



Einstein: The Life and Times

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Einstein: The Life and Times Ronald William Clark THE DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY

Albert Einstein was far more than the physicist who confidently claimed that space and time were not what they seemed to be. Middle age saw the man who described himself as "*pas très Juif*" blossoming out as a standard-bearer for Zionism. He passionately indulged in pacifism, and as passionately rejected it when Hitler began to show, unbelievably to most reasonable men, that he really meant what he said about the Jews and the master race. Throughout it all, Einstein stuck to the job at hand, as determined to squeeze the next fact out of Nature as a businessman intent on turning millions into billions.

Ronald W. Clark has drawn an extraordinarily moving portrait of a man who was one of the great tragic figures of our time. It is the picture of a man who while still young abandoned much of life with the passion of the convinced monastic, and who was thrust back into it by the unobliging pressures of history. And in science the greatest physicist of three centuries, or possibly of them all, found himself after middle age pushed by the advance of quantum mechanics into a backwater, "a genuine old museum-piece," as he himself wrote.

The life of Albert Einstein has been brought into brilliant focus by Ronald W. Clark's deeply significant and compassionate biography. Mr. Clark has drawn on a immense amount of new material. But he has never lost sight of the man who was one of the greatest contradictions of out times: the German who hated the Germans; the pacifist who changed his mind; the ambivalent Zionist who was asked to head the Israeli state; the physicist who believed in God.

"A fascinating description of the career and substance of a genius." -- *Christian Science Monitor*

"A nonscientific reader will gain a real and imaginative impression of Einsteinian physicsA remarkable feat. Read the book. It is well worth it." -- *C.P. Snow, Life*

"An adventure of the intellect, challenging and absorbing." -- *Vancouver Sun*

"Applauded for its precision as well as its perception." -- *Chicago Tribune*

"Clark not only brings Einstein alive, but also the scientific and intellectual issues." -- *Los Angeles Times*

"Encyclopedic! Vivid and readable." -- *New York Times Book Review*

Einstein: The Life and Times Details

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Bryan Jones says

I didn't particularly care for Clark's writing style. It tended to be longwinded and was filled with too much innuendo. While such a comment could simply be a matter of preference, I do have another, more concrete criticism. After Einstein becomes famous in the late 1910's, Clark moves away from a strict chronological biography. Rather he breaks up the subsequent chapters by Einstein's three major undertakings - physics, Zionism, and pacifism. By doing this, the book jumps around and becomes hard to follow.

All that said, Clark's biography is comprehensive and well-researched. Morevoer, I think he does an adequate job of putting into layman's terms the basics of Einstein's theories which is no small task.

All in all, I have to believe that there is another Einstein biography out there that is just a cut above this one.

JBedient says

I can't believe all the reviews about this book being mediocre - I got to take two minutes out of my day to stand tall for my man RWC!

If you're thinking of reading a book about Einstein I wholeheartedly recommend this one.

I really enjoyed this thing back when I was a young man in my early twenties trying to understand the world. I savored it and read it chapter by chapter, day by day, on the bus to and from this death-dealing manual labor job I despised - it saved my brain! Clark's writing style is more than adequate as biographers go, and he covers a lot of bases: Einstein's childhood and development into an unspectacular young man; his theories and the subsequent backlashes and accolades they received; his relationship to the world as a celebrated genius; his death and legacy - you get the whole shebang. If anybody knows of a more accurate and all-encompassing bio of Einstein please let me know.

I just found this the other day at a yard sale for a dime! Going to see if it really was as good as I remembered it. A part of me doesn't want to reread it for fear of ruining that magical feeling it gave me back on that bus...

Alright, finally finished it... not as life changing or earth shattering as it was when I was 22 but still packs a wallop with its scope and breath on Einstein. Still highly recommended...

Ronald Lett says

This was a wonderful gift from a good friend.

Unfortunately, the author is trapped in the hero worship of their time period, and several times has let this lead them astray into unmerited defamation of supporting characters around Einstein, and a completely

unwarranted character assassination of Mileva Mari?. If you seek an accurate source for the history of relativity and the objective contributions of the scientists of this period, I would disrecommend this book as a resource.

I have added correctional notes in the margins for any unsuspecting future readers that may not have multiple sources on the people of this time period to compare; one of the only times vandalizing a book has improved its potentially damagingly erroneous content.

Dan Bimrose says

Seemed to be an honest and thorough recounting of Einstein's life. Fascinating life. He was a mountain of a man.

Erik Olsen says

Not a fast read, but fascinating. I have my Grandmother's 1971 copy in hardback which I read many years ago. Need to re-read.

Joshy Mathew says

Einstein's life given to the minute detail. This is really a classic. Those who are the upcoming scientists must read this to have a value embedded research and utility. I have benefitted a lot as an academician and a man from this book.

????? says

Albert Einstein, a prodigy who has many a scientific theories and discoveries to his name. In this biography, Ronald W Clark puts light on the various aspects of Einstein's life such as - Einstein's dislike of student life in Germany, his life as a Patent worker, his life in Berlin, his life as a Professor, his life in Switzerland, his days of rise to fame with the Theory Of Relativity and Photo Electric Effect, his days of devotion toward Zionism and Pacifism, his dislike for Hitler, his contribution in the discovery of atom bomb, his role in the political turmoil leading to the bombing of Japan, his caricatures on Hitler in order to return to Germany, his liking for music, his undying passion for Physics, his family life, his desire to lead a peaceful life, $E = mc^2$, his stay in United States, General Theory Of Relativity, his interactions with Niels Bohr and Max Planck, and many more routines of Einstein.

This biography of Einstein is a must read for every Science lover. An excellent elaboration on his early life acts as a prologue to the illustrious career of Einstein. The continuity and the sequenced portrayal of the events in Einstein's life leave the reader spell bound. His enormous level of focus helped him solve complex Physics problems. Ronald W Clark has done justice as a biographer of Albert Einstein. Clark presents to the readers an altogether fabulous set of hand written letters by various personalities, who played a key role in Einstein's life. An excellent, in detail read. A high five for this one.

Relstuart says

Einstein was a remarkable man. I was aware of this and knew his reputation as a brilliant scientist who postulated the theory of relativity.

But there was more to the man than this. There are three main things in his life he dedicated himself to. Science was his greatest love, followed by pacifism, and Zionism.

WWI deeply affected Einstein. He saw his brother scientists turn their minds to creating better ways to kill their fellowmen and it disturbed him. After WWI he spent a great deal of time and effort arguing for mutual disarmament and made speeches encouraging the men in Europe to refuse to serve in the military and if drafted to refuse to serve. There was a lot of support for this type of thinking in the years between the world wars and there was a great number of people who could not fathom another world war or even major military conflict ever taking place in Europe.

Einstein made speeches, lent his name to groups, and wrote in support of a pacifistic viewpoint. After the rise of Hitler, the expelling of Jews from professional engagement in education and science in Germany, and the rise of military might in Germany Einstein changed his mind and believed that military service was appropriate and that Hitler and Germany had to be stopped using violence.

Most people know that he was somehow involved with the atomic bomb. He did not work directly on the project but he acted to initiate the project by sending a letter to president Roosevelt about the research that was going on that could produce a prodigious explosion bigger than any so far achieved. He was concerned that the Germany military might develop it first and gain a disturbing advantage over the allies. While he probably knew from conversations with scientists involved in the actual development of the bomb, and contributed some brain power to solving some issues, he did not participate directly nor was he given security clearance to do so.

In the years after WWII he stated he regretted sending the letter.

The persecution of the Jews in Germany drove Einstein to embrace his Jewish roots. One fact I found interesting was that as Jews were being driven from their educational posts in Germany books written by Jews, even those who had lived their whole lives in Germany and never learned Hebrew had their books marked "translated from Hebrew" so that the German public would know that the ideas in the book were probably rubbish based on the race of the author.

Even before the war Einstein worked with other Jews in establishing Jewish higher education in what was to become Israel. He helped raise funds for the Jewish people there and later, for displaced German Jewish academics as they were being driven out of Germany.

At the passing of the first prime minister of Israel his name was suggested as a suitable replacement. He declined citing his age and health as good reasons for his action.

Einstein never stopped working on his scientific research. While his most earthmoving theory was postulated in his earlier age he continued thinking and proposing ideas about how the universe worked until he passed

away.

You cannot understand Einstein unless you understand that a major part of what made him tick was his belief in the importance of the empowering of the individual when it comes to self education and actualization. Einstein had a terrible time in school at a younger age. The highly regimented classroom and typical German instruction methods were something he resented and spoke against for the rest of his life. His ability to come up with the theory of relativity was related to his ability to think outside the box of conventional ways of looking at the universe. When it comes to discipline modern American schools are nothing like German schools. However, I wonder if he would disapprove of the cookie cutter approach we take to education? I suspect not.

A note on religion, it seems Einstein is quoted by everyone who is for, against, or unsure whether God exists. He commented on an accusation that he was a godless communist once and advised that he believed in God, a view he repeated on many occasions, but later clarified that he did not have any sort of relationship with a personal God. He was a theist but it does not appear that there is evidence that would support an argument that he was a devout Christian, Catholic, Jew, or practicing member of another religion. I suppose because people view him as such a brilliant person that his opinion lends credibility to what you think about the existence of God if it agrees with what you believe.

I felt the author did a good job of not stooping to hagiography, did a decent job of explaining the theory of relativity in a way that allowed me to understand what he was talking about, and the significant effect that the theory had on the world of science. I felt like I understood to a decent degree the man behind the accomplishments and some of the things that made him tick. Overall this book was lengthy, seemed to cover the subject well, and seemed to maintain a good tone relating to the main character, and drew from many sources to create a picture of a brilliant life.

Alan Merchant says

red-shifted

Prepare to feel time slow down if you approach this black hole of a book.

The thesis of Einstein: The Life and Times is that Albert Einstein was both the preeminent physicist of our age and a saint.

The first claim - Einstein's genius - is manifestly true. Einstein single-handedly established four of the foundational principles of modern physics (statistical mechanics, space-time equivalence, photon quantization, and the covariant formulation of gravitation). But Ronald Clark fails to make the case for genius, preferring in every case to document contemporary opinions rather than share the scientific excitement of the discoveries themselves. In this sense, Clark was intellectually incompetent to be Einstein's biographer.

The second claim, sainthood, is manifestly false. Einstein is consistently described by his friends as inconsiderate, socially inept, and self-centered. His life after 1920 was a scientific wasteland - because of his self-imposed isolation. Outside of physics, his opinions were inconsistent, shallow, and readily manipulated. This biographer, with his frequent Socialist and anti-American embellishments, is just another in a long line of Einstein manipulators.

In spite of Clark's incessant emphasis on Einstein as *sui generis*, the most consistent theme that emerges from the documentation of his life is the saintliness of other scientists. His fellow physicists deserve credit for recognizing, promulgating, proving, developing, and rewarding Einstein's ideas - and protecting him personally - in spite of the impediments of his personality. It's no wonder that Einstein could maintain such rose-colored pacifism when he lived off of the emotional and financial largess of the international scientific community.

Clif says

What a joy to find a masterful writer. Ronald Clark brings both the subject of his book and the period within which Einstein lived to life. I'm excited to see that he has also written bios of Bertrand Russell and Ben Franklin.

As any good biographer should, Clark is after all aspects of Einstein's character and is not out to confirm the man's place on a pedestal. Einstein himself hated the public adulation he received, though he treasured the high estimation with which his fellow physicists held him.

A man obsessed, Einstein never took a break from his life-long thought project. Even his family took a distant second place. His home life was one of constant attendance by a doting wife who took care of the tiniest details so that he could be left free to sit, ponder and make notations.

As Clark so deftly portrays, Einstein was a man of contrasts - a German who repudiated Germany, yet whose last words in life were in German, a pacifist who urged work on atomic fission for a weapon, a Zionist who was uneasy at the idea of a Jewish nation with the imperative of power, and a thinker who was able to see space and time in a new way yet could never accept the statistical basis of the quantum world.

The period from his birth in 1879 until his death in the 1955 saw the end of empires and, thanks to him, a revolution in the way the world is understood by science. Clark's explanation of special and general relativity is crystal clear. The reader can easily understand the impact of Einstein's discovery because it is so lucidly placed within the scientific thinking that came before and after it.

A wonderful read

Pooja Kashyap says

One of the best biographies, I have read so far, although I had to re-read some of Einstein's concepts to make myself clear for the next move. The progression from one part to the other is like moving a higher level with respect to Einstein's journey and getting to know more of him at personal level.

Before reading this book, I have always wondered had Einstein not discovered the theory of relativity, what would have happened to physics. But the answer wasn't too difficult to find, there would have been an ether theory revolving around the same principle. And this would have come to the fore somewhere around the mid twentieth century unlike the beginning of the century, which is the present case.

Brownian motion and theory of relativity were in rudimentary in quantum mechanics Einstein helped them

reach shore.

At the same time, there are invaluable and breakthrough contributions like 'photon paper' and the 'duality of quantum mechanical wave-particle'. His contemporaries Bohr, Schrodinger, DeBroglie and Heisenberg together might have reached the latter's conclusion but (I'm sure) not alone.

Einstein's life since the very beginning, his hatred towards Germany, his work in Switzerland and then academics in Germany again, his family leniency towards religions & spirituality, his love for physics, his journey during world wars & inclination towards Zionism in later years of life is all majestically ingrained by the author.

In addition, Clark did a fantastic job in explaining the most complex theories in physics for laypersons like myself, his involvement in politics and his role in the invention of atomic bomb.

Prior to his death in late 1954, Einstein summarized his feelings about his role in the creation of the atomic bomb: "I made one great mistake in my life... when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that atom bombs be made; but there was some justification - the danger that the Germans would make them."

Unlike the books that I have read so far, this is the second one that is not a fast read, first being Dawkins' The God Delusion.

Overall, an exemplary work done by Ronald W. Clark in introducing us to the life and world of man with the most phenomenal intellect Albert Einstein.

Tom says

This work on Einstein's life is, to say the least, exhaustive. But don't mistake that for a criticism. All the major periods in Einstein's life are intricately detailed, and it has obviously been researched extensively. Certain parts do tend to drag on and come off as a bit drab, but on the whole this is an immensely readable account. I understand that this is first and foremost a biography, but my main criticism is that it was almost *too* biographical. What I mean is that while the details of his life are of course important, I felt that his scientific and philosophical ideas were only discussed superficially. Being that those ideas were so important to his life and career, I think it would have been welcome and appropriate to give them a more penetrating treatment. Nevertheless, I really enjoyed reading this work and learned quite a few interesting tidbits about the great scientist I hadn't yet known.

Sallie Dunn says

This biography of Einstein transformed him from a famous scientist to a real man who lived, breathed and followed his heart for me.

Brandon Davis says

A very thorough read.

Jim Townsend says

The "definitive biography" of one of the most famous scientists who ever lived is detailed and well-researched. Though a scientific genius and a nice man, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) had his prejudices, hated Germany, was the prototype of the "absent-minded professor" more comfortable with things than with people, and generally disdained anyone not in his inner circle (though he loved children). A very fair biography, exposing Einstein's faults and mistakes as well as lauding his brilliant mind and ethical principles.
