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Many appreciate Richard P. Feynman's contributions to twentieth-century physics, but few realize how engaged he was with the world around him_how deeply and thoughtfully he considered the religious, political, and social issues of his day. Now, a wonderful book_based on a previously unpublished, three-part public lecture he gave at the University of Washington in 1963_shows us this other side of Feynman, as he expounds on the inherent conflict between science and religion, people's distrust of politicians, and our universal fascination with flying saucers, faith healing, and mental telepathy. Here we see Feynman in top form: nearly bursting into a Navajo war chant, then pressing for an overhaul of the English language (if you want to know why Johnny can't read, just look at the spelling of "friend"); and, finally, ruminating on the death of his first wife from tuberculosis. This is quintessential Feynman_reflective, amusing, and ever enlightening.

Marked by Feynman's characteristic combination of rationality and humor, these lectures provide an intimate glimpse at the man behind the legend. "In case you are beginning to believe," he says at the start of his final lecture, "that some of the things I said before are true because I am a scientist and according to the brochure that you get I won some awards and so forth, instead of your looking at the ideas themselves and judging them directly...I will get rid of that tonight. I dedicate this lecture to showing what ridiculous conclusions and rare statements such a man as myself can make." Rare, perhaps. Irreverent, sure. But ridiculous? Not even close.

It requires an unusually strong intellect to remain relevant on a wide variety of social, religious and political issues after 35 years. Feynman, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, had just such an intellect. Originally delivered as a three-part lecture series at the University of Washington in 1963, this collection touches on such far-ranging topics as the existence or nonexistence of God; the Constitution; and UFOs. At times, Feynman's comments seem uncannily prescient, as when he discusses the dumbing-down of media: "The whole idea that the average person is unintelligent is a very dangerous idea. Even if it's true, it shouldn't be dealt with the way it's dealt with," he says here. As readers of his previous works (Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman, etc.) know, Feynman, who died in 1988, was never one to shy away from strong opinions: "Incidentally, I must explain that because I am a scientist does not mean that I have not had

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contact with human beings," he explains. These memorable lectures confirm that Feynman's gift of insight extended from the subatomic world to the cosmic, and to the very human as well. BOMC featured selection.