

Email Exchanges with Dr. Sperber

I. HENRIQUES NOTIFICATION EMAIL

From: Henriques, Gregg
Sent: Wednesday, June 26, 2018
To: Dan Sperber
Cc: Joseph Michalski
Subject: important intellectual property matter
Importance: High

Dear Professor Sperber:

I am writing because I need to communicate with you about an important issue regarding intellectual property and the book you have recently co-authored with Dr. Hugo Mercier, *The Enigma of Reason: A New Theory of Human Understanding* (Harvard Press, 2017/2018). I would appreciate it if you could please reply to this email indicating that you have received this note, and that you will look for the next correspondence from me. Upon receiving your reply, I will share with you the necessary information. Note, at this point I am only contacting you rather than both you and Dr. Mercier for reasons that will become clear in my next correspondence. Thank you for your willingness to attend to this important matter.

(I am ccing a college, Associate Dean at Kings College in Canada, Dr. Joe Michalski, who has served to consult me about this matter. Please cc him also on this reply).

Sincerely,
Gregg

Gregg Henriques, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Graduate Psychology

II. SPERBER'S INITIAL REPLY

From: Dan Sperber
Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2018 9:44 AM
To: Joseph Michalski
Subject: The Enigma of Reason

Dear Dr Michalski,

As you probably know, Dr Gregg Henriques has send me (and now resent) an email message, cc-ed to you, that I find not only weird but also, in the light of an Amazon.com libellous review of our book, *The Enigma of Reason*, entitled "This book is Intellectual Theft" that Dr Henriques must have at least inspired, offensive. Dr Henriques seems to believe that, in our book, we have stolen ideas of his. This is doubly delusional. His work has had no influence on ours whatsoever. Moreover, ideas about justification that we discuss in a few pages of our book and that he seems to think we have stolen from him go back to Aristotle and have been quite extensively discussed in 20th century philosophy, psychology, and sociology. We give relevant references.

If you are a friend of Dr Henriques, you would render him a service by reassuring him that he has not been the victim of intellectual theft. If need be, a competent and honest lawyer would point out that he doesn't have even the beginning of a case.

Here is why I will not directly answer Dr Henriques' messages nor engage in any discussion with him. If, by reading our book, he could come to the conclusion that we have stolen ideas from him, then there is nothing I could say that would convince him otherwise. I don't have the time for this.

Sincerely,

Dan Sperber

III. MICHALSKI'S REPLY TO SPERBER

From: Joseph Michalski
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2018 8:15 AM
To: Dan Sperber

Dear Professor Sperber:

I appreciate that you are a busy academician with many other obligations. I will be brief. It seems that there are a couple of key facts you may not be aware of that complicate matters. I certainly agree that if you were not aware of the Justification Hypothesis, then this would not be an issue and there would be friendly dialogue about the overlap in ideas going forward. As a community, ideally we connect regularly with those in our respective fields with respect to the latest ideas and research.

That's where things were in 2013 and why, when Dr. Henriques became aware of your and Dr. Mercier's work, he did the collegial thing by contacting Dr. Mercier to share his own work on the Justification Hypothesis. The Hypothesis explicitly characterizes the evolved design of human reasoning & reason giving as an adaptive response to the problem of human language and social influence. Dr. Henriques' first article came out in 2003 and his book was published in 2011 (along with several more articles by Dr. Henriques and other colleagues).

In response to the materials he received, Dr. Mercier wrote back the following to Dr. Henriques on September 10, 2013:

**That was an interesting read! I think an important difference is that your theory is part of a much broader one about the mind and consciousness, whereas we've tried to be more pointed and only talk about one cognitive mechanism (albeit an important one). We're also stressing more, I guess, the 'reception' side of the story: how reasoning is used not only to produce arguments, but also to evaluate them. Thanks for sending the papers.
take care,
Hugo**

Dr. Henriques thanked him and requested that he be informed about any new developments. Since that time, the theory of human reason proffered in *The Enigma of Reason* is the idea that human reason evolved not only to serve as a basis of argumentation, but of justification as well. This makes it almost identical to the Justification Hypothesis. Hence I think part of the concern is Dr. Mercier's denial that he'd ever heard of the Justification Hypothesis and stating that he would have cited this work had he been aware.

I am not recommending litigation or anything along those lines, but I merely offered to serve as a mediator in the hopes of gaining some clarity and mutual understanding as to what has happened. As you well know, the currency of ideas and our reputations as scholars are the most important resources we have as academicians.

Sincerely,
Joe
Dr. Joseph H. Michalski
Associate Academic Dean; King's University College at Western University

IV. SPERBER'S SECOND REPLY

From: Dan Sperber <dan.sperber@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2018 3:25 PM
To: Joseph Michalski
Subject: Re: The Enigma of Reason

Dear Dr Michalski,

Thank you for your prompt response. I appreciate that you "merely offered to serve as a mediator in the hopes of gaining some clarity and mutual understanding as to what has happened," and I agree with you that "the currency of ideas and our reputations as scholars are the most important resources we have as academicians." In this spirit of responsible common sense, let me share with you some information about the facts of the matter.

After I received Dr Henriques mail, a couple of days ago, I asked my co-author Hugo Mercier if he had ever heard of him, and he directed me to the 'review' at Amazon.com. Two hours later or so, he wrote to me again, saying that, checking his old email, he now realized he had had, and had forgotten, an email exchange with this Dr Henriques in 2013, which he copied to me. Dr Henriques sent him two papers of his on September 9, 2013. Already on September 10, Hugo sent the message that you quote in your mail. This is the type of message you send when you receive a paper out of the blue and look at it cursorily and when you are a kind and considerate person, as Hugo is. We received many messages, papers etc. after the publication of our BBS paper; most of them, rightly or wrongly, we didn't find particularly relevant and we didn't share with one another. Hugo, in particular didn't share Dr Henriques' papers with me.

I am the one who, at a later date in the writing of our book, started thinking that we should approach the use of reasons for justification and their use for argumentation in an integrated manner when discussing the mechanism of reason. I wrote all the passages about the issue in our book. I am originally a social scientist and I may have been influenced in taking this approach by old readings of the extensive work of Jürgen Habermas on reason and justification. I was also influenced on this issue by the work of the philosopher Joseph Raz. A third source is the work of Jon Haidt on moral justification, which had already influenced our earlier work.

As I mentioned, I first came across the name of Dr. Henriques when I received his mail a couple of days ago. Maybe too bad for me, but I have never read any of his work. In any case, the idea that justification and reason are closely linked, while neglected in recent psychology of reasoning, is not a particularly original one. I would be surprised if the way we used this idea in our theory of human reason and the way Dr. Henriques used it for his own goals weren't rather different. Be that as it may, there is no issue of intellectual theft here at all. The 'review' at Amazon.com that claims that there is is a direct and totally unjustified attack on our "reputation as scholars" (to use your words), which I resent.

Sincerely,

Dan