

Terrorism and the Emotions of Divinity:  
Elevation, Admiration, and Awe

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Unbalanced Emotions

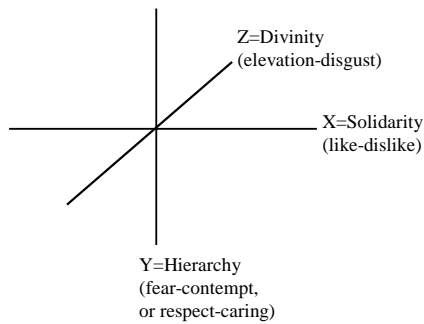
Appraisal of Agent's Action			
		Praiseworthy	Blameworthy
Self	Pride	246	Guilt 2,144
	Self-satisfaction	60	Shame 1,242
Other	Gratitude	63	Anger 3,341
	Awe	25	Disgust 146
	Admiration	20	Contempt 45
	Moral elevation	2	

(From PsycInfo search of words in title or key concepts, 1/04)

Research is unbalanced:

- Research and theorizing on negatives greatly outweighs positives
- There is almost NO empirical work on the "other-praising" emotions (beyond recent work on gratitude).

The third dimension of social space?



Purity and pollution: keep our animal/corporeal nature separated from god/divinity

**In Biblical Judaism:** When a woman gives birth to a boy, "*she shall continue in the blood of purification three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled.*"

--Leviticus, 12:4

**In Islam:** "*O believers, when you stand up to pray wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and your feet up to the ankles. If you are defiled, purify yourselves...*"

--Koran, V:9.

Purity/God/Goodness is up

**Hindu categorical imperative:** "*Any action that makes us go Godward is a good action and is our duty; any action that makes us go downward is evil and is not our duty.*"  
--Vivekananda, 1890s

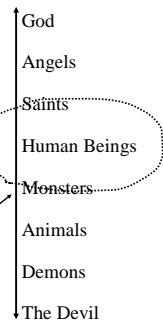
**Transmigration of souls:** Up or down, based on Karma (right-action in this life)

**The Scala Natura:** Greek and then Christian ordering of beings based on perfection, later virtue, with God at the top

**In Victorian America:** "*God has made no mistake in giving man a strong sexual nature, but any young man makes a fatal mistake if he allows the sexual to dominate, to degrade, and to destroy that which is highest and noblest in his nature.*" --Sylvanus Stall, 1904

The third dimension: Divinity

What do we feel when we see people move up, blurring the human/divine boundary?



**Social Disgust** is felt when we see people move down, especially when they blur the human/animal boundary.

**Elevation: Three main features**

- 1) Elicitors: acts of courage, kindness, loyalty.... or any other act of moral beauty
- 2) Phenomenology/physiology: a warm/open/pleasant feeling in the chest; also sometimes getting “choked up”.
- 3) Motivation: emulation, moral self-improvement, altruism?

**Cross-Cultural Interviews**

**Method:** Structured interviews with small samples in  
 --India  
 --Japan (Yuki Amano)  
 --among Born-again Christians (Carter Chandler)  
 --among Palestinian Americans (Mona Hasan)

**Results:** In all groups, we find linkage among  
 --virtuous acts  
 --feelings in body (chills or chest)  
 --motivation to help others or work for a higher cause

**Elevation and suicide bombing (Mona Hasan)**

**Question:** Does suicide bombing cause elevation?

**Participants:** 36 Palestinians and Palestinian Americans recruited from a mosque in Northern Virginia, interviewed 11/01-2/02, during period of heavy suicide bombing in Israel

**Method:** Structured interviews about 4 situations:

- 1) Good deed (“when you saw or heard about someone doing something good, kind, or compassionate for someone else”)
- 2) Self-sacrifice (“when you saw or heard about someone who risked or lost his life to further his cause”)
- 3) Rescue (“when you saw or heard about someone who risked or lost his life to help others, or save someone else’s life”)
- 4) Achievement (“when you accomplished a goal”)

<b>Results: % who mentioned</b>	Good Deed	Self-Sacrifice	Rescue	Achievement
Affect words mentioned:				
self-praising (pride, bold)	0*	3*	0*	80
other-praising (adm., awe, grat)	32*	31*	62*	3
Physical symptoms: goosebumps, chills, chest, or tears	35*	26*	17	7
Motivations:				
Self-focused (celebrate, continue)	3*	0*	0*	47
Other-focused (help, emulate)	74*	83*	72*	7

\* = differs from achievement p<.05

--47% of self-sacrifice was suicide mission; 25% protesters.  
 --The 3 pro-social situations are different from achievement, but not generally different from each other

**Discussion of suicide bombings (after main interview)**

- Half were supportive, half ambivalent. None opposed.
- Some mentions of revenge, hate, “negative” moral motives
- No mentions of rewards in heaven
- What feelings do you have when you hear about a successful suicide attack in Israel? Satisfaction (67%) happiness (61%), admiration (61%), gratitude (56%).

**Conclusions:**

- Self-sacrifice in suicide bombers often causes other-praising emotions in other members of the group.
- These emotions include motivations to do the same thing
- Terrorism is better understood as motivated by moral emotions than by free-floating “evil”

**Elevation and Disgust are opposites**

	<b>Disgust</b>	<b>Elevation</b>
Elicitor	People moving down, blurring human/animal divide	People moving up, blurring human/god divide
Physical feelings	Gut (unpleasant)	Chest (warm glow)
Motiv. Tendency	Separate, close off, reject	Merge, open up, copy virtuous example
Contamination	Negative	Positive

### The Evolution of “Awe”: Starts with fear

OED 1: From old Norse root “agi,” related to old English and German words meaning immediate and active fear; terror, dread. [Obs].

OED 2: “From its use in reference to the Divine Being this passes gradually into: Dread mingled with veneration, reverential or respectful fear; the attitude of a mind subdued to profound reverence in the presence of supreme authority, moral greatness or sublimity, or mysterious sacredness.”

### Saul on the road to Damascus



*...suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one (Acts 9.3-7).*

### A Theory of Awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003)

Many different kinds of awe: at power, nature, skill, divinity, magic....

2 Central appraisals: Vastness, and need for accommodation

5 Peripheral or “flavoring” appraisals: Threat, Beauty, Ability, Virtue, Supernatural

Evolutionary origins of awe? submission to power, then importance of selecting role models (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001).

Function: Awe prepares the mind to switch identities, allegiances, ideas. (Rumsfeld used the word correctly)

### Research and Applications

--Redo Hasan’s study more professionally: ethnographic and psychological research into the emotional reactions of young men to the suicide terrorism of their peers.

--How can America trigger elevation/admiration/awe? When (historically) have Americans been seen by enemy combatants as good? What moves in Iraq worked? Which backfired?

--Study “Manicheism” – our tendency to divide world into good and evil, and then believe that the ends justify the means. (This belief drives American policy, as well as Al Qaeda)

--Study American responses to American heroes, as after 9/11. Can elevation/admiration/awe help us cope after an attack?