

The Power to Make Others Worship

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Abstract

In this paper I ask a new question about worship: Can any being worthy of worship make others worship it? By way of an analogy to love, I argue that it is perfectly coherent to think that one could be made to worship. However, forced worship would be inauthentic—much like love earned through potions. For this reason, I argue that one cannot be made to worship properly. My principal claim is that no being worthy of worship could exercise the power to make others worship it, since the act of making another worship would necessarily make one unworthy of worship.

1 Introduction

Does omnipotence impart the holder with the power to make others worship it properly? Another way to phrase the question is to ask: Could any being worthy of worship exercise the power to make others worship it? This question is distinct, although related, to another that has recently received some attention by philosophers of religion, namely: Can one properly demand worship?

Campbell Brown and Yujin Nagasawa argue that one cannot justly, or even coherently, demand worship, since worship is something that must be voluntary.¹ I offer reasons to think that Brown and Nagasawa's conclusion needs some qualification, but my primary goal in this paper is to defend a different, albeit related position. I argue that no one worthy of worship could exercise the power to make others worship it, since the act of making another worship oneself would necessarily make one unworthy of worship.

Before we begin, it will be helpful to say a bit about what I mean by "worship." For present purposes it is unnecessary to provide a precise formal analysis of "worship," it will be enough to note the difference between the attitude and the practice of worship. When one thinks about worship, images of chanting monks, prostrating practitioners, and incense waving devotees immediately come to mind—that is, one thinks of people engaged in ritual practices. But by "worship" I do not have in mind the act of engaging in a ritualistic practice of paying tribute. One can pay tribute to fallen soldiers,

¹ Campbell Brown and Yujin Nagasawa, "I Can't Make You Worship Me", *Ratio XVIII* (2005): 138-144.

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elders, or benefactors without thereby worshipping them. By “worship” I mean a complex of attitudes, desires, and emotions directed toward something, not a devotional act. The act of acknowledging this complex is an act of worship. An act of worship is different from a mere ritual; an act of worship must be sincere. One may behave as if they worship something by engaging in ritual acts that are typically expressive of feelings of worship. But it is not an act of worship unless one genuinely worships the object.

To genuinely worship is not simply to respect, admire, or feel gratitude and love. It is beyond these, but most plausibly includes them all. On most accounts, to worship is to venerate, to honor, and to love, perhaps unquestioningly—to feel unworthy in the presence of awe-inspiring greatness.² Of course, this notion of worship is characteristic of the Christian ideal of the proper attitude that one should hold toward God. It is a perfectly acceptable consequence of this rough analysis that if this is not the attitude that Hindus adopt towards gods such as Ganesh, then it would follow that they do not worship Ganesh, despite the fact that they may honor, revere, and pay tribute to him. However, there are clearly other Hindu gods, such as Krishna, that inspire the emotion complex and attitudes that are worship—this is certainly Arjuna’s response to Krishna after the theophany in the eleventh teaching of *The Bhagavad-Gita*. Although a Christian paradigm, the notion of worship under consideration is common enough for this discussion to have general significance.

The specific question I want to consider is whether something could have the power to make others *properly* worship it? Admittedly, this question is a bit cumbersome, but the “properly” is important. To understand why I have qualified the question in this manner, we will first need to explore an unqualified version of the same question: Can something have the power to make others worship it?

² Tim Bayne and Yujin Nagasawa provide a more elaborate description of the kind of worship that I have briefly characterized. See Bayne and Nagasawa, “The Grounds of Worship,” *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 299-313. Rudolph Otto’s description of the experience of the “numinous” is similar, but not identical to what I am calling worship. Otto describes an experience of which he calls a *mysterium tremendum* (a tremendous mystery). The experience is one of fascination and awe directed at an overpowering, otherness with tremendous energy. It involves feelings of unease, humility, and fascination. The experience Otto describes is what it might be like to think that you are in the presence of a being worthy of worship. But one can worship something without having such an experience.

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Among philosophers of religion, there has recently been some discussion of whether God can coherently command our worship. Many if not most theists believe that we are obligated to worship God, precisely because he demands it. Depending on the demarcation scheme, the first, or the first two, of the Ten Commandments explicitly command worship:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven, or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me. (Exodus 20:3-5)

Similarly, from the second page until the page before the last, the Koran repeatedly warns of the dismal fate—"grievous punishment" (2:5) of "the Destroying Fire" (104:4)—in store for unbelievers who fail to worship Allah. The Koran could not be more emphatic: "They have incurred God's most inexorable wrath. Ignominious punishment awaits the unbelievers" (2:90).³

In every major monotheistic religion, God demands faith—that is, he commands our worship.⁴ Of course, one could take issue with the claim that faith and worship are identical. Perhaps, one might argue, the kind of faith that God demands is mere belief, not the emotion complex that I have described as worship.⁵ This minimal interpretation might save the traditions from absurdities, but I do not think that it is even slightly plausible. It simply does not make sense to think that God would be jealous if we merely believed in other gods. Although I might not be able to devote myself to multiple gods, I could certainly believe in hundreds without diminishing my affections for my favorite. Jealousy is only appropriate if the text is referring to something akin to the attitude of worship, roughly, as I describe it. Mere belief does not fit God's jealous response.

Regardless, I have no intention of engaging in a three-front exegetical battle, since the actual doctrines of any given religion are largely irrelevant to our more abstract question: Can one be made to worship (in the sense described earlier)? Whether or not the God of the Jews, Christians, or Muslims commands

³ *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (Penguin, 2003).

⁴ We also find the command to worship in the New Testament: *Matthew* 4:10 and *Revelation* 19:10, 22:9.

⁵ Here I am making reference to Annette Baier's theory of love as an emotion complex. I do not want to endorse this view of love, since I think that love is likely more than a complex of emotions. It also involves a suite of desires and beliefs that cannot be reduced to the causes or consequences of emotions. Annette Baier, "Unsafe Loves" in *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*, eds. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (U P of Kansas, 1991).

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this kind of attitude has no bearing on our issue. However, since it is highly plausible to think that the major monotheistic traditions hold that God demands worship, our question has significance for the world's major religious traditions.

We must ask the question, can one coherently command worship? Clearly, one can be intimidated into supplication by a bully, but it is not so clear that one can force the sincere attitudes and emotions that are worship. It seems that the attitudes and emotions that compose worship can only arise voluntarily. At least, Campbell Brown and Yujin Nagasawa think so. They argue that,

Worship is, just like love or admiration, always voluntary. It is logically impossible for one reluctantly or unwillingly to worship anything. One might *pretend* to worship God by following certain religious rituals, but that does not mean that one actually worships God.⁶

Of course, one might have strong second-order desires not to worship, say, because the reigning political regime executes devotes of your chosen god. With second-order desires not to worship one may find persistent worshipful attitudes extremely troubling, but continue to worship nonetheless. In this way, one might worship reluctantly. But this is not the sense that Brown and Nagasawa have in mind. They are primarily concerned with whether one could sincerely worship something *because* it commands worship. And they are likely right to conclude that we cannot love or worship something out of mere compliance with a demand.⁷ However, the statement of their conclusion may be a bit too strong.

To better see the possible problem with the formulation of Brown and Nagasawa's conclusion, consider the last stanza of Sappho's poem "Hymn to Aphrodite." In this poem Sappho invokes the goddess Aphrodite to help her win the affections of a young woman. In a fantasy of optimism, Sappho imagines the arrival of the goddess, willing to grant her every wish. Aphrodite speaks: "Who, O / Sappho, is wronging you? / For if she flees, soon she will pursue. / If she refuses gifts, rather she will give them. / If she does not love, soon she will love / even if unwilling."⁸ Perhaps not in the sense that Brown and Nagasawa have in mind, but it is perfectly coherent to think that one can be made to love unwillingly—that is, one could be made willing. It is not at all logically contradictory to think that one could be made to love, and perhaps worship, as well.

Although one might not have the power to make oneself worship another

⁶ Brown and Nagasawa, "I Can't Make You Worship Me", p. 142.

⁷ Martin Blaauw takes issue with Brown and Nagasawa's claim that one could not come to worship something out of compliance with a demand. He argues that one could put oneself in situations conducive to worship, and, perhaps, eventually come to worship. See, Martin Blaauw, "Worship Me! A Reply to Brown and Nagasawa", *Ratio XX* (2005): 236-240.

⁸ Sappho, "Deathless Aphrodite of the Spangled Mind", trans. Anne Carson, *Norton Anthology of Western Literature*, vol. 1, (Norton; 2006), p. 497.

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out of mere compliance with a command, it is perfectly conceivable that, like fabled love potions or the will of Aphrodite, something could have the power to impart the attitudes, emotions, and desires that constitute worship on another. By having the ability to affect another's psychological states, one could have the power to make oneself the object of another's worship. Certainly a deity with the power to create the universe could have the power to make mere mortals feel awe, admiration, respect, love, and most anything else.

We should conclude that it is logically possible that something could have the power to make others love or even worship it. Imagine meeting Sappho's lover, who exhibits all the symptoms of being in love and, further, she frequently announces her feelings. We would think that Sappho and her lover are very much in love. It is not clear why we would need to revise our assessment if we later came to find out that Aphrodite's intervention is what caused the girl to fall for the tenth muse. No, the way one falls in love does not change the fact that one is in love. Hence, although a mere demand will not suffice, it is safe to say that one could have the power to make others love.

But one might object that there is something perverse in this kind of love. In the third act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, after Puck has misapplied love-in-idleness, Oberon exclaims:

What have you done? Thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love juice on some true-love's sight.
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true-love turned, and not a false turned true. (3.ii.90-94)

Oberon does not dispute that Lysander now loves Helena and has all but forgotten Hermia; nevertheless, Oberon makes a distinction between true and false love. I will return to this distinction in the next section, but for now, it is important to note that perverse or not, the way one comes to love another does not change the ultimate response. True or false, it is love either way.

3 Love and Authenticity

Although it is coherent to think that one could be made to love, it seems that something is not quite right about love gained through incantations or heavenly machinations. The difficulty is in saying just where the problem lies. Most of us share Oberon's intuition that there is something deficient about love earned through potions. But what exactly is the deficiency?

Perhaps what seems suspect about love garnered from potions is that it is not freely chosen by the lover. Although this is likely close to the correct answer, it is not a completely satisfactory solution. Assuming that people have free will, we do not think that unwilling actions could be freely chosen. The problem is that love does not appear to be the product of will. One symptom of

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this is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to offer a clear account of how our love for another is rationally justified. We typically say that we “fall” in love, and we do not always choose to fall; typically, it just happens to us.⁹

Although no one should ever ask this question, imagine that your lover—never one to avoid a horribly awkward situation—turns to you and says, “Why do you love me?” If you are willing to humor such unreasonable requests, you might begin by listing a variety of attractive qualities, such as: great sense of humor, sparkly eyes, sharp wit, kind and forgiving nature, cute ears, insightful, well read, lovely toes, and so on. The problem is that if these properties are what rationally justify your love, it seems that you should “trade up” if given the chance. That is, if someone else comes along with an even better sense of humor, with an even brighter sparkle in their eyes, with an even sharper wit, etc., then you should trade in you lover for the new, improved model. But we do not think that the objects of our love are fungible; they simply cannot be exchanged like old shoes. Recognizing this, if one answers the question “why do you love me?” by saying something along the lines of, “there is just something special about you,” then one has given up trying to rationally justify their love. This problem has led many philosophers to conclude that although we might be able to explain how we came to love some particular person, we cannot rationally justify our love.¹⁰ Such a conclusion may make us uncomfortable at first, but it is not altogether intolerable.¹¹

We might not be able to say that love should always be freely chosen, but we still might want to say that love should be authentic—a genuine outgrowth of oneself, one’s major commitments, and goals. For one’s values and commitments to be authentic, they must be, in some important sense, one’s own. Hence, they would likely have to be autonomous. For present purposes, we do not need to decide on the correct theory of authenticity, our prereflective understanding of the concept will be adequate for now. Regardless of our precise notion of authenticity, it is clear that love earned through potions and spells would be inauthentic, or “false” as Oberon calls it.¹²

⁹ Robert Solomon disputes this claim. He argues that falling in love is a process, where, at each step, or at least the early ones, lovers can decide whether or not to continue the descent. Robert Solomon, *About Love* (Madison Books, 2001).

¹⁰ Worship is different from love in this respect. We don’t fall in love with God. And many think that worship can be rationally justified, perhaps not faith, but that one worships what one believes to exist. That is, the attributes of God, if he exists, would warrant worship.

¹¹ For a good discussion of the problem, see Laurence Thomas, “Reasons for Loving,” in *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*, eds. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (UP Kansas, 1991). Bennett Helm also provides an excellent summary of the problem in his entry “Love” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Perhaps, the source of the problem is Gregory Vlastos’ essay “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” which can be conveniently found in Alan Soble’s anthology *Eros, Agape, and Philia* (Paragon House, 1989)

¹² It exceeds the scope of the current discussion to say more about autonomy and authenticity. Harry Frankfurt’s work on authenticity and love is particularly insightful.

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Our moral intuitions strongly indicate that we value autonomy in love. Consider two worlds. The first world is much like our own. People fall in love and decide to pursue the objects of their love without divine intervention. The second world differs in one crucial way: Rather than allowing people to fall in love with whomever they please, a panel of cupids makes the decision for them. Immediately following the verdict of the cupids, a love-laced arrow is fired, making the target fall in love with whomever the cupids decide. Overall, the amount of happiness in the two worlds is the same. Perhaps the second world is even more joyful, since the wise cupids might make better match-makers than the normal mechanisms of our fallible human hearts. Nevertheless, my intuitions are clear: The first world is a far better place to live. It is a better world. Even if the cupids always make the same decision, deciding on the same object of love that their first-world counterparts would have selected, the second world is less desirable.

However, intuitions diverge when the amount of happiness in the two worlds becomes pronounced. If the cupids were perfect match-makers whose every decision lead to a "match made in heaven", and if the normal mechanisms of our fallible human hearts were even worse than they appear to be, the cupidian world would be a far happier place. It would be so much happier that some would indeed welcome the pluck of Cupid's bow.

I will return to this suggestion in the next section. But for now, it is important to note that we judge the first-world, the world absent of paternalistic cupidian interference, as better than the second, at least when both are at roughly the same level of happiness. This clearly shows that we value authenticity in love.¹³ And the value of authenticity arises for worship just as it does for love.¹⁴

See: Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, 2004) and *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge UP, 1993). I will say a bit more in the next section.

¹³ My argument is dependent on the assumption that we can develop a satisfactory notion of authenticity. Of course, the skeptics may prevail, but I cannot take up their challenge here.

¹⁴ James Rachels makes a far different argument against worship based on autonomy. He argues that to worship something would be to acknowledge its absolute authority. This would require giving up one's moral autonomy, which is something we should never do. Hence, we should never worship anything. See James Rachels, "God and Moral Autonomy" in *Can Ethics Provide Answers* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

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We can now return to the question I asked at the beginning of the paper: Can one have the power to make others properly worship it? The notion of “proper” worship is ambiguous. There are two senses in which one might say that worship could be improper. First, by improper one might mean that the worship could have been caused by suspect means—that is, the way in which a person comes to worship could be problematic. Second, one might mean that worship would be improper if the object worshiped were not worthy of worship. I have in mind this second sense. I will argue that forced worship would necessarily be unfitting of its object. To see why, it is best first to make it clear that those made to worship are inauthentic.

Forced-Worship and Autonomy

I suspect that there will be little disagreement around the claim that those who are made to worship by a powerful, mind altering force, are inauthentic in their worship. But, at this point, it might be useful to explain why a bit more explicitly. The desires, emotions, and evaluations that comprise worship are inauthentic if they are not autonomous. Any plausible theory of autonomy would exclude worship gained through powerful hypnotism, potions, or the will of a deity. Both of the two main types of theories of autonomy—end state and process theories—concur. A brief consideration of each will be helpful.¹⁵

End state theories claim that the autonomy of a desire, for instance, can be determined by the total state of one's desires at any given time. One popular style of end state theory evaluates the autonomy of a desire in reference to some higher-order desires—the desire to desire. On this model, roughly, a desire is autonomous only if one desires to have that desire. Harry Frankfurt's recent formulation of this view holds that a desire is autonomous for a subject if and only if the subject endorses it wholeheartedly.¹⁶ This theory suffers from a serious problem, namely, it seems that one's higher-order desires can also be inauthentic. Similarly, one can be relieved of conflicting desires and thereby become wholehearted in inauthentic ways. For our purposes, we need not go into any more detail. The important thing to note is that forced worship would be inauthentic on any similar end state theory.

To be effective, forced worship would likely have to rule out a second-order desire not-to-desire to worship. The compelling force would have to eliminate conflict in order to achieve wholehearted endorsement. Hence, the person's higher-order evaluations would be as inauthentic as her first-order desires. Forced worship is different from mere prodding. Merely giving someone an

¹⁵ John Christman makes this distinction in "Autonomy and Person History", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21.1 (1991): 1-24.

¹⁶ Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What we Care About* (Cambridge UP, 1998).

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impulse to worship, a religious feeling of sorts, is not enough to make that person worship. To make someone worship, a huge suite of first-order desires would have to be installed. For these desires to be effective, it would be necessary to rule out second-order conflicts that might squash first-order desires. If second-order doubts were not squashed, the person made to worship would likely cease to worship, or at least remain conflicted. If a person continues to love a deity despite second-order desires to be rid of such feelings, her worship would be inauthentic according to most plausible end state theories. She would have a higher-order desire not to desire to worship. Alternatively, if a powerful, mind altering force squashed one's doubts, we would not want to call the resulting wholehearted worship authentic. Wholehearted or not, one's higher-order assessment would be just as inauthentic as one's first-order desires. Either way, forced worship is inauthentic worship.

Similarly, any plausible process style account of autonomy would classify forced worship as non-autonomous. Unlike end-state theories, process accounts of autonomy hold that what makes a desire autonomous is not merely its relation to other desires, but the process through which one formed the desire. Desires formed through manipulative processes such as brainwashing are suspect.¹⁷ If someone comes to worship through manipulative processes, such as hypnotism, brain washing, or the mind altering will of a deity, we would be rightfully reluctant to call her worship authentic. Worship formed through autonomy limiting, manipulative processes is not authentic worship.

Although something could have the power to make others worship it, I hope it is clear that forced worship would be inauthentic. And, as with forced love, forced, inauthentic worship is not as desirable as authentic worship. But this does not answer my principal question. Most plausibly, worship caused by the mind-altering abilities of a powerful agent might be less desirable than voluntary, authentic worship, but this does not show that such worship would be improper, in the sense of unfitting.

Made to Worship: Two Reasons Why

In order to determine if something could ever make someone worship it properly, in the fitting sense, we need to consider the various reasons why something might force worship on another. Something with the power to do so might make others worship it for two different types of reasons. First, it might make others worship it primarily out of a desire to be worshiped. Alternatively, something might make someone worship it because worshiping benefits the person or others affected by that person. The options are roughly that a deity could make another person worship it either for its own benefit or for the benefit of person who is doing the worshipping.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Christman, "Autonomy and Personal History" for an important development of the process view.

¹⁸ I am ignoring the possibility that some powerful creature might make some people worship some other god, since allowing this to happen—not reversing the

Case One: For the Object of Worship

It is fairly clear that the first case—where one is made to worship for the benefit of the object of worship—could never be fitting. It is never worth denying a person's autonomy for the sake of a deity. To see why, we merely need to ask, what kind of being would want to be worshiped by coercion? It is clear: If something has and acts on the desire to make others worship it, then it has a moral character equivalent of a megalomaniac. But power-hungry tyrants are not worthy of worship, no matter how strong they might be. Necessarily, the mere desire to make someone worship you for *your* benefit, much less actually doing so, would make you unworthy of worship. Hence, nothing can have the power to make others worship it properly for its own sake.

One might object that an omnipotent, perfectly benevolent, creator of everything could indeed make others worship it properly for its own sake. A perfect creator god would rightly believe that it ought to be worshiped. Given its infallible knowledge, it ought to be able to clue others in to the fact that it should indeed be worshiped. Consider an analogy: Imagine that you discovered the cure for cancer, but due to either negligence or some simple mistake, others do not properly attribute the discovery to you. Everyone in the world thinks that Quentin Tarantino developed the cure. Suppose a genie offers you a magic button which will correct this global epistemic defect. If you decide to press the button, everyone in the world will correctly come to believe that you cured cancer. Certainly, the objection continues, you would be justified in pressing the button. Even more so, a perfect creator god would be justified in making everyone believe that it ought to be worshiped. Hence, one could be made to worship properly for the sake of the object of worship.

In response, a few comments are in order. First, it is not altogether clear that it would be justified to press the genie's button. To see why, we should ask: Why can't the misattribution be corrected through non-autonomy subverting mechanisms, such as the proffering of evidence? And more importantly, even if the button is the only possible means, what precisely is the good that results from the correction that would justify the subversion of autonomy? It is not compelling to say that we should give credit where credit is due. Sure, credit is a *prima facie* good, but it does not clearly trump the value of autonomy. How could credit be so important?

The problem is even more pronounced when it comes to worship. Merely making someone believe that a deity ought to be worshiped is not the same thing as making a person worship, at least not in the robust sense that I described in the introduction. Making someone worship would be far more invasive than merely instilling a belief. Given the extent of the necessary psychological alteration, we need some clear account of the benefit. What precisely is the good achieved in the process? How could a deity worthy of worship benefit from worship through such means? More importantly, why would it even want to be worshiped by non-autonomous subjects? Such a desire smells of

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megalomania. The defender of this approach has some explaining to do. In absence of a plausible reason, it is safe to assume that if one is to be made to worship properly, it cannot be for the benefit of the worshiped.

Case Two: For the One who Worships

The second case—where one is made to worship for one's own good—is more complicated. Assume for the sake of argument that some people might be better off if they worshiped. Perhaps they might be happier, less troubled by existential concerns, and have a greater sense of purpose. Accordingly, some consequentialists might argue that if forced-worship increases the well-being of the one made to worship, then it would plausibly be morally permissible to make her worship. Hence, forcing another to worship would not morally compromise the object of worship. The object of worship would not necessarily be unworthy of worship. Therefore, worship could be fitting of a deity who makes others worship it for their own good. To evaluate this suggestion, it is necessary to say something about the nature of well-being.

Theories of well-being (also known as "prudential value," "welfare," and "self-interest") tell us what makes a life good for the one who lives it.¹⁹ Prudential value is distinct from other ways in which a life may be good. For instance, a life of self-sacrifice spent working for the poor might be both morally and instrumentally good, but it is not necessarily good for the one who lives it. We do not intend to benefit ourselves through self-sacrifice. This is precisely what makes it self-*sacrifice*. Although it is almost always morally good to sacrifice one's own good for the good of others, it is almost never, or at least not necessarily, intrinsically prudentially good.

There are two general ways that one might respond to the suggestion that forced worship, which involves a clear violation of autonomy, could be justified if it results in a compensatory increase in well-being. First, one might deny that inauthentic happiness contributes to well-being. Second, one might deny that the putative compensatory benefits justify the particular violation. I will consider both.

The suggestion that one could be made to worship for one's own good is problematic. One problem is that it is not clear that inauthentic happiness genuinely increases one's well-being. We do not want to say that the oppressed are living good lives, even if they have adopted the values of their oppressors. Self-assessment, or subjective happiness, is highly subject to social conditioning. Hence, subjective happiness appears to be too malleable to function as a reliable measure of well-being. Many reject a general theory of well-being called *mental statism* for just this reason. Mental statism holds that the sole bearers of intrinsic prudential value are mental states. Hedonism, for instance, is a specific type of mental statism that counts only the mental states of

¹⁹ For an excellent, exceptionally clear, recent overview see: Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford, 2006).

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pleasure and pain.²⁰ One of the principal problems for mental statism is that it mistakenly seems to count inauthentic happiness as prudentially valuable.²¹

In response to worries about the vulnerability of happiness to social conditioning, L. W. Sumner builds an autonomy condition into his theory of prudential value. He argues that welfare is authentic happiness—an informed and autonomous self-assessment of one's life.²² Any similar theory of well-being would not consider happiness brought via inauthentic worship as genuinely contributing to one's well-being. I do not mean to endorse Sumner's theory, but merely show that the claim that one could be made better off through forced-worship is extremely controversial.

I do not want to rest my defense on a rejection of mental statism. In fact, I think that mental statism is likely correct as a general theory of well-being. But I do not think that mental statism lends support to the claim that one could be forced to worship properly for one's own sake. If mental statism is the correct theory of well-being, then autonomy has little to do with welfare. However, this does not show that autonomy does not matter morally, even for consequentialists. Let me briefly explain why.

If we do accept mental statism about well-being, then we will likely have to acknowledge that other forms of value besides welfare are morally relevant. For instance, it seems that deception is bad even if the deceived never find out. If so, then one must either reject mental statism or reject *welfarism*. Welfarism is the view that the only source of moral obligation is well-being. If you accept welfarism, then a narrow theory of well-being, such as mental statism, becomes highly counter-intuitive. This is because, if you accept welfarism and a narrow theory of well-being, you have to jump through hoops to explain why it is morally good to honor death-bed promises and why deception is bad. If deception is bad for the deceived only if they find out, and if the welfare is the only source of moral obligation, then deception is morally permissible as long as everyone can keep a secret. But this is absurd. Deception is clearly wrong, regardless of whether the deceived finds out. To avoid an absurdity, we have to either widen our theory of well-being beyond mental states or reject welfarism. Accordingly, a narrow theory of well-being is far more plausible if we reject welfarism and acknowledge that more than welfare counts morally. Clearly, it is far out of scope to decide the issue here. The important thing to note is that even

²⁰ Parfit and Wolf reverse this distinction. They seem to hold that all forms of *mental statism* are forms of hedonism. See: Derek Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best", in *Reasons and Persons* (Clarendon Press, 1984); Susan Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life", *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 14 (1997): 207-25.

²¹ Nozick's "Experience Machine", Nagel's "Deceived Businessman", Nagel's "Contented Infant", Mill's "Pig", and Nozick's "Mongolian Pornographer" are the most pressing thought experiments presented in opposition to *mental statism*.

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974), pp.42-5; Thomas Nagel, "Death"; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Hackett, 2002); and Robert Nozick, "On the Randian Argument", *Socratic Puzzles* (Harvard UP, 1997).

²² L.W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 167-171.

Section 4. The Power to Make Others Worship Properly

if we accept a consequentialist moral framework, we have no clear reason to think that violations of autonomy are not morally significant.

Although consequentialists should consider autonomy as a morally relevant form of value, it is plausible that it might sometimes be permissible to deny people their autonomy in egregious way, if the benefits are clear and compelling.²³ In order to see if one could be made to worship for the benefit of the one doing the worshiping, we need to figure out exactly how one could benefit from worshiping. Again, perhaps one might be happier, less troubled by existential concerns, and have a greater sense of purpose if one felt genuine worship. But I cannot see why the putative benefits of worship could not be achieved by other means. If the same goods could be had without worship, then we have no reason to think that the forced worship is not also motivated by a desire to be worshiped. Hence, unless the goods can only be achieved by worship, we have no reason to think that the situation is morally any different from the first case, where someone is made to worship for the sake of the object of worship.

The central problem is that there is not a single plausible reason why one would have to be made to worship to reap the putative benefits of worship. Certainly it could not be to prevent eternal damnation, since any god that would torture those whom it did not make worship and reward those that it did make worship would be a twisted sadist, no more worthy of worship than the most wicked devil imaginable. On the other hand, if mere happiness is the intended result, a god could simply administer a divine form of Prozac. If a god could make people worship it, then it could just as easily make them happy. Worship is not necessary for blind happiness, contentment, general life satisfaction, or even a pleasant disposition. Hence, I am simply at a loss for any plausible account of the benefits that could not be had by any means but worship.

Without a clear benefit that would justify coerced worship, I am forced to conclude that any act of imposing worship on another would make the object unworthy of worship. If this is right, then it is logically impossible to make someone appropriately worship you. This is simply not a power the worshipable can possess. Something could have the power to make others worship it, but by exercising that power it would prove itself unworthy of worship. Hence, any such worship would be mistaken or improper. Since one cannot have a power that logically cannot be exercised, it is safe to say that one cannot have the power to make others properly worship it. Of course, if someone could produce a compelling reason why someone would need to be made to worship for benefits that could not be achieved via other direct means, then my conclusion would need to be revised.

²³ On Kantian grounds it would likely never be justified, since it is not clear that anyone could consent to being made to worship.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I ask a new question about worship: Can any being worthy of worship make others worship it? By way of an analogy to love, I argue that it is perfectly coherent to think that one could be made to worship. However, forced worship would be undesirable in the same way that love earned through potions is undesirable—both would be inauthentic. For this reason, I argue that one cannot be made to worship properly. My principal claim is that no being worthy of worship could exercise the power to make others worship it, since the act of making another worship oneself would necessarily make one unworthy of worship.

I argue that forced worship cannot be justified, neither for the sake of the object of worship nor for the sake of the one worshipping. Making another worship for the sake of a deity violates that person's autonomy. And we lack a compelling justification for the violation of autonomy, especially since worship could be elicited through non-autonomy subverting means. More importantly, any being desirous of non-autonomous worship is a megalomaniac unworthy of respect, much less worship. Alternatively, there is no clear reason why someone would need to be made to worship for her own sake. Any of the relevant, putative prudential goods to be had from worshipping could be achieved through more direct means, such as divine Prozac. Hence, although one can be made to worship, one cannot be made to worship properly.²⁴

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