

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

EINSTEIN'S GOD



Santa Barbara beach, 1933

One evening in Berlin, Einstein and his wife were at a dinner party when a guest expressed a belief in astrology. Einstein ridiculed the notion as pure superstition. Another guest stepped in and similarly disparaged religion. Belief in God, he insisted, was likewise a superstition.

At this point the host tried to silence him by invoking the fact that even Einstein harbored religious beliefs.

"It isn't possible!" the skeptical guest said, turn-

ing to Einstein to ask if he was, in fact, religious.

"Yes, you can call it that," Einstein replied calmly. "Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible laws and connections, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion. To that extent I am, in fact, religious."¹

As a child, Einstein had gone through an ecstatic religious phase, then rebelled against it. For the next three decades, he tended not to pronounce much on the topic. But around the time he turned 50, he began to articulate more clearly — in various essays, interviews, and letters — his deepening appreciation of his Jewish heritage and, somewhat separately, his belief in God, albeit a rather impersonal, deistic concept of God.

There were probably many reasons for this, in addition to the natural propensity toward reflections about the eternal that can occur at age 50. The kinship he felt with fellow Jews due to their continued oppression reawakened some of his religious sentiments. But mainly, his beliefs seemed to arise from the sense of awe and transcendent order that he discovered through his scientific work.

Whether embracing the beauty of his gravitational field equations or rejecting the uncertainty in quantum mechanics, he displayed a profound faith in the orderliness of the universe. This served as a basis for his scientific outlook — and also his religious outlook. "The highest satisfaction of a scientific person," he wrote in 1929, is to come to the realization "that God Himself could not have arranged these connections any other way than