

953 Albert Einstein's 'Weltbild' (this is an edited version of my blog 953)

Here is a book I read in one session: Einstein's *The World as I see it* (Mein Weltbild). I have recently occupied myself with thoughts about this extraordinary man ... I featured his God Letter (blog 943) and his Cosmic Religion (blog 949). This little book is a collection of essays and letters he wrote in the years 1922 to 1934, a period when he lived in Germany (he emigrated to the USA in 1933, the year Hitler came to power); in 1933 Einstein made his famous declaration, "as long as I have any choice, I will stay only in a country where political liberty, toleration and equality of all citizens before the law are the rule". Albert Einstein, as everybody knows, was a pre-eminent scientist of the twentieth century. However, what many people are not aware of is that he also was an eminent humanist and a champion of the rights of man; and - I may add - a prolific writer of articles, essays and letters. So this book focuses not on his scientific achievements, but rather his humanism; Einstein writes about topics like the meaning of life, good & evil, religion & science, pacifism and the issues around Palestine. One of the reasons I am so enamored of Einstein is this statement: "My passionate sense of social justice and social responsibility has always contrasted oddly with my pronounced freedom from the need for direct contact with other human beings and human communities. I gang my own gait and have never belonged to my country, my home, my friends ... with my whole heart; in the face of all these ties I have never lost an obstinate sense of detachment, of the need for solitude, a feeling which increases with the years." Hear, hear! Furthermore, "A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear and punishment and hope of reward after death. It is therefore easy to see why the Churches have always fought science and persecuted its devotees. On the other hand, I maintain cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest incitement to scientific research." And "There is nothing divine about morality, it is a purely human affair." But to me the most endearing of Einstein's qualities is his pacifism. "This topic brings me to that worst outcrop of the herd nature, the military system, which I abhor. That a man can take pleasure in marching in formation to the strains of a band is enough to make me despise him. He has only been given his big brain by mistake; a backbone was all he needed. This plague-spot of civilization ought to be abolished with all possible speed. Heroism by order, senseless violence and all the pestilent nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism - how I hate them! War seems to me a mean, contemptible thing: I would rather be hacked in pieces than take part in such an abominable business." He then makes a point dear to me, "Anybody who really wants to abolish war must resolutely declare himself in favour of his own country's resigning a portion of its sovereignty in favour of international institutions: He must be ready to make his own country amenable, in case of a dispute, to the award of an international court. He must in the most uncompromising fashion support disarmament all round, which is actually envisaged in the unfortunate Treaty of Versailles; unless military and aggressively patriotic education is abolished, we can hope for no progress." I could not agree more. I have an essay UNITED NATIONS where I quote the Australian statesman Gough Whitlam's call for *The Parliament of Man, The Federation of the World*.