

The Claim of Holiness

Cole S. Aronson
Hebrew University

ABSTRACT: I argue that God’s holiness as conceived in Hebrew Scripture grounds human obligations to obey divine commands. To disobey the commands of a holy God would disrespect a basic good, which we have decisive reason to avoid doing. God’s holiness may be a somewhat obscure property—though I propose transcendence and perfect morality as necessary conditions—but His omniscience and perfect morality guarantee that He would not command human beings to do things that His holiness would not ground His authority to command. I conclude by replying to objections.

1. Introduction

The central presupposition of monotheistic ethics is that human beings have an obligation to obey God. The bindingness of God’s commands entails that He has rightful authority to issue them and that human beings are accountable for treating them, not just as good options providing sufficient reason for a course of action, but as demands providing *decisive* reasons for a course of action.¹ But what makes it the case that God can authoritatively command human beings? The answer has proved elusive. As Bayne and Nagasawa (2006) argue in their paper about whether we have an obligation to worship God, the standard candidates for grounding human obligations to God seem to fail. In their paper, Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that grounding humans’ obligations to worship God in God’s holiness is an under-explored route. They see problems with its prospects all the same. I think Bayne and Nagasawa have hit on something important, and this essay tries to develop their suggestion as it can be applied to our obligation to obey God’s commands generally. The thesis of this essay is that of all God’s properties, it is His holiness that stands the best chance of playing the central role in the correct account of why human beings are duty-bound to God.

Some words are in order about the standard to which it’s right to hold the argument of this essay. Atheists (and perhaps not only they) are unlikely to be moved by my points. Atheists don’t believe that God exists, much less that He has authority over human beings. I face a deeper problem, however. Although atheists deny that God exists, one at least hopes that they and theists can in general agree about the character of the being whose existence is at issue. This is easiest if God’s nature is exhausted by perfections like omnipotence, omni-benevolence, and omniscience. The property of holiness, by contrast, may seem to atheists, and perhaps even to some theists, to be a lot of mystical hocus pocus. My argument makes

¹ Like many of the thoughts about obligation in this paper, my formulation here is a summary of thoughts from Darwall (2009). Also: in this essay: “obligation,” “duty,” and “decisive reason” are used interchangeably.

crucial appeal to a property that is very obscure—even, perhaps, to the people who insist on devoting their lives to a God that they believe essentially and crucially possesses it. Human beings seem not to have nearly the experience with holiness that they do with redness and tree-ness, or for that matter with knowledge and power and moral action. Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that many theists will want to take holiness as primitive, and I'm inclined to agree with them, though I think there are some necessary conditions, and I discuss them below. I will consider this essay a success if an appreciation for the character of the property of holiness is the only thing obstructing an otherwise logical and reasonable atheist from agreeing with my point of view. For many theists *do* appreciate holiness. Given some basically non-religious philosophical thoughts about the nature of obligation, and given some data from religious texts, many theists will, I hope, find my argument to be valid and my premises to be true.

The plan of action is as follows: in Section 2, I will present (with some extensions useful to my purposes) Stephen Darwall's theory of the obligation as it's defended in *The Second Person Standpoint* and some auxiliary essays. Darwall's principal aim is formal—to isolate what's structurally distinctive about normative reasons that obligate rather than merely recommending, in a non-obligating way, particular courses of action. In brief, his Darwall's view is that obligatory reasons—"second-personal reasons"—are those which are in principle addressable by authorities to those from whom those authorities can rightfully demand compliance, where both the content of the reason and the normative basis of the authority are acceptable to free and rational persons with certain kinds of capacities. Although as we'll see he discusses some examples of actual, substantive second-personal reasons, Darwall's account does not imply any particular set of acceptable authority relationships, nor, *a fortiori*, any particular set of substantive obligations. In Section 3, I show how God's holiness as understood by the Hebrew Bible can position God as an authority able to obligate human beings to perform particular actions. I conclude in Section 4 by responding to objections.

2. Obligation

A reason makes an action obligatory only if the reason decides in favor of the action. No matter how praiseworthy, desirable, good, or all-things-considered recommended an action is, it might fail to be obligatory. One might not do wrong by doing otherwise. In the *Second Person Standpoint*, Darwall (2009) is principally interested in the question of what, formally, needs to be true of a reason in order for it to make an action obligatory. The foundation of his theory is a series of conceptual judgments, which, taken together, produce an inter-definable and irreducible set of *second-personal* notions. They are so called because they concern all and only reasons that are in theory addressable by an authority to a party accountable to that authority (though the reasons can do their normative work even if no actual authority is present in a situation to do the addressing). Second-personal reasons are therefore, to employ technical language Darwall sometimes makes use of, *irreducibly agent-relative*. They concern not what we ought to do in any case, as if from the perspective of a perfectly wise observer or practical counselor. They concern what can be claimed from us by others with the authority to demand certain kinds of conduct from us (Darwall 2009, 5-8, 26-8).

The best way to elucidate Darwall's circle of second-personal concepts is by example.² I'm going to use a straightforwardly moral example—involving what Darwall sometimes calls *obligation period* (Darwall 2013)—but formally similar ones could be produced about many other relationships of authority and accountability mediated by claims on wills structured by the constraints of second-personal address: For instance, the relationship of parent to child or of employer to employee. Or, as I plan to suggest, of God to human being.

Here's an example of my own construction: John spills his drink on Alison. Alison indignantly adjures John as follows: "Hey, John, you can't just go around spilling your drinks on people. You owe me an apology, plus the cost of dry-cleaning my shirt." This is a totally commonplace bit of moral discourse. I'll divide the normatively salient features of into three concentric elements: (1) the *second-personal reason* invoked in Alison's accusation; (2) the *assumptions* that Alison must hold about John to intelligibly address him with the accusation; (3) and the *authority relationship* between Alison and John that must obtain for Alison's accusation to have second-personal bite.

Beginning with (1): Alison's statement constitutes an accusation of wrongdoing against John. She's *blaming* him for what he did. Alison purports to address John with a decisive reason not to spill his drink on her. Not that John had some kind of reason inviting him to action that might be ignored in favor of an alternative but reasonable course of action, as if not spilling a drink on Alison was just one good option among several. And not, moreover, a merely agent-neutrally desirable state of affairs concerning the state of Alison's person (or shirt). Such a reason would underdetermine the content, and, we can imagine, the accusatory tone, of Alison's address to John after he spills his drink. If John refraining from spilling his drink had merely occasioned someone else to spill their drink on Alison, Alison would not have similar grounds of complaint against John. She'd address her adjuration elsewhere, namely, to the spiller. Our case involves something qualitatively different. John violated a (second-personal) duty—well, two, actually. He violated a general duty he has in general not to damage other people's persons or property. And he violated an instance of that duty particular to Alison, as a person, not to violate *her* person or property. What Alison says is that he had decisive reason to not do these things.

Now to (2): so Alison wants to blame John for wrongdoing and to demand redress. Alison does not slap John or threaten to harm him somehow if he doesn't do what she says. She purports to address him with *reasons* why he was duty-bound not to have done what he did, why he is culpable for what he did, and why he is now liable to be held accountable for his action. What facts have to obtain about John for Alison intelligibly to address John on these terms? In accusing John, Alison is committed to presupposing that John is possessed of a kind of practical reasoning for which free and rational beings can be held accountable—i.e., the ability to apprehend and execute actions guided by second-personal reasons of the sort Alison invokes. Which in turn presupposes John's capacity to take a second-personal perspective on himself, that is, to hold *himself* accountable for second-personal reasoning and for (not) executing his duties. If John can't take up this second-personal perspective on himself—if he isn't himself full member of the moral community, i.e. the community of free and rational agents—he will have no basis for guiding and correcting his own behavior with reasons. He'll just be

² Darwall formulates his circle at Darwall (2009, 12) but elicits more of the circles members as the book goes on, in particular in his discussion of second-personally accountable practical reason (see in particular his ch. 11). I've tried to be faithful to the substance of his circle while changing the presentation for brevity's sake.

a kind of obedient automaton programmed to take (genuine!) second-personal reasons as inputs. “To intelligibly hold someone responsible,” Darwall writes, “we must assume that she can hold herself responsible in her own reasoning and thought. And to do that, she must be able to take up a second-person standpoint on herself and make and acknowledge demands of herself from that point of view” (Darwall 2009, 23).³

So let’s say John is *second-personally competent* in the way described in the previous paragraph, and that Alison knows this, and that the reasons contained in Alison’s adjuration are indeed valid second-personal reasons. For all that’s been said, Alison’s adjuration would not have obligated John to do anything. For it to have that power, we need (3). Alison needs to have the authority or the standing to address John with second-personal reasons, and John needs to be accountable to Alison for this particular instance of wrongdoing. Darwall takes the connection between authority-relations and obligation to be a conceptual one: “It is conceptually impossible for one to be morally obligated to do something but not responsible for doing it, neither to the moral community, nor to God, nor to anyone” (Darwall 2013, 138). One could intelligibly take a certain set of (actually normative!) reasons as obligatory for one’s own actions without being in any way duty-bound to act on them. For that we need the possibility of an authoritative addressing of those reasons to one as a second-personally competent agent (the authority could be oneself as a representative member of the moral community). In the case of Alison and John, Alison’s reproach actually involves two different standings or species of authority. Most obviously, Alison is the party wronged by John’s behavior. John violated a bipolar obligation—an obligation the violation of which wrongs some particular party (Darwall 2013)—to respect Alison’s person and property. John’s violation of duties owed to Alison gives her standing to blame, accuse, demand redress, and so on. But this *bipolar* obligation is an instance of a more general obligation to respect the person and property of others. John can be held to account for his violation of that second, more general duty by any representative of the moral community (that is, of the community of second-personally competent agents). John and Alison are both members of that community, and what matters for *it* is the capacity to have one’s second-personal attitudes—blame, indignation, resentment—react properly to instances of second-personal wrongdoings, as Alison’s do when she responds to John’s wrongdoing with her adjuration. It is partly in virtue of the kind of sensitivity peculiar to second-personally culpable wrongdoing that gives Alison standing to *herself* adjure John for his wrongdoing. It was implicit in the previous paragraph, but to make it clear: this kind of attitudinal responsiveness to second-personal reasons is part of what makes an agent second-personally competent, and so is therefore also part of what Alison must assume about John to intelligibly address him on second-personal terms.

It’s important to distinguish the two species of authority Alison implicitly invokes because the general sort is more limited than the particular sort. As the party wronged by John’s violation of a bipolar duty, Alison can permissibly voluntarily *let it go,* excusing or not acting on blame towards John and foregoing redress. But this bipolar duty is, as noted above, a particular instance of a more general duty not to tortiously contact other persons. In adjuring John for his violation of that second, more general duty, Alison speaks not as the wronged party, but as a representative member of the moral community—the community of second-personally competent agents. This kind of authority she shares with, say, a bystander who saw John’s actions. Such a bystander however, would lack Alison’s power as the wronged party to just

³ Darwall extensively discusses the idea of taking up a second-personal perspective on oneself at (2009) 257-62. He extensively discusses the idea of commands presupposing free rationality in their addressees at (2009) 111-15.

let it go, and would have authority, as a representative of the community of free and rational persons, only to demand respectful treatment for Alison on her behalf (if, say, she were asleep when this happened and couldn't make the demand herself).

The points made up till now about moral obligation have concerned the form rather than the substance of moral obligation. Now, Darwall thinks he can derive *some* of moral obligation's substance from its mere form. He writes as follows: "When we hold one another and ourselves responsible from [the perspective of a representative of the moral community, i.e. the community of second-personally competent agents] through exercising second-personal competence, there is a straightforward sense in which we are committed to valuing one another's exercise of this very same competence" (Darwall 2013, 49). It would be incoherent, in other words, both to base one's second-personal appeals to another moral agent on that other agent's second-personal competence and to undermine or to usurp his ability to make autonomous choices. The very form of moral obligation conceived second-personally implies a *pro tanto* obligation to respect another's space to make autonomous choices.

In recent work, Darwall has considered how we can incorporate the (intuitively much) broader range of ways in which we can respect or wrong others into the second-personal framework. There are many interests, Darwall writes in a recent paper, "that are simply impossible adequately to appreciate if we abstract from the embodied animal nature of human existence" (Darwall 2022). He asks us to consider two aspects of rape as an example. The first is radical disrespect towards "rational personality and will," the kind of substantive violation fairly easily derivable by just considering, as in the previous paragraph, the form of moral obligation. There is a second element, however: "it is impossible to appreciate [rape's] distinctive horror as a deeply personal bodily violation and defilement if we abstract from our embodied animal nature." Or take our earlier case of John and Alison, only this time imagine they're chemists and John intentionally spills caustic chemicals on Alison's skin. What we have then is a pretty egregious case of assault, but the egregiousness depends not only or even primarily on the wrongful limitation of Alison's rational autonomy, but on the damage wrongfully inflicted to Alison's body. Our concept of blameworthy bodily harm trades not only or even primarily on a view about how the body can contribute to autonomous action but, more centrally, on a view about what it means for a human body to be healthy, well-functioning, etc. The lesson is that limiting our consideration of the contents of second-personal reasons to just those implicated by violations of autonomy glosses over stark normative differences between species of coercion, and, just as importantly, between coercion and other forms of wrongful conduct.

Which isn't surprising at all given the diverse goods or forms of flourishing/wellbeing that human beings can pursue—and consequently, the forms that wrongful violations of one's interests can take (from here on out, unless otherwise noted, my use of "harm" will be restricted to cases of wrongful and blameworthy i.e. second-personally implicated production of such disvalue).⁴ Some goods—bodily integrity or health, for instance—will be fairly uncontroversial, as will the forms of harm, and duties of respect, generated thereby. But what else makes the list? Friendship and knowledge may do so. And, I will assume in the rest of this essay, religion does so as well. Spending a lot of time trying to define "religion" is probably not going

⁴ This idea, which seems fairly commonsensical to the present author, receives its canonical expression in the natural law tradition. Perhaps its preeminent contemporary treatment comes from Finnis (2011). Intriguingly, a prominent Kantian not normally associated with the natural law tradition has, in some recent work, begun to write about moral respect grounded in the goods immanent in beings that lack free and rational capacities. See Korsgaard (2011).

to be fruitful. So I'll just say that by "religion" I mean cognitive/practical/affective accord with whatever answers the question of What It All Means. Perhaps it is not terribly obvious that religion so understood constitutes a self-sufficient human good. I take it that this non-obviousness is largely parasitic on the widespread view that the material cosmos is all there is (besides maybe some abstract objects like numbers). But if there were some being behind the cosmos and our place in it, it strikes me as fairly obvious that human beings would have strong reason to pursue engagement with this being. Now, the form of engagement will of course depend on the character of the being and its relationship to us. If this universe is the product of a malevolent devil who created the world for the sake of wicked amusement, then it seems that the right posture is one of cosmic resistance. But assuming, minimally, a benevolent deity responsible (in some sense) for all of our being here, it seems certain sorts of responses would be in order, and constitute sufficient reason for action.

3. Holiness

Of course, the Abrahamic theist wants more—not merely sufficient reasons for action but decisive reasons for action disobedience to which constitutes culpable wrongdoing for which God and other members of the community of free and rational persons have the authority to hold agents accountable. God's commands, addressed as they are to second-personally competent beings in the form of authoritative instructions, *purport* to provide human agents with such decisive reasons. But do they succeed in doing so? Or rather, what is it in virtue of which God can address human beings second-personally (besides the basic requirements—the right second-personal attitudes, for instance—for second personal address)? In a minute I'm going to propose that we have excellent evidence that God's holiness as Hebrew Scripture conceives of it can indeed do the job, but first I'm going to follow Bayne and Nagasawa (2006) and review some less exotic candidates. As we'll see, they all fail.

Candidate #1: omnipotence. Bayne and Nagasawa write that obeying a being just because it's extremely powerful sounds like fascism. I take them to be proposing that simply being stronger than someone doesn't give you normative authority to command, so disobedience to commands issued under the aspect of strength doesn't constitute blameworthy disrespect. This seems correct.

Candidate #2: omniscience. Bayne and Nagasawa write about omniscience what they write about omnipotence, but I think they're very different cases. This is especially so when omniscience is understood as *infallibility*.⁵ Such a quality would seem to command awe and deference, not just raw fear. In particular, if we imagine God as, say, a perfectly wise counselor, His advice about what to do would seem always to be worth following. The problem with grounding an obligation to obey God in His infallibility is that God, just to the extent that He's infallible, seems to be able to generate no *new* reasons for humans to act, and certainly no new obligatory reasons. He could only inform human beings of reasons to act that they had in any case.

Candidate #3: transcendence/immanence/ontological dependability. Although many theists hold these to be essential qualities of God on some interpretation of them, each individually and all jointly seem insufficient to ground an obligation to obey God. In particular they would not guarantee the morality of God's commands. They might be necessary conditions of what does ground such obligations but it's unclear to me how they could themselves be sufficient. For instance, plausibly abstract objects are both transcendent and immanent, and

⁵ I am grateful to David Johnson for helpful discussion of divine infallibility in a different context.

don't seem to be able to command anything like the sort of fealty that atheists are looking for God's will to command. Moreover, it doesn't seem as though there's some other necessary condition of holiness—like, say, consciousness—that, if satisfied by abstract objects (if that's even possible), could hoist them into the class of holy things.

Candidate #4: great benefaction. God has, many theists believe, given us great gifts of His own free accord. We did not deserve them. Perhaps He created and sustains our very existence, for instance. Generally speaking, gifts, even very great gifts, are condignly requited with gratitude and thanks. Anything more seems unnecessary. Worse, if more were demanded in second-personal terms, it would actually vitiate the initial act's status as a gift. Imagine if you gave me a birthday present and the next week told me that, on account of the birthday present, I had an obligation to help you move houses. Now our relationship—at least from your perspective—is beginning to resemble a very different sort of, perhaps even contractual, relationship. Now contractual relationships *can* be grounds for demanding compliance. But of course, contracts are invalid without both parties' consent to the contract, which is precisely what makes your pretense to demand my assistance so wrongheaded. The attempted retrojection of the status of consideration back onto your initially free gift contradicts the terms under which I accepted the gift, since there were no terms attached to it at the time. You lack grounds, therefore, given the current status of our relationship, to demand anything at all from me. Great benefaction can only ground obligations to obey if it ceases to be benefaction.⁶

Candidate #5: perfect goodness or perfect morality. At first glance these seem like better candidates for grounding an obligation to obey God. The problem is that they concern God's own status as an agent. These might make it appropriate to admire or to esteem and perhaps even to imitate God as an agent. It might also justify holding God to higher standards in His behavior.⁷ What it's difficult to imagine these properties doing is putting meat on God's claim to create new, obligatory reasons for human beings to act. Even if following God's commands were extremely good, that would not—or at least not necessarily—make it obligatory to follow his commands. It's unclear how the quality of extreme goodness could decide against other also-very-good courses of action. But that's just what obligations seem to be able to do. Also, even if following God's commands were a superlatively morally praiseworthy thing to do, it does not follow that disobeying them was an immoral thing to do. Heroes are moral exemplars. Not being a hero does not thereby make one immoral.

The candidates so far considered and rejected may not exhaust the list of candidates for grounding an obligation to obey God. Bayne and Nagasawa discuss the possibility that prudential reasons ground an obligation to worship God. As mentioned above, they're interested in a slightly different question—worship specifically, rather than duty to obey generally—but we can still ask: might prudential reasons ground our obligations to obey God's command? It's difficult to say how they could, at least in the way theists probably want. If I do A for the

⁶ Throughout Hebrew Scripture, God makes reference to His beneficence towards the Israelites in the context of His issuing commandments. “Do such-and-such for I brought you out of Egypt” and similar formulations are quite common in the Pentateuch. This fact might lead us to think that, whatever theses the philosophers want to forward, Hebrew Scripture *itself* views God's great benefaction as a reason to obey God's commands. Two responses: first, all I'm committed to is the view that God's benefaction doesn't provide *decisive* reason to do as He says. It might upgrade its praiseworthiness, or its value, or whatever. Second, it's possible to read the appeal's God makes to His own benefaction as a kind of rhetorical exhortation, or as a way of establishing or invoking reasons for trust on the part of His Israelite subjects. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to clarify these points.

⁷ This is an adaptation of a point Korsgaard (2011) makes about human beings and how they compare to animals.

prudential reason that it promotes some separate and desirable goal G, I leave it open that some other route B to G might come along and claim my normative assent, so long as it's a better route to A. Theists will probably not want to place our obligations to obey God's commands at the mercy of such a possibility. The Kantian maxim that whoever wills the ends wills the necessary means, even if rephrased in terms of prudence rather than necessity, is a rule of instrumental rationality, not axiology. It is not a maxim about which ends one should have, let alone which ends it is obligatory for one to have, but is rather a point about what one is committed to if one chooses particular ends.

So far, not so good. Is there any property of God's that could both generate substantive second-personal reasons and, together with other things, ground God's authority to issue and demand compliance with commands grounded in those reasons? My proposal is that holiness as understood by the Hebrew Bible can do the trick. My argument for this proposal will go as follows. First, I'm going to sketch an account of what holiness is, the point of which is to show that God's holiness is the kind of thing towards which, in principle, we might behave culpably disrespectfully, and which could therefore, in theory, be the grounds of God's demands for respectful treatment. Since offenses against God's holiness are offenses against God, God is (as it were) personally positioned to demand respect for His holiness. Holiness can, together with God's own second-personal competence, ground God's second-personal authority to hold human beings responsible for treating His holiness with the proper regard. Secondly, I'm going to examine the textual evidence from the Hebrew Bible concerning holiness. The point of that examination is to show that the Hebrew Bible in fact purports to make use of God's holiness to ground second-personal reasons. Thirdly, I'm going to present an argument for why we have good reason to believe that God's holiness not only could be the object of disrespectful behavior *in principle* but that the commands God issues under the aspect of His holiness can in fact be issued by Him authoritatively.

My investigation into the question of what holiness is is complicated by two factors: the diversity of religious traditions and the obscurity of the property considered even within a particular tradition. I'm an orthodox Jew writing about Abrahamic theism, and conveniently enough, Abrahamic theists in general take Hebrew Scripture to be true (if in some respects superseded, whatever that means, but I'll ignore this matter in what follows). So I'm going to present an exclusively Hebrew Scripture-based account of holiness.

Now to the property itself. Bayne and Nagasawa propose that many theists will want to take holiness as primitive, and I'm inclined to agree with them that there's no obviously good reduction or set of necessary/sufficient conditions. Hebrew Scripture, however, indicates some necessary conditions, as brought out by a central mention of holiness at Leviticus 19:1-2. Those verses read: "God spoke to Moses, saying: address the entire Israelite congregation and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.'" This declaration comes just after the Levitical sexual code and just before the rehearsal of some central moral edicts: honoring mother and father, leaving some of one's crops for the alien and destitute, not stealing or lying or placing stumbling blocks in front of the blind, and so on. Jacob Milgrom (2007)—seconding the judgment of Baruch Schwartz (2000)—proposes that the Hebrew word "kadosh" (holy) and its cognates, when predicated of God, indicate "the total otherness of God, his unbridgeable distance from man." This is so, Milgrom proposes, not only in Leviticus but throughout the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets (Milgrom 2007, 1605-6). The natural metaphysical interpretation of this first condition on holiness is in terms of God's transcendence from the created order, the quality of God's that is most obviously not possessed even in quantitatively diminished form by human beings, and a kind of ontological

dependability such that facts about the created order depend on facts about God.⁸ I explain in a footnote that this notion of transcendence is pretty weak. Assuming other conditions obtain (see next paragraph) God's holiness will account for God's being the address of positive religious activity. That is, practical/intellectual/affective accord with Him will constitute a self-sufficient reason for action of the sort discussed above.

A second necessary condition I want to propose is God's perfect moral goodness. Apparently, Israel somehow sharing in—I'll say more about this relation in a moment—God's holiness entails moral concern for the welfare of the weak: the poor, the alien. It entails a code of justice: not perverting legal proceedings on behalf of anyone. And it entails an ambitious code of interpersonal ethics: reproving one's fellow to the end of improving his conduct, lest one come to hate the fellow in one's heart. There's no air-tight inference from these edicts to God's perfect moral goodness. But if they're the one's compliance with which evince or achieve holiness, a superlative moral character seems to have centrally to do with this particular property of God's. In any case I'm going to assume these two necessary conditions on God's holiness, because there's textual evidence for them and because I need a notion to work with.⁹ God's superlative morality guarantees that He won't issue commands that are immoral, which would make obeying His commands in the way many theists would want rationally unstable (or worse). I assume that God's perfect moral goodness and His transcendence as I've understood it are essential qualities of God. Since I can't at the moment think of another necessary condition of holiness, I also assume in what follows that God is essentially holy.

Before I dig a bit more into the Biblical data about how exactly holiness functions I want to dispose of an objection Bayne and Nagasawa (2006, 307) consider: "An obvious objection to the attempt to ground worship on holiness is that holiness is itself a rather mysterious notion. To use J.L. Mackie's term, holiness seems to be *queer*." To their credit, Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that theists will likely just dig in their heels. Let me just add: I find appeals to queerness to be about as philosophically interesting as David Lewis claims to have found incredulous stares to be. And Lewis was defending a thesis that probably had a rounding error of adherents before he put pen to paper. There are, to contrast, billions of people living and dead who have thought God to be holy. So, perhaps holiness is not pervasive a feature of our experience as redness is. But it seems that, even if for various reasons atheists may be rational

⁸ I will assume a very weak version of transcendence, a sufficient condition of which I'll specify in terms of a more familiar attribute that theists will probably also want to ascribe to God, that of creative freedom. When I say God created the world freely I just mean, at a minimum, a) that God's necessary properties do not entail the existence of the material world and b) that God caused the material world to come into existence. If God's necessary properties entailed the existence of the material world, we would be within our rights to propose that the world was a necessary proper part of God. It seems plausible that if a necessary proper part of something does not exist, then that thing does not exist. If God existed only in possible worlds containing the material world, that would seem to conflict with the intuitive idea that He transcends, or is beyond, the material world. For existentially speaking, He would not to be able to get by without the material world. But if, say, "In the Beginning" it was just God and no world, and then God created the world, then *even if*, as some theists believe, God creates the world out of Himself (this is the idea of *creatio ex Deo*) then God is in some intuitive sense transcendent.

⁹ For God to stand as a candidate for the office of object of human religious activity, it seems He has to in some sense govern the world or be responsible for its existence. That's fine, for Abrahamic theists assume that He does—as creator, as ongoing sustainer, or merely as highest power. These don't ground God's holiness, for He'd be holy though He created nothing. What they do is help to guarantee that He bears the right sort of relation to human beings to be considered an object of our religious activity.

in rejecting appeals to holiness, they cannot exactly fault theists for refusing to follow their example.

What does all of this mean for theism? If God is holy, then it seems some kind of favorable interaction with Him is sufficient cause for action, and second-personally culpable disrespect towards holiness, like analogous behavior towards other goods (like bodily integrity), is something we have decisive reason to avoid. Moreover, God, as holy, is the party disrespected by second-personally culpable disrespect towards His holiness (as we'll see below, the holiness of other things, like people and objects, is something of an extension of God's own holiness, so this point applies generally to culpable disrespect against holiness). Lastly, it seems fairly obvious that God would be capable of the attitudes—indignation, resentment, and so on—needed to hold human beings accountable for culpable disrespect towards His holiness.¹⁰ God is, in other words, a fully-qualified member of the moral community, the kind of agent capable of issuing authoritative demands for respectful treatment. Since the demands relevant here concern an essential property of God's own, the demands concern *bipolar* obligations, duties owed to God directly, rather than merely general obligations.

What's yet to be specified is, first, that holiness, according to Hebrew Scripture, actually behaves the way that, say, bodily integrity does—serving as the ground for second-personal reasons. And secondly, that holiness is itself adequate to ground the demands God *actually* makes on human beings, in addition to being in principle the proper object of second-personal respect. We'll take the textual problem first.

So far as I can tell, throughout Hebrew Scripture, no thing, act, or being is called holy that is not a) God or b) called so by God directly or by an authorized deputy of His. And things that aren't God are not simply indicated to be holy *in any case*. They are *hallowed*. Holiness is bestowed upon them. Contrast with goodness. Creation is judged by God to be good. Goodness supervenes on the product of God's creative (e.g. material) activity. It isn't then added afterwards by God in a separate creative moment. Contrast with the Sabbath, which God sanctifies (a synonym for "hallows" in the context of this essay). The seventh day did not come along already holy. Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that holiness may not be unique to God. If it isn't, then whatever we owe God in virtue of being holy we also owe to human beings in virtue of *their* being holy. But, they say, the property grounding an obligation to worship God should be unique to God. If regular human beings can be holy (without, I'll add, their holiness being parasitic on God's holiness) then perhaps those beings and God would be equal with respect to capacity to obligate human beings. The evidence from Hebrew Scripture suggests that holiness does indeed satisfy Bayne and Nagasawa's (2009) uniqueness constraint. Holiness exclusively characterizes God or modifies something God wants modified by it.

What effect does hallowing have on the hallowed thing itself? The best indication is that God hallows things as a way of claiming them to play some kind of normative role in mankind's relationship with Himself. A vivid case is Leviticus 20:26, where God says of the Israelites, "You shall be holy to me, for I am holy, and lo, I separate you from the nations to be mine," in the context of issuing numerous commands. Here God acts as sanctifier in the sense

¹⁰ Someone might object that God cannot have the right reactive attitudes because He is impassible. I think that the doctrine of divine impassibility is false, but I don't want to lose anyone on that basis. I hope the following will satisfy an impassibilist: the moral reactive attitudes—indignation, resentment—needed to ground the possibility of authoritatively addressing demands can do all their work if all they amount to are particular *judgments* of wrongdoing in other agents. There's no need, at least for these purposes, to ascribe to God an experience of the phenomenal character of anger et al. Since God—I hope it is fair to assume—has the relevant judgments, He has the right second-personal capacities.

of distinguishing the sanctified entity, the Israelites, as His own special member of the class (of nations) of which it's a member. But the status of holiness is not merely relational. That would be odd if all holiness effected was some kind of setting aside *for*. After all, human beings themselves engage in *that*. It is, rather, in virtue of God's intrinsic status as holy that can God sanctifies the Israelites. God claims the Israelites by associating them with an essential property of His. He invites them into His life not via domination, but by some sort of elevation (it's difficult to say more) towards Him. God claims things under the aspect of holiness by making them, in some sense, more godly.

So, hallowing is a—perhaps the—way God distinguishes things in the world as particular to Him. But particular *in what sense?* A pervasive feature of hallowing in the Bible is the imposition of duties on people who relate, in some way, to the hallowed object. A famous example comes from the narrative of the burning bush. When Moses approaches the burning bush God instructs him to remove his shoes, lest he tread improperly on holy ground (the instruction occurs at Exodus 3:5). Normally of course God permits people to walk where they choose wearing what footwear they please. But in the case of the burning bush God hallows the ground and then invokes the ground's holiness as the basis for demanding a particular kind of behavior from Moses. Structurally similar effects of holiness appear throughout Leviticus, where the temple rite and its priests are discussed. When Israel as a nation is called holy, attendant duties flank the mention.¹¹ In one especially important passage at Numbers 15:40, obedience to commandments generally is *itself* discussed alongside holiness. The context is the discussion of fringes Jewish men are obligated to wear on their garments: “so that you should remember and perform all of my commands, and you shall be holy to your God.” One possible interpretation of this verse is that wearing the fringes effects holiness. That strikes me as a poor interpretation. But mentions elsewhere of Israel's sanctity indicate that they have no ongoing choice in the matter of their holiness—it is in virtue of God's hallowing of them that they have commandments to keep. Most likely, I think, is that Israel's obedience is a condition of them being *worthy* of holiness. This is the best way to combine the imposed status of holiness with what Baruch Schwartz (2000) notes is sense in which Israel is “bidden to strive.” Disobedience, by contrast, is a kind of insult to their status as holy. I'll note lastly that mentions of God's own holiness aren't always attended by normative duties. For instance, the famous passage at Isaiah 6:3: “And each will call to the other saying, ‘holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, all the land is full of His glory.’” It's not obvious what injunction this verse is supposed to occasion. That isn't troubling—holiness, we've seen, is not only a relational property, even if it can ground certain duties.

So far, we've seen a couple of crucial things about holiness on Hebrew Scripture's conception therefore: first is that it is unique to God and the things He wants to designate (directly or vicariously) as such. Holiness is God's special property. Unlike his other perfections (transcendence and perfections thereby enabled notwithstanding) beings not God seem not to be intrinsically holy even in a diminished sense. Second is that holiness carries with it normative demands—ways that it has to be respectfully responded to. The intuitive way to understand these demands when they concern, say, particular objects or places is as extending from what holiness demands at its source. The object is holy partially because God is holy. So intuitively, to respect the holiness of the object—to behave towards it in accordance with the prescribe manner—is to respect the holiness of the deity that made the object itself holy. It is to treat holiness-generated reasons as authoritative for oneself. Equally, to transgress (how exactly the

¹¹ See for instance Deuteronomy 7:6, Leviticus 19:2, Leviticus 20:26.

transgression works will vary by context: in the case of the burning bush, it would've been Moses treading while shod on the holy ground) against the holiness of a holy object offends against the holiness of God. What God claimed for Himself by bestowing upon it a certain status a transgressor attempts to deny to God in the way He sees fit. Milgrom (2007, 1605-6) implicitly notes the way in which disrespect to holiness amounts to disrespect to God in his gloss on Leviticus 19:2—"if one is careful not to take *imitatio dei* literally, but rather to follow the *text* of 19:2 literally, namely, strive for holiness ... and thereby approach God's holiness ... then the concept can be maintained: *imitatio dei* means to live a godly life. ... Thus the Masoretes, too, imply the doctrine of *imitation dei*: observance of the divine commandments leads to God's attribute of holiness, but not to the same degree—not to God, but to godliness." Spurning God's commandments issued under the aspect of holiness is a way of spurning God—it is a form of disrespect.

Holiness is not a normatively idle property. It purports to ground claims on free wills, which claims, when obeyed, implicitly acknowledge the authority of the source of holiness: God. Holiness purports to obligate human beings to perform are particular actions, for which human (or just free and rational) beings can be held blameworthy, culpable, and accountable. As God is the source of holiness-obligations, He is the party disrespected by actions that offend against holiness. As a member of the moral community capable of the right kinds of second-personal reactive attitudes, He's in a position to demand rightful treatment of His holiness—just as human persons are positioned to demand respectful treatment of their bodily integrity. God's holiness establishes Him as the proper address for positive religious activity which itself, like bodily integrity, provides decisive grounds for refraining from disrespect. If we persons have authority in virtue of our second-personal authority to demand respectful treatment for our bodily integrity, then God is in a structurally identical position with respect to His holiness.

Human beings, though not themselves intrinsically holy, can (and may be obligated to, depending on God's instructions) take a custodial attitude towards God's holiness, holding violators to account for their actions. When human beings do so, they behave just as they would when standing up for a victim of physical assault. As members of the community of free and rational beings, they have what Darwall (2013) calls *representative authority* to hold wrongdoers to account even when those representatives are not themselves wronged. I should be clear that it may be that God is not strictly speaking *harmed* when human beings wrongfully disobey His commands. But that does not mean He doesn't have a legitimate interest in His holiness being respected.¹²

But let's say you agree that God's holiness can in principle, like a human being's bodily integrity, generate second-personal reasons. And let's say you agree that God is in a position to demand respect for His holiness as a full member of the community of second-personally competent agents. It does not follow that God can just command anything in order to claim respectful treatment for His holiness—any more than it follows from a member of the moral community's second-personal interest in her own bodily integrity that she can therefore command anything at all in order to claim respectful treatment for it. There may not be total consensus on what constitutes a wrongful violation of bodily harm, but there seems to be a vast set of agreed-upon cases of it readily comprehensible to cognitively healthy, second-personally competent adults. By contrast, we haven't got anything like that kind of data about what counts

¹² Thanks to a referee for pushing me to clarify the relationship between the non-harm of disobeying God and the second-personal reasons we nonetheless have to obey God.

as wrongful disrespect towards God's holiness. But if we don't, then how do we know that God's holiness is adequate to ground the demands for respectful treatment God in fact makes?

Here's my answer: we don't. But God is omniscient. He knows. If you're committed to divine omniscience, and you're committed to God's holiness, then you're committed to God knowing all the ways that His holiness—which in principle can be the object of disrespectful treatment just like a human being's bodily integrity—can *in fact* ground demands for respectful treatment.¹³

But I hear objections:

Wait just a minute. Let's say what you just said is true. Why appeal to holiness? Why not appeal to some other property of God's and just say that God knows it can be the ground of second-personal obligations? Because in the cases of other properties of God's—say, His power—we have good reason to believe they are *not* adequate for the job. Simply being very powerful does not seem to authorize commands in general. And the same goes for the others of God's properties rehearsed above and rejected as candidate grounds for God to command human beings. We have no such contrary reasons in the case of holiness.

But do we have positive reasons in the case of holiness? Yes. As discussed above, God's holiness is partially grounded in His transcendence. Creating and ontologically sustaining the universe couldn't occur without that transcendence, and those characteristics, together with God's moral perfection (which is also a condition on God's holiness) seem to make God an unsurpassed candidate to be an object of favorable religious activity. If you accept that positive religious activity is a basic good the way that e.g. bodily integrity is, then you should accept that the proper object of it, God, can be disrespectfully treated in virtue of a property grounded in what makes Him a superb candidate for such activity.

Okay, but say a bit more about the appeal to God's omniscience? The thought here is that while in principle God's holiness seems to be a ground for second-personal reasons, which particular

¹³ What seems to be a structurally similar appeal to God's omniscience in grounding His commands' capacity to generate decisive reasons for us to act is made in Murphy (2002). Basically, Murphy proposes that God's infallibility—together with His sincerity—guarantees that the commands He issues cannot fail to generate decisive reasons for us to act. If they did, it would imply that He was unaware that the commands He did in fact issue couldn't do their purported normative work. The details of his view are complicated, but the upshot is that Murphy hopes that God's epistemic authority regarding the domain of decisive reasons can do what I think only His distinctively practical authority can do. The details of Murphy's argument are complicated and there are many parts with which I disagree, but I think our basic point of difference concerns the nature of commanding. Following Darwall, I regard what Murphy calls "sincere commanding" as presupposing a capacity genuinely to bind the will of the commanded. Otherwise I don't see how the demand for compliance and holding the commanded party blameworthy and accountable in case of non-compliance gets off the ground.

In fact I don't even see how sincere commanding is intelligible on Murphy's view. Murphy writes that, for instance, a bully can "without possessing practical authority, give commands, in part because he or she has, through physical strength or other means of making others' lives unpleasant, the capacity to modify the reasons for action others have by his or her commands." I regard the bully in this case as *abusing* the practice of commanding. The bully wants not free and rational compliance but to appeal to his victims' sense of their safety (or some such) in adjuring them to submit to his will. True commands do not merely inform and they do not merely seek to, in some roundabout way, bring about action in accordance with the state of affairs they represent. Commands purport to bind those to whom they are addressed to obedience as free and rational persons. God's omniscience may make it wise to do as He advises. But His commands can do no more than point us towards reasons we had anyway, reasons our behavior regarding which cannot license anything close to the reactions that theists believe God to have to our behavior. Only something else, some interest of God's that can also serve as a basis for mutually acceptable practical authority relations, can do that. My proposal is that holiness can do the trick. See Murphy (2002, 26-9).

ones it grounds—which particular demands for respecting holiness God can make—is an obscure matter. Compare with bodily integrity: anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the human body can tell you like a hundred things off the bat you have an obligation not to do to human beings in virtue of their having bodies. Not so with holiness. The appeal to God's omniscience is meant to solve *that* problem. The thought is just that if you already believe in a holy and omniscient God, you have no reason to doubt that the holiness-demands He makes are in fact legitimate ones.

Well, fine, but isn't it a constraint on our obligations that they're readily intelligible to us as second-personally competent agents? No special sensibility required, and so on. Your account seems to violate that condition.

I agree that the way in which holiness grounds a particular demand may remain—at least this side of paradise—obscure to us. But the thought is that divine omniscience gives you something almost as good: the say-so of a perfectly knowledgeable being that the right relation in fact obtains between God's holiness—which has already been accepted as, in principle, the kind of thing that can be culpably disrespectfully treated—and the particular demand to respect it that He makes of human beings. Note, by the way: omniscience is meant to solve not a normative problem but a purely epistemic one. God's omniscience can vouchsafe us epistemic access to holiness-grounded reasons that is—assuming we accept God's omniscience—as solid from an epistemic perspective as our access to second-personal reasons in more mundane cases.

So far, holiness-obligations and other kinds of obligations look to be structurally on all fours. But are *all* of God's commands grounded in holiness such that to obey God is always to accord with holiness, and to disobey God is always to offend against holiness? Two considerations speak strongly in favor of God's holiness grounding not just some but all of God's commands to human beings.

Consideration #1: availability. Assuming that God does in fact sometimes bind human wills by assigning e.g. objects and places the status of holiness, then it would stand to reason that He makes use of the grounding property (holiness) when He wants to do similar kinds of things in other contexts. That is: God has a task—obligating people to do certain things—and God has a tool—holiness. If He's competent to use the tool for the task in some contexts, then if He sets Himself the same task in other contexts, we should assume He makes use of the same tool. That is what an authority *would* do if they wanted their commands to have obligatory force. Now, of course, if God had some other way to give His commands obligatory bite, He might only need to make use of holiness in certain contexts. Some other way is just what we seem unable to find among God's properties. Assuming God means all His commands to be taken as binding, we should assume unless there's evidence to the contrary that holiness is behind all of them given that it's behind some of them.

But even if God wanted all of His commands to normatively bind human wills, what if He can't make use of His holiness in all contexts? This objection is in order if there are facts about certain of God's commands that make it unlikely that holiness is the source of their normativity. Holiness is certainly not mentioned in the Bible every time God commands somebody to act. Why should we think holiness is grounding the obligation in the contexts in which it isn't mentioned? Unfortunately for this objection, the difference between the obligations God purports to mediate through holy objects and places and those he seeks to impose directly (without explicit mention of holiness) makes it extremely likely that the second can also be grounded in holiness. For God Himself is intrinsically holy (and the source of holiness). God is the fitting claimant of duties grounded in holiness *if anything in the entire universe is*. In other words: there might be some question about whether certain material objects can be sanctified,

and serve as ground for a normatively-demanding holiness. But there's no such question about God. He's owed what we are obligated to do in virtue of holiness if anything is. The natural interpretation of His commands is, that they constitute instructions about how to treat the source of holiness.¹⁴

Moreover, (some of) the kinds of obligations that Hebrew Scripture explicitly grounds in holiness are those sorts of obligations which, it might seem, would be hardest to ground period. I'm thinking in particular of the ritual obligations discussed in Leviticus. These are time consuming exercises that, as opposed to e.g., commercial regulations, seem be completely unintelligible in a world without God. Every society has an economy, physical defenses, courts, sexual mores, family law, and so on. Violent chaos results from the absence of *some* measure of unanimity on these matters. Although many (arguably all) societies have rituals in some sense, they are the furthest removed from necessity, the most, it would seem, superfluous. The greater the necessity of some particular institution, the higher the risk of harm given the institution's non-existence or dysfunction, the lower the threshold an authority will have to meet for being able to command unanimity on that institution's character. Diversity concerning the arts is (relatively) innocuous. Diversity concerning who can legitimately use force is not. Diversity concerning ritual is, perhaps, highly innocuous in the abstract. If God's holiness can successfully ground ritual obligations, it is highly likely that it is able to do the same regarding obligations legitimate authority for which involves a lower threshold.

Consideration #2: perfection. It is excellent news for purposes of this argument that God would not issue commands not grounded in His holiness. But perhaps we can do even better, and motivate the thought that God could not but ground in His holiness the commands that He issues. The basic thought is that holiness is a perfection that behaves similarly to God's other perfections. Take God's omniscience, for instance. What it means for God to be omniscient is, presumably, for there to be no knowable proposition the truth value of which God does not know. The same goes for His omnipotence. If a power exists, God has it. It is the nature of perfections to permeate the parts of life that they perfect. If there were a knowable proposition God did not know, that would mean He was not omniscient.¹⁵ If holiness is a perfection of God's, then its function in one case should be thought to extend to all like cases. If holiness' function is to ground obligations of respect constituted by obedience to certain commands, then its function-qua-perfection is to ground obligations to obey *all* commands. To coin a phrase: perfecting properties are pervasive properties.

Even if holiness can in principle ground obligations to obey God's commands, can it ground the obligations actually contained in the Bible? God seems to command a number of things are *prima facie* unjust. It seems the unjust is always wrong to do. Worse still: we are assuming that God's perfect moral goodness is a necessary condition of His holiness. We might worry therefore that holiness is on its own terms uniquely ill-suited to the task of

¹⁴ In private communication, Aaron Segal queries roughly as follows: If holiness can ground second-personal reasons, why does God have to *in addition* issue a command? Why isn't the hallowing itself sufficient to create the demand? My answer is that if the kinds of demands holiness can ground are not obvious to human beings, then some explication of the *effect* of hallowing on an object—in the form of making explicit the particular consequent duty—seems in order on God's part. Of course, holiness-duties vary, on my account, as much as God's own commands do. It may be that, like bodily integrity, there are numerous ways to (dis)respectfully act towards God's holiness.

¹⁵ I leave to one side, as interesting but not directly relevant, the extent to which God has the capacity to self-limit. I also leave to one side the complicated modal questions about whether even if God is omniscient in this world, He's omniscient at every world at which He exists. Though frankly, God seems to be not only perfect but perfect essentially, and essential properties are possessed at every world at which something exists.

grounding our obligations to God. I don't have space here for a defense of each and every obligation God seeks to impose on human beings. But let me take an especially troubling class of obligations: the obligation reiterated throughout Hebrew Scripture to severely punish idolaters. The worry here, I suppose, is that there is nothing so very wrong with idol-worship. It may be a waste of time, but hardly the sort of thing it's fit to get violent about. My response is this intuition is Godless. No, seriously: in a world in which there is a holy God of the sort Abrahamic theists worship, idol-worship is almost the worst thing in the universe. It is a kind of cosmic treachery, integrating the acts properly exclusive to one relationship with another relationship (it makes matter worse, of course, if the idols are especially *bad* idols, like Moloch, and worse still if they are historically popular competitors to God). The motivation for punishing idolatry is therefore structurally similar to the motivation for punishing any other violation of our obligations. Certain action become permissible when, and to the extent that, they're performed as punishments that would not be permissible outside that context. Harming someone's health, for instance, is either harm or the execution of justice depending on whether that person is innocent of a crime or guilty of one. Views will differ, of course, about whether treachery against God is the kind of thing that ought to be punished even if it's obligatory not to do so. I'd only say for now that the structure of the argument justifying the punishment of idolaters looks solid. The question now probably depends on intuitions about how bad idolatry is itself. That's fine, since I imagine those intuitions are largely parasitic on intuitions about great the good of holiness is.

Of course, we should expect that the calculus of punishment to be different in a world governed by a holy God from what it is in a world not so governed. Does this mean there are no limits to what God can command by virtue of His holiness? My intuition is that limits are set by God's intrinsic nature. For instance, God could not command that we torture for pleasure, habitually show disrespect to our parents, and so on down the line. He couldn't because to do so would be immoral, therefore contrary to God's essential, perfect moral character. Are there limits to what can be sanctioned by holiness set by holiness itself, without reference to one of its necessary conditions? That's a very interesting question. I could imagine someone persuasively making the case that certain rituals, though not immoral, would be unworthy of the sanction of a holy God. But I'm not sure I'd want to take a position on that question here.

4. Objections

I'm going to conclude by addressing four objections to my argument.

A first objection is that my appeal to holiness violates a kind of publicity requirement for reasons. "It would be unreasonable," Darwall writes, "to hold people accountable to standards whose application required some special sensibility ordinary moral agents could not be assumed to have or that could not be formulated in ways that ordinary agents could not understand" (Darwall 2009). Above I addressed a version of this objection by an appeal to God's omniscience—if you're committed to God's holiness as an in-principle second-person reason generating property but don't see how it could ground some particular obligation, a commitment to God's omniscience is good enough to justify confidence and perhaps knowledge that God commands properly under the aspect of His holiness. He knows, in other words, what His holiness can and cannot justify. But there's a separate worry: if God's holiness is the ground of His authority to obligate human wills, then evidence for God's holiness *itself* had better be, at least, widely knowable by reasonable people. But the evidence that God is holy is, frankly, thin. Way thinner than is the evidence that most of the authorities we acknowledge

to be normative for us are so. And that's an especially serious problem in this case given how extreme is the fealty God is demanding. It is dubious, frankly, whether even the most philosophically rigorous and best-informed religious believers know that God is holy.

Publicity seems to be gradable along two axes. Axis 1 is how widespread the relevant information is. Axis 2 is how easy the information is for those with access to it to apprehend. Compare: how widespread a newspaper's circulation is, and how lucid the prose of the articles is. In the specifically moral case: if a reason is pretty easy to understand and knowledge of it is within reach of many people, it will be fairly easy to justify punishing someone for ignoring that reason. But it is not sufficient to cancel a reason's status as obligatory that it is somewhat difficult to understand, or that information about it isn't so widespread. What relative but not total obscurity is more likely to do is to provide an excuse for non-compliance. Excuses extenuate wrongdoing by reference to circumstances that disabled the agent from acting as a fully second-personally responsible agent. Usually excuses are offered to deflect the severity of sanctions. Ignorance is a standard kind of excuse, and that seems to be sort of thing we're dealing with when it comes to holiness, given how widespread sincere theistic belief in God's holiness seems to be and have been in the past. The atheist's situation is similar to that of a wandering explorer in what he believes to be ungoverned territory that is, in fact, a region of a justly-constituted republic rightly purporting to bind, through legislation, the wills of those persons under its sovereignty. It seems that the wandering explorer is not by virtue of his ignorance exempt from the laws of the republic in question. He is obligated to obey. If a police officer saw him doing something illegal and told him to stop, the police officer would be in the right. The explorer just does not know, before he's told, that there's any polity here with authority. An objector who wishes to establish obligation as a luminous condition, such that some agent A is obligated to F only if he knows that he is obligated to do F, will have to accept that an enormous class of excuses—those appealing to the ignorance of the obligee—are, indeed, not those at all. Sometimes of course ignorance does mean there's no obligation at all. If you're ignorant of making a contract at the moment papers are signed, you aren't consenting, and therefore aren't contracting. But numerous cases could be instanced in which what grounds the excuse is ignorance not merely that certain factual conditions that put known obligations into force have been met, but that the obligations themselves exist. A substantial burden of proof rests on the objector to prove that these cases are something other than what they look like.

A second objection is that the appeal to holiness is otiose because God's authority can be adequately just by analogy to that of parents over children.¹⁶ Even if, this objection runs, it proves difficult to say why exactly parents have authority over children, it seems obvious *that* they do. One worry is that this line of thinking aims too low. We might be able to demythologize God's authority by appeal to a more mundane case, like that of parenthood. This move would not clarify that, let alone why, God can command human obedience—we'd just be passing the buck to the analogue case, and hoping things worked out with our theory for it. But let's leave this to one side. A more basic problem is that theists probably think God's authority is very different from parental authority. For one thing, parents seem to lose authority as their children get older and become more independent. God's authority remains steady (in the Jewish tradition, it even gains, as people can be held accountable for more as they mature). Even more importantly, parental authority seems to be justified, in part, by its exercise

¹⁶ I am grateful to Terence Cuneo for raising this objection at a conference on the philosophy of worship at Hebrew University during July 2021.

in accordance with the child's wellbeing understood independently of obedience to parental authority.¹⁷ But theists will probably not want to instrumentalize God's authority like that. Obeying God constitutes its own (obligatory) end. It requires no further justification for the religious believer. A final point is that God seems to be able to command a much broader range of actions than parents do. It is plausible that, if what I've said so far about God is true, the range of God's permissible commands is constrained only by other facts about God's intrinsic nature, and facts entailed by those facts. Parents have a much narrower scope within which to exercise their authority. A good example is sacrificial ritual. It would strike most people as exceeding the remit of parental authority to establish such rituals for their children. Not so with God, at least according to the plain text of Hebrew Scripture. Similar points could be made about political authority, and indeed every other temporal authority of which I'm aware.¹⁸

A third objection is that God's holiness, unlike bodily integrity and perhaps other goods that can ground obligations, is impervious to our actions. God is (probably) not less holy no matter what we do, just as He's not less knowledgeable or powerful. One might think that in order to ground an obligation, there have to be real stakes—in the form of harm, say—to the possibility of neglecting said obligation. My reply is, well, maybe not all goods are like bodily integrity in that sense. That's not really an objection, it's to notice diversity. But, moreover, we've already second-personally violated our obligations when we will hostility, whether our target is health or holiness. The person who shoots a bullet at an innocent person has violated a very serious obligation regardless of whether or not the bullet hits the mark. The person who shows disrespect to God's holiness, by violating His commandments, may not subtract from God's holiness (the grounds of the obligation) but that doesn't make his will any less culpably hostile to God's interests.

A final objection runs as follows: "the obligations generated holiness cannot overwhelm our moral dilemmas, i.e., cases in which we have conflicting obligations. But the theist will not want to say there's ever any dilemma about whether to obey God. You always have to do *that!*" I confess to being very troubled by this objection, but I think I can sketch a response.

In her famous paper *Two Distinctions in Goodness*, Christine Korsgaard proposes, well, two distinctions in goodness. The first is the distinction between instrumental and final goods. The first sort are desirable just as means to the second sort. Money is a classic instrumental good. A loving marriage, a classic case of a final good. A second, subtler distinction is between intrinsic and extrinsic goods. Intrinsic goods are desirable because of their own intrinsic properties. Extrinsic goods—which may be final goods, if they're not desired solely for the sake of attaining some separate good—are good only when they stand in certain relations to other goods. Pleasure, on a common sense view—i.e. one that's non-hedonistic and non-Stoic—is a paradigmatic extrinsic good. Pleasure is desirable when it's taken in something good, and undesirable when it's taken in something bad. In both cases it's (un)desirable for its own sake

¹⁷ Of course, having a good relationship with one's parents is itself a good, and obeying one's parents may help to constitute that good. That good relationship may, it should be said, borrow some of its axiological weight from the way in which the relationship between parent and child mimics certain aspects of the relationship between God and person. A conception of this sort may be behind the Talmud's dicta concerning the obligation to wait on one's parents, and even submit to some of their more irrational request. See Babylonian Talmud Qid31a. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to clarify this line of thought.

¹⁸ With the caveat that many of these other authorities' normative claim on subjects seems, unlike parental authority and like divine authority, to increase rather than diminish with the subject's maturation.

and not as a means to something beyond, but, in both cases, it also has the status it does just because it stands in the right relations to an intrinsic good (Korsgaard 1983).

I want to propose a distinction in extrinsic goodness: parasitic extrinsic goods and defeasible extrinsic goods. Pleasure is of the former kind. Pleasure's intrinsic properties are such that its contribution to the overall axiological situation simply is determined by the qualities of what the pleasure is taken in. The quality of such a good's contribution is simply determined by the intrinsic qualities of the other relatum.¹⁹ Defeasible extrinsic goods, by contrast, are themselves desirable unless certain, defeating conditions are met. That is, defeasible extrinsic goods can be intelligibly evaluated independent of other conditions. Their positive qualities can just also be overwhelmed by other factors. Parasitic extrinsic goods, to be good at all, need to be made so by standing in the right relation to the right thing. Defeasible extrinsic goods are good unless they are *ruined* by some defeating condition.

The theist may want to say that all final goods that are not holiness (and perhaps moral goodness, but I'm not sure about this) are defeasible extrinsic goods. Considered by themselves, they are good. But when they conflict with holiness—when they are unholy—they are ruined, and the demands they'd normally make are overwhelmed by the demands that holiness makes. This isn't actually so crazy a thought as it sounds. Take life, for instance. Very plausibly life is good in itself, deserving promotion and protection. But it is very plausible that certain lives are, on the whole, a burden to those living them. They are not overall good. Lives of great evil, for instance. Although preserving or promoting life is normally a sufficient reason for action, and not harming life a decisive reason for forbearance, if the right conditions are met then the goodness of life might itself depart. Some lives are perhaps not worth living. A theist will likely say that an unholy life is such a life (which isn't to foreclose the possibility of repentance). Other goods can be ruined in structurally similar ways by unholiness. Can holiness be ruined in the same way? It's hard to know. I expect that for many theists, holiness can't be made *not worth it* except in ways that are offensive already to holiness on holiness' own terms (which is just to say there wasn't really a dilemma in the first case). Which is all to say that conflicts between holiness and other goods should be decided in holiness' favor.²⁰

¹⁹ Pleasure taken in nothing is, on a non-hedonist view, a bad thing, because nothing does not merit the kind of psychic approval that pleasure represents. Such a pleasure would be *empty*.

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