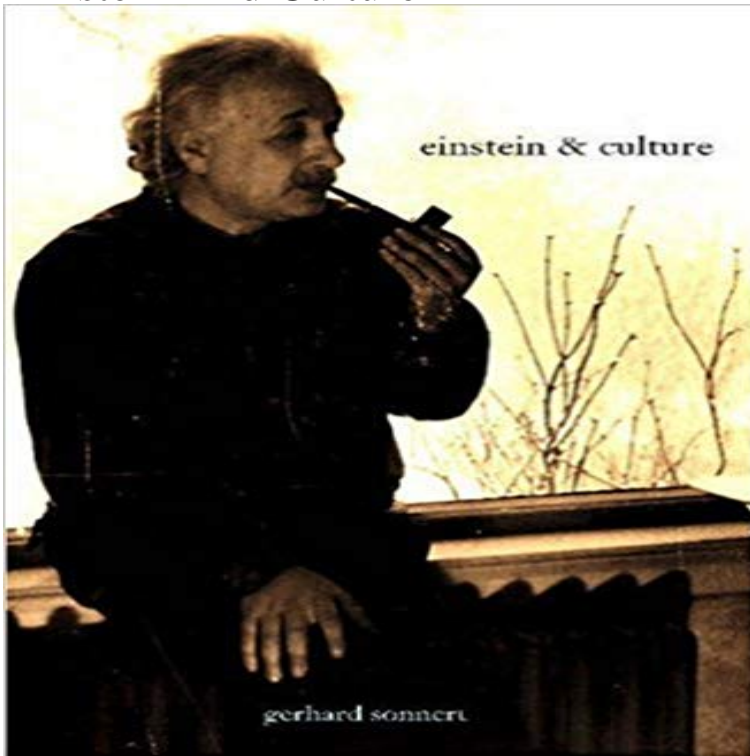


Einstein And Culture



Popular images of Albert Einstein often depict him as either an almost superhuman solitary genius or as a counter-cultural rebel. In this unique perspective on Einstein the man, sociologist of science Gerhard Sonnert argues that both popular images are simplistic and misleading because they fail to account for the impact of culture. In this scholarly yet accessible book, Sonnert examines major features of German Kultur, showing how powerful cultural influences helped to shape Einsteins life and science. Starting with a review of the evidence supporting Einsteins rebel image, Sonnert confronts it with counter-evidence that suggests his traditionalist side. The apparent contradiction is resolved through an extensive study of the cultural landscape of nineteenth-century Germany. Sonnert takes a close look at the German concept of Kultur, laying special emphasis on the related ideas of Weltanschauung and Weltbild, two German terms representing particular types of worldviews. Einstein and Culture demonstrates how strongly Einsteins physical research program was driven by a pivotal cultural goal: the quest for the synthesis of a scientific worldview (Weltbild). His was the rebellion of the idealistic radical in the name of Kultur against its perceived failings and shortcomings. Sonnert also shows that Einsteins quest was deeply motivated by a broadly defined religious impulse. Here again, the physicist reveals himself to be a true creature of Kultur, epitomising the German scientist-priest. In conclusion, Sonnert argues that the mass exodus during the Nazi regime of German scientists and intellectuals, including Einstein, marked a demise of Kultur. However, this cataclysm also resulted in a fertile synthesis between the German Kultur-inspired science and the quite different American scientific tradition. This is a fascinating, insightful, and original study of a neglected aspect of

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