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**Collected and edited by Alice Calaprice: The Expanded Quotable Einstein**

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# THE EXPANDED Quotable Einstein

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By Alice Calaprice

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## Chapter One

### *On Einstein Himself*

A happy man is too satisfied with the present to think too much about the future.

Written at age seventeen (September 18, 1896) for a school French essay entitled "My Future Plans."  
*CPAE*, Vol. 1, Doc. 22

\* Strenuous intellectual work and the study of God's Nature are the angels that will lead me through all the troubles of this life with consolation, strength, and uncompromising rigor.

To Pauline Winteler, mother of Einstein's girlfriend Marie, ca. May 1897. *CPAE*, Vol. 1, Doc. 34

I decided the following about our future: I will look for a position *immediately*, no matter how humble it is. My scientific goals and my personal vanity will not prevent me from accepting even the most subordinate

position.

To future wife Mileva Maric, July 7, 1901, while having difficulty finding his first job. *CPAE*, Vol. 1, Doc. 114

I have come to know the mutability of all human relationships and have learned to insulate myself against both heat and cold so that a temperature balance is fairly well assured.

To Heinrich Zangger, March 10, 1917. *CPAE*, Vol. 8, Doc. 309

\* I am by heritage a Jew, by citizenship a Swiss, and by makeup a human being, and *only* a human being, without any special attachment to any state or national entity whatsoever.

To Alfred Kneser, June 7, 1918. *CPAE*, Vol. 8, Doc. 560

\* I was originally supposed to become an engineer, but the thought of having to expend my creative energy on things that make practical everyday life even more refined, with a loathsome capital gain as the goal, was unbearable to me.

To Heinrich Zangger, ca. August 11, 1918. *CPAE*, Vol. 8, Doc. 597

Here is yet another application of the principle of relativity ...: today I am described in Germany as a "German savant" and in England as a "Swiss Jew." Should it ever be my fate to be represented as a *bête noire*, I should, on the contrary, become a "Swiss Jew" for the Germans and a "German savant" for the English.

To *The Times* (London), 1919. Quoted in Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein: Creator and Rebel*, 139; also quoted in Frank, *Einstein: His Life and Times*, 144

\* I have not yet eaten enough of the Tree of Knowledge, though in my profession I am obliged to feed on it regularly.

To Max Born, November 9, 1919. In Born, *Born-Einstein Letters*, 16

With fame I become more and more stupid, which of course is a very common phenomenon.

To Heinrich Zangger, December 1919. Einstein Archive 39-726; also quoted in Dukas and Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein, the Human Side*, 8

\* My father's ashes lie in Milan. I buried my mother here [Berlin] only a few days ago. My children are in Switzerland.... I myself have journeyed everywhere continuously-a stranger everywhere.... A person like me is at home anywhere with those near and dear to him.

To Max Born, March 3, 1920. In Born, *Born-Einstein Letters*, 26

Let me tell you what I look like: pale face, long hair, and a tiny start of a paunch. In addition, an awkward gait, and a cigar in the mouth ... and a pen in pocket or hand. But crooked legs and warts he does not have, and so is quite handsome-also there's no hair on his hands, as is so often the case with ugly men. So it really is a pity that you didn't see me.

Postcard to eight-year-old cousin Elisabeth Ney, September 1920. Einstein Archive 36-525; also quoted in Dukas and Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein, the Human Side*, 44

Just as with the man in the fairy tale who turned whatever he touched into gold, with me everything is turned into newspaper clamor.

To Max Born, September 9, 1920. Einstein Archive 8-151

Personally, I experience the greatest degree of pleasure in having contact with works of art. They furnish me with happy feelings of an intensity that I cannot derive from other sources.

1920. In Moszkowski, *Conversations with Einstein*, 184

It strikes me as unfair, and even in bad taste, to select a few individuals for boundless admiration, attributing superhuman powers of mind and character to them. This has been my fate, and the contrast between the popular assessment of my powers and achievements and the reality is simply grotesque.

From an interview, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 1921; reprinted in *Ideas and Opinions*, 3-7

If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German and France will declare that I am a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a German and Germany will declare that I am a Jew.

From an address to the French Philosophical Society at the Sorbonne, April 6, 1922. See also French press clipping, April 7, 1922, Einstein Archive 36-378; and *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 8, 1922, Einstein Archive 79-535

\* When a blind beetle crawls over the surface of a curved branch, it doesn't notice that the track it has covered is indeed curved. I was lucky enough to notice what the beetle didn't notice.

In answer to his son Eduard's question about why he is so famous, 1922. Quoted in Max Flückiger, *Albert Einstein in Bern* (Bern: Haupt, 1961); also quoted in *Grüning, Ein Haus für Albert Einstein*, 498

\* Now I am sitting peacefully in Holland after being told that certain people in Germany have it in for me as a "Jewish saint." In Stuttgart there was even a poster in which I appeared in first place among the richest Jews.

To sons Hans Albert and Eduard, November 24, 1923

\* [I] must seek in the stars that which was denied [to me] on earth.

To his secretary Bette Neumann, ca. 1923-1924, with whom he had fallen in love, upon ending his relationship with her. See Pais, *Subtle Is the Lord*, 320, and Fölsing, *Albert Einstein*, 548

\* Of all the communities available to us, there is not one I would want to devote myself to except for the society of the true seekers, which has very few living members at any one time.

To Max and Hedwig Born, April 29, 1924. In Born, *Born-Einstein Letters*, 82

\* Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.

Originally in "What Life Means to Einstein,"

*Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929; reprinted in "On Science," in *Cosmic Religion*, 97.

To punish me for my contempt of authority, Fate has made me an authority myself.

Aphorism for a friend, September 18, 1930.  
Einstein Archive 36-598; also quoted in Hoffmann, *Albert Einstein: Creator and Rebel*, 24

I am an artist's model.

To a fellow train passenger, October 31, 1930, who asked him his occupation, reflecting Einstein's feeling that he was constantly posing for sculptures and paintings. Einstein Archive 21-006; also quoted in *ibid.*, 4

I have never looked upon ease and happiness as ends in themselves-such an ethical basis I call the ideal of a pigsty.... The ideals which have guided my way, and time after time have given me the energy to face life, have been Kindness, Beauty, and Truth.

From "What I Believe," *Forum and Century* 84 (1930), 193-194; reprinted in *Ideas and Opinions*, 8-11

I am truly a "lone traveler" and have never belonged to my country, my home, my friends, or

even my immediate family, with my whole heart. In the face of all this, I have never lost a sense of distance and the need for solitude.

Ibid. Sometimes translated as "I am a lone wolf" and "I am a horse for a single harness."

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.

Ibid.

It is an irony of fate that I myself have been the recipient of excessive admiration and reverence from my fellow-beings, through no fault or merit of my own.

Ibid.

Professor Einstein begs you to treat your publications for the time being as if he were already dead.

Written on Einstein's behalf by his secretary, Helen Dukas, March 1931, after he was besieged by one manuscript too many. Einstein Archive 46-487

Although I am a typical loner in my daily life, my awareness of belonging to the invisible community

of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice has prevented me from feelings of isolation.

From "My Credo," for the German League for Human Rights, 1932. Quoted in Leach, *Living Philosophies*, 3

Although I try to be universal in thought, I am European by instinct and inclination.

*Daily Express* (London), September 11, 1933.  
Quoted in Holton, *Advancement of Science*, 126

People flatter me so long as I don't get in their way. [At other times] they immediately turn to abuse and calumny in defense of their interests.

To a pacifist friend. Published in *Mein Weltbild* (1934), 54; reprinted in *Ideas and Opinions*, 110

\* To be called to account publicly for what *others* have said in your name, when you cannot defend yourself, is a sad situation indeed.

From "Interviewers," in *ibid.*, 40 and 15, respectively

\* My life is a simple thing that would interest no one. It is a known fact that I was born, and that is all that is necessary.

To Princeton High School reporter Henry Russo.

In *The Tower*, April 13, 1935

\* As a boy of twelve years making my acquaintance with elementary mathematics, I was thrilled in seeing that it was possible to find out truth by reasoning alone, without the help of any outside experience.... I became more and more convinced that even nature could be understood as a relatively simple mathematical structure.

Ibid.

I have acclimated extremely well here, live like a bear in its cave, and feel more at home than ever before in my eventful life. This bearlike quality has increased even more because of the death of my mate, who was more attached to other people than I am.

To Max Born, ca. early 1937, after the death of Einstein's wife, Elsa. In Born, **Born-Einstein Letters**, 128

I wouldn't want to live if I did not have my work.... In any case, it's good that I'm already old and personally don't have to count on a prolonged future.

To close friend Michele Besso, October 10, 1938, reflecting on Hitler's rise to power. Einstein Archive 7-376

\* I firmly believe that love [of a subject or hobby] is a better teacher than a sense of duty—at least for me.

Draft of a letter to Philipp Frank, 1940

Why is it that nobody understands me, yet everybody likes me?

From an interview, *New York Times*, March 12, 1944

\* I do not like to state an opinion on a matter unless I know the precise facts.

From an interview with Richard J. Lewis, *New York Times*, August 12, 1945, 29:3, on declining to comment on Germany's progress on the atom bomb

I never worry about the future. It comes soon enough.

Aphorism, 1945-46. Einstein Archive 36-570

I have to apologize to you that I am still among the living. There *will* be a remedy for this, however.

To a child, Tyffany Williams, in South Africa, August 25, 1946, after she expressed surprise in a letter that Einstein was still alive. Einstein Archive 42-612

\* What is essential in the life of a man of my kind is *what* he thinks and *how* he thinks, and not what he does or suffers.

Written in 1946 for "Autobiographical Notes," in Schilpp, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, 33

There have already been published by the bucketsful such brazen lies and utter fictions about me that I would long since have gone to my grave if I had allowed myself to pay attention to them.

To the writer Max Brod, February 22, 1949.  
Einstein Archive 34-066

My scientific work is motivated by an irresistible longing to understand the secrets of nature and by no other feelings. My love for justice and the striving to contribute toward the improvement of human conditions are quite independent from my scientific interests.

To F. Lentz, August 20, 1949, in answer to a letter asking Einstein about his scientific motivation.  
Einstein Archive 58-418

\* I'm doing just fine, considering that I have triumphantly survived Nazism and two wives.

To Jakob Ehrat, May 12, 1952

It is a strange thing to be so widely known, yet to be so lonely. But it is a fact that this kind of popularity ... is forcing its victim into a defensive position that leads to isolation.

To E. Marangoni, October 1, 1952. Einstein Archive 60-406

I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.

To Carl Seelig, his biographer, March 11, 1952. Einstein Archive 39-013. A similar sentiment was expressed in a letter to Hans Muehsam, March 4, 1953, Einstein Archive 38-424

All my life I have dealt with objective matters; hence I lack both the natural aptitude and the experience to deal properly with people and to carry out official functions.

Statement to Abba Eban, Israeli ambassador to the United States, November 18, 1952, turning down the presidency of Israel after Chaim Weizmann's death. Einstein Archive 28-943

In the past it never occurred to me that every casual remark of mine would be snatched up and recorded. Otherwise I would have crept further into my shell.

To Carl Seelig, October 25, 1953. Einstein Archive  
39-053

All manner of fable is being attached to my personality,  
and there is no end to the number of ingeniously  
devised tales. All the more do I appreciate  
and respect what is truly sincere.

To Queen Elizabeth of Belgium, March 28, 1954.  
Einstein Archive 32-410

I'm not the kind of snob or exhibitionist that you  
take me to be and furthermore have nothing of  
value to say of immediate concern, as you seem to  
assume.

In reply to a letter, May 1954, asking Einstein to  
send a message to a new museum in Chile, to be