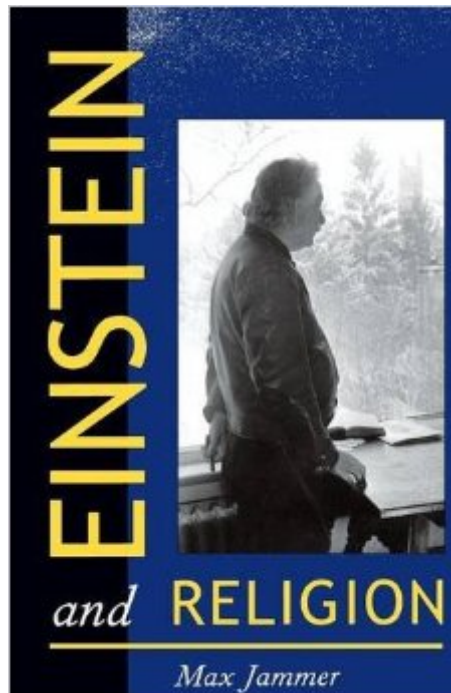


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Einstein And Religion: Physics And Theology



Synopsis

The philosophy of religion and the quest for spiritual truth preoccupied Albert Einstein--so much that it has been said "one might suspect he was a disguised theologian." Nevertheless, the literature on the life and work of Einstein, extensive as it is, does not provide an adequate account of his religious conception and sentiments. Only fragmentarily known, Einstein's ideas about religion have been often distorted both by atheists and by religious groups eager to claim him as one of their own. But what exactly was Einstein's religious credo? In this fascinating book, the distinguished physicist and philosopher Max Jammer offers an unbiased and well-documented answer to this question. The book begins with a discussion of Einstein's childhood religious education and the religious atmosphere--or its absence--among his family and friends. It then reconstructs, step by step, the intellectual development that led Einstein to the conceptions of a cosmic religion and an impersonal God, akin to "the God of Spinoza." Jammer explores Einstein's writings and lectures on religion and its role in society, and how far they have been accepted by the general public and by professional theologians like Paul Tillich or Frederick Ferré. He also analyzes the precise meaning of Einstein's famous dictum "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind," and why this statement can serve as an epitome of Einstein's philosophy of religion. The last chapter deals with the controversial question of whether Einstein's scientific work, and in particular his theory of relativity, has theologically significant implications, a problem important for those who are interested in the relation between science and religion. Both thought-provoking and engaging, this book aims to introduce readers, without proselytizing, to Einstein's religion.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book because the title intrigued me. Like so many people, I had assumed Einstein had been an atheist. I have to admit to little previous knowledge of the man beyond his theory of relativity and a few charming stories about his eccentricities, many probably apocryphal. This book certainly provided a nice introduction to the man as human being, intellectual, and philosopher. One of the most impressive facets of Einstein's life made obvious in Professor Jammer's work was the impact the physicist's pronouncements, even on subjects outside of his professional expertise, had upon the public in general. It was apparent from some of his personal correspondence and from news articles in response to his papers on science and religion that the general public held the man in considerable esteem. There seemed an almost awed reverence for his intellect to the extent that his personal position on a topic as emotional and as arbitrarily individual as religion could assume an almost scientific finality, eliciting the commendations of those who agreed and an almost knee jerk response from those who disagreed. Few remained without an opinion. So potent were Einstein's mere personal, albeit well schooled, philosophical opinions that they could elicit outright attack from those who felt their cherished beliefs were under siege. A theologian as eminent as Dr. Fulton Sheen (later Bishop Sheen) attacked his position on the existence of a personal god as the "sheerest kind of stupidity and nonsense." While a private individual wrote to him suggesting he "take your crazy, fallacious theory of evolution [sic] and go back to Germany where you came from, or stop trying to break down the faith of a people who gave you a welcome...."

By some accounts Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was the greatest theoretical physicist of the twentieth century, if not of all time. Max Jammer, Professor of Physics Emeritus and former Rector at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, has written an eminently readable account of Einstein's thoughts on religion, a subject that he insists has been ignored by the over 400 books on Einstein published in the last several decades. Einstein renounced accusations that he was an atheist, and railed against the intolerance of those whom he called "the fanatical atheists." In his three long chapters Jammer portrays Einstein as "undogmatic and yet profoundly religious." In his first chapter Jammer treats the role of religion in Einstein's private life. Born to what he described as "entirely irreligious Jewish parents," Einstein attended a Catholic primary school where like all students he received religious instruction. From the influences of nature and music he developed pronounced religious feelings quite early, although by age twelve he became estranged from institutional religion (although not from religion as he would define it) through reading some popular scientific books. His first wife, Mileva Maric, was Greek Orthodox, and his last wishes were to be cremated rather than to be

buried in any religious tradition. Einstein was decidedly irreligious in the sense that he rejected any and all institutional affiliations, never attended worship services or prayed, rejected all dogmatic theology (eg, miracles, the afterlife or prayer), did not believe that God was in any sense personal, and was a strict determinist.

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