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On Whether there are Grounds for Worship

Abstract:

I explore a novel defense of the duty to worship God based on the idea that it is what's best for us. I argue that this should be understood as the claim that humans are required to do what's best when (a) there is a best option available; (b) the best option is identifiable and; (c) the best option is feasible. One virtue of this account is that it can explain how a duty to worship God is defeasible. I show this by appealing to a recent concept developed by Chris Tucker called motivated submaximization.¹

1. Introduction: The No Grounds of Worship Argument for Atheism

Worship is a much-neglected topic in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Tim Bayne and Yujin Nagasawa's article, "The grounds of worship" attempts to help remedy this problem (2006). They argue that it is difficult to identify the grounds of the obligation to worship. In light of this, they tentatively suggest that inasmuch as the obligation to worship God is essential to the very concept of God, the theist's inability to identify the grounds of worship supports atheism. It's relatively straight-forward to see how their suggestion could be expanded into a more explicit argument for atheism.

Bayne and Nagasawa distinguish between the following two theses:

Reasonableness thesis: Necessarily, it is reasonable for us to worship God.

Obligation thesis: Necessarily, it is obligatory for us to worship God.²

¹ Chris Tucker, "Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93 (2016): 127-143; Chris Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017): 1365-1384.

² Tim Bayne and Yujin Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship." *Religious Studies* 42 (2006) : 299-313.

They focus on problematizing the obligation thesis, and when I refer to the requirement of our obligation to worship this is what I have in mind (unless stated otherwise). Here's a standardized version of what I take to be the implicit argument offered in Bayne and Nagasawa:

The No Grounds of Worship Argument for Atheism

1. If God exists, then there is an obligation to worship God.
2. Probably, there are no (truth-making) grounds for the obligation to worship God.

Therefore,

3. Probably, there is no obligation to worship God. (MT 3,4)

Therefore,

4. Probably, God does not exist. (MT, 1,4)

This is a simple version of the argument (or at least a nearby argument) of the one Bayne and Nagasawa gesture at toward the end of their paper. With Bayne and Nagasawa I will assume that premise (1) is true. Or, more precisely, I will assume that for many theists (1) is uncontroversial and enjoys prima facie plausibility. An additional assumption is that truth-making grounds for worship are required to justify our obligation to worship. For an initial objection to the argument is that premise (3) only follows from (1) and (2) if the obligation mentioned in (1) needs to be grounded by a truth-maker. So, this objection says that (1) really needs to be: If God exists then there is a grounded (by a truth-maker) obligation to worship God. But, so the objection goes, this is false because while we might have an obligation to worship God, that obligation need not be grounded. Perhaps God has the brute property of worship-worthiness. If this were right, however, such a property couldn't be part of God's essence since that would constitute a grounds for

worship. Thus, this brute property would be merely contingent. This is something many theists will want to deny.³

Thus, I assume, with Bayne and Nagasawa, that a ground of worship is required. Furthermore, I assume that this is not a case where it's "reasonable to think that p is the case even when one has no idea what might make it the case that p " (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 311). Finally, in premise (1) I assume that worship-worthiness is essential to the nature of God. If God exists, then in every possible world there is a requirement on agents (who are capable of it) to worship God. Again, I think that this is uncontroversial for most theists. To deny (1) the theist would have to deny that worship-worthiness is an essential attribute of God, and hence affirm that there are possible worlds where God exists, but an obligation to worship God fails to exist. This argument's strength is relative to the theist's ability to state the relevant truth-making grounds of worship.

In Section Two I critically explain Bayne and Nagasawa's defense of premise (2). Their strategy is to explain the most promising ways of grounding an obligation to worship God and show why they fail. In Section Three I develop an account of worship which is grounded in the idea that it's what's best for us. In Section Four I address a number of objections to my what's best account. One virtue of this account is that it can be correct and yet leave open the possibility that our duty to worship is defeasible. I show this by appealing to motivated submaximization which occurs when an agent aims at the best but doesn't do it because of countervailing considerations.⁴ With respect to our duty to worship, such countervailing considerations might be motivated based on the idea that it denies us our rightful status as autonomous moral agents and hence violates our

³ Bayne and Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship," 310.

⁴ Tucker, "Satisficing and Motivated Submaximization"; Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing."

dignity.⁵ The theist can thus admit that the duty to worship God is defeasible while simultaneously holding that we ought to worship.

2. Premise (2): There are no (truth-making) grounds for the obligation to worship God.

In this section I present some possible ways to ground the obligation to worship God, largely following Bayne and Nagasawa and their critics in briefly describing and rejecting these attempts. Much more could be said for and against each of these accounts. I make no attempt at completeness here. Rather, my purpose is to spell out the different attempts and their problems in order to provide a basis and motivation for my subsequent alternative account which I think improves upon them.

2.1 Creation-Based Accounts

Creation-based accounts say that the obligation to worship God arises from the fact that God creates and sustains us (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 303). For instance, Bayne and Nagasawa quote Richard Swinburne as offering atypical example of this line of thought:

If there is a God and he has made and sustains the world and issued commands to men, men have moral obligations which they would not otherwise have. The grounds for this are as follows. Men ought to acknowledge other persons with whom they come into contact, not just ignore them – and this surely becomes a duty when those persons are our benefactors. We acknowledge people in various ways when we meet them, e.g. by shaking hands or smiling at them, and the way in which we acknowledge their presence reflects our recognition of the sort of individual they are and the kind of relation they have to us. Worship is the only response appropriate to God, the source of all being (Swinburne 1981, 126 quoted on Bayne and Nagasawa 2016, 304).⁶

Reply:

⁵Rachels, “God and human attitudes,” *Religious Studies* 7 (1971): 325-337.

⁶ Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*. Oxford University Press (1981): 126 quoted in Bayne and Nagasawa, “The grounds of worship,” 304

This account understands existence as an underserved good (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 303). But there are a number of problems with this view. First, this view implies that uncreated persons do not have an obligation to worship God. While modal metaphysics is often murky, it's worth noting that many theists accept the possibility of uncreated persons. In so far as a theist accepts that there are uncreated persons, the creation-based account is problematic.⁷

Second, a person should only be grateful for her existence inasmuch as being created benefits her. If being created is necessarily a benefit (i.e. it leaves someone better off), then it appears we would have a moral obligation to increase that benefit in so far as we can, and thus ought to procreate as much as possible and encourage others to do the same. But this is absurd.⁸ The absurdity of this shows it is problematic to think we owe God worship for our mere existence.

Third, it is intuitively obvious that certain individuals are harmed by being brought into existence. Just "[l]ike Job, many have cursed the day of their birth, and although some such judgements might be unjustified, it is difficult to believe that everyone does well by having been created".⁹ This objection starts to slip into the problem of evil. Marilyn Adams holds that if God exists then every individual's life must be on balance good. She admits that some earthly lives are so miserable that this might only be possible in an afterlife.¹⁰ Bayne and Nagasawa claim that the theist who wishes to pursue a creation-based account should consider adopting Adams' line of thought. However, "both those who are sceptical of the notion of an afterlife and those who doubt that even communion with God could counterbalance an otherwise horrendous life will regard the problem of horrendous evils as providing additional reason to reject any attempt to ground

⁷ Bayne and Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship," 304.

⁸ Bayne and Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship," 305.

⁹ Bayne and Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship," 305.

¹⁰ Bayne and Nagasawa, "The grounds of worship," 306. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous evils and the goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (supplementary volume)* 63 (1999): 299-310.

worshipfulness in creation” (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 306). Adams’ proposal will be more or less attractive depending on whether one wants to take on board the assumptions such an account requires to succeed.¹¹

2.2 The Maximal-Excellence Account

Another way of grounding the obligation to worship is what Bayne and Nagasawa refer to as the maximal-excellence account. This appeals to God’s intrinsic nature, as opposed to God’s relation to us (e.g. the fact that he created us) (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 306). There are, of course, many different ways of understanding maximal excellence. Perhaps God has the maximal set of good-making properties.¹²

Reply:

While this might make it *permissible* to worship God, it’s more difficult to explain why this would make it *obligatory* to worship God. This is because:

Worshipping God for His power or His knowledge seems to smack of fascism. The idea that moral perfection obligates worship is less objectionable, but not unproblematic. Most of us recognize various other persons as our moral superiors, yet few of us suppose that we have *obligations* to worship such persons. Perhaps we ought to recognize their moral superiority and aspire to emulate their behaviour, but these attitudes seem to fall short of worship (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 307).

Perhaps the maximal-excellence account is better explained by the property of holiness. Maybe it’s a brute or primitive concept. But holiness is a difficult concept. If it’s intended to ground a duty to worship then the theist needs to explain how holiness differs from other terms

¹¹ Fourth, this account may entail that we have an obligation (even if to a lesser degree) to worship family, friends, and many aspects of society at large (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 306). For we depend on many other people for our existence.

¹² Bayne and Nagasawa, “The grounds of worship,” 307.

like awe and respect (Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 307). It also seems that other beings possess the property of holiness (i.e. it might come in degrees). If this is right, then God wouldn't be the only being worthy of worship (to some degree).¹³

2.3 The Prudential-Reasons Account

Yet another approach to grounding the obligation to worship God is based on prudential-reasons. Bayne and Nagasawa explain that “[a]ccording to most theists, we are designed to worship God, and our true fulfillment and happiness is found only in such an activity”.¹⁴

Reply:

Even if it's true that humans were indeed designed to worship, it's less clear that the object of such worship needs to be God. Additionally, authentic worship should not be motivated entirely out of pure self-interest.¹⁵

2.4 Divine Command accounts

The divine command accounts say that we are obligated to worship God because God commands it.

Reply:

This appears to equate moral commands with moral duties. Not only is this a controversial view in metaethics, it doesn't really tell us *why* God commands it. While Bayne and Nagawasa never mention the Euthyphro dilemma¹⁶ as a potential problem for divine command accounts, clearly it

¹³ Some have objected to Bayne and Nagasawa's reject of maximal excellence accounts on the basis that it is a threshold term. Once a being passes a certain threshold of excellence a duty to worship that being obtains. I don't find this very persuasive. See Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Oxford University Press (1999). Others hold that different accounts of maximal excellence would avoid these problems. Again, I don't find this convincing and won't discuss these issues further.

¹⁴ Bayne and Nagasawa, “The grounds of worship,” 309.

¹⁵ Bayne and Nagasawa, “The grounds of worship,” 309.

¹⁶ Nor does their critic in Benjamin D. Crowe, “Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa,” *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 465-474.

is relevant here. It's a problem for the theist wanting to say that the duty to worship is grounded in a divine command. Does God command us to worship him because God recognizes that we have a duty to do so, or because God prefers that we do so? If the former is true, then there are independent reasons for our duty to worship God. This may be correct, but it leaves us with no more clarity as to the grounds of worship. For this section shows numerous difficulties in attempting to find such grounds. If the latter is true, then the question is why does God prefer that we worship? Without an explanation of this preference, it is arbitrary. Yet for such an explanation not to be arbitrary the reasons may well have to be external to God. There is, of course, a dense literature on divine command theory more generally. What one thinks of divine command theory in general will likely influence what one thinks of grounding the duty to worship in divine commands. It would be another project entirely to evaluate divine command theory here, but those who reject it as a theory in metaethics will likely not wish to endorse it here.

2.5 Redemptive-Based Accounts

One account proposed by Benjamin D. Crowe (and not subsequently addressed Bayne and Nagasawa) is based on God's redemptive activity. This turns the duty to worship God into an issue of justice. According to Crowe, on this view the duty to worship is about the justice of giving someone what is owed to them.¹⁷ He writes that:

This account, which certainly figures prominently in the history of both Judaism and Christianity, might be called a 'redemption-based' account. The basic thought is that, since God has performed acts of incalculable benefit for humanity, human beings are therefore obliged to render God His Due as far as they are capable by worshipping Him.¹⁸

¹⁷ Crowe, "Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa," 470.

¹⁸ Crowe, "Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa," 470.

This account is able to avoid the worry that existence is not a good for certain individuals. Crowe appeals to the work of early Anglican theologian Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) to explain this point:

Both in the case of the Incarnation generally, and the Passion in particular, Andrewes's thought is that God has provided us with something unambiguously good, such that we now owe worship to God. On the Christian hypothesis, redemption places human beings in the best condition possible for them. While sheer existence may be of questionable value for some people, participation in divinity is surely not. Beyond this, however, the concept of the Incarnation entails that God Himself, the supreme, incommensurable goodness, became fully present to and available for human beings in a concrete, tangible manner. Here again, there is no scope for ambiguity regarding the goodness of what God has rendered to humanity.¹⁹

Reply:

Yet there are difficulties with this account too. For instance, Bayne and Nagasawa write that “[r]edemption is, fundamentally, the salvation from sin. But what does sin involve if not the failure to worship God in the way that one ought? The grounds of the obligation to worship God must be logically or conceptually prior to redemption”.²⁰ Note that this response is perfectly consistent with being thankful for God's redemptive work. Additionally, it is unclear what it means to say that God's redemptive activity allows us to participate in the divine. This is obscure and hand-waving. What does it mean? And how does it create an obligation to worship God? Finally, this solution is narrow in that it only applies to Christians and perhaps also those in the Jewish tradition (i.e. theists who believe that God does redemptive work).

¹⁹ Crowe, “Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa,” 471.

²⁰ Crowe, “Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa,” 479.

3. The Best-Based Account

The potential grounds of worship I examined and rejected above was done quickly. I don't deny that there might be ways of defending the abovementioned grounds that I didn't address. However, I don't want to get mired in such details as my primary objective is to present a novel ground of worship. So for the sake of argument, suppose that the above grounds fail. In this section I offer what I call a best-based account which grounds the obligation to worship in the simple idea that it is what's best for us. This account is distinct but related to the prudential reasons account. More importantly, that worship is the best for us is gestured at in Crowe's reply to Bayne and Nagasawa's rejection of the divine command account. Crowe writes "[t]hat worship is indeed commanded by God, who is a morally perfect being, and who therefore always wills the best, entails that worship belongs to the best. Assuming that we have an obligation to promote the best, it follows that we have an obligation to worship God".²¹ On this account, it's not just that God commands us to worship God and that we are designed to worship God. The key is that we have a duty to worship God because worshipping God is what's *best* for us.

Crowe is quick on this point and I am going to develop it into its own unique account. As we've seen, it doesn't follow that because x is commanded by God to y that x is obligated to y (or we've at least seen reasons to question that this follows). Likewise, we've seen that it doesn't follow that if x is designed to w that x has a duty to w. But the more pertinent question for this account is whether just because q is the best for x, it follows that x has an obligation to q. The best-based account I want to defend here affirms that in such a case an obligation does indeed arise for x to q. But an explanation for this is surely owed so in what follows I will attempt to defend it.

²¹ Crowe, "Reasons for worship: a response to Bayne and Nagasawa," 469-470.

The defense of this best-based account of the duty to worship can be found in the more general requirement for people to do what's best. This defense says that we're required to do what's best iff:

- (a) There is a best option.²²
- (b) The best option is identifiable.
- (c) The best option is feasible.

This is an account grounded in reasons. For when (a) through (c) obtain it would be *irrational* for an agent to do otherwise. If it's a norm that irrationality is to be avoided and rationality pursued, then this account is quite intuitively appealing. For *why* would one do otherwise if there is a best option available? Assuming that this general account of why we should choose the best is correct, we still need specific reasons for thinking that worship is what's best for us.

If there is a God, then worship is what's best for us for a number of reasons. Worship is what's best for us because it is commanded by God, it's what we're designed to do, and it's what God is owed because of his maximal excellence, creative and redemptive work. One might balk at this explanation. Aren't these the very reasons that were just explained and rejected in the previous section? Yes. But they were rejected as independent reasons *on their own* as to why we should worship God. Here, they serve as part of the *explanation* as to why worship is the best, rather than as the independent grounds for worship. If this account is correct, then there is reason to reject premise (2) of the No Grounds for Worship Argument for Atheism. In what follows I explore a number of potential objections to the best based account.

4. Objections to the Best Based Account

²² If there are multiple best options, then one of them needs to be chosen for the reason that it is contained in the set of best options. But it need not matter which specific option among the best is chosen. \

4.1 Worship is an Obscure Term so we can't Identify it as the Best

The first objection I examine says that while even if there is such phenomenon as genuine worship, it is an exceedingly difficult term to define. Since it is so difficult to define, it is difficult to identify. Thus, even if worship is the best (and we ought to do the best), this obligation doesn't exist with respect to worship since we cannot identify it.

There are a number of different ways to see this point. Offering necessary and sufficient conditions is an impossible task. Such conditions are bound to be either too permissive or too strict. Perhaps one might admit this but say we can get a grasp on worship by explaining how it differs from neighboring terms such as awe, wonder, respect, fear, gratitude. Yet it seems that this strategy just reinforces the problem. For it becomes difficult to specify how worship is distinct from these other terms. In light of these problems we can't identify worship and so we can't identify the best. On the assumption that ought implies can, we can't have an obligation to worship since we can't identify it. This objection just says that condition (b) is not met by the best based account.

Reply:

A benefit of the best-based account is that it can deal with this objection in ways other accounts cannot. Worship could have an affective component such as awe, praise, or delight (or a similar but affective response that is unique to worship). It could have a volitional component such as yielding or perhaps even abasing oneself. Worship might involve an agentive component such that worshipping God entails obedience. There may also be important epistemic aspects of worship: can one worship God without knowing one is doing so? Or can one worship an object (i.e., God) without being able to (fully comprehend) that object? Should worship be understood as a single temporal event or as something that occurs throughout the course of one's life? Is worship something that is best done publicly? A significant upshot of my best-based account is that it

doesn't necessarily matter how these questions are answered. My account can simply be applied to whatever preferred conception of worship one has in mind.²³

One might press the point that the objection is really that it's going to be difficult for anyone to identify their preferred account in the first place. However, that we can't give necessary and sufficient conditions for worship does not entail that it cannot be identified. The demarcation problem for what constitutes 'science' is well-known but most don't take this to mean there is no such thing as science. For instance, maybe we simply know worship when we see it. Perhaps it can be identified as a cluster of 'worship-like' attitudes and/or actions. This suggests something even more permissive than Wittgenstein's family resemblance approach. When I refer to a cluster I could be referring to terms in different families, though they all are in some way connected to worship. This would just broaden the scope of what's included in the term worship and hence what should be included in the best.

4.2 Satisficing: it can be rational to do the less-than-best

Another objection to the best based account challenges the assumption that it's irrational not to do the best when the best is an available option. This appeals to a concept in economics known as *satisficing*. This is the idea that it is sometimes permissible for an agent to choose the less-than-best, provided that she chooses a *sufficiently good* option.²⁴ To help understand this view, consider Jacob Caton's explanation of Herbert Simon's apartment problem:

Presumably, when searching for an apartment one values several attributes (perhaps cost, size, distance from work, quiet neighborhood, and so forth). How ought one

²³ See Ninian Smart, *The Concept of Worship*, Palgrave Macmillan (1972) for an early analysis of worship in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion.

²⁴ In discussion of the problem of no best world there is a debate about whether God can satisfice with respect to world selection and creation. For example, see [Removed] and Klaas J. Kraay, "Theism and Modal Collapse," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 48 (2011): 361-372.

. But this need not concern us here since we want to know whether satisficing is permissible for humans.

choose? The optimization procedure recommends maximizing some measure. For example, one way to proceed would be to list every available apartment, assess each apartment's total subjective value under the various attributes, determine the likelihoods of obtaining each apartment, and then calculate this "weighted average" and choose the apartment that optimizes or maximizes this measure. Simon noticed that such an optimization procedure is typically not feasible for humans: it is too computationally demanding. For one, the complete information about apartment availability or even complete information about apartment attributes is often unavailable. Secondly, the relevant probabilities are crucial to an optimization strategy, but these probabilities are too cognitively demanding for typical human agents. For example, what is the probability that apartment *B* will still be available if the initial offer for apartment *A* gets rejected? How would one calculate this probability? Instead, Simon suggests that humans ought to make decisions by "satisficing", or deciding to act when some threshold representing a "good enough", but not necessarily best or optimal, outcome is achieved.²⁵

Satisficing means simply finding a 'good enough' apartment, given that finding the very best is unfeasible. Satisficing is not meant to be understood as a second-best option to optimization. Rather, Simon intended it to be *the* procedure that ought to be used to evaluate the rationality of humans. If humans satisfice instead of optimizing, they shouldn't be deemed irrational.²⁶ The purported advantage of satisficing is that it is far less demanding than optimization with respect to computational costs. To satisfice, agents aren't required to compute "expected values based on a network of probabilities and subjective values, and also the computational resources to store and

²⁵ Jacob Caton, "Resource Bounded Agents" *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2019).

²⁶ Jacob Caton, "Resource Bounded Agents."

compare these values. Satisficing strategies, by contrast, only require that an agent is able to compare a possible choice with a threshold value, and there is no need to store past assessments (other than the fact that a past choice was assessed).²⁷ Yet another benefit of satisficing is that it appears to describe how humans actually make decisions and hence enjoys broad explanatory power.²⁸

There are important questions about whether such a controversial concept in economics and decision theory should be appealed to in order to motivate this objection. Additionally, surveying and adjudicating the debate over satisficing would take us too far afield. Still, even if satisficing is permissible in certain contexts, it cannot be used as an objection to the best based account. Consider that satisficing is a concept only used for non-ideal reasoners in non-ideal situations (both morally and epistemically). While my best-based account certainly is about non-ideal reasoners, they are not in less-than-ideal circumstances with respect to worship. This is because humans are able to recognize worship as the right response to God and they are able to choose it.²⁹ Humans need not be ideal reasoners in order to worship. In other words, worship is indeed the best option and agents are able to choose it. Thus, even if satisficing is permissible when there is no best option (or the best exists but isn't feasible), this is not the case when it comes to worship.³⁰

5. Rachels' *A Priori* Argument

²⁷ Jacob Caton, "Resource Bounded Agents."

²⁸ Jacob Caton, "Resource Bounded Agents." For criticisms of satisficing see Caton's helpful encyclopedia entry "Resource Bounded Agents."

²⁹ Of course, there are interesting questions here regarding to the extent to which every person has an innate knowledge of God. One might object that certain people (think of indigenous tribes in a jungle) do not necessarily have a knowledge of God and so cannot be expected to identify worshipping God as the best option. At the very least, what I say here applies to those with (some) knowledge of monotheism.

³⁰ A more general worry is how an agent can identify the 'sufficiently' good enough options in any scenario, not just with respect to worship.

Bayne and Nagasawa never claim to be offering what they call a ‘master argument’ against the existence of God. A more precise characterization of their argument would have a qualifier like ‘as far as we can tell’ amended to premise (2). Bayne and Nagasawa seem to think that inasmuch as they successfully problematize the grounds for our obligation to worship God, that they put pressure on the rationality of theism. This is perhaps best understood as an abductive or inductive argument against theism. My best based account gives us reasons for questioning the truth of premise (2). Yet there is a stronger argument lurking nearby than the previously offered No Grounds for Worship Argument for Atheism. Recall that Bayne and Nagasawa are only discussing the Obligation Thesis. James Rachels, on the other hand, attacks the Reasonableness Thesis, claiming that it is *never* permissible to worship God (or anything else). Thus, Rachels offers an *A priori* argument against the logical possibility of the existence of God.³¹ Here’s the standardized version of Rachels’ argument:

- (1) If any being is God, he must be a fitting object of worship.
- (2) No being could possibly be a fitting object of worship, since worship requires the abandonment of one’s role as an autonomous moral agent.
- (3) Therefore, there cannot be any being who is God³²

I’m not going to evaluate the merits of this argument here.³³ Rather, I’m going to show how the argument can be leveraged into an objection to my best based account, regardless of what we think of it. For example, one might think that even if worship is the best and hence we have a requirement

³¹ This is of course still on the assumption that worshipfulness is essential to God’s nature

³² James Rachels, “God and human attitudes,” *Religious Studies* 7 (1971): 335.

³³ For discussion of this argument see Robert A. Oakes, “Reply to Professor Rachels,” *Religious Studies* 8 (1972): 165-167; Philip L. Quinn, “Religious Obedience and Moral Autonomy,” *Religious Studies* 11 (1975): 265-281; John Chandler, “Is the Divine Command Theory Defensible?” *Religious Studies* 20 (1984): 443-452.

to worship, that it does indeed violate one's (moral) autonomy and dignity. This violation could be a motivation to *submaximize*. It could be a reason to choose the less than best (i.e. not to worship) because of the countervailing consideration (i.e. it violates our autonomy). This sort of consideration has become known as *motivated submaximization*.

6. Motivated Submaximization

We need more details about motivated submaximization in order to understand whether it can be appropriately used as an objection to worship. Chris Tucker explains that “[a]n agent submaximizes with motivation when she aims at the best but chooses a less good option because of a countervailing consideration” (Tucker 2017, 1365). More precisely:

Motivated Submaximization: an agent *A* *submaximizes with motivation* in a transparent situation iff:

- (a) *A* aims at getting as much of good *G* as *A* can, but
- (b) *A* chooses a suboptimal option with respect to *G* because of some countervailing consideration.³⁴

Tucker explains that a situation is transparent for an agent if there are no epistemic reasons to excuse the decision. For instance, an agent might think she is choosing the best when she isn't, due to ignorance.³⁵ Thus:

A's situation is transparent iff (1) *A* knows precisely what *A*'s options are, and (2) *A* knows the ranking of all *A*'s options. Transparent situations ensure that, if the agent chooses an option that is suboptimal, then she does so with full knowledge. In

³⁴ Tucker, “How to Think About Satisficing,” 1369.

³⁵ Tucker, “How to Think About Satisficing,” 1367.

transparent situations a choice for less than best is never made in ignorance. Epistemic excuses don't apply.³⁶

There are four reasons to justify motivated (transparent) submaximization that are typically thought to be legitimate. The first is what Tucker calls 'Ever Better Situations'. These are situations in which for any option an agent chooses there will always be a better one. Since there is no best, an agent is justified in choosing a sufficiently good option.³⁷ Second, special connections to specific individuals are said to justify submaximization. For instance, it could be acceptable to choose an option that isn't the best overall (but good enough) if it is better for one's family.³⁸ Third, sometimes two options might be incommensurable with each other. They aren't equally good; there is no way to tell which is better or worse. Finally, the fourth reason is what Tucker says are "deontological side constraints on the promotion of goodness".³⁹ Perhaps one chooses a less than best option on the condition that no one's rights are violated.⁴⁰ Tucker notes that there is a common structure to each of these four motivations:

Each motivation is compatible with the agent's aiming at as much of the good as she can get. What made choosing a suboptimal option plausibly appropriate [...] is that there were independent considerations that conflicted with that aim; there were countervailing considerations that (allegedly) made choosing a suboptimal option appropriate.⁴¹

³⁶ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1367.

³⁷ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1367.

³⁸ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1367-1368.

³⁹ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1368.

⁴⁰ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1368.

⁴¹ Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1369.

This sort of motivation is part of what makes submaximization distinct from satisficing. Tucker concludes with an important note on the sort of countervailing reasons one can legitimately appeal to when submaximizing. He writes:

In appropriate motivated submaximization, however, one's countervailing consideration for rejecting the best must be independent of the promotion of well-being (or whatever good determines the rankings of one's options). Suppose that options are ranked solely by the degree of well-being they contain, so that the best option is the one that contains the highest degree. This degree of well-being provides a reason to choose the best option. Since no smaller degree of well-being is minimally independent of the highest degree, no reason grounded in the promotion of well-being can countervail one's reason to choose the best. Hence, appropriate motivated submaximization involves countervailing considerations that are at least partly independent of the promotion of well-being (or whatever good determines the ranking of one's options).⁴²

7. Dignity, Worship, and Submaximization

A pertinent question now is whether, even granting worship is the best, submaximization could ever justify one's choice not to worship. Rachels' argument is instructive. Perhaps worship fundamentally violates our status as 'an autonomous moral agent'. Rachels presumably means that giving up our autonomy somehow violates our *dignity*. In worshipping we are necessarily acknowledging God as our moral superior. We are acknowledging our subservience to another being. The idea I'm gesturing towards here is that if worship violates our dignity it could constitute a countervailing reason not to do it.

⁴² Tucker, "How to Think About Satisficing," 1379.

Here's one upshot of this idea: the person (most likely a theist) pulled in either direction of this debate can have their cake and eat it too. For she could acknowledge that the best based account is sufficient to ground the duty to worship while simultaneously acknowledging that the associated dignity harms provide a countervailing reason not to worship. This means the theist can accept much of the sentiment behind Rachels' argument while rejecting that his argument is successful in showing the non-existence of God. She can also reject premise (2) of the No Grounds of Worship Argument by affirming that there are indeed grounds to worship. They're just grounds that don't necessarily apply to her because of the dignity harm associated with worship. There is no paradox here. Submaximization makes all of this perfectly intelligible.

Questions remain. Tucker notes that an appropriate countervailing reason needs to be (partly) independent of the good associated with the best option. Above I briefly suggested that worship is what's best for us because it is commanded by God, it's what we're designed to do, and it's what God is owed because of his maximal excellence, creative and redemptive work. Pressed further to explain this we might say worshipping, in at least some sense, promotes our human flourishing and well-being. There are, of course, many different philosophical conceptions of flourishing and well-being. Briefly, we might think that a person is flourishing if they are healthy and doing what they were designed to do in a relevantly suitable environment.⁴³ I don't take this definition to be exhaustive, but let's suppose it touches on what's important and is also consistent with a number of different approaches to flourishing. Supposing the initial reasons for worship I mentioned do indeed reduce to these more general goods about flourishing and well-being we can ask whether dignity really is separate from such goods. If it isn't (at least partly) separate from

⁴³ I use the language of design for simplicity but can be made consistent with a purely naturalistic process that doesn't involve design per se.

flourishing and well-being, then submaximization cannot be appealed to here. More work remains to be done in exploring the similarities and differences between the moral value of worship and of human dignity.

8. Conclusion

Worship is underexplored in the contemporary literature, yet there are many problems and puzzles associated with it. On the assumption that worshipful-worthiness is an essential property of God, the inability to identify the grounds of worship puts pressure on the rationality of theism. Following Bayne and Nagasawa, I explored and rejected five potential possible ways of grounding the duty to worship. I argued that a more promising account is based on the idea that we should worship God because it's what is best for us. We are required to do the best when such an option is available, identifiable, and feasible. Yet even if I have successfully identified the grounds of our duty to worship this duty is defeasible. Motivated submaximization occurs when an agent aims at the best yet chooses a different option because of a countervailing consideration. One such countervailing consideration is that worship violates our status as morally autonomous agents and hence our dignity. Whether this good's value is ultimately distinct from the value of worship remains to be seen. However, if they are distinct, the theist can have her cake and eat it too. For the duty to worship is successfully grounded, yet she doesn't in fact have a duty to worship.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Acknowledgements.