

Suppose that at an instant of time, the wave function of a quantum particle

$$\psi = \sum c_n \psi_n,$$

where  $\psi_n$  are normalized eigenfunctions of particle's Hamiltonian, *i.e.*  $\hat{H}\psi_n = E_n\psi_n$ , and  $c_n$ 's are numbers (complex, in general). Let us find the average value of the energy of that particle

$$\langle E \rangle = \langle \psi, \hat{H}\psi \rangle.$$

Plugging in the linear combination representing  $\psi$  and using properties of the inner product, we find

$$\langle \psi, \hat{H}\psi \rangle = \langle \sum c_m \psi_m, \hat{H} \sum c_n \psi_n \rangle = \sum_m \sum_n c_m^* c_n \langle \psi_m, \hat{H}\psi_n \rangle.$$

But  $\psi_n$ 's are eigenfunctions of the Hamiltonian ( $\hat{H}\psi_n = E_n\psi_n$ ). Hence

$$\sum_m \sum_n c_m^* c_n \langle \psi_m, \hat{H}\psi_n \rangle = \sum_m \sum_n c_m^* c_n E_n \langle \psi_m, \psi_n \rangle.$$

Now, recall that  $\hat{H}$  is Hermitian, and eigenfunctions that belong to different eigenvalues are orthogonal, that is  $\langle \psi_m, \psi_n \rangle = \delta_{mn}$ . Hence

$$\sum_m \sum_n c_m^* c_n E_n \langle \psi_m, \psi_n \rangle = \sum_m \sum_n c_m^* c_n E_n \delta_{mn} = \sum_n E_n \cdot |c_n|^2.$$

Eventually,

$$\langle E \rangle = \sum_n E_n \cdot |c_n|^2.$$

When you recall how we calculate average values in the theory of probability, then the non-negative numbers  $|c_n|^2$  on the rhs exactly correspond to the probability that the value  $E_n$  is obtained in a measurement of the energy of the particle

$$\text{Pr}(E = E_n) = |c_n|^2.$$

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Of course the same discussion can be repeated for  $\psi = \sum c_n \phi_n$ , that is a linear combination of eigenfunctions of any Hermitian operator  $\hat{A}$  representing a physical quantity  $A$ . Then  $|c_n|^2$  will be the probability that a measurement of  $A$  gives the value  $a_n$  (where  $\hat{A}\phi_n = a_n\phi_n$ ).