

Correspondence

Letter to Professor Bruno Frey

May 3, 2011

Professor Bruno Frey
University of Zurich
Department of Economics
Zürich, Switzerland

cc: Professor Benno Torgler and David A. Savage, Queensland University of Technology
Orley Ashenfelter, President, *American Economic Association*

John Siegfried, Secretary-Treasurer, *American Economic Association*

William Nielson, Editor, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organizations*

Douglas Heckathorn, Editor, *Rationality and Society*

Dear Professor Frey,

I'm writing you in my capacity as editor of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* to express my dismay at your professional conduct surrounding your recently published *JEP* article with David Savage and Benno Torgler:

- Frey, Bruno S., David A. Savage and Benno Torgler. 2011. "Behavior under Extreme Conditions: The Titanic Disaster." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter, 25(1): 209–222.

At the time that you agreed to write your paper for *JEP* in January 2010, we were already aware of your forthcoming *PNAS* article on the same subject:

- Frey, Bruno S., David A. Savage and Benno Torgler. 2010. "Interaction of natural survival instincts and internalized social norms exploring the *Titanic* and *Lusitania* disasters." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(11): 4862–65.

We were not however aware, until some attentive *JEP* readers alerted us, that you had recently published two other papers on the *Titanic* disaster in two other professional journals:

- Frey, Bruno S., David A. Savage and Benno Torgler. 2010. "Noblesse oblige? Determinants of survival in a life-and-death situation." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organizations*, 74(1–2): 1–11.
- Frey, Bruno S., David A. Savage and Benno Torgler. 2011. "Who perished on the *Titanic*? The importance of social norms." *Rationality and Society*, 23(1): 35–49.

There is very substantial overlap between these articles and your *JEP* publication. Indeed, to my eye, they are substantively identical. Based on discussions with the editors of these journals, we have confirmed that the *JEB* article was in press and the *R&S* article under review while your article was under revision for *JEP*. At the time we accepted your paper for *JEP*, we could not readily have learned of these two overlapping articles since they were at the time unpublished. Further obscuring the links among these articles is the fact that none of your four articles cites any of the other three. Had you chosen to inform us of the *JEB* and *R&S* articles prior to the publication of your *JEP* article, we would of course have no grounds for complaint. In that case, however, we would not have published your article.

We view your publication of this substantive material in multiple journals simultaneously as a violation of the spirit of the editorial agreement with American Economic Association that you signed in the winter 2010, which states "The Author(s) warrant(s) that the above-named manuscript is his or her own original work of authorship and has not been published previously." The AEA does not intend to pursue legal action against you for violation of copyright. However, we find your conduct in this matter ethically dubious and disrespectful to

the American Economic Association, the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* and the *JEP*'s readers.

I hope that an explanation of your conduct, as well as an apology to the parties above, will be forthcoming.

Sincerely,

David H. Autor
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Professor of Economics and Associate Chair
Department of Economics
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Response from Professor Frey

13 May, 2011

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Professor David Autor
Department of Economics
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Professor Autor

Thank you for your letter of May 3, which reached me now because I was away.

I have forwarded the letter to Benno Torgler and we well understand your very serious complaint and we both agree that you are right. It was a grave mistake on our part for which we deeply apologize. It should never have happened. This is deplorable. We both wish to emphasize that as senior researchers we take full responsibility. David Savage is not responsible for our mistake.

Please be assured that we take all precautions and measures that this unfortunate event does not happen again, with any journal.

Sincerely yours,

Bruno S. Frey
University of Zurich
Department of Economics
Zürich
Switzerland

P.S. When I forwarded the letter to Benno Torgler he insisted to be included in the apology. Hence the term "we" in the above text. However, as senior (older) author I am fully aware that the responsibility and blame is on me.

This article has been cited by:

1. Nate Breznau. 2021. Does Sociology Need Open Science?. *Societies* 11:1, 9. [[Crossref](#)]
2. . The Production of Knowledge 20, . [[Crossref](#)]
3. M. V. Dougherty. Dispersal Plagiarism 51-74. [[Crossref](#)]
4. Garret Christensen, Edward Miguel. 2018. Transparency, Reproducibility, and the Credibility of Economics Research. *Journal of Economic Literature* 56:3, 920-980. [[Abstract](#)] [[View PDF article](#)] [[PDF with links](#)]
5. M. V. Dougherty. What Is Academic Plagiarism? 59-89. [[Crossref](#)]
6. M. V. Dougherty. Beyond the Published Retraction 221-242. [[Crossref](#)]
7. James R. Wible. 2016. Scientific misconduct and the responsible conduct of research in science and economics. *Review of Social Economy* 74:1, 7-32. [[Crossref](#)]
8. Sönke Albers. 2014. Preventing unethical publication behavior of quantitative empirical research by changing editorial policies. *Journal of Business Economics* 84:9, 1151-1165. [[Crossref](#)]