

What is the Best Jewish Account of the Grounds of Worship of God?

Michael J. Harris
London School of Jewish Studies

ABSTRACT: This paper brings contemporary debate in analytic philosophy of religion regarding the notion of worship into conversation with Jewish sources and attempts to identify the most promising philosophical grounds for a Jewish account of the putative obligatoriness of worship. Some philosophers have recently debated the notion of worship, focusing in particular on the claim that human beings have an obligation to worship God and on whether and how such an obligation might be adequately grounded. I first canvass the major bases for worshipping God that have featured in this debate. I then turn to some relevant liturgical and philosophical sources of Jewish tradition, identifying grounds for the obligatoriness of (exclusively) worshipping God that have been advanced in those sources. I next consider which grounds of the putative obligatoriness of worship are the most promising for a Jewish account in terms of both philosophical cogency and rootedness in Jewish tradition. I argue that a version of a divine command grounding of prayer in a Soloveitchikian mode is both well-rooted in Judaism and also plausibly surmounts philosophical objections to divine command accounts. In the final section, I briefly raise the issue of whether the concept of worship is truly well-suited to a Jewish context, suggesting that the rich Hebrew notions of *avodah* and *tefillah* are perhaps more appropriate in articulating a fully adequate Jewish understanding of the pertinent issues. In particular, I argue that these notions fit well with the Soloveitchikian divine command grounding of the obligation to worship God.

This paper brings contemporary debate in analytic philosophy of religion regarding the notion of worship into conversation with Jewish sources and attempts to identify the most promising philosophical grounds for a Jewish account of the putative obligatoriness of worship. Although there is much focus in this paper on specifically Jewish sources, the grounds of obligation to worship considered here are relevant to a range of religious traditions and much of the material drawn from Jewish sources finds parallels in other faiths, such that the discussion is of relevance beyond the narrower Jewish theological context.¹

Some philosophers of religion have recently debated the notion of worship, focusing in particular on the claim that human beings have an obligation to worship God and on whether and how such an obligation might be adequately grounded.² I will first canvass

¹ All translations from Hebrew sources in this article are my own unless otherwise stated.

² The debate on which I will mostly focus began with Bayne and Nagasawa (2006). The first response was Crowe (2007). Bayne and Nagasawa claim that most theists regard it as a necessary truth that we have an obligation to worship God. I am not sure whether this claim can be grounded in Jewish sources. I propose to leave this issue to one side for the purposes of this paper. A further general issue concerning the putative obligation to worship God is whether such an obligation can be a moral one in the strict sense of the term, given that it concerns the human relationship with God rather than interhuman dealings. All parties to the recent debate about the grounds of worship seem simply to assume that the putative obligation to worship God that is being discussed must be a *moral* obligation. Yet it is not obvious that human obligations towards God are part of the moral sphere strictly speaking, and as we will note below, in traditional Jewish categorization of the Torah's commandments, obligations towards God are placed in categories *other than those* which include the ethical commandments. I mostly bracket this issue in this paper but it does emerge explicitly at a few points.

the bases for worshipping God that have featured in this debate, including creation-based, redemption-based, maximal-excellence, and divine command accounts (further accounts feature in the literature e.g., the “prudential reasons” account, but I limit myself to those which appear to me the strongest).

I will then turn to some of the relevant liturgical and philosophical sources of Jewish tradition, identifying grounds for the obligatoriness of (exclusively) worshipping God that have been advanced in the tradition. In the history of Jewish philosophy, these include grounds suggested by Saadia Gaon and Maimonides in the medieval era and by Yeshayahu Leibowitz and Joseph B. Soloveitchik in modern times. I also pay particular and detailed attention to grounds of the obligatoriness of worship explicitly or implicitly presented in traditional Jewish liturgy, an obviously central resource for any discussion of Jewish thought on worship and the essential component of the lived Jewish experience of worship over many centuries. Throughout the discussion of the Jewish philosophical and liturgical sources, I distinguish not only between explicit and implicit grounds for the obligatoriness of worship but also between both of these and rationales for worship which do not seem intended to ground obligatoriness.

In light of the contemporary philosophical and Jewish material explored, I will then consider which grounds, if any, of the putative obligatoriness of worship are the most promising for a Jewish account in terms of both philosophical cogency and rootedness in the Jewish liturgical and philosophical traditions. I argue that while not necessarily the sole defensible philosophical and/or adequately Jewishly-rooted basis for the obligatoriness of worship, a version of a divine command grounding of prayer (in a Soloveitchikian rather than Leibowitzian mode) is both well-rooted in the Jewish philosophical tradition and can also plausibly surmount the philosophical objections to divine command accounts raised by Bayne and Nagasawa.

In the final section of the paper, I will briefly raise the issue of whether the concept of worship is in fact well-suited to a Jewish context. I will suggest that the notion of worship involves difficulties in a Jewish setting because of its possible implications of utter submissiveness before God (including in the moral arena), as argued in an oft-cited article by James Rachels. I will further suggest that the Hebrew notions of both *avodah* and *tefillah* are richer than the concept of worship and perhaps more appropriate in articulating a fully adequate Jewish understanding of the pertinent issues. In particular, I will suggest that these notions fit well with the Soloveitchikian divine command grounding of the obligation to worship God.

1. Accounts of the Obligation to Worship God in Recent Philosophical Debate

1.1 The Creation-Based Account

Robert Adams writes: “People who worship God do not normally praise him for his moral rectitude and good judgment in creating us. They thank God for their existence as for an undeserved personal favor” (Adams 1972, 324, cited in Bayne and Nagasawa 2006, 304). Richard Swinburne argues: “[I]f God has given us our whole life and all the good things it involves, much thankful worship becomes our duty” (Swinburne 2005, 168).

Grounding the obligation to worship God in gratitude to Him for having been created assumes, as Bayne and Nagasawa note, that being created is a benefit (2006, 305).³ But

³ More fundamentally, as Crowe points out (2007, 470), it assumes that we can incur obligations in virtue of having been benefited by another person. What kind of obligations would these be? The obvious answer is

assuming that an act can benefit someone only if it leaves them better off than they were, or at least than they would have been had one not acted, our creation cannot benefit us because had God not created us, we would not have been worse off – we would simply not have existed. Bayne and Nagasawa reference David Heyd’s book *Genethics* (Heyd 1992). Heyd (30–31, 37) makes the following two relevant points: 1) It is not that nonexistence is a mysterious form of existence that we cannot compare to existence because of the lack of epistemic tools; rather, we do not understand nonexistence simply because there is nothing to understand. As he puts it. “nonexistence is not a state that can be given a value” (30). 2) Non-existence is not a state that can be attributed to a subject – indeed it is hardly a “state” at all. Death occurs *to* someone but it does not necessarily seem coherent to say that if a particular person is not conceived, that is a benefit or disbenefit to this person – or even to say that a particular person is not conceived.

Bayne and Nagasawa note a further objection to the creation-based grounding of the obligation to worship (2006, 305–306). Even if it is possible to benefit a person by creating that person, many individuals are not benefited by having been created because they live lives of intense misery and suffering. Here, of course, the problem of evil rears its head. One could, like Marilyn McCord Adams, appeal to the afterlife, especially from the perspective of traditional Jewish belief: an afterlife in communion with God could make a terrestrial life plus afterlife, considered as one composite life, of overall benefit to the person living it (1999).⁴ But this will not convince people who deny or doubt the existence of an afterlife. And even if one accepts the existence of an afterlife, there are questions about whether and how it could compensate for suffering experienced in this life.⁵

1.2 The Redemption-Based Account

This approach is suggested by Benjamin Crowe: “The basic thought is that, since God has performed acts of incalculable benefit for humanity, human beings are therefore obliged to render God His due as far as they are capable by worshipping Him” (2007, 470). Crowe develops this idea in a Christian context, focusing on the incarnation, but, as will be discussed in Section 2 below, it can also be applied in a Jewish setting. Crowe points out that whereas the creation-based account is open to the objection that bringing a person into existence is not necessarily a benefit for that person, God’s great redemptive acts seem to avoid this problem. On the redemption-based account, as opposed to the creation-based account, it is not God’s gift of sheer existence to human beings that generates the obligation to worship God. Rather, what grounds the obligation is something or things unequivocally and hugely beneficial conferred on human beings once they already exist.

1.3 The Maximal-Excellence Account⁶

On this account, which has received particular attention in discussions flowing from Bayne and Nagasawa (2006), what makes the worship of God obligatory is God’s “supreme degree of intrinsic excellence” (Adams 1999, 14).⁷ The properties which theists usually identify as constituting God’s intrinsic excellence include His perfect goodness, power and

moral, perhaps connected to justice, which, Crowe cites Aquinas as explaining, means “fully rendering to another the debt owed him.”

⁴ See, e.g., Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 39b, 40b on the afterlife as compensating for suffering in this earthly life.

⁵ For further discussion see Hick (2010, 340–341). While an afterlife is central to Hick’s theodicy, he rejects a compensatory conception of it.

⁶ The term is based on Anselmian theology according to which God is a maximally excellent being.

⁷ Swinburne considers God’s “incomparable greatness” to constitute one ground that makes God worthy of worship – “if greatness deserves respect, he deserves a peculiar respect” (Swinburne 1993, 298).

knowledge. As Bayne and Nagasawa point out, worshipping God simply for His power or knowledge seems objectionable (2006, 307). God's moral perfection obligating worship of Him, they observe, is a less objectionable but still problematic idea. Bayne and Nagasawa's main difficulty with it is that we usually consider people whom we regard as morally superior to ourselves as worthy of emulation rather than worship.⁸ Crowe responds, drawing on early Christian patristic authors and Aquinas, that God's goodness and excellence are superior beyond our comprehension. God does not *share* the properties of beauty, goodness, power and knowledge with any finite being: "[T]he properties that, on classic theists' accounts, render God worthy of worship are [not] properties that human beings (or anything else, for that matter) could ever have" (2007, 473). In consequence, it does not follow from a human person's goodness not justifying worship of that person that God's goodness does not justify the worship of God. Bayne and Nagasawa, however, respond by impaling Crowe on the horns of a dilemma, one to which Crowe leaves himself open by the use of oxymorons such as "incommensurably superior" and "incommensurably greater" (2007, 473). In claiming that divine properties (e.g., goodness) are "incommensurable" with human properties, Crowe must mean either that (i) God's goodness, for example, is fundamentally distinct from our goodness and literally incommensurable with it, or alternatively he intends the weaker claim that (ii) God's goodness is fundamentally the same as human goodness but far more extensive. If Crowe intends the first alternative, it is not clear in what sense God is "more good," morally superior, to us. If what Crowe has in mind is the second alternative, which in fact he seems to (since he uses the example of the brightness of the sun by comparison with the brightness of a candle), then we are back with the problem that we do not worship people whom we consider our moral superiors (Bayne and Nagasawa 2007, 478).

It seems to me that Crowe could surmount the challenge posed by this dilemma in one of two ways. The first is to embrace the dilemma's second horn and maintain that the difference between God's goodness and ours is one of degree, but an almost ungraspably huge difference of degree, so that the worship of God but not of morally excellent human beings is appropriate. This line of thought is developed by Hugh Burling, as we will see below. The second option is to steer closer to the first horn of the dilemma and to deploy Barry Miller's concept of a "limit case" (Miller 1996, ch.1). Applying this concept to the property of goodness, the idea would be that God's goodness is not an instance of goodness in the sense in which this property is predicated of human beings, but God's goodness is nevertheless that to which an ascending series of instances of human goodness points. God's goodness is thus fundamentally distinct from human goodness but stands in a (superior) relation to it as the limit case of the series.

Jeremy Gwiazda introduces the concept of "threshold obligations" into the debate in order to defend maximal excellence accounts against Bayne and Nagasawa's objection (Gwiazda 2011). Gwiazda's argument is that "maximal-excellence accounts can ground an obligation to worship God without lesser degrees of excellence grounding lesser obligations to worship lesser entities" (522). This is because the obligation to worship is a "threshold obligation", meaning one which "kicks in" only when relevant properties of excellence are possessed beyond a certain degree by the being or person putatively being worshipped. Gwiazda urges that it makes sense to view worship as a threshold obligation. The excellences required for there to be an obligation of worship, for Gwiazda, include

⁸ Bayne and Nagasawa (2006, 308), themselves unconventionally suggest holiness as the strongest candidate for a property grounding the obligation to worship God in a maximal excellence account, with worship as the appropriate response to holiness. They acknowledge that the parallel to their own objection to maximal excellence accounts based on goodness can be raised i.e., holiness is often a property ascribed not only to God but to certain people as well, yet we do not consider it appropriate to worship such people.

awe-inspiringness, holiness, goodness, knowledge, power and others. Only a person or being who is beyond the threshold on every required excellence should be worshipped. Only God is beyond the threshold where worship is obligatory – in fact God is maximally excellent in respect of all the required excellences.

John Danaher argues that Gwiazda's defence of maximal excellence accounts fails (Danaher 2012). Danaher employs a distinction between perfect and imperfect obligations according to which an imperfect obligation allows for latitude with respect to the actions that fulfil it whereas a perfect obligation does not. Danaher cites as simple examples paying one's mortgage as a perfect obligation and donating money to charity as an imperfect obligation. He argues that there are no threshold obligations as such. Thresholds do not create obligations *de novo*; they are only relevant to obligations to the extent that they transform a pre-existing imperfect obligation into a perfect obligation. This means that thresholds can be appealed to in our context only if the worship of some being is already imperfectly obligatory; God alone passing the threshold of maximal excellence would then transform that obligation into a perfect obligation to worship only Him. But whether there is any such pre-existing imperfect obligation is far from clear. Therefore, Gwiazda's deployment of the concept of threshold obligations fails to deflect Bayne and Nagasawa's objection to maximal excellence accounts.

Danaher devotes some discussion to Gwiazda's specific examples of threshold obligations, and here his analysis seems to have some force. In Gwiazda's clearest example - the child who refuses to eat her lunch properly and gets hungry later - it is plausible that, as Danaher argues, once the child's hunger gets beyond a certain point, the parent has an obligation to feed the child only because we accept that there is a pre-existing general obligation for a parent to look after a child, and that pre-existing general obligation is crystallised into a concrete course of action in this context, where the threshold of unacceptable hunger is crossed. That, Danaher claims, is what makes this example intuitively compelling. However, even if the case of the hungry child is not a case of a threshold obligation in Gwiazda's sense of one that is created *de novo* once a certain threshold has been passed, Gwiazda's analysis of worship as a genuine threshold obligation seems more persuasive. In other words, Gwiazda may not have chosen the best examples from the human interpersonal realm to demonstrate the existence of *de novo* threshold obligations, but it seems intuitively plausible (and the criterion of intuition, as just noted, is the criterion recommended by Danaher himself) that the obligation to worship God could be a *de novo* threshold obligation that does not depend on any pre-existing general obligation of worship.

An alternative plausible approach to defending the maximal excellence account against Bayne and Nagasawa's main objection is offered by Hugh Burling (Burling 2019). Burling (who terms the maximal excellence account "the respect account") argues that worship is not *sui generis* but a species of the respect for persons grounded in our ordinary moral intuitions, and therefore morally obligatory. At the same time, however, only God is worthy of worship, and worship is very different from attitudes we owe to creatures. Maximal excellence, which according to theism only God possesses, is the property that grounds worship. Worship is "the extraordinary way we show the extraordinary respect merited" by the particular determinate property of maximal excellence (Burling 2019, 490). Creatures do not and will never have this determinate property and thus are not worthy of worship, even though persons are worthy of respect, something which is much further down the continuum at whose apex stands worship. Our obligation to worship God arises from a general obligation to respect excellence but it does not entail an obligation to worship less excellent beings, only to respect them. Unlike Gwiazda's position, then, Burling's "allows lesser degrees of excellence to ground lesser obligations to show respect to lesser entities, but calls the actions satisfying those lesser obligations 'showing respect'

rather than ‘worship’” (497). Burling’s defence of maximal excellence accounts does not require the idea of threshold obligations. Burling prefers his defence to Gwiazda’s because although Gwiazda’s threshold obligation solution avoids generating the result that creatures would be worthy of worship, it “does this by obscuring the analogue between creaturely and divine respect which made the respect account morally intelligible in the first place. We are left with a *sui generis* obligation to worship a maximally excellent being” (497). This does seem persuasive if we are prepared to accept that a morally intelligible account of respect can generate possibly non-moral (or quasi-moral, or moral-in-an-extended-sense) obligations (i.e., obligations to God), at the apex of the respect continuum. Burling also notes that his maximal excellence account meets Danaher’s objection. There is an imperfect general obligation to show respect which does not generate any obligation to worship any creatures but generates the perfect obligation to worship God (498). On either Burling’s approach or Gwiazda’s *sui generis* threshold obligation to worship God, both of which seem at least plausible, as well as on Crowe’s position buttressed by Miller’s concept of a limit case, Bayne and Nagasawa’s main objection to maximal excellence accounts seems rebuttable.

1.4 The Divine Command Account

Benjamin Crowe raises the possibility of a divine command account of the obligation to worship God, basing it on Deuteronomy 6:5 and 6:13: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might... The Lord your God you shall fear; Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear.” Crowe concedes that there is no explicit mention of worship in these verses but notes that, for theists, worship is an activity expressive of attitudes such as the love, fear and service commanded here (2007, 469). If worship is commanded by God, then on the divine command theory of ethics, worship is morally obligatory.

As already indicated, however, whether the notion of *moral* obligation really fits here is at least a *prima facie* issue. To say that if worship is commanded by God, then worship is morally obligatory is to assume that God’s command is a sufficient condition of the moral obligatoriness of an act. This, however, is less than totally clear.⁹ Take the example of ritual commandments of the Torah such as the dietary laws, the laws of the Sabbath, and the commandment to eat unleavened bread on Passover. If God’s command is a sufficient condition of the moral obligatoriness of an act, then it would follow for many traditional Jewish believers that eating unleavened bread on Passover is morally obligatory. This is somewhat counter-intuitive. Intuitively, even to traditional Jewish believers, eating unleavened bread on Passover seems neither morally obligatory nor morally non-obligatory. I think that most traditional Jewish believers would understand eating unleavened bread on Passover as a different and independent kind of obligation, a purely religious or ritual duty. Indeed, traditional Jewish believers would place eating unleavened bread in the traditional category of commandments concerning the relationship between human persons and God, the category conventionally *contrasted* with the interpersonal commandments – the latter category being very close to, if not identical with, morality. Or in Saadia Gaon’s famous terminology, eating unleavened bread on Passover is a “revealed” commandment that would never have been known without revelation, as opposed to a “rational” precept, a category including the ethical and which comprises those commandments of which human beings would have been aware even without revelation. The upshot of these considerations in our context is that a divine command account of the obligation to worship God may be better off presenting itself not as a traditional divine

⁹ For a somewhat more detailed discussion of this issue see Harris (2003, 9–10).

command theory (i.e., a divine command theory of ethics) but as a divine command theory of another kind of obligation.

Leaving that issue to one side, Bayne and Nagasawa object to the divine command account that it seems “odd – perverse, even” for worship to be grounded in imperatives (2007, 478). The first reason they provide for this view is that attitudes akin to worship, such as love, admiration and respect, tend not to be under volitional control.¹⁰ This raises the issue of how the love of God can be commanded by the Torah. Rabbi Isaac Arama (1420-1494) raises precisely the same objection as Bayne and Nagasawa: “How can commandments be given regarding those things which are not under a person’s control? It is inconceivable that a person should be charged to do things not dependent on a person’s own will.”¹¹ Many Jewish thinkers believe, however, that commanded love does not pose a problem. Maimonides in *The Book of Commandments*, Positive Commandment 3, claims that there is a religious obligation to love God which he terms “the obligatory love.” Reflecting on God (Maimonides’ Positive Commandment 1) leads to greater understanding of God, from there to pleasure, and thence inexorably to the commanded love. So, as Nehama Leibowitz puts it, love, which is not under the control of the will, can be the subject of a command for Maimonides because love of God can be attained through contemplation and study, and these *are* under the control of the will (Leibowitz 1980, 66).¹² In his *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides again speaks of the love of God – a very fierce love – as something commanded.¹³ More directly than Maimonides’ approach, many Jewish thinkers claim simply that emotions *are* under volitional control, at least to a large extent. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra offered his celebrated parable of the beautiful princess and the peasant. A peasant of sound mind, says Ibn Ezra in his commentary on the commandment not to covet, the last of the Ten Commandments, will put out of his mind any thought of romance with the princess of the realm because he knows that it is unattainable. In the thirteenth century, the anonymous but highly influential *Book of Education* emphasized the power of the will in controlling emotions. In the modern era, Soloveitchik has notably followed in this tradition.¹⁴

The second reason offered by Bayne and Nagasawa for opposing a divine command grounding of the obligation to worship God is that it seems inconsistent with the phenomenology of worship, which, they argue, seems to represent worship as a response to God’s very being rather than as a response to God’s commands. Bayne and Nagasawa suggest that “[i]t is hard to imagine theists conceiving of their act of worship as grounded in the commands of God” (2007, 478). Yet many Jews (for example) do conceive of their acts of worship in this way, or partly in this way – they may experience many particular acts of worship as responding both to God Himself, in, e.g., gratitude, reverence or love, *and* to God’s command, or some acts of worship may respond primarily to God and some

¹⁰ Burling (2019, 502, n. 9), counters that there are cases in which failure to hold or cultivate a certain attitude prompts a response of blame (e.g., the wife who fails to continue loving her husband as he becomes old and his virility and wit fade.) A better example might be a spouse who fails to continue loving a partner who has become seriously ill. Avital Hazony Levi (2021) argues that worship should be not be viewed as a particular attitude at all but rather as a ritual that aims to inculcate certain attitudes in the psyche of the worshipper. If one accepts this characterization of worship, the objection of lack of volitional control seems to fall away. However, it seems to me, as indicated below in the text, that Jewish acts of worship often express particular attitudes to God even if they also simultaneously inculcate such attitudes, and the objection of lack of volitional control presumably applies also to a command to express a particular attitude by performing a particular act.

¹¹ Translation (slightly amended) from Leibowitz (1980, 64).

¹² See also the famous passage in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2:2, where Maimonides emphasizes contemplation of nature as a means of achieving love of God.

¹³ Laws of Repentance 10:3.

¹⁴ See Ziegler (2012, ch. 6).

to His command (to take a Jewish example again: contrast a grateful prayer with a full heart after the birth of a child with a rushed mandatory Afternoon Prayer on a hectic day).

In an earlier article, Nagasawa together with Campbell Brown argues that the Divine Command Theory actually implies that it is *not* morally obligatory to worship God (Brown and Nagasawa, 2005). Brown and Nagasawa argue that Divine Command Theory includes what they call the “Compliance Principle,” on which my reason for conforming with God’s command to do x must be the command itself and not some other reason. However, urge Brown and Nagasawa, the nature of worship is such that it is impossible to obey God’s command to worship Him because of the command to do so because “[w]orship is, just like love or admiration, always voluntary” (142). So if I worship God solely because of His command then I am not genuinely worshipping Him. Even if I have more than one reason for worshipping God, Brown and Nagasawa deny that one of those reasons could be God’s command. So Divine Command Theory is inconsistent with the view that we have a moral obligation to worship God.

This argument, however, obviously assumes once again that attitudes like love can never be coherently commanded. Moreover, that the Compliance Principle is part of Divine Command Theory is controversial. Indeed, in at least some cases, it is preferable that my reason for obeying God’s command is *not* God’s command itself. David Shatz gives the example of visiting a friend in hospital. If, as I am leaving, my friend thanks me and I reply “Visiting the sick is a divine commandment,” I seem to be getting something wrong (Shatz 2012, 26).¹⁵ Maimonides in the sixth chapter of his *Eight Chapters* extends this thought to all ethical commandments of the Torah; motivation for fulfilling these commandments should flow from one’s beneficent and compassionate character rather than from obedience to God. We might, then, adapt Brown and Nagasawa’s argument and suggest that a stronger formulation might run as follows:

- 1) God’s command to worship Him is not a moral but a ritual or religious command.
- 2) My reason for obeying this command must be the command itself.
- 3) But worship is by its very nature voluntary.
Therefore
- 4) It is impossible to obey God’s command to worship Him and so there is no obligation to do so.

Yet although in this revised form, Brown and Nagasawa’s argument might avoid the problem of inappropriate motivation, 3) remains controversial, especially in the eyes of many important Jewish thinkers.

The overall conclusion of our discussion in this subsection, then, is that a divine command account of the obligation to worship God seems plausible, and that it might be preferable to construe this as a divine command account of a ritual or religious obligation rather than a moral obligation.

¹⁵ See Shatz (2012, 25–26), for brief discussion of some key rabbinic texts and Maimonides’ position on this issue. For further discussion of Brown and Nagasawa’s paper, see Blaauw (2007).

2. Grounds of the Obligation to Worship God in Jewish Liturgical and Philosophical Sources

I turn now to some of the liturgical and philosophical sources of Jewish tradition, identifying grounds for the obligatoriness of (exclusively) worshipping God that have been advanced.¹⁶ Why is worshipping God obligatory in Jewish tradition?¹⁷

An important introductory point is that sometimes rationales for worship appear in the Jewish philosophical texts that do not seem intended to ground obligatoriness and should not be understood as such. Maimonides in the *The Guide of the Perplexed*, for example, writes that the purpose of prayer and other acts of worship is to foster observance of the commandments, the love, fear, and constant awareness of God, and correct beliefs about God (1963, III:44). These clearly seem to be *objectives* of worship rather than things that ground obligatoriness. The same can be said regarding Judah Halevi's view of the purpose of prayer as pedagogical, instilling correct theological beliefs (1946, III:17). Regarding the liturgy, it may be useful to make a three-fold distinction (though in the case of some prayers, which of the three categories they best fit is debatable):

1) Prayers which provide an implicit or explicit rationale for worship but do not convey either implicit or explicit obligation. To cite just a few examples from the daily Morning Service: "I will sing to the Lord for He has been kind to me" (Psalms 13:6, explicit rationale); "How manifold are your creations, O Lord, you have made them all with wisdom, the earth is full of your creations" (Psalms 104:24, implicit rationale); the expression "Life-Giver to worlds (*bei ha'olamim*)" – a praise of God as the source of life of multiple worlds (implicit rationale). In the daily Morning and Afternoon Prayers, the phrase "and Your praise, our God, will never depart from our mouths, for You are a great and holy King" provides an explicit rationale for prayer based on God's maximal excellence but apparently imposes no obligation and certainly no explicit obligation. Part of the prayer upon entering a synagogue, "I will bow down and bend the knee, I will bless the Lord my Maker" provides a close-to-explicit reason for worshipping God but again seems to impose no general obligation of worship.

¹⁶ The liturgy on which I focus in this paper is the "Ashkenaz" version which was developed in Europe and is one of the major versions used for prayer in the contemporary Jewish world. All existing versions of the liturgy are broadly similar, though there may be particular prayers and locutions that appear only in non-Ashkenaz liturgies that would be germane to our topic.

¹⁷ Bayne and Nagasawa (2006, 301), term the claim that God is the exclusively or uniquely appropriate object of worship *the uniqueness thesis*. While intuitively one would think that Jewish tradition totally endorses the uniqueness thesis and while it seems to be, as Bayne and Nagasawa note, a defining feature of monotheism, there are interesting issues at the margins. The Gaon of Vilna (Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720-1797) held that the third stanza of the Friday night hymn "Peace Be Unto You" should be omitted, yet it remains widely recited by observant Jews despite apparently constituting a straightforward petitionary request to angels that one be blessed with peace. In a similar vein, there are notes in some editions of the Penitential Prayers addressing the problem that the passage "Angels Who Usher in Prayers for Mercy" might easily be interpreted as a petition to the angels themselves. Again, standard works of Jewish law exhort one not to pray *to* righteous parents at their graves but rather to be sure to pray *to God at* their graves, indicating that praying to ancestors was something that people were wont to do and needed to be cautioned against. Bayne and Nagasawa (2006, 302), similarly note the problems caused for the uniqueness thesis by the veneration of saints and angels on the part of many theists. They outline three possible positions for such theists: 1) the term 'worship' when used to describe a religious person's veneration of a saint is used analogically, like a younger sibling's 'worship' of an older one; 2) worship admits of degree, so there can be legitimate worship of saints or angels but it is subservient to the worship of God; 3) to insist that God ought to be the exclusive object of our worship and give an account of how exactly worship differs from our attitudes to saints, angels etc. 3) seems to me the best option for a traditional-minded Jewish approach to this issue, though Hazony Levi (2021) argues in the spirit of position 2) that from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible, God is the ultimate rather than the only addressee of worship, such that worship of other human beings can be permissible but is limited by the worship of God.

2) Psalms 118 and 136, both of which feature in the liturgy, contain the verse “Give thanks to the Lord because He is good, because His lovingkindness endures forever.” Here the explicit rationale for worship is God’s moral excellence and our gratitude, and the use of the imperative “give thanks” seems to signal an implicit general obligation to worship. Mention might also be made here of the interesting fact that sometimes in Jewish liturgy we encounter the idea of prayer as appropriate or fitting rather than obligatory – as something less than a fully-fledged obligation. Thus, in the Morning Service we encounter the phrase “song and praise is fitting (*na’eh*) for You,” and in all the mandatory daily prayers, the words “to You it is fitting to give thanks.” God is sometimes referred to in the liturgy as “He for Whom praise is fitting.”

3) Prayers which mention an explicit obligation to worship. An example is the very beginning of the prayer which concludes the daily services: “It is our duty to praise the Lord of all.” The grounds given for this obligation in the succeeding lines of the prayer are God’s creation of the world and the chosenness of the Jewish people. A further example is the early section in the daily morning liturgy which gives an explicit statement of obligation and explicit grounding (again in chosenness and also in God’s love) of the obligation to worship: “Therefore we are obliged to thank You, praise You... and to give praise and thanks to Your Name.”

While the grounds of the obligation to worship God mentioned in the preceding paragraph and other grounds appear in Jewish liturgical and philosophical sources, what is most notable for our purposes in this paper is that there is a substantial presence in Jewish sources of each of the four accounts of the obligation to worship God discussed in the contemporary philosophical debate and detailed above in Section 1. It is these accounts which appear to be the strongest philosophical options and therefore it is these accounts, this time as they appear in Jewish sources, on which I will again focus, taking them in the same order as in Section 1.

2.1 The Creation-Based Account

Saadia Gaon offers a creation-based account of the obligation to worship God. Life itself, existence itself, is an act of kindness from God (1948, 137). Saadia argues that reason demands that a favour be repaid by reward or thanks, and so God commands us to thank Him for having created us (139). In Psalm 148, part of the daily liturgy, all of creation including humankind is similarly called upon to praise God for having been created. The language used is “let them praise (*yehalelu*),” implicitly suggesting a general obligation to worship God for this reason.¹⁸

There is a famous Talmudic dictum which seems to run counter to the idea of life as a good for which one might praise God: “It would have been better (literally, “easier” or “more comfortable”) for a person not to have been created.”¹⁹ This is reminiscent of the “wisdom of Silenus” mentioned in Sophocles²⁰ and cited by Nietzsche (1967, Section 3) - that it would have been preferable never to have been born, and the next best thing is to die quickly. However, the meaning of the Talmudic dictum is not necessarily so negative, though there are indeed some who read it in a pessimistic vein. In his commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Ephraim Solomon of Luntshitz (1550-1619) writes: “[The First

¹⁸ Further important passages in the liturgy, even if they do not ground a human obligation to worship God in His creation of us, present creation as a rationale for worship, e.g., the passage in the daily liturgy: “We will thank You and declare Your praise for our lives which are in Your Hands.” The prayer upon waking in the morning thanks God for continued life, as does the blessing recited at Festivals and other special occasions “Who has kept us alive...and allowed us to reach this season.”

¹⁹ Babylonian Talmud *Erwin* 13b.

²⁰ *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1224–1228.

Commandment of the Decalogue] does not say [‘I am the Lord’] Who created you [but rather ‘I am the Lord your God Who took you out of the land of Egypt’] because our sages teach that it would be better for a person not to have been created than to be created, and the Torah here mentions only the goods which God bestowed on them because of which they are obliged to worship Him.”²¹

Rabbi Ephraim Solomon thus explicitly opposes a creation-based account of the obligation to worship God; our creation is simply not a benefit that could ground such an obligation.

Other important commentators, however, interpret the Talmudic dictum differently. For example, some read it as meaning that at the beginning of life, when we do not know how the person who has just been born will turn out, it would have been better had she or he not been born. But if a person turns out to be righteous, then clearly that person’s life is a benefit to them and to others.²² Alternatively, some interpret the Talmudic maxim as meaning that it is better to stay as an unembodied soul in God’s heavenly repository of souls than to have one’s soul lowered into an earthly body. On either of these interpretations of the Talmudic teaching, life could still be a benefit that could ground an obligation to worship God. However, as we noted above in section 1, the philosophical objections to a creation-based account seem strong.

2.2 The Redemption-Based Account

Praise of and thanks to God for historical redemptions are commonplace in Jewish liturgy. A lengthy blessing praising God for the Exodus is included in the mandatory morning and evening prayers. There is also the daily recitation of the Song at the Sea of Exodus 15 and the special prayers giving thanks for the specific redemptions of the festivals of Chanukah and Purim. These prayers all provide a rationale for worship, namely the redemptions to which they refer, but do not seem to convey any implicit or explicit obligation to worship. The *Nishmat* prayer recited on the Sabbath and Festivals comes closer to presenting worship as implicitly obligatory because of God’s many acts of redemption, and even more so Psalm 98 in the Friday night liturgy, beginning “Sing to the Lord a new song”, which contains several exhortations to praise God because of His acts of salvation and redemption but stops short of explicitly setting down an obligation to do so.²³ In the Passover Seder, however, there is an explicit statement of and grounding of the obligation to worship in gratitude for the redemption from Egypt: “...therefore we are obliged to thanks, laud, praise... the One Who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us.” The redemption-based account of the obligation to worship God thus appears in traditional Jewish sources and, as noted in Section 1.2, does not seem vulnerable to the philosophical difficulties facing the creation-based account.

2.3 The Maximal-Excellence Account

Some of the prayers referenced above state that prayer is fitting because of God’s greatness and holiness or cite these properties of God as a reason for worshipping Him. Psalm 99, which is included in the Friday night liturgy, also exhorts us to praise God because of His holiness, and Psalm 150, incorporated in the daily liturgy, because of His holiness and greatness. Thus, something less than explicit grounding of the obligation to worship God due to His goodness or holiness is present in Jewish liturgical sources. We noted in Section 1.3 that Bayne and Nagasawa highlight God’s holiness as the possible optimum focus of a

²¹ *Keli Yakar* to Exodus 20:2.

²² Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (c.1250-1327), *Tosafot HaRosh* on Tractate *Erubin* 13b.

²³ See also Psalms 135 and 136, again both included in the liturgy.

maximal excellence account and the objection that they acknowledge from the fact that we tend to ascribe holiness not just to God but to people also. In Jewish tradition, too, holiness is commonly ascribed to people and not only to God. The Shunamite woman refers to the prophet Elisha as “holy”;²⁴ Rabbi Judah the Prince, redactor of the Mishna, is referred to as “our holy rabbi”; one of the leaders of Hasidism, Rabbi Jacob Isaac of Peshischa (1766-1813), was referred to as “the Holy Jew”; and the standard term for martyrs is “*kedoshim*,” “holy ones.” The traditional Jewish view is certainly that worship (as opposed to reverence, great respect or admiration) of holy people would be not merely inappropriate but idolatrous. It thus seems perfectly possible to ascribe holiness to people as well as to God while reserving worship solely for God.²⁵ As we saw in Section 1.3 above in our discussion of the maximal excellence account in the contemporary philosophical literature, there are several theoretical ways of making sense of this which can be applied to goodness and other excellences.

It should be noted, however, that the maximal excellence account appears problematic from the perspective of Maimonides’ doctrine of negative attributes, according to which we can only say what God is not but cannot ascribe any affirmative attributes to him. Despite his position that prayer is obligatory in Jewish law, the whole enterprise of praising God is philosophically problematic for Maimonides, who approvingly cites the dictum of Psalms 65:2 that “to You silence is praise” (1963, I:59). Maimonides argues that positive attributes predicated of God in prayer are restricted in scope by tradition and constitute (as when used in the Torah itself) concessions to limited human understanding - “the necessity to address men in such terms as would make them achieve some representation” (I:59).²⁶

The maximal-excellence account thus seems overall a plausible candidate for grounding the obligation to worship God in terms of philosophical defensibility and rootedness in Jewish liturgical sources. However, as we shall now see in section 2.4, Soloveitchik argues that God’s maximally excellent attributes are almost grounds for *prohibiting* prayer rather than obligating it.

2.4 The Divine Command Account

According to Maimonides, prayer is a biblical commandment, a divine command. As Arthur Hyman notes, for Maimonides prayer in Judaism is primarily a religious obligation, an instance of the more general obligation of “service” or “worship” (*avodah*).²⁷ Maimonides writes: “Although this commandment also belongs to the category of general commandments... there is a specific commandment concerning prayer.” Maimonides then cites earlier rabbinic sources which also locate an obligation to pray in Scripture. Maimonides also makes the biblically-based obligation of prayer explicit in the *Mishneh Torah*.²⁸ Maimonides and all other authorities are very clear, as Soloveitchik (2018, 20–21, 147) emphasizes, that what is commanded is not just the recitation of texts but an inner experience without which the physical recitation is, as Soloveitchik puts it, “worthless”

²⁴ II Kings 4:9.

²⁵ Not only people but also objects or locations are often considered holy in Judaism, e.g., a Torah scroll, the Holy Ark in the synagogue containing the Torah scrolls, phylacteries, the entire Temple, and even the entire city of Jerusalem or the whole territory of the biblical Land of Israel, but worshipping any of these would be considered blasphemous. There is also holy time – the Sabbath and Festivals. For a discussion of the nature of the holiness of people, time, territories, and objects in Judaism from a Maimonidean perspective, see Kellner (2006, ch.3).

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of Maimonides’ views on prayer see Benor (1995). Benor argues that ultimately Maimonides’ conception of prayer constitutes a coherent whole.

²⁷ Maimonides, *Book of Commandments*, Positive Commandment 5; Hyman (2003, 299–300).

²⁸ Laws of Prayer 1:1-2.

(20). Maimonides rules that if a person prays without concentration, he is obliged to recite the prayer again.²⁹ Prior to Maimonides, Soloveitchik emphasizes, the consensus among Jewish legal authorities was that daily prayer is a rabbinic obligation; Maimonides was the first of the major medieval authorities to rule that prayer is a biblical commandment.

Following in the footsteps of this Maimonidean divine command account of the obligation to pray, Soloveitchik stresses the obligatory nature of prayer in Jewish law. Indeed, as indicated above at the end of section 2.3, Soloveitchik believes that we would have no right or permission to pray were prayer not commanded in biblical passages. We need God's permission to approach Him in prayer (2018, 149–151). As Soloveitchik puts it: "Relating to God through speech and supplication appears to our sages as a brazen and adventurous activity. How can mortal man, who is today here and tomorrow in the grave, approach the supreme King, the Holy One blessed be He? Does an ordinary subject have license to speak to a great and exalted King and petition Him for his needs?" (2018, 149). Soloveitchik (2018, 152) emphasizes that we have no right to add to the prayers or even to repeat the recitation of an obligatory one. This underscores that prayer is only obligatory (and indeed only permitted) because of divine command.

In the context of this sub-section, the position of Yeshayahu Leibowitz should also briefly be considered. It would be inaccurate to say that Leibowitz straightforwardly construes worship or prayer as divinely commanded. This is because of Leibowitz's fundamental commitment to the idea of God's radical transcendence. Since God does not intervene in nature or history, God did not, according to Leibowitz, reveal a Torah containing a command to worship at Mount Sinai. According to Leibowitz, it is ultimately one's personal subjective commitment to God's commandments, one's commitment to take them as commands, the "assumption of the burden of Torah and Mitzvoth" (1992, 31) that gives one an obligation to worship. This might be termed a kind of 'command theory' rather than 'divine command theory' of worship.

For Leibowitz, however, proper prayer or worship is certainly an obligation. My spontaneous voluntary prayer because of a bad situation in which I find myself is condemned by Leibowitz as service of myself, not of God. It is not worship and is not even a religious act (1992, 30). Leibowitz urges:

Prayer, as shaped in the prayerbook, is an entirely different matter. It is obligatory and fixed... As obligatory, it is not what a person desires but what is demanded of him; not prayer initiated by him, but one imposed upon him. As fixed, it does not vary with the changing circumstances or states, subjective or objective, in which the praying individual finds himself... The Jewish prayer – inasmuch as it is a distinctive religious institution, determined by religious considerations and a constitutive element of halakhic Judaism – is not intended to serve as an outlet for the feelings and thoughts of man... It is more than an expression of a psychological need which has been granted due place in the religious life. (30–31)

Leibowitz goes on to cite the Mishnaic teaching that prayer should not be routine or fixed but rather supplication for mercy before God.³⁰ Leibowitz claims that this view is in fact rejected by Jewish law and that prayer is precisely routine and fixed, merely the fulfilment of an obligation: "The sole meaning of prayer as a religious institution is the service of God by the man who accepts the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" (1992, 31). This for Leibowitz is "[t]he grandeur and power of prayer" (31), the setting aside of all human interests and motives in the pure acceptance of the obligation to worship.

²⁹ *Laws of Prayer* 4:15.

³⁰ *Ethics of the Fathers* 2:13.

Even bracketing out the difficulties involved in Leibowitz's radical position on God's transcendence and its implications, his conception of prayer will strike many as excessively bleak and austere. His account leaves out all the spiritual richness of prayer that Soloveitchik highlights: "The lover expresses his yearning, the trembler his fear, the wretched and dejected his helplessness, the perplexed his confusion, and the joyful his religious song – all within the framework of prayer" (2018, 147). Leibowitz struggles to explain why the set mandatory prayers of Jewish liturgy contain so many requests for the fulfilment of human needs if such requests are nothing more than human beings' service of themselves rather than genuine worship of God. Leibowitz responds merely that some form and content or other for prayer had to be established. This yields an inadequate and impoverished account of prayer compared to Soloveitchik's description of, for example, the inner journey of the properly-focused reciter of the Standing Prayer central to the daily liturgy. Such a worshipper travels through "all the transformations and oscillations from love and mercy to the experience of dread and human helplessness, after man comes crashing down from the heights of yearning and aspiration to the depths of confusion and terror... self-negation and self-recovery... sacrifice..." and then upwards again to delight, joy and confidence (2018, 181). And for Soloveitchik, prayer does constitute, in direct opposition to Leibowitz, the expression of a human psychological need vis-à-vis God which has been granted due place in the religious life: "[P]rayer is a vital necessity for the religious individual. He cannot conceal his thoughts and his feelings, his vacillations and his struggles, his yearnings and his wishes, his despair and his bitterness... in the depths of his soul. Suppressing liturgical expression is simply impossible: prayer is a necessity... prayer is justified because it is impossible to exist without it" (2018, 150).³¹

Taking into account all of the contemporary philosophical and Jewish material explored in our discussion, it seems to me that a divine command account of the obligatoriness of worship is the most promising candidate for a successful Jewish account in terms of philosophical defensibility and rootedness in the Jewish philosophical tradition. While not necessarily the sole defensible philosophical and Jewish basis for the obligatoriness of worship, a version of a divine command grounding of prayer (in a Soloveitchikian rather than Leibowitzian mode) is both rooted in Jewish philosophical literature and apparently able to successfully overcome the philosophical objections to divine command accounts raised by Bayne and Nagasawa.

3. Limitations of the Concept of Worship in a Jewish Context and the Notions of *Tefillah* and *Avodah*

I conclude this paper by briefly raising the question of whether the concept of worship is in fact well-suited to a Jewish context. One reason that the notion of worship involves difficulties in a Jewish setting is because of its possible implications of utter submissiveness before God, including in the moral arena, as argued, for example, in a frequently cited paper by James Rachels (Rachels 1971). Rachels argues that worship and moral autonomy are incompatible and that human moral challenges to God are incompatible with a worshipful stance. Yet in Jewish tradition, the appropriate stance towards God often *requires* moral challenge, as evidenced by well-known biblical instances such as Abraham's dialogue with God in Genesis 18, some of Moses' and other prophets' protests to God,

³¹ Soloveitchik's position also has the advantage over Leibowitz's that in taking account of human needs, it satisfies Raz's "dependence thesis," part of his "service conception" of legitimate authority. On the dependence thesis, "all authoritative directives should be based on reasons which already independently apply to the subjects of the directives" (Raz 1986, 47).

and some of Job's protests. In classical Jewish sources, such human moral challenges to God are often, though certainly not always, presented as perfectly religiously legitimate. Anson Laytner summarizes: in rabbinic literature, biblical figures are sometimes criticized or punished for arguing with God, sometimes praised and rewarded by God Himself, sometimes criticized for *not* arguing, and sometimes individuals who question God's judgement themselves end up regretting their words and acknowledging God's justice. In short, there is a long and rich tradition in biblical and rabbinic literature of arguing with God, often on moral issues, and although such argument is often criticized in these sources, frequently it is not censured or is even endorsed (Laytner 1990, 116). The whole mode of standing before God portrayed in traditional Jewish texts is often much more assertive and even combative than Rachel's extreme notion of worship suggests.³²

This leads us to a further reflection regarding the appropriateness of the concept of worship in a Jewish context. Most of the discussion of this paper has taken 'worship' as more or less synonymous with 'prayer,' but 'worship' can be understood much more expansively. In place of 'prayer' or of the narrow sense of 'worship' in which 'worship' is roughly synonymous with 'prayer,' the Hebrew notion of *tefillah* may be a richer alternative since its root meaning has an added dimension of self-judgement or self-assessment. The closest classical Jewish concept to 'worship' seems to be *avodah* which like 'worship' can denote either prayer or broader divine service but again is richer, capturing in its basic meaning the "hard work" aspect of Jewish prayer/worship, unlike 'worship' whose etymology is based in Old English and the term 'worth.' *Avodah* further denotes the sacrificial form of worship as well as verbal prayer.

The classic Jewish concepts of *tefillah* and *avodah* cohere well with the Soloveitchikian divine command account of worship discussed in Section 2.4 above, thus bolstering the credentials of that account as the most promising one available from a Jewish perspective. Maimonides, who, as noted above, emphasizes the obligatory nature of prayer based on the biblical term *avodah* and deeply influences Soloveitchik's account, explicitly mentions both *tefillah* and *avodah* in setting out that obligation in the very first line of his Laws of Prayer, as well as making these notions central in his brief analysis of the obligation in the *Book of Commandments*.³³

The concept of *tefillah*, with its root meaning of self-judgement, seems to dovetail with a Soloveitchikian divine command account.³⁴ The central prayer in the liturgy, the Standing Prayer (*Amidah*) has, in its standard form, a substantially petitionary nature. But Soloveitchik stresses that since the *Amidah*'s text is a fixed one, it is the liturgy, rather than the untrammelled wishes of the petitioner, that establishes the content of the petitions: "Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his, or its, genuine needs are, what he should, or should not, petition God about" (Soloveitchik 1978, 65). As Shalom Carmy points out, petition which has a mandated text thus encourages, for Soloveitchik, self-criticism and self-understanding: "[T]he gesture of petition, insofar as it poses to God the question of our true needs, leads us to criticize our false beliefs about our needs" (Carmy 2003, 16).³⁵ The self-judgement and careful introspection of *tefillah* is thus enabled through the *Amidah* and other mandatory petitionary parts of the liturgy. The firm direction provided by these central texts fits well with Soloveitchik's own view of prayer as a divinely-commanded obligation which is also responsive to important human needs.

³² See also Weiss (2016).

³³ *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer 1:1; *Book of Commandments*, Positive Commandment 5.

³⁴ In Gen. 48:11, the Hebrew root *p-l-l* appears to mean 'thought' (see the commentary of Rashi ad. loc). Thus, the Hebrew verb corresponding to the noun *tefillah*, which is standardly in the reflexive form, would mean 'thinking about oneself', 'introspection.'

³⁵ See also Carmy (1989).

The notion of *avodah*, although, like that of *tefillah*, not explicitly linked by Soloveitchik to his divine command account of worship, fits that account more directly than *tefillah*. Significant in this context are Soloveitchik's reflections on the essential connection between prayer and sacrifice in two key essays on prayer, "Reflections on the Amidah" and "Redemption, Prayer and Talmud Torah."³⁶ Although Soloveitchik's thought on prayer is characteristically dialectical and includes an emphasis on the idea of self-acquisition through prayer (Soloveitchik 1978, 70), the notion of prayer as sacrifice of the self looms large in both essays. Noting that "*avodah* (worship) is a synonym for sacrifice" (2018, 161), Soloveitchik argues that although physical human sacrifice is prohibited by the Torah, offering one's whole existence to God is a requirement: "[W]hen it comes to experiential sacrifice – this God demands from us" (2018, 161; see also 164). The essence of *avodah* continues even after the animal sacrifices central to the *avodah* of Temple times have ceased: "The spiritual act remains in place" (2018, 162; see also 178). Soloveitchik concludes: "Take the knife to slaughter your existence for Me. This is the command of the awesome God... This approach is the very foundation of prayer. Man hands himself over to God. He approaches the awesome God, expressing this movement in sacrifice" (2018, 163).

Of course, sacrificial service of God could be voluntary rather than commanded, but his explicit references here to "command" and "demand" make plain the obligatory nature of Soloveitchik's prayer-as-sacrifice.

Similarly in "Redemption, Prayer and Talmud Torah": "Prayer means sacrifice, unrestricted offering of the whole self, the returning to God of body and soul, everything one possesses and cherishes...[prayer] is rooted in the idea ... that God claims man, and that His claim to man is not partial but total" (Soloveitchik 1978, 70–71). And this *avodah*, prayer as total sacrifice, is, once again, something commanded rather than voluntary: "[M]an belongs to God, without qualification, and ... God, from time to time, makes a demand upon man to return what is God's to God" (71).

Jewish discussions of prayer and worship, in addition to paying careful attention to the contemporary philosophical literature on worship, are likely to be enhanced by reflection on the relevant authentic and rich concepts internal to Judaism. An instance of this is the aptness of the classic Jewish concepts of *tefillah* and *avodah* to the Soloveitchikian divine command account of the obligation to worship God.

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³⁶ "Reflections on the Amidah" was originally an independent essay but appears as Chapter 10 of Soloveitchik (2018).

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