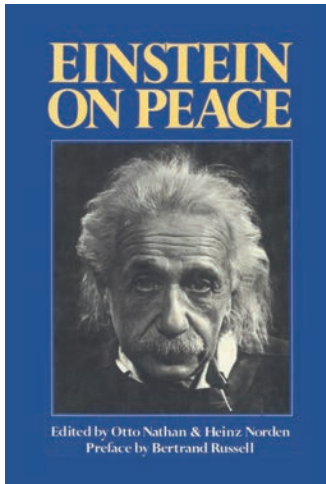


Einstein and Russell



Albert Einstein died 60 years ago, on 18 April 1955. His last public act was to endorse what became known as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, which urged the scientists of the world to work together to help prevent war with hydrogen bombs and ‘universal death’, in Russell’s telling phrase (see Spokesman 85). The Manifesto gave birth to the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which continue to this day. In September 1958, at Pugwash’s third conference, the Vienna Declaration was promulgated, which forms, as Professor Rotblat has said, the credo of the Pugwash Movement. Russell spoke in his capacity as President of Pugwash and chairman of the Continuing Committee. He recalled his grandfather’s speech at a Congress (also in Vienna) during the Crimean War in which he spoke in favour of peace, but was overruled.

More recently, in December 2014, Vienna hosted a landmark international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons with, for the first time, official representation from the United States and United Kingdom, nuclear-armed powers, together with many other non-nuclear states. A well-attended civil society conference, organised by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), also met in Vienna at the time. Examining the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is very much in the spirit of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto.

Einstein and Russell shared a mutual affection and regard, which shines through their exchanges over decades. Einstein was moved to verse when he contemplated Russell’s mistreatment at the City College

of New York, where a witch-hunt had been instituted against the philosopher in 1940. Nicole Morris offers a translation of this little poem alongside Einstein's original German. These follow Russell's own considered tribute to Albert Einstein, written in 1960 as the Preface to Einstein on Peace (edited by Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden).

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Russell wrote:

It is a very good thing that Einstein's letters and writings on other than scientific subjects are being collected and printed. Einstein was not only the ablest man of science of his generation, he was also a wise man, which is something different. If statesmen had listened to him, the course of human events would have been less disastrous than it has been. It is the custom among those who are called 'practical' men to condemn any man capable of a wide survey as a visionary: no man is thought worthy of a voice in politics unless he ignores or does not know nine-tenths of the most important relevant facts. On this ground, no one listened to Einstein. In Germany, during Hitler's reign, the theory of relativity was condemned as a Jewish trick of which the sole purpose was to bewilder Aryans. It seems that Hitler and Himmler could not understand it and rashly inferred that *no* Aryan could. In the United States, where he lived after Germany had rejected him, he received, as a scientist, all that great measure of honour which was his due; but, when he allowed himself to say anything about political matters, what he said was, by most people, considered highly undesirable.

I was among those who almost always agreed with him. He and I both opposed the First World War but considered the Second unavoidable. He and I were equally perturbed by the awful prospect of H-bomb warfare. We agreed to make a joint pronouncement on this subject in conjunction with many eminent men of science who were willing to co-operate. I drew up a statement and sent it to Einstein. Before getting an answer from him, while travelling by air from Rome to Paris, I learned of his death. On arrival in Paris, I found his letter agreeing to sign. This must have been one of the last acts of his life.

We met from time to time, but I did not see much of him except while I was living in Princeton in 1943. At that time I used to go to his house once a week to discuss various matters in the philosophy of science with him and Pauli and Gödel. Pauli and Gödel are both very eminent in their respective fields, but Einstein was, of course, outstanding even among the most eminent. I found these informal discussions very illuminating and

exceedingly valuable.

Einstein's attitude as regards the acceptance or rejection of a scientific theory was very different from that recommended by Francis Bacon. One must, of course, know the facts. But a theory, if it is to have any value, must not emerge from careful collection and collation of individual observations. It must emerge, rather, as sudden imaginative insight, like that of a poet or composer. When Eddington undertook to verify Einstein's predictions by observations of the eclipse in 1919, Einstein was much less interested in the result than Eddington was. I was reminded of a story about a female admirer of Whistler who told him that she had seen Battersea Bridge looking just as it did in one of his pictures, to which Whistler replied, 'Ah, Nature's coming on!' One felt that Einstein thought the solar system was 'coming on' when it decided to confirm his predictions. It is difficult to turn Einstein's method into a set of textbook maxims for the guidance of students. The recipe would have read as follows: 'First acquire a transcendent genius and an all-embracing imagination, then learn your subject, and then wait for illumination.' It is the first part of this recipe that offers difficulties.

Einstein was an extraordinarily satisfactory human being. In spite of his genius and his fame, he always behaved with complete simplicity and never seemed to be claiming any superiority. His work and his violin brought him, I believe, a considerable measure of happiness, but his wide sympathies and his concern with the destiny of mankind prevented him from acquiring an undue measure of serenity. I never saw in him any trace, however faint, of vanity or envy, which are vices to which even the greatest men, such as Newton or Leibniz, are prone.

Einstein, throughout his life, cared for the individual and for individual liberty. He showed, himself, all the courage that his circumstances demanded and called upon others, often without success, to show equal courage. He had seen individual freedom lost in Germany with the advent of the Nazis, and he was quickly perceptive of any danger of a like disaster in other countries. He had small respect for the Big Battalions, and his attitude to governments was very like that of the Hebrew prophets. He was not only a great scientist but a great man, a man whom it is good to have known and consoling to contemplate.

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Einstein on Bertrand Russell in 1940

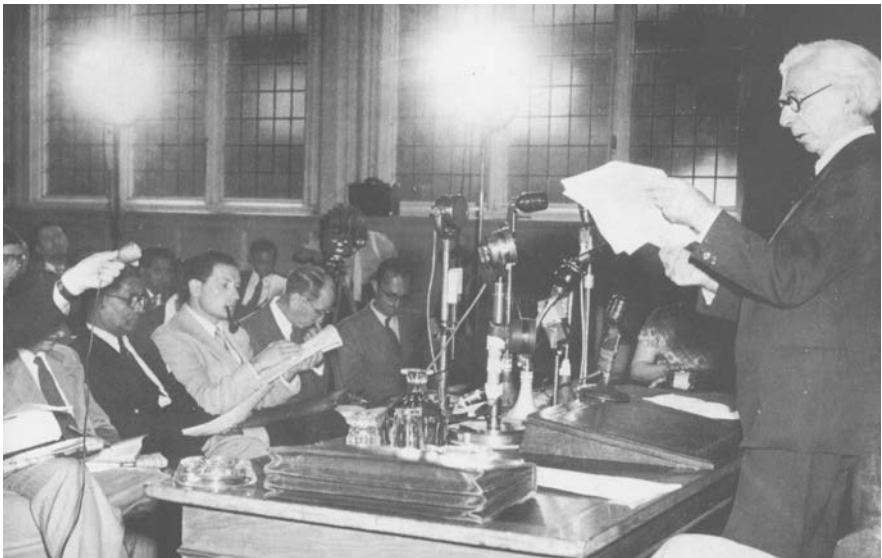
Es wiederholt sich immer wieder
In dieser Welt so fein und bieder
Der Pfaff den Poebel alarmiert
Der Genius wird executiert.

A never-ending cycle
In this world so fine and staid
The priest rouses the rabble
And the genius is slayed.

And in 1946

Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* makes for delectable reading matter. I do not know at which people will marvel more: the crispness and originality of this great thinker, or his sensitivity to distant places and foreign mentalities. I consider it a boon that our generation, so prosaic and yet so brutal, can boast of such a wise, honest, brave and – what's more – witty man. It is an educational work in the highest sense, which stands above the quarrels of parties and opinions.

Translations by Nicole Morris



Russell launches the joint Appeal, July 1955, after Einstein had died