CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT II: KANT

Claus-E. Bärsch

1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of German political thought in the 19th and 20th centuries, no philosophers were so influential as Kant and Hegel. However, Hegel depends on the philosophy of Kant. The representatives of the various worldviews and ideologies (liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and even National Socialism) permitted themselves to refer to Kant. Among the different political regimes in the recent two hundred years (authoritarian state, constitutional monarchy, Weimar Republic, “Third Reich”, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany) Kant was celebrated – and was misunderstood, far more than less. Kant has in fact not written a politico-philosophical monograph like Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau did, but in the third-to-last section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole, whereby Kant became *a fortiori* a Kantian, he asks questions being central to both political science and philosophy:

> The whole interest of reason, speculative as well as practical, in centred in the three following questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?\(^1\)

There are few rulers and ruled who know Kant’s answers to these questions. Nevertheless, anybody who became powerful and remained it had to answer those questions, no matter by what purposes and practices. Kant on the other hand, within his philosophy of reason, was an author of several political works. In addition, he has dealt with subjects of political life in some of his philosophical writings – the relationship between the order of man, society, and history, practice, liberty, morality, law, war, and peace. The following works and writings of Kant should be

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After the national socialist rule, it was remembered in the Federal Republic of Germany – in universities, schools, and the public opinion – that Germany had Enlightenment as well and that Kant was its most famous representative. He is regarded as a protagonist of liberty, of general emancipation (maturity), of the modern constitutional state, of the postulate of peace in the world, and religious tolerance. Too many fancy him even a friend of pluralistic democracy and a critic of religion. However, it is not as simple as that. We shall see that in due course.

To start, I will dwell on Kant’s opinion about the relationship between politics and religion in the writing *An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”* an often quoted work of Kant (§2). Then we will discuss extensively his *Critiques* and his *Religion within the limits of Reason alone* (§3) and finally his political philosophy (§4), which is followed by a general conclusion to these two chapters on politics and religion in the philosophy of the Enlightenment (§5).

2. Politics and Religion in Kant’s *An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”*

In the passage just before the before the last paragraph in *An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”* Kant takes a firm stand towards the relevance of religion: “I have portrayed matter of religions as the focal point of enlightenment” and explicates why: “because religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all”. His answer to the question what Enlightenment is, boils down to this famous sentence:

> Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity: Immaturity is the inability of use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without

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