

The Myth of the Twelve men who understood Einstein's relativity

Roger J Anderton

R.J.Anderton@btinternet.com

In the early beginnings of Einstein's fame in 1919 there was presented to us a myth that twelve men understood Einstein's relativity. But when we look at the facts these twelve men never existed, and instead all we are presented with is a list of people who did not agree about relativity. So on this foundation of myth that there was some agreed upon theory – modern physics post-Einstein was built. Whereas the reality is – it was a theory that no one agreed upon, hence a mess was pushed upon us by this myth. Further, in order to protect this mess from being fixed, it was said that if you did not agree with these twelve men (that never existed) then you were just not clever enough to understand Einstein's relativity.

A look at the book “Easy lessons in Einstein a discussion of the more intelligible features of the theory of relativity” by Edwin E. Slosson, M.S., PH.D. Literary Editor of The Independent, Associate in the Columbia School of Journalism. [1] This was published in 1920 – as example of what was being said in the early days of when Einstein became famous, when the myths were starting to be built around Einstein.

In an imaginary conversation between Reader and author Slosson about the news of “Eclipse Observations Confirm Einstein's Theory of Relativity.”

Reader reads in newspaper: “Most sensational discovery in the history of science” - “Greatest achievement of the human intellect” - “Upsets Galileo, Newton, and Euclid” - “Revolution in philosophy and theology.”

me: That's the hype the newspapers were making about it; there was too much hype.

Reader picks upon what the rest of the newspaper says: ““Parallel lines meet ” - “a man moving with the speed of light never grows old” - “gravitation due to a warp in space” - “length of a measuring stick depends upon direction of its motion” - “mass is latent energy” - “time as a fourth dimension”, why, the man is crazy, isn't he?”

me: What is presented by Einstein is a mass of new ideas, and the immediate thinking of the average person (presented here in this imagined conversation) is to react that its all nonsense and crazy. However the author replies-

The Author: “Well, definitions of insanity are so uncertain that it is not safe to say who is crazy.

But it seems there's method in his madness otherwise how could he have hit upon the exact extent of the sun's attraction on light?"

me: So the author tries to get the crazy ideas a fair hearing by making it vague and ambiguous as to what crazy means, and referring to the theory although appearing crazy agrees with what Eddington observed. On that issue it was dealt with in previous articles that - the light bending can be dealt with by Newtonian physics, that Eddington's results were not good etc. So based upon this misrepresentation of what Eddington observed in 1919, a mass of crazy ideas are presented to the public by a lot of hype.

The Reader: "(Picks up his paper and reads aloud with concentrated attention) "Postulate I. Every law of nature which holds good with respect to a coordinate system K must also hold good for any other system K', provided that K and K' are in uniform movement of translation." Say, do you know anything about this business?"

The Author: "Well, yes, a little. I have followed the controversy at a safe distance for a number of years."

The Reader: "Can you tell me in plain language what it is all about?"

The Author: "Yes. Just that. I can tell you what it is about, though I can't tell you what it is. Einstein says that there are only twelve men in the world capable of understanding his latest paper."

me: This is then the myth that not many people can understand Einstein's relativity, so that when a person recognises it is nonsense they are accused of not understanding; when in fact they do understand its nonsense.

The Reader: "Are you one of the twelve?"

The Author: "No, nor the thirteenth."

me: So now the author admits to not understanding Einstein's relativity, and this is preposterous because he has written a book to explain it; we can't put much confidence in what he says if he does not understand what he is talking about; but it is this level of nonsense that Einstein plunges us into.

Author continues: "But without plunging into the mathematics of it, we might talk over some of the interesting aspects of the theory of relativity and in the end I could put you on track of the twelve so you could read up on the subject if you liked."

me: At the end of the book the author lists articles and books by more than 40 people, those names include Einstein, Eddington, Edwin Abbott, Norman Campbell, Wildon Carr, Paul Carus, D F Comstock, E Cunningham, Camille Flammarion, C J Keyser, Sir Oliver Lodge, Henri Poincare, Bertrand Russell, J Thomson, Reinhard A. Wetzell, Marcel Grossman, Lorentz, Minkowski, M Abraham, A V Backlund, H Bateman, Marcel Brillouin, Henry I Brose, Robert Daniel Carmichael, Charles W Cobb, A W Conway, A C D Crommelin, E Cunningham, Armando Dezuani, T de Donder, J Droste, Silberstein. It would be nice to know who these "twelve" are supposed to be. Silberstein, I note was considered Devil's Advocate – opposed to Einstein's relativity. (As dealt with in one of my previous articles.) They did not all agree about relativity with Einstein. And even Einstein said he no longer understood the theory after the mathematicians had worked on it. [2] Also as supposed Einstein experts note in "Einstein Symposium" the theory (or theories) of Einstein needed their mathematical formalism sorted out. [3] So I propose these "twelve" men who

supposedly agreed on Einstein's relativity never existed, its a myth; and reality is just people all disagreeing among themselves. In this way a pretence is offered to us that a supposed agreed theory from twelve mythic men has been presented to us, when in reality it was a mess of no agreed theory, with lots of conflicting opinions. And then the myth if you did not agree with these twelve men (who did not exist) you were told the myth that you were not clever enough. (There is by the way - a similar myth that it was three men not twelve.)

Finally I would like to quote the author who says: "We sometimes hear it said that "Einstein has overthrown Newton's theory of gravitation." That is impossible because Newton did not have any theory of gravitation. He merely laid down the law of gravitation. He told how bodies behaved toward their neighbors; he did not tell why. Newton was not content with the idea of action at a distance through empty space and he tried to explain gravitation by the pressure of the ether on material bodies but he was not satisfied with the results and did not publish them. In the 234 years since many men have tried their hands at devising some sort of machinery that will "explain" gravitation."

That is essentially correct. And I think I should point out the author admits to being helped by professors of physics, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy with his book. So Newton never had a theory of gravity. Thus this hype around Einstein presents us with the biggest myth of all that – Einstein overturned Newtonian physics. It did no such thing. After Newton's death there were by people – various theories of gravity built within the context of Newtonian physics. Ideally it should be those theories contrasted with Einstein's theory. But rather than allow that - "they" present us with the hype for Einstein's theory to act as smokescreen. In the context of Newtonian physics – that was as I have dealt with in previous articles - developed further until it became Boscovich's theory. As regards the results of the 1919 observation of light bending, it takes merely a bit of mathematical manipulation and Newtonian physics can deal with that result. Mathematical manipulation that I have done and others have done to show the supposed experiments and observations said to show Einstein's general relativity can still be dealt with in context of Newtonian physics. All we have therefore from 1919 is just hype and myth created around a fiction about Einstein. Mainstream has taken on a fairy story.

References and Note

My guess at the twelve men is: Einstein, Lorentz, Poincare, Hilbert, Mach, Eddington, J Thomson, Varicak, Grossman, Silberstein, Minkowski, Schwarzschild. But some of them had died by the time the claim was made, and they did not all agree about things; and controversy over many issues like – maybe Hilbert derived general relativity before Einstein etc. So such "twelve men" supposedly fully endorsing Einstein's relativity does not exist even from this list.

[1] Easy Lessons in Einstein, a discussion of the more intelligible features of the theory of relativity, by Edwin E. Slosson, M.S., PH.D. Literary Editor of The Independent, Associate in the Columbia School of Journalism. With an Article by Albert Einstein and a Bibliography NEW YORK Harcourt, Brace and Howe 1920

[2] If this can be believed - Einstein himself once remarked, "Since the mathematicians have invaded the theory of relativity, I do not understand it myself any more." from: Waiting for the new genius, Future Tense for Mar. 14, 2007, By Steve Welker <http://stevewelker.net/print/18>

[3] On Einstein: an Edge Symposium, Roger J Anderton <http://gsjournal.net/Science-Journals/Essays-Relativity%20Theory/Download/4490>

c.RJAnderton03Feb2013