

THE BASIS OF EINSTEIN'S APPEAL WITH THE LAY PUBLIC

The essence of this paper can be established by posing the following succinct question. Despite the fact that no *layman* comprehended his theories, why was Einstein's appeal with the lay public so substantial? Einstein himself was confounded by this very question. He himself once stated the following. "I never understood, why the theory of relativity with its concepts and problems so far removed from practical life should for so long have met with a lively, or indeed passionate, resonance among broad circles of the public...What could have produced this great and persistent psychological effect? I never yet heard a truly convincing answer to this question."¹ Prior to proceeding to answer this question, it would be most judicious to provide some examples to substantiate that Einstein did indeed enjoy an inordinate degree of popularity amongst the lay public subsequent to the experimental verification of his theory of gravity in 1919.

Some direct quotes from Einstein are as follows. "Ever since the announcement of the deflection of light a cult has been practiced with me, so that I feel like a graven image,"² There is also the following as it pertains to the publicity. It was "so bad that I can hardly breathe, let alone get down to sensible work."³ Some other facts to illustrate Einstein's mass appeal are as follows. At times, he would list his occupation as photographer's model.⁴ Children were named after him.⁵ The Einstein cigar appeared on the market.⁶ He was the recipient of an inordinate number of invitations to lecture in foreign countries.⁷ The London Palladium music hall asked him to name his own price for a three week engagement.⁸ Although he began publishing in 1905, his name did not appear in *The New York Times* until November 1919. From then until his death, not one year elapsed without his name being mentioned somewhere in that paper.⁹ Although it is possible to continue listing various facts to substantiate Einstein's mass appeal, the listed facts will suffice. The question is (once again) raised. What was the basis of this popularity when laymen did not comprehend his theories?

In order to formulate a preliminary answer to this query, one preliminary point must be established. In what *precise capacity* was Einstein viewed by the lay public? Did they view him as a great physicist, or did they view him in the capacity of an absolute genius? Although they probably viewed him in this dual capacity, it is predominantly the latter category which most appropriately conforms to the public's view of Einstein. With this stated, an analysis of Einstein's appeal can be implemented.

To begin, the following question will be posed. *What is the one human quality which causes society to advance?* It is the human intellect which is responsible for the *advancement* of society. In order to (superficially) illustrate the validity of this statement, consider, as some examples, man's physical activities, or even man's generosity to his fellow man (assuming such a quality actually exists). Will these qualities advance our society? Although they would be necessary for the maintenance of our society, they will not actually cause our society *to advance*. It is *only* intellectual achievements which will induce the advancement of society. However there would be an additional implication of phenomenal intellectual proficiency which was germane to Einstein's appeal. Namely, a phenomenal intellect which was capable of solving nature's mysteries should, in principle, be capable of solving other problems which had bearing on mankind.

To briefly illustrate the validity of the concept of intellectual achievements advancing our society, let us briefly scrutinize various developments from the history of

mankind which have culminated in the betterment of society. Some examples would be, the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution, the car, the phone, the airplane, the light bulb, the transistor, and the computer. The two revolutions stated and these other creations have advanced society to a considerable extent. What human quality was responsible for their development? The human quality responsible for them was *the intellect*. No athlete, artist, or philanthropist ever *advanced* mankind (despite the fact that their activities constitute valuable contributions to society).

Returning to Einstein, since he was viewed as one of the greatest geniuses of all time (if not *the* greatest genius), then on an unconscious level, there would have been the expectation that he would have *greatly* advanced our society and solved some of mankind's problems. Consequently, if Einstein was a foremost genius, then he would have been capable of achieving what was stated in the previous sentence. As a direct result of this, he was inordinately popular among the lay public despite the public's incomprehension of his theories.

Some readers may be of the view that there is an anomaly in this theory. Much of Einstein's work had very little practical effect on the common man's life. Furthermore, he did not solve any of mankind's problems. Consequently, his popularity should, at the very least, wane as the years elapsed. This fact does not necessarily invalidate this theory for the following reason. Mankind did not necessarily expect immediate practical benefits from this "towering intellect" immediately. They would have been prepared to wait prior to seeing the (practical) fruits of his mind. Furthermore, there are other facts which can be incorporated into this analysis to establish that the public's interest in Einstein *did* wane with time.

There are a few individuals who *completely* fulfilled society's "expectations" (even though these "expectations" were completely independent of intellectual development) and were adulated up to, and including, the point of their death. Namely, Houdini, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley. There is one primary reason why these individuals are being introduced in order to implement a comparison with the public's view of Einstein. Specifically, *the public's reaction upon their deaths*. When Houdini died, *thousands* of people lined the streets for his funeral procession. Similarly, when Lennon and Presley died, there was a palpable sense of loss due to the outpouring of grief from the general public. These individuals completely "fulfilled" society's expectations by providing a level of entertainment that was incomparable to the magnitude of entertainment previously provided by others. Consequently, society felt an inordinate degree of loss upon their deaths. However, since Einstein did not fulfill society's (unconscious) expectations, there was no palpable sense of loss upon his death. In other words, if, hypothetically speaking, the public had known in advance that Einstein's work (or intellect) would have no bearing on their individual lives, I don't think he would have experienced the enormity of popularity that he experienced among the lay public. Therefore, the anomaly that was outlined in the previous paragraph does not invalidate this theory.

Working within the parameters of this theory being fundamentally accurate, an interesting point is raised as it pertains to the unconscious mind. (The following element has been briefly "touched" upon in my papers *The Origins of Religion* and *The Psychological Basis of a Belief in the Afterlife*. However, those papers predominantly

deal with our ancient ancestors. In this paper, contemporary man is being more closely analyzed.) All human beings are different and react to various circumstances in diverse ways. However, this paper illustrates that it is possible for there to be a "collective unconscious". What this specifically entails is that masses of people can potentially experience the same reactions on an unconscious level. Previous concepts of the unconscious mind dictated that everybody must be analyzed on an individualistic basis. Although that precept remains fundamentally valid, this paper illustrates that under sporadic circumstances, the general public could be analyzed "en masse".

REFERENCES

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3. Ronald W.Clark *Einstein the Life and Times* p.295
4. Albrecht Fosling op.cit. p.457
5. Ronald W.Clark op.cit. p.308
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Abraham Pais *Einstein Lived Here* p.146