

Should (Religious) Deities be Acknowledged?

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ABSTRACT

Global Science Books (GSB) has received – from a total of about 4000 submissions – approximately 15 manuscripts, particularly from scientists in Islamic countries such as Egypt, Iran or Pakistan, that thank Allah in the Acknowledgements. Only on two occasions have Christian Nigerian scientists requested to thank God in the Acknowledgements. No other scientist has requested the acknowledgement of any other religious deity. In all these cases, GSB has politely requested the authors to remove such acknowledgements and to only acknowledge those people or entities who were directly (and tangibly) related with the research work. Herein, I try to explore why GSB has chosen this stance, but also try to explore an understanding of how it could be achieved it without segregating, appear to be segregating, or being anti-this or anti-that. How to accommodate atheists or agnostics? Religious and ethnic, socio-cultural or personal choices can all be respected, even if the publisher does not permit the acknowledgements of important elements of these choices within the acknowledgements of a scientific paper. This opinion piece is not an attack or challenge on any religion. It is a call for heightened consciousness when compiling a manuscript.

Keywords: agnostic, atheist, religion

SHOULD A DEITY BE ACKNOWLEDGED?

Religion is a personal choice. Often it is based on strong cultural roots and in many cases, it tends to define certain countries, but always, and ultimately, it is a personal choice. In some countries, however, it might not be a personal choice, and has the potential to be imposed (actively or sub-consciously). In religion, and in the deity that tends to be at the forefront of that religion, a god (in general), lies the ultimate example of moral and spiritual value. The prime example, so to speak. Religion is good in that it provides a constant reminder of morality and even though there could be heated discussion as to whether those that pray more are more moral. Those who do not believe in a deity (atheists) or those who doubt (the existence of) deities (agnostics) would likely point to other factors that influence morality and human judgment. Independent of the religious or anti-religious background, in this brief opinion paper, I want to examine if it is appropriate or not to acknowledge religious deities in the acknowledgements section of a scientific paper. This issue has never been discussed before and, for obvious socio-culturally sensitive reasons, will likely not be touched upon by main-stream publisher for fear of “losing” market ground for stirring issues that would be considered to be on the fringe of science. However, this issue, as many others, needs to be openly and frankly discussed because religion (or the lack thereof) is an integral part of members of this science society.

In 2007, we first received such a paper in MERJPSB (<http://www.globalsciencebooks.info/Journals/MERJPSB.html>) from a group of Egyptian scientists who wrote “We wish to thank Allah for help and assistance”. At that time, GSB was quite young and inexperienced, and I, as Editor-in-Chief, was left with a very difficult situation of deciding whether to allow this acknowledgement to be included, or not. Although I was faced with a possible back-lash, and after long and careful reflection, I decided that it would not be appropriate for a scientific paper, to be acknowledging one’s important religious deity. Following that acknowledgement, we received approximately 10-15 such acknowledgements, exclusively from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Egypt, Pakistan and Muslim Indians, but not from scientists

in any other Muslim countries. In all cases, we have quietly, and respectfully, requested the authors to remove any acknowledgement to Allah, and to only acknowledge scientists and institutes that were directly involved in the research or who provided tangible assistance. In 2010, we then received two manuscripts submitted to AJPSB (<http://www.globalsciencebooks.info/Journals/AJPSB.html>) from Christian Nigerian scientists thanking God in the acknowledgements.

Below follows my reasoning, as Editor-in-Chief, of why we at GSB have not allowed such acknowledgements.

By religious deity, I am insinuating a person or object, living or not, that is most likely considered to be supernatural and omnipresent. Such deities are not tangible and are part of the spiritual and psychological realms. Yet, belief in them provides hope, encouragement, understanding, love, compassion and a wealth of other positive emotions that fortify the positive human character. These are all the obvious aspects and effects that we can observe of religion. The logical counter of such ideologies would broadly encompass atheists and agnostics. However, there may also be religious fanaticism, and the use of religion to advance a political or economic agenda, a distortion of faith aimed at a grab for power, a change of regime, or to instill fear, which has always been a strong and integral component of most religions. What about agnostics and atheists? Perhaps for others, an ice-cream, a walk in the park, their dog or pet fish, or pop-star might be equally important spiritual symbols of self-improvement. Therein lies the difficulty. There is absolutely no way of applying an across-the-board standard for religion and what is or what isn’t important when it comes to the spiritual and psychological stability and improvement of an individual. As I stated in the start of my text, religion (or the lack of it) is a personal choice, and should remain so. I am of the belief that it should remain a “secret” personal choice that should not be stated proudly and publically in the hope of being seen, although it can be proudly displayed, subconsciously, in so many other ways. Religious affiliation should not be trumpeted to gain social or political points. Open discussion and proud affiliation to or against a religion or deity should never be mustered and constitute free speech within the public domain (newspapers,

radio, TV, internet blogs, wikis, etc.), unless we are dealing with the acknowledgements section of a scientific paper.

Turning back to science. If I would have allowed the first Egyptian group of scientists to acknowledge Allah in their acknowledgements, I would have been forced to respect the request of Christians to acknowledge God or Jesus Christ, Hindus to acknowledge Sheeva, Bhuddists to acknowledge Buddha, or others. Not only. If I had allowed the first acknowledgement to Allah, or the Nigerian acknowledgement to God, I would have been forced to also allow atheists and non-believers (in a higher spiritual deity) as well as agnostics to acknowledge objects and people, who would have provided spiritual and religious guidance, making them stronger perhaps to perform that experiment. I would have had to allow the acknowledgements of cults, of radical groups and of odd concepts, too. By opening up one exception, I would have had to open up a sea of exceptions. Would it be right to allow someone to acknowledge the Klu-Klux Clan or *neo*-Nazi groups, their cat, Mr. Bean, their Toyota, or the sun? We would enter the realm of pathos. By opening up one exception, I would have been forced to open up ALL exceptions. Counter to this, by not opening up such an exception, I could have been labeled anti-Islamist, anti-Christian or anti-religious or any other string of apartheid-like intolerant insinuations. However, for reasons explained above, I believe I made the right choice. However, since this topic is almost never discussed, this opinion paper aims to provide a platform for future discussion. By openly and transparently discussing the issue would be, I believe, important for the scientific community to consider.

Therefore, in the spirit of fair and free choice, I have had to and must continue to deny any requests for acknowledgements to religious or any other deity, or group that was not directly (and tangibly) involved with the research in the scientific paper. This includes people or entities (specifically academic institutes such as universities or

companies) who provide financial, material, intellectual or structural support. Psychological support may enter the same realm as religious inspiration, and merits more analysis and discussion. This does not necessarily mean that the same rule should be applied to all publishers and journals, who have their own choices to make, simply this is the logic and rationale behind the choice made at GSB. It is my sincere hope that this topic can be discussed at greater length even in social media.

CONCLUSION

The acknowledgements should therefore avoid excessively personal or strong emotional intonation or messages. It should only list individuals (people) who do not qualify for authorship but who contributed to some aspect that led to an improvement of the research or manuscript. Institutes that lent support to the research should be listed.

GLOSSARY

These terms have been based on Wikipedia definitions, *verbatim*, except where otherwise defined.

Agnostic: the view that the truth values of certain claims – especially claims about the existence or non-existence of any deity, as well as other religions and metaphysical claims – are unknown and (so far as can be judged) unknowable.

Atheist: the rejection of belief in the existence of deities (broad sense); there are no deities (narrow sense).

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