



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 19, 2026

Asked: “Should Cops Be Feared or Respected?” The Answer Is...

“Is it better to be loved or feared?” the main mobster character, Sonny, was asked in the film *A Bronx Tale* (1993). His answer was that he’d like to enjoy both. But if he had to choose one, it would be fear, he stated, because “fear lasts longer than love.”

Of course, these are the sentiments of a criminal. Yet as such they’re most relevant to a recently asked question:

“Should cops be feared or respected?”

This question is quite germane currently, too. After all, we’ve in past years heard the rallying cries “Abolish the police” and “Defund the police.” This reflects a lack of respect. And recent times’ attacks on police demonstrate how fear is now often sorely absent, too.



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Asking the question and examining the matter yesterday was commentator and ex-cop Bob Weir. As he [wrote](#):

Once upon a time, in the history of our country, there was a widespread mood when it came to the way most people viewed the police. They recognized the obvious need for an organization of trained public guardians that would protect and serve the law-abiding segment of society. Undoubtedly, since most liberty-loving individuals resent any restrictions on their behavior, some thought of cops as a necessary evil. Others thought of them the same way they thought of children: to be seen but not heard. In other words, everyone wants to feel secure on the streets and in his home, but they get intimidated by the sight of those semi-military uniforms, with a gun strapped to the side of it. It’s okay to see a cop on patrol when you’re walking along the street, especially at night.

However, when you’re out for a drive and see a radio car in your rearview mirror, you’re likely to glance quickly to see how fast you’re going. That momentary tension will make one feel a bit resentful. It’s an emotion that subsides the moment you see the bubbletop auto taking the exit ramp.

I’ve often heard that people should obey the police out of respect for them, rather than fear. Still, is it respect when you slow down at the sight of a police cruiser, or is it the fear of getting a ticket? When a burglar runs at the sight of a police unit, he’s in fear of being captured. He’s not filled with admiration for his pursuer. If more people feared the punishment for breaking the law, our prisons wouldn’t be filled to capacity.



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Weir then notes how it's not just that miscreants who attack police cars obviously don't respect law enforcement. It's that they're predators who also view civilized people as "sheep" to be sheared. They can only be brought to heel by stronger men who, when necessary, use violent means on our behalf.

So it should be obvious that with true thugs, love just isn't in the equation. This means they won't respect what's respect-worthy because a prerequisite for that is *loving* what's *good*. In fact, they may often only respect what they fear. Yet there's a deeper issue here — one relating to man's nature generally.

Hold Fear Dear?

It has been said that love and fear of God are complementary aspects of a believer's faith. To many, though, this sounds awfully antiquated and "unenlightened." "Why should we have fear of God?" they may ask. "We should do the right thing simply because it's the right thing — not because we're afraid" (of Hell, perhaps). Of course, too, this is ideal. But the sentiment misses much.

Now, note here that what follows is just as how Albert Einstein called time "a handy illusion" and how great theologians have said "God is outside of time." That is, the best science and best theology draw the same conclusion. And attention is warranted whenever these two realms intersect.

Let's start with the science. American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg promulgated six stages of moral development through which a youngster passes. Before him, famed German-born child psychologist Erik Erikson wrote about "stages of psychosocial development." And they both deliver the same truth.

A child in a certain early stage of development only understands something is wrong via reward and *punishment*.

This relates to adults as well because, lamentably, not everyone experiences proper moral development. Ergo, psychopaths and other morally dysfunctional people.

As for good theology, it long ago tackled this matter with the concepts of "perfect contrition" and "imperfect contrition." The former is ideal; it's when you're sorry for your sins because they're wrong and "offend" God, whom you love. The latter is when you're sorry *only because you fear punishment*.

Yet Christianity accepts imperfect contrition as sufficient for absolution because it recognized what science did before scientists thought about it. That is, tiny children — and some adults — are too morally stunted to act rightly for the highest reason.

Fear Can Be the Mother of Virtue

So what should we do with the morally immature? When they're young children, [good parents know](#), as beautifully illustrated in the 58-second video below.

Now, most people notice the obvious in the above. It's paradigmatic because it involves parental emotional control, accountability, punishment, and reconciliation. (The father concluded by making clear he still loved his son.) But note something in the above most relevant to the topic at hand.

When the father firmly ordered, "Come right here!" the youngster said "OK" — with some *obvious trepidation in his voice*.

The boy knew he'd stepped in it, and he feared his father's discipline.

And what of older people who (unlike that child, most likely) only respond to consequences? Do we accept that they'll run amok?



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Well, that's why we have police, a legal system, and prisons. That is why, too, just as how it's beneficial when predatory animals (e.g., bears) have a "healthy fear of man," it's important for animalistic people to have a healthy fear of "the Man."

(Also, maybe it's now easier to appreciate the usefulness of belief in Hell.)

Unfortunately today, it's increasingly the case that only good people fear police. A healthy fear is necessary, though, because not all parents do the job the dad above does. And when parents don't, and fear of God is absent, the law is all that remains.



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