

April 18, 1993

When the Twain of Science and God Meet; Einstein's Faith

To the Editor:

"In Science We Trust" (Op-Ed, April 8) by Bryan Appleyard, which addresses the relationship of physics to God, makes reference to Albert Einstein in support of its thesis, even calling him "the godfather of this rhetoric." Mr. Appleyard states that "God, for Einstein, had a certain reality, a moral force." These views represent common, serious misconceptions about Einstein's religiosity or lack of it.

Einstein, in response to a query from a Colorado banker in 1927, wrote in German (translated in "Albert Einstein: The Human Side," edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, Princeton, N.J., 1979):

"I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on the creatures of His own creation. I cannot do this in spite of the fact that mechanistic causality has, to a certain extent, been placed in doubt by modern science.

"My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance -- but for us, not for God."

Or, as put more succinctly by Abraham Pais in his 1982 biography, "Subtle Is the Lord" (Oxford, England): "If he had a God, it was the God of Spinoza." RONALD F. FOX
Atlanta, April 8, 1993 The writer is a professor of physics at Georgia Institute of Technology.