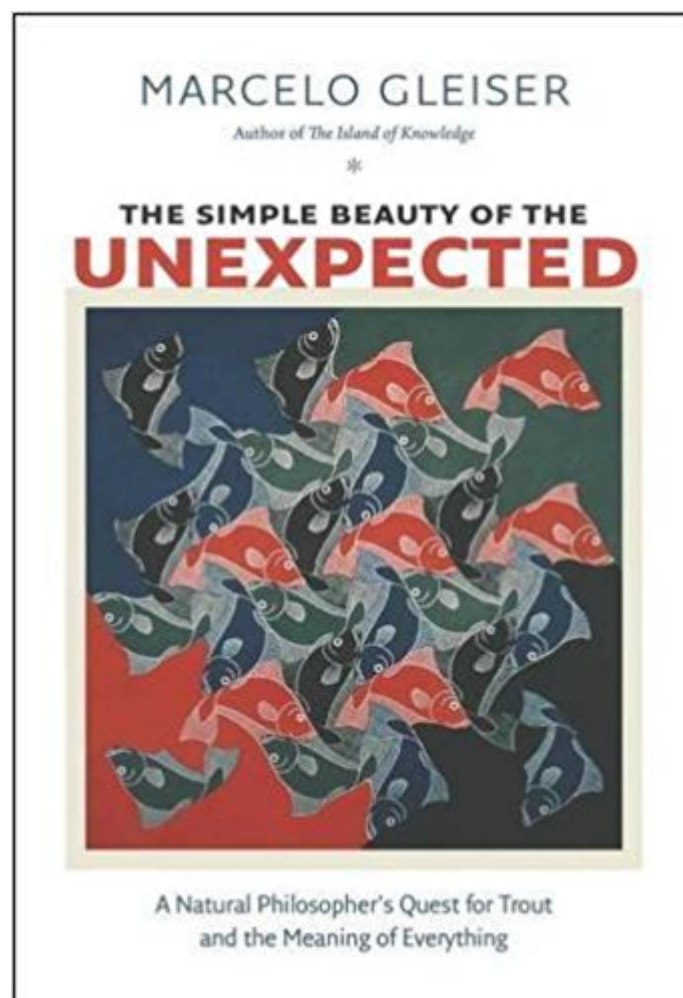




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The Simple Beauty Of The Unexpected: A Natural Philosopher's Quest For Trout And The Meaning Of Everything





Synopsis

Marcelo Gleiser has had a passion for science and fishing since he was a boy growing up on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. Now a world-famous theoretical physicist with hundreds of scientific articles and several books of popular science to his credit, he felt it was time to connect with nature in less theoretical ways. After seeing a fly-fishing class on the Dartmouth College green, he decided to learn to fly-fish, a hobby, he says, that teaches humility. In *The Simple Beauty of the Unexpected*, Gleiser travels the world to scientific conferences, fishing wherever he goes. At each stop, he ponders how in the myriad ways physics informs the act of fishing; how, in its turn, fishing serves as a lens into nature's inner workings; and how science engages with questions of meaning and spirituality, inspiring a sense of mystery and awe of the not yet known. Personal and engaging, *The Simple Beauty of the Unexpected* is a scientist's tribute to nature, an affirmation of humanity's deep connection with and debt to Earth, and an exploration of the meaning of existence, from atom to trout to cosmos.

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Customer Reviews

"Beautifully composed . . . This elegant treatise will inspire readers who relish a philosophical approach to science and travel." —Library Journal
"Altogether excellent."
"Brain Pickings"
"Part memoir, part popular science blog, with interludes of closely guided casting in England, Italy, and Iceland, Gleiser, like many of us, explores angling as a conduit to the outer world of natural phenomena and the inner world of the self."
—Fly Fishing & Tying Journal

“The fly-fishing is naively beautiful. The physics is just beautiful. But the conclusion to the journey of a man so engaged by both the epiphany is magnificent and should be shared by us all.” (Jeremy Lucas, European Open fly-fishing champion, author of *Presentation Fly-Fishing and The Last Salmon*)

“The Simple Beauty of the Unexpected is an elegantly written, introspective, and thought-provoking meditation on growing up as someone curious about the universe. It’s a wonderful introduction to the human side of science and the scientific side of being human.” (Sean Carroll, author of *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself*)

“Whether teasing apart the known, the unknown, and the unknowable in science, or immersing us in the natural world of Brazil or Iceland, Marcelo Gleiser’s words sing on the page. You don’t have to fish or seek out spiritual experiences to love this book (I do neither). I was absolutely delighted with Marcelo’s joy in nature, with his reasons for not eating meat, and with the wonderful surprise for all animal lovers at the end of this compelling and highly personal narrative.” (Barbara King, author of *How Animals Grieve*)

“With wit, charm, humor, and passion, Gleiser pulls off that rarest of catches connecting the most fundamental and sublime aspects of science with the most intimate and ordinary experience of fishing. From a river in Iceland to the Large Hadron Collider near Geneva, Gleiser seamlessly pulls together disparate themes of life and questions of meaning. Full of warmth and deep insight, *The Simple Beauty of the Unexpected* is a meditation on human significance in a vast Universe that is full of both fish and stars.” (Adam Frank, professor of astrophysics, University of Rochester, and NPR commentator)

This is an eloquent exploration of the human situation from the perspective of an eminent scientist turned fly fisher. It illustrates the old saying that new fishermen start out wanting to catch the most fish, then the biggest fish, and finally are satisfied to just see the River. (He discusses the gendered reference in “fisherman,” finding it acceptable on esthetic grounds.) Professor Gleiser carries the last stage of the fisherman a bit further, suggesting that the enlightened abandon fishing altogether. Only time will tell whether that ultimately satisfies him. I suspect not, although he offers an ethical rationale for his position. His final position seems unrealistic to me in that only a fisheries biologist is likely to master the intricacies of trout habitat and life, absent the incentive of actually fishing for them. It also seems he had an in-born (dare I say it?) propensity that makes vegetarianism attractive as an ethical position. However, he also displays a predatory propensity to fish, so we’ll see which propensity ultimately wins out. I hope he writes on the subject again, maybe 10 or 15

years down the road. Although he rejects the compromise that catch-and-release fishing offers, in so doing he gives short shrift to his predatory side. I suspect somewhat the same impulse underlies scientific inquiry, so perhaps his science gives him a different outlet. But, can the impulse be fully sublimated? The book is as much about his scientific world view as about fishing. That genre is also familiar, although this example is skewed toward physics rather than biology, giving it a different twist from the usual one. I like physics, so I enjoyed that. The discussion is general. It assumes some previous exposure to the subject at a lay person's level. Someone lacking a rudimentary exposure to quantum physics in particular might find that discussion a little challenging. But, that's only a tiny part of the book. The personal, biographic details are interesting, especially regarding his youth in Brazil, and also illuminating as to Dr. Gleisser's world view, which is less deterministic and more skeptical about science itself than typical in a scientist. He cites a wonderful, personal experience as the basis for this. Despite my quibble with the conclusion, I enjoyed the book. It is very well written. It makes you think. Fly fisherpersons with a taste for science will enjoy it. Those uninitiated in fly fishing who like science will also enjoy it as the fishing portions of the book are not technical.

Brilliant book, brilliant mind, a joy to read

Wonderfully insightful. Flowing between the large and small while holding the excitement of fly-fishing akin to discovery and new understanding.

Recommended for any people that loves nature. Some ideas on particle models should be clarified with a little more wording.

I felt like the physics was not very substantive and the angling at the same level. The book started on such a high note and ended flat. Fishing is a blood sport, which one would hope one would address prior to casting a line.

This book has three intermixed themes--theoretical physics, fly fishing and autobiography. Gleiser was born in Brazil, has a PhD from a British university and has been a professor at an American Ivy League school for more than twenty years. He writes: "In my life--and in this book--the fishing is mostly a conduit to the outer world of natural phenomena and the inner world of the self."As an adult he acquires an interest in fly fishing (trout). This is difficult to describe if you have not read the book,

but it echoes a boyhood interest in fishing. The chapters are built around places he goes to give talks but also to fish--England (Lake District), Italy (Tuscany), Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul) and Iceland (Laxe River). Each of these places is different and yet the same, the relationship of fisher and fish, two different worlds of air and water interconnected. He becomes more expert and more appreciative, with fly fishing mentors coming into the mix. He also mentions briefly his sport of obstacle running and Spartan racing (I had to look these up--sounds more like Marine training than a sport!). Each chapter is also about an aspect of physics that he was invited to speak about at a conference. These cover a very wide range of physics, from some history of physics, the Big Bang, particles, string theory, origins of life and the prospect of life elsewhere in the universe. He describes science as good at the How and When questions but not useful in the Why question. We have one planet to support us and we're not going to solve things by leaving the mess behind us and rocketing across the cosmos for new planets. Along the way, he discusses personal loss, climate change, and varieties of agnosticism. In the last section, the Iceland chapter, he has a sort of epiphany about fly fishing. I won't describe it here because it's an important point the book builds to and in a sense it would be like giving away the ending in a mystery novel. I don't want to take away some of the surprise a reader might have.

This is a great book. Combining the complexities of fly fishing, Gleiser skillfully blends insight about the ultimate nature of reality from various perspectives. Weaving together in an easy to understand narrative of personal experience, current physics, ecology, and timeless wisdom. I highly recommend this book.

A great blending of philosophy, science, nature and their inseparable natures - with even a smidgeon of religion tossed in. Replete with nature analogies that argue (or prove, to my mind) that science, faith and nature complement rather than contradict each other.

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