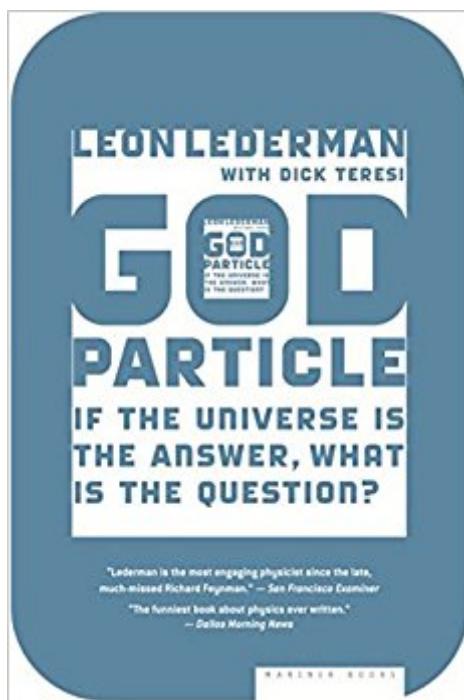


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The God Particle: If The Universe Is The Answer, What Is The Question?



Synopsis

A fascinating tour of particle physics from Nobel Prize winner Leon Lederman. At the root of particle physics is an invincible sense of curiosity. Leon Lederman embraces this spirit of inquiry as he moves from the Greeks' earliest scientific observations to Einstein and beyond to chart this unique arm of scientific study. His survey concludes with the Higgs boson, nicknamed the God Particle, which scientists hypothesize will help unlock the last secrets of the subatomic universe, quarks and all—it's the dogged pursuit of this almost mystical entity that inspires Lederman's witty and accessible history.

Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; Reprint edition (June 26, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9780618711680

ISBN-13: 978-0618711680

ASIN: 0618711686

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 130 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #452,775 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #65 in Books > Science & Math > Physics > Nuclear Physics > Particle Physics #529 in Books > Science & Math > Astronomy & Space Science > Cosmology #1473 in Books > Textbooks > Science & Mathematics > Physics

Customer Reviews

The "God particle" of the title is Lederman's term for what other physicists call a Higgs boson--a hypothetical particle that might hold a key to the subatomic world of quarks and leptons. To find out if a Higgs boson indeed exists, this Nobel laureate in physics conceived of the Superconducting Super Collider, which, if constructed, would be the world's most powerful particle accelerator.

Writing with Teresi (coauthor of *The Three-Pound Universe*), Lederman first surveys moments of discovery from Newton to Einstein in a breezy, folksy style that can be annoying ("Galileo was an irascible sort of guy . . . He could be a pain in the ass"). This style, however, serves the reader well when Lederman and Teresi enter the complexities of subatomic physics, clarifying the search for squarks and winos, grand unified theories, superstrings and dark matter. \$100,000 ad/promo;

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Nobel Laureate and physicist Lederman is funny, clever, entertaining, and highly accessible as he charts the course of experimental physics from 430 B.C. to the planned opening of the Superconducting Supercollider (SSC), of which he is one of the principal architects. This book might be seen, in fact, as a sort of advertisement for the SSC, answering as it does the question, What is the SSC for ? Even allowing for Lederman's open bias toward big physics, his book is a delight to read and absorb, far more accessible than most books about contemporary physics, because it is rooted in the experimental; the "God particle" of the title is the missing link of experimental physics, just as this book is the missing link between a complex world and the general reader. By contrast, Amit Goswami (physics, Univ. of Oregon) is interested in the metaphysical, or perhaps the meta-metaphysical. Drawing heavily on New Age and Eastern philosophical concepts, he attempts to demonstrate that the world as we know it is but a construct of human consciousness; mind, not matter, is the stuff of which we are made. Where Lederman explains for the delight of knowing, Goswami explains only to support his thesis, making for a much more abstract and strange book. All but the converted will find this heavy sledding. The books are thus not interchangeable: Lederman will appeal to those interested in learning about science and the physical world, Goswami to those seeking a hip confirmation of their own sense of self-enlightenment.- Mark Shelton, Athens, Ohio

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Mr. Lederman, thank you for putting IT all in plain language; I agree with your statement in Chapter 9: "the arguments were abstract, mathematical, and very lively. Most of it was over my head." Nevertheless, the presentation of a very complex subject (even those studying it do not know ALL the questions/answers) is so well done, this is on my to read again list. This book presents the behind-the-scenes search for our origins, the before the Big Bang what?, the what is going to happen next; the brains, actions, competition, and risks of the participants in this enterprise are tremendous. The only thing they are not searching for is why humankind is so ignorant, violent, and self-centered. Nevertheless, I highly recommend this tome to those lay persons who are interested in physics, but are willing to let others do the heavy lifting, especially since Lederman sees the creator as female and has peppered a large dose of humor into his great work! Again, thanks, Mr. Lederman.

I love long books that peek my interest, challenge conventional ways of thinking, and sufficiently address / answer the author's main topic; the latter part is where I feel the book comes up short. Despite needing updating since it was originally written, it starts with a well articulated and interesting history of physics (I especially like his sense of humor) however following that, if your intent is to learn quantum physics, be prepared to read disproportionately about supercolliders and the authors's experiments, and throughout take notes to try to comprehend the science (also might help if you took an intro to physics course). Among many other terms, he explains and speaks fluently of anti-protons, baryons, bosons, dimensions, electrons, fermions, gluons, hadrons, ions, kaons, leptons, mesons, muons, neutrons, nucleons, photons, pions, protons, selectrons, sleptons, tevetrons, and upsilons. Don't get me wrong, I think (as apparently does the author) that he is brilliant, which is why, despite my degree in mathematics, the book makes me feel like a peon (so I do not feel bad about obtaining the book at a significant discount). If I have walked away with any lasting impressions, they are 1. physicists apparently like words that end in "on" and 2. I'm now convinced that they will not solve the Higgs Boson God Particle mystery until they have exhausted all the combinations and permutations of such words. ... Anon

Excellent introduction to the physics of subatomic particles, not to mention backgroundstarting at the very beginning (ancient Greeks and Galileo). Well written - Ledermanhas a wonderful sense of humor. As close to a page-turner as you can get, even whenprogress slows to allow excursions to the Wikipedia or a handy physics text. (Supplementaryreading helps clarify the physics, and also gives more up-to-date info than the book, which was writtenin 1993, but it really wasn't dated.) It also offers insights intothe lives and personalities of physicists (as well as entertaining quips about the2 cultures of theorists vs. experimentalists). I even enjoyed the details of particle acceleratorsand detectors, which I wasn't interested in beforehand. My only complaint is the Kindle edition is poorly scanned. There are many misspellings andeven words that are incomprehensible, as well as technical terms (eg particle names) that are clearly wrongand have to be guessed at.

Excellent and highly readable overview of modern and contemporary physics. Intelligent, clear and demystifying. Humor, even where it (rarely) misses the point, is exhilarating. There is not only humor, but passion too, which deserves respect. However, there are some shortcomings. For example, when the author criticizes Capra for making the unfounded parallels between contemporary physics and the Eastern mysticism, he actually does the same, only in different terms, making equally unfounded parallel between contemporary physics and Ionian philosophers and

Democritus. Is Democritus' atom really closer to subatomic world of contemporary physics than the concepts of the ancient Chinese philosophy? Or is it just the name (atom) and the doubtful concept of basically linear progress - in spite of sporadic setbacks - of our civilization, beginning with the "birth of science" in ancient Greece? Equally problematic is the disqualification of Aristotle, by making him in fact responsible for the worldview ("medieval") based not on Aristotle but on the peculiar version of Aristotelianism. It's funny and interesting: it seems that great physicists have some problem with philosophy (e.g. S. Hawking closes his otherwise lovely and enjoyable book "A Brief History of Time" with quite unnecessary remarks about philosophy, proclaiming Wittgenstein "the most famous philosopher" of the 20th century. Wittgenstein is ok, but why "the most famous", for goodness' sake?). The physicists are great guys, especially those who are capable of writing such fine books. As for the philosophy, they probably do not have enough time to learn more about it. In conclusion I very much enjoyed reading this book and learned a lot.

Witty book about physics, full of jokes and subtle humor. I enjoyed reading it. The author gives a personal spin to the most important physics discoveries. The only thing about it that I found frustrating was that the author tells you not to worry about certain concepts, and others he doesn't explain too well

A good shot at "explaining" the inexplicable: modern Quantum mechanics. I wound up with the curious feeling that I actually understood what he was talking about! The "God Particle", of course, is the Higg's Boson, which at the time this book was written was as yet undiscovered. Since the Higg's mediates the force of gravity, perhaps an actual "Unified Theory of Everything" isn't that far away. If you like this, try The Hidden Reality as well. If you're into both Physics and Metaphysics, try The Quantum and the Lotus, a truly wonderful book.

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