PHILLIP MICHAEL LASATER

Facets of Fear

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Mohr Siebeck

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Phillip Michael Lasater

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The Fear of God in Exilic and Post-exilic Contexts

Mohr Siebeck

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For my dad, David B. Lasater

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Introduction

In various texts and in varying ways, those who composed the Hebrew Bible spoke about יראׄ, as well as יראת יהוה, יראת אלהים, and other similar expressions. This study is an attempt to understand this widespread language and to renew interest in the topic, which receives relatively little attention in current biblical scholarship.

As will be made clear, most of the work that has been done builds upon highly influential interpretations of יראׄ-derivatives as having a deep connection to "holiness" (קדשׁ-derivatives) and human experiences of it. In order to foster clearer understanding and to engage the history of interpretation more adequately, this project divides into two main parts: Part 1, which is broader and more phenomenological; and Part 2, which offers specific exegetical studies of divergent sorts of literature among each major section of the Hebrew Bible. Part 1 is comprised of the first two chapters. Chapter 1 overviews both where and how יראׄ-derivatives, as well as synonyms and Greek translations of יראׄ, are used in the Hebrew Bible and other Second Temple literature. The chapter addresses the distribution, semantic field, and conceptual affinities of יראׄ. Even though יראׄ-derivatives can indeed mean, "to fear, be afraid," relying on a straightforwardly feeling-oriented translation would misrepresent their semantic scope. Normative, submissive, intentional activity is equally relevant and often inseparable from the element of feeling. The results of the first chapter are a cumulative challenge to the way that יראׄ has been related to religious experience, as well as to יראׄ-derivatives' psychological classification. The relationship between יראׄ and feelings; rationality; intentionality; and normative evaluation makes it very difficult to situate, say, the noun יראה within modern psychological categories or to translate it with words informed by those categories. What one finds in the Hebrew Bible also overlaps with the use of "fear" terminology in a number of extra-biblical texts, where such language clusters together with recognition of greatness, authority, hierarchy, as well as practicing virtue and avoiding vice.

The anthropological dimensions of יראׄ even more directly occupy Chapter 2. In the commonly held association of יראׄ with קדשׁ, to hold that יראׄ has to do with religious experience is to say that it is relevant

to theological anthropology. Although not in the way usually imagined, יראּ does indeed play an interesting role in conceptions of human beings, such as moral agency. After identifying some characteristics of theological anthropology in the Hebrew Bible, this chapter focuses on what seems to have been a debate in exilic and post-exilic texts about the capacity of the human heart and its relationship to יראּ. I examine texts that present יראּ as a normal function of the heart, and then turn to texts where the heart is actively regulated by people who are expected to יראּ. These texts contrast others where the heart is regulated by God, who enables it to יראּ. It is argued that an explicit connection between יראּ and "*tôrāh*, law" is a later link, though this link itself presupposes some common threads in the usage of יראּ-derivatives (e. g., authority and normative conduct). That is, some developments do take place, but without a neat, diachronic shift. The differences among these texts point to competing views about moral agency or moral psychology.

Part 2 of this project contains more narrowly focused, exegetical studies. There is one from each major section of the Hebrew Bible, and these exegetical studies follow a literary-historical arrangement, not a canonical one. Given the strong tendency to associate God and one's conduct before God with יראּ-derivatives, יראּ was often at home in a cultic context. There are accordingly two chapters that examine cult-related instances of יראּ. Chapter 3 discusses Jer 10:1–16, a poetic arrangement within the prophetic book of Jeremiah. The text is a parody about cultic images, where, in subtle ways, themes (including the issue of images themselves) gradually "accelerate" and become more explicit over the course of this text in its Masoretic version. In Jer 10:1–16, יראּ denotes proper conduct before Yhwh, who is identified as an appropriate object of יראּ. A major reason that Yhwh is identified as an appropriate object of יראּ in Jeremiah 10 is the text's creation theology, which contains the familiar elements of greatness, hierarchy, and power that were important for the evaluative logic of יראה. Since Jer 10:1–16 appears to fit well within the Neo-Babylonian period, the chapter ends with a comparison between this text and other Hebrew Bible texts that may reasonably be dated to the same period.

Chapter 4 continues the focus on cultic dimensions of יראּ, but considers a different kind of text: the Priestly, legal material of Leviticus 17–26. Since many interpreters have presumed an experiential connection between יראּ-derivatives and holiness (קדשׁ), one might think that, of all places, Priestly texts would evince such a connection. That is not the case. Indeed, יראּ-derivatives are scarce in the Priestly literature at large (both

P and H), and where they actually cluster together in Leviticus 17–26, not a single text confirms the idea that יראּ indicates a human response to holiness. Holiness is a major issue in Leviticus 17–26, but its relationship to יראּ diverges from what the history of research might lead readers to expect. This chapter studies the way that H uses יראּ within the קדשׁ-based, hierarchically structured communal life that the Holiness Code envisions. In Leviticus 17–26, יראּ takes not only personal superiors and God as its object, but the logic of יראת יהוה also places limits upon the more powerful residents of the post-exilic community. In this text block, the same יראּ-derivatives that reflect individuals' lower standing (e. g., impoverished workers) are used to protect these vulnerable individuals from potential mistreatment at the hands of those who have authority over them. Even though debates persist about the dating of P, and therefore of H too, the Persian period seems at the moment to be the likeliest setting for Leviticus 17–26 as we know it. Chapter 4 concludes by looking at other texts from the same general period, comparing them to what one finds in H.

Chapter 5 is the final exegetical study. It transitions away from the legal material of Leviticus 17–26 and toward the instructional material of Proverbs 1–9, part of the wisdom literature. While the theme of יראת יהוה hardly belongs exclusively to wisdom literature, the usage of יראּ-derivatives in Proverbs 1–9 accentuates the intellectual nuances of יראּ already discernible in some earlier texts. The most persuasive period for the largely unified composition of Proverbs 1–9 seems to be the Hellenistic period or, at the earliest, the late-Persian period. According to this series of parental lectures, on the one hand, and speeches by personified Wisdom, on the other, יראת יהוה is inseparable from concerns with knowledge, wisdom, and practicing the virtues. Furthermore, there is good reason to understand Proverbs 1–9 as part of an intellectual project that sought to differentiate between different albeit complementary levels of knowledge, which are juxtaposed in fairly direct ways in this instructional material. In Proverbs 1–9, not all knowledge is equal, and to rest content with an "untrained" (פתי) human understanding would go against the grain of being-human, the rightful enactment of which involves a connection with divine חכמה and, via חכמה, a connection to Yhwh. Indeed, the highest variety of knowledge would seem to be דעת אלהים, the attainment of which fosters human flourishing in a process that begins with יראת יהוה. Not only the hierarchical schema of knowledge, but also the relationship to practicing the virtues and tutoring the passions maintains familiar nuances of יראּ-derivatives. Greatness, hierarchy, authority, and

normative practice remain in view, but in a manner somewhat unique to this canonical text block. Chapter 5 concludes with a comparison to other texts plausibly dated to the Hellenistic period.

Undoubtedly, more texts could and should be examined. However, due to there being over 400 instances of יראׄ-derivatives in the Hebrew Bible, the only realistic option for Part 2 is a sampling of texts to illustrate the facets of "fear" in exilic and post-exilic literature. Future studies will be needed for other texts that either conform to or diverge from the usages of יראׄ in Jeremiah 10; Leviticus 17–26; and Proverbs 1–9. An advantage of this selection is that it gives a glimpse into usages of יראׄ-derivatives from thoroughly different texts, so that readers can get a sense of both unifying and distinctive threads in the textual tapestry. Whatever the literary selections in future studies may be, it will be important to recognize the serious shortcomings of the all too familiar connection between יראׄ and קדשׁ. This correction will hopefully enable other interpreters better to recognize the shortcomings to be identified in this study too, for the sake of better understanding the widespread and multi-dimensional motif of יראת אלהים or יראת יהוה. Moreover, increased attention to the place of יראׄ-derivatives in the history of psychology can only help. In biblical studies, יראׄ-derivatives tend to be classified as belonging somehow to the "emotions," without noting that, in the history of psychology, the category of the emotions is an outgrowth of a specific philosophical tradition from the modern period, and the category was articulated by theorists who were consciously rejecting classical notions of the "passions." Due to the passions' traditional relevance to the intellect, will, and ethics, it is here that biblical scholars can find more fruitful parallels to the way that יראׄ could indeed denote the feeling of "fear," while nonetheless being inseparable from matters such as rationality, intentionality, normative activity, and normative, third-person assessments. My hope is that this study helps to clarify at least some of the numerous facets of how יראׄ operates in biblical and related literature.

I.

Philological, interpersonal, and theological dimensions of יראּ

In the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century, the concept "fear of the divine" and the perceived place of "fear" in the history of religion occupied a noteworthy position in the phenomenology of religion, social anthropology, and, as discussed below, biblical studies.[1] But interest seems to have waned. This chapter proposes a revised perspective on the issue, attending to the distribution and meanings of יראּ in the Hebrew Bible and reviewing the history of scholarship on "fear of God." A central goal of this chapter is to distance scholarly understanding of יראּ-derivatives from concepts of "the sacred,"[2] and from a purportedly unique, religious feeling of the sacred to which past studies have linked "fear of God." A more promising juxtaposition is to couple ancient Hebrew's "fear" terminology with notions of greatness, hierarchy, and certain modes of activity. Understanding how יראּ-derivatives were

[1]For an early twentieth century critique of the theory that religion developed in linear fashion from a fear-based to an ethics-based phenomenon, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [orig. 1912]), 169; and later, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge: New York, 1996 [orig. 1966]), 1–6.

[2]In J. Z. Smith's essay "The Topography of the Sacred," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 101–116, Smith argues that two competing schools of thought have dominated academic discourse about the sacred: a French tradition (sociology and anthropology, where the sacred is largely spatial and taxonomic) and a German tradition (phenomenology, where the sacred is a positive and often experiential reality). Especially the portrayal of the sacred from German-speaking scholarship has deeply influenced studies of fear of the divine and religious experience in antiquity. For example, in Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 3, note Jacobsen's willingness to presuppose the phenomenological theory of Rudolf Otto. More recently, Rainer Albertz has published an essay on "personal piety" in ancient Israel, mentioning fear of the divine twice under the headings "Personal Piety in Proverbs" and "Different Personal Theologies in the Post-Exilic Period." Although he does not elaborate on fear of God, one wonders whether this emphasis on "piety" and individual, "personal experience" in connection with the "fear of God" illustrates the enduring influence of Otto and the phenomenology of religion. See Rainer Albertz, "Personal Piety," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 141, 144.

used not only sharpens our grasp of this terminology's meanings, but also shows how, even though a feeling of "fear" may be involved, the pertinent conception of "fear" diverges from what is often meant in modern references to "fear" as an emotion. In what follows in this chapter, the aim is to improve our grasp of this language's semantics and taxonomical placement.

1. The distribution of יראּ-derivatives in the Hebrew Bible

Almost exclusively in Hebrew with rare exceptions in Ugaritic, derivatives of the root יראּ appear in multiple forms. In the Hebrew Bible's 443 total instances of יראּ-derivatives, the most numerous by far are the verbal forms (290 times; nearly all Qal, with a few exceptions in Piel [2 Sam 14:15; 2 Chr 32:18; Neh 6:9, 14, 19] and Nifal [Psa 130:4]). These verbal forms are numerically followed by the adjectival forms (97 times; including both the participle נורא and the verbal adjective יראּ) and then the nominal forms (56 times; including both יראה and מורא). Canonically, both the root יראּ and the associated idea of "fear of God" enjoy wide albeit somewhat uneven distribution and should not be treated as indicating any particular school of thought (e. g. deuteronomistic, sapiential, etc.). The widely distributed fear of God(s) motif in the ancient Near East mirrors its extensive attestations in the Hebrew Bible itself.[3] According to my count, the verbal usages (including infinitives, which could be classified as nominal) are as follows:

Table 1: Verbal Usages of יראּ in the Hebrew Bible (290 total)

	Qal (284 times)	**Piel** (5 times)	**Nifal** (1 time; excluding נורא)[4]	
Genesis	20			**Torah: 75**
Exodus	11			
Leviticus	8			
Numbers	4			
Deuteronomy	32			

[3]The figures in the tables below are adapted from H. F. Fuhs, Art. "יראּ *yārēʾ*" *T. D. O. T.* 6:292–293.

[4]This total of 290 verbal usages excludes the 44 occurrences of נורא, which, while morphologically a verbal form (Nifal participle), is better classified with adjectival usages of

	Qal (284 times)	**Piel** (5 times)	**Nifal** (1 time; excluding נורא)	
Joshua	11			**Prophets: 140**
Judges	6			
1 Samuel	21			
2 Samuel	6	1		
1 Kings	8			
2 Kings	19			
Isaiah	22			
Jeremiah	21			
Ezekiel	5			
Hosea	1			
Joel	2			
Amos	1			
Jonah	4			
Micah	1			
Habakkuk	1			
Zephaniah	3			
Haggai	2			
Zechariah	3			
Malachi	2			
Psalms	30		1	**Writings: 75**
Proverbs	5			
Job	8			
Ruth	1			
Lamentations	1			
Ecclesiastes	7			
Daniel	3			
Nehemiah	6	3		
1 Chronicles	3			
2 Chronicles	6	1		

ירא-derivatives. In the Hebrew Bible, נורא is usually a predication, almost always describing God or God's activity. Cf. Fuhs, "ירא *yārē,*" who arrives at a verbal total of 333 by including the texts with נורא.

The Nifal participle נורא is listed separately, despite the fact that it would be morphologically justifiable to include נורא with the verbal usages represented in Table 1. The reason for this distinction is that נורא is often a *predication* in the Hebrew Bible and, in almost all cases (namely, 36 of 44), נורא functions as a descriptor of either God or God's activity (cf. the verbal adjective chart below).[5] The canonical distribution of נורא in individual books is shown here:

Table 2: The Nifal Participle נוֹרָא in the Hebrew Bible (44 total)

Genesis	1	**Torah: 9**
Exodus	2	
Deuteronomy	6	
Judges	1	**Prophets: 13**
2 Samuel	1	
Isaiah	4	
Ezekiel	1	
Joel	2	
Habakkuk	1	
Zephaniah	1	
Malachi	2	
Psalms	15	**Writings: 22**
Job	1	
Daniel	1	
Nehemiah	3	
1 Chronicles	2	

The adjectival form[6] appears in multiple books of the Hebrew Bible but clearly predominates in the Writings and is most pronounced in the psalms.

[5]See Joachim Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament* (Rom: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1965), 46; Fuhs, "יראּ *yārē'*," 292 with further references.

[6]The numbers in Table 2 also reflect *HALOT* 2:433 (bracketing out the conjectural readings), whose count differs slightly from Fuhs's count. For all יראּ-derivatives combined, my total count is slightly higher than his, bringing his total of 435 up to 443 (a difference of 8).

Table 3: The Verbal Adjective יְרֵא in the Hebrew Bible (53 total)

Genesis	3	**Torah: 7**
Exodus	2	
Deuteronomy	2	
Judges	1	**Prophets: 7**
1 Samuel	1	
Isaiah	1	
Jonah	1	
Malachi	3	
Psalms	31	**Writings: 40**
Proverbs	2	
Job	3	
Ecclesiastes	2	
1 Chronicles	1	

The nominal form יראה is fairly widespread, appearing almost always in construct (37 of 44 instances) and showing up in each canonical section, though quite unevenly.

Table 4: The Nominal Form יִרְאָה in the Hebrew Bible (44 total)

Genesis	1	**Torah: 3**
Exodus	1	
Deuteronomy	1	
2 Samuel	2	**Prophets: 12**
Isaiah	5	
Jeremiah	1	
Ezekiel	2	
Jonah	2	
Psalms	8	**Writings: 30**
Job	5	
Proverbs	14	
Nehemiah	2	
2 Chronicles	1	

Finally, the nominal form מורא is much rarer than יראה and has a more even divide between construct and absolute states. Unlike the other forms of יראּ-derivatives, it appears least frequently in the Writings. But in light of the rarity of מורא in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings alike, this point is inconsequential.

Table 5: The Nominal Form מוֹרָא in the Hebrew Bible (12 total)

Genesis	1	**Torah: 5**
Deuteronomy	4	
Isaiah	2	**Prophets: 5**
Jeremiah	1	
Malachi	2	
Psalms	1	**Writings: 2**
Job	1	

Worth noting here is that the nominal construct "fear of Yhwh" (יראת יהוה) – including variations like "fear of God" (יראת אלהים), "fear of Adonai" (יראת אדני), and on one occasion, "fear of Shaddai" (יראת שׁדי) – appears in the Hebrew Bible 36 times, 27 of which are with יראה and 9 of which are with פחד. First, the texts using יראה are Gen 20:11; 2 Sam 23:3; Isa 11:2, 3; 33:6; Psa 19:10; 34:12; 111:10; Job 6:14; 28:28; Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; Neh 5:9, 15; 2 Chr 19:9. Secondly, the texts using פחד are 1 Sam 11:7; Is 2:10, 19, 21; Psa 36:2; 2 Chr 14:13; 17:10; 19:7; 20:29. The numerical dominance of יראה over פחד is indicative of the Hebrew Bible's preference for יראּ-derivatives in general when using fear vocabulary.[7] Yet one should keep in mind that some texts with the formulation CONSTRUCT-"FEAR"-NOUN + SUFFIX have to do with God, but do not have a full nominal expression like יראת יהוה (e. g. יראתו in Ex 20:20; יראתך in Isa 63:17; יראתי in Jer 32:40; etc.). Given the relative paucity of these nominal constructions, one can see from the tables above that fear of the divine in the Hebrew Bible is first and foremost a verbal phenomenon, something that people actively "do," to put it simply. But what kind of activity is meant? A closer look at the verbal and, indeed, behavioral nuances of יראּ will receive more attention in what follows.

2. The semantic field of יראּ: synonyms, collocations, antonyms

In the Hebrew Bible, the most common roots whose derivatives can mean "to fear, to be afraid" are יראּ and פחד, though the latter is much less frequent. Verbal forms of פחד occur 26 times and nominal forms 47 times (i.e., 73 total פחד-derivatives; cf. 443 total יראּ-derivatives). Fearing and

[7] On this point, see Becker, *Gottesfurcht*, 6–18.

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