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S O T E R

Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement (PEMS)



2022

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Introduction

The *Soter* Journal of Religious Science (hereinafter, the Journal) adheres to the highest standards of publishing ethics. The journal's Editorial Board follows, and encourages authors to follow, the policies and recommendations of the [PERK](#) (Publishing Ethics Resource Kit) and the [COPE](#) (Committee on Publication Ethics) – online resources to help editors and authors deal with ethics concerns. Please refer to the PERK website for an explanation of the various aspects of ethical conflicts in publishing and for information on what actions the Journal's Ethics Committee can take to address publishing-related ethical conflicts.

The Journal is also guided by the high international ethical standards set out in the following documents approved by the Senate of Vytautas Magnus University: [Provisions for Professionalism and Ethics in Research](#) and the [Code of Ethics of Vytautas Magnus University](#). The Journal's Publishing Ethics and Malpractice Statement correlates with the provisions of these documents.

1. PUBLICATION ETHICS

1.1. Editorial Process

The members of the Editorial Board must assess the intellectual value of the content of a submitted manuscript and its relevance to the Journal's scientific direction without regard to the race, gender, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, nationality, or political affiliation of the author(s).

The Editorial Board and the Editor-in-Chief are responsible for ensuring a fair and unbiased double-blind peer review of manuscripts and that all information related to them is kept confidential. They also ensure that both authors' and peer reviewers' identities are protected. The Editorial Board is responsible for ensuring that appropriate reviewers are selected.

The Editor-in-Chief of the Journal decides together with the members of the Editorial Board which submitted articles can be published. The Editor-in-Chief determines the eligibility of articles for publication based on the guidelines set out in the Aims and Scope section of the Journal and the provisions of this document (PEMS), as well as in accordance with the legal requirements of VMU and the State. The

Editor-in-Chief should consult with other Editorial Board members or reviewers when deciding whether to publish or reject an article. The Editor-in-Chief is responsible for handling disputes or complaints and publishing corrections, clarifications, rebuttals, and apologies.

The Editor-in-Chief may not disclose any information about a manuscript which is under consideration to anyone other than the author(s), the reviewers, and, where appropriate, other members of the Editorial Board.

1.2. Peer review process

Peer review is an essential tool and basis for assessing the quality of official scientific output. Reviewers can help improve a paper by working with the author and following peer review etiquette. The review process also helps the Editor-in-Chief determine the suitability of an article for publication.

The Editor-in-Chief must ensure that the peer review process is fair, impartial, and timely. Articles must be reviewed by at least two independent external reviewers, and the Editor-in-Chief may request additional expert opinions as necessary.

All manuscripts submitted to the Journal go through a double-blind peer-review process. Reviewers must write a thorough review report according to the guidelines given by the Editorial Board. The Editor-in-Chief reviews the declarations of conflicts of interest, considers the likelihood of bias of applicants to be reviewers, and rejects reviewers with obvious potential conflicts of interest.

Any manuscripts received for review must be treated as confidential documents. They must not be shown to or discussed with others except if authorized by the Editor-in-Chief. Reviewers may not share their review or information about the document with anyone or contact the authors directly without the permission of the Editor-in-Chief.

Authors sometimes ask an editor not to appoint as a reviewer a specific individual whom they consider to be biased against them or to have a potential conflict of personal or professional interest. In such cases, the authors should be asked to explain or justify their suspicions so that editors can better decide on the merits of a request.

Reviews must be written objectively. Personal criticism of an author is not acceptable. Reviewers must clearly identify errors, formulate their comments, and provide arguments in support of their statements.

1.3. Policies on authorship and contributorship

It is important to ensure the authenticity of an article's authors in two senses. First, all contributors to an article should be credited as authors; and second, individuals who are not in fact authors of the article should not be named as authors.

Authors are those who have made a significant contribution to the design, conduct or interpretation of the study. Persons who have made some other significant contribution to the preparation of the article (e.g., editing, designing the figures, etc.) should be acknowledged in an acknowledgements paragraph.

Authors should carefully consider who to include on the list of authors for a manuscript and in what order and should provide the final list of the authors at the time of initial submission.

Authors bear personal and collective responsibility for an article submitted for publication. All authors must provide a completed and signed Declaration of Authorship and Interests before submitting manuscripts.

1.4. Policies on conflicts of interest / competing interests

Undisclosed conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest exists when an author (or the author's institution), reviewer or editor has a financial or personal relationship that unduly influences (biases) his/her decisions regarding the contents, suitability, timing or other aspect of a publication.

Authors must declare any potential conflicts of interest in writing or certify that they have none when completing the Declaration of Interests. They should declare any financial or personal relationships with other individuals or organisations that could be considered as biased and interested in the publication of the article.

Unpublished material disclosed in the submitted manuscript may not be published without the express written consent of the author.

1.5. Policies on data sharing and reproducibility

The author(s) of an article may reuse the material in their article in new works without permission or payment (linking to the article in the Journal): they may include the article in a subsequent collection of their work, expand the article to book length, reuse parts of the article or excerpts from it in other works, use and share the article for scholarly

purposes (linking to it in a Journal), distribute the article, including by email, to their students and fellow scholars for personal use, publicly share the online link to the article on any website or repository, etc.

The publishing institution, Vytautas Magnus University, has the right to make copies of the published article available in both electronic and physical form for non-commercial, educational and research, purposes within the University. Articles may be included in applications for submission to databases or grants. Material published in articles may be included in research papers and syllabi (but not in open online courses), and in theses and dissertations used within the University. In all cases, a reference to the journal article must be provided.

1.6. Policy on intellectual property

The author(s) and the Journal agree to the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](#), which licenses peer-reviewed journals and grants the Journal permission to publish their unpublished and original manuscript. This provision also applies to open access issues of *Soter*. The Journal's copyright is protected under the "Rules for the Management, Use and Disposal of Intellectual Property of Vytautas Magnus University" as approved by the Council of VMU in 2019.

1.7. Options for post-publication discussions and corrections

We invite authors, reviewers, and readers to contribute to improving the quality of the Journal. We welcome all comments on the thematic layout of articles, their format, the layout of the text, figures, and tables, and especially the correctness of the research results and the summaries and conclusions presented in the articles. Please send all observations to the Deputy Editor-in-Chief by email to soter@vdu.lt, citing the DOI number of the article in the subject line of your email.

The Editorial Board will review comments and discuss them with interested parties as appropriate. The outcome of the review will be discussed with the Editor-in-Chief to best respond to your comments. This may take the form of a personal letter, correction of errors noted (errors in the text, figures, misrepresentation of the results of the study, inadvertent omission of an author, etc.), or the removal of content already published. In exceptional cases involving serious breaches of publishing ethics, the Editorial Board reserves the right to remove an article from *Soter* online platforms.

2. PROCESS FOR IDENTIFICATION OF AND DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Violations of research ethics. Violations of research standards are usually flagged when a reviewer or reader of an article observes that informed consent to participate in a study was not obtained, that the study did not comply with the requirements for the participation of minors, that the study was not authorized by the head of the institution, or in other relevant cases.

Misappropriation of research results. If there is any doubt that the research results reported in a submitted article are the original work of the author or group of persons claiming authorship, the Editor-in-Chief will inform the authors and/or the institutions they represent. The Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board have the right to make enquiries to the relevant persons and institutions to assess the veracity of a research claim. The Editorial Board may also seek expert advice from other research professionals.

Potential research errors and fraud. Fraud is the publication of fabricated or deliberately distorted or falsified research data or findings, such as the alteration of data to make it conveniently fit a desired result, the exclusion of unfavorable or inconvenient results, any deliberate error in a study, and the like.

There are three main research ethics violations: plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Any breach of research ethics damages the reputation of the author(s) and the institution each represents.

2.1. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the representation of another author's work (theoretical ideas or forms of expression) as one's own original work, without permission from or reference to the true author. Important types of plagiarism include: paraphrasing, or repeating the research results or theoretical ideas of others in different words; replicating data using the same methodology and obtaining similar results without referring to the previous work; using secondary sources, like a meta study, but only citing the primary sources it contains; duplication, or using previous research papers and data; unethical collaboration, where researchers work together and use each other's citations but do not state this; misattribution, or not giving full credit to all authors of a study; self-plagiarism, as when sending the same paper to many publications and publishing it more than once, etc.

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. To prevent plagiarism, the Journal's Editorial Board checks every article it receives with plagiarism detection software.

Manuscripts containing suspected plagiarism will be rejected. If plagiarism is detected after publication, the Journal's policy on ethical oversight will apply, with the corresponding procedures for handling ethical concerns, complaints and appeals.

2.2. Citation manipulation

Citation manipulation refers to the over-citation of another author or journal or including a citation solely for the purpose of increasing the citation index of the author(s) and/or journal(s).

Multiple/duplicate simultaneous publication/submission. Authors are expected to submit original articles that have not been submitted to any other publication, except in special cases and only with the agreement of the editor. Submitting the same article to several journals at the same time, or submitting several articles based on the same research, is considered by the Journal to be a breach of publishing ethics.

Citation manipulation will result in the rejection of an article and may be reported to the institution represented by the author.

2.3. Data falsification/fabrication

Falsification is the alteration or omission of the results (data) of a study to support claims, hypotheses, other data, etc. Falsification may involve the manipulation of research instruments or research processes.

Fabrication is the presentation of a study that has not been carried out or study results (data) that have not been obtained as if the study had been carried out or the results obtained. Fabrication can involve filling in missing questionnaires, increasing the number of respondents, etc.

The Journal's Editorial Board must investigate whether an article involves potential fraud when it receives allegations by a reviewer or reader that the researchers did not have the technical capability to carry out the published research, the results of the study appear to be fraudulent, the data from control experiments are "too perfect", etc.

If reviewers and editors find that any type of falsification or fabrication has taken place that alters the results of the research presented in the article, the article will be rejected, and the authors' representative bodies may be notified.

3. POLICY ON ETHICAL OVERSIGHT

3.1. Procedures for handling ethical concerns

Breaches of publishing ethics may be identified by many parties and not only by members of the Editorial Board, reviewers, and readers. The following procedures should be followed:

1. Any person who suspects a violation of publishing ethics should inform the Editor-in-Chief, clearly identifying the possible ethical violation.
2. To determine whether an ethical violation is involved, the Editor-in-Chief shall examine the relevant documents and, as needed, contact the person who identified the possible violation, the author(s) who possibly violated publication ethics, and any other person involved.
3. If the Editor-in-Chief finds that there has been misconduct, a publishing misconduct report shall be written and an ad hoc Publication Ethics Review Commission (hereinafter, Commission) shall be formed.
4. The task of the Commission is to investigate the problem, verify the facts of the case, and determine whether a breach of publication ethics has occurred.

The Commission shall consist of at least three editors and/or members of the Journal's Editorial Board and two external reviewers with relevant expertise. Potential members of the Commission must disclose any potential conflicts of interest they have in regard to the author. The identity of the members of the Commission shall be confidential.

5. When a Commission is formed, the author(s) who possibly violated publication ethics shall be notified and given the opportunity to explain their actions within 30 days.
6. The Commission shall report back to the Editor-in-Chief within 60 days with its conclusions and recommendations. When a breach of publication ethics is confirmed, the Commission shall suggest suitable sanctions according to the gravity of the violation, such as, for example, a letter of reprimand, rejection/retraction of the article, possible restriction of future submissions to the Journal and/or suspension of reviewing privileges.
7. The Editor-in-Chief shall review the findings of the Commission and its recommendations. The Editor-in-Chief may consult with the relevant parties regarding further action.

8. If the Commission has not been able to substantiate the alleged misconduct, no further investigation shall be carried out and the case shall be closed. No sanctions shall be imposed on the author(s). A letter shall be sent to the author(s) with the conclusions of the investigation.

9. For a confirmed violation, the Editor-in-Chief shall inform the author(s) and relevant academic and funding agencies of the results of the investigation. If deemed necessary, the Editor-in-Chief may also notify the State Ethics Oversight Committee regarding the violation.

The author(s) shall have 30 days after receiving notification of the results of the investigation to appeal the decision and/or sanctions. The letter of appeal must be addressed to the Editor-in-Chief and must contain the specific information or new information on which the appeal is based.

3.2. Complaints and appeals

The Editor-in-Chief, in consultation with the members of the Editorial Board, has the right to decide whether an article submitted for publication is suitable for the Journal. The decision to reject a submitted article is taken on a collegial basis, providing a general comment on the reasons for rejection, and there is no formal right to appeal the rejection. However, if the author(s) believe(s) that the decision to reject their manuscript was due to an error in the review of the manuscript, the author(s) may request in a letter to the Editor-in-Chief that any error in the review be corrected. In such case, the Editor-in-Chief shall appoint one of the members of the Editorial Board as the expert responsible for examining the request and he/she shall examine the author's arguments. The Board's decision on appeals is final. If such a request is considered, the author will be contacted by email within 28 days of its receipt.

If an author believes that a decision to reject his/her article has been influenced by a breach of publishing ethics, he/she may contact the Journal with a detailed written description of his/her concerns and the information supporting the concerns to soter@vdu.lt.

When dealing with complex ethical conflicts, the members of the Journal's Editorial Board, authors, reviewers, readers, and other stakeholders are invited to abide by the guidelines and rules presented in the internationally recognized publishing ethics resource bases [PERK](#) (Publishing Ethics Resource Kit) and [COPE](#) (Committee on Publication Ethics).

Contacts and useful links

Contacts

Any questions regarding the integrity of *Soter* contents or breaches of publishing ethics should be addressed to: soter@vdu.lt.

All questions related to the post-publication discussions and corrections process should be addressed to the Deputy Editor-in-Chief by email to: soter@vdu.lt.

Useful links

[Publishing Ethics: Academic Research](#). Cambridge University Press (2021).

Committee on Publication Ethics ([COPE](#)) (2022).

Publishing Ethics Resource Kit ([PERK](#)) (2022).

[Provisions for Professionalism and Ethics in Research](#). Senate of Vytautas Magnus University (2021).

[Code of Ethics of Vytautas Magnus University](#). Senate of Vytautas Magnus University (2011).