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Original research paper

THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF BONA FIDES TO THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN STUDENT PAPERS

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Abstract. The principle of good faith and fair dealing, originating in Roman law and continually evolving through various legal traditions, serves as a cornerstone of contemporary legal and ethical standards. In the context of academic writing, this principle demands that students act with integrity when utilizing external sources, including those generated by artificial intelligence. Respect for good faith and fair dealing ensures the preservation of academic values, fosters trust within the academic community, and upholds the dignity of scholarly work. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic writing has raised significant ethical and legal questions, particularly regarding the proper attribution of sources and the integrity of scholarly work. As AI tools become more sophisticated, understanding the application of traditional legal principles, such as good faith and fair dealing, is essential to ensuring academic integrity. To better understand this principle, we will explore its roots, the motivation behind its establishment, and trace its development alongside the evolution of social and economic conditions.

Key words: bona fides, good faith, fair dealing, artificial intelligence, students' writing, plagiarism

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1. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A FACILITATOR OF DISHONESTY IN STUDENTS' WRITING

The presence of Artificial Intelligence (hereinafter: AI) has been noted for more than 50 years, but the last decade has brought AI and its rapid development into focus, and often referred to as the AI renaissance (Gentile et al., 2023). Although many authors have begun researching the implications AI might have across various fields of application, this remains a largely unexplored area where the full scope of use has yet to be determined.

This paper focuses on the use of AI in higher education. The potential for both teachers and students to use AI in this context raises important questions that touch upon the core principles of the educational and legal frameworks of the system itself. It is of utmost importance to understand the impact AI may have on current educational paradigms and the integrity of the academic process, in order to adjust the use of AI tools to support the acquisition competencies outlined in study programs (Hutson, 2024, p. 22).

In this paper, we aim to explore the issues surrounding students' use of AI text-generating tools in completing their writing assignments. Numerous text-generating tools, may be used for this purpose, including ChatGPT, Writesonic, Jasper, Grammarly, ProWritingAid, Scalenut, Rytr, TextCortex, Microsoft Bing Assistant, and Google's Bard (Malakar & Leeladharan, 2024; Iorliam & Abunimye Ingio, 2024; Gasaymeh, Beirat & Abu Qbeita, 2024). ChatGPT is one of the most popular (Stošić & Janković, 2023, p. 59). This tool is designed to generate answers to prompts. When prompts are well constructed, ChatGPT may provide solved tasks or written content that can be easily copied into students' assignments. This portrays ChatGPT as a tool that may facilitate plagiarism and academic dishonesty (Jarrah, Wardat & Fidalgo, 2023, p. 2). It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the blurred lines: when is ChatGPT a technical assistant and when does it become a tool that completes the task on behalf of the student (Chan, 2023, p. 21).

Educators are alarmed that the overuse of technical assistance in completing assignments might undermine critical thinking, creativity and the originality of students' work (Hutson, 2024, p. 20). Additionally, there is the issue of the accuracy of knowledge obtained through the use of AI tools. ChatGPT is not designed to deliver factual information, but rather to produce human-like text that gives the impression of accuracy (Hicks, Humphries & Slater, 2024, p. 2). As AI continues to develop, these tools are capable of generating increasingly sophisticated outputs (Steponenaite & Barakat, 2023, p. 2.), making it more difficult to distinguish between the human-generated content and AI-assisted writing (Hutson, 2024, p. 27.).

OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, has published "A Student's Guide to Writing with ChatGPT". This manual aims to help students become better writers and engage more deeply in the learning process. In the introductory remarks, the guide states the following:

"Used thoughtfully, ChatGPT can be a powerful tool to help students develop skills of rigorous thinking and clear writing, assisting them in thinking through ideas, mastering complex concepts, and getting feedback on drafts.

There are also ways to use ChatGPT that are counterproductive to learning—like generating an essay instead of writing it oneself, which deprives students of the opportunity to practice, improve their skills, and grapple with the material."

This statement made by OpenAI indicates an awareness of the potential misuse of AI. This should prompt the academic community to reconsider and redefine the concept of plagiarism in the context of AI-assisted writing. The task is not an easy one, as it requires adapting the notions of originality, creativity and integrity to the changes brought by digital age (Hutson, 2024, p. 21). The goal should be to leverage AI as a tool for enhancing the educational

experience, rather than as a substitute for the critical thinking and creative processes that are central to learning (Hutson, 2024, p. 22.) AI tools should be integrated in a way that complements rather than replaces the learning process, ensuring that students remain at the center of their educational journey (Hutson, 2024, p. 21).

Ultimately, students are responsible for the quality and honesty of their work. However, universities and educators also bear a share of responsibility, to teach students how to incorporate good practices and the principles of academic integrity into their assignments (Vieyra & Weaver, 2023, p. 12).

One of the difficulties in attempting to frame the use of AI is the fact that it is still not bound by any legal regulation. In this paper we explore whether AI is suitable to be protected under the rules that regulate copyright. If that is not the case, we turn to the fundamental principle of higher education, as stipulated in the Law on Higher Education (2025), which is academic integrity. We aim to explain how academic integrity, in the context of AI's impact on student plagiarism, might be achieved through the principle of bona fides. The principle of good faith and fair dealing, which today permeates all branches of law, has its roots, like most modern legal institutions, in Roman law. As a universal legal principle applied in obligations, commercial law, labor law, and other areas, it has been embraced by both national and European legislators.

The principle of good faith and fair dealing serves as a guarantee of legal certainty and justice in all relationships we enter. In the context of this paper, we will examine the principle of good faith as an imperative governing students' use of others' scholarly work.

A descriptive-analytical method was applied in this paper, examining the ethical and legal aspects of the use of AI in academic writing. A normative analysis of relevant legal sources in the Republic of Serbia, as well as a comparative analysis of different cultural approaches to plagiarism was also conducted.

2. AN ATTEMPT TO REGULATE THE USE OF AI IN STUDENTS' WRITING

Plagiarism comes from the Latin word "plagium" which means "kidnapping". Thus, plagiarism is commonly understood as literary theft: presenting someone else's work as your own. In the Oxford English Dictionary, plagiarism is defined as "the practice of copying another person's ideas, words or work and pretending that they are your own." Although these definitions seem clear, it is often difficult to determine what constitutes plagiarism.

The concept of plagiarism varies across countries and cultures. For example, East Asian countries, which have been influenced by Confucian principles, foster a collectivist culture and the communal ownership of knowledge. In these societies, knowledge is seen as something that belongs to the community, so using that knowledge is viewed as a form of respect and acknowledgment. Individual authorship and intellectual theft are not the central concerns. Respecting accumulated knowledge and contributing new ideas to it, represent a form of established wisdom that is available to everyone. In the Middle East, it is allowed and even expected to quote religious texts and political authorities without adhering to formal citation rules, since such sources are treated as common knowledge. In contrast, the individualist approach, dominant in the U.S. and Western European countries, emphasizes strong authorship rights. Formal citation rules are established, and students are taught to follow strict academic standards and uphold academic integrity, as each author must be credited for their own work (Hutson, 2024, p. 23).

It is becoming even more difficult to define what constitutes the act of plagiarism in the context of using AI tools as help in completing writing assignments. The academic community still doesn't have a unified answer to this issue. Some argue that using a generated text is not original work by the author using it. That means that using ChatGPT should be acknowledged as a source. Others believe that ChatGPT and other text-generative AI tools are just that – tools which might assist writers, but they do not compromise the originality of the students' work. However, these authors believe that when using ChatGPT or similar tools, students should critically analyze the generated text and properly cite it (Jarrah, Wardat & Fidalgo, 2023, p. 3). Whether we understand ChatGPT as technical assistance or as an author whose text we are using for our written assignment, proper citation rules need to be followed.

Some scientific journals have already recognized the potential AI has as a tool which might be used in academic writing, so they offer instructions for authors with very precise guidelines on how Chat GPT and other AI tools may be used when preparing papers for publishing with these journals. For example, the international scientific journal Artificial Intelligence and Law, in the instructions for authors, stipulates:

"Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria. Notably an attribution of authorship carries with it accountability for the work, which cannot be effectively applied to LLMs. Use of an LLM should be properly documented in the Methods section (and if a Methods section is not available, in a suitable alternative part) of the manuscript. The use of an LLM (or other AI-tool) for "AI assisted copy editing" purposes does not need to be declared. In this context, we define the term "AI assisted copy editing" as AI-assisted improvements to human-generated texts for readability and style, and to ensure that the texts are free of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and tone. These AI-assisted improvements may include wording and formatting changes to the texts, but do not include generative editorial work and autonomous content creation. In all cases, there must be human accountability for the final version of the text and agreement from the authors that the edits reflect their original work."

This instruction explains that the role of AI tools is technical assistance in writing.

With the development of AI, text-generating tools are becoming more sophisticated, and it is becoming hard to distinguish between AI-generated and human-generated text (Hutson, 2024, p. 21). This makes the issue of originality in academic writing even more complex. The authenticity of someone's work and new ideas is what contributes to the development of scientific thought. But what if there are no clear rules on what is simply assistance in describing and writing about an idea, and when that help means taking someone else's idea and presenting it as an original contribution.

The cornerstone of avoiding plagiarism in written assignments is following proper citation rules and acknowledgment of authors whose work is used (Hutson, 2024, p. 20). The problem arises when we cannot identify the author, or when we are not sure whether the text we are using comes from the source we may consider the author. The instructions for authors offered in the scientific journal Artificial Intelligence and Law are very clear on whether ChatGPT meets the authorship criteria.

The question of attributing authorship to AI is of a legal nature, and it should answer whether AI has rights under copyright legislation. If that is the case, then there is no further debate on whether copying text from AI text-generative tools constitutes a breach of copyright. However, the current legislature does not offer strict rules on these issues. We need to interpret the existing legal definitions and see if they may apply to the authorship implications raised by AI usage.

In the Republic of Serbia, the Law on Copyright and Related Rights (2016) is in force. The law defines the author's work as follows:

"A work of authorship is an author's original intellectual creation, expressed in a certain form, regardless of its artistic, scientific or other value, its purpose, size, content and manner of manifestation, as well as the permissibility of public communication of its content."

Meeting the authorship criteria means that the work was made in the creative thinking process. It is a work into which the author brings his own spirit and personality, the original creation which is an expression of the author himself and his intellectual creativity. A work of authorship is where the author expresses his individuality (Savčić, 2024, p. 19). AI tools lack these features. It might be said that we are reluctant to accept the idea that machines are capable of creative thought (Davis, 2011, p. 604). But, for example, ChatGPT does not generate text which is a product of this tool's own idea, rather it provides answers to the prompts of users. The text ChatGPT provides is led by the user input (Savčić, 2024, p. 17), so it is not an expression of its personality, or original idea. This means that AI generated text lacks all the required qualities for it to be considered a work of authorship under the Law on Copyright and Related Rights. If so, then AI-generated text is free to use without any permissions. From a legal point of view, the usage of this text in someone's writing does not constitute an act of plagiarism. To overcome this deficiency in the existing legislation, some authors propose that the owner of AI-generated text is the creator of the AI. Since AIgenerated text is a derivative of the programmer's work, it can be attributed to him (Savčić, 2024, p. 24). However, the creator of AI is not familiar with the text that is going to be created as it depends on the input of the users. It also depends on the available data AI has to learn from. So the creator of AI has no control over the outcomes of AI usage (Davis, 2011, p. 604). There is no intellectual, creative or direct connection between the work of an AI creator and the final product. On the other hand, the user is in direct connection with the AI, and when giving prompts, the user controls the process of generating text, by narrowing down the results. Without the input of a user there would be no generated text. But still, the users may not be considered the authors who fall within the scope of a legal protection under the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, since the text gained by AI tool is not original, but derivative work (Savčić, 2024, p. 26). Finally, there are authors who believe that using AI in academic writing should be awarded sui generis protection, but these ideas still haven't been adopted in current legislation (Savčić, 2024; Davis, 2011; Stošić & Janković, 2023).

As there are no clear, precise and unified academic rules on how to define the act of plagiarism in the context of using AI tools in academic writing, we must turn to ethical principles for guidance.

One of the fundamental principles of higher education is academic integrity, as provided in Article 4, paragraph 1, point 3 of The Law on Higher Education (2025). Article 7 of the same law further elaborates on academic integrity, stating: "Academic integrity is based on: the preservation of the dignity of the profession, the advancement of moral values, the protection of the value of knowledge, raising awareness of the responsibility of all members of the academic community, and the promotion of human rights and freedoms." Since students are undoubtedly members of the academic community, the obligation to uphold moral values applies equally to their conduct.

To make these provisions of The Law on Higher Education applicable to every-day situations and dealings with students' assignments, we explore the principle which portrays the tradition of legal thinking in our system to guide the interpretation of existing law and universities' rulebooks that is the principle of bona fides.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF BONA FIDES

The principle of bona fides evolved from the principle of fides. In the archaic and preclassical periods of Roman law, fides represented a fundamental principle governing all legal relations among Romans, initially in public life and later in private relations as well. Due to the significant interconnection between religion and law during this period, fides can be considered to have had a sacred foundation – it was initially a religious and moral principle, later becoming a legal one (Sič, 2012, p. 162). Honor, honesty, trust, and reliability were virtues so deeply embedded in the Roman consciousness that their violation was deemed unacceptable. Regardless of the absence of legal sanctions, the Roman citizen feared communal condemnation and exclusion, as well as moral judgment by society. Romans sought to avoid offending the gods, dishonoring ancestral traditions, or provoking communal disdain, and thus strictly adhered to fides, primarily meaning "faithfulness to one's given word" (Vuletić, 2010, p. 260).

During the pre-classical period, fides developed through contractual relations. Although the conclusion of contracts was a strictly formal act at the time, the abstract nature of legal transactions left room for abuses. It was precisely fides that ensured contracts were executed as agreed. Rituals and solemn formulas accompanying contract formation created obligations, while fides secured their fulfillment.

In the late Republic, significant economic and social transformations, as well as changes in religious and spiritual life, took place. The activity of the *praetor peregrinus* contributed to the development of the *ius gentium*, a legal system more flexible than the *ius civile*, characterized by reduced formalism, less abstraction, a rejection of literal interpretation of norms, and recognition of the parties' intent, consensualism, and causality in contracts (Bujuklić, 2010, p. 80).

As religious influence waned and Roman society became more religiously heterogeneous, a mechanism was needed to ensure compliance with norms and fulfillment of obligations based on mutual will rather than strict formalities. In this period, the principle of bona fides — good faith and fair dealing — alongside the principles of equity (*aequitas*) and justice, emerged (Bujuklić, 2010, p. 84). These principles transitioned from the domain of religious obligation to fully legal concepts, with bona fides replacing fides (Stanojević, 2010, p. 51).

The transformation of fides into bona fides occurred concurrently with the decline of formalism, both developments driven by the same underlying causes. As formal requirements for concluding contracts diminished, the responsibility for faithful performance of obligations, secured by the principle of bona fides, increased. Bona fides became part of the judicial formula through the inclusion of the clause ex fide bona, thus transforming what had previously been an ethical and moral code of conduct into a legal institution continuously developed through juristic activity (Vuletić, 2010, p. 270).

Bona fides can be seen as a form of business ethics that emerged as law moved away from direct religious control. This ethical standard was crucial both in relations among Roman citizens and especially in dealings with foreigners, as Roman territorial expansion brought interaction with diverse peoples holding varying notions of acceptable commercial behavior. Thus, bona fides served as a universal standard of conduct (Sič, 2012, p. 174).

In the classical period of Roman law, bona fides assumed a broader meaning. Contracting parties were required to act in good faith from the moment of contract formation through its execution. It may be said that bona fides became the fundamental principle of classical Roman law (Stojčević, 1985, p. 194), evolving into a standard of honest conduct to address increasingly complex commercial relations.

The post-classical period brought significant changes to Roman law. Influenced by new economic, social, and cultural circumstances and the growing dominance of Christianity, the legal system became less formalistic, giving greater weight to notions of fairness and moral values. Consequently, bona fides acquired even greater importance. Judges were increasingly empowered to decide disputes not only according to the letter of the law but also in accordance with the demands of good faith, equity, and conscience (Ignjatović, 2022, p. 282). Bona fides was no longer limited to contractual honesty but extended to all forms of social interaction.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the principle of bona fides continued to influence European legal traditions. During the Middle Ages, economic activity and trade declined, and society reverted to a predominantly natural economy. The Catholic Church inherited many Roman legal ideas, including bona fides, reinforcing them with Christian ethical teachings. Christian influence emphasized the importance of moral values in legal relations, thus maintaining bona fides as both a legal and moral principle.

With the rise of modern states, bourgeois society, and capitalist economies, legal systems underwent codification and formalization. Nevertheless, bona fides remained a vital concept, taking on new forms and functions. In the modern era, it increasingly became a formal legal standard, integrated into written laws through major codifications, ensuring its presence in contemporary law of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The law, following the needs of the time, continuously adapts to regulate newly arising relationships. It is anticipated that the use of others' scientific results through artificial intelligence (since AI utilizes existing sources and does not generate ideas independently) will gradually transition from the domain of ethical regulation to the domain of legal protection. Until then, we are left with the principles that are embedded in our legal tradition, as ethical guidance that should direct students in the direction of preserving academic integrity.

If a student attempts to present someone else's work or AI-generated content as their own without proper attribution, it constitutes a violation of the principle of bona fides thereby undermining honesty and trust within the academic process. A student must properly cite sources, otherwise, such conduct amounts to a breach of academic integrity, which universities typically categorize as academic misconduct.

4. CONCLUSION

The availability of AI tools and their ease of use, portray AI as a tool that facilitates plagiarism among students. One of the problems in suppressing the possible misuse of AI is the absence of clear rules and policies on how to implement AI in the learning environment (Jarrah, Wardat & Fidalgo, 2023, p. 2). The issue is not just how to define standards to determine what constitutes the act of plagiarism when a student uses AI to complete a writing assignment. Universities need to develop strategies to detect AIgenerated text in students' writing, and, even more importantly, strategies to adapt pedagogical practices to prevent the use of AI in completing assignments. Developing academic standards that can help uphold the integrity of research and academic writing, as well as guidelines to educate students about these standards means creating a responsible learning environment in the AI age (Jarrah, Wardat & Fidalgo, 2023, p. 15). Students need to embrace the benefits of AI tools, and, at the same time stay true to learning, developing critical thinking and expressing their own opinions. Implementing AI into the realm of higher education is more demanding than enacting binding legislation. On the contrary, there needs to be a framework consisting of rules, principles and values that raise awareness of the importance of student honesty.

Although the principle of bona fides permeated the entirety of Roman legal history, it was not always easy to determine what constituted good faith and fair conduct in concrete situations. As a legal standard, bona fides has always allowed room for interpretation. The same applies to the issue addressed in this paper. Given that the use of artificial intelligence is not yet comprehensively regulated by law, its ethical application currently falls within the realm of morality rather than legal obligation. Nevertheless, it is essential to recall Paulus' maxim: "Non omne quod licet honestum est" ("Not everything that is permitted is honorable"). Therefore, even if certain conduct is not yet explicitly prohibited or sanctioned, it should not be interpreted as permitted or desirable.

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PRIMENA PRINCIPA BONA FIDES NA UPOTREBU VEŠTAČKE INTELIGENCIJE U STUDENTSKIM RADOVIMA

Načelo savesnosti poštenja ima koren u rimskom pravu, ali se stalno razvija kroz različite pravne tradicije i predstavlja osnov savremenih pravnih i etičkih principa. U kontekstu pisanja akademskih radova, ovaj princip podrazumeva da studenti postupaju sa integritetom kada koriste spoljne izvore, uključujući i one koje generiše veštačka inteligencija (VI). Poštovanje načela savesnosti i poštenja osigurava očuvanje akademskih vrednosti, podstiče poverenje unutar akademske zajednice i podržava dostojanstvo naučnog rada. Upotreba veštače intelignecije u akademskim radovima pokrenula je značajna etička i pravna pitanja, posebno u vezi sa pravilnim navođenjem izvora i integritetom naučnog rada. Kako alati VI postaju sofisticiraniji, pravilno razumevanje i primena tradicionalnih pravnih principa, kao što je načelo savesnosti i poštenja, neophodni su za obezbeđivanje akademskog integriteta. Da bismo bolje razumeli ovaj princip, istražićemo njegove korene, motivaciju za njegovu primenu i pratiti njegov razvoj uporedo sa evolucijom društenvih i ekonomskih uslova.

Ključne reči: bona fides, savesnost i poštenje, veštačka inteligencija, studentski radovi, plagijarizam