

Robert Johnson

Fanaticism

1. *Meaning and location in Kant's works*

'Fanaticism' was a pejorative term used by Kant and his contemporaries. It is distinguished from enthusiasm, which is a transitory *delerium* of unbridled imagination, by being an undermining disease of mania, involving an anomalous imagination. The concept arises in Kant's practical and aesthetic philosophies. He discussed a number of phenomena under this and related headings.

Wichtige Stellen: 5:84-6, 5:275, 5:460, 6:175, 6:408-9

2. *Related keywords in Kant's work*

Hamann, Jacobi, enthusiasm, moral indifference, moral apathy

3. *Philosophical function in Kant's philosophy*

Kant lived through anti-Enlightenment movements such as Romanticism and "Sturm und Drang". He was aware of and concerned by the fascination with extreme emotions that religious figures and artists embraced. Advocates of such emotions thought that reason was not the sole means by which the world's truths could be discerned. And, indeed, Kant's own transcendental philosophy, which put limits on what reason can deliver, was taken by some as reason to think, however misguidedly, that extreme emotion could take one to truths beyond reason's reach. There was also an aesthetic interest in extreme emotion. Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, for instance, tells the story of an unrequited love so painful that the lead character commits suicide. It had such a profound impact on the culture that it led many young men of the day to carry out in reality the fictional character's act.

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Kant was deeply opposed to religious fanaticism. Such fanaticism is "the moral death of reason without which there can be no religion, because like all morality in general, religion must be founded on principles". 6:175 In our ideas of the "supersensible" reason must be restricted to "the conditions of its practical employment", which "keeps *religion* from falling into...a fanatical delusion that a feeling can be communicated to us from other supersensible beings." 5:460 He was also opposed to *moral* fanaticism. 5:84-6 The proper representation of the virtuous disposition was "apathy", in the sense that respect for duty is more powerful than one's natural feelings, generating a kind of tranquility. This is opposed to letting the thought of what is good "rise into an affect". 6:408-9 A moral fanatic "allows *nothing to be morally indifferent (adiaphora)* and strews all his steps with duties, as with mantraps" and thus "turns the government of virtue in to tyranny". 6:409

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