

Motion of an electron through vacuum fluctuations

By Anirudh Gundhi

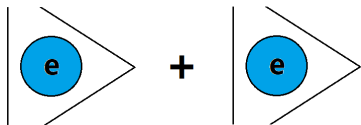
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**UNIVERSITÀ
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Does an electron in a superposition of two different spatial locations decohere due to zero point fluctuations?

Interaction with the radiation field

- 1 The Lagrangian for a non-relativistic electron interacting with the radiation field is given by

$$L(t) = \frac{1}{2} m \dot{\mathbf{r}}_e^2 - V_0(\mathbf{r}_e) + \frac{\epsilon_0}{2} \int d^3r (\mathbf{E}_\perp^2(\mathbf{r}) - c^2 \mathbf{B}^2(\mathbf{r})) - e \mathbf{r}_e \cdot \mathbf{E}_\perp(\mathbf{r}_e). \quad (1)$$

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- 2 The goal is to describe the effective dynamics of the charged particle, having taken into account its interaction with the radiation field environment.
- 3 This can be achieved by deriving the reduced density matrix for the electron.

Density matrix from path integral

- 1 From the path integral formalism we have

$$\begin{aligned}\langle x_f | \hat{U}(t; t_i) | x_i \rangle &= \int_{\substack{x(t)=x_f, \\ x(t_i)=x_i}} D[x] e^{iS/\hbar}, \\ \psi(x_f, t) &= \int_{x(t)=x_f} D[x] e^{iS/\hbar} \psi(x_i, t_i), \\ \langle x'_f | \hat{\rho} | x_f \rangle &= \int_{\substack{x(t)=x_f, \\ x'(t)=x'_f}} D[x, x'] e^{\frac{i}{\hbar}(S[x'] - S[x])} \psi(x'_i) \psi^*(x_i). \quad (2)\end{aligned}$$

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- ② Separate the environmental degrees of freedom

$$\begin{aligned}\langle x'_f; \Pi^{f'} | \hat{\rho}(t) | x_f; \Pi^f \rangle &= \int_{\substack{x(t)=x_f, \\ x'(t)=x'_f}} D[x, x'] e^{\frac{i}{\hbar}(S_s[x'] - S_s[x])} \rho_s^i \times \\ &\times \int_{\substack{\Pi(t)=\Pi^f, \\ \Pi'(t)=\Pi^{f'}}} D[\mu, \mu'] e^{\frac{i}{\hbar}(S_{EM}[\mu'] + S_{int}[x', \Pi'] - S_{EM}[\mu] - S_{int}[x, \Pi])} \rho_{EM}^i. \quad (3)\end{aligned}$$

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- 2 Doing that we get the formal expression for reduced density matrix of the electron

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- 3 where the so called influence functional S_{IF} is given by

$$S_{IF}[x, x'] = \frac{1}{2} \int_{t_i}^t dt_1 dt_2 [x(t_1) \quad x'(t_1)] \cdot M(t_1; t_2) \cdot \begin{bmatrix} x(t_2) \\ x'(t_2) \end{bmatrix}. \quad (5)$$

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- 4 with $(\Pi_E := -\Pi/\epsilon_0)$

$$M(t_1; t_2) = \frac{ie^2}{\hbar} \begin{bmatrix} \langle \tilde{\mathcal{T}} \{ \hat{\Pi}_E(t_1) \hat{\Pi}_E(t_2) \} \rangle_0 & - \langle \hat{\Pi}_E(t_1) \hat{\Pi}_E(t_2) \rangle_0 \\ - \langle \hat{\Pi}_E(t_2) \hat{\Pi}_E(t_1) \rangle_0 & \langle \mathcal{T} \{ \hat{\Pi}_E(t_1) \hat{\Pi}_E(t_2) \} \rangle_0 \end{bmatrix}. \quad (6)$$

Time evolution of the reduced density matrix

The time evolution of the reduced density matrix takes the standard basis independent form

$$\begin{aligned}\delta_t \hat{\rho}_r = & -\frac{i}{\hbar} [\hat{H}_s, \hat{\rho}_r] \\ & -\frac{1}{\hbar} \int_0^{t-t_i} d\tau \mathcal{N}(t; t-\tau) [\hat{x}, [\hat{x}_{H_s}(-\tau), \hat{\rho}_r(t)]] \\ & +\frac{i}{2\hbar} \int_0^{t-t_i} d\tau \mathcal{D}(t; t-\tau) [\hat{x}, \{\hat{x}_{H_s}(-\tau), \hat{\rho}_r(t)\}] .\end{aligned}\quad (7)$$

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{N}(t_1; t_2) & := \frac{e^2}{2\hbar} \left\langle \{ \hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(t_1), \hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(t_2) \} \right\rangle_0 , \\ \mathcal{D}(t_1; t_2) & := \frac{ie^2}{\hbar} \left\langle [\hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(t_1), \hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(t_2)] \right\rangle_0 \theta(t_1 - t_2) .\end{aligned}\quad (8)$$

Kernels

- 1 From standard quantization of the radiation field we have

$$\hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(\mathbf{r}, t) = i \left(\frac{\hbar c}{2\epsilon_0 (2\pi)^3} \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \int d^3k \sqrt{k} \sum_{\epsilon} \hat{a}_{\epsilon}(\mathbf{k}) e^{i(\mathbf{k}\cdot\mathbf{r} - \omega t)} \epsilon_{\mathbf{k}}^x + \text{c.c.} \quad (9)$$

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- ② Using the expression above we can calculate the two-point correlations

$$\begin{aligned} & \langle \hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(x(t_1), t_1) \hat{\Pi}_{\mathbf{E}}(x(t_2), t_2) \rangle_0 \\ &= \frac{-i\hbar c}{2\epsilon_0 4\pi^2} \hat{\square} \left\{ \frac{1}{r} \int_0^{\infty} dk e^{-i\omega_k \tau} (e^{ikr} - e^{-ikr}) e^{-\omega_k / \omega_{\max}} \right\} \\ &= \frac{\hbar c}{\pi^2 \epsilon_0} \frac{1}{(r^2 - c^2(\tau - i\epsilon)^2)^2}, \quad \epsilon := \frac{1}{\omega_{\max}}. \end{aligned} \quad (10)$$

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- ③ where

$$\tau := t_1 - t_2, \quad r := |x(t_1) - x(t_2)|, \quad \hat{\square} := -\frac{1}{c^2} \partial_{\tau}^2 + \partial_r^2. \quad (11)$$

Kernels

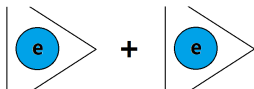
Noise kernel \mathcal{N}

$$\mathcal{N}(\tau) = \frac{e^2}{\pi^2 \epsilon_0 c^3} \frac{(\epsilon^4 - 6\epsilon^2 \tau^2 + \tau^4)}{(\epsilon^2 + \tau^2)^4}. \quad (12)$$

Dissipation kernel \mathcal{D}

$$\mathcal{D}(\tau) = \frac{e^2}{3\pi \epsilon_0 c^3} \theta(\tau) \frac{d^3}{d\tau^3} \delta_\epsilon(\tau), \quad \delta_\epsilon(\tau) = \frac{1}{\pi} \frac{d}{d\tau} \tan^{-1}(\tau/\epsilon). \quad (13)$$

Decoherence



$$\rho_r(x', x, t) = \exp\left(-\frac{(x' - x)^2}{\hbar} \mathcal{N}_2(t)\right) \rho_r(x', x, 0), \quad (14)$$

where

$$\mathcal{N}_2(t) = \int_0^t d\tau \int_0^\tau d\tau' \mathcal{N}(\tau'). \quad (15)$$

Decoherence

At large times, the length scales over which the superposition can be maintained ($l_x(t)$) scales with the cutoff

$$\rho_r(x', x, t) = \exp\left\{-\left(\frac{x' - x}{l_x}\right)^2\right\} \rho_r(x', x, 0), \quad (16)$$

$$l_x(t) = \sqrt{\frac{3\pi c^2}{2\alpha \omega_{\max}^2} \cdot \frac{(t^2 + \epsilon^2)^2}{t^4 + 3t^2\epsilon^2}} \stackrel{t \gg \epsilon}{\approx} \sqrt{\frac{3\pi}{2\alpha} \frac{c}{\omega_{\max}}}. \quad (17)$$

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- 1 Should we have a small value of the cutoff, as suggested by Barone and Caldeira in Phys. Rev. A 43, 57 (1991)?
- 2 Or does the density matrix describe false decoherence, as suggested by Unruh in Relativistic Quantum Measurement and Decoherence (False Loss of Coherence, pp. 125–140)?

False decoherence

- 1 We consider the situation in which the charged particle interacts with vacuum fluctuations for a finite period of time

$$e' = ef(t), \quad f(0) = f(T) = 0, \quad f(0 < t < T) = 1. \quad (20)$$

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- 2 The Noise kernel transforms as $\mathcal{N} \rightarrow \tilde{\mathcal{N}}$

$$\tilde{\mathcal{N}} = f(t_1)f(t_2)\mathcal{N}(t_1; t_2) = f(t_1)f(t_2)\mathcal{N}(t_1 - t_2). \quad (21)$$

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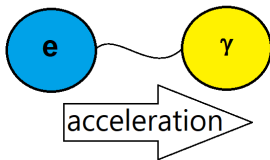
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- 3 Coherence is not lost irreversibly since the coherence length becomes infinite after switching off the interaction

$$\tilde{l}_x(T) = \left(\frac{2}{f^2(0) + f^2(T)} \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \left(\frac{3\pi}{2\alpha} \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{1}{k_{\max}}. \quad (22)$$

Radiation reaction



- 1 Neutral particle $m\ddot{x} = -\frac{\partial}{\partial x} V(x) = F_{\text{ext}}$.
- 2 Charged particle $m_R\ddot{x} = F_{\text{ext}} + \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2}\ddot{\dot{x}}$.

Features of the Abraham-Lorentz equation

$$m_R \ddot{x} = F_{\text{ext}} + \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} \dddot{x}.$$

- 1 The radiation reaction term can be viewed as a frictional force (for SHM, $\ddot{x} \approx -\omega_0 \dot{x}$).

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$$\textcircled{4} \int_{x_1}^{x_2} \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} \ddot{x} dx = \int_{t_1}^{t_2} \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} \dot{a} \cdot v dt = \underbrace{- \int_{t_1}^{t_2} \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} a \cdot a dt}_{\text{Larmor's formula}} + \underbrace{a_{t_2} v_{t_2} - a_{t_1} v_{t_1}}_{\text{Schott term}}.$$

The problem

① Classical mechanics

$$m_R \ddot{x} = -\frac{\partial}{\partial x} V(x) + \frac{2\alpha \hbar}{3c^2} \dot{x} \ddot{x} . \quad (23)$$

② The runaway solution ($V(x) = 0$)

$$m_R \ddot{x} = m_R \tau_0 \dot{x} \ddot{x} \implies a(t) = a(t_0) \exp(t/\tau_0) . \quad (24)$$

The QM Abraham-Lorentz equation

1 Quantum mechanics

$$m_R \frac{d^2}{dt^2} \langle \hat{x} \rangle = -\langle \hat{V}_{,x} \rangle - \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} \text{Tr} \left(\frac{i}{\hbar^3} \hat{\rho}_r(t) \left[\hat{H}_s, \left[\hat{H}_s, \left[\hat{H}_s, \hat{x} \right] \right] \right] \right) . \quad (25)$$

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- ③ When $\hat{V}(x) \neq 0$ the two solutions match exactly

$$m_R \frac{d^2}{dt^2} \langle \hat{x} \rangle = -\langle \hat{V}(x)_{,x} \rangle + \frac{2\alpha\hbar}{3c^2} \frac{d^3}{dt^3} \langle \hat{x} \rangle. \quad (27)$$

The end

Thanks!