

949 Albert Einstein's Cosmic Religion (*this is an edited version of my blog 949*)

Albert Einstein didn't believe in a traditional God, but by his own admission was very religious, and his religion is truly "cosmic". When researching Einstein's God Letter (blog 946) I came across a 1985 article by Eugene Mallove: *Einstein's Intoxication With the God of the Cosmos*, in the Washington Post: Because Albert Einstein, the humble and intensely private seeker of truth, was so reluctant to broadcast his views, few know him as the God-intoxicated man he was. His writings reveal an intensely religious person. Einstein's God was neither the personal God of Western religions nor did his theology match religions of the Orient; he had a "cosmic religion", a "rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that in comparison, all thinking of human beings is utterly insignificant." Writing in a 1931 essay *The World as I See It*: "I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes its creatures, or has a will of the kind we experience in ourselves." "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science." It was the experience of mystery that engendered religion, "a knowledge of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds - it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity; in this sense I am a deeply religious man." Einstein's scientific career started at age 5 when his father showed him a pocket compass. Einstein later remembered wondering what invisible force could make the needle always point in the same direction. He went on to unify electromagnetism and mechanics within a consistent framework. By 1905 Einstein had published his theory of Special Relativity; his 1916 General Theory of Relativity described gravity's origin in the curvature of space and time by matter. He spent the rest of his life in an attempt to unify the other known forces of nature with gravity. The revelations of his theories no doubt strengthened Einstein's belief in the paramount importance of comprehending the natural order. He made statements about this, which, taken out of context, might be mistaken for more conventional religious beliefs, e.g. "I want to know how God created this world ... I want to know His thoughts." Einstein's God was the Universe itself, not an external "grand puppeteer." And he had no doubt that there was a Universe, a deep, super-personal reality. He wrote in 1941, "a person who is religiously enlightened appears to me to be one who has, to the best of his ability, liberated himself from the fetters of his selfish desires and is preoccupied with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations to which he clings because of their super-personal value." The New York Times Magazine of Nov. 9, 1930 featured an article by him, "Religion and Science." In it he discussed his "cosmic religion" and its relation to science and other varieties of religious experience. "I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings." Baruch Spinoza had said, "God has a body - the world of matter; angels might be hallucinations; the soul might be life itself and the Old Testament did not affirm an afterlife; the philosopher knows God and nature are one being." Einstein's legacy must include not only his physical theories, but his cosmic religion - little known and little shared, until perhaps another age.