

"It is a special blessing to belong among those who can and may devote their best energies to the contemplation and exploration of objective and timeless things. How happy and grateful I am for having been granted this blessing, which bestows upon one a large measure of independence from one's personal fate and from the attitude of one's contemporaries. Yet this independence must not inure us to the awareness of the duties that constantly bind us to the past, present and future of humankind at large.

Our situation on this earth seems strange. Every one of us appears here, involuntarily and uninvited, for a short stay, without knowing the why and the wherefore. In our daily lives we feel only that man is here for the sake of others, for those whom we love and for many other beings whose fate is connected with our own.

I am often troubled by the thought that my life is based to such a large extent on the work of my fellow human beings, and I am aware of my great indebtedness to them.

I do not believe in free will. Schopenhauer's words: 'Man can do what he wants, but he cannot will what he wills,' accompany me in all situations throughout my life and reconcile me with the actions of others, even if they are rather painful to me. This awareness of the lack of free will keeps me from taking myself and my fellow men too seriously as acting and deciding individuals, and from losing my temper.

I have never coveted affluence and luxury and even despise them a good deal. My passion for social justice has often brought me into conflict with people, as has my aversion to any obligation and dependence I did not regard as absolutely necessary.

[Part 2]

I have a high regard for the individual and an insuperable distaste for violence and fanaticism. All these motives have made me a passionate pacifist and antimilitarist. I am against any chauvinism, even in the guise of mere patriotism.

Privileges based on position and property have always seemed to me unjust and pernicious, as does any exaggerated personality cult. I am an adherent of the ideal of democracy, although I know well the weaknesses of the democratic form of government. Social equality and economic protection of the individual have always seemed to me the important communal aims of the state.

Although I am a typical loner in daily life, my consciousness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice keeps me from feeling isolated.

The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as of all serious endeavour in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all there is."

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely of Albert Einstein, written in dark ink.

Courtesy of the Albert Einstein Archives, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel