

On Two Arguments for Fanaticism*

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Abstract

Should we make significant sacrifices to ever-so-slightly lower the chance of extremely bad outcomes, or to ever-so-slightly raise the chance of extremely good outcomes? *Fanaticism* says yes: for every bad outcome, there is a tiny chance of extreme disaster that is even worse, and for every good outcome, there is a tiny chance of an enormous good that is even better. I consider two related recent arguments for Fanaticism: Beckstead and Thomas's argument from *strange dependence on space and time*, and Wilkinson's *Indology* argument. While both arguments are instructive, neither is persuasive. In fact, the general principles that underwrite the arguments (a *separability* principle in the first case, and a *reflection* principle in the second) are *inconsistent* with Fanaticism. In both cases, though, it is possible to rehabilitate arguments for Fanaticism based on restricted versions of those principles. The situation is unstable: plausible general principles tell *against* Fanaticism, but restrictions of those same principles (with strengthened auxiliary assumptions) *support* Fanaticism. All of the consistent views that emerge are very strange.

Not madness but the
mathematics of eternity drove
them.

Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*

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