

## WHAT DID ALBERT EINSTEIN REALLY BELIEVE IN?

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It is psychologically understandable that theists that believe in a personal God have the tendency to present Einstein as believer in such a God. Some of them really do it. For instance the known French philosopher Jacques Maritain wrote in a paper *God and Science* [1] that Einstein, although he had in the beginning doubts concerning the existence of God finally arrived at the conclusion that there must be a personal God. On the other hand, atheists and materialists were convinced that Einstein was an atheist and a materialist. For example, Einstein's collaborator, Leopold Infeld wrote in his book *Moje wspomnienia o Einsteinie [My Remembrances of Einstein]* [2] that both of them considered themselves as materialists.

As we can see, the opinions presented above are contradictory. In such a situation we can ask the question: How much are these opinions based on wishful thinking and what did Albert Einstein really believe in? Let's begin with the childhood of our scientist. Einstein was a son of religiously indifferent parents of Jewish origin: Herman Einstein and Paulin Koch. As a child he was sent to a catholic elementary school and at that time he believed in a personal God. But when he was 12 years old, he became a free-thinker under the influence of popularized scientific books provided to him by a young student M.Talmud, also of Jewish origin. Later when he was already a scientist he became a representative of an ontological rationalism. According to him, the fact that Nature can be understood, that it is understandable, was the greatest miracle. According to him, Nature is imprinted by an Intelligence greater than human intelligence, Nature is rational, but not irrational, and therefore understandable. When he was asked if he believed in God, he answered that he believed in Spinoza's God and therefore he never considered himself as an atheist, although until his death, he never believed in a personal God. Like Spinoza, Einstein was rather a pantheist. He considered Nature as God and therefore his attitude towards Nature was religious. He called his worldview „a cosmic religion”. The Spinoza's pantheistic views expressed in his dissertation *Ethics* exerted a great influence on Einstein. L. Infeld wrote in that book that Einstein mentioned his idea of God more often than a priest, but he emphasized that for Einstein God meant the extraordinary admirable order of Nature [2]. Since several theists considered him as a believer in a personal God he often opposed and protested against that.

A year before his death (on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1954) Einstein answered a letter written by Selfmademan, who asked him if he believed in a personal God as is written in several books. Einstein, angry with the authors of these books, answered:

*Was Sie über meine religiösen Überzeugungen gelesen haben, war natürlich eine Lüge, eine Lüge, die systematisch wiederholt wird. Ich glaube nicht an einen persönlichen Gott, und ich habe das nie geäußert, sondern klar zum Ausdruck gebracht.*

*Wenn etwas in mir ist, das religiös genannt werden kann, dann ist es die grenzenlose Bewunderung der Struktur der Welt, so weit unsere Wissenschaft sie sichtbar machen kann [3, p. 43]*

„What you have read about my religious convictions is naturally a lie, a lie which is systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God, but I have never denied it and I expressed it in a clear way.

When there is something in me that can be called religious, it is an unlimited admiration of the structure of the world so far as our science can do it visible” [3]

Some days later, on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1954, Einstein has defined himself, in a letter to Hans Muehsam, as „a deeply religious unbeliever”.

*Man wird zum tief religiösen Ungläubigen. (Dies ist eine einigermaßen neue Art von Religion* (Einstein’s Archives, pp. 38-434).

„One becomes a deeply religious unbeliever. It is to a certain degree a new kind of religion” (Einstein’s Archives, pp. 38-434).

Einstein’s religious worldview called by him a „cosmic religion” was expressed by him in the best way in his following words:

„My views are very close to Spinoza’s views: an admiration for beauty and a belief in a logical simplicity of order and harmony which we are able to get to know only in a very imperfect way because of our deficiency” [4]

On the next day after Einstein’s death, on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1955, *New York Times* published a text which is often quoted by theists as Einstein’s words, words that, according to them, testify his belief in a personal God. Here they are:

„My religion is reduced to an admiration full of humility towards an infinitely perfect Spiritual Being that manifests itself in these small particularities that we are able to reach with our weak and fragile minds. The deep conviction that there exists a Supreme Intellect that manifests itself through the unknown. Universe constitutes the basis of my conception of God” [5]

The above text interpreted from a theist point of view is but a contradictory to many other Einstein’s words. If they are his actual words, they are to be interpreted from a point of view of specific kind of pantheism in the context of other Einstein’s statements. Such an interpretation is provided by eg. his 1927 statement that is closest to discussed text and a telegram sent two years later. „I cannot imagine a personal God exerting a direct influence on people’s deeds... My religion is based on a humble adoration infinite lofty Spirit, which exists in any tiny particle of reality which we are able to understand” (from a letter to a certain Colorado banker, August 1927; Einstein’s archives, pp. 48-380). „I believe in Spinoza’s God manifesting himself in the harmony of all things existing, but not God that would take care of fates and deeds of all people” (from a telegram to one of Jewish newspapers; Einstein’s archives, pp. 33-272). Finally, it must be stated that the concept of Einstein’s „theology” is not fully worked out and, as claimed by S. Butryn [6, pp. LIX – LXI], often incoherent. Thus theist will see theism in it, atheists atheism and pantheists pantheonism. But Butryn [6, p. LXI] is right about the fact that Einstein’s concept of God is not even that of Spinoza, although Einstein claimed that he believed in Spinoza’s God.

Einstein didn’t also believe in the concept of the human soul that is separate from the body, and in the afterlife and a reward or a punishment that is supposed to be awaiting people there. In 1921 he wrote „Because our psychological experience is based on reconstructed and put in different orders sensations, the idea of soul without a body seems to me empty and lacking reason” (from a letter to a certain woman from Vien, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1921, Einstein’s archives 43-847). As to the afterlife reward and punishment he wrote: „I cannot imagine a God who rewards or punishes his own

creations... I also cannot and I don't want to imagine that a man still lasts after his physical death, I leave this hope to weak people who need this feeling because of the fear or unreasonable egoism (from an article What I Believe, „Forum and Century,” 84, (1930), pp. 193-194). Similarly, two years before his death he said „I don't believe in the immortality of an individual and I consider morality as a purely human thing that do not need to be raised to any superhuman authority” (July 1953, Einstein's archives, pp. 36-553).

Einstein also expressed his opinion on religion and the relationship between this and science. In the evolution of religion he distinguished three stages that depended on feelings and longing that were the engine drive of religious thinking. The first stage is as follows: „For primitive people, the first and foremost thing that raises religious images is fear. Fear of starvation, wild animals, sickness, death. Because on such a level of existence the cause-and-effect understanding is usually small, the human mind beguiles us with more or less similar to us creatures whose will and doings seems to cause most dreadful experiences. People think that by uptaking certain actions and making offerings that according to beliefs transfered from one generation to another, they will calm these down and make these kinder. In this respect it is a religion of fear” [*Religion and Science* in 6, p. 215].

The next stage was summerized in a following way: „Social feelings are the second source of forming religious beliefs. Mother and father – the leaders of bigger social communities – are mortal. The longing for having a leader – and his love and support – is a stimulus for the formation of social or moral concept of God. It is a Providence God that protects, decides, rewards and punishes. It is a God that, dependably on a person's attitude, loves and supports the life of a tribe, humankind or life in itself, someone who comforts in misfortunes and unfulfilled longing, someone who guards the souls of the dead. It is a social or moral idea of God” [6, p. 216].

The third stage of religious experience was defined by him as „cosmic religiousness” and he felt a subject experiencing that particular kind of religion. „(...) there is a third stage of religious experience, very rarely in its pure form though, that might be called a cosmic religiousness. It is hardly explainable to someone who doesn't have anything in common with it, beacues there is no antropomorphic counterpart of this concept of God. An individual feels the uselessness of human desires and aspirations and the loftiness and the miraculous order existing in nature and in the world of thoughts... Religious geniuses of all times were distinguished by such a cosmic religiousness free from dogmas and images of God who is similar to man.” [6, p. 216].

According to Einstein, the conflict between the science and religion is inevitable in the religion of fear and in the social-moral religion, but it is not present in the cosmic religion. This view of Einstein is related to his deterministic idea of causality. Due to it Einstein denied the existence of free will. „For a person who is deeply convinced of a causative regularity of all things happening, the concept of a creature involved in the course of events of the universe is totally impossible – but it is only for those who consider the causative hypothesis in a very serious way. According to him, there is no place for the religion of fear, the same applied to the social or moral religion. A God that rewards and punishes is unacceptable for him, just because people act in harmony with inner and outer necessities. Einstein considered also the other aspects of the science – religion relationship. The details can be found in his works: *Religia i nauka* [*Religion and Science*], [6, pp. 215- 217]; *Religijność badań naukowych* [*The Religiousness of Scientific Research*], [6, pp. 217-218]; *Nauka a Bóg* [*Science and God*], [6, pp. 218-226] *Nauki przyrodnicze a religia* [*The Science of Nature and*

*Religion*], [6, pp. 226-232]; *Religia a nauka: czy są nie do pogodzenia [Religion and Science: Are They Irreconcilable]*, [6, pp.232-234]; *Esej o religii [An Essay on Religion]*, [6, pp.234-235].

Einstein's view on a concept of a man and a human existence in general are equally interesting.

He wrote: „How odd is our situation, the children of the Earth! All of us are here with just a short visit. No one knows what for, but some think that they can feel it.” [6 p. 237]

According to Einstein, we do not exist, but rather co-exist. We first and foremost live for other people.

Firstly, for those on whom our well-being and good luck depends. They are people who are the closest to us. Secondly, all the strangers with whom we share the ability to feel the existing reality.

Einstein considered the simple life lacking excessive needs as the most desirable and optimal.

He didn't believe in the concept of human freedom in a philosophical sense and the question concerning the meaning and the aim of life was considered as pointless by him. But he didn't denied the meaning of life in itself, as he claimed that its essence is the personal matter of every individual.

Einstein's philosophy is subjective, but not deprived of tolerance. He didn't refused the ability of others to find either their own way of life or the accuracy of their choice.

He negated himself such transient tangible value such as possession, outer success and luxury. These attributes of modern society were regarded as false and contemptible by him.

The search for the meaning of life is found by us only in self-satisfaction and our own happiness, and, according to Einstein, these are ethical values of the swine.

The real value of a man is measured by the degree of his freeing from the cage of egoism. His achievement is not what he gained for himself, but what he gave to the others, that is how his existence and actions were supportive for the co-existing people.

A valuable man is not only a receiver, but also a giver.

The man's existence which only aim is his own benefit, fashionable nowadays example of the so-called „the man of success,” is in fact improper and unjust. Somebody who gains a financial success, that is who gathers substantial material goods, takes much more from the others than he deserves in reality. He is not really valuable, although he may think of himself in such a way. Others consider his life as tooo egoistic and parasitic.

According to Einstein, the real value that marked the way for his life was the continuous search for good, beauty and truth. It was the search for these values that gave him the feeling of happiness and self-realization.

He also claimed that only by the awareness of existing in a community, a human life becomes valuable and full of sense. The only condition for such a state is guiding oneself and one's actions towards for the common good.

A man is not born with a sense of place in a society, but he discovers it through an appropriate way of education.

Einstein put a lot of emphasis on the school as the only educational unit that actually prepares a young man for living in a society. The school should be the carrier of practical knowledge creating an individual that is able to think in a self-reliant way and thus socially useful and creative. He also pointed to an often appearing error of the youngster's education, namely fueling the spirit of competition and rivalry. He claimed that using an individual ambition of the students or the need for being better than the others as a stimulus for learning is improper. It leads to egoism and in consequence quite often to antisocial behaviour.

Added to all this, there is an extraordinary nice Einstein's view in which he expressed the thought that a man should not take himself and others in a completely serious way, as by acting in such a way he leaves some space for precious sense of humour. It must be stated that Einstein didn't lack it. In an U.S. immigration form in the blank 'race,' he wrote 'human.' Maybe he did it out of perversity, maybe for a joke, or maybe he couldn't stand racial division as just senseless. It's hard to say it now. The only certain thing is that in such a way he plainly gave others to understand that not only was he a deeply tolerant person that respected the dignity of everyone, but also he expressed his reluctance towards all interpersonal conflicts – the thought that was often said by him.

A very good introduction to other philosophical views of Einstein is the preface of S. Butryn to PF, [6, pp. IX-LXXI].

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