

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 7 | Issue 2

Article 1

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4-1-1990

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### Recommended Citation

Davis, Lawrence H. (1990) "The Importance of Reverence," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol7/iss2/1>

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF REVERENCE<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence H. Davis

Is it more important to love God, or to revere Him? On the account of reverence I give, it differs both from literal “fear” of God and from love—but the latter only if certain Humean views are incorrect. Assuming my account, it follows that reverence is virtually a prerequisite for love. Also, there are reasons to think God is more concerned with asking reverence from humanity than with asking for their love. In these respects, at least, reverence is more important.

Which is more important in a person’s spiritual life, to love God, or to revere Him?

The question presupposes that there is a distinction—that reverence is not merely a species of love. This is occasionally denied, perhaps because it is thought that “reverence” entirely without love would be nothing but “fear,” assumed to be an unworthy element in the spiritual life. I think this is incorrect. In section I, I will consider what reverence is, and some ways in which it is like and unlike fear and love. In section II, I will argue that reverence so understood is virtually a prerequisite for genuine love of God, and is less problematically viewed as something which God *requires* of us. For these two reasons, and a third I shall mention, reverence may be judged more important.

## I

Etymologically, “reverence” is “fear.” Biblical Hebrew, also, does not distinguish verbally between the two concepts. But it should be noted that fear itself has many varieties.<sup>2</sup> There is for example what I will call “terror,” a state in which a person in a sense loses control of himself or herself because of the item feared. The result may be paralysis, failure to take any action, or some sort of panicked *reaction*. In the latter case, the behavior may not be fully voluntary. Even if voluntary, it will characteristically not have been thought out, and may not coincide with what the agent *would* have chosen to do had he or she not fallen victim to this terror. Behavior stemming from terror is thus *not rational* from the agent’s point of view, or is rational only by accident. The “accident” may be past training, or the agent’s evolutionary



history, in which case it would not be pure luck if the terror-stricken individual behaves adequately. But the behavior is not what we would call the product of the agent's rational thought processes at the time.

A very different type of fear is that expressed by remarks like "I fear that it will start raining before we reach home," or "I fear that the Cardinals will not win today." As I imagine the setting, the very fact that the agent uses words like these indicates that control has not been lost. To the contrary, these remarks could function as preludes or invitations to rational consideration of what to do. "Shall we start walking faster? Prepare ourselves for disappointment?" I do not have a convenient name for this type of fear—I shall refer to it as "the second type of fear," or just "fear" where it is clear enough that I do not mean what I have called "terror." This second type of fear may be classified as a *rational attitude*. Given that one would like to stay dry, or experience the thrill of victory for one's side, fear that it will rain or that the Cardinals will lose may be a perfectly rational response to perception of dark clouds or superior pitching by the opposing team.

I forego discussion of other types of fear, and other aspects of the two we have distinguished. Our concern is with reverence. My claim is that reverence, like the second type of fear, is a rational attitude.

I shall not argue directly for this claim, but simply present an account of reverence in accordance with it. The account implies that reverence is quite different from love. After exploring this, I will explain one reason some may have had for rejecting or never considering an account like mine, preferring one instead according to which reverence may just be a certain kind of love.

Understanding reverence as a rational attitude means understanding it as *not* just a feeling—of awe, for example. To fear that it will rain is not to feel a certain way "inside,"<sup>3</sup> but to recognize a certain kind of relation between one's situation and one's preferences.<sup>4</sup> One would like to stay dry, but it is likely to prove difficult, unless appropriate steps are taken. Similarly with reverence for God. One would like to do various things, or nothing in particular; but here is a superior being with a different agenda. Again, it may be appropriate to alter one's plans. The paradigm case for this understanding of reverence is the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac upon God's request (Genesis 22). Afterward, the angel says to him (verse 12) "Now I know that you are God-fearing"—i.e., reverent.<sup>5</sup> The point was not how Abraham felt—nor, for that matter, whether he trembled—but how he was ready to act in response to his perception of the divine, his *attitude* toward God.

Reverence and the second type of fear are structurally alike but importantly different. Each is "rational" in that it motivates, or is, a readiness to behave in ways that are rational from the agent's point of view. Fear that it will rain may lead to hastening one's progress toward shelter. The behavior is rational partly because of the agent's beliefs that it might rain, and that if it does, he

or she stands a chance of getting wet. We can say these are beliefs about the object of the fear. Reverence for God led Abraham to place his son upon the altar. Again, rationality of the behavior has to do with beliefs about the object of the attitude—for example, that He had indeed asked this of Abraham. But in the first case, we naturally suppose that the agent *already had an aversion* to getting wet. A supposition like this is essential to our understanding the fear-motivated behavior as rational from the agent's point of view. In the second case, we need make no such supposition about antecedent motivation. To the contrary, we should suppose Abraham's beliefs about God themselves supplied the motivation, independently of his desires and aversions. For example, he may have believed God to be supremely great and exalted, from which it followed that his love for his son was trivial alongside God's wish for a sacrifice. (See Genesis 18:27.) Schematically, we have:

*Diagram 1*

Antecedent aversion

Beliefs about object of fear  
Fear; fear-motivated behavior

*Diagram 2*

Beliefs about object of reverence  
Reverence; reverential behavior

In these diagrams, what is above the line explains the rationality of what is below the line. The fear and associated behavior is rational from the agent's point of view because of the aversion and the beliefs. But the rationality of the reverence and behavior manifesting it is explained simply by reference to the beliefs. In the preceding paragraph, it was suggested that fear and reverence can each be identified with a "recognition" of a certain sort (see note 4). We might say then that each is in itself a "cognitive" state. The difference between them brought out in this paragraph is that fear, unlike reverence, presupposes and depends on a previously existing "conative" state.

We should say more about the rationality of Abraham's behavior from his own point of view. Earlier I hinted that reverence for an entity involved perception of that entity as "superior," and I have just suggested that Abraham believed God to be "supremely great and exalted." I have in mind something like the following. An agent A reveres an entity E only if A thinks that E is *objectively more important* than A himself. Where E is itself an agent, this means that E's intentions, plans, and purposes *take precedence* over A's. And where E can communicate with A, E's expressed wishes take precedence over A's personal concerns, other things equal.<sup>6</sup> A regards this as an objective matter of fact. So for A not to obey E (when other things *are* equal) would be from A's point of view a failure to respond appropriately to the facts; it would be irrational.

On my account, then, an agent who has genuine reverence for something implicitly sides with Kant against Hume on the matter of 'is' and 'ought.' Such an agent believes that there are situations in which reason by itself

dictates what should be done. My account is itself incompatible with Hume's position on reason as a motivator of action. By it, if A reveres E, then A will be minded to obey E *simply because of what is believed about E*. A may have no *desire* at all to obey E or to promote E's objectives. In Kantian terms, we might say that Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac out of a sense of duty, and against the pressure of all his inclinations to spare his son.

Notice that the account given of *fear* as a rational attitude does not involve this double-conflict with Hume. For as Diagram 1 shows, the agent's motivation comes ultimately from an aversion, not from "pure reason." Nor would the agent of our example believe he or she had reason to hasten home, but for the aversion to getting wet. (Real-life agents, including undergraduates, tend to believe that this aversion itself is inherently rational. But this is a different issue.) But in the case of reverence, the conflict cannot be avoided. The agent is in fact motivated by perception of certain features in the object of reverence, which are taken to provide sufficient reason to make reverential behavior rational.

A complete account of reverence would have to attend to other features of the concept. I have already mentioned (though only to ignore) the view that there are characteristic inner feelings associated with reverence. There may after all be a conceptual tie with "terror." And some find a similarity in the kind of readiness for action motivated by both fear and reverence.<sup>7</sup> These last two points may help explain why reverence is referred to with a term that also means "fear." Finally, I suspect that there are social aspects. Reverence as a psychological phenomenon may presuppose the existence in one's culture of conventionally defined *acts* of reverence.<sup>8</sup>

But for present purposes we need concentrate only on the fact that reverence is a rational attitude. For it is in this respect that it contrasts with love.

Love may be called an "attitude," as plausibly as may reverence and fear; is it not also rational? Isn't the behavior of a person in love also "rational from the agent's point of view"? Only if love itself is included in "the agent's point of view." Thus, suppose A buys B some flowers because he loves her. We may say his action is "rational from his point of view" if we think that *because of his love* he "views" B as someone for whom it is appropriate to buy flowers. But this trivializes the idea of a "rational" attitude. Suppose A has an *irrational terror* of B, because of which he flees from her presence. This behavior is also "rational from his point of view" if that point of view includes the terror. For having that attitude, he views B as someone from whom to flee. Perhaps terror should not be counted as an "attitude." Suppose then that A is *embarrassed* at having forgotten B's birthday, and is for this reason motivated to leave town. Such behavior might or might not be rational in the light of his antecedent values and beliefs (including the belief that he forgot B's birthday). But it will *automatically* be "rational from his point of

view” if that point of view includes the embarrassment, given how deep it is. For part of what it is to be embarrassed is to want to hide oneself, or some such. (In all three of these examples, I ignore the possibility that other factors might make it *more* rational from the agent’s point of view *not* to buy flowers, flee, or leave town.)

Fear of the second type is not like this. If A is running to his house because he fears that it will rain, his behavior is “rational from his point of view” even if the fear itself is *not* included in that point of view. True, if asked why he is running, he might say “Because I fear it will rain,” just as he might say “Because I love her” if asked why he bought flowers for B. But in the case of fear, reference to the attitude is eliminable: “Because I think it might rain, and I’m averse to getting wet.” Note that in Diagram 1, reproduced below, the fear *and* the behavior are below the line. This means that *either* can be explained as rational in terms of the items above the line. It is not necessary to explain the behavior in terms of the fear, even if we think of the fear as a state mediating between the items above the line and the behavior.

*Diagram 1*

Antecedent aversion  
 Beliefs about object of fear  
 —————  
 Fear; fear-motivated behavior

But in the case of love, reference to the attitude is not eliminable. It will not suffice to say, for example, “Because she likes flowers.” Perhaps it is true (as Nagel and Kant have urged) that it is rational to fulfill anyone’s desire that one can, other things equal. But this time, the flowers were bought out of love for the individual, not general benevolence. The agent must say something like “Because I love her, and she likes flowers.” Otherwise, his explanation is incomplete and possibly misleading. This situation is represented by Diagram 3. Here, the love is above the line. This means that explanation of the behavior

*Diagram 3*

Love  
 Beliefs about object of love  
 —————  
 Love-motivated behavior

as rational from the agent’s point of view must include mention of the agent’s love for the beneficiary of his behavior.

Reverence is like fear and unlike love in this regard. Abraham *could* explain his conduct by saying “Because I revere God, and He asked me to sacrifice Isaac.” But the reference to reverence is eliminable. He could just as well have said “Because God is supremely great and exalted, and ....” This would be an incorrect explanation only if God is not in fact supremely great or exalted in the intended sense. But even then, the explanation would not be

misleading. Abraham would be making it quite clear that he acted as he did because of certain features he *believed* were present in God, and which in his view sufficed to make the sacrifice of Isaac mandatory.<sup>9</sup> Diagram 2, reproduced below, shows this, again by placing both the attitude and the behavior motivated by it below the line.

*Diagram 2*

Beliefs about object of reverence  
 Reverence; reverential behavior

Perhaps it will be claimed that reference to love is equally eliminable after all: "I bought her flowers because I perceived in her certain love-evoking features, and...." But is the agent implying his love was a rational response to perception of these alleged "love-evoking features," or is he implying that they merely caused him to love her, not by a rational process? If the latter, then love is already not a rational attitude. And reference to love could be eliminated from the explanation of the flower-buying only if the "love-evoking features" unfailingly produce love. Otherwise, the full explanation would have to be: "I bought her flowers because I perceived in her certain love-evoking features which did, indeed, cause me to love her; and she likes flowers."

If the "love-evoking features" led to the love by a rational process, we ask whether the result is taken to be *rationally required*, as reverence is taken to be a rationally required response to God's "superiority" or "exaltedness." I would be suspicious of an affirmative answer, whatever these love-evoking features may be. And if not, then once again, reference to the love is not eliminable from the explanation of the behavior. For despite perception of the features, and even if the agent is fully rational, the love might not have ensued, in which case the behavior would not have occurred.

If *per impossibile*, as I think, suitable "love-evoking features" exist to be cited in explanations of this sort, I might have to concede the point about eliminability. Love would still be unlike fear (of the second type) and reverence in a second respect noted. For love is itself a "conative" state while reverence and even fear (of the second type) are in themselves "cognitive" states. To love someone or something is in large part if not entirely to have a number of desires concerning that object. Desire plays no role in reverence, however, and is at best an antecedent, not an ingredient, of fear.

My account of reverence and its distinction from love requires the Kantian position that an attitude *can* be purely "cognitive," that beliefs can motivate action without the help of any desire or other "conative" factor. If Kant is wrong about this and Hume is right, reverence as I have described it cannot exist. What account will followers of Hume give, then, if they also believe that there is such a thing as reverence?

On my account, Abraham's belief that God is supremely great and exalted

*directly* motivated him to accept God's commands and act on them. The simplest way to harmonize this with Humean psychology would be to *interpose a desire* between belief and readiness to act. A Humean would say that Abraham acted as he did not from anything like a Kantian sense of duty, but from a *desire to obey God*, to fulfill God's wishes. This desire may have been aroused by Abraham's belief in God's greatness and exaltedness. And a Humean could even grant Abraham the belief that it is rational for him and everyone to have this desire because of this belief. (This is not to say the Humean would *agree* with this belief.) But the belief caused the behavior only *via* this desire. Had the belief failed to cause the desire, Abraham would not have tried to sacrifice his son.

This maneuver virtually collapses the distinction between reverence and love. For an intrinsic desire to obey God, especially if as strong as it would have to have been in the case of Abraham, can fairly be called a form of love for God. At best, reverence could be distinguished as love for God having a certain kind of origin—*viz.*, arousal by belief in God's greatness. (Alternatively, reverence might be a non-intrinsic desire to obey God, derivative from a general desire to do what is right, coupled with a belief that obedience to God is right. This belief in turn might stem from belief in God's greatness, or it might have some other etiology. But if the desire to obey God is derivative from anything like a desire to avoid divine punishment, it would be neither love nor reverence, but fear.) But it is unclear why the distinction between love and reverence would be made, if this were the way to make it. For example, there would be no point to recommending both love and reverence for God. And our opening question, which is more important, would be obviously wrong-headed. The question could only be whether it was preferable that one's love for God have a certain causal background or not.

I submit then that witting and unwitting followers of Hume are blind to an understanding of reverence of the sort I have developed, and so are prone to identify "true" love and "true" reverence for the divine. No doubt there are other reasons why people have made this identification. But I think the popularity of Humean psychology has played a role, and this is in any case the most philosophically interesting reason. Once one is no longer enslaved to Humean views of reason and the passions, however, reverence may plausibly be understood as a rational attitude, a purely "cognitive" state, entirely distinct from love.

## II

Assuming my account of what reverence is and how it differs from love, we return to our opening question: which is more important? I promised to offer three considerations in favor of reverence. By 'more important' here, I do *not* mean anything like "more precious to God" or "more valuable to the



person.” Rather, I wish to point out ways in which reverence seems to be more *fundamental* or *essential* to a proper, healthy relationship with God. Ultimately, I would like to argue that love for God *need* not figure in such a relationship at all; but I shall not go quite so far in this paper.

1. A person who reveres God believes that God has certain features because of which it is rational to, for example, obey Him, other things equal. If this belief is false (as Hume would maintain), then reverence cannot be important at all to the spiritual life. At least, I would find very puzzling a claim that spiritual growth requires cultivating an attitude which incorporates a false belief. So let us continue the discussion on the assumption that this belief is true. And for convenience, let us assume also that the relevant divine feature is “exaltedness.”

Reverence is a rational response to awareness of God’s exaltedness. (Compare: fear that it will rain is a rational response to awareness of the likelihood of rain, in a person averse to getting wet, who stands to get wet if it does rain.) Now whatever precisely “exaltedness” consists in, it would seem to be a central attribute, or an implication of central attributes, of God. For starters, He is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe and His will reigns supreme within it. This would seem to imply a measure of divine exaltedness relative to us. It would be hard, then, to have a clear idea of *who God is*, yet somehow fail to be aware of His exaltedness. If one has this awareness and is in addition sufficiently rational, one will perforce revere God. (Again, I am ignoring possible other aspects of reverence, such as the involvement of social conventions.)

Now consider a person who loves God. He or she must have some conception of the object of this love. If this conception diverges too far from the truth, we should say it is not *God* who is loved, but some other being, who may or may not exist. (Others can consider the question under what circumstances this person might be an unwitting idolator.) If it *is* God whom the person loves, the conception may still be (must be?) incomplete. Still, it is plausible to suppose that a satisfactory conception will include God’s exaltedness, or those of His central attributes which imply His exaltedness.

It follows that any sufficiently rational person who truly loves God must also revere Him. And if we assume that rationality and an adequate conception of God are *prerequisites* for a spiritually satisfactory love of God, then reverence also is in effect a prerequisite for this love. To love God is already to revere Him.

In our society and others there may be many pious individuals who ostensibly love God yet do not seem to revere Him as I have described reverence. For example, they do not seem motivated to serve God *because of His exaltedness*. This may be because their love for God and their consequent *desire* to serve Him are so great as to mask the presence of the purely rational

motivation. A relevant counterfactual might still be true: "If you were to cease *loving* God,...." Less happily, the person's understanding of God—in particular, His exaltedness—might be deficient. Perhaps the person has never thought much about the kind of being God is, or has focussed on less central attributes. More likely, the defect is in the person's rationality; the mental machinery just does not make the automatic transition from perception (understanding) of the divine exaltedness to realization of the propriety of self-subordination to the divine. Of course a follower of Hume would deny that this is a defect in *rationality* and might deny that it is any kind of defect at all. The influence of views like Hume's may partly explain why reverence is not more in evidence in our society. (One thinks here of Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that there has been a general breakdown of our moral concepts in the last 300 years.)<sup>10</sup> But we have already assumed for purposes of discussion that Hume is wrong. If a person has an adequate conception of God but does not revere Him, there is a defect in the person's rationality.

There is a way to escape this argument. I said above that it would be hard to have a clear idea of who God is, yet be unaware of His exaltedness. But "exaltedness" may have to be understood as *relative to oneself*. Its role in reverence is to ground such judgments as the one ascribed above to Abraham, that his love and hopes for Isaac are insignificant next to God's request for a sacrifice. If "exaltedness" is so relativized, then one can know God, be rational, yet fail to revere Him if one is relevantly unaware of *who one is, oneself*. And there is a spiritual ideal which calls precisely for such unawareness of self, for losing oneself in the divine. Advocates of this ideal could say that reverence is wholly *unimportant*. At best, it would be psychologically necessary at the beginning of one's spiritual life; but the goal would be to rid oneself of the awareness necessary for its existence. So long as one continued to revere God, an attitude distinct from one's presumably growing love for God, one would still not have reached the ultimate spiritual goal.

Whereas on other views of the goal, reverence would be a necessary and permanent part of one's relation to God, from its inception throughout one's spiritual life. (It should not be thought, however, that reverence is a static phenomenon. One can grow in reverence just as one can grow in love.) I do not think the converse is true. I have already expressed doubt that there are any "love-evoking features" to the perception of which love would be a rationally *required* response. If I am right, then it is possible to be fully rational, have an adequate conception of God, and so revere Him, but still not love Him. One could not then argue in the same way that love would be a necessary and permanent part of one's relation to God. In this sense, reverence would be more "important" than love.

2. Suppose a reason for the "importance" of loving God is alleged to be that God has *commanded* us to love Him. (How could there be a satisfactory

spiritual relationship with God that did not include positive response to His commands regarding that relationship?) A parallel reason could be given for the "importance" of revering Him.<sup>11</sup> But these two alleged reasons are not equally plausible.

There is an old question how love can be commanded. Some have held that since one cannot love "at will," it would have been improper for God to command it; and being morally perfect, He must not have done so. At most, He has commanded loving *behavior*: acts of worship, zealously in promoting His goals, and so on. The corresponding question how reverence could be commanded was rarely if ever raised, to my knowledge. But for all that it is *rational*, reverence is still an *attitude*, and not one that one can adopt "at will." It is an attitude one comes to have in response to God's exaltedness.

One reason why the question was not asked about reverence may be that reverence was not distinguished from fear. A command to be in "terror" of God would be as problematic as a command to love Him. But the second type of fear can be commanded, if it can be supposed that the addressees of the command all have appropriate antecedent motivation. For example, a command to "fear God" addressed to a person averse to pain might be interpreted as an admonition to reflect on the certainty of divine retribution. (Cf. Diagram 1.)

The truth is, however, that even love and other "emotions" can be commanded. If it is impossible to acquire them "at will," one can take steps to acquire them over a period of time.

There is still a reason for thinking the alleged command to love to be more suspect than the alleged command to revere. This emerges from a significant difference in the steps one would have to take in order to comply with them. The preceding discussion indicates a straightforward course of action for one who does not revere God but considers himself commanded to do so. He must enhance his rationality and/or reflect more deeply on God's exaltedness. But what shall a person do, to get himself to *love* God? If there is no more-or-less clear way to undertake compliance, one may wonder if God can really have issued such a command.

Perhaps a procedure like that advocated by Pascal for generating *belief* in God would work to generate *love* for Him. Perhaps a pill could be developed, or some appropriate psychotherapy devised. I cannot deny these possibilities *a priori*. Nor will I consider how suitable any of them may be as a way for a non-lover of God to bring himself into compliance with the alleged command to love.

What I do wish to examine is the suggestion that the way to do it involves enhancing and exploiting one's rationality. I am committed to denying this suggestion, by my twice-expressed disbelief that there are *any* "love-evoking" features to which love is a rationally required response. For if there are none at all, then there are none to be found in the divine nature or in His

interactions with us. And where else would one look, to get oneself by a *rational process* to love God?

I have not defended my disbelief. And I do not deny that in fact, love for God often does result from reflection on His nature. But I deny that there is any *rational necessity* in this result.

Perhaps love for God would result from reflection on all the good things God has done for one (and disregard of all the bad)?<sup>12</sup> More likely, such reflection would culminate in *gratitude* to God. But gratitude—however important it may be in one’s spiritual life—is not love.

Most promising is the suggestion that one reflect on the fact, if it is a fact, that God loves *us*. There is still no guarantee; there is such a thing as unrequited love. But people speak of love for God as a “free” response to His love for us. This suggests that awareness of God’s love may *put it within one’s power* to reciprocate, voluntarily. If so, there is no difficulty in supposing God to have commanded us to love Him—*provided there is no difficulty in supposing us to be aware of God’s love for us*.

I confess however to having some difficulty in understanding this love. The logical positivist in me keeps wanting to ask if it comes to anything more than the fact that God sustains us in existence for whatever period of time and through whatever hardships He in fact does so.<sup>13</sup> If it is to evoke reciprocal love, it seems it would have to mean something more. I suspect that whatever it means, it is what Aquinas would call a truth of faith, or revelation, as opposed to a truth of reason. That is, only people who have been *told* that God loves them, and have accepted the message, can reasonably be expected (commanded) to love Him back.

As is well known, this is a proper subset of all people, even all people who are as fully rational as people come. I believe it is a *smaller* set than, even if not a subset of, the people who are rational enough and aware enough of the divine to be subject to the alleged command to revere God. The idea that God loves everyone, or anyone prior to their love and devotion to Him, is not so widespread as the idea that He is exalted. If it is true, then, that God commands both love and reverence, it is also true that He has addressed the former command, or meaningfully addressed it, to a much smaller segment of humanity than the latter. One wants to say that in some sense, God cares equally for the spiritual welfare of every human being. But this invites the conclusion that in God’s own judgment, love for God is not as essential a component of the spiritual life as is reverence. In this sense, once again, reverence is more “important” than love.

3. A third line of argument might run as follows. Ideal service to God would be service with one’s whole being—with *all* one’s capacities. Still, the most important component of that service would be service drawing entirely on our *highest* capacity, that which makes us superior to “lower” creatures. This

is our rationality. But then reverence, not love, would be the more important component of our relationship with God. (Service of the *mind* would be more important than service of the *heart*.)

There are many problems with this argument, and I do not endorse it. I mention it for two reasons. First, to forestall a possible similar argument employing the premise that our "highest" capacity is our capacity to love. Anyone tempted to use such a premise without argument should be reminded that there *is* a tradition which locates our "superiority," or our chief distinction among God's creatures, in our intellectual abilities, not in our emotional lives.

Second, if we ignore the issue of "higher" and "lower," the argument can draw our attention to the fact that reverence *is* a way, perhaps *the* way, to serve God *as* a rational being. Depending on how we feel about our status as rational beings, this may after all provide a reason for wanting our relationship with God to include reverence, whether or not it also includes love.

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## NOTES

1. My thanks to Robert Oakes, an anonymous referee for this journal, and the Editor of this journal, for helpful comments on an earlier version.

2. In what I say about types of fear, I am indebted to Robert M. Gordon, "Fear," *Philosophical Review* 89 (1980), pp. 560-78. But I am not trying to present a rigorous or complete analysis, and my terminology does not coincide with his. See also Wayne Davis, "The Varieties of Fear," *Philosophical Studies* 51 (1987), pp. 287-310.

3. For this reason, perhaps, some readers may not regard fear that it will rain as a "genuine" fear at all. But if not, it is that much harder to explain why it is acceptable to *say* things like "I fear it will rain," and that much harder to explain why reverence and fear have been associated as closely as they have been.

4. I here identify the fear with a certain "recognition." In the last sentence of this paragraph and the second sentence of the next, I invite identification of the fear with a certain "readiness to behave." I do not know whether to claim the two are identical, or that the former causes the latter, or that their relation is more complicated. Nor do I know in how many ways the term 'recognition' may prove to be misleading. But I do wish to insist that fear is more than belief that a state of affairs is (somewhat) likely, in a person who would rather it was not. That is, I disagree with Wayne Davis's claim (p. 290 of his article):

S is afraid that p iff S desires that not-p and is uncertain whether p, where the uncertainty is not based solely on indecision about a course of action.

There must also have been some interaction between the belief and the preference, with a resulting impact upon the person's mental state. Minimally, this impact would be what

I here call a "recognition." I do not know how much more might properly be judged necessary; although it is of course *not* necessary that overt, fear-motivated behavior actually ensue.

5. I remarked above that Biblical Hebrew does not have different words for "fear" and "reverence." Some may suspect that the whole concept of "reverence" as an attitude distinct from "fear" may not have existed in Biblical times, but may instead have developed as discomfort grew with the older idea that one ought literally to fear God. But the context here and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible where the phrase "fear of God" is used makes it unlikely that "terror" alone is meant. (Abraham is described as taking three days to reach the appointed site, a bit long to be out of rational self-control!) Nor is it plausible to suppose fear of the second type is meant. As Abraham and his concerns are portrayed, it is unlikely that he could conceive of anything God might do to him worse than the very thing he was being asked to do to himself: kill his beloved son. The Biblical phrase "fear of God" probably covered also what in our day we might identify as "respect for basic morality"; see Genesis 20:11 and the discussion of "fear of God" in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and The Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, 1972). But its use in this Abraham story makes it clear that it does cover what we would consider a specifically religious attitude, reverence. See also Exodus 20:17: "Fear not; for God has come only to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray." It seems to me that "fear of Him" here means "reverence for Him."

6. When would "other things" *not* be "equal"? One possibility would be a case where E's expressed wish is for something *immoral*; more accurately, something which A *thinks* is immoral. A might be ready to let E's wishes override A's *purely personal* concerns, yet *not* be ready to obey instructions to do something immoral. Such a scruple would in no way compromise A's reverence for E. There is no reason to think "reverence" entails total, exceptionless obedience. In the celebrated case of Abraham, there is no reason to think Abraham as portrayed thought God's request immoral or even exceptionally odd. It may be noted that in classical Jewish discussions, the puzzling feature of God's command to Abraham was not its alleged immorality, but its apparent conflict with God's earlier promise to Abraham that "through Isaac would he be considered to have seed" (Genesis 21:12, my translation; see also 17:19, 21). Contrast James Rachels, "God and Human Attitudes," *Religious Studies* 17 (1971) (reprinted in Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, eds., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 167-81).

7. Joseph Albo, a fifteenth century Jewish philosopher, wrote:

Fear [i.e., fear or reverence] in general is a retreat of the psyche and an ingathering of its powers when one perceives something fear-inspiring. And this can be of two sorts. [First,] when it [*sc.* the psyche] perceives something potentially harmful.... [And second,] when it perceives something very great, exalted,...and reflects on its own comparative worthlessness....even if it does not anticipate any harm from that thing.

(*Sefer Halkkarim* (Book of First Principles) III:32; my translation.) I take his talk of the psyche's "retreat" and "ingathering of its powers" to be a metaphor for the perceived need in typical cases to stop what one is doing and reconsider one's plans upon sudden confrontation with a feared or revered object.

8. Rachels, in the article cited, makes a plausible case for the presence of such social aspects in the case of *worship*.

9. On the strength of Isaiah 41:8, many say that Abraham *also* loved God, and acted as he did out of this love. But this just means that his conduct was overdetermined. He was ready to sacrifice Isaac from reverence, and he was also ready to do it from love. Our discussion concerns the determining factor featured in the Genesis account.

10. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 1981), p. 2.

11. If indeed there is a divine command to revere God, it would imply that God Himself does not advocate losing oneself in Him as a spiritual ideal. For in order to revere God, one would have to retain one's awareness of oneself. This includes awareness of having interests and concerns of one's own, independently of God's, else there is nothing to subordinate to His will!

12. Moses Maimonides apparently thinks love of God is the psychologically inevitable result of reflection on *everything* that God has done:

When a person contemplates His deeds and great, wonderful creations, and in this way gains some insight into His wisdom which has neither measure nor limit, immediately he will love, praise, glorify, and experience a great yearning to know [Him]...

(*Mishneh Torah*, "Basic Principles of Torah," 2:2; my translation. Some interpreters say that 'His deeds' here refers specifically to God's revelations; but 'wonderful creations' surely includes everything else that God has done.) Would that Maimonides were right about this!

He thinks that essentially the same reflection leads also to reverence, as is evident from the continuation of this passage:

...And when he considers these same things further, immediately he will recoil, tremble, and realize that he is a small, lowly, and benighted creature standing with shallow and slight intelligence before the One who is perfect in knowledge.

This time, his psychological claim fits with what we have said, if we read him as assuming everyone who "considers these same things further" is sufficiently rational. Perhaps in the 12th century this was a plausible assumption.

Notice that Maimonides' description of a person coming to love God includes mention of a "yearning." By contrast, no such "conative" factor appears in his description of nascent reverence. This also fits with the account we have given.

13. Consider the following reminiscence of a "thalidomide baby," now grown up: "In kindergarten, I asked for the first time, 'Why don't I have legs?' 'Because God looked for someone to love extra special. He chose you to be that person...,'" one nun explained. Eileen Cronin-Noe, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for July 30, 1987.