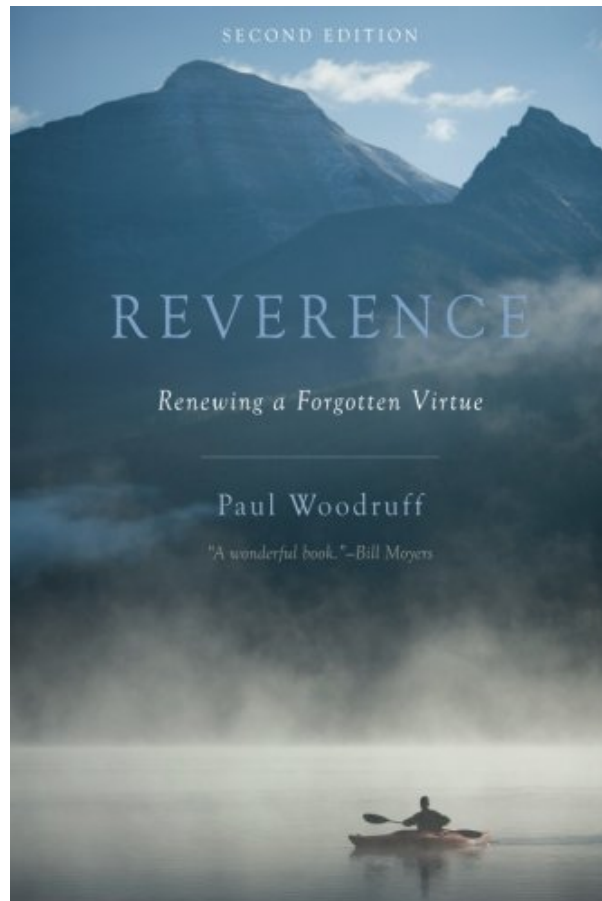
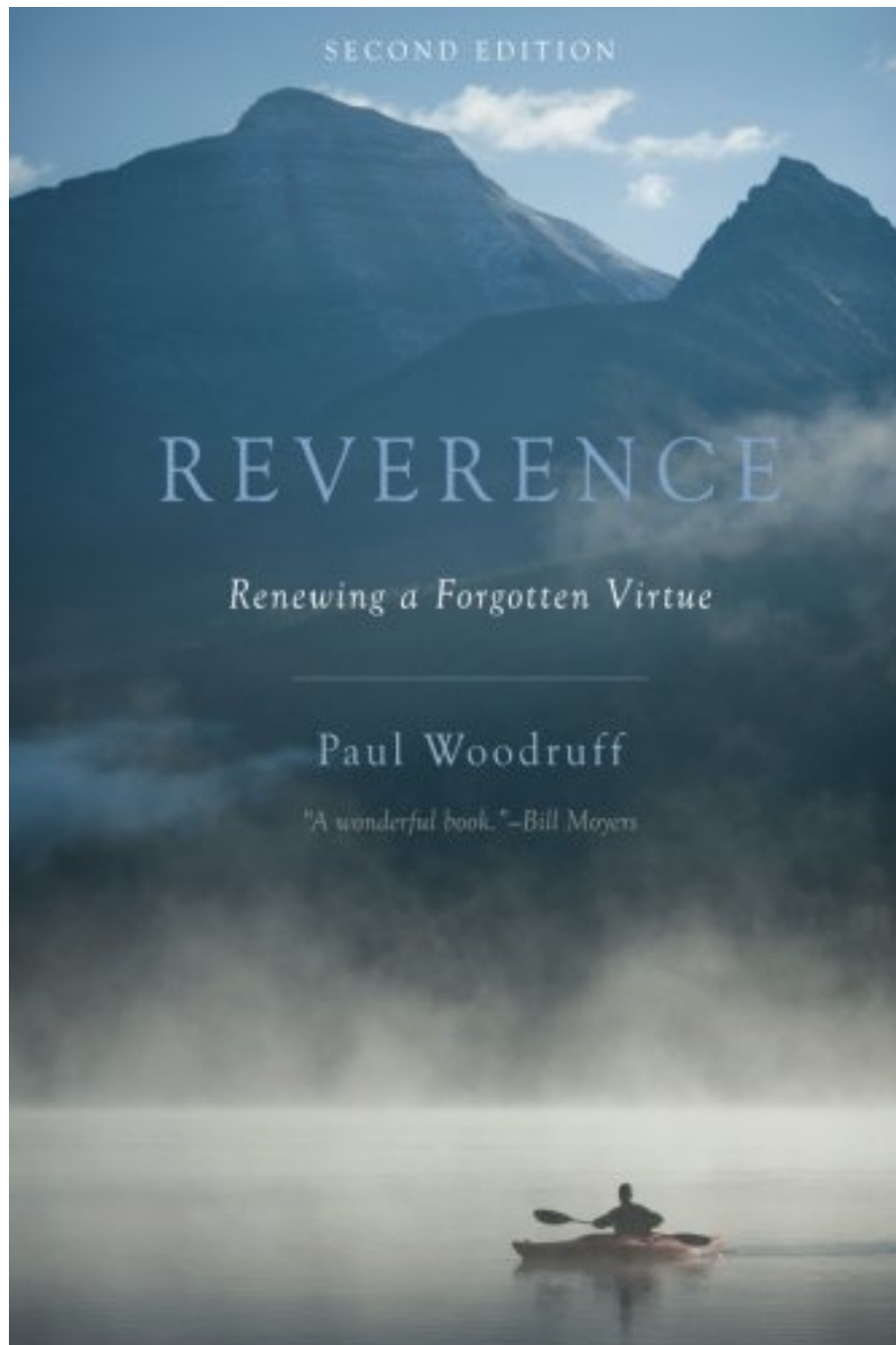


# REVERENCE: RENEWING A FORGOTTEN VIRTUE BY PAUL WOODRUFF



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Reverence is an ancient virtue that survives among us in half-forgotten patterns of civility and moments of inarticulate awe. Reverence gives meaning to much that we do, yet the word has almost passed out of our vocabulary.

Reverence, says philosopher and classicist Paul Woodruff, begins in an understanding of human limitations. From this grows the capacity to be in awe of whatever we believe lies outside our control -- God, truth, justice, nature, even death. It is a quality of character that is especially important in leadership and in teaching, although it figures in virtually every human relationship. It transcends religious boundaries and can be found outside religion altogether.

Woodruff draws on thinking about this lost virtue in ancient Greek and Chinese traditions and applies lessons from these highly reverent cultures to today's world. The book covers reverence in a variety of contexts -- the arts, leadership, teaching, warfare, and the home -- and shows how essential a quality it is to a well-functioning society.

First published by Oxford University Press in 2001, this new edition of *Reverence* is revised and expanded. It contains a foreword by Betty Sue Flowers, Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin, a new preface, two new chapters -- one on the sacred and one on compassion -- and an epilogue focused on renewing reverence in our own lives.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Thought-provoking book written for a broad audience

By Timothy J. Bartik

This is a well-written and thoughtful book that argues that reverence is a necessary virtue. Woodruff's definition of reverence is that it is "the well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when these are the right feelings to have."

But reverence for what? What is particularly distinctive in this book is that Woodruff forcefully argues in the possibilities of a wide variety of objects of reverence -- not just for God, but for nature, for truth, for beauty, for community, and for the best human moral capacities. In Woodruff's view, the emotion of reverence provides the necessary support for the other virtues, such as justice. One needs to feel that other human beings, the community, and the universe have a beauty and potential glory beyond our individual power to be

properly supported and motivated in our continued struggle to act to be in right relations with others and with the world.

Woodruff explores the idea of reverence through numerous examples from philosophy, literature, history, current affairs, and his own life. The book spends some considerable time on reverence in ancient Greece and China, in the works of Plato, the Greek playwrights, and Confucius. He also discusses the war in Iraq, including the case of the tortures at Abu Ghraib, his own experiences in Vietnam, and more mundane day-to-day events in which reverence can help, ranging from committee meetings to local politics to teaching.

This is a second edition of a previously published book. This second book adds 3 new chapters, including a chapter on compassion. Woodruff argues that this chapter emphasizes what he characterizes as the most important message of the book: "Leaders are responsible for the compassion of those who follow them." In his view, part of this responsibility is by leaders showing the proper respect for moral principles, for truth, and for their followers, all of which, in Woodruff's view, helps to cultivate compassion in the community being led.

Woodruff also adds an epilogue that suggests some guides as to how to cultivate reverence. These guides include: paying attention, or mindfulness about myself, my fellow human beings, and the universe; engaging in "languages" that arouse reverence, such as music and poetry, and ceremony that has the true spirit of reverence; always asking oneself questions, as Socrates did, about whether the right things are being done and in the right spirit and with the right character.

This is a thought-provoking book. I suspect a philosopher might want more extensive and detailed discussion of the exact relationship of reverence with the other virtues, such as justice and wisdom. As Woodruff mentions, Plato did not treat reverence as a virtue, seeing justice as supreme. But Plato was perhaps less attentive than he should be to some emotional requirements for virtue. However, for most readers, who are not looking for philosophic proofs, this book will provide plenty of examples and images that will be nourishing and encouraging in developing better character, regardless of the exact relationships among the virtues. In addition, the book is written in a way that will appeal to a broad audience, regardless of their specific religious or philosophic beliefs, and including both theists and atheists.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Theme and Variation

By Gabriel M. Ertsgaard

Some reviewers of the first edition expressed confusion regarding the structure of the book. I've read both editions, so I'll offer my thoughts on this topic. The book has a theme and variation structure common in orchestral music, less common in philosophy books. Woodruff's aim is not merely to convey an intellectual concept, but to make us feel something that affects the rhythm of our everyday lives. If we assent to his argument, but are unaffected by it, the book has failed. The true proof of its potency comes when reverence serves as a lens for experiencing, understanding, and acting in both personal and global affairs.

(Most of the above paragraph comes from a recent essay of mine. For those who might be interested, search Medium for "Reverence in a Time of Protest.")

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

This wonderful book with additional thoughts from the original edition is ...

By john m cogswell

This wonderful book with additional thoughts from the original edition is an essential read for anyone interested in the importance of virtue in all aspects of living. Reverence, as one of the virtues, becomes a touchstone for measuring the quality of both every day relationships and the leadership we need to govern



ourselves as a nation. Every American should read this book.

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