

COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

*The Feynman*

LECTURES ON

PHYSICS

FEYNMAN · LEIGHTON · SANDS

VOLUME III

费恩曼物理学讲义 第3卷



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VOLUME III

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This special commemorative issue of  
**The Feynman Lectures on Physics**  
celebrating the 25th anniversary of  
their publication is dedicated to the  
memory of Richard Feynman.

1918 – 1988

## **About Richard Feynman**

Born in 1918 in Brooklyn, Richard P. Feynman received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1942. Despite his youth, he played an important part in the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos during World War II. Subsequently, he taught at Cornell and at the California Institute of Technology. In 1965 he received the Nobel Prize in Physics, along with Sin-Itaro Tomanaga and Julian Schwinger, for his work in quantum electrodynamics.

Dr. Feynman won his Nobel Prize for successfully resolving problems with the theory of quantum electrodynamics. He also created a mathematical theory that accounts for the phenomenon of superfluidity in liquid helium. Thereafter, with Murray Gell-Mann, he did fundamental work in the area of weak interactions such as beta decay. In later years Feynman played a key role in the development of quark theory by putting forward his parton model of high energy proton collision processes.

Beyond these achievements, Dr. Feynman introduced basic new computational techniques and notations into physics, above all, the ubiquitous Feynman diagrams that, perhaps more than any other formalism in recent scientific history, have changed the way in which basic physical processes are conceptualized and calculated.

Feynman was a remarkably effective educator. Of all his numerous awards, he was especially proud of the Oersted Medal for Teaching which he won in 1972. *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*, originally published in 1963, were described by a reviewer in Scientific American as “tough, but nourishing and full of flavor. After 25 years it is the guide for teachers and for the best of beginning students.” In order to increase the understanding of physics among the lay public, Dr. Feynman wrote *The Character of Physical Law* and *Q.E.D.: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter*. He also authored a number of advanced publications that have become classic references and textbooks for researchers and students.

Richard Feynman was a constructive public man. His work on the Challenger commission is well known, especially his famous demonstration of the susceptibility of the O-rings to cold, an elegant experiment which required nothing more than a glass of ice water. Less well known were Dr. Feynman's efforts on the California State Curriculum Committee in the 1960's where he protested the mediocrity of textbooks.

A recital of Richard Feynman's myriad scientific and educational accomplishments cannot adequately capture the essence of the man. As any reader of even his most technical publications knows, Feynman's lively and multi-sided personality shines through all his work. Besides being a physicist, he was at various times a repairer of radios, a picker of locks, an artist, a dancer, a bongo player, and even a decipherer of Mayan Hieroglyphics. Perpetually curious about his world, he was an exemplary empiricist.

Richard Feynman died on February 15, 1988, in Los Angeles.

## ***The Feynman Lectures on Physics, Special Preface***

Toward the end of his life, Richard Feynman's fame had transcended the confines of the scientific community. His exploits as a member of the commission investigating the space shuttle Challenger disaster gave him widespread exposure; similarly, a best-selling book about his picaresque adventures made him a folk hero almost of the proportions of Albert Einstein. But back in 1961, even before his Nobel Prize increased his visibility to the general public, Feynman was more than merely famous among members of the scientific community—he was legendary. Undoubtedly, the extraordinary power of his teaching helped spread and enrich the legend of Richard Feynman.

He was a truly great teacher, perhaps the greatest of his era and ours. For Feynman, the lecture hall was a theater, and the lecturer a performer, responsible for providing drama and fireworks as well as facts and figures. He would prowl about the front of a classroom, arms waving, “the impossible combination of theoretical physicist and circus barker, all body motion and sound effects,” wrote the New York Times. Whether he addressed an audience of students, colleagues, or the general public, for those lucky enough to see Feynman lecture in person, the experience was usually unconventional and always unforgettable, like the man himself.

He was the master of high drama, adept at riveting the attention of every lecture hall audience. Many years ago, he taught a course in Advanced Quantum Mechanics, a large class comprised of a few registered graduate students and most of the Caltech physics faculty. During one lecture, Feynman started explaining how to represent certain complicated integrals diagrammatically: time on this axis, space on that axis, wiggly line for this straight line, etc. Having described what is known to the world of physics as a Feynman diagram, he turned around to face the class, grinning wickedly. “And this is called *THE* diagram!” Feynman had reached the denouement, and the lecture hall erupted with spontaneous applause.

For many years after the lectures that make up this book were given, Feynman was an occasional guest lecturer for Caltech's freshman physics course. Naturally, his appearances had to be kept secret so there would be room left in the hall for the registered students. At one such lecture the subject was curved-space time, and Feynman was characteristically brilliant. But the unforgettable moment came at the beginning of the lecture. The supernova of 1987 has just been discovered, and Feynman was very excited about it. He said, “Tycho Brahe had his supernova, and Kepler had his. Then there weren't any for 400 years. But now I have mine.” The class fell silent, and Feynman continued on. “There are  $10^{11}$  stars in the galaxy. That used to be a *huge* number. But it's only a hundred billion. It's less than the national deficit! We used to call them astronomical numbers. Now we should call them economical numbers.” The class dissolved in laughter, and Feynman, having captured his audience, went on with his lecture.

Showmanship aside, Feynman's pedagogical technique was simple. A summation of his teaching philosophy was found among his papers in the Caltech archives, in a note he had scribbled to himself while in Brazil in 1952:

“First figure out why you want the students to learn the subject and what you want them to know, and the method will result more or less by common sense.”

What came to Feynman by “common sense” were often brilliant twists that perfectly captured the essence of his point. Once, during a public lecture, he was trying to

explain why one must not verify an idea using the same data that suggested the idea in the first place. Seeming to wander off the subject, Feynman began talking about license plates. "You know, the most amazing thing happened to me tonight. I was coming here, on the way to the lecture, and I came in through the parking lot. And you won't believe what happened. I saw a car with the license plate ARW 357. Can you imagine? Of all the millions of license plates in the state, what was the chance that I would see that particular one tonight? Amazing!" A point that even many scientists fail to grasp was made clear through Feynman's remarkable "common sense."

In 35 years at Caltech (from 1952 to 1987), Feynman was listed as teacher of record for 34 courses. Twenty-five of them were advanced graduate courses, strictly limited to graduate students, unless undergraduates asked permission to take them (they often did, and permission was nearly always granted). The rest were mainly introductory graduate courses. Only once did Feynman teach courses purely for undergraduates, and that was the celebrated occasion in the academic years 1961–1962 and 1962–1963, with a brief reprise in 1964, when he gave the lectures that were to become *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*.

At the time there was a consensus at Caltech that freshman and sophomore students were getting turned off rather than spurred on by their two years of compulsory physics. To remedy the situation, Feynman was asked to design a series of lectures to be given to the students over the course of two years, first to freshmen, and then to the same class as sophomores. When he agreed, it was immediately decided that the lectures should be transcribed for publication. That job turned out to be far more difficult than anyone had imagined. Turning out publishable books required a tremendous amount of work on the part of his colleagues, as well as Feynman himself, who did the final editing of every chapter.

And the nuts and bolts of running a course had to be addressed. This task was greatly complicated by the fact that Feynman had only a vague outline of what he wanted to cover. This meant that no one knew what Feynman would say until he stood in front of a lecture hall filled with students and said it. The Caltech professors who assisted him would then scramble as best they could to handle mundane details, such as making up homework problems.

Why did Feynman devote more than two years to revolutionize the way beginning physics was taught? One can only speculate, but there were probably three basic reasons. One is that he loved to have an audience, and this gave him a bigger theater than he usually had in graduate courses. The second was that he genuinely cared about students, and he simply thought that teaching freshmen was an important thing to do. The third and perhaps most important reason was the sheer challenge of reformulating physics, as he understood it, so that it could be presented to young students. This was his specialty, and was the standard by which he measured whether something was really understood. Feynman was once asked by a Caltech faculty member to explain why spin  $1/2$  particles obey Fermi-Dirac statistics. He gauged his audience perfectly and said, "I'll prepare a freshman lecture on it." But a few days later he returned and said, "You know, I couldn't do it. I couldn't reduce it to the freshman level. That means we really don't understand it."

This specialty of reducing deep ideas to simple, understandable terms is evident throughout *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*, but nowhere more so than in his treatment of quantum mechanics. To aficionados, what he has done is clear. He has presented, to beginning students, the path integral method, the technique of his own devising that allowed him to solve some of the most profound problems in physics. His own work using path integrals, among other achievements, led to the 1965 Nobel Prize that he shared with Julian Schwinger and Sin-Itaro Tomonaga.

Through the distant veil of memory, many of the students and faculty attending the lectures have said that having two years of physics with Feynman was the experience of a lifetime. But that's not how it seemed at the time. Many of the students dreaded the class, and as the course wore on, attendance by the registered students started dropping alarmingly. But at the same time, more and more faculty and graduate students started attending. The room stayed full, and Feynman may never have known he was losing some of his intended audience. But even in Feynman's view, his pedagogical endeavor did not succeed. He wrote in the 1963 preface to the *Lectures*: "I



don't think I did very well by the students." Rereading the books, one sometimes seems to catch Feynman looking over his shoulder, not at his young audience, but directly at his colleagues, saying, "Look at that! Look how I finessed that point! Wasn't that clever?" But even when he thought he was explaining things lucidly to freshmen or sophomores, it was not really they who were able to benefit most from what he was doing. It was his peers—scientists, physicists and professors—who would be the main beneficiaries of his magnificent achievement, which was nothing less than to see physics through the fresh and dynamic perspective of Richard Feynman.

Feynman was more than a great teacher. His gift was that he was an extraordinary teacher of teachers. If the purpose in giving *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* was to prepare a roomful of undergraduate students to solve examination problems in physics, he cannot be said to have succeeded particularly well. Moreover, if the intent was for the books to serve as introductory college textbooks, he cannot be said to have achieved his goal. Nevertheless, the books have been translated into 10 foreign languages and are available in four bilingual editions. Feynman himself believed that his most important contribution to physics would not be QED, or the theory of superfluid helium, or polarons, or partons. His foremost contribution would be the three red books of *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*. That belief fully justifies this commemorative issue of these celebrated books.

David L. Goodstein  
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*April 1989*

*The Feynman*  
LECTURES ON  
PHYSICS  
QUANTUM MECHANICS

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## ***Feynman's Preface***

These are the lectures in physics that I gave last year and the year before to the freshman and sophomore classes at Caltech. The lectures are, of course, not verbatim—they have been edited, sometimes extensively and sometimes less so. The lectures form only part of the complete course. The whole group of 180 students gathered in a big lecture room twice a week to hear these lectures and then they broke up into small groups of 15 to 20 students in recitation sections under the guidance of a teaching assistant. In addition, there was a laboratory session once a week.

The special problem we tried to get at with these lectures was to maintain the interest of the very enthusiastic and rather smart students coming out of the high schools and into Caltech. They have heard a lot about how interesting and exciting physics is—the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, and other modern ideas. By the end of two years of our previous course, many would be very discouraged because there were really very few grand, new, modern ideas presented to them. They were made to study inclined planes, electrostatics, and so forth, and after two years it was quite stultifying. The problem was whether or not we could make a course which would save the more advanced and excited student by maintaining his enthusiasm.

The lectures here are not in any way meant to be a survey course, but are very serious. I thought to address them to the most intelligent in the class and to make sure, if possible, that even the most intelligent student was unable to completely encompass everything that was in the lectures—by putting in suggestions of applications of the ideas and concepts in various directions outside the main line of attack. For this reason, though, I tried very hard to make all the statements as accurate as possible, to point out in every case where the equations and ideas fitted into the body of physics, and how—when they learned more—things would be modified. I also felt that for such students it is important to indicate what it is that they should—if they are sufficiently clever—be able to understand by deduction from what has been said before, and what is being put in as something new. When new ideas came in, I would try either to deduce them if they were deducible, or to explain that it was a new idea which hadn't any basis in terms of things they had already learned and which was not supposed to be provable—but was just added in.

At the start of these lectures, I assumed that the students knew something when they came out of high school—such things as geometrical optics, simple chemistry ideas, and so on. I also didn't see that there was any reason to make the lectures



in a definite order, in the sense that I would not be allowed to mention something until I was ready to discuss it in detail. There was a great deal of mention of things to come, without complete discussions. These more complete discussions would come later when the preparation became more advanced. Examples are the discussions of inductance, and of energy levels, which are at first brought in in a very qualitative way and are later developed more completely.

At the same time that I was aiming at the more active student, I also wanted to take care of the fellow for whom the extra fireworks and side applications are merely disquieting and who cannot be expected to learn most of the material in the lecture at all. For such students I wanted there to be at least a central core or backbone of material which he *could* get. Even if he didn't understand everything in a lecture, I hoped he wouldn't get nervous. I didn't expect him to understand everything, but only the central and most direct features. It takes, of course, a certain intelligence on his part to see which are the central theorems and central ideas, and which are the more advanced side issues and applications which he may understand only in later years.

In giving these lectures there was one serious difficulty: in the way the course was given, there wasn't any feedback from the students to the lecturer to indicate how well the lectures were going over. This is indeed a very serious difficulty, and I don't know how good the lectures really are. The whole thing was essentially an experiment. And if I did it again I wouldn't do it the same way—I hope I *don't* have to do it again! I think, though, that things worked out—so far as the physics is concerned—quite satisfactorily in the first year.

In the second year I was not so satisfied. In the first part of the course, dealing with electricity and magnetism, I couldn't think of any really unique or different way of doing it—of any way that would be particularly more exciting than the usual way of presenting it. So I don't think I did very much in the lectures on electricity and magnetism. At the end of the second year I had originally intended to go on, after the electricity and magnetism, by giving some more lectures on the properties of materials, but mainly to take up things like fundamental modes, solutions of the diffusion equation, vibrating systems, orthogonal functions, . . . developing the first stages of what are usually called “the mathematical methods of physics.” In retrospect, I think that if I were doing it again I would go back to that original idea. But since it was not planned that I would be giving these lectures again, it was suggested that it might be a good idea to try to give an introduction to the quantum mechanics—what you will find in Volume III.

It is perfectly clear that students who will major in physics can wait until their third year for quantum mechanics. On the other hand, the argument was made that many of the students in our course study physics as a background for their primary interest in other fields. And the usual way of dealing with quantum mechanics makes that subject almost unavailable for the great majority of students because they have to take so long to learn it. Yet, in its real applications—especially in its more complex applications, such as in electrical engineering and chemistry—the full machinery of the differential equation approach is not actually used. So I tried to describe the principles of quantum mechanics in a way which wouldn't require that one first know the mathematics of partial differential equations. Even for a physicist I think that is an interesting thing to try to do—to present quantum mechanics in this reverse fashion—for several reasons which may be apparent in the lectures themselves. However, I think that the experiment in the quantum mechanics part was not completely successful—in large part because I really did not have enough time at the end (I should, for instance, have had three or four more lectures in order to deal more completely with such matters as energy bands and the spatial dependence of amplitudes). Also, I had never presented the subject this way before, so the lack of feedback was particularly serious. I now believe the quantum mechanics should be given at a later time. Maybe I'll have a chance to do it again someday. Then I'll do it right.

The reason there are no lectures on how to solve problems is because there were recitation sections. Although I did put in three lectures in the first year on how to solve problems, they are not included here. Also there was a lecture on inertial

guidance which certainly belongs after the lecture on rotating systems, but which was, unfortunately, omitted. The fifth and sixth lectures are actually due to Matthew Sands, as I was out of town.

The question, of course, is how well this experiment has succeeded. My own point of view—which, however, does not seem to be shared by most of the people who worked with the students—is pessimistic. I don't think I did very well by the students. When I look at the way the majority of the students handled the problems on the examinations, I think that the system is a failure. Of course, my friends point out to me that there were one or two dozen students who—very surprisingly—understood almost everything in all of the lectures, and who were quite active in working with the material and worrying about the many points in an excited and interested way. These people have now, I believe, a first-rate background in physics—and they are, after all, the ones I was trying to get at. But then, “The power of instruction is seldom of much efficacy except in those happy dispositions where it is almost superfluous.” (Gibbons)

Still, I didn't want to leave any student completely behind, as perhaps I did. I think one way we could help the students more would be by putting more hard work into developing a set of problems which would elucidate some of the ideas in the lectures. Problems give a good opportunity to fill out the material of the lectures and make more realistic, more complete, and more settled in the mind the ideas that have been exposed.

I think, however, that there isn't any solution to this problem of education other than to realize that the best teaching can be done only when there is a direct individual relationship between a student and a good teacher—a situation in which the student discusses the ideas, thinks about the things, and talks about the things. It's impossible to learn very much by simply sitting in a lecture, or even by simply doing problems that are assigned. But in our modern times we have so many students to teach that we have to try to find some substitute for the ideal. Perhaps my lectures can make some contribution. Perhaps in some small place where there are individual teachers and students, they may get some inspiration or some ideas from the lectures. Perhaps they will have fun thinking them through—or going on to develop some of the ideas further.

RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

*June, 1963*



## ***Foreword***

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A great triumph of twentieth-century physics, the theory of quantum mechanics, is now nearly 40 years old, yet we have generally been giving our students their introductory course in physics (for many students, their last) with hardly more than a casual allusion to this central part of our knowledge of the physical world. We should do better by them. These lectures are an attempt to present them with the basic and essential ideas of the quantum mechanics in a way that would, hopefully, be comprehensible. The approach you will find here is novel, particularly at the level of a sophomore course, and was considered very much an experiment. After seeing how easily some of the students take to it, however, I believe that the experiment was a success. There is, of course, room for improvement, and it will come with more experience in the classroom. What you will find here is a record of that first experiment.

In the two-year sequence of the Feynman Lectures on Physics which were given from September 1961 through May 1963 for the introductory physics course at Caltech, the concepts of quantum physics were brought in whenever they were necessary for an understanding of the phenomena being described. In addition, the last twelve lectures of the second year were given over to a more coherent introduction to some of the concepts of quantum mechanics. It became clear as the lectures drew to a close, however, that not enough time had been left for the quantum mechanics. As the material was prepared, it was continually discovered that other important and interesting topics could be treated with the elementary tools that had been developed. There was also a fear that the too brief treatment of the Schrödinger wave function which had been included in the twelfth lecture would not provide a sufficient bridge to the more conventional treatments of many books the students might hope to read. It was therefore decided to extend the series with seven additional lectures; they were given to the sophomore class in May of 1964. These lectures rounded out and extended somewhat the material developed in the earlier lectures.

In this volume we have put together the lectures from both years with some adjustment of the sequence. In addition, two lectures originally given to the freshman class as an introduction to quantum physics have been lifted bodily from Volume I (where they were Chapters 37 and 38) and placed as the first two chapters here—to make this volume a self-contained unit, relatively independent of the first two. A few ideas about the quantization of angular momentum (including a discussion of the Stern-Gerlach experiment) had been introduced in Chapters 34 and 35 of Volume II, and familiarity with them is assumed; for the convenience of those who will not have that volume at hand, those two chapters are reproduced here as an Appendix.

This set of lectures tries to elucidate from the beginning those features of the quantum mechanics which are most basic and most general. The first lectures tackle head on the ideas of a probability amplitude, the interference of amplitudes, the abstract notion of a state, and the superposition and resolution of states—and the Dirac notation is used from the start. In each instance the ideas are introduced together with a detailed discussion of some specific examples—to try to make the physical ideas as real as possible. The time dependence of states including states of definite energy comes next, and the ideas are applied at once to the study of two-state systems. A detailed discussion of the ammonia maser provides the frame-



work for the introduction to radiation absorption and induced transitions. The lectures then go on to consider more complex systems, leading to a discussion of the propagation of electrons in a crystal, and to a rather complete treatment of the quantum mechanics of angular momentum. Our introduction to quantum mechanics ends in Chapter 20 with a discussion of the Schrödinger wave function, its differential equation, and the solution for the hydrogen atom.

The last chapter of this volume is not intended to be a part of the “course.” It is a “seminar” on superconductivity and was given in the spirit of some of the entertainment lectures of the first two volumes, with the intent of opening to the students a broader view of the relation of what they were learning to the general culture of physics. Feynman’s “epilogue” serves as the period to the three-volume series.

As explained in the Foreword to Volume I, these lectures were but one aspect of a program for the development of a new introductory course carried out at the California Institute of Technology under the supervision of the Physics Course Revision Committee (Robert Leighton, Victor Neher, and Matthew Sands). The program was made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation. Many people helped with the technical details of the preparation of this volume: Marylou Clayton, Julie Curcio, James Hartle, Tom Harvey, Martin Israel, Patricia Preuss, Fanny Warren, and Barbara Zimmerman. Professors Gerry Neugebauer and Charles Wilts contributed greatly to the accuracy and clarity of the material by reviewing carefully much of the manuscript.

But the story of quantum mechanics you will find here is Richard Feynman’s. Our labors will have been well spent if we have been able to bring to others even some of the intellectual excitement we experienced as we saw the ideas unfold in his real-life Lectures on Physics.

*December, 1964*

MATTHEW SANDS