

Einstein's Dreams Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Einstein's Dreams chronicles the dreams of Albert Einstein between April 14 and June 28, 1905, as he develops his theory of time as part of his theory of relativity. Each dream envisions a different world, with time behaving in a different way. The stories explore the relationships between people and time, an essential part of the human condition.

The story begins with Einstein in the patent office where he works, waiting for the typist who will type up his theory of time. Einstein has been dreaming about time every night. Einstein's dreams cast time in every conceivable form. He dreams that time is a circle, that time can flow backwards in isolated rivulets, and that time branches outward in parallel worlds.

In each alternate world with a different time, time affects how people live. People in one world choose to live regimented by mechanical time or by their body's fluid time. People in another world live on the mountaintops because time passes more slowly there. In yet another world, people take comfort in the rigid, constant nature of time. In the world where cause and effect aren't necessarily chronological, scientists suffer while artists thrive. In the world where time passes slowly, people fear change.

Einstein's dreams are intermittently broken up by interludes, which give Michele Besso's perspective of his friend Einstein, who is distant but brilliant. Einstein's dreams resume. Time is finite, scheduled to end in 1907. Time is sticky, and people become stuck at moments in their lives. Time brings order from chaos and confusion. Time is centered at a certain spot, where time stands still. In another dream, people do not remember the past. In the next dream, people's lives are governed by visions of the future. In yet another dream, people are obsessed with moving quickly to gain an advantage in time.

Einstein cannot share his dreams with his friend Besso. He dreams of a world where time travels backwards and people grow from old to young. Then, he dreams of a world where people only live one day. In the next dream, time travels at a different rate for each person. Then, Einstein dreams that people live forever. On June 10, Einstein dreams that time is a quality, instead of something to be measured.

Einstein dreams that there is no future and that time is a spatial dimension. He dreams that time stops and starts imperceptibly. He dreams of a world with only one magnificent clock that is worshipped around the world, and he dreams of a world where time is different in each city. Einstein dreams that everything is predetermined and that time echoes infinitely, making many copies of each moment. He dreams that the past is constantly changing and that time is a fleeting nightingale that the old constantly try to catch. Finally, Einstein finishes his theory of time, but instead of finding answers or becoming closer to God, Einstein feels empty once his theory is developed.



Prologue through 24 April, 1905

Prologue through 24 April, 1905 Summary

Einstein's Dreams chronicles the dreams of Albert Einstein between April 14 and June 28, 1905, as he develops his theory of time as part of his theory of relativity. Each dream envisions a different world, with time behaving in a different way. The stories explore the relationships between people and time, an essential part of the human condition.

In June 1905, Albert Einstein has come to the patent office where he works, with his recently finished theory of time. As dawn breaks, the light slowly reveals the hidden contents of the office. He waits for the typist to arrive. The patent files are filled with useful inventions. For months, Einstein has been dreaming about time, and it has driven him to focus his research on how time works. He is exhausted, but now he is done. He has realized how time works in our world, although his dreams might be true in other worlds.

On April 14, Einstein dreams that time is a circle. Everything that happens in the world will happen again, in exactly the same way, as time moves through the cycle. This cycle goes on infinitely, without changing, but most people do not realize that all their actions are predetermined and have happened before. They imagine that every first is still a first.

A man lies dying of cancer in the hospital, and his wife says her last goodbye while his two children look on, fearful. She does not know that this will all happen again, from her birth, through her schooling, through her art career, through her marriage, and finally to this moment again. All the good things will happen again, but all the bad things will happen again, too. Every moment of viciousness will recur, and have recurred an infinite number of times. Only a few unhappy people know that time moves in cycles. They are haunted by the feeling that nothing can change. All their bad luck and all their wrong actions are fated to happen again and again. They cannot undo anything that has been done. They cannot sleep at night, and their wailing can be heard all night.

On April 16, Einstein dreams that time flows forward like water and can be sent off track by a random interference. When this happens, things and people can accidentally be sent back in time. People who are misplaced in time are afraid to affect anything, for fear they might change time. A woman from the future is hiding in the shadows on Kramgasse, afraid to stir the dirt. Peter Klausen is on his way to the pharmacy and may be late if he stops to brush dirt off his clothes. He might not get his wife's medicine, and his wife might not go to Lake Geneva. Then, she will fail to accidentally meet Catherine d'Épinay, who she then cannot introduce to her son Richard, preventing Catherine and Richard from marrying, having a son named Friedrich, the father of Hans Klausen, without whom there will be no European Union in 1979.



The woman from the future is afraid of changing this story, or hundreds more stories like it. She dares not do anything but wait for time to return her to the correct place. Time travelers live in fear, only seeing events without participating in them. Without the ability to act, time travelers have lost their humanity and envy those who are in their proper time and can act without fear of changing the future.

On April 19, in Einstein's dream, a man stands on his balcony looking out over Berne. He is wondering about a woman who lives in Fribourg. Should he go see her? He decides that she could make him unhappy because she is controlling and critical. He throws himself into work and friends instead. Three years later, he meets another woman. She is nice, and they live quietly together into old age. In a parallel world, the same man decides that he must go to Fribourg to see the woman. He knows that she can be emotional and critical, but she is also clever and beautiful. He goes and makes love to her, and then he moves to Fribourg to be with her. They fight and make love with passion. His life is full of joyous torment.

In yet another parallel world, the same man decides that he must go to Fribourg to see the woman, although she is emotional and critical, because of her beauty and cleverness. However, when he sees her, they do not make love. They have tea and talk. Then she leaves. He goes home feeling empty. All three worlds happen at the same time, because time has three dimensions, creating an infinite number of worlds. Some people say that this makes decisions meaningless, since all choices are made in some world. Others say that each decision is still important.

On April 24, Einstein dreams of a world with two kinds of time, mechanical time and body time. Machines and clocks move in a regular, unchanging time, but people live in a changing, soft time. Some people live only by their body's time, listening to their internal desires. Other people live only by mechanical time, regulating their lives by the movement of the clock. They look at the body as another machine.

Both worlds exist side by side along the Aare River. Two brothers meet on the bridge, and though they have not seen each other in a year it is like they've never separated. At the same time, the lights of apartments turn out in response to the cathedral bell sounding ten o'clock. People can live by body time or mechanical time, but not by both.

Prologue through 24 April, 1905 Analysis

Einstein's Dreams takes place inside the mind of Albert Einstein, as he is developing a theory of time for his groundbreaking theory of relativity. Each world that Einstein imagines in his dream operates on a different kind of time, but the time in each world reveals an aspect of human nature. The dreams are framed by scenes of Albert Einstein in his life as a patent clerk. The tone is pensive and musing. In the prologue, the writer examines the scene of the city of Berne awakening as much as he draws a portrait of Einstein. The focus is on humanity in general, and so most of the characters are fleeting, unnamed sketches.



In the world where time is a circle, all things in life are repeated in an infinite cosmic cycle. No decision can be revised or changed, and so every decision and moment is infinitely important. The past will always come back, and so it cannot simply be forgotten. This world emphasizes the idea that the present matters and that bad actions cannot simply be forgotten. In each moment, it is important to make the right choice.

In the world where time travelers are sent back in time by random cosmic events, the important human issue is fear. The time travelers are afraid of the consequences of their actions. They do nothing, for fear of taking a misstep. They envy the people who are in their own time, who don't think about the future but merely live their lives. These fearful people, unable to move or act, are paralyzed by the idea of their actions' consequences. In a world where time only moves forward, a similar type of paralysis can be found, much as there are also people (like the people of the circular-time world) horrified by the idea that they can never take back the past or change their world.

In the world where many choices can be made, people can view the world in two different ways. Either they can think that choices are meaningless because every choice will happen, or they can think that every choice is important because it is real and consequential in each world. The way that people interpret the world around them reflects their own nature. The same is true in the world where there is mechanical time and body time. People can think of everything in terms of machines and regimentation, valuing self-control, or people can think of everything in terms of desires and whims, acting on their instincts. Should decisions be feared, controlled, and weighed carefully, or should a person just leap forward in life regardless of consequences? The dichotomy seems to be a division between the id and ego, the emotional and intellectual.



26 April, 1905 through Interlude

26 April, 1905 through Interlude Summary

In Einstein's dream on April 26, everyone lives in the mountains because time goes more slowly the farther you are from the center of the Earth. Although the effect is small, people live as far from the center of the Earth as possible, to extend their time. The higher up a house is, the more prestigious and valuable it is. People in lower altitudes envy those higher up. People in high altitudes look down on those below. When people must leave their high-up houses, they hurry through their chores, afraid to age a little bit faster with the change of altitude.

A few people don't care about saving a little bit of time by staying high up. They happily swim, walk, and play wherever they like, not keeping track of the time. People have forgotten why being high up is better, but they teach their children to value high altitudes and carefully keep to the heights, even though it is cold and uncomfortable on the mountaintops. In keeping with the thin air, some people eat almost nothing, becoming thin, bony, and old-looking.

On April 28, Einstein dreams of a world full of clocks, watches, and other instruments of time. Time is unyielding and equal for everyone. Every second is rigid and exact. On Kramgrasse at four minutes to three, the people of Berne come together and celebrate time in a carnival that lasts until precisely three o'clock. Some people see the exactness of time as evidence of God.

A woman who has worked for twenty years as a clerk has been fired by her boss. She supports her school-aged daughter and ill husband, and now she's out of a job. She tells a friend the story. The two women decide to have tea the next day at ten o'clock. The idea of the regular time moving forward toward the decided time cheers the woman who's lost her job. Time is dependable and absolute in an uncertain world.

In Einstein's dream on May 3, cause does not necessarily come before effect. A man is distraught because his friends suddenly stopped spending time with him, and he doesn't know why. A week later, he begins being obnoxious and insulting. Which is the cause, and which is the effect? The Zurich city council has made the sale of pistols illegal and cracked down on visitors and financial institutions. The military presence is increased. A month later, a crime spree erupts, including murder and theft. Which is the cause, and which is the effect?

A woman comes to a park every Sunday. One day, she is suddenly happy and excited. Days later, she falls in love with a young man. The effect seems to precede the cause. Scientists cannot make predictions, and so science makes no sense. Artists thrive in the random and retroactive world. Most people live for right now, without worrying about past and present.



On May 4, Einstein dreams about a Swiss couple and an English couple having dinner in the hotel in St. Moritz where they vacation every year during June. They discuss the weather and the races. One of the couples is an admiral and his wife is Josephine, who wears brocade in her hair. The couples discuss the food when it comes. The other woman suggests putting her head under the sheet, but the admiral's wife seems uncomfortable with the idea. The men go to the smoking room after dinner, and the women go outside. The admiral asks the other man about his children. They have grown a year's worth. Things change very slowly in this world, as time passes.

In the Interlude, the story returns to Albert Einstein, who is walking with his friend Besso. Einstein explains why he wants to understand time, but he doesn't discuss his dreams. Einstein will likely stay at Besso's through dinner, but he will be a poor companion, obsessed with his ideas and his own thoughts. Einstein says he wants to get close to The Old One through the study of time, and Besso understands. Besso wonders, though, whether Einstein can achieve his goals, both of understanding time and understanding God. Still, Einstein seems capable of anything.

Besso's brother is coming to visit, and Besso asks Einstein if he will be okay while Besso is spending time with his brother. Einstein, though, is caught up in his inner world and doesn't seem to mind a lack of companionship. Besso wonders about Einstein's desire to be close to God, since he is so distant from other people, including his wife Mileva.

26 April, 1905 through Interlude Analysis

In the dream where people find out that living in higher altitudes extends time, most people are concerned with planning and expending energy to eke out even the smallest advantage. They become so concerned with forcing small advantages out of the universe that they lose track of joy and pleasure, even looking old before their time when the original goal was to extend youth. Rigidity and planning seems the anathema of happiness.

However, rigidity also seems to offer comfort. In the world where time is absolute, this comfort seems akin to godliness and gives people a comforting support and framework that will always be stable. People crave stability and dependability, which absolute time gives them. The dream of May 3rd presents an opposite world. Instead of stability and dependability, time provides chaos and irrationality. Without the ability to connect cause and effect, the world is unknowable. People who embrace the emotional, artists, revel in this world. People who embrace the rational, scientists, suffer greatly.

The world of confused cause and effect also brings up the idea that causes and effects are intertwined and feed on each other in our world. If a man is obnoxious, his friends may leave him, but if a man's friends leave him, it may make him obnoxious. Is it really that easy to point out where the cycle begins? The relationship between authoritarianism and crime can be described similarly, as well as the relationship

between happiness and love. These relationships may seem straightforward at first glance, but in reality cause and effect are complex.

The dream of the world where things change slowly highlights people's natural resistance to change. Josephine seems uncomfortable even at the simple suggestion that she might sleep with her head under the covers. Her likes and dislikes don't change; she makes the same comments she makes every year. In a world without change, people become complacent and uncomfortable with any modification to their usual routine.

The interlude further explores the character of Einstein through the eyes of his best friend Besso. Einstein is a man who lives within himself, in his own private ideas and dreams. Besso knows he is a genius and doesn't understand how Einstein's mind works. Einstein is seeking a closeness to God, which is also a closeness to the understanding of human nature, through understanding time. The answers to humanity and to God come from within from Einstein, not from reaching outside himself.



8 May, 1905 through 15 May, 1905

8 May, 1905 through 15 May, 1905 Summary

In Einstein's dream of May 8, 1905, time is finite, and everyone knows that time ends on September 26, 1907. Schools close the prior year, and children are free to play. A month before the end, businesses and government shut down. People are free to talk and be with each other. A mother and daughter plan a trip together, to spend time together before the end. A man who hated his boss has made peace with the boss and with his unfaithful wife. Money has little value, and people are happy and free, spending time doing what they want.

A day before the end, everyone is happy, laughing and playing in the streets. People swim in the river and bathe naked in the fountain. Everyone is equal, since the world is ending for everyone. A woman plans to make love to a man she has wanted for years, although she is married to another. Only people regretful of their pasts seem worried, trying to rush to do good deeds to make up for the bad. A minute before the end, people gather together, hold hands, and wait. The light reflects through the world, off the flowers and off the Alps. In the stillness, the end rushes through the waiting people.

On May 10, Einstein dreams of a Berne divided into parts. One area is from the fifteenth century, and another is from the eighteenth. Another part is from the present. Each piece of the city is stuck in a different time. Time seems sticky. Just as areas of town become stuck, people also become stuck in time. A man is stuck in his school days, bragging about the trophies he won and the things he did. He has never moved forward and his present life is empty.

Another man, who was unable to tell his father he loved him, sits at an empty table set for two, stuck in the past. A woman writes letters to her son, imagining him in the past, but she does not acknowledge the reality of him in the present. She will not lend him the money he asks for and will not answer his letters, in which he begs to see her. She writes to him lovingly at an address no longer in use. Everyone is unhappy, stuck alone in one time.

On May 11, Einstein dreams of a world where time brings order. Things put themselves together instead of falling apart. Houses and businesses become clean instead of dirty as the day progresses. Randomness gives way to organization. Gardens, desks, calendars, and purses all organize themselves. Every spring, people become tired of order and begin to break and dirty everything. This riotous behavior continues until summer comes, bringing order again.

On the 14th of May, Einstein dreams of a world with a certain location where time stands still. As a person nears this location, time slows down. Time travels faster farther away from the center of time. Parents and lovers travel to the center of time to hold on



to their children or their lovers. Near the center of time, light reduces to almost nothing. When people leave the center of time, time travels more quickly.

To a child who has been near the center of time, the hug that lasted hundreds of years seemed to only last seconds. The perception of time remains the same. For children who leave the center of time, an eternal hug is remembered as but a moment. If people move away from the center of time, the rest of the world has changed. Their family and friends are gone, as time has passed more quickly. Some people want to cling to moments, and others stay away from the center of time. On May 15, Einstein dreams of a time where there is no time, only individual, frozen moments, like still photographs.

8 May, 1905 through 15 May, 1905 Analysis

The known end of time in the dream of May 8th shows how time is tied to consequences. Knowing that time will not continue frees people of the consequences of their actions. Women may sleep with men who are not their husbands. This freedom brings happiness. People live in the moment instead of living for tomorrow. They forgive each other and relax, except those who are sorry for their past action.

Being stuck in time is an important theme of Einstein's Dreams. The dream of May 10 highlights this. People may become so attached to a memory that they forget about the present and the future. This shows that the effects of time are largely psychological, and is the unhappiness of the people in the May 8th dream who regret their pasts. People's reaction to the May 11th dream is also psychological. If time brings order, then people must rebel against time. People need a certain amount of disorder.

The dream of May 14 also has a psychological message. The perception of time remains the same, no matter where a person is. If a person moves toward the center of time, that person's objective time slows down, but subjectively time stays the same. A hug takes only the time a hug might normally take. People move to the center of time to gain more time with their loved ones, but this is deceptive. Subjective time does not change or slow down. From the point of view of an individual, time does not change. Love does not last longer. When a person leaves the center of time and rejoins others moving through time at a faster rate, that person loses more than he or she gained.



20 May, 1905 through Interlude

20 May, 1905 through Interlude Summary

In Einstein's dream of May 20, no one remembers anything from the past. No one knows their business, their home, or their wives and children, so that each day is a fresh, new day. Sleeping with a spouse is like the first time. Every moment is lived in the present, except for written records. People keep Books of Life of their own experience to remember themselves. Each person discovers himself or herself anew when reading his or her book. When people are old, they must choose whether to read the beginning of their books or the end, their youths or their later days. Other people have stopped looking at the Book of Life, forgetting about their own path. These people are confident and live well in a world of no memory.

On May 22, Einstein dreams of a world where people's plans are suddenly upset by visions of the future. Buildings and projects are upset by glimpses of what is to come. People change their course of action when they see the future. People who have not seen the future are inhibited from doing anything. People will not take risks. Some people actively try to change the future they have seen. However, the future always ends up as it was envisioned.

On the 29th of May, Einstein dreams of a world where everything is moving. Buildings are on wheels, moving through the city. Desks move. People run. With speed, time travels more slowly, and so people in motion have more time. Mr. Randolph Whig is the first person to notice the change, while driving his mother-in-law to London in one of the first cars. He arrives in half the expected time. After Whig's discovery, people and businesses are constantly in motion, trying to eke out as much time as possible. Frustratingly, because everyone is in motion, one's neighbors always seem to be traveling faster than one's self. Some people block out the rest of the world and live, satisfied, without comparing themselves to the speed of the rest of the world.

In the second interlude, Einstein and Besso sit at a café. Einstein says that his theory of time is moving forward. Einstein's distressed appearance reminds him of his father's sudden death, when Besso was full of grief. During that time, Einstein cared for Besso for a month. However, Einstein does not need any help. Einstein criticizes another scientist's paper. Besso invites Einstein and his wife over for dinner, but Einstein says only his wife and child can come. Besso asks about a new patent idea, and Einstein suggests an improvement. Besso knows that Einstein will send it to the inventor without asking for recognition.

20 May, 1905 through Interlude Analysis

The dream of May 20th emphasizes how the past affects the present. People living without a past seem happiest. Spouses are like lovers meeting for the first time, when

love is fresh and new. The Book of Life is the only record of an individual's past, and those who forget their books seem the happiest. Memory and time seem to be a drag on the present and the future.

As the dream of May 20th is about the past, the dream of May 22nd is about the future. People receive visions of what is to come, the consequences of their actions. People are paralyzed when they do not know the consequences of their actions, and people change their course if they do know its consequences. Knowledge of the future seems even more harmful than knowledge of the past, interfering with the life of the present.

Einstein's dream on May 29 is another dream where humanity's actions can affect the movement of time. Whenever mankind can affect time, whether people can perceive the changes or not, human beings try to manipulate time to their "advantage" to gain more time for themselves. This constant seeking of advantage usually brings only frustration and disappointment. In this dream, people seeking the advantage of more time are frustrated by the misleading and unavoidable perception that everyone else is moving faster than they are.



2 June, 1905 through 10 June, 1905

2 June, 1905 through 10 June, 1905 Summary

On June 2, Einstein dreams that time travels backward. People and things are revitalized and grow young with the passage of time. An old woman, alone and barely alive, becomes younger. She spends time with friends and takes up her hobby of crochet. Her husband comes to life, and they become young together. She begins teaching again. Growing still younger, she goes to school and then lives with her parents, eventually becoming a baby again.

Others live their lives backward as well. A man receives the novel prize, and then moves backward in time while he works alone in a small room. Another man attends his friend's funeral, knowing afterward that the friend will become alive and looking forward to a past day together.

Einstein's dream of June 3 portrays a world where a lifetime lasts only one day. People only see the season in which they are born. People who grow up during the night are intellectual, and people who grow up in the day are outdoorsy. Each is upset by the rising or setting of the sun and cannot adapt to the new conditions. Life is short, and people watch the time going by closely, hurrying along. Then, when people grow old, they find that they know no one.

On June 5, Einstein dreams of a world in which time seems to travel at a different speed for each observer. To some people, everything seems to happen slowly. To others, events fly by quickly. Time is a sense. Some people are born without a sense of time, and have instead an enhanced sense of place. These people cannot communicate what they know, since talking requires time.

Einstein dreams of a world where people live forever on June 9. There are two types of people: Nows and Laters. Laters believe that there is plenty of time for future action and never do anything, while Nows constantly are doing new things and have many experiences and careers. All people, both Nows and Laters, have an infinite number of relatives to give them advice, since no one ever dies. An infinite number of ancestors means infinite indecision and waiting for advice. Some people decide to kill themselves rather than live under the burden of advice from all their relatives.

On June 10, Einstein dreams of a world where time is a quality. Time cannot be measured. Lovers may have been together only a day or a whole lifetime. A woman sees her son and mourns that he's not at home. Perhaps he's been gone a day, or many years. Business is nearly impossible because time passes differently for buyers and sellers. There are no clocks, and people only respond to events, not to any measure of time. People who try to measure time are turned to stone.



2 June, 1905 through 10 June, 1905 Analysis

The world where people travel backward in time is similar to the world where cause and effect are unhinged. As people travel backward, cause and effect seem backward as well. A retirement party truly seems a celebration of one's life's work, since it begins the joy of working. The world also seems similar to the world where chaos becomes order, since the elderly become young and everything seems to become better as time moves backwards. The dream of June 9 is the opposite. Instead of lasting a day, lifetimes last an infinity. People, however, don't really change. They either do everything today or put everything off until tomorrow.

The dream of June 5th highlights people's natural resistance to change. Although people's lives last only a day, this is no different than people whose lives last seventy or eighty years. If people live most of their lives in a certain era, and the era changes as they grow older, they have difficulty adapting. Difficulty adapting to change is part of the human condition.

When time is a sense or a quality, each person is at variance with the rest of the world. Existence is personal and ultimately cannot be shared without shared time. This is evident in the story of the mother who is separated from her child because she believes he should still be at home, and in the businesspeople who cannot conduct business because time is different for each. Separate time creates separateness and loneliness.



11 June 1905 through Interlude

11 June 1905 through Interlude Summary

On June 11, Einstein dreams of a world where there is no future. No one can imagine the next moment, day, or year. Every moment is final. A goodbye means never seeing the other person again, and being alone means being alone forever. Actions don't have consequences. Some people are afraid to do anything. Other people live in each moment, and still other people are consumed by the past.

A man sits in a café having coffee and pastry, watching the street. The sky fills with clouds, but the man does not leave. There is no future, so he cannot foresee that clouds will mean rain. When the rain comes, the man goes inside. He talks with the chef. The rain, from the man's viewpoint, will never end. When the rain stops, the sunshine will never end, the man believes.

Einstein's dream on June 15 is of a world where time is a dimension you can see. You can look and see the future and the past. You can also move around in time. A young college student sits with his mentor, talking about his doctoral thesis. The boy is afraid of the future and decides to stay in the warm room of his instructor and not continue forward in time. His friends move forward with their lives, leaving him behind. A woman lies in her bed, listening to her parents fighting and looking at a photograph of herself as a child, at the beach with her family. She decides to rush forward in time and goes so fast that she cannot slow down until she is fifty years old. Her past is a blur in her memory.

On June 17, Einstein dreams of a baker shouting at a woman who hasn't paid her bill, and a child skating after a ball. People stroll along the streets. Then, everything stops. A moment later, it starts up again. Time stops and starts in small bursts, and no one notices.

In the third interlude, Einstein and Besso are fishing on the river. When Besso asks, Einstein says that he never catches any fish in the Aare. They eat sandwiches and drink beer. After lunch, the two men lie on their backs, watching the sky. Besso says that a cloud looks like a goat chasing a frowning man. Einstein wants to tell Besso about his dreams but cannot. Besso says that he believes Einstein will find the theory of time, and then Einstein must come back to the boat and tell his friend about the solution. Einstein laughs.

11 June 1905 through Interlude Analysis

In the world of June 11, where there is no set future, every person lives for the current moment. No one can imagine the consequences to their actions, or can understand what is coming next from the signs that appear in the moment. Dark clouds are not a



signifier of rain. Instead, they merely mean darkness. Every moment is the last moment. People are at once free from consequences and trapped in the current time.

In the dream of June 15th, where time is a dimension, the theme of being stuck in time occurs. People's psychological drives cause them to stop or run forward in time. The student who becomes stuck in his mentor's study willingly gives up his future because he is afraid of what it might bring. In many ways, he is like the man who is stuck in his past, glorying over his achievements in high school. The woman who rushes forward in time is also driven by her psychology. She, also, is afraid. She cannot face her parents' fighting and is afraid of unhappiness in her life. While the man loses his future, the woman loses her past. Because of their fears, neither gets to experience their life.

The man who leaves his lover because he thinks that she does not really love him is also a victim of his own fear. He has been hurt before, and so he takes the slightest, most unnoticeable hesitation on her part as rejection or insincerity. He believes that she does not love him, and he is not willing to take a risk. His fear turns a slight quirk of time into the loss of a relationship.

Like the people in his dreams, Einstein also has fear. He wants to tell Besso about his dreams and to open himself up to his friend. However, Einstein cannot bridge that gap, the distance between the two. He remains separate from Besso, unable to share what is in his mind. The two remain companions, but they cannot share what is going on beneath the surface of their relationship.



18 June 1905 through Epilogue

18 June 1905 through Epilogue Summary

On June 18, Einstein dreams of a temple called the Temple of Time in Rome. Thousands of people wait outside the temple. They have journeyed there from all over the world and wait to see the Great Clock. The Great Clock, within the Temple of Time, is the only clock in the world. Twelve pilgrims stand around the Great Clock, marking off the hours. They chant in unison with the clock, as it counts out the minutes of their lives. Each hour, twelve new pilgrims take their place.

At first, time is measured by nature, the passing of days and seasons as well as the changing rhythms of the human body. Then a man in Italy invents the clock, bringing awe and horror to the people. The clock measures out human life in quantifiable minutes. The people get the man to build the Great Clock and then kill him and destroy all other clocks. The clock is worshiped as a religion, and also feared and hated, a constant reminder that time is being counted and measured.

In Einstein's dream on June 20, time is different in different parts of the world. The farther apart two places are, the more different their times are. From an individual's perspective, time always seems to pass at the same rate, but for two people in different towns, time passes differently. There is no business between cities, because people on different schedules of time cannot do business together. Each city supports itself, and each city develops separately, at its own pace.

When a traveler comes from one city to another, he or she adjusts to the local time. The change is only noticed when a traveler tries to return home, where time has gone more quickly or slowly. Either nothing at all has changed, or much time has passed. Travelers never return home. Some people are pleased with their isolated homes, and some people want to understand the other cities around them. Each location is different, and the world is full of variety. However, no culture can contact or share with another.

Einstein has another dream on June 22. One hundred and twenty-nine boys are graduating from high school. The valedictorian is not congratulated. Nothing seems important, because the future is predetermined. Everything is planned and unchanging. A ballerina's movements are unchangeable and inevitable.

A chemist buys things for himself, even though he owes money to a friend. He excuses himself because the future is predetermined, and he cannot change it. He has no control over his own actions, he reasons, and so there is no right and wrong—he experiences an odd freedom in this predetermined world.

On June 25, Einstein dreams of a young man playing the violin, thinking about his wife and child. At the same time, countless other identical men are playing the violin, thinking about wives and children. Time is infinite, creating many copies of the same scene. The



man is aware of the many copies of himself. He wonders whether he should leave his wife, and his thoughts echo back through the many copies.

In another dream on June 27, Einstein sees a middle-aged man who mines stones from a quarry, bringing them to a mason every Tuesday. He has a wife and two grown children. He is ashamed and avoids contact with other people because when he was a young boy he had accidentally urinated in school. The other children made fun of him. That moment has defined his life.

However, in this world, time is fluid, and the past can change. The quarryman wakes one morning, and he never had an accident in class. He owns a quarry and is wealthy. He is happy with his wife and has friends. Another day will bring another past and present. Each day, everyone's memories change, but no one can tell that the past is in flux.

On June 28, Einstein dreams of a family having a picnic. The grandmother tells her son not to eat so much, and his daughters run and play. A flock of birds flies past, and the man tries to catch them. Other people join him. The birds are too fast, though, and the people cannot catch them. One woman cries when she cannot catch a bird.

The nightingales are time, and anyone who catches a nightingale stops time. Only children are quick enough to catch them, though, and the children do not want to stop time. They want to leap forward. Older people, who want to stop time, are too slow. If a bird is caught, the catcher is thrilled with the moment. However, the captured bird soon dies, and the moment dies with it.

In the epilogue, Einstein is at the patent office as eight o'clock comes. Berne wakens. Life goes on outside the patent office's window. Another patent clerk comes in. Finally, the typist arrives. She has typed manuscripts for Einstein before, and she sees the manuscript that Einstein has, his theory of time. After turning over his manuscript to the typist, Einstein feels empty.

18 June 1905 through Epilogue Analysis

The existence of clocks in the dream world of June 18th doesn't change the world. It only changes human perception of the world. Human perception is the key to human interaction with time. The people of this world both glorify and hate clocks because the clocks point out the irrevocable, mechanical passage of time, which slowly marks the diminishment of their lives. The people are too obsessed with time itself to truly enjoy their lives.

The obsession with the passage of time that is evident in the dream of June 18th also appears in the final dream on June 28th. People want to catch a moment in time, even though that moment will wither and die. This instinct is the same as the instinct that leads people to become stuck in a moment in time, literally or psychologically. People strive so hard to catch and hold time that ultimately they forget to enjoy living their lives.



The dream of June 20th illustrates the irony of diversity. In order for diversity to occur, there must be separation, whether of time or space. In order for diversity to be appreciated, there must be contact between cultures. However, contact will necessarily destroy diversity, since cultures in contact with each other will meld together. Diversity can only exist where it can never be appreciated.

The dream of June 22nd also illustrates an irony. In a world of predetermination, the chemist is able to find freedom. He is free of the consequences of his actions, because he is free from responsibility. Predetermination means that there is no free will, and without free will there is no right and no wrong. The chemist is not responsible for his actions, and so he can do whatever he wants.

The chemist's perception of the world gives him a sense of freedom. In reality, his perspective is likely as predetermined as his actions because the two are intertwined. Similarly, it is the perspective of the quarryman in the dream of June 27th that determines the man's life and happiness, not the actuality of his past. The past is fluid and changeable, and in the present, what is important is the man's perception of the world and his beliefs about both the past and himself.

Characters

Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein is working as a patent clerk in Berne, Switzerland, and he is working on a theory of time as part of his theory of relativity. Einstein has become obsessed with time because he is dreaming about time every night. In every one of his dreams, time has a different character, and the character of time affects the lives of the people of Berne and of the world. Essentially, each dream describes a different universe. Einstein's dreams drive him to find the truth about time. They also exhaust him.

Einstein is a solitary person, not sharing his dreams or his theory with his friends or family. He works early and late, dreams restlessly at night, and works through his thoughts in solitude. The people around him do not know what is going on in his mind or how he is uncovering meaning about the universe. In Einstein's mental world, the actions and motivations of people are wrapped up with the physical reality of the universe. The two are interdependent: the seemingly mechanical reality of the universe and the very human emotional reality of people's lives. The story of physics must meld with the story of humanity, and Einstein mentions wanting to get close to "The Old One", or God, through his study of time. The dichotomy of physical reality and emotional reality is reflected in Einstein's dreams, such as in the dream where mechanical time and body time work at different paces. In every dream, the physical reality of the universe changes the emotional reality of the people in the dream. The dreams reflect the human condition.

Einstein, although he is quiet, is also kind and helpful. He often writes to the people who apply for patents, offering suggestions on how to improve the patent designs. These suggestions are anonymous, sent out into the world without prompting, and without expecting thanks or recognition. Einstein's friend Besso recognizes Einstein's quiet genius and that his friend's mind is working out great problems. Einstein gets deeply involved in the problems he is working on, even to the point of ignoring his wife Mileva.

Michele Besso

Besso is Einstein's close friend, but Einstein does not confide his dreams in Besso. He spends time with Besso and talks to Besso about his ideas. Besso has great admiration for Einstein. Although Besso doubts whether Einstein can tackle the nature of time or find a way to become closer to God, Besso also knows that Einstein is brilliant and seems to him capable of anything, even at the young age of twenty-six. Besso worries about Einstein and tries to make sure that Einstein will be okay without any company while Besso's brother comes to visit.

Besso seems to find Einstein a puzzle and a mystery, even though Einstein shares time with him and shows Besso his work. Einstein's mind works on a level that Besso can't



seem to fathom. Besso does not understand Einstein's prosaic life, including his relationship with his wife and child. Besso also does not know or understand about Einstein's dreams, which seem to be the reflection of the innermost workings of the abstracted Einstein's brain.

Besso wants to help Einstein, who helped Besso through a difficult time when Besso's father died. However, Einstein is independent, and Besso does not have the ability to help out his friend. Besso watches passively as Einstein struggles to develop a theory of time. Although Einstein goes without food and sleep, there is nothing Besso can do but watch, until his friend finds his own answer. Besso gives the outsider's view of Einstein, lacking the understanding to see within the complex workings of Einstein's mind.

The Wife Whose Husband Is Dying of Cancer

In the April 14th dream, a wife says goodbye to her husband who is dying of throat cancer. She is unaware that she has lived this moment before and will continue repeating it eternally throughout time, which moves in a cycle.

The Time Traveler

In the April 16th dream, a woman accidentally set back in time by a random jetty of the flow of time sits and waits in the shadows, afraid to do anything for fear of changing time.

Peter Klausen

Peter Klausen is on his way to a pharmacy. He does not like dust on his clothes, and if he gets dirty, he will stop to clean his jacket. The time traveler is afraid that, if she kicks up dirt, Peter Klausen may be late, setting into motion a string of events that will prevent the founding of the European Union almost seventy-five years later.

The Man in the Leather Coat on the Balcony Making a Decision

In the April 19th dream, a man in a leather coat stands on his balcony, deciding whether to see a woman in Fribourg again. Because in this world, time separates along different paths toward alternate futures at every decision, the man moves along three paths. In one path, he does not go, meets another woman, and lives quietly with her. In another path, he goes to see the woman in Fribourg and lives a tumultuous life with her. In a third path, he goes to see her but does not end up with her.



The Woman Who Lost Her Job

In the April 28th dream, a woman has lost her job. The regular, absolute nature of time comforts her.

The Man Whose Friends Abandon Him

In the May 3rd dream, a man's friends abandon him for seemingly no reason. Later, he begins acting obnoxious and horrid, making a fool out of himself and alienating others. Which is cause and effect? Does the friends' abandonment cause him to become insulting, or does his future insulting behavior retroactively lead to his friends abandoning him? This story highlights how cycles can become self-perpetuating.

Josephine/The Admiral's Wife/The Woman with Brocade

Josephine is the wife of the admiral, and one of the four people who meet at St. Moritz every year in the dream where things change very slowly with the passage of time. Josephine makes the same comments every year and is uncomfortable with the new idea of sleeping with her head under the sheet to keep out the draft. Change makes her uncomfortable in her slow-changing world.

The Admiral

Josephine's husband is an admiral. He is one of the four people who meet at St. Moritz every year in the dream where things change very slowly with the passage of time.

Mileva

Mileva is Einstein's wife and mother of his young child. Einstein seems to ignore her, especially when he is consumed with a new theory or idea.

Anna

Anna is Besso's wife.

The Man Stuck in His School Days

In the dream of May 10th, people become stuck at different times in their lives. A man becomes obsessed with his school days, unable to move forward into the future and only able to talk about his achievements, activities, and awards during school.



The Man Who Never Told His Father He Loved Him

In the dream of May 10th, people become stuck at different times in their lives. A man becomes obsessed with the fact that he never told his father he loved him.

The Woman Who Won't Acknowledge Her Son

In the dream of May 10th, people become stuck at different times in their lives. A woman is stuck with a prior image of her son. She ignores his pleas in the present, only imagining him adoringly as he was in the past and writing letters to him at an address where he no longer lives.

Mr. Randolph Whig

In the dream of May 29, Randolph Whig is the first person to notice that time moves more slowly at high speeds. Mr. Whig drives his mother-in-law to London in one of the first motor cars, and he arrives in half the time he expected.

The Old Woman Who Grows Younger

In the dream of June 2, an old woman grows younger, regaining her husband and her career as a teacher. Growing still younger, she goes to school and then lives with her parents, eventually becoming a baby again.

Nows and Lateres

On June 9, Einstein dreams of a world where people live forever. The world has two types of people, Nows and Lateres. Lateres believe that there is plenty of time for future action and never do anything, while Nows constantly are doing new things.

The Doctoral Student

On June 15, Einstein dreams of a world where time is a dimension, like space. A young doctoral student, afraid of the future, decides to stop moving forward in time and becomes stuck in his mentor's study.

The Woman Whose Parents Fight

On June 15, Einstein dreams of a world where time is a dimension like space. A young woman, frustrated and upset with her parents' fighting, rushes forward in time and finds herself in the future, barely remembering any of her life as it rushed past.



The Chemist

One June 22, Einstein dreams of a world where the future is predetermined. A chemist finds a certain freedom in knowing that he cannot change the future and therefore is not responsible for his actions.

The Violinist

One June 25, Einstein dreams of a world where time creates infinite copies of each moment. A violinist wonders whether to leave his wife, and his thoughts echo back to him through infinite copies of himself.

The Quarryman

One June 27, Einstein dreams of a world where the past might suddenly change. A stone miner is traumatized by the memory of having urinated in class as a young boy. His past changes, and he becomes a well-adjusted man without the humiliating memory from his past.

The Typist

In the prologue and epilogue, Einstein is in the patent office waiting for the typist to arrive so that he can give her his manuscript describing the nature of time to type for him. She has typed his other works in the past and likes Einstein.



Objects/Places

Berne, Switzerland

Berne is the setting of most of Einstein's dreams about time, and it is the city where he lives while he works as a patent clerk in 1905. The Aare River runs through the city, and the Alps can be seen in the distance. Einstein writes his theory of time in Berne.

The Patent Office

Albert Einstein works in a patent office as a clerk. He comes in early to work on his theories, and one of his coworkers types his scientific articles for him.

The Aare River

The Aare River runs through Berne, Switzerland where Einstein is a patent clerk.

Marktgasse

Marktgasse is the market street in Berne, Switzerland where Einstein is a patent clerk, and this town is the setting of most of Einstein's dreams.

Nydegg Bridge

The bridge over the Aare River in Berne is a meeting place and a prominent local feature in Einstein's dreams.

Kramgasse

Kramgasse is a residential street in Berne. The man in the leather coat making a decision lives in Kramgasse, and the time traveler hides in the shadows of Kramgasse.

St. Moritz

In the May 4th dream, two couples meet in St. Moritz during their yearly vacation. Little changes from year to year in this slow-moving time.



Book of Life

In the May 20 dream, where there is no memory, people keep Books of Life to remember their own pasts.

The Photograph

In the June 15 dream, a woman looks at a photograph of herself on the beach with her parents as a child while she listens to her parents fighting. She becomes upset and decides to rush forward in time, only to find herself an old woman, alone, and barely remembering the life that she rushed past. She still stares at the old photograph.

The Temple of Time and the Great Clock

In the dream of June 18, there is only one clock in the world, the Great Clock which is within the Temple of Time. People travel on pilgrimages from around the world to visit the Great Clock, which reminds them that their lives can be reduced to quantifiable time.

Nightingales

In the dream of June 28, anyone who can catch a nightingale stops time. Only the young are spry enough to catch nightingales, but the young do not want to stop time.

Einstein's Manuscript

The novel begins and ends with Einstein in the patent office where he works, holding his finished manuscript that defines time. He is waiting for the typist to arrive to type his manuscript.



Themes

Being Stuck in Time

Throughout the novel, many of the characters become stuck in time. Some of the characters become stuck psychologically, like the man who is obsessed with his achievements in high school. Other characters become stuck physically in time, like the doctoral student who decides not to face his fears and move forward in time. He remains in the comfortable study of his mentor, never finishing his doctorate or moving on to his future. In all of these instances, being stuck in time is isolating. Other people move on with their lives or become stuck in different moments, and each person who is stuck in time is isolated.

Another example of being stuck in time is the time traveler who is isolated because she has been uprooted from her own time. Like the doctoral student, she is paralyzed by fear. She is afraid of changing the future. Fear is paralyzing and isolating, similar to being stuck in time, and fear is often the reason why characters become stuck in time. The quarryman is afraid of being ridiculed, and so ironically he becomes stuck in the moment of time when he was most ridiculed.

The characters who race forward in time are also stuck. The woman who races through her life becomes stuck in her future and misses all the moments of her past, much as the doctoral student, her counterpart, becomes stuck in his past and misses all the moments of his future. Each person becomes hampered and tied down by his or her own fear, unable to face the present.

Actions and Consequences

One of the primary ways that time affects people is through actions and consequences. This relationship between actions and consequences is explored in several of Einstein's dreams. In the dream where cause and effect aren't necessarily sequential, the sometimes circular relationship of actions and consequences is pointed out. Is the man alone because he will become obnoxious, or does he become obnoxious because he is alone? Does a crime spree erupt because of a totalitarian government, or does the government become totalitarian because of crime?

In most of Einstein's dreams, though, actions and consequences are explored at a more personal level. In the world where the future is predetermined, the consequences of actions don't matter, because the actions cannot be changed. In the world where many choices all take place in alternate timelines, people are divided on whether what choice you make matters at all.

When people find out truths about the nature of time, they make choices to try to gain more time. These people who struggle to extend their time become so caught up with the desire to gain a little more time that they forget to live. The people who want to live



on mountaintops and keep in constant motion to gain time ultimately reduce the quality of the time that they have. They don't realize the self-defeating consequences of their actions.

Rationalism versus Emotionalism

In many of Einstein's dreams, people are divided between rationalism and emotionalism. In the world where there is mechanical time and body time, this division is easy to see. Those people who live by mechanical time are rational and intellectual. Those people who live by body time are emotional, listening to the natural rhythm of their bodies.

The same division is clear in the world where cause and effect aren't necessarily chronological. People who are overly rational, particularly scientists, suffer from the unknowability of cause and effect in the irrational world. However, artists, who are emotional, thrive in this world.

People who constantly think and examine their actions, such as the people who wait for visions of the future before they make any decisions or the time-travelers who cannot make a step for fear of changing the future, are overly rational. They become paralyzed with their thoughts. They cannot make decisions or live their lives because they are too busy thinking about their lives. People who live in the moment and take actions based on their desires and whims enjoy their lives. Einstein's dreams seem to say that rationalism is antithetical to happiness.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of Einstein's Dreams is third person omniscient. The narrator sees inside Einstein's mind as well as Besso's. Most importantly, the narrator sees inside Einstein's dreams and inside the minds of the characters in Einstein's dreams. The narrator peels back layers of reality to find meaning within a reality that exists only within Einstein's brain.

The character of Besso gives the reader an outsider's point of view of Albert Einstein. Einstein is clearly brilliant, but he is also quiet and shy. Even with his best friend, the inner workings of Einstein's mind are hidden to the outside world. However, the workings of Einstein's mind are not hidden from the reader. The book explores Einstein's mind through his dreams, which reveal his thoughts about humanity, if not about time.

The dreams within the novel each reveal different aspects of human nature, and so it is important that the narrator can see within the characters' minds and tell what they are thinking. In the dream where time imperceptibly starts and stops, the reader understands how time affects the lovers because the reader can see what's in the man's mind when he leaves the woman, even though the woman never knows why it happened. The insights into the characters' perspective give the reader insights into humanity.

Setting

The setting of Einstein's Dreams is Berne, Switzerland, the town where Albert Einstein works as a patent clerk in 1905 while he is writing his groundbreaking theory of relativity and exploring the nature of time. The city of Berne is central to the dreams in the novel, which explore snippets of everyday life throughout the city. People pass in the street, going to the market or heading to work, and each person has a story. Those stories are explored in Einstein's dreams.

A few of the dreams take place in alternate locations. In the world where everyone wants to live high up, the city of Berne is deserted, and people have fled to the highest peaks of the Alps. In the world where time is worshiped as religion, the setting is Rome, the center of religion, and the center of Rome is taken up with the Temple of Time. One of the aspects of setting in the novel is time itself, which creates an alternate reality for each dream, a new world defined not by place but by time.

Although most of the stories are set in a version of Berne, the true setting of Einstein's Dreams is in Einstein's mind. Einstein is a brilliant man who is exploring one of the deepest mysteries of the universe, the nature of time. Einstein is also exploring the nature of man through his dreams, and so Einstein's dreams give insight into Einstein's



beliefs and perspectives on human beings. Every story and character lives not in Berne or in an alternate universe, but in Albert Einstein's unconscious mind. The lessons that the reader learns about humanity are beliefs that Einstein's character holds, consciously or unconsciously.

Language and Meaning

Einstein's *Dreams* begins with a lyrical portrait of the city of Berne awakening at dawn, and this lyrical and poetic language continues in the descriptions of all the worlds that Einstein dreams. The novel is about time, and each moment of time is a picture that the author paints with words. Each moment exists importantly and individually within the story, whether it is a moment in Einstein's real world or in his dreams.

Instead of following one character and one storyline, Einstein's *Dreams* follows many dream worlds full of many characters. Often, the characters themselves are unnamed, giving them a sense of anonymity and generality. The lack of character names in the short sketches of Einstein's dreams show that each man can be any man, and each woman can be any woman. The stories are not about specific characters but about humanity.

The author describes how time works and what is happening in each dream, moving in and out of scenes instead of following a traditional story. He uses questions to bring ambiguities to the attention of the reader: "Have they been together a lifetime, or only a moment? Who can say? . . . What more could he do?"

Structure

The novel begins and ends on the day when Albert Einstein, a patent clerk in Berne, Switzerland, has finished his groundbreaking theory of time, the basis of the theory of relativity. Einstein is waiting for the typist to come into the office so that he can give her the manuscript to type. Within the bookends of the prologue and epilogue, while Einstein waits for the typist, the reader experiences Einstein's dreams about time over the past two months.

Einstein's dreams are short depictions of different worlds, dated by the night that Einstein has the dream. The dreams are interrupted three times with interludes, scenes of Einstein with his friend Besso. The alternate worlds of Einstein's dreams take place in Einstein's mind, and the interludes give the reader a sense of ongoing reality on which to cling. The dreams exist as an undercurrent beneath the surface world that Einstein lives in, and Einstein gives the impression of only partially existing in that surface world. Much of his mind is full of the ideas and theories that are expressed through his dreams.

The structure of the novel itself toys with time. A whole world exists in every evening, and each new night creates another world. Characters live their whole lives in the space of a dream, and all of the dreams are fit within the space of a few hours of dawn

between when Einstein arrives at the patent office and when the typist arrives to take his manuscript.



Quotes

"She huddles in a corner, then quickly creeps across the street and cowers in another darkened spot, at no. 22. She is terrified that she will kick up dust, just as a Peter Klausen is making his way to the apothecary at Spitalgasse this afternoon of 16 April 1905." 16 April 1905, p. 11

"Some make light of decisions, arguing that all possible decisions will occur. In such a world, how could one be responsible for his actions? Others hold that each decision must be considered and committed to, that without commitment there is chaos." 19 April 1905, p. 17

"Those of religious faith see time as the evidence for God. For surely nothing could be created perfect without a Creator. Nothing could be universal and not be divine. All absolutes are part of the One Absolute." 28 April 1905, p. 26

"Einstein has been explaining to his friend Besso why he wants to know time. But he says nothing of his dreams." Interlude, p. 39

"On closer look, it is a town in many pieces. One neighborhood lives in the fifteenth century. Here, the storeys of the rough-stone houses are joined by outdoor stairs and galleries, while the upper gables gape and open to the winds. Moss grows between the stone slabs of the roofs. Another section of the village is a picture of the eighteenth century. Burnt red tiles lie angled on the straight-lined roofs. A church has oval windows, corbeled loggias, granite parapets. Another section holds the present, with arcades lining every avenue, metal railings on the balconies, façades made of smooth sandstone. Each section of the village is fastened to a different time." 10 May 1905, p. 47

"Imagine a world in which there is no time. Only images." 15 May 1905, p. 57

"Who would fare better in this world of fitful time? Those who have seen the future and live only one life? Or those who have not seen the future and wait to live life? Or those who deny the future and live two lives?" 22 May 1905, p. 68

"When old age comes, whether in light or in dark, a person discovers that he knows no one. There hasn't been time." 3 June 1905, p. 85

"Such is the cost of immortality. No person is whole. No person is free. Over time, some have determined that the only way to live is to die." 9 June 1905, p. 94

"Sitting in his chair, the young man steps hesitantly forward in time, only minutes into the future, shudders at the cold and uncertainty. He pulls back. Much better to stay in this moment, beside the warm fire, beside the warm help of his mentor. Much better to stop movement in time." 15 June 1905, p. 104



"Einstein gazes at the clouds but is thinking of his project. He wants to tell Besso about his dreams, but he cannot bring himself to do it." Interlude, p. 114

"In a world of fixed future, life is an infinite corridor of rooms, one room lit at each moment, the next room dark but prepared. We walk from room to room, look into the room that is lit, the present moment, then walk on. We do not know the rooms ahead, but we know we cannot change them. We are spectators of our lives." 22 June 1905, p. 126

"The catchers delight in the moment so frozen but soon discover that the nightingale expires, its clear, flutelike song diminishes to silence, the trapped moment grows withered and without life." 28 June 1905, p. 138



Topics for Discussion

Why does Einstein feel empty after the development of his theory of time?

Does understanding time help Einstein become closer to God?

How are time and human perception related?

Throughout the novel, Einstein dreams of people who become stuck in moments of time. How can a person in reality become stuck in time?

Why can't Einstein share his dreams with his friend Besso?

Why does Besso believe that Einstein can develop a theory of time?

In what ways does the reader get to know the character of Einstein through his dreams?