

Don't be worshipful!

To be worshipful is to be servile. Thus, one shouldn't worship anything or anyone.

Worship:

To worship a being is first of all to adore or venerate and love that being to the utmost degree possible. It is also to trust it and to defer to it completely.

Let us begin with the claim that God is the unique being worthy of worship.

An argument that God is the unique being worthy of worship:

1. God fulfils the functions of creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all that exists.
2. No other being fulfils these functions (for two beings would limit each other and, thereby, neither could fulfil them).

Therefore: 3. God uniquely fulfils these functions.

4. Fulfilling the functions of creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all that exists is both necessary and sufficient for being worthy of worship.

Therefore: 5. God is uniquely worthy of worship.

(Actually, being the redeemer of all that exists is sufficient for being worthy of worship, but nothing redeems all that exists except that it is the creator and sustainer of all that exists.)

Question:

If I believe that God exists and, thus, that a being uniquely worthy of worship exists, won't I then, as a matter of psychological fact, worship God?

No, for worshiping involves adoration, love, trust, and deference while belief is a cognitive attitude. Only in the presence of relevant conative or affective attitudes can a belief generate other affective attitudes (such as love) or conative attitudes (such as deference).

Question:

If I believe that a being worthy of worship exists, shouldn't I worship that being?

No. That you believe a sofa is worth buying doesn't imply that you should buy it. That you believe learning to play piano worth your while doesn't imply that you should learn to play piano.

One's believing that something is worth one's xing might give one a reason to x, but one's having a reason to x doesn't imply that one should x, for one might have better reason not to x.

Perhaps believing God (uniquely) worthy of one's worship gives one a reason to worship God (given that one has relevant affective or conative attitudes). But one has a better reason not to worship God.

The argument:

1. Worshipping something involves being completely trusting of it and deferential toward it.
2. To be completely trusting and deferential is to be blindly obedient and submissive (*blindly*, for "complete" here requires being committed to ignoring or discounting whatever evidence one might acquire that it's not completely trustworthy).

Therefore: 3. Worshipping something is to be blindly obedient and submissive toward it.

4. To be blindly obedient or submissive is to renounce one's own personality and values.

5. One can have no good reason to renounce one's own personality or values.

Therefore: 6. One can have no good reason to be blindly obedient and submissive toward it.

Therefore: 7. Whatever reason one might have to worship God, one can have no good reason to assume the attitudes involved in worship.

Therefore: 8. One shouldn't worship even God, the unique being worthy of worship.

Objections:

1. God, by virtue of being creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all that exists, is entitled to our worship. To believe that God exists and yet to refrain from worshipping God is knowingly to fail to give a person what is his due, and that's a serious moral failing. (This is Satan's sin. Satan has no false beliefs about God. He simply refuses to give God what he knows is God's due.)

2. The trust and obedience involved in worship is not servility, for in worship one trusts and obeys out of adoration and love, not fear.

3. Being the redeemer of all that exists (being its ground of purpose and meaning) is not sufficient for being worthy of worship. The argument need not even consider God; the point that to worship is to be servile is entirely general.

4. A person can have good reason to be servile (at least servile toward some specific thing). Since whether a person should be some particular way depends on that person's conative and affective attitudes (as well as her beliefs), and we can imagine a person who wants to be servile or would like to be so, a person can have good reason to be servile (toward something).

5. God's will can never really be known by us, for God has hidden Himself from us. We must draw deeply on our own experience, intelligence, and heart when we try to discern what His will is. For that reason, our attempt to follow God is unlike the obedience we would show a master who issues commands directly and clearly. Thus, our obedience to God, because it necessarily involves inquiry and judgement, is not servility.