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 Nielsen, 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:


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:


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:


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 JEP 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your paper for JEP, we could not readily have learned of these two overlapping articles since they were at the time unpublished.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 JEP 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]
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]