

How should humanity steer the future? An interview with Einstein in Heaven

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We are proud to present here the recent interview we had with Albert Einstein, TIME magazine's Man of The Century, the well-known physicist, pacifist, social critic and undeserved butt of mad-scientist jokes.

The interview came about in this way: our reporter was surfing the web casually reading the news, worrying about the state of the world and marvelling at the latest gizmos and technological marvels. Look at 3D printing - wow! It will be wonderful to manufacture one's own household goods or make sculptures and toys, even shoes that fit perfectly - right there on the desktop! Oh no! Someone has 3D-printed a working gun. What could come next, 3D printed bombs of ever-increasing sophistication? Humanity seems to be at a crossroads. One road leads to prosperity and peace: basic physical needs will be satisfied for all, while the flowering of communication between people and nations would foster understanding and a creative will to deal with common problems such as hunger, the increasing scarcity of drinking water, pollution, climate change and issues such as sustainable energy.

The other road would lead to unprecedented global disaster. If left unsolved, these problems, added to economic inequality, terrorism, and religious conflicts, could escalate out of hand into global war. And if atom bombs are ever used it would be catastrophic for humanity for generations to come; assuming any living creatures even survive, that is. What a pity Albert Einstein was not with us to share his wisdom and experience. He had firsthand knowledge of, was intimately engaged with, and spoke out about three of the core issues that trouble humanity today: the danger of nuclear war, inequality between the rich and the poor, and the Israel/Palestine conflict that has now spawned many wars and poisoned relations between East and West.

Our reporter kept thinking about Einstein - he was not just a great physicist but a pacifist and a social activist who criticised the capitalist system of his time for concentrating wealth in the hands of a privileged few, who then acquire political power and systematically control the information media to bend the nation to their interests and values, while eventually leaving just the shell of democracy to beguile the poor duped *hoi polloi*. He was also a vehemently outspoken critic of racism a couple of decades before the civil rights movement in the U.S. got started. His view on Palestine was that it should become a homeland for Jews, but one shared equitably with the Arabs, with resources and administrative authority also shared. He did not favour a Jewish state exercising political and military authority.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our reporter moused and clicked and stumbled onto the Foundational Questions Institute websiteⁱⁱⁱ. By then the brandy he was sipping started to take effect. The pretty graphics on the website's homepage with its cosmic circle began to swirl around and seemed to form a wormhole in space-time. Our reporter was sucked in, plummeting for the longest time, the pixellated

walls of the tunnel zooming past like in an 80's SciFi movie. He finally reached a place of calm and light. It was Heaven! He asked the angel on reception duty for Einstein and was ushered to where the great physicist was reclining, mouthing an empty pipe. Nearby was a cloud-shaped sign that said "NO SMOKING IN HEAVEN - if you want to smoke go to Hell" displayed in a rapidly changing number of languages. Einstein was playing craps using four-dimensional dice, tesseracts^{iv}, with an Exalted Personage. Nearby an angelic orchestra accompanied Mozart playing his heavenly (that too, but it was actually composed in heaven) *Piano Concerto Number 125*.

Reporter: Er excuse me sir an online physics community the Foundational Questions Institute fqXi is running a contest for essays dealing with "How Should Humanity Steer the Future?"

Einstein: Eh? Online? Oh you mean that newfangled personal telex-television system? Amazing. And that fqXi I have heard of it - open to a mixed bunch of excellent academics, inspired amateurs and plain cranks and bumblers. One contributor had the chutzpah to ramble on about the "disservice Einstein has done physics in creating Special Relativity"^v and demanded to "Fix Physics!"^{vi} without three of my key contributions. The photon is not a particle?! What a dumbkauf!

Reporter: But sir Earth is in trouble.

Exalted Personage (mumbling to Himself): Hmm...I should not have made that apple look too enticing to Eve!

Einstein: Er, steer the future? Is the future a donkey or a flock of sheep? And whom would you presume to place at the helm?

Reporter: Ah yes, I recall your saying that humanity has an infinite capacity for stupidity.

Einstein: And in any case the future is in time, an element of spacetime - and that is dependent on the observer in the frame of reference.

Reporter: And if that observer has a limitless capacity for stupidity...

Einstein: Either way, for humanity the frame of reference is the Earth, and they should have their feet planted firmly in it, look around them and do what's right. Everyone knows what that is - there is no rocket science involved - and they go on doing the opposite. Anyway why should physicists be asking this question? They know the implications of the Second Law^{vii}. Things always unravel of their own accord and it takes a constant effort to bring order to chaos. Chaos always seems to win out. Notably in the form of war. World peace is preached from every pulpit and the stages of all the beauty contests, but all humankind ever does is fight, fight, fight. God knows - excuse me Sir

its just the expression - I tried to preach pacifism. But when that Hitler – talk about steering humanity - Jews, gypsies and all the other inferior non-Aryans to the ovens, there was no choice...he had to be stopped.

Reporter: Do you mean war is sometimes justified?

Einstein: In that one instance, what was the alternative? But war is still terrible, and it is in human nature to fight.

Reporter: Yet you as a pacifist struggled to find a way to prevent war, and had a public discourse with Freud about that^{viii ix}

Einstein: Alas that did not lead to a solution...

Reporter: Let me ask you, Sir, don't you have any feelings of responsibility or regret about your role in the present mess?

Einstein: Are you referring to the ignorant belief that I invented the Atom Bomb?

Reporter: Well, not exactly...

Einstein: They wouldn't let me near the project. The FBI said I was a subversive.

Reporter: I see. Could we go back to your famous $e=mc^2$?

Einstein: When I was scribbling my equations and $e=mc^2$ came out I could have had tears in my eyes it was so beautiful.

Exalted Personage: Yes but didn't Poincaré and others write the equation before you, and those Lorentz transformations look a lot like yours?^x

Einstein: Yes, Sir, they did but I honestly did not read Poincaré's paper..

Exalted Personage: Still...

Einstein : Well I should have added references to my Special Relativity paper, I suppose... I was young and enthusiastic and stuck in that patent office. Can you imagine sitting on those hard high stools all day? Anyway I did not dream the equation would translate into an Atom Bomb.

Reporter: But you did write that letter to Roosevelt?

Einstein: Ah of course. Leó Szilárd wrote it and I signed it ...we felt that if the Nazis succeeded in creating an atom bomb it would be the end. What if that madman Hitler used his V2 Rockets to throw them around?



"You know that those two sixes landed as a one and a three!"

Reporter: But now there are some 17,000 of those bombs stockpiled in the US, around Russia, North Korea, India, Pakistan, China, Britain, France and Israel.^{xi}

Einstein: OMG (I learned that from my Facebook friends). Getting rid of every last one should be the first priority. Who ordered those?

Reporter: Well, the Cold War...

Einstein: I know, I know...BTW all my papers are "now" – as you know there is no simultaneity in Relativity – archived in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; isn't that nice? They asked me to be Israel's first president but I refused – I did not want to be responsible for what some were doing. Imagine – the day after the Deir Yassin massacre by renegade Zionists, their associates asked me to endorse their cause! I sent them packing.^{xii}

Reporter: Now extremists in the Arab world and beyond are doing it, and America sends in its drones, and where does it end?

Einstein: (sadly) Newton's law "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Reporter: And it isn't just the bombs. There are now four or five hundred nuclear power plants all over the world. Despite Fukushima, where the worst nuclear accident in history took place and the contamination continues to leak out into the environment, the country's PM is going around to other countries to sell the technology and politicians are talking about moving on with the 'safe use of nuclear energy'.^{xiii}

Einstein: An insane oxymoron. I warned a long time ago that giving human beings this technology was the same as putting a sharp razor in the hands of a three-year-old. (with a despondent wave) Ach! (turning to the Exalted Personage) Isn't it your turn?

Reporter: But, Sir, can we go back to the original question - don't you have anything to say about the future? People feel that God Is Dead (looking at the Exalted Personage) It isn't me, Sir! I am just quoting TIME magazine!

Einstein: Ah yes, that bastion of truth and fairness. So? What's your point?

Reporter: So if they feel religion has failed them they need assurances. Who created them. When? Why? They turn to physics for answers. Big Bang, Multiple Universes, what is Dark Matter made of?

Einstein (pointing to the Exalted Personage): He told me about Dark Matter, but how is that going to help "humanity steer the future?"

Reporter: Well physicists are brainy people – shouldn't they have the answers?

Einstein: Physicists are just human (to the Exalted Personage) umm that's not fair! You know that those two sixes landed as a one and a three!

Reporter: Probably it's due to the uneven cloud surface.

Einstein: Probability again? Please don't remind me. Physicists today see probability everywhere. The mathematics works but its not reality - its just a gimmick- but some have used that as a basis to doubt everything! People go around with no absolute values of what's right and what's wrong.

Reporter: But it was you who said everything was relative?

Einstein: Nein! Nein!! I just dealt with the relative effects of motion on observers moving in different inertial frames in space and time. I never said "everything is relative!". How can a theory in physics apply to moral values ? The absence of an absolute spacetime frame of reference does not mean there are no absolute philosophical ethical standards for humanity.

Exalted Personage (to the Reporter): Well, there you have it. You have troubled my guest enough. Security! Please escort this fellow back where he came from.

Reporter (struggling with his escorts): But what shall I tell them? Humanity is drowning in a sea of trouble!

Shakespeare (passing through): Hey *I* wrote that! They should learn to swim... it is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.

Jesus and Mohammed cheerfully debating the question of drinking wine, also walk by and call out to the Reporter.

Jesus: Tell people to love and forgive one another, even their enemies. They are clever enough to figure out the rest!

Mohammed: Yes, and tell people not to wage wars in our names!

Exalted Personage: And for God's sake clean up my favorite planet!

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- x <http://physicsworld.com/cws/article/news/2011/aug/23/did-einstein-discover-e-equals-mc-squared> (Web: Feb 11, 2014)
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- xii Einstein's letter rejecting a request to support the Zionist Stern gang is reproduced here: <http://www.deiryassin.org/einstein.html> (Web: Feb 4, 2014)
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