

Lectures on Quantum Mechanics

Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg combines his exceptional physical insight with his gift for clear exposition to provide a concise introduction to modern quantum mechanics.

Ideally suited to a one-year graduate course, this textbook is also a useful reference for researchers. Readers are introduced to the subject through a review of the history of quantum mechanics and an account of classic solutions of the Schrödinger equation, before quantum mechanics is developed in a modern Hilbert space approach. The textbook covers many topics not often found in other books on the subject, including alternatives to the Copenhagen interpretation, Bloch waves and band structure, the Wigner–Eckart theorem, magic numbers, isospin symmetry, the Dirac theory of constrained canonical systems, general scattering theory, the optical theorem, the “in-in” formalism, the Berry phase, Landau levels, entanglement, and quantum computing. Problems are included at the ends of chapters, with solutions available for instructors at www.cambridge.org/LQM.

STEVEN WEINBERG is a member of the Physics and Astronomy Departments at the University of Texas at Austin. His research has covered a broad range of topics in quantum field theory, elementary particle physics, and cosmology, and he has been honored with numerous awards, including the Nobel Prize in Physics, the National Medal of Science, and the Heinemann Prize in Mathematical Physics. He is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, Britain’s Royal Society, and other academies in the USA and abroad. The American Philosophical Society awarded him the Benjamin Franklin medal, with a citation that said he is “considered by many to be the preeminent theoretical physicist alive in the world today.” His books for physicists include *Gravitation and Cosmology*, the three-volume work *The Quantum Theory of Fields*, and most recently, *Cosmology*. Educated at Cornell, Copenhagen, and Princeton, he also holds honorary degrees from sixteen other universities. He taught at Columbia, Berkeley, M.I.T., and Harvard, where he was Higgins Professor of Physics, before coming to Texas in 1982.

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Steven Weinberg
The University of Texas at Austin



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For Louise, Elizabeth, and Gabrielle

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Contents

PREFACE	<i>page xv</i>
NOTATION	xviii
1 HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Photons	1
Black-body radiation □ Rayleigh–Jeans formula □ Planck formula □ Atomic constants □ Photoelectric effect □ Compton scattering	
1.2 Atomic Spectra	5
Discovery of atomic nuclei □ Ritz combination principle □ Bohr quantization condition □ Hydrogen spectrum □ Atomic numbers □ Sommerfeld quantization condition □ Einstein <i>A</i> and <i>B</i> coefficients	
1.3 Wave Mechanics	11
De Broglie waves □ Davisson–Germer experiment □ Schrödinger equation	
1.4 Matrix Mechanics	14
Radiative transition rate □ Harmonic oscillator □ Heisenberg matrix algebra □ Commutation relations □ Equivalence to wave mechanics	
1.5 Probabilistic Interpretation	21
Scattering □ Probability density □ Expectation values □ Classical motion □ Born rule for transition probabilities	
Historical Bibliography	27
Problems	27

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
2	PARTICLE STATES IN A CENTRAL POTENTIAL	29
2.1	Schrödinger Equation for a Central Potential	29
	Hamiltonian for central potentials □ Orbital angular momentum operators □ Spectrum of L^2 □ Separation of wave function □ Boundary conditions	
2.2	Spherical Harmonics	36
	Spectrum of L_3 □ Associated Legendre polynomials □ Construction of spherical harmonics □ Orthonormality □ Parity	
2.3	The Hydrogen Atom	39
	Radial Schrödinger equation □ Power series solution □ Laguerre polynomials □ Energy levels □ Selection rules	
2.4	The Two-Body Problem	44
	Reduced mass □ Relative and center-of-mass coordinates □ Relative and total momenta □ Hydrogen and deuterium spectra	
2.5	The Harmonic Oscillator	45
	Separation of wave function □ Raising and lowering operators □ Spectrum □ Normalized wave functions □ Radiative transition matrix elements	
	Problems	50
3	GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF QUANTUM MECHANICS	52
3.1	States	52
	Hilbert space □ Vector spaces □ Norms □ Completeness and independence □ Orthonormalization □ Probabilities □ Rays □ Dirac notation	
3.2	Continuum States	58
	From discrete to continuum states □ Normalization □ Delta functions □ Distributions	
3.3	Observables	61
	Operators □ Adjoints □ Matrix representation □ Eigenvalues □ Completeness of eigenvectors □ Schwarz inequality □ Uncertainty principle □ Dyads □ Projection operators □ Density matrix □ von Neumann entropy	
3.4	Symmetries	69
	Unitary operators □ Wigner's theorem □ Antiunitary operators □ Continuous symmetries □ Commutators	
3.5	Space Translation	73
	Momentum operators □ Commutation rules □ Momentum eigenstates □ Bloch waves □ Band structure	

Contents ix

3.6 Time Translation	77
Hamiltonians □ Time-dependent Schrödinger equation □ Conservation laws □ Time reversal □ Galilean invariance □ Boost generator	
3.7 Interpretations of Quantum Mechanics	81
Copenhagen interpretation □ Two classes of interpretation □ Many-worlds interpretations □ Examples of measurement □ Decoherence □ Calculation of probabilities □ Abandoning realism □ Decoherent histories interpretation	
Problems	96
4 SPIN ET CETERA	97
4.1 Rotations	99
Finite rotations □ Action on physical states □ Infinitesimal rotations □ Commutation relations □ Total angular momentum □ Spin	
4.2 Angular Momentum Multiplets	104
Raising and lowering operators □ Spectrum of $\mathbf{J}^2$ and J_3 □ Spin matrices □ Pauli matrices □ J_3 -independence □ Stern–Gerlach experiment	
4.3 Addition of Angular Momenta	109
Choice of basis □ Clebsch–Gordan coefficients □ Sum rules □ Hydrogen states □ $SU(2)$ formalism	
4.4 The Wigner–Eckart Theorem	118
Operator transformation properties □ Theorem for matrix elements □ Parallel matrix elements □ Photon emission selection rules	
4.5 Bosons and Fermions	121
Symmetrical and antisymmetrical states □ Connection with spin □ Hartree approximation □ Pauli exclusion principle □ Periodic table for atoms □ Magic numbers for nuclei □ Temperature and chemical potential □ Statistics □ Insulators, conductors, semi-conductors	
4.6 Internal Symmetries	131
Charge symmetry □ Isotopic spin symmetry □ Pions □ Δ s □ Strangeness □ $U(1)$ symmetries □ $SU(3)$ symmetry	
4.7 Inversions	138
Space Inversion □ Orbital parity □ Intrinsic parity □ Parity of pions □ Violations of parity conservation □ P, C, and T	
4.8 Algebraic Derivation of the Hydrogen Spectrum	142
Runge–Lenz vector □ $SO(3) \otimes SO(3)$ commutation relations □ Energy levels □ Scattering states	
Problems	146

x	<i>Contents</i>	
5	APPROXIMATIONS FOR ENERGY EIGENVALUES	148
5.1	First-Order Perturbation Theory	148
	Energy shift □ Dealing with degeneracy □ State vector perturbation □ A classical analog	
5.2	The Zeeman Effect	152
	Gyromagnetic ratio □ Landé g-factor □ Sodium <i>D</i> lines □ Normal and anomalous Zeeman effect □ Paschen–Back effect	
5.3	The First-Order Stark Effect	157
	Mixing of $2s_{1/2}$ and $2p_{1/2}$ states □ Energy shift for weak fields □ Energy shift for strong fields	
5.4	Second-Order Perturbation Theory	160
	Energy shift □ Ultraviolet and infrared divergences □ Closure approximation □ Second-order Stark effect	
5.5	The Variational Method	162
	Upper bound on ground state energy □ Approximation to state vectors □ Virial theorem □ Other states	
5.6	The Born–Oppenheimer Approximation	165
	Reduced Hamiltonian □ Hellmann–Feynman theorem □ Estimate of corrections □ Electronic, vibrational, and rotational modes □ Effective theories	
5.7	The WKB Approximation	171
	Approximate solutions □ Validity conditions □ Turning points □ Energy eigenvalues – one dimension □ Energy eigenvalues – three dimensions	
5.8	Broken Symmetry	179
	Approximate solutions for thick barriers □ Energy splitting □ Decoherence □ Oscillations □ Chiral molecules	
	Problems	181
6	APPROXIMATIONS FOR TIME-DEPENDENT PROBLEMS	183
6.1	First-Order Perturbation Theory	183
	Differential equation for amplitudes □ Approximate solution	
6.2	Monochromatic Perturbations	184
	Transition rate □ Fermi golden rule □ Continuum final states	
6.3	Ionization by an Electromagnetic Wave	187
	Nature of perturbation □ Conditions on frequency □ Ionization rate of hydrogen ground state	

<i>Contents</i>	xi
6.4 Fluctuating Perturbations	189
Stationary fluctuations □ Correlation function □ Transition rate	
6.5 Absorption and Stimulated Emission of Radiation	191
Dipole approximation □ Transition rates □ Energy density of radiation □ <i>B</i> -coefficients □ Spontaneous transition rate	
6.6 The Adiabatic Approximation	193
Slowly varying Hamiltonians □ Dynamical phase □ Non-dynamical phase □ Degenerate case	
6.7 The Berry Phase	196
Geometric character of the non-dynamical phase □ Closed curves in parameter space □ General formula for the Berry phase □ Spin in a slowly varying magnetic field	
Problems	202
7 POTENTIAL SCATTERING	203
7.1 In-States	203
Wave packets □ Lippmann–Schwinger equation □ Wave packets at early times □ Spread of wave packet	
7.2 Scattering Amplitudes	208
Green’s function for scattering □ Definition of scattering amplitude □ Wave packet at late times □ Differential cross-section	
7.3 The Optical Theorem	211
Derivation of theorem □ Conservation of probability □ Diffraction peak	
7.4 The Born Approximation	214
First-order scattering amplitude □ Scattering by shielded Coulomb potential	
7.5 Phase Shifts	216
Partial wave expansion of plane wave □ Partial wave expansion of “in” wave function □ Partial wave expansion of scattering amplitude □ Scattering cross-section □ Scattering length and effective range	
7.6 Resonances	220
Thick barriers □ Breit–Wigner formula □ Decay rate □ Alpha decay □ Ramsauer–Townsend effect	
7.7 Time Delay	224
Wigner formula □ Causality	
7.8 Levinson’s Theorem	226
Conservation of discrete states □ Growth of phase shift	

xii	<i>Contents</i>	
7.9	Coulomb Scattering	227
	Separation of wave function □ Kummer functions □ Scattering amplitude	
7.10	The Eikonal Approximation	229
	WKB approximation in three dimensions □ Initial surface □ Ray paths □ Calculation of phase □ Calculation of amplitude □ Application to potential scattering	
	Problems	234
8	GENERAL SCATTERING THEORY	235
8.1	The S-Matrix	235
	“In” and “out ” states □ Wave packets at early and late times □ Definition of the S-Matrix □ Normalization of the “in” and “out” states □ Unitarity of the S-matrix	
8.2	Rates	240
	Transition probabilities in a spacetime box □ Decay rates □ Cross-sections □ Relative velocity □ Connection with scattering amplitudes □ Final states	
8.3	The General Optical Theorem	244
	Optical theorem for multi-particle states □ Two-particle case	
8.4	The Partial Wave Expansion	245
	Discrete basis for two-particle states □ Two-particle S-matrix □ Total and scattering cross-sections □ Phase shifts □ High-energy scattering	
8.5	Resonances Revisited	252
	S-matrix near a resonance energy □ Consequences of unitarity □ General Breit–Wigner formula □ Total and scattering cross-sections □ Branching ratios	
8.6	Old-Fashioned Perturbation Theory	256
	Perturbation series for the S-matrix □ Functional analysis □ Square-integrable kernel □ Sufficient conditions for convergence □ Upper bound on binding energies □ Distorted wave Born approximation □ Coulomb suppression	
8.7	Time-Dependent Perturbation Theory	262
	Time-development operator □ Interaction picture □ Time-ordered products □ Dyson perturbation series □ Lorentz invariance □ “In-in” formalism	
8.8	Shallow Bound States	267
	Low equation □ Low-energy approximation □ Solution for scattering length □ Neutron–proton scattering □ Solution using Herglotz theorem	
	Problems	273

<i>Contents</i>	xiii
9 THE CANONICAL FORMALISM	275
9.1 The Lagrangian Formalism	276
Stationary action □ Lagrangian equations of motion □ Example: spherical coordinates	
9.2 Symmetry Principles and Conservation Laws	278
Noether’s theorem □ Conserved quantities from symmetries of Lagrangian □ Space translation □ Rotations □ Symmetries of action	
9.3 The Hamiltonian Formalism	279
Time translation and Hamiltonian □ Hamiltonian equations of motion □ Spherical coordinates again	
9.4 Canonical Commutation Relations	281
Conserved quantities as symmetry generators □ Commutators of canonical variables and conjugates □ Momentum and angular momentum □ Poisson brackets □ Jacobi identity	
9.5 Constrained Hamiltonian Systems	285
Example: particle on a surface □ Primary and secondary constraints □ First- and second-class constraints □ Dirac brackets	
9.6 The Path-Integral Formalism	290
Derivation of the general path integral □ Integrating out momenta □ The free particle □ Two-slit experiment □ Interactions	
Problems	296
10 CHARGED PARTICLES IN ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELDS	298
10.1 Canonical Formalism for Charged Particles	298
Equations of motion □ Scalar and vector potentials □ Lagrangian □ Hamiltonian □ Commutation relations	
10.2 Gauge Invariance	300
Gauge transformations of potentials □ Gauge transformation of Lagrangian □ Gauge transformation of Hamiltonian □ Gauge transformation of state vector □ Gauge invariance of energy eigenvalues	
10.3 Landau Energy Levels	302
Hamiltonian in a uniform magnetic field □ Energy levels □ Near degeneracy □ Fermi level □ Periodicity in $1/B_z$ □ Shubnikow–de Haas and de Haas–van Alphen effects	
10.4 The Aharonov–Bohm Effect	305
Application of the eikonal approximation □ Interference between alternate ray paths □ Relation to Berry phase □ Effect of field-free vector potential □ Periodicity in the flux	
Problems	307

xiv	<i>Contents</i>	
11	THE QUANTUM THEORY OF RADIATION	309
11.1	The Euler–Lagrange Equations	309
	General field theories □ Variational derivatives of Lagrangian □ Lagrangian density	
11.2	The Lagrangian for Electrodynamics	311
	Maxwell equations □ Charge density and current density □ Field, interaction, and matter Lagrangians	
11.3	Commutation Relations for Electrodynamics	313
	Coulomb gauge □ Constraints □ Applying Dirac brackets	
11.4	The Hamiltonian for Electrodynamics	316
	Evaluation of Hamiltonian □ Coulomb energy □ Recovery of Maxwell’s equations	
11.5	Interaction Picture	318
	Interaction picture operators □ Expansion in plane waves □ Polarization vectors □	
11.6	Photons	322
	Creation and annihilation operators □ Fock space □ Photon energies □ Vacuum energy □ Photon momentum □ Photon spin □ Varieties of polarization □ Coherent states	
11.7	Radiative Transition Rates	327
	S-matrix for photon emission □ Separation of center-of-mass motion □ General decay rate □ Electric dipole radiation □ Electric quadrupole and magnetic dipole radiation □ 21 cm radiation □ No $0 \rightarrow 0$ transitions	
	Problems	335
12	ENTANGLEMENT	336
12.1	Paradoxes of Entanglement	336
	The Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen paradox □ The Bohm paradox □ Instantaneous communication? □ Entanglement entropy	
12.2	The Bell Inequalities	341
	Local hidden variable theories □ Two-spin inequality □ Generalized inequality □ Experimental tests	
12.3	Quantum Computation	346
	Qbits □ Comparison with classical digital computers □ Computation as unitary transformation □ Fourier transforms □ Gates □ Reading the memory □ No-copying theorem □ Necessity of entanglement	
	AUTHOR INDEX	350
	SUBJECT INDEX	353

Preface

The development of quantum mechanics in the 1920s was the greatest advance in physical science since the work of Isaac Newton. It was not easy; the ideas of quantum mechanics present a profound departure from ordinary human intuition. Quantum mechanics has won acceptance through its success. It is essential to modern atomic, molecular, nuclear, and elementary particle physics, and to a great deal of chemistry and condensed matter physics as well.

There are many fine books on quantum mechanics, including those by Dirac and Schiff from which I learned the subject a long time ago. Still, when I have taught the subject as a one-year graduate course, I found that none of these books quite fit what I wanted to cover. For one thing, I like to give a much greater emphasis than usual to principles of symmetry, including their role in motivating commutation rules. (With this approach the canonical formalism is not needed for most purposes, so a systematic treatment of this formalism is delayed until Chapter 9.) Also, I cover some modern topics that of course could not have been treated in the books of long ago, including numerous examples from elementary particle physics, alternatives to the Copenhagen interpretation, and a brief (very brief) introduction to the theory and experimental tests of entanglement and its application in quantum computation. In addition, I go into some topics that are often omitted in books on quantum mechanics: Bloch waves, time-reversal invariance, the Wigner–Eckart theorem, magic numbers, isotopic spin symmetry, “in” and “out” states, the “in-in” formalism, the Berry phase, Dirac’s theory of constrained canonical systems, Levinson’s theorem, the general optical theorem, the general theory of resonant scattering, applications of functional analysis, photoionization, Landau levels, multipole radiation, etc.

The chapters of the book are divided into sections, which on average approximately represent a single seventy-five minute lecture. The material of this book just about fits into a one-year course, which means that much else has had to be skipped. Every book on quantum mechanics represents an exercise in selectivity — I can’t say that my selections are better than those of other authors, but at least they worked well for me when I taught the course.

There is one topic I was not sorry to skip: the relativistic wave equation of Dirac. It seems to me that the way this is usually presented in books on quantum mechanics is profoundly misleading. Dirac thought that his equation was

a relativistic generalization of the non-relativistic time-dependent Schrödinger equation that governs the probability amplitude for a point particle in an external electromagnetic field. For some time after, it was considered to be a good thing that Dirac's approach works only for particles of spin one half, in agreement with the known spin of the electron, and that it entails negative energy states, states that when empty can be identified with the electron's antiparticle. Today we know that there are particles like the $W^\pm$ that are every bit as elementary as the electron, and that have distinct antiparticles, and yet have spin one, not spin one half. The right way to combine relativity and quantum mechanics is through the quantum theory of fields, in which the Dirac wave function appears as the matrix element of a quantum field between a one-particle state and the vacuum, and not as a probability amplitude.

I have tried in this book to avoid an overlap with the treatment of the quantum theory of fields that I presented in earlier volumes.¹ Aside from the quantization of the electromagnetic field in Chapter 11, the present book does not go into relativistic quantum mechanics. But there are some topics that were included in *The Quantum Theory of Fields* because they generally are not included in courses on quantum mechanics, and I think they should be. These subjects are included here, especially in Chapter 8 on general scattering theory, despite some overlap with my earlier volumes.

The viewpoint of this book is that physical states are represented by vectors in Hilbert space, with the wave functions of Schrödinger just the scalar products of these states with basis states of definite position. This is essentially the approach of Dirac's "transformation theory." I do not use Dirac's bra-ket notation, because for some purposes it is awkward, but in Section 3.1 I explain how it is related to the notation used in this book. In any notation, the Hilbert space approach may seem to the beginner to be rather abstract, so to give the reader a greater sense of the physical significance of this formalism I go back to its historic roots. Chapter 1 is a review of the development of quantum mechanics from the Planck black-body formula to the matrix and wave mechanics of Heisenberg and Schrödinger and Born's probabilistic interpretation. In Chapter 2 the Schrödinger wave equation is used to solve the classic bound-state problems of the hydrogen atom and harmonic oscillator. The Hilbert space formalism is introduced in Chapter 3, and used from then on.

* * *

I am grateful to Raphael Flauger and Joel Meyers, who as graduate students assisted me when I taught courses on quantum mechanics at the University of Texas, and suggested numerous changes and corrections to the lecture notes on

¹ S. Weinberg, *The Quantum Theory of Fields* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995; 1996; 2000).

Preface

xvii

which this book is based. I am also indebted to Robert Griffiths, James Hartle, Allan Macdonald, and John Preskill, who gave me advice regarding specific topics. Of course, only I am responsible for errors that may remain in this book. Thanks are also due to Terry Riley and Abel Ephraim for finding countless books and articles, and to Jan Duffy for her helps of many sorts. I am grateful to Lindsay Barnes and Jon Billam of Cambridge University Press for helping to ready this book for publication, and especially to my editor, Simon Capelin, for his encouragement and good advice.

STEVEN WEINBERG

Austin, Texas
March 2012

Notation

Latin indices i, j, k , and so on generally run over the three spatial coordinate labels, usually taken as 1, 2, 3.

The summation convention is not used; repeated indices are summed only where explicitly indicated.

Spatial three-vectors are indicated by symbols in boldface. In particular, ∇ is the gradient operator.

∇^2 is the Laplacian $\sum_i \partial^2/\partial x^i \partial x^i$.

The three-dimensional “Levi–Civita tensor” ϵ_{ijk} is defined as the totally anti-symmetric quantity with $\epsilon_{123} = +1$. That is,

$$\epsilon_{ijk} \equiv \begin{cases} +1 & ijk = 123, 231, 312 \\ -1 & ijk = 132, 213, 321 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The Kronecker delta is

$$\delta_{nm} = \begin{cases} 1 & n = m \\ 0 & n \neq m \end{cases}$$

A hat over any vector indicates the corresponding unit vector: Thus, $\hat{\mathbf{v}} \equiv \mathbf{v}/|\mathbf{v}|$.

A dot over any quantity denotes the time-derivative of that quantity.

The step function $\theta(s)$ has the value +1 for $s > 0$ and 0 for $s < 0$.

The complex conjugate, transpose, and Hermitian adjoint of a matrix A are denoted A^* , A^T , and $A^\dagger = A^{*T}$, respectively. The Hermitian adjoint of an operator O is denoted $O^\dagger$. + H.c. or + c.c. at the end of an equation indicates the addition of the Hermitian adjoint or complex conjugate of the foregoing terms.

Where it is necessary to distinguish operators and their eigenvalues, upper case letters are used for operators and lower case letters for their eigenvalues. This

convention is not always used where the distinction between operators and eigenvalues is obvious from the context.

Factors of the speed of light c , the Boltzmann constant k_B , and Planck’s constant h or $\hbar \equiv h/2\pi$ are shown explicitly.

Unrationalized electrostatic units are used for electromagnetic fields and electric charges and currents, so that e_1e_2/r is the Coulomb potential of a pair of charges e_1 and e_2 separated by a distance r . Throughout, $-e$ is the unrationalized charge of the electron, so that the fine structure constant is $\alpha \equiv e^2/\hbar c \simeq 1/137$.

Numbers in parenthesis at the end of quoted numerical data give the uncertainty in the last digits of the quoted figure. Where not otherwise indicated, experimental data are taken from K. Nakamura *et al.* (Particle Data Group), “Review of Particle Properties,” J. Physics G **37**, 075021 (2010).