

# Chikuro Hiroike and his Contemporaries: Albert Einstein and the Moral Life

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This presentation examines Einstein from five perspectives: his ethical beliefs; his scientific collegiality; his relationship with quantum mechanics; his personal life; and his connection with Chikuro Hiroike.

Einstein's ethical principles, notably his pacifism, can be traced back to his early life. They were clearly expressed during the First World War and the 1920's, but did not survive the rise of Hitler intact. Indeed, by 1939, Einstein was advocating the development of the atomic bomb out of fear that Hitler would get there first.

Einstein was able to be far more consistent in his role as a member of the scientific community. His collegiality was truly remarkable, and two case studies – his relationships with Werner Heisenberg and Satyendra Nath Bose - illustrate his modesty, his good humor, and his generosity particularly clearly.

His unrelenting suspicions of quantum mechanics are well known, but why he so passionately believed that 'God does not play dice with the universe' is a complex problem. He saw himself as continuing the line of strict determinism that went back to Newton, but quantum mechanics also made him deeply uneasy because it blinded his imagination, his ability to visualize problems that found its clearest expression in the 'thought experiment'. At the deepest level, perhaps, by elevating randomness to a position of dominance, and thus undermining causality, its implications for a moral life in the age of Hitler were simply unacceptable.

His personal life, and especially his relationship with his first wife, reveals the most troubling aspects of his character. He was capable not just of being detached and aloof, but of actually behaving in ways that can only be describe as callous and cruel. The impact of this on others, and especially on his younger son, was sometimes devastating.

Einstein visited Japan for a month in late 1922, and admired much of what he saw. Although he never met Chikuro Hiroike, it is interesting to try to evaluate Einstein's life in the context of morality. While it can be said that, scientifically and ethically speaking, Einstein was one of the purest human beings who has ever existed, his ethics dealt with humanity in the abstract, and not with people in the flesh, which the fullest of human engagement that, for Hiroike, was essential for the practice of true benevolence.