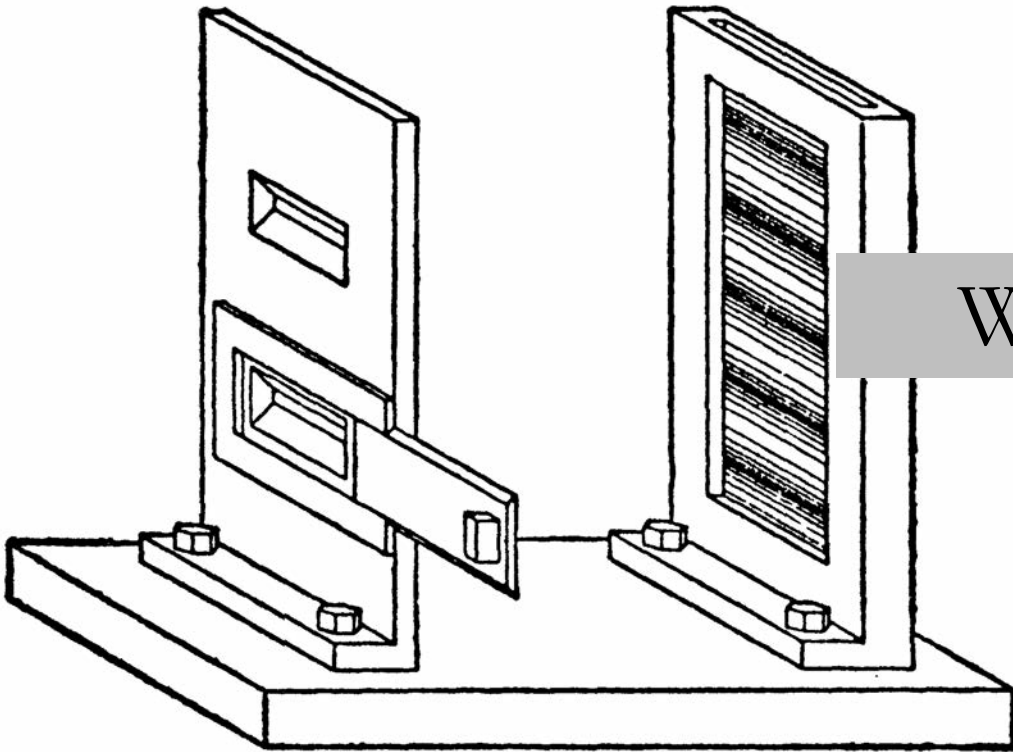


# Waves and Probabilities



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8.225 / STS.042, Physics in the 20th Century  
Professor David Kaiser, 13 October 2020

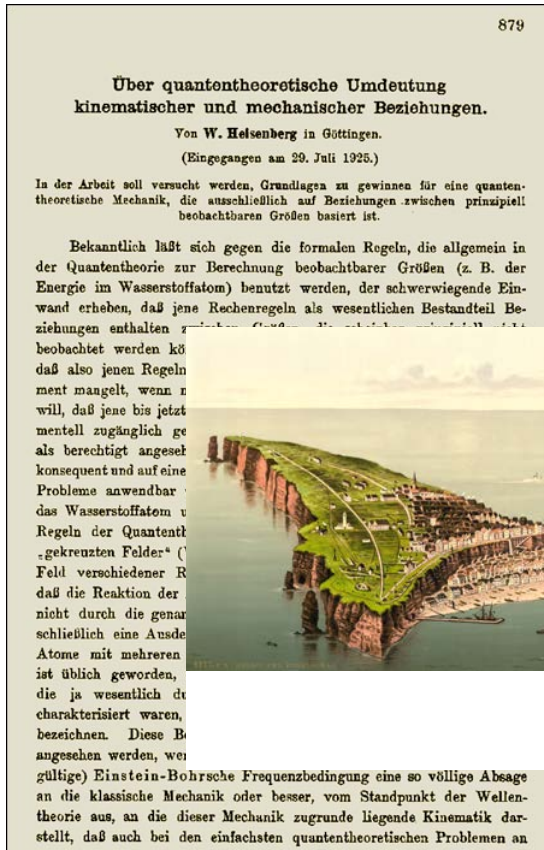
# 1. Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics

## 2. Born's Interpretation and the Double-Slit Experiment\*

## 3. Slit Detector?\*

\* See optional *Lecture Notes* on the double-slit experiment

# Matrix Mechanics Recap



Heisenberg, "On the quantum-theoretical reinterpretation of kinematic and mechanical relationships," 1925  
Images are in the public domain.

In spring 1925, *Werner Heisenberg* introduced a new, first-principles approach to quantum theory. Rather than beginning with classical concepts and expressions — such as for the orbit of an electron in an atom — Heisenberg argued that one should focus only on *observable features*, such as the properties of spectral lines.

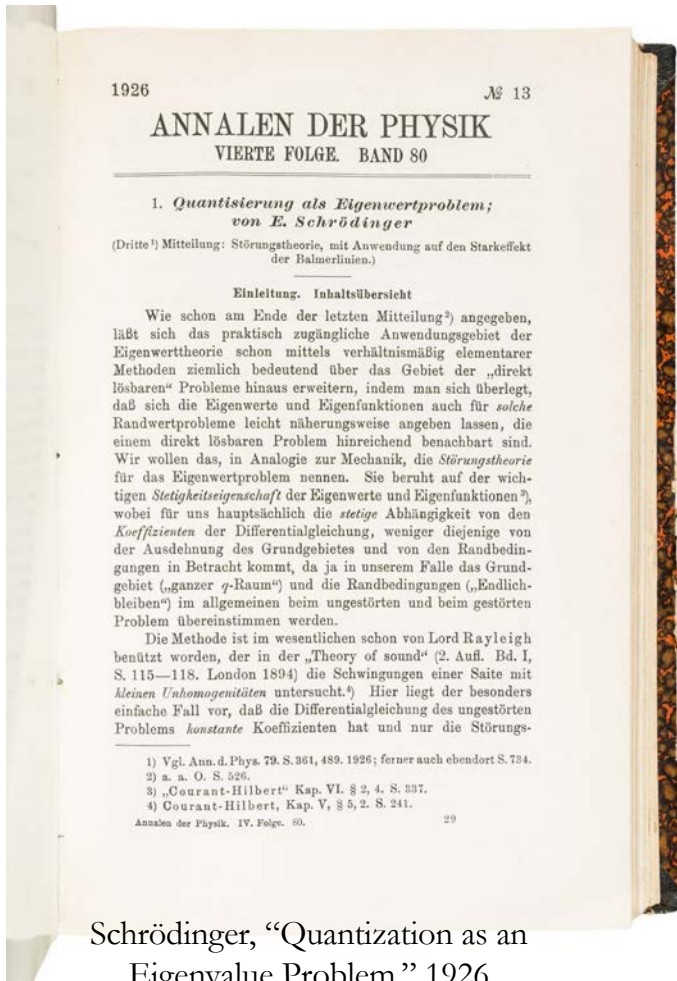
He reasoned that since the *frequencies* of spectral lines obeyed a law of *addition*, the *amplitudes* of the corresponding spectral lines should *multiply*. But then he found that the *outcome* depended on the *order of multiplication*. Max Born clarified: these are *matrices*!

$$\nu_{nm} = \nu_{nk} + \nu_{km} \quad \longrightarrow \quad A_{nk} \times A_{km} \neq A_{km} \times A_{nk}$$

In spring 1927, amid emotional debates with Niels Bohr, Heisenberg derived a consequence of his non-commuting matrices: the *uncertainty principle*.

$$\Delta x \Delta p_x \geq \frac{\hbar}{2}$$

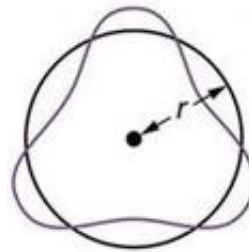
# Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics



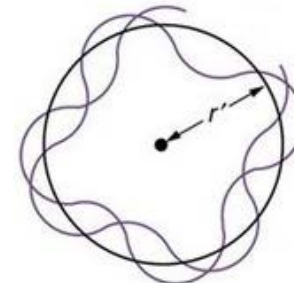
Schrödinger, “Quantization as an Eigenvalue Problem,” 1926

During the winter and spring of 1926 — beginning just six months after Heisenberg’s first paper on matrix mechanics — *Erwin Schrödinger* introduced a *different* first-principles approach to quantum theory. Whereas Heisenberg had built upon ideas about *discreteness* from among the hodge-podge of “old quantum theory,” Schrödinger picked up on the idea of de Broglie’s *matter waves*.

Schrödinger — originally from Vienna and at the time teaching in Zürich — was a generation older than Heisenberg and Pauli; he had already published *many* research articles. His approach was to *retain* as much of the “look and feel” of time-tested physics as he could.



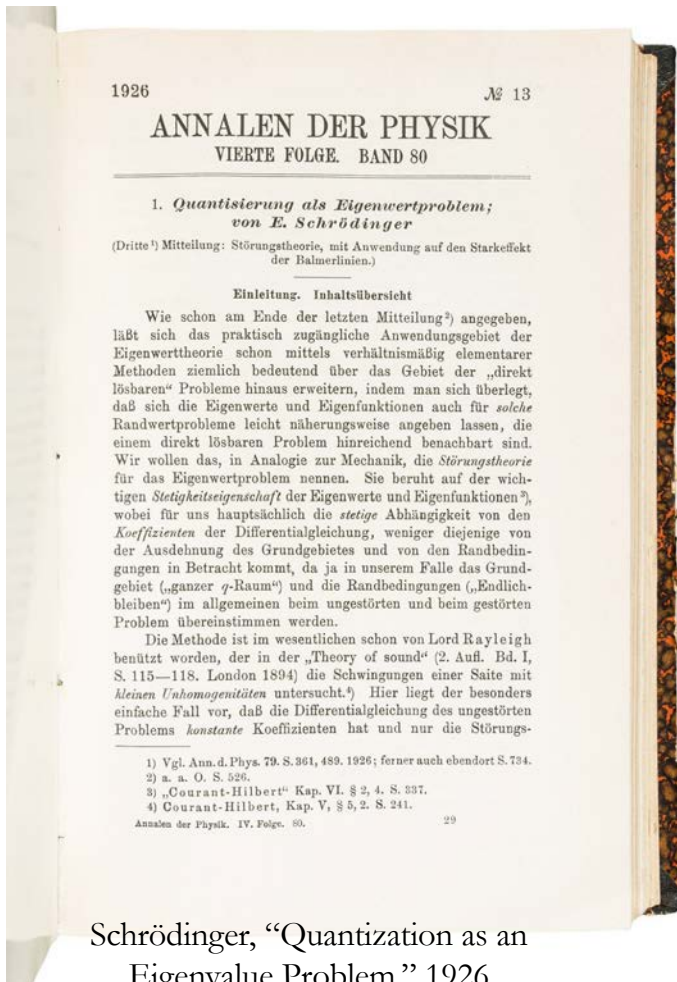
constructive interference



destructive interference

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# Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics



Schrödinger, "Quantization as an Eigenvalue Problem," 1926

Schrödinger began with the usual expression for energy:

$$E = \frac{p^2}{2m} + V(r)$$

De Broglie had suggested that *matter waves* were crucial. So Schrödinger considered the usual equation for a standing wave:

$$\nabla^2 \psi + k^2 \psi = 0 \quad k \equiv \frac{2\pi}{\lambda}$$

De Broglie had identified a *wavelength* for matter:

$$\lambda = \frac{h}{p} \implies k = \frac{2\pi}{\lambda} = \frac{2\pi p}{h} = \frac{p}{\hbar}$$

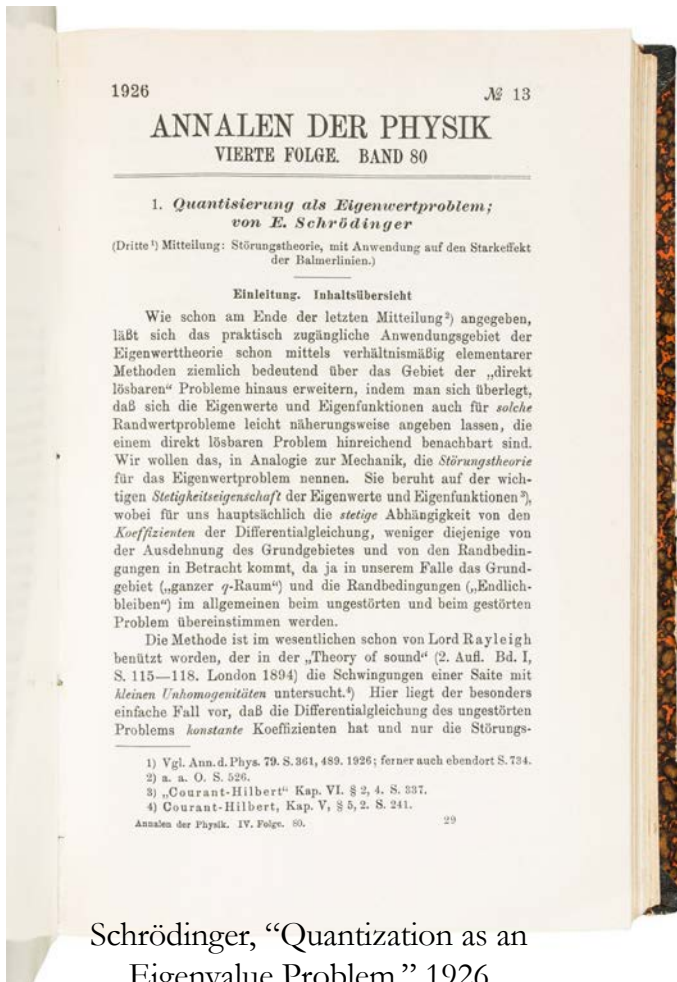
$$\nabla^2 \psi = -k^2 \psi = -\frac{p^2}{\hbar^2} \psi \implies p^2 \psi = -\hbar^2 \nabla^2 \psi$$

$$\mathbf{p} = i\hbar \nabla$$

new "quantum operator":  
*ħ built in from the start.*

$$E\psi = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \nabla^2 \psi + V(r)\psi$$

# Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics



Schrödinger, “Quantization as an Eigenvalue Problem,” 1926

Schrödinger wave equation:

$$E\psi = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\nabla^2\psi + V(r)\psi$$

*All continuum!* No “special states” or orbits with discrete positions (as in Bohr’s model). Plus, the mathematics was *familiar* to physicists: differential equations rather than abstract matrices.

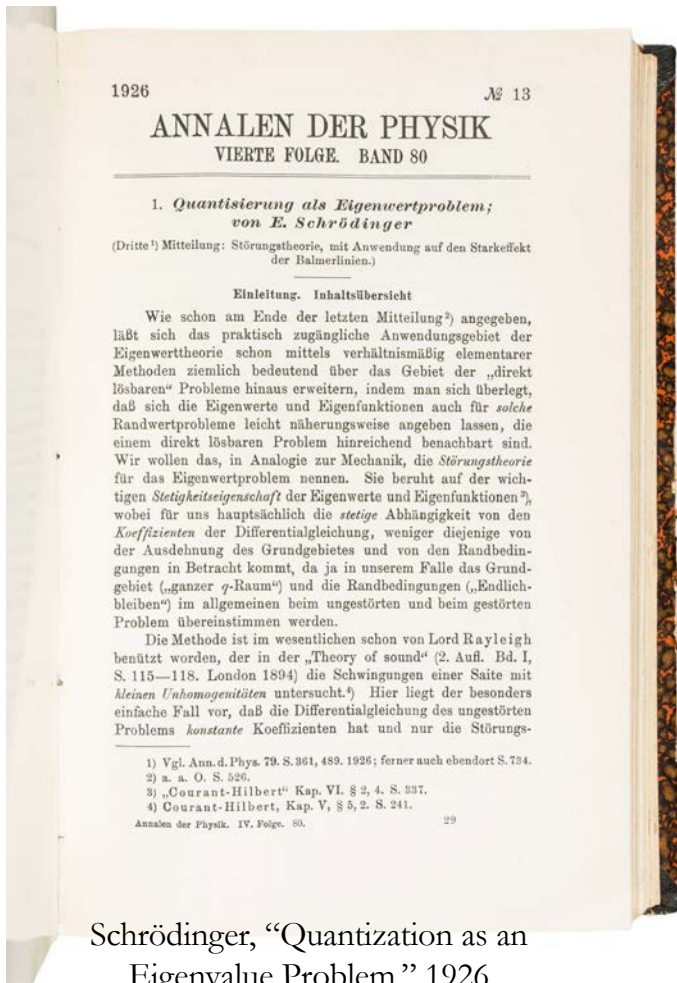
First big test: substitute  $V(r) = -\frac{e^2}{r}$ . Then solutions to Schrödinger’s equation correspond to

$$E = -\frac{me^4}{2\hbar^2n^2} \quad n = 1, 2, 3, \dots$$

Exactly the same spectrum as the Bohr model, so it reproduces the Balmer spectrum!

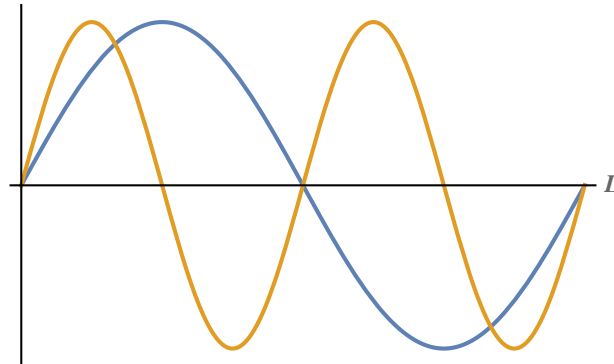
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# Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics



$$E\psi = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\nabla^2\psi + V(r)\psi \quad \rightarrow \quad E = -\frac{me^4}{2\hbar^2n^2}$$

Analogous to one-dimensional standing waves on a string:



$$\left[ \frac{d^2}{dx^2} + k^2 \right] \psi = 0$$

discrete allowable wavenumbers,  
 or “eigenvalues”

$$\psi(x) = A \cos(kx) + B \sin(kx) \quad \rightarrow \quad \psi(x) = B \sin\left(\frac{n\pi}{L}x\right)$$

*apply boundary conditions*

For the Hydrogen atom, apply the boundary conditions:

$$\psi(r = 0) = 0$$

$$\psi(r = \infty) = 0$$

$$E = -\frac{me^4}{2\hbar^2n^2}$$

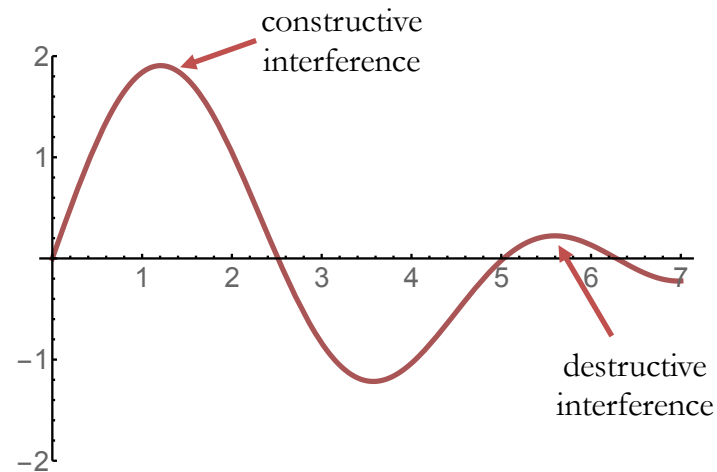
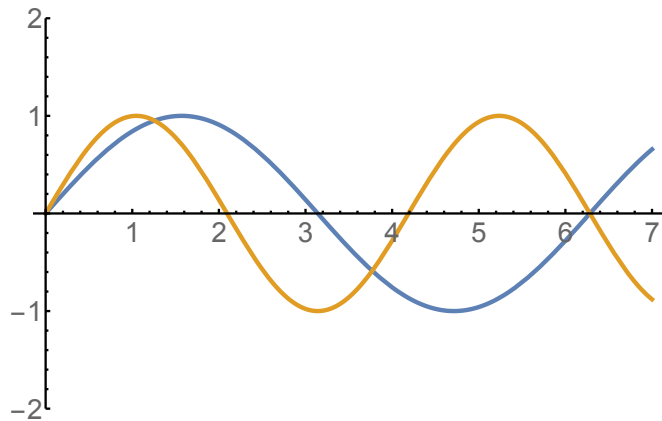
# Schrödinger and Wave Mechanics

Solutions  $\psi$  to Schrödinger's wave equation obeyed *superposition*: if  $\psi_1(t, \mathbf{x})$  were a solution and  $\psi_2(t, \mathbf{x})$  were a solution, then  $\psi_3(t, \mathbf{x}) = \psi_1(t, \mathbf{x}) + \psi_2(t, \mathbf{x})$  was *also* a solution.

That meant that Schrödinger's wavefunctions  $\psi$  could undergo *constructive* and *destructive* interference.

So  $\psi$  had definite wavelike properties. But *what* was  $\psi$ ? A wave of *what*?

Even more bizarre: if one considered a system with *two* electrons,  $V \rightarrow V(x_1, y_1, z_1, x_2, y_2, z_2)$ . So then  $\psi$  would be a wave in some *six-dimensional space*! Clearly  $\psi$  was not just like a water wave...





# A New Quantum Mechanics

Schrödinger and Heisenberg had strong feelings about each other's work.

*Schrödinger, 1926: “My theory was inspired by L. de Broglie ... and by short by incomplete remarks by A. Einstein. ... No genetic relation whatever with Heisenberg is known to me. I knew of his theory, of course, but felt *discouraged*, not to say *repelled*, by the methods of transcendental algebra [matrices], which appeared very difficult to me and by the lack of visualizability.”*

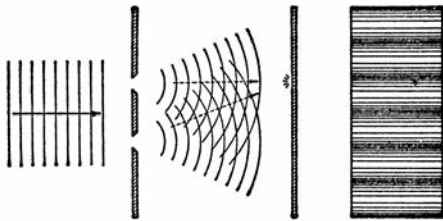
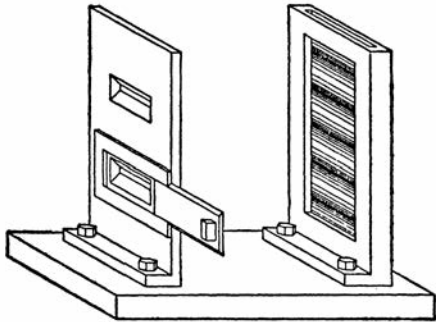
*Heisenberg to Pauli, 1926: “The more I reflect on the physical portion of Schrödinger's theory the more *disgusting* I find it. ... What Schrödinger writes on the visualizability of his theory ... I consider *trash*.”*

So it was all the more surprising when several physicists (*Schrödinger* himself, *Pascual Jordan*, and *Paul Dirac*) demonstrated later in 1926 that Heisenberg's matrix mechanics and Schrödinger's wave mechanics were *mathematically equivalent*.

By the end of 1926, physicists began to refer to a new “*quantum mechanics*.”

*Questions?*

# The Double-Slit Experiment



The *double-slit experiment* is one of the most celebrated experiments in modern physics.

*Heisenberg* lectured on it in 1929; *Schrödinger* in 1936.

*Niels Bohr* featured it in his discussion of his long debate with *Albert Einstein* over quantum theory (1949).

*Richard Feynman* declared that it “has in it the *heart* of quantum mechanics” (1962).

Readers of *Physics World* magazine voted it the #1 all-time single most beautiful experiment in all of physics (2002)!

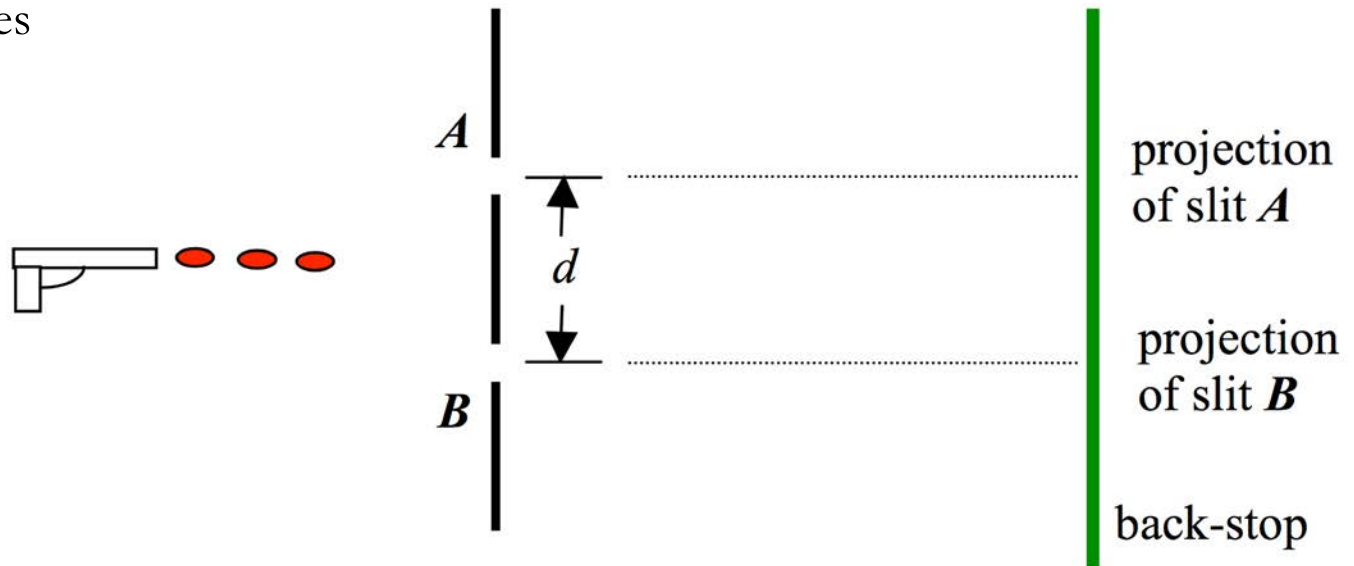
Niels Bohr, “Discussions with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics” (1949)

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\* See optional *Lecture Notes* on the double-slit experiment

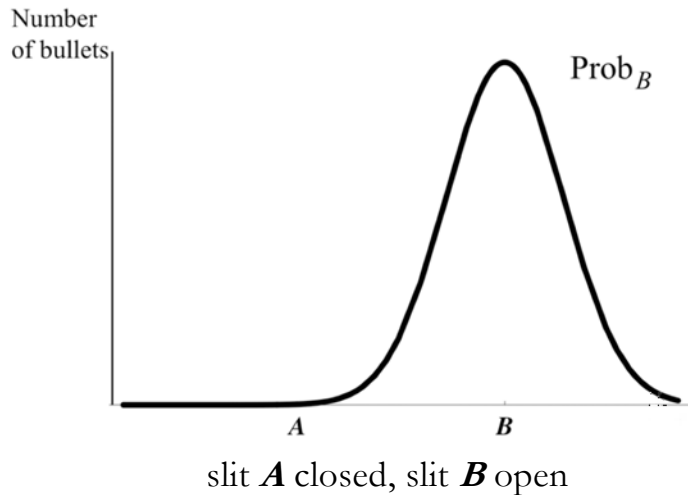
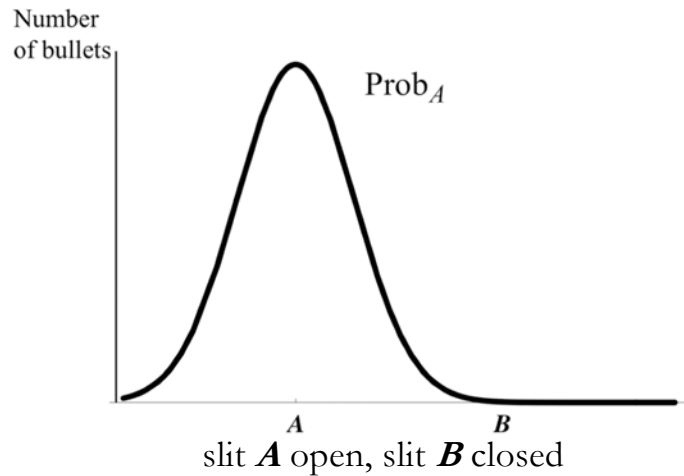
# The Double-Slit Experiment

## Case 1: Classical Particles

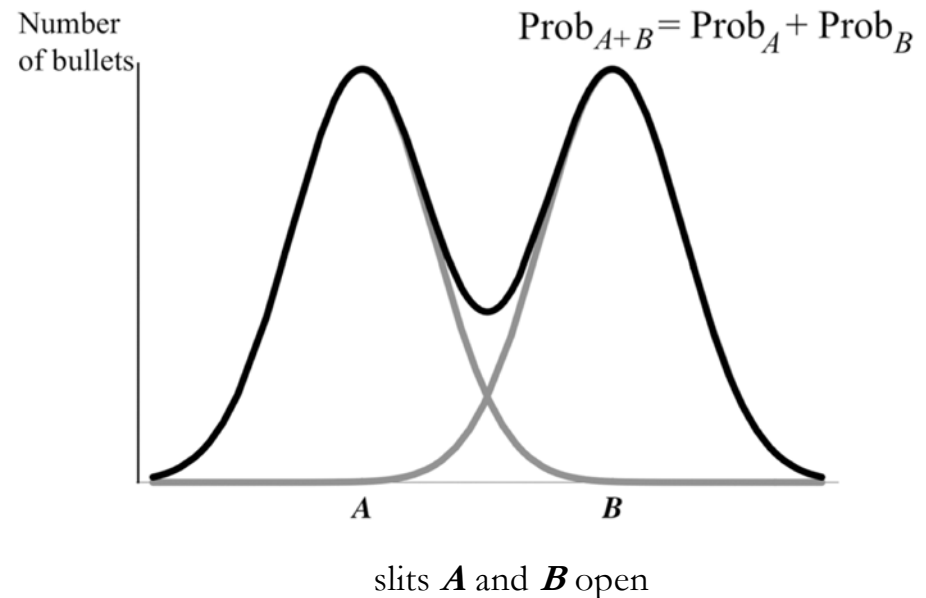


Fire bullets one at a time at a bullet-proof wall that contains two narrow slits, *A* and *B*. Then count the number of bullets that arrive at the back-stop as a function of position along the back-stop.

# The Double-Slit Experiment



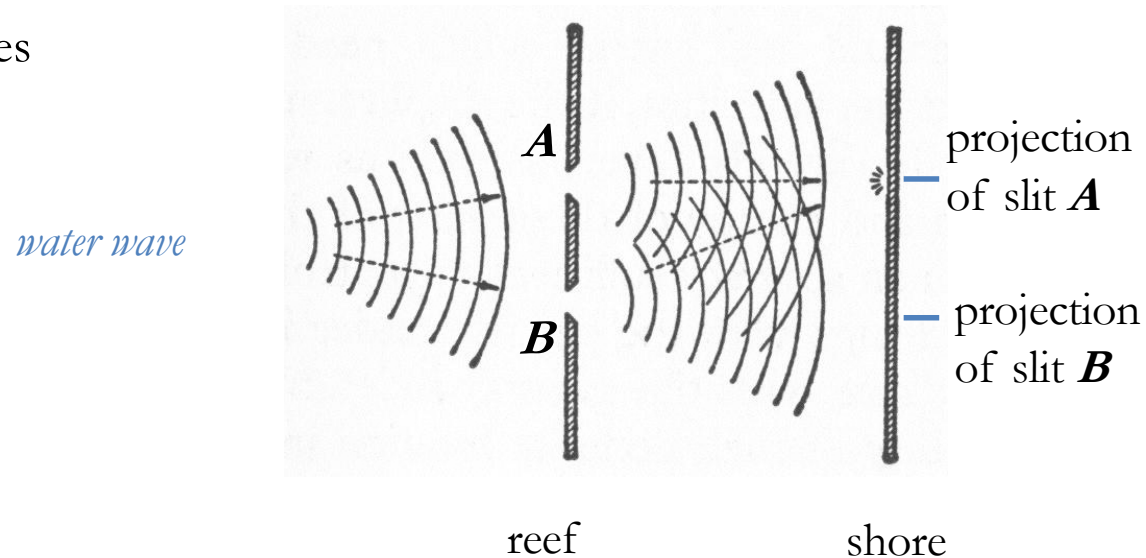
## Case 1: Classical Particles



The counts of bullets per location yield *probability distributions*. For classical particles, the probabilities for independent events *add*.

# The Double-Slit Experiment

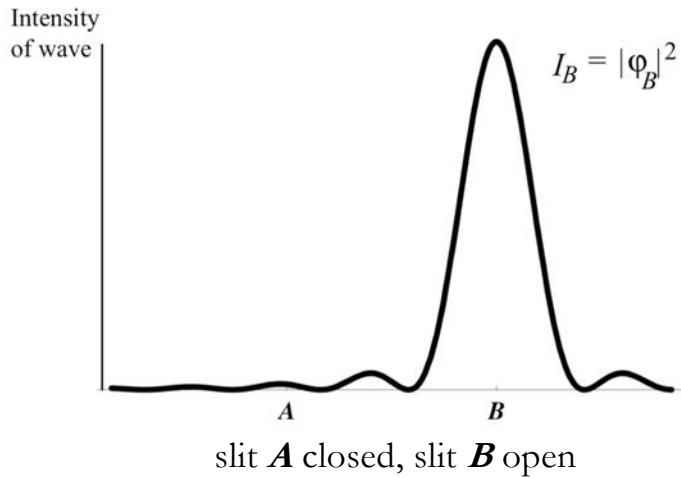
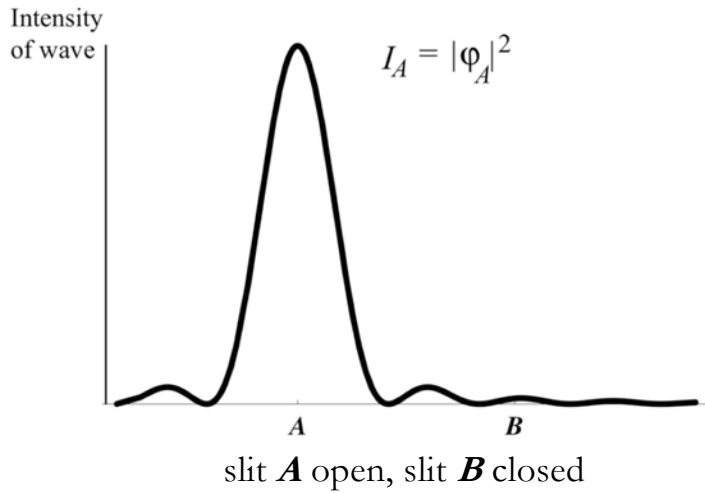
## Case 2: Classical Waves



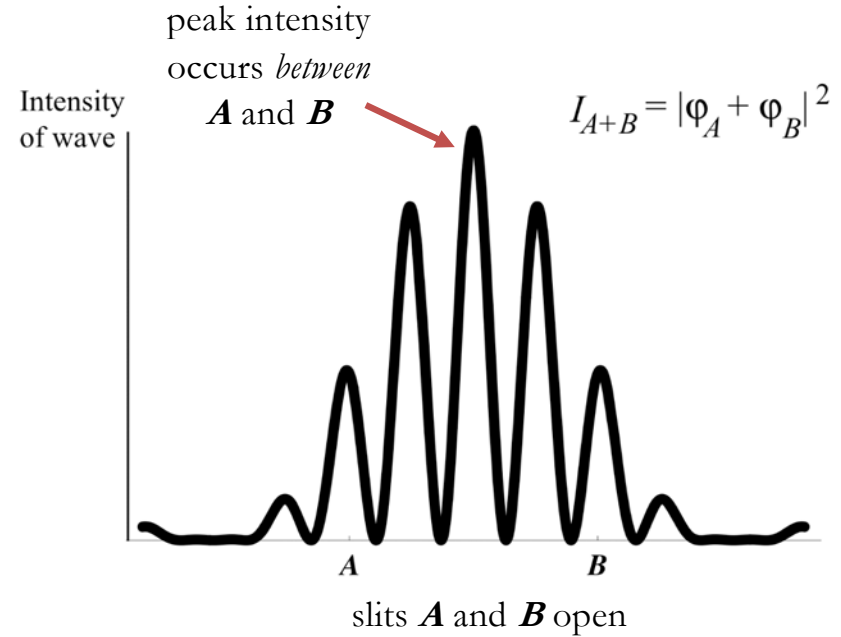
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A water wave approaching the shore encounters a reef with two narrow slits in it, **A** and **B**. Measure the intensity of the wave along the shore as a function of position.

# The Double-Slit Experiment



## Case 2: Classical Waves



The intensity of the wave goes as the *absolute square* of the amplitude. Because of *superposition*, the resulting wave shows a characteristic *interference pattern*.

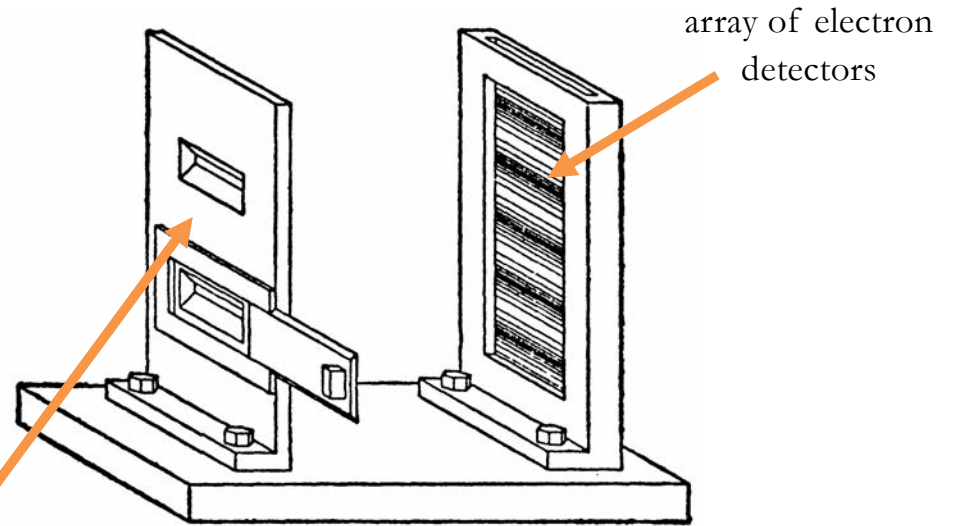
$$|\varphi_A + \varphi_B|^2 \neq |\varphi_A|^2 + |\varphi_B|^2$$

# The Double-Slit Experiment

*Case 3: Quanta*



electron source



Distance between slits **A** and **B** is 10,000 times larger than the electrons' de Broglie wavelength

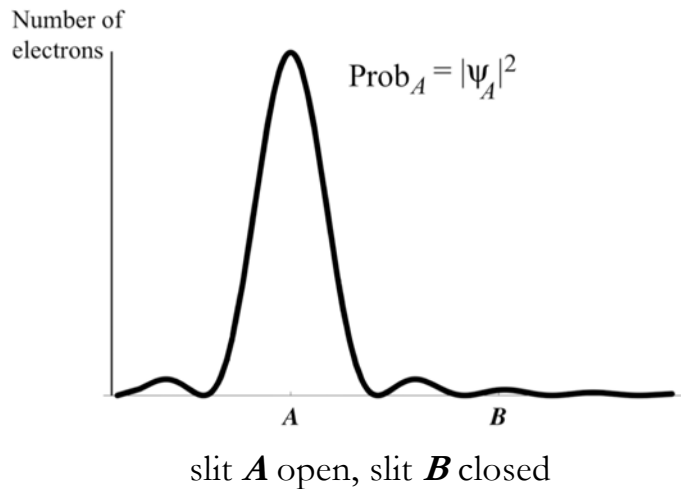
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Release one electron at a time toward the barrier; wait one hour between releases. Repeat this procedure 10,000 times (i.e., get a patient graduate student), and then plot the number of electrons detected at a given position along the array of detectors.

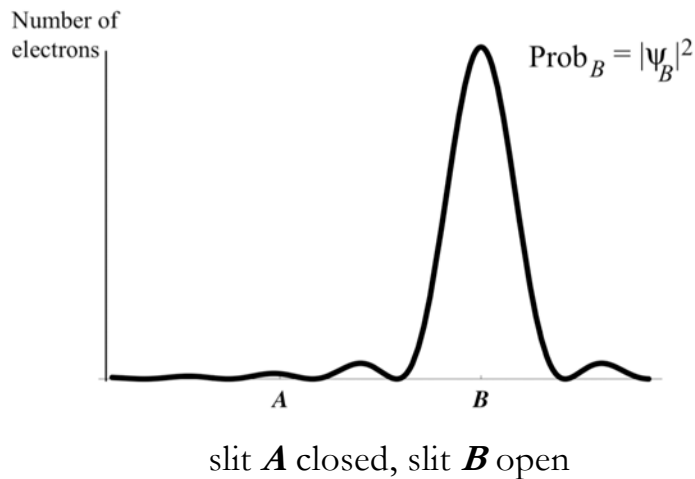


# The Double-Slit Experiment

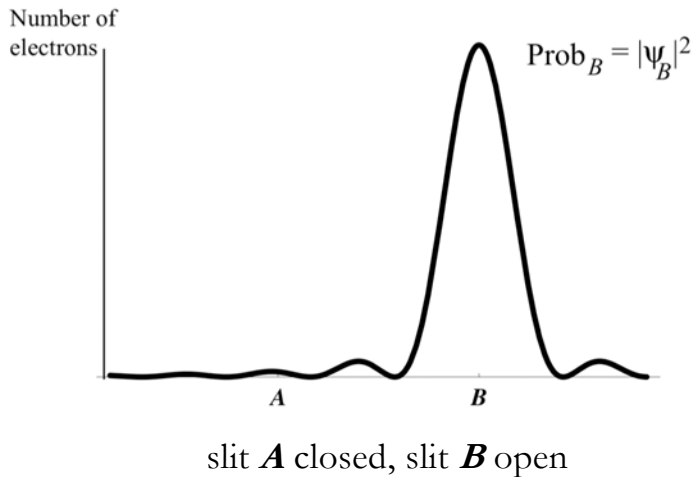
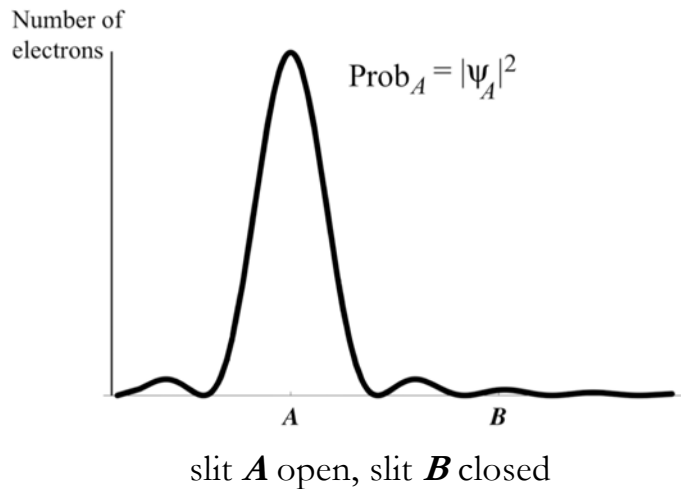
Case 3: Quanta



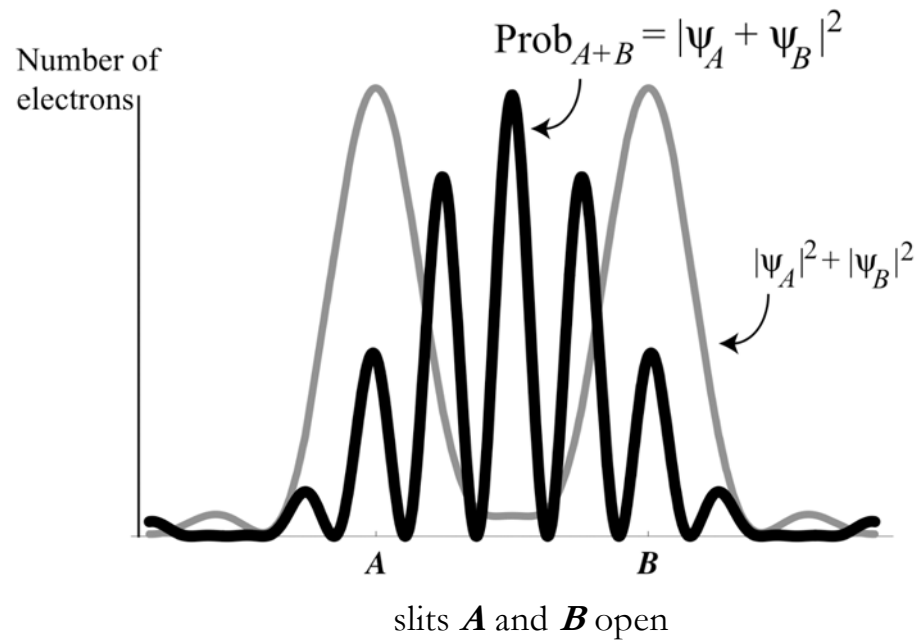
When only one slit is open, the electron results look a lot like the bullet results, clearly clumped behind the open slit. You might readily dismiss the small wiggles on either side of the central peak as spurious experimental error; they never rise above  $\sim 1\%$  of the central peak. “Aha,” you say: “electrons are like bullets after all ...”



# The Double-Slit Experiment



## Case 3: Quanta



When both slits are open, the pattern — after 10,000 individual electrons have been shot at the slits, one at a time, an hour apart! — is exactly like that of interfering water waves. Every individual electron was detected as a localized particle. It wasn't the electrons that spread out like a wave and interfered with each other; it was their *probability amplitude*,  $\psi$ . Max Born (1926): **Probability =  $|\psi|^2$** .

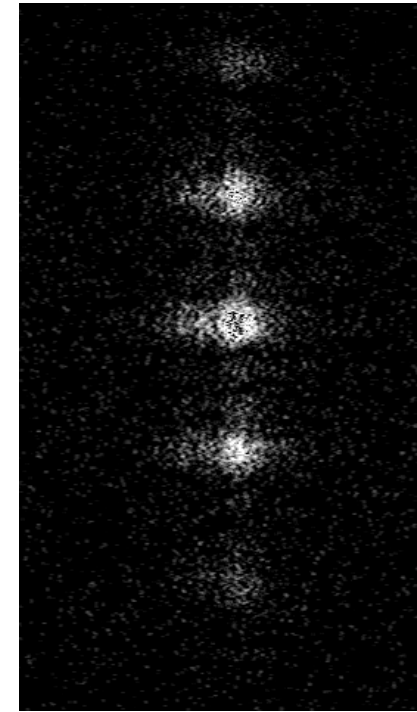
# The Double-Slit Experiment



$t = 1/30$  s



$t = 1$  s



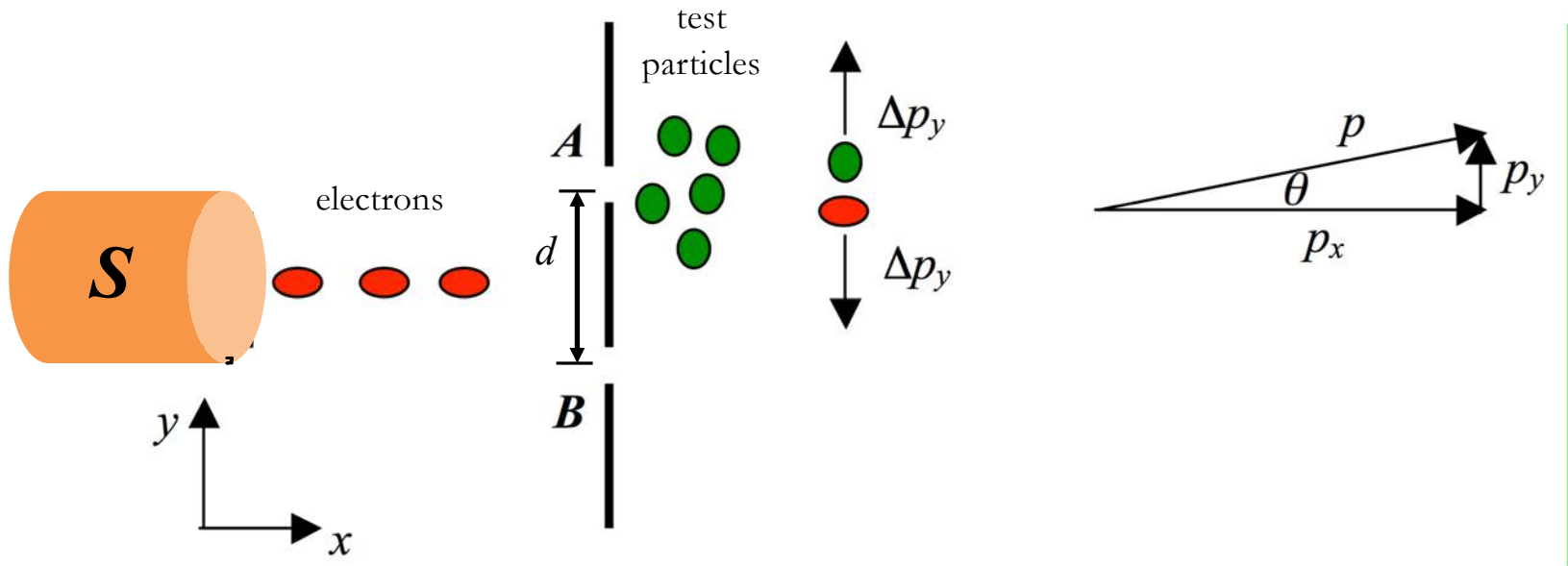
$t = 100$  s

Three snapshots of the detection of individual photons after they have passed through a barrier with slits. Each quantum is detected as a localized particle, yet the pattern that builds up over time reveals wavelike interference.

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*Questions?*

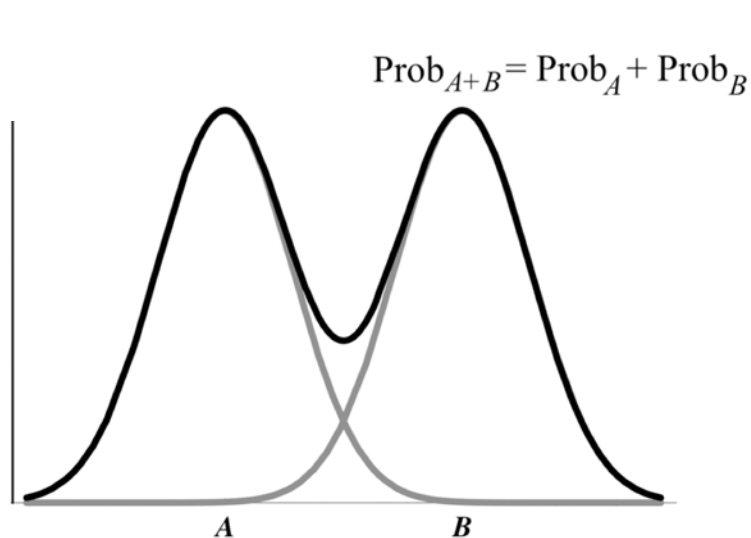
# A Slit Detector?



We could modify our apparatus to try to determine *through which slit* an **electron** really passed: place **test particles** behind slit **A**. If those **particles** get scattered, then we know that the **electron** passed through slit **A** en route to the screen.

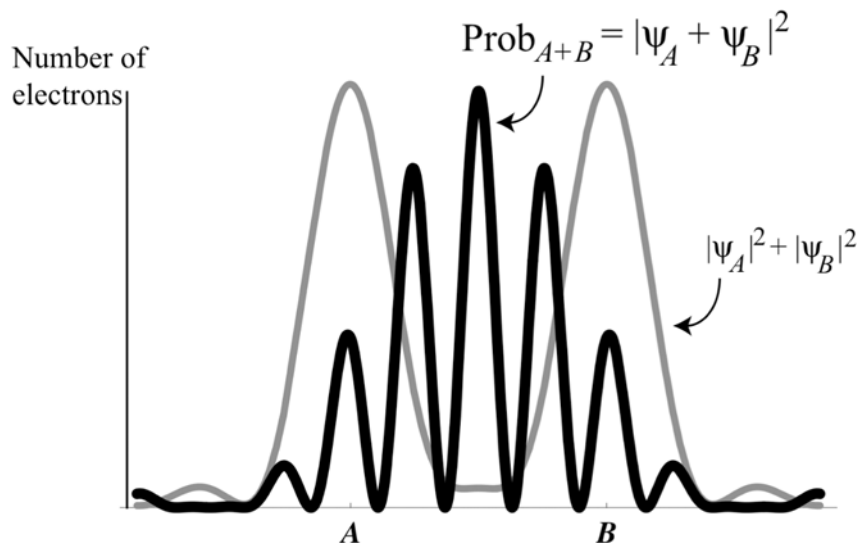
\* See optional *Lecture Notes* on the double-slit experiment

# A Slit Detector?



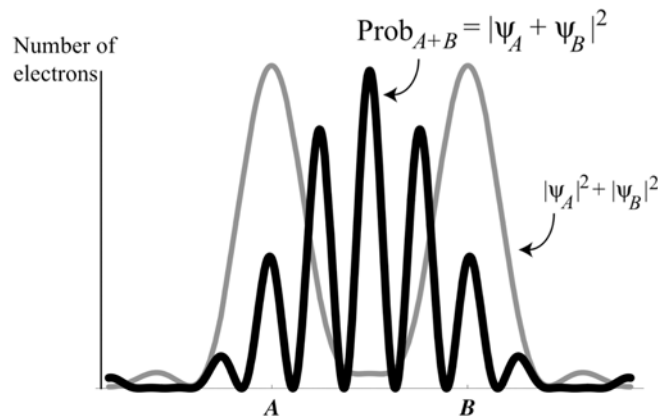
Results when both slits are open, *but* we measure through which slit each electron passed.

Ask a “particle-like” question — “through which slit did the electron pass?” — and we will get a particle-like answer (*either* slit *A* or slit *B*, with particle-like statistics). Ask a “wave-like” question — “how does  $\psi$  behave between the slits and the detector?” — and we will get a wave-like answer (interference pattern with wave-like statistics).



Results when both slits are open, *and* we do *not* measure through which slit each electron passed.

# Wave Mechanics Summary



During 1925-26, *Heisenberg* and *Schrödinger* independently introduced new approaches to a first-principles *quantum mechanics*: a quantitative description of the atomic realm that had certain “quantum” ideas built in from the start, rather than being appended as ad hoc “conditions.”

The rival approaches—matrix mechanics and wave mechanics—at first appeared to be quite distinct from each other. *Heisenberg’s* approach emphasized discreteness while *Schrödinger’s* approach emphasized continua. Yet by 1926, several physicists had demonstrated a mathematical equivalence.

Several conceptual surprises:

- the wavefunction  $\psi$  was related to *probabilities*: **Probability** =  $|\psi|^2$  (1926);
- certain pairs of quantities could not take on simultaneously sharp values:  $\Delta x \Delta p_x \geq \hbar/2$  (1927);
- *wave-particle duality*: the *type* of answer one could expect to find depended on the type of *question* one had asked (1927). Bohr: “**complementarity**.”

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STS.042J / 8.225J Einstein, Oppenheimer, Feynman: Physics in the 20th Century  
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