

University of Minnesota
School of Physics and Astronomy

2025 Fall Physics 8901
Elementary Particle Physics I
Assignment Solution

Lecture Instructor: Professor Tony Gherghetta

Zong-En Chen
chen9613@umn.edu

September 25, 2025

Problem Set 2 due 9:30 AM, Monday, September 29th

Question 1

The $\tau - \theta$ Puzzle

In the 1950's, two particles τ , θ were discovered with the same mass and lifetime that decayed differently. At the time, physicists believed that parity was conserved in all interactions.

- (a) Consider the decay $\theta \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^0$. Assuming parity invariance and zero for the spin of θ , find the parity of θ .
- (b) Now consider the decay process $\tau \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^+\pi^-$. (This is an old symbol for the K meson.) Let l be the orbital angular momentum of $\pi^+\pi^+$ and l' the orbital angular momentum of π^- relative to the center-of-mass of $\pi^+\pi^+$. Assuming parity invariance and the spin of τ equal to zero, find its parity.
- (c) What resolved the $\tau - \theta$ puzzle?

Answer

(a)

First, we note that the intrinsic parity of a pion is -1 . The parity of a two-particle system is given by

$$P_\theta = P_1 P_2 (-1)^l, \quad (1)$$

where P_1 and P_2 are the intrinsic parities of the two particles, and l is their relative orbital angular momentum. Since the θ and pions have spin 0, the system of two pions must have total angular momentum $j = s + l = 0$, in order to satisfy the conservation of total angular momentum. This means that l must be 0, too. Therefore, we have $P_\theta = 1$. It is even parity.

(b)

The parity of a three-particle system is given by

$$P_\tau = P_1 P_2 P_3 (-1)^{l+l'}, \quad (2)$$

where P_1 , P_2 , and P_3 are the intrinsic parities of the three particles, and l and l' are their relative orbital angular momenta. Since the τ and pions have spin 0, the system of three pions must have total angular momentum $j = s + l + l' = 0$, in order to satisfy the conservation of total angular momentum. This means that $l + l'$ must be 0, too. Therefore, we have $P_\tau = -1$. It is odd parity.

(c)

Since the τ and θ have the same mass and lifetime, they are actually the same particle, now known as the K meson. The resolution of the $\tau - \theta$ puzzle was the discovery that parity is not conserved in weak interactions, which is how the K meson decays. \square

Question 2

List all applicable conservation laws that are or would be violated in the following decays:

1. $\rho^0 \rightarrow \pi^0 \pi^0$
2. $\rho \rightarrow \gamma \gamma$
3. $K^+ \rightarrow \pi^+ \pi^0$
4. $\pi^0 \rightarrow 5\gamma$

(Look up the corresponding parities from the Particle Data Group at <http://pdg.lbl.gov>.)

Answer

Before we analyze each decay, we list the conservation laws that we will check for each decay:

- Conservation of electric charge
- Conservation of angular momentum (total angular momentum J).
- Conservation of isospin
- Conservation of parity
- Conservation of C-parity
- Conservation of G-parity

1. The ρ^0 has quantum numbers $I^G(J^{PC}) = 1^+(1^{--})$, the π^0 has quantum numbers $I^G(J^{PC}) = 1^-(0^{-+})$.

- Electric charge: The ρ^0 has charge 0, and the two π^0 's have charge $0 + 0 = 0$. Electric charge is conserved.
- Angular momentum: The ρ^0 has spin 1, and the two π^0 's have spin $0 + 0 = 0$. To conserve total angular momentum, the two-pion system must have orbital angular momentum $l = 1$. Total angular momentum is conserved.
- Isospin: The ρ^0 has isospin $I = 1$, and the two π^0 's can couple to isospin $I = 0, 1, 2$. Therefore, the decay can proceed through the $I = 1$ channel. Isospin is conserved.
- Parity: The parity of the two-pion system is given by

$$P_\rho = P_\pi P_\pi (-1)^l = (-1)(-1)(-1)^l = (-1)^l. \quad (3)$$

Since the ρ^0 has spin 1 and the pions have spin 0, the two-pion system must have orbital angular momentum $l = 1$ to conserve total angular momentum. Therefore, the parity of the two-pion system is $P = -1$, which matches the parity of the ρ^0 . Parity is conserved.

- C-parity: The C-parity of the two-pion system is given by

$$C_\rho = C_\pi C_\pi (-1)^l = (+1)(+1)(-1)^l = (-1)^l. \quad (4)$$

Since the ρ^0 has spin 1 and the pions have spin 0, the two-pion system must have orbital angular momentum $l = 1$ to conserve total angular momentum. Therefore, the C-parity of the two-pion system is $C = -1$, which matches the C-parity of the ρ^0 . C-parity is conserved.

- G-parity: The G-parity of the two-pion system is given by

$$G_\rho = G_\pi G_\pi = (-1)(-1) = 1. \quad (5)$$

Hence, the G parity is $G = +1$, which matches the G-parity of the ρ^0 . G-parity is conserved.

All conservation laws are satisfied, so the decay can occur.

Remark: If we check the decay mode of $\rho \rightarrow \pi\pi$, we find that the branch ratio is close to 100%. This is consistent with our analysis that the decay can occur.

2. The ρ has quantum numbers $I^G(J^{PC}) = 1^+(1^{--})$, the photon has quantum numbers $I^G(J^{PC}) = 0^-(1^{--})$.

Remark: Actually, PDG show that the photon has isospin $I = 0, 1$. Here, I choose $I = 0$ because the photon do not involve in strong interactions. In other words, the photon is a singlet under the strong interaction. I think $I = 1$ case is for the weak interaction, but I am not sure.

- Electric charge: The ρ has charge 0, and the two photons have charge $0 + 0 = 0$. Electric charge is conserved.
- Angular momentum: The ρ has spin 1, and the two photons have spin $1 + 1 = 0, 1, 2$. To conserve total angular momentum, the two-photon system must have orbital angular momentum $l = 0$ (when $s = 1$), $l = 1$ (when $s = 0, 1, 2$), $l = 2$ (when $s = 1$). Hence, the total angular momentum might be conserved. However, by the **Landau-Yang theorem**, a massive spin-1 particle cannot decay into two photons. Therefore, the decay cannot occur. **Angular momentum is not conserved.**
- Isospin: The ρ has isospin $I = 1$, and the two photons can couple to isospin $I = 0$. Therefore, the decay cannot proceed through any isospin channel. **Isospin is not conserved.**
- Parity: The parity of the two-photon system is given by

$$P_\rho = P_\gamma P_\gamma (-1)^l = (-1)(-1)(-1)^l = (-1)^l. \quad (6)$$

By checking the possible values of l above, we know the l should be 1 to conserve the parity.

- C-parity: The C-parity of the two-photon system is given by

$$C_\gamma C_\gamma = (-1)(-1) = 1 \neq -1 = C_\rho. \quad (7)$$

Hence, the C parity is $C = +1$, which does not match the C-parity of the ρ . **C-parity is not conserved.**

The decay cannot occur because angular momentum, isospin, and C-parity are not conserved.

Remark: If we check the decay mode of $\rho \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$, we find that the branch ratio is 0%.

3. The K^+ has quantum numbers $I(J^P) = \frac{1}{2}(0^-)$, the π^+ has quantum numbers $I(J^P) = 1(0^-)$, and the π^0 has quantum numbers $I(J^P) = 1(0^-)$.
 - Electric charge: The K^+ has charge +1, and the two pions have charge $+1+0 = +1$. Electric charge is conserved.
 - Angular momentum: The K^+ has spin 0, and the two pions have spin $0+0 = 0$. To conserve total angular momentum, the two-pion system must have orbital angular momentum $l = 0$. Total angular momentum is conserved.
 - Isospin: The K^+ has isospin $I = \frac{1}{2}$, and the two pions can couple to isospin $I = 0, 1, 2$. Therefore, the decay cannot proceed through any isospin channel.

Question 3

List all states $((J^{PC}))$ with total spin $J = 0, 1, 2$ and P, C parities that cannot be realized as a fermion-antifermion system (i.e., as e^+e^- or quark-antiquark). (Hypothetical particles with such combinations of quantum numbers are called exotic, and are being sought for in experiments, so far unsuccessfully.)

Answer

Question 4

State which of the following combinations can or cannot exist in a state of isospin $I = 1$, and give the reasons:

1. $\pi^0\pi^0$
2. $\pi^+\pi^-$
3. $\Sigma^0\pi^0$
4. $\Lambda\pi^0$

Answer