What Life Means to Einstein
An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck

RELATIVITY! What word is more symbolic of the ages? We have ceased to be positive of anything. We look upon all things in the light of relativity. Relativity has become the plaything of the parlor philosopher.

Is there any standard that has not been challenged in this our post-war world? Is there any absolute system of ethics, of economics or of law, whose stability or permanence is not assailed somewhere? Can there be any permanent value or any absolute truth in a world in which the three angles of the triangle have ceased to be equal to two right angles—in a world in which time itself has lost its meaning, in which infinity becomes finite, and the finite is lost in the infinite?

Einstein refuses to sponsor newfangled theories which draw their justification from his own assault upon the certainties of mathematics. His voice was bell-like and gentle, but his words were decisive when he smashed with one sentence the rash application of the term "relativity" to philosophy and to life.

"The meaning of relativity," he said, "has been widely misunderstood. Philosophers play with the word, like a child with a doll. Relativity, as I see it, merely denotes that certain physical and mechanical facts, which have been regarded as positive and permanent, are relative with regard to certain other facts in the sphere of physics and mechanics. It does not mean that everything in life is relative and that we have the right to turn the whole world mischievously topsy-turvy." I now remembered that some years ago, when I first met Einstein in New York, he had emphatically resisted the suggestion that he was a philosopher. "I am," he said, "solely a physicist." In spite of these denials, Einstein stands in a symbolic relation to our age—an age characterized by a revolt against the absolute in every sphere of science and of thought. He is a child of his age even if he eschews metaphysics.

A Born Teacher

LIKE Napoleon, like Mussolini, Albert Einstein has the distinction of having become an almost legendary figure in his own lifetime. No man since Copernicus, Galileo and Newton has wrought more fundamental changes in our attitude toward the universe. Einstein's universe is finite. Seen through Einstein's eyes, space and time are almost interchangeable terms. Time appears compartmentalized as a fourth dimension. Space, once undefinable, has assumed the shape of a sphere. Einstein taught us that light travels in curves. All these facts are deduced from the theory of relativity advanced by Einstein in 1915.

With the advent of Einstein, mathematics ceased to be an exact science in the fashion of Euclid. The new mathematics appeared in the midst of the World War. It is not impossible that in the evolution of human thought Einstein's discovery may play a greater part than the Great War. His fame may outlive Foch and Ludendorff, Wilson and Clemenceau.

Einstein, in the words of his favorite colleague, Erwin Schrödinger, explains the fundamental laws of mechanics as geometrical proportions of space and time. I shall not attempt to expound this statement. It is said that only ten men understand Einstein's theory of relativity.

Einstein's patience is infinite. He likes to explain his theories. A born teacher, Einstein does not resent questions. He loves children. The ten-year-old son of a friend was convinced that he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. Einstein pain­takingly explained to him the flaw in his calculations.

Whenever a question involving a difficult mathematical problem comes up, Einstein immediately takes up his pencil and covers page after page with the most intricate equations. He does not refer to a textbook; he works out such formulas immediately himself. Often the formula thus obtained is clearer, more comprehensible and more perfect than the equation that is found in books of reference.

Time in Space

RECENTLY someone talked to him about color photography. Einstein immediately involved the subject in his mind. He studied the camera, he made various calculations, and before the evening was over, he had evolved a new method of color photography. It is difficult for him to explain his theories when he writes an article for lay consumption. But when the inquiring layman exposes the abysses of his ignorance face to face with Einstein, the great mathematician usually succeeds in bridging the gulf with an apt illustration. Talking to him, I saw in a flash not only a fourth dimension but numerous others. Glowing with pride in my achievement, I scribbled down a sentence here and there, but afterward my notes were as difficult to interpret as the fantastic network of a dream.

"How can I form at least a dim idea of the fourth dimension?"

"Imagine," Einstein replied, slightly inclining his head with the crown of curly white hair, "a scene in two-dimensional space—for instance, the painting of a man reclining on a bench. A tree stands beside the bench. Then imagine that the man walks from the bench to a rock on the other side of the tree. He cannot reach the rock except by walking either in front of or behind the tree. This is impossible in two-dimensional space. He can reach the rock only by an excursion into the third dimension.

"Now imagine another man sitting on the bench. How did he get there? Since two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time, he can have got there only before or after the first man moved. He must have moved in time. Time is the fourth dimension. In a similar manner it is possible to explain five, six and more dimensions. Many problems of mathematics are simplified by assuming the existence of more dimensions."
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CHANCES ARE IT’S HANES

 appropriated from the open cases a supply for future use.

Now, in this drug uniforms worn by the Waldorf-Astoria bellhop of the period, there was scant room to hide a quart of champagne. A tightly-tied dickey could not conceal an increment of such size. But those lads were resourceful, and they had known hundreds of experience that the taut leg had possibilities beyond the average imagination. It proved easy to frisk out a bottle from a case, raise the side of one’s blouse, and slide the bottle down inside the waistband. Thus lads, all of which was now necessary, these youths evidently con­ cluded, was the cultivation of a convincing air of unconcern.

However, one of the assistant managers of the establishment, who had kept a quick eye on bottles as they were brought into the ballroom, deemed the case a much too obvious one, and therefore, actually caught one of the lads in the act.

Immediately a quart bottle of champagne crashed on the hard floor at his feet and the wine splattered and spread in every direc­ tion. The manager started to grab, but was halted by a second crisis, coming from one end of the line. Another bottle had slipped from a mooring waist­ band, and was coming down to destruction. A third followed suit from a boy at the end already inspected. Before the inspection was over, many of the lads in the same fashion had splashed their costly contents upon an unsavory precipitate.

Of course the performance of the bell boys is not, per se, as the lawyers might say, evidence that people used to drink more before prohibition than now. It was just an example of what might happen when boose flowed so nearly freely in what are often called the good old days. But what I have narrated ought to prove that, whatever a comparison would determine, in some special act of licor use to be drunk before prohibition. And certainly, no matter how many people used to take liquor as defined as definitely established.

Again a smile played about his face, creeping from his eyes toward his cheeks and disappearing in his mustache, slightly darker in color than the tangle mass of hair on his head.

He, his wife, and cousin, as well as his helpmate, filled our glasses with strawberry juice and heaped more fruit upon our plates.

Einstein, in no way, was prepared for this. It was necessary for Einstein to express gravity in terms of electricity. The formula needed for this purpose is so complex that in order to explain it, he was compelled to create a new system of advanced mathematics.

Einstein’s new system redefines Euclid with Riemann. It restores parallel lines, which Riemann abolished.

According to Riemann, there can be no parallel lines in a curved universe. Einstein rediscovered parallel lines with the aid of the fourth dimension. Don’t ask me to explain the process in detail. It is a thing that can be told in a series of intricate equations, but without human being, not even Einstein himself, can visualize.

“No man,” as Einstein said to me, sitting comfortably on the couch of the sitting room of his Berlin home, “can visualize four dimensions, except mathematically. When I visualize three dimensions, I think in four dimensions.”

“But don’t you,” I said, “think in four dimensions?”

“I think in four dimensions,” he replied, “but only abstractly. The human mind can picture these dimensions no more than it can express electricity. Nevertheless, they are no less real than electro-magnetism, the force which controls our universe, without which neither the car nor theajplane would have our being.

“I am particularly interested in your new theory which proves that gravity and electricity are one. Surely no six pages ever written by the hand of any scholar have so revolutionized human thought?”

“Unfortunately,” Einstein remarked, with a smile which shared the brightness of his face, “my last theory is only a hypothesis which remains to be proved. It is different from any other thought which has been confirmed by many indepen­ dent investigators and may now be re­ garded as definitely established.”

Again a smile played about his face, creeping from his eyes toward his cheeks and disappearing in his mustache, slightly darker in color than the tangled mass of hair on his head.
THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

James Huneker once remarked to me, no roguish in one way or two girls account in the eighties, and he was justly proud of it. His former wife is still friendly. He is deeply interested in the children of his first marriage, and he was always on the lookout for children sprung from his cousin’s first union.

One of his commentators, Alexander Moskowski, called Einstein’s lecture a “philosopher’s siren.” When Einstein speaks, his animated face reminds one somewhat of the sphinx. He is a man of great vitality and appealing personality. Some friends and admirers learned that he had decided to build a summer house with his wife and family. They offered him a princely gift of land. But Einstein shook his head. “No,” he said; “I could accept a gift from a community. I would not accept such a gift from an individual. Every gift we accept is a tie. Sometimes,” he added with Talmudic wisdom, “we do not store the most things one gets for nothing.”

His Attic Retreat

Although the most sought-after scientist of the world, Einstein absolutely refuses to capitalize on his reputation. He laughed when he was asked to indorse an American cigarette. This was the name for his name. There would have paid the expense of his summer house. Knowing that fame has set apart from his family, he feels that he must preserve at all costs the integrity of his soul. He escapes the interviewer by every possible device. He even writes letters even from celebrities, unanswered. But he never ignores even the smallest note from a friend. He turned down an offer to exploit his theories and his life in a book for popular consumption. “I refuse,” he said again and again, “to make money out of my science. My laurel is not for sale like so many bales of cotton.”

It is generally known that Professor Einstein is not merely an expert in the upper regions of higher mathematics but that he takes a special delight in the practical solution of technical problems, such as, for instance, the unsolved problems for several years of the Swiss patent office. It is through his work of this type that Einstein has built his fortune which enables him to build a house for himself without relying upon the munificence of the city of Berlin.

Einstein is acquainted with the mathematical and technical problems which are submitted to him in the solitude of his attic on the top floor of the old house in the Shape Haidlerstrasse, where he lives. He furnished the little attic exclusively with the rather primitive furniture which he has been using for years with his first savings.

I expected to see queer utensils and rare books, rare volumes only. I should not have been surprised if his den had resembled the laboratory of a medieval magician. I was disappointed. Einstein does not emulate Doctor Faust. There are a few books, also a few pictures. Paraday, Maxwell, Newton, and a little of the more modern circles nor triangles. Einstein’s only instrument is the head. He needs no books. His brain is his library.

From his desk Einstein sees only roofs—an ocean of roofs—and the sky. Here is he alone with his speculations. He can think like, from head to head, the theories which have revolutionized modern science. Here no human interference impedes the flight of his thoughts. Even his wife does not enter this holy of holies without trespass.

Albert Einstein does not bury himself in his studies uninterrupted. He is not a mollycoddle physically. He loves aquatic sports. His favorite toy is a sailboat with all modern technical improvements, in which he enjoys himself on the lakes and rivers near his country place, Caputh. A towel wrapped fantastically around his head, he looks more like a pirate than like a professor of a great university. Battling with the wind, he forgets relativity and the fourth dimension. When the spray glistens in the silver of his hair and the sun strokes his cherubic features, his thoughts are far from curved space time.

Our Intellectual Democracy

A speculative thinker, a practical engine, a sportsman and an artist, Einstein comes close to the Greek ideal of harmonious development. When he neither sails his boat nor permits his mind to meander through fourth-dimensional space, Einstein enjoys himself with his violin. While he waited at the door of his apartment, it seemed to me that I heard strains of electric music. Perhaps it was Einstein playing. When I entered, he was wrapping up his violin for the night like a mother putting to bed.

Professor Einstein looks more like a musician than like a mathematician. “If,” he confessed to me, with a smile that makes dictionary meanings most elusive, “I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.”

“Perhaps,” I remarked, “if you had chosen to become a musician you would have outshone Richard Strauss and Schönberg. Perhaps you would have given us the music of the spheres or a fourth-dimensional music.”

Einstein gazed dreamily—was it into the far corners of the room, or was it into space—that space which his investigations have robbed of infinity? “I cannot tell,” he replied, “if I would have done any creative work of importance in music, but I do know that I get most joy in life out of my violin.” As a matter of fact, Einstein’s taste in music is severely classical. Even Wagner is to him unattractive music. He adores Mozart and Bach. He even prefers their work to the architectural music of Beethoven.

President Hindenburg hardly ever appears in public, because he is immediately recognized wherever he goes. For this reason, Professor Einstein refuses all invitations to the more popular restaurants. Although his wife finds it tiresome to seek isolation, he is a sociable being. He loves quiet chats over his dinner table with friends. Gerhart Hauptmann and Professor Schrödinger are his best friends. Little. Modern fiction does not seduce him. Even in science he limits himself largely to his special field. “Reading is a certain age diverts the mind too much from its creation pursuits. Any way I can use my own brain and much and use my own brain too little falls into lazy habits of thinking, just as the man who spends too much time in the theater is tempted to living vicariously instead of living his own life.”

In his own field of thought Einstein follows every development with keen interest. He has the gift of reading at a glance a whole page of equations. Einstein can master a whole new system of mathematics in half an hour. “Who,” I asked him, “are your greatest contemporaries?”

“I cannot reply to this question,” Einstein answered, his eyes twinkling humorously, “because I cannot even discuss intelligently the men who labor in my own field without writing a book.”

“Our time,” he added, “is Gothic in its spirit. Unlike the Renaissance, it is not dominated by a few outstanding geniuses. The twentieth century has established the democracy of the intellect. In the past the republic of art was shared. Not many men who take an equaly important part in the intellectual movements of our age. It is the epoch more than the individual that is important. There is no one dominant personality like Galileo or Newton. Even in the nineteenth century there were still a few giants who outtopped all others. Today the general level is much higher than ever before in the life of the world, but there are few men whose stature immediately sets them apart from the rest.”

“Whom do you consider the most conspicuous worker in your own field?”

The Contemporaries

“It is not fair,” Einstein replied, “to single out individuals. In Germany, I consider Schrödinger and Heisenberg as being of supreme importance.”

“Schrödinger?” I said. “What has he done?”

“Schrödinger has discovered the mathematical formula for the fact that all life moves in waves.”

“Is there any other?”

“Heisenberg is a sovereign mathematician who has formulated a new definition of mathematical magnitudes. Then there is, of course, Flaxen, the exponent of the quantum theory.”

“I did not ask Einstein to explain the quantum theory. I know that it is even more difficult to grasp than relativity. Would you say that Eddington is your most brilliant interlocutor?”

“Eddington,” Einstein replied, “is a great mathematician, but his supreme achievement is his discovery of the physical constitution of the stars.”

“Is there?” I asked modestly, “anyone in America whose importance is commensurate with that of the men you have just discussed?”

“De Broglie,” Einstein replied quietly, “more than anywhere else, the individual is lost in the achievements of the many. America is beginning to be the world of scientific investigation. American scholarship is both patient and inspiring. The Americans show us an unfailing desire for science, which is the very opposite of the conventional European view of your country. Too many of us look upon Americans as dollar chasers. This is a cruel lie, even if it is reiterated thoughtlessly by the Americans themselves. It is not true that..."
THE SATURDAY EVENING POST
October 26, 1925

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We Can Do What We Wish, But...

"Do you blame the Kaiser for the downfall of Germany?"

"The Kaiser," Einstein replied, "meant well. He often had the right instincts. His intentions were frequently more inspired than the labored reasons of his Foreign Office. Unfortunately, the Kaiser was always surrounded by poor advisers."

"It seems to me," I interjected, "that there were two parties in Germany. One blamed the Kaiser for the German defeat; the other attempts to saddle the responsibility upon the Jews."

"Both," Einstein remarked, "are largely guiltless. The German debacle was due to the fact that the German people, especially the upper classes, failed to produce men of character, strong enough to take hold of the reins of government and to tell the truth to the Kaiser."

"It was partly," Einstein added somewhat hesitatingly, "the fault of Bismarck. Bismarck's philosophy of government was wrong. Besides, there was no one to succeed to the giant. Like many men of genius, he was too jealous to permit any other man to walk in his footsteps. In fact, it is doubtful if any other man could have followed the tortuous path of Bismarckian politics."

"In a sense," he added, "we can hold no one responsible. As a determinist, I do not believe in free will. The Jews believe in free will. They believe that man shapes his own life."

"Don't you believe that man is a free agent at least in a limited sense?"

Einstein smiled ingratiatingly. "I believe with Schopenhauer: We can do what we wish, but we can only wish what we must. Practically, I am, nevertheless, committed to act as if man of the will existed. If I wish to live in a civilized community, I must act as if man is a responsible being."

"I know that philosophically a murderer is not responsible for his crime; nevertheless, I must protect myself from unpleasant contacts. I may consider him guilty, but I prefer not to take him with.""You do mean to say that you did not choose your own career, but that your actions were determined by some power outside of yourself?"

The Danger of Too Much Analysis

"My own career was undoubtedly determined, not by my own will but by various factors over which I have no control—primarily those internal jealousies and ambition which swell with the growth of a career. It is, I think, that I regard the East as a political and ecclesiastical union. There be two political orders, and it seems to me that the fact that the human will is not free."

"Don't you deliberately ignore all psychological factors in human development? What, for instance," I asked, "is your attitude toward the subconscious? According to Freud, psychic events are registered indelibly in our nether mind and make our lives."

"Whereas materialistic historians and philosophers neglect psychic realities, Freud is inclined to overstate their importance. He is not a psychoanalyst, and it seems to me that his analysis is not a scientific one."

"Then you do not believe in psychoanalysis?"

"I am not," Einstein modestly replied, "able to venture a judgment on so important a phase of modern thought. However, it seems to me that psychoanalysis is not always salutary. It may not always be helpful to delve into the subconscious. The machinery of our legs is controlled by a hundred different muscles. Do you think it would be helpful to walk—all we know is that one of the muscles must be employed in locomotion and the order in which they work?"

"Perhaps," he added with the whimsical smile that sometimes lights up the somber pools of his eyes like a will-o'-the-wisp, "you remember the story of the toad and the centipede? The centipede was very proud of having one hundred legs. His neighbor, the toad, was very much depressed because he had only four. One day a diabolic inspiration prompted the toad to write a letter to the centipede as follows:"

"Honored Sir: Can you tell me which one of your hundred legs you first, when you transfer your distinguished body from one place to another, ask of you to order the other ninety-nine legs?"

"When the centipede received this letter he began to think. He tried first one leg, then the other. Finally he discovered that he was unable to move a single leg. He could no longer..."
The Standardization Peril

"How then," I said, "do you justify Jesus' parables?"

"I support Zionism," Professor Einstein replied, "in spite of the fact that I cannot see the practical results. We Jews have a common interest. This nationalism is no menace to other peoples. Zionism is too small to develop imperialistic designs."

"Then you do not believe in assimilation?"

"We Jews," Einstein replied, "have been too adaptable. We have been too eager to seize every idiosyncrasy for the sake of social conformity?"

"Perhaps assimilation makes for greater happiness?"

"I do not think so," Einstein replied. "Even in modern civilization, the Jew is most happy if he remains a Jew."

"Do you believe in race as a substitute for nationalism?"

"Race, at least, constitutes a larger unit. Nevertheless, I do not believe in race at all."

"If race is a fraud. All modern people feel the solidarity of so many ethnic mixtures that no pure race remains."

"Do you," I remarked, "look upon religion as the tie which holds the children of Israel together?"

"I do not think," Einstein replied thoughtfully, "that religion is the most important element. We are held together rather by a body of tradition, handed down from father to son, which the child imbibes with his mother's milk. The atmosphere of our infancy predetermines our idiosyncrasies and predilections. When I met you, I knew I could talk to you without the inhibitions which make the contact with others so difficult. I looked upon yourself as a German nor as an American but as a Jew."

"I have written the autobiographies of the Jew with Paul Elrudge," I told him. "Nevertheless, it so happens that I am not a Jew. My parents and my grandparents are Noric from Protestant Germany."

"It is impossible," Professor Einstein observed, "for any Jew to live without the blood of his constitution. Ancestors multiply like the famous seed of corn. All Jew's blood is blood of Paul, Elrudge and the Jewish."

"I accept the historical existence of Jesus."

"Unquestionably. No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life. How different, for instance, is the impression we receive from an account of Jesus' miracles of sympathy antithetical to these? These are actions of the type of Jesus, but this other stories are curious and not sympathetic."

"Ludwig Lewinsohn, in one of his recent books, claims that many of the sayings of Jesus are not his, but rather the sayings of others."

"No man," Einstein replied, "can deny that the stories of Jesus existed, nor has his sayings been beautiful. Even if some of them have been said before, no one has expressed them so delightfully as he."

"Gilbert Chesterton told me that, according to a Catholic writer in a Dublin newspaper, the idea of relativity is confirmed by the cosmology of Thomas Aquinas."

"I have not," Einstein replied, "read all the works of Thomas Aquinas, but I am delighted if I have reached some conclusions as the comprehensive mind of that great Catholic scholar."

"Do you look upon yourself as a German or as an American?"

"It is quite possible," Einstein replied, "to be both. I look upon myself as a man, a writer than a scientist."

"Nevertheless, I do not believe in standardizing human beings. Standardization is a great peril which threatens American life in a way more important than other matters."

"You do not believe in standardizing human beings. Standardization is a great peril which threatens American life in a way more important than other matters."

Mrs. Einstein on Guard

Einstein rose and excused himself. It was nearly midnight. We had been talking for nearly three hours.

"My husband," Mrs. Einstein remarked, "does not attend to important matters, but there is no reason why you should go. Will you not stay here and talk to me?"

We talked and talked. A little while later I saw the figure of Einstein, wrapped in a bathrobe, on his way to his daily ablutions. He smiled at me with the same droll smile which had captivated me from the first. "He is so childlike!" I exclaimed. "The sage in his bathrobe! The touch of common humanity in no way detracted from his glory."

Mrs. Einstein's eyes followed her husband adoringly when he vanished, and again when he reappeared from his bath. She adjusted herself to his habit with a tact that is rare in wives of great men. Mrs. Einstein's eyes followed her husband adoringly when he vanished, and again when he reappeared from his bath. She adjusted herself to his habit with a tact that is rare in wives of great men. After a few moments, I was astonished when she told me that Einstein does not clink to his coat tails. When he wishes to be alone, she completely eliminates herself from his world. She spares him all her domestic contacts and prevents the serenity of his mind with the devotion of a vestal fire. It is impossible that with a less-sacrificing one, Einstein would not have made the discoveries which link his name with the immortals. Thus love, that moves the sun and all the stars, sustains in its lonely path the genius of Albert Einstein.

The Measles of Mankind

"I believe in intuitions and inspirations. I sometimes feel that I am right, do not know that I am. When two expressions of scientists, financed by the Royal Academy, went forth to test my theory of relativity, I was convinced that their conclusions would tally with my hypothesis. I was not surprised when the eclipse of May 29, 1919, confirmed my intuitions. It has been a great joy to me."

"I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge limits, imagination encircles the world."

"To what extent are you influenced by Christianity?"

"As a child, I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene."

"Have you read Emile Ludwig's book on Jesus?"

"Emile Ludwig's Jesus," Einstein replied, "is shallow. Jesus is too colloquial for the pen of phraseologists, too profound for man can dispose of Christianity with a bon mot."

"You accept the historical existence of Jesus?"

"Unquestionably. No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life. How different, for instance, is the impression we receive from an account of legendary characters of antiquity like Theseus. Theseus and other heroes of his type lack the humanistic vitalities of Jesus and the Then the others how do you leap forward?"