

Action–Angle Indeterminacy in Central Potentials: A Referee-Safe Witness

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Abstract

“Action–angle indeterminacy” should not be read as a force-range heuristic (in the style of energy–time slogans), but as a clean conjugacy statement: sharpening an action variable broadens the conjugate angle variable. For central potentials the safest, most explicit instance is the azimuthal pair (ϕ, L_z) : an L_z eigenstate has ϕ -dependence $e^{im\phi}$, hence a uniform azimuthal probability distribution; conversely, any state localized in ϕ must involve a broad superposition of angular-momentum modes (Fourier on the circle). This note records that witness and explains its foundations-level message: classical orbit-phase/orientation pictures correspond to semiclassical packets/superpositions rather than single stationary eigenstates.

1. Purpose and scope

This dependent note isolates one specific “action–angle indeterminacy” statement that is both explicit and referee-safe in a central potential: **ϕ is delocalized in an L_z eigenstate**, and conversely **localizing ϕ requires a superposition over many m modes**.

We deliberately keep the scope bounded. We do **not** enter the self-adjoint “angle operator” debate; instead we use the standard circle/Fourier structure and the unitary phase variable $e^{i\phi}$. We also do **not** make any claims about the range of forces or potentials; the point here is about **which variables can be simultaneously sharp** in stationary states.

2. The safe conjugate pair on the circle: ϕ and L_z

In spherical coordinates the azimuthal angle is periodic, $\phi \sim \phi + 2\pi$. The generator of rotations about the z -axis is

$$L_z = -i\hbar \frac{\partial}{\partial \phi}.$$

The periodicity makes the naive commutator $[\phi, L_z] = i\hbar$ subtle if one insists on an everywhere-defined self-adjoint ϕ operator. A standard way to stay on safe ground is to use the unitary “phase” variable

$$E := e^{i\phi}.$$

Acting on 2π -periodic wavefunctions, E is well-defined and satisfies the canonical shift relation

$$[L_z, E] = \hbar E,$$

which already captures the operational content: sharp L_z implies maximal delocalization in the conjugate angle.

Remark 2.1 (Number-phase pair: the oscillator counterpart). The same structure appears for the harmonic-oscillator number-phase pair (N, θ) . The number operator $N = \hat{a}^\dagger \hat{a}$ has non-negative integer spectrum, and the oscillation phase θ is periodic — the same mathematical setting as (L_z, ϕ) . The Susskind–Glogower operator $\hat{E}_- = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} |n\rangle\langle n+1| = \hat{a} (N+1)^{-1/2}$ (Susskind and Glogower, 1964) plays the role of $E = e^{i\phi}$: it satisfies $[N, \hat{E}_-] = -\hat{E}_-$ (lowering n by one) and its adjoint \hat{E}_+ satisfies $[N, \hat{E}_+] = +\hat{E}_+$. However, $\hat{E}_+ \hat{E}_- = I - |0\rangle\langle 0|$: the vacuum projection spoils exact unitarity because the spectrum of N is bounded below, and there is no state below $|0\rangle$ to shift into. This is the Fock-space manifestation of the same obstruction that prevents a self-adjoint angle operator on the circle. The consequence: a Fock state $|n\rangle$ has a completely uniform phase distribution (the ring of Remark 6.4), just as an L_z eigenstate has uniform ϕ (Section 3), and localizing the oscillator phase requires a broad superposition over number states — exactly the coherent-state construction of Example 6.1.

Remark 2.2 (Phase POVM: rigorous angle probabilities without a self-adjoint operator). The unitary variable $E = e^{i\phi}$ of Section 2 captures the first circular moment of the angle distribution, but the full probability distribution for angle outcomes is given by a positive operator-valued measure (POVM). The phase POVM on $[0, 2\pi)$ is $d\Pi(\phi) = (2\pi)^{-1} \sum_{m,n} |m\rangle\langle n| e^{i(m-n)\phi} d\phi$, where the sum runs over the appropriate spectrum (all integers for L_z , non-negative integers for the oscillator number operator). One verifies $\int_0^{2\pi} d\Pi(\phi) = I$ by orthogonality, and positivity follows because $\langle \psi | d\Pi(\phi) | \psi \rangle = (2\pi)^{-1} |\sum_m c_m e^{-im\phi}|^2 d\phi \geq 0$. For an L_z eigenstate $|m_0\rangle$, the distribution is uniform (as in Section 3); for a coherent state, it is peaked at the classical phase (as in Example 6.1). The POVM determines all moments of the phase distribution — the unitary E captures only the first — and thus provides the rigorous framework underlying the Fourier tradeoff of Section 4. The obstruction to a self-adjoint angle operator differs between the two settings: for the oscillator (semi-bounded spectrum $n \geq 0$), it is Pauli’s argument that the generated shift would produce negative eigenvalues; for L_z (doubly-unbounded integer spectrum), it is the compactness of the circle S^1 — a continuous shift cannot map the discrete spectrum \mathbb{Z} to itself (Holevo,

1982). The POVM framework handles both uniformly, replacing the nonexistent self-adjoint operator with a well-defined probability measure.

Remark 2.3 (Pegg-Barnett hermitian phase operator: self-adjointness via truncation and limit). The POVM of Remark 2.2 provides angle probabilities without a self-adjoint operator. Pegg and Barnett (1989) showed that a complementary route exists: in a truncated $(s+1)$ -dimensional Hilbert space $\text{span}\{|0\rangle, \dots, |s\rangle\}$, define $(s+1)$ phase states $|\theta_m\rangle = (s+1)^{-1/2} \sum_{n=0}^s e^{in\theta_m} |n\rangle$ with $\theta_m = \theta_0 + 2\pi m/(s+1)$, and a Hermitian phase operator $\hat{\Phi}_{\text{PB}} = \sum_{m=0}^s \theta_m |\theta_m\rangle \langle \theta_m|$ [PeggBarnett1989]. In the truncated space, the number states $\{|n\rangle\}$ and phase states $\{|\theta_m\rangle\}$ form complementary bases with uniform overlap $|\langle n|\theta_m\rangle|^2 = 1/(s+1)$ for all n, m — making number and phase maximally complementary observables. The matrix elements of the commutator $[\hat{N}, \hat{\Phi}_{\text{PB}}]$ between physical states (those in the original $\ell^2(\mathbb{N}_0)$ space) approach the canonical value i as $s \rightarrow \infty$, with corrections of order $1/(s+1)$; all expectation values and moments of $\hat{\Phi}_{\text{PB}}$ likewise converge to the POVM results of Remark 2.2 in this limit. The strategy — self-adjoint operator in finite dimension, physical predictions extracted via limiting — sidesteps the Pauli obstruction (Remark 2.1) and the POVM detour (Remark 2.2) by a third route: the phase operator is not defined at any single finite truncation, but as a controlled limit of well-defined finite-dimensional operators.

3. Central potentials: L_z eigenstates have uniform ϕ distribution

For a central potential (or any Hamiltonian commuting with L_z), one may choose simultaneous eigenstates of L_z . In the standard separation of variables, the azimuthal dependence of an angular-momentum eigenstate is the Fourier mode $e^{im\phi}$ with integer m (for example in the spherical-harmonic factor $Y_{\ell m}(\theta, \phi) \propto P_{\ell m}(\cos \theta) e^{im\phi}$) [TongQMLectures].

Thus an L_z eigenstate may be written as

$$\psi(r, \theta, \phi) = F(r, \theta) e^{im\phi}, \quad m \in \mathbb{Z},$$

and therefore

$$|\psi(r, \theta, \phi)|^2 = |F(r, \theta)|^2,$$

independent of ϕ . In particular, the marginal distribution of ϕ is uniform on $[0, 2\pi)$. This is the minimal “angle indeterminacy” witness for central potentials.

Remark 3.1 (Real spherical harmonics: directional lobes from the minimal m -superposition). The complex spherical harmonics $Y_{\ell, m}$ have definite m and therefore uniform ϕ -dependence (the main result above). The “real” spherical harmonics used in chemistry — $p_x \propto \sin \theta \cos \phi$, $p_y \propto \sin \theta \sin \phi$, $d_{xy} \propto \sin^2 \theta \sin 2\phi$, etc. — are the real and imaginary parts of $Y_{\ell, m}$, hence equal-weight superpositions of m and $-m$. This minimal two-mode superposition

already breaks azimuthal uniformity: the probability density acquires $\cos^2(m\phi)$ or $\sin^2(m\phi)$ angular lobes, at the cost of angular-momentum indeterminacy $\text{Var}(L_z) = m^2\hbar^2$. The directional orbital shapes of atomic and molecular physics are thus the simplest instance of the Fourier tradeoff quantified in Section 4.

Remark 3.2 (Dipole selection rules as Fourier orthogonality). The azimuthal Fourier structure $e^{im\phi}$ of Section 3 has its most experimentally consequential manifestation in electromagnetic selection rules. The electric dipole transition matrix element involves $\langle n'l'm'|rY_1^q|nlm\rangle$, where $q = 0$ for π -transitions (z -polarization) and $q = \pm 1$ for σ -transitions (circular polarization). The azimuthal integral $\int_0^{2\pi} e^{-im'\phi} e^{iq\phi} e^{im\phi} d\phi = 2\pi \delta_{m',m+q}$ gives the selection rule $\Delta m = q = 0, \pm 1$ directly from Fourier orthogonality on the circle. A separate selection rule, $\Delta l = \pm 1$, arises from the polar integral (parity and Clebsch–Gordan orthogonality of the associated Legendre functions); this constrains the radial-angular coupling but is not a consequence of the azimuthal Fourier structure. For each allowed transition, the emitted photon carries angular momentum component $q\hbar$ along the quantization axis: $+\hbar$ for σ^+ ($\Delta m = +1$), $-\hbar$ for σ^- ($\Delta m = -1$), and 0 for π ($\Delta m = 0$). The selection rule $m' = m + q$ is thus angular momentum conservation projected onto the z -axis. The Zeeman effect provides the canonical experimental demonstration: in a magnetic field the m -degeneracy is lifted, and spectral lines split into components with $\Delta m = 0, \pm 1$ — directly encoding the azimuthal Fourier structure in the emitted light. This is the observational face of the Fourier tradeoff quantified in Section 4: the orthogonality of Fourier modes constrains which modes can couple, and this orthogonality is precisely the mathematical content of the uniform ϕ distribution.

Remark 3.3 (Orbital angular momentum of light: the photonic analog of azimuthal structure). The azimuthal Fourier structure $e^{im\phi}$ of Section 3 is not limited to matter wavefunctions: optical beams carry orbital angular momentum (OAM) with the same $e^{i\ell\phi}$ dependence. Allen, Beijersbergen, Spreeuw, and Woerdman (1992) showed that Laguerre–Gauss beams $\text{LG}_{p,\ell}$ carry OAM of $\ell\hbar$ per photon — independently of the spin angular momentum (polarization), so the total angular momentum along the beam axis is $(\ell + \sigma)\hbar$ with $\sigma = \pm 1$ for circular polarization [Allen1992]. For $|\ell| \geq 1$, the azimuthal intensity is uniform in ϕ , producing the characteristic ring-shaped “doughnut” beam — the optical version of the L_z eigenstate’s uniform ϕ distribution (the $\ell = 0$ modes are Gaussian-like, with a central maximum). Superposing $\text{LG}_{p,\ell}$ and $\text{LG}_{p,-\ell}$ creates intensity patterns with $2|\ell|$ azimuthal petals — the photonic analog of the real spherical harmonics of Remark 3.1. The OAM alphabet $\{\ell = 0, \pm 1, \pm 2, \dots\}$ is unbounded, unlike spin polarization, enabling higher-dimensional quantum information protocols; Mair, Vaziri, Weihs, and Zeilinger (2001) demonstrated entanglement of photonic OAM states [Mair2001]. The azimuthal Fourier tradeoff of Section 4 applies identically: localizing the angular position of a photon requires superposing many ℓ modes, and the phase vortex at the beam axis — where the phase winds by $2\pi\ell$ around the optical axis, topologically forcing zero intensity — is the photonic

manifestation of the single-valuedness condition that quantizes m in Section 3.

Remark 3.4 (Quantized vortices in superfluids: the macroscopic face of azimuthal quantization). The azimuthal structure $e^{im\phi}$ of Section 3 is not limited to single-particle wavefunctions: it governs the macroscopic order parameter of a superfluid or Bose–Einstein condensate, $\Psi(\mathbf{r}) = \sqrt{\rho(\mathbf{r})} e^{iS(\mathbf{r})/\hbar}$. Single-valuedness of Ψ around any closed loop forces the circulation to be quantized: $\oint \mathbf{v} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\ell} = (h/m)n$ with integer n , where $\mathbf{v} = (\hbar/m)\nabla S$ is the superfluid velocity (Onsager, 1949; Feynman, 1955) [Feynman1955]. At a vortex with winding number n , the phase winds by $2\pi n$, topologically forcing $|\Psi| \rightarrow 0$ at the core — the same mechanism as the OAM beam’s on-axis singularity (Remark 3.3), with the core radius set by the healing length $\xi = 1/\sqrt{8\pi\rho a}$ (typically tens to hundreds of nanometers in dilute BECs). In dilute-gas BECs, singly quantized vortices ($n = 1$) have been directly imaged (Matthews et al., 1999; Madison et al., 2000); multiply charged vortices ($n > 1$) are dynamically unstable in uniform condensates and decay into n single-quantum vortices on millisecond timescales [Matthews1999]. In type-II superconductors, the circulation quantization becomes magnetic flux quantization: each flux tube carries $\Phi_0 = h/(2e)$ (reflecting the Cooper-pair charge $2e$), and the tubes self-organize into Abrikosov’s triangular lattice (1957; Nobel Prize 2003). The action–angle connection is direct: the winding number n is the quantized action variable, while the overall condensate phase is the conjugate angle — delocalized when particle number N is sharp (the macroscopic version of the number–phase tradeoff of Remark 2.1). The Anderson–Josephson relation $d\varphi/dt = -\mu/\hbar$ (where μ is the chemical potential) makes the phase dynamics explicit: Josephson oscillations between weakly coupled condensates are the macroscopic manifestation of the number–phase tradeoff.

4. Fourier tradeoff: localizing ϕ forces a broad m -superposition

Any square-integrable 2π -periodic function admits a Fourier series

$$\psi(\phi) = \sum_{m \in \mathbb{Z}} c_m e^{im\phi}, \quad \sum_{m \in \mathbb{Z}} |c_m|^2 < \infty.$$

If only one Fourier mode is present (sharp m , hence sharp L_z), then $|\psi(\phi)|^2$ is constant; conversely, a state that is peaked in ϕ necessarily uses many Fourier modes (broad m -support).

Example 4.1 (Dirichlet-kernel packet). The normalized superposition of modes $-M \leq m \leq M$,

$$\psi_M(\phi) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi(2M+1)}} \sum_{m=-M}^M e^{im\phi},$$

is peaked near $\phi = 0$ with an angular width that scales like $1/M$, while its m -distribution is spread across $\{-M, \dots, M\}$. This makes the “sharpening $\phi \Rightarrow$ broadening L_z ” tradeoff completely explicit without invoking any disputed angle-operator formalism.

The Fourier tradeoff above can be made into a sharp quantitative bound using only the self-adjoint observables $\cos \phi$ and $\sin \phi$:

Proposition 4.2 (Circular uncertainty relation). For any state on the circle, define the circular concentration $R = |\langle e^{i\phi} \rangle| \in [0, 1]$. Adding the Robertson inequalities for the two self-adjoint pairs $(L_z, \cos \phi)$ and $(L_z, \sin \phi)$ — using $[L_z, \cos \phi] = i\hbar \sin \phi$ and $[L_z, \sin \phi] = -i\hbar \cos \phi$ — and the identity $\text{Var}(\cos \phi) + \text{Var}(\sin \phi) = 1 - R^2$, gives

$$\text{Var}(L_z) \cdot (1 - R^2) \geq \frac{\hbar^2}{4} R^2.$$

When $R = 0$ (uniform distribution, as in an L_z eigenstate) the bound is trivial. As $R \rightarrow 1$ (sharply localized angle) the bound forces $\text{Var}(L_z) \rightarrow \infty$: angular localization requires spreading across many m -modes. This quantifies the Fourier tradeoff above without invoking a self-adjoint angle operator.

Example 4.3 (Verifying the bound for the Dirichlet-kernel packet). For the state ψ_M of Example 4.1, the circular concentration is $R = \langle e^{i\phi} \rangle = 2M/(2M+1)$ (by orthogonality, only the $2M$ consecutive pairs $(m, m+1)$ with both in $\{-M, \dots, M\}$ contribute). The angular-momentum variance is $\text{Var}(L_z) = \hbar^2 M(M+1)/3$ (using $\sum_{m=1}^M m^2 = M(M+1)(2M+1)/6$ and $\langle L_z \rangle = 0$ by symmetry). The ratio of the left-hand side to the right-hand side of the bound in Proposition 4.2 is

$$\frac{\text{Var}(L_z) (1 - R^2)}{(\hbar^2/4) R^2} = \frac{(M+1)(4M+1)}{3M},$$

which equals $10/3 \approx 3.3$ at $M = 1$ and grows as $4M/3$ for large M . The inequality is satisfied with increasing slack: the Dirichlet kernel is far from a minimum-uncertainty state for the circular relation. Physically, narrower angular packets ($R \rightarrow 1$) require disproportionately more angular-momentum spread than the bound demands.

Remark 4.4 (Near-optimal angular localization: the von Mises state). The rectangular Fourier profile of the Dirichlet kernel wastes angular-momentum variance on sidelobes, driving the ratio LHS/RHS to $4M/3$. The angular analog of a Gaussian — the von Mises wavefunction $\psi(\phi) \propto \exp(\kappa \cos \phi)$ — has Fourier coefficients $c_m \propto I_m(\kappa)$ (modified Bessel functions) that decay smoothly. For large κ the coefficients are approximately Gaussian in m with width $\sqrt{\kappa}$, giving $\text{Var}(L_z) \approx \hbar^2 \kappa/2$, while the circular concentration satisfies $1 - R^2 \approx 1/(2\kappa)$ (since the probability $|\psi|^2 \propto \exp(2\kappa \cos \phi)$ is a von Mises distribution with parameter 2κ). The ratio

$\text{Var}(L_z)(1 - R^2)/[(\hbar^2/4)R^2] \rightarrow 1$ as $\kappa \rightarrow \infty$: the von Mises state asymptotically saturates the bound in Proposition 4.2.

Remark 4.5 (Entropic uncertainty: an always-nontrivial bound on the Fourier tradeoff). The variance-based bound of Proposition 4.2 becomes trivial when $R = 0$ (uniform angle distribution, as in an L_z eigenstate). Entropic measures avoid this limitation. For a state with angular-momentum probabilities $\{|c_m|^2\}$ and angular density $p(\phi) = |\psi(\phi)|^2$, the Shannon entropy $H(m) = -\sum |c_m|^2 \ln |c_m|^2$ and differential entropy $h(\phi) = -\int p(\phi) \ln p(\phi) d\phi$ satisfy the entropic uncertainty relation $h(\phi) + H(m) \geq \ln(2\pi)$ (Bialynicki-Birula and Madajczyk, 1985). This bound is always nontrivial: for an L_z eigenstate, $h(\phi) = \ln(2\pi)$ and $H(m) = 0$, saturating the bound; for any state with reduced angular entropy $h(\phi) < \ln(2\pi)$, the angular-momentum entropy must compensate: $H(m) \geq \ln(2\pi) - h(\phi) > 0$. The mixed differential-discrete entropy formulation is valid because the Fourier series on the circle connects an L^2 function on $[0, 2\pi)$ to a sequence in $\ell^2(\mathbb{Z})$, and the inequality follows from the Hausdorff–Young inequality on the circle group. This is the circular analog of the Hirschman–Beckner–Bialynicki-Birula–Mycielski bound $h(x) + h(p) \geq 1 + \ln \pi$ for position-momentum on the line (Beckner, 1975; Bialynicki-Birula and Mycielski, 1975), which is saturated by Gaussians — the coherent states of Example 6.1.

Remark 4.6 (Gabor limit: the time-frequency analog of action-angle indeterminacy). The circular Fourier tradeoff of Section 4 has a direct counterpart in signal processing: the Gabor limit. A signal cannot be simultaneously localized in time and frequency, with the uncertainty bound $\Delta t \cdot \Delta f \geq 1/(4\pi)$ (equivalently $\Delta t \cdot \Delta \omega \geq 1/2$ for angular frequency $\omega = 2\pi f$). Gabor (1946) identified the “logon” — the elementary signal unit of minimum time-bandwidth product — as the Gaussian-windowed sinusoid $\exp(-t^2/2\sigma^2) \cdot e^{2\pi i f_0 t}$, which is literally a coherent state of the harmonic oscillator (Example 6.1) under the identification $t \leftrightarrow q$, $f \leftrightarrow p/\hbar$ [Gabor1946]. Gabor frames — the overcomplete set of time-frequency shifted Gaussians $\{g(t - na) \cdot e^{2\pi i k b t}\}$ — provide a resolution of identity when $ab < 1$ (overcomplete regime); at the critical density $ab = 1$ the system is a Riesz basis, but the Balian–Low theorem then forbids simultaneous good localization of the window in both time and frequency (Daubechies, 1992) [Daubechies1992]. The Fourier tradeoff of Section 4 is the circular analog of the Gabor limit: on S^1 , the entropic uncertainty of Remark 4.5 and the variance bound of Proposition 4.2 play the role of the Gabor limit on \mathbb{R} , with the von Mises state (Remark 4.4) serving as the circular analog of the Gaussian window. The entropic inequality $h(\phi) + H(m) \geq \ln(2\pi)$ of Remark 4.5 maps to the Hirschman–Beckner inequality for position-momentum on the line, while the circular concentration R of Proposition 4.2 is the counterpart of the spectral concentration studied in Slepian–Landau–Pollak theory (prolate spheroidal wave functions).

5. Foundations message: orbit pictures require packets/superpositions

This witness supports a simple interpretive guardrail for central-force intuition: a single stationary eigenstate (even when it carries classical-sounding quantum numbers) is typically **not** a localized classical orbit with a definite phase/orientation. Variables like the azimuthal phase ϕ (and, in more structured integrable cases, other angle variables on the invariant torus) become localized only in **coherent superpositions** of many stationary modes.

In other words, “classical orbit pictures” correspond to semiclassical packets and stationary-phase concentration, not to exact eigenstates that are sharp in the conserved actions.

Remark 5.1 (Temporal coherence and quantum revivals). The superpositions that localize an angle variable also have a temporal constraint: for anharmonic spectra ($d^2E/dm^2 \neq 0$), the packet disperses on a timescale $t_{\text{disp}} \sim \hbar/(|d^2E/dm^2| \Delta m)$ and reforms at the revival time $t_{\text{rev}} \sim 2\pi\hbar/|d^2E/dm^2|$. Only for a linear spectrum ($d^2E/dm^2 = 0$) does the packet rotate rigidly like a classical orbit for all time. Thus classical orbit pictures require not only spatial localization (many m -modes, Section 4) but also approximate spectral linearity for temporal coherence.

Remark 5.2 (Decoherence selects the localized packets). Environment-induced decoherence provides the dynamical mechanism that selects the coherent packets of Section 4 over the sharp-action eigenstates of Section 3. For a harmonic oscillator coupled to a thermal bath through position, coherent states minimize the rate of entanglement with the environment and emerge as the preferred “pointer states” — the states most robust against decoherence [ZurekHabibPaz1993]. Fock states, by contrast, decohere rapidly: superpositions of well-separated number states lose coherence on timescales much shorter than the thermal relaxation time, because the position operator (through which the environment couples) does not commute with the number operator. Classical orbit pictures thus emerge not only from semiclassical wavepacket structure (Sections 4–5) but from the environment’s dynamical selection of those packets as the robust states.

Remark 5.3 (Energy-time uncertainty: the Mandelstam-Tamm temporal analog). The action–angle tradeoff of Sections 3–4 has a temporal counterpart that avoids the well-known difficulty of defining a self-adjoint time operator (Pauli’s theorem for bounded-below Hamiltonians). Mandelstam and Tamm (1945) define the “evolution time” of an observable A as $\Delta t_A := \Delta A/|d\langle A \rangle/dt|$ — the time for $\langle A \rangle$ to change by one standard deviation. The Robertson inequality for (H, A) then gives $\Delta E \cdot \Delta t_A \geq \hbar/2$: sharp energy implies slow evolution of every observable, just as sharp L_z implies uniform ϕ (Section 3). An energy eigenstate ($\Delta E = 0$) has $d\langle A \rangle/dt = 0$ for all A — a completely static state, the temporal version of the azimuthally uniform L_z eigenstate. Conversely, rapid

evolution requires a broad energy superposition, just as angular localization requires many m -modes (Section 4). For the coherent state of Example 6.1 below, this bound is saturated: $\Delta E \cdot \Delta t_x = \hbar/2$, confirming the coherent state as a minimum-uncertainty state for both the spatial and temporal versions of the tradeoff.

Remark 5.4 (Aharonov-Bohm effect: the action variable shifted by a gauge potential). The action-angle framework extends naturally to charged particles in electromagnetic fields through the canonical momentum $\mathbf{p} = m\mathbf{v} + e\mathbf{A}$. In the Aharonov-Bohm effect (Aharonov and Bohm, 1959), a charged particle encircling a solenoid acquires a phase shift $\Delta\varphi = e\Phi/\hbar$, where $\Phi = \oint \mathbf{A} \cdot d\boldsymbol{\ell}$ is the enclosed magnetic flux — even though the magnetic field vanishes everywhere along the particle’s path. This is a direct modification of the action integral: the EBK quantization condition of Remark 6.3 becomes $\oint \mathbf{p} \cdot d\mathbf{q} = (n + \alpha/4)\hbar + e\Phi/(2\pi)$, shifting the spectrum by the enclosed flux. In a ring geometry, the energy levels are $E_m \propto (m - \Phi/\Phi_0)^2$ with flux quantum $\Phi_0 = h/e$, periodic in Φ — directly observed as conductance oscillations in mesoscopic rings. The AB phase is topological: it depends only on the enclosed flux, not on the path shape, making it a gauge-potential holonomy — the same geometric structure as the Berry phase in Remark 3.5 of the companion uncuttable note (Tonomura et al., 1986, provided the definitive experimental demonstration using electron holography with completely shielded magnetic flux).

Remark 5.5 (Heisenberg limit: the action-angle tradeoff as a metrological resource). The Fourier tradeoff of Section 4 has a direct metrological consequence: the precision with which an angle (phase) can be estimated is limited by the spread of the conjugate action variable. For N independent probe particles (e.g., photons in an interferometer), each acquiring phase φ independently, the quantum Cramér-Rao bound with quantum Fisher information $\mathcal{F}_Q = 4\text{Var}(\hat{J})$ — where \hat{J} is the generator of the phase shift $e^{-i\varphi\hat{J}}$ — gives a minimum phase uncertainty $\delta\varphi \geq 1/\sqrt{\mathcal{F}_Q}$. For a coherent state (Poisson action distribution, $\text{Var}(\hat{J}) \approx N$), this yields the shot-noise limit $\delta\varphi \geq 1/\sqrt{N}$ (Braunstein and Caves, 1994). Entangled states can do better: a NOON state $(|N, 0\rangle + |0, N\rangle)/\sqrt{2}$ achieves $\text{Var}(\hat{J}) = N^2/4$, saturating the Heisenberg limit $\delta\varphi \geq 1/N$ — the ultimate bound for linear phase-encoding unitaries (Giovannetti, Lloyd, and Maccone, 2006). The gap between $1/\sqrt{N}$ (shot noise) and $1/N$ (Heisenberg) is precisely the gap between classical and quantum exploitation of the action-angle tradeoff: the more action variance a state carries, the finer the angle resolution it permits. This is the Fourier tradeoff of Section 4 in its most operationally consequential form.

Remark 5.6 (Quantum Zeno effect: dynamical enforcement of the action-angle tradeoff). The static statement of Section 3 — sharp action implies delocalized angle — has a dynamical counterpart in the quantum Zeno effect (Misra and Sudarshan, 1977). Frequent projective measurement of the action variable (\hat{N} or L_z) keeps the system in an action eigenstate: the

short-time survival probability after each measurement interval $\delta t = T/N$ is $p(\delta t) \approx 1 - (\delta t \Delta H/\hbar)^2$, so after N measurements the total survival probability $P(T) \approx [1 - (\Delta H)^2 T^2/(\hbar^2 N^2)]^N \rightarrow 1$ as $N \rightarrow \infty$. The system is frozen in its action eigenstate, which has a uniformly delocalized angle distribution — not because the measurement “randomizes” the angle, but because it prevents the system from building up the superposition of different action eigenstates that would be required for angle localization (Section 4). This is complementary to Remark 5.2 (decoherence): position-coupled decoherence selects coherent states (localized angle, spread action), while frequent action measurement selects Fock/ L_z eigenstates (localized action, delocalized angle) — two opposite dynamical mechanisms that each enforce one extreme of the action–angle tradeoff. The Zeno effect was first demonstrated experimentally by Itano et al. (1990) using repeated optical pulses on trapped ions to inhibit transitions between internal states.

Remark 5.7 (QND measurement of action variables). Quantum nondemolition (QND) measurement completes the measurement story of Remarks 5.2 (decoherence) and 5.6 (Zeno effect). A QND observable A satisfies two conditions: $[A, H_{\text{sys}}] = 0$ (the observable is a constant of the free motion) and $[A, H_{\text{int}}] = 0$ (the measurement interaction does not feed back into A). Together these ensure that repeated measurement of A yields the same result without disturbing A ’s subsequent evolution — though the conjugate variable is randomized by each measurement (Braginsky, Vorontsov, and Thorne, 1980). For action variables (\hat{N} or L_z), the first condition is automatic: they commute with their respective system Hamiltonians by construction. The second condition constrains the measurement apparatus: the interaction must couple to A without generating terms that fail to commute with it. The canonical experimental realization is dispersive photon-number readout in cavity QED (Nogues et al., 1999): Rydberg atoms traverse a microwave cavity and acquire a phase shift $\Delta\varphi = \chi n t_{\text{int}}$ proportional to the photon number n via the dispersive interaction $H_{\text{int}} = \hbar\chi \hat{n} \sigma_z$. Ramsey interferometry on the atomic superposition state then reveals n — distinguishing $n = 0$ from $n = 1$ — without absorbing or emitting photons. QND measurement is conceptually distinct from the Zeno effect (Remark 5.6): Zeno freezing relies on rapid projective measurements that prevent any evolution, while QND exploits the fact that the measured observable is already conserved — the measurement reads the value without needing to freeze the dynamics. Decoherence (Remark 5.2) selects coherent states via position coupling; QND measurement selects Fock states via action coupling. The choice of coupling determines which extreme of the action–angle tradeoff is enforced.

6. A second witness: the harmonic oscillator

The same structure appears in the simplest one-dimensional integrable system.

Example 6.1 (Harmonic oscillator: Fock states vs coherent states). For a harmonic oscillator of frequency ω , define the classical action vari-

able $J = E/\omega$. The quantum Fock states $|n\rangle$ are the action eigenstates ($J_n = (n + \frac{1}{2})\hbar$), and their phase-space (Husimi) distribution is a ring centered at the origin — the orbit phase θ is uniformly delocalized, exactly as ϕ is delocalized in an L_z eigenstate. Conversely, a coherent state

$$|\alpha\rangle = e^{-|\alpha|^2/2} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{\alpha^n}{\sqrt{n!}} |n\rangle, \quad \alpha = |\alpha| e^{i\theta_0},$$

is the closest quantum analog of a classical orbit with definite amplitude $|\alpha|$ and phase θ_0 . Its Fock-state weights follow a Poisson distribution with mean $\bar{n} = |\alpha|^2$, so localizing the phase to width $\Delta\theta \sim 1/|\alpha|$ requires spreading the action over $\Delta n \sim |\alpha|$ modes. The tradeoff is the same as in Section 4: sharp action implies delocalized phase, and vice versa.

Example 6.2 (Hydrogen atom: three action-angle pairs). In the hydrogen atom, the n^2 -fold degeneracy (E_n depending only on the principal quantum number n) reflects an enhanced $SO(4)$ symmetry [Sakurai2020]. Semiclassically, the bound orbits lie on a three-torus with action integrals quantized by (n, ℓ, m) . A stationary eigenstate $|n, \ell, m\rangle$ is sharp in all three actions and therefore delocalized in all three conjugate angles: the azimuthal phase ϕ is uniform (Section 3), the in-plane orbit orientation has no preferred direction (the Runge–Lenz vector has vanishing expectation value, since it connects states of different ℓ), and the radial probability $|R_{n\ell}(r)|^2$ is time-independent — the sharp radial action leaves the conjugate radial phase uniformly delocalized. A classical Keplerian ellipse with definite eccentricity, orientation, and timing requires a coherent superposition over ranges of (n, ℓ, m) , just as a coherent state in Example 6.1 requires superposing many Fock states.

Remark 6.3 (EBK quantization on the invariant torus). For a classically integrable system with d degrees of freedom, the Arnold–Liouville theorem provides d action variables $I_k = (2\pi)^{-1} \oint_{\gamma_k} p \cdot dq$, integrated around the independent cycles γ_k of the invariant d -torus. The EBK (Einstein–Brillouin–Keller) quantization condition requires

$$I_k = \left(n_k + \frac{\alpha_k}{4} \right) \hbar, \quad n_k \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0},$$

where α_k is the Maslov index of the k -th cycle (counting caustic/turning-point contributions). The integer quantum numbers n_k select the torus; the conjugate angle variables $\theta_k \in [0, 2\pi)$ are uniformly distributed on that torus and carry no quantum-number information. This is the semiclassical counterpart of the fully quantum statement: stationary eigenstates (sharp actions) have delocalized angles. Examples 6.1 and 6.2 are the exact quantum versions of this principle for the $d = 1$ and $d = 3$ cases.

Remark 6.4 (Husimi function: visualizing action-angle states in phase space). The Husimi Q -function $Q(\alpha) = \langle \alpha | \hat{\rho} | \alpha \rangle / \pi$ assigns a non-negative quasiprobability to each phase-space point α , using coherent states as

the reference frame. For a Fock state $|n\rangle$, $Q(\alpha) = e^{-|\alpha|^2} |\alpha|^{2n} / (\pi n!)$ — a ring at radius $|\alpha| = \sqrt{n}$, uniform in the phase angle: sharp action, fully delocalized angle. For a coherent state $|\alpha_0\rangle$, $Q(\alpha) = e^{-|\alpha - \alpha_0|^2} / \pi$ — a Gaussian blob centered at α_0 , simultaneously localizing both action and angle to uncertainty-limited width. The ring-versus-blob distinction is the phase-space portrait of the Fourier tradeoff in Section 4, with the Husimi function providing a literal (non-negative) probability picture that the Wigner function’s sign changes would obscure.

Remark 6.5 (Squeezed states: continuous interpolation between ring and blob). The Fock ring and coherent blob are not the only options; squeezed states of the form $D(\alpha_0)S(\xi)|0\rangle$ (displacement followed by squeezing) produce an elliptical Husimi contour at α_0 , with the squeeze parameter $r = |\xi|$ controlling the eccentricity. When the ellipse is aligned radially (amplitude squeezing), action uncertainty is reduced at the expense of angle uncertainty — approaching Fock-ring character. When aligned tangentially (phase squeezing), angle uncertainty is reduced at the expense of action uncertainty — giving a better approximation to a classical orbit with definite phase. The full family, parametrized by r and the squeeze angle, interpolates continuously between the extremes of Examples 6.1 and 6.4 while saturating the Heisenberg bound $\Delta X_1 \Delta X_2 = \hbar/2$ (for the dimensionless quadratures X_1, X_2 of the oscillator mode) at every point.

Remark 6.6 (Wigner function: sub-Planck structure beneath the Husimi portrait). The Husimi function is the Wigner function convolved with a Gaussian of width $\sqrt{\hbar}$: this smoothing guarantees non-negativity (Remark 6.4) but erases interference fringes. For a Fock state $|n\rangle$, the Wigner function $W_n(x, p) = ((-1)^n / \pi \hbar) L_n(2H/\hbar\omega) e^{-2H/\hbar\omega}$ (where $H = (p^2 + \omega^2 x^2)/2$ and L_n is a Laguerre polynomial) exhibits alternating-sign rings — structure finer than the minimal uncertainty cell $\Delta x \Delta p \sim \hbar$ that the non-negative Husimi ring completely hides. The Wigner portrait thus complements Remarks 6.4–6.5: Husimi shows where the state “is” in phase space, while Wigner reveals the quantum coherences that make “where” an incomplete description.

Remark 6.7 (Quantum state tomography: reconstructing the phase-space portrait). The Husimi and Wigner functions of Remarks 6.4–6.6 are not merely theoretical constructs: they can be reconstructed from experimental data via quantum state tomography. For an oscillator mode, measuring the rotated quadrature $X_\theta = x \cos \theta + p \sin \theta$ at angle θ yields a marginal distribution $P_\theta(s)$ that is a Radon projection of the Wigner function. Collecting P_θ for all $\theta \in [0, \pi)$ and inverting the Radon transform (filtered back-projection) recovers the full $W(x, p)$. This was first demonstrated by Smithey, Beck, Raymer, and Faridani (1993), who reconstructed the Wigner function of a squeezed vacuum state using optical homodyne detection, where the local oscillator phase selects the measured quadrature angle. The ring-versus-blob distinction of Remark 6.4 is thus directly observable: Fock-state tomograms show the uniform-phase ring, while coherent-state tomograms show the localized Gaussian blob — the action-angle tradeoff of Sections 3–4 made experimentally visible.

Remark 6.8 (Spin coherent states: the angular-momentum analog of coherent-state localization). The harmonic-oscillator coherent states of Example 6.1 have a direct angular-momentum counterpart. The spin coherent state $|j, \hat{n}\rangle = R(\hat{n})|j, j\rangle$ — obtained by rotating the highest-weight state to point along $\hat{n} = (\theta_0, \phi_0)$ (Radcliffe, 1971; Perelomov, 1972) — has m -coefficients that follow a binomial distribution with mean $\bar{m} = j \cos \theta_0$ and variance $\text{Var}(m) = (j/2) \sin^2 \theta_0$. The expectation value of the angular-momentum vector is $\langle \mathbf{J} \rangle = j \hbar \hat{n}$, with angular uncertainty $\Delta \theta \sim 1/\sqrt{2j}$ that saturates the SU(2) Robertson bound $\Delta J_1 \Delta J_2 \geq (\hbar/2) |\langle J_3 \rangle|$. As $j \rightarrow \infty$, the spin coherent states become delta-concentrated on the classical phase space S^2 (Lieb, 1973) — the angular-momentum analog of the $|\alpha| \rightarrow \infty$ classical limit of Example 6.1. The ring-versus-blob picture of Remark 6.4 thus extends from the flat (oscillator) phase space to the sphere: $|j, m\rangle$ eigenstates are azimuthal rings with uniform ϕ , while spin coherent states are directional blobs that spread over $\sim \sqrt{j}$ magnetic sub-levels.

Remark 6.9 (Bargmann representation: action-angle duality made algebraic). The Bargmann–Segal representation (Bargmann, 1961) maps the oscillator Hilbert space to the space of holomorphic functions on \mathbb{C} with Gaussian measure $d\mu = \pi^{-1} e^{-|z|^2} d^2 z$. Under this map, Fock states become monomials — $|n\rangle \mapsto z^n/\sqrt{n!}$ — whose rotational symmetry $|z^n|^2 = |z|^{2n}$ reflects the uniform phase distribution of Remark 6.4’s ring. Coherent states become reproducing kernels $K_\alpha(z) = e^{\alpha z}$, which extract the value of a holomorphic function at α — the algebraic expression of “evaluation at a phase-space point,” i.e., maximal localization. Creation and annihilation become multiplication and differentiation: $\hat{a}^\dagger \mapsto z, \hat{a} \mapsto d/dz$. The Husimi function of Remark 6.4 is then the squared modulus of the Bargmann representative (weighted by the Gaussian measure), so the ring-versus-blob distinction of Remarks 6.4–6.8 is literally monomials versus peaked exponentials. For spin- j systems (Schwinger’s oscillator construction), the Bargmann space truncates to polynomials of degree $\leq 2j$, and spin coherent states become evaluation points on $\mathbb{CP}^1 \cong S^2$ — the finite-dimensional counterpart of the full oscillator duality.

Remark 6.10 (Hamiltonian monodromy: topological obstruction to global action-angle coordinates). The EBK quantization of Remark 6.3 and the Bargmann representation of Remark 6.9 assume that action-angle coordinates exist globally. Duistermaat (1980) showed that this can fail: for a completely integrable system, the regular invariant tori form a torus bundle over the space of regular values of the energy-momentum map, and this bundle may be non-trivial. Hamiltonian monodromy — a non-trivial $\text{GL}(d, \mathbb{Z})$ transformation of the action variables upon transport around a loop enclosing a singular value (such as a focus-focus equilibrium) — obstructs the existence of globally smooth action variables. The quantum manifestation (Cushman and Duistermaat, 1988; Vũ Ngọc, 1999) is that the joint spectrum of commuting observables cannot be embedded in a regular integer lattice: the quantum number lattice has a topological defect around which the labeling undergoes the same $\text{GL}(d, \mathbb{Z})$ transformation as the classical actions. The spherical

pendulum provides the canonical example, with a single focus-focus point producing a lattice defect visible in the (E, L_z) spectrum. This is “action-angle indeterminacy” at the global-topological level: the action variables of Sections 3–4 are locally well-defined but may not extend consistently around singular fibers of the energy-momentum map.

7. Outlook (kept minimal)

The preceding witnesses illustrate the action–angle tradeoff in systems with one, two, and three action–angle pairs, and Remark 6.3 shows that EBK quantization makes the same structural point in general: the more sharply the actions are specified, the less information remains in the conjugate phases.

Remark 7.1 (Boundary at integrability breaking). The action–angle framework of Sections 3–6 presupposes the existence of global action variables, hence applies exactly to integrable systems. For nearly integrable Hamiltonians, the KAM theorem guarantees persistence of most invariant tori (those with sufficiently irrational frequency ratios), on which the framework remains valid. In fully chaotic systems, the absence of conserved actions replaces the structured Fourier tradeoff with eigenstate thermalization — a more drastic delocalization where individual energy eigenstates appear thermal for local observables, with no residual action–angle structure to organize the uncertainty.

Remark 7.2 (Spectral statistics: from Poisson to random-matrix universality). The action–angle structure of Sections 3–6 also organizes the energy spectrum. Berry and Tabor (1977) showed that for a generic integrable system (incommensurable classical frequencies), EBK quantization on independent tori produces energy levels whose nearest-neighbor spacings follow a Poisson distribution $P(s) = e^{-s}$ — uncorrelated, with no level repulsion. Bohigas, Giannoni, and Schmit (1984) conjectured (and verified numerically for the Sinai billiard) that classically chaotic systems instead display the level repulsion characteristic of random matrix theory: GOE statistics for time-reversal invariant systems, GUE when time-reversal is broken. The spectral transition — Poisson to Wigner-Dyson — mirrors the phase-space transition of Remark 7.1: independent torus quantization gives way to the global eigenstate entanglement that produces both level repulsion and eigenstate thermalization.

Remark 7.3 (Ehrenfest time: temporal boundary of the classical orbit picture). The Ehrenfest theorem — $d\langle x \rangle/dt = \langle p \rangle/m$, $d\langle p \rangle/dt = -\langle V'(x) \rangle$ — gives exact classical dynamics only when the potential is at most quadratic (so that $\langle V'(x) \rangle = V'(\langle x \rangle)$). For anharmonic systems, the wavepacket’s finite width introduces corrections that grow with time, and the classical-orbit picture breaks down after the Ehrenfest time t_E . For integrable systems, the characteristic quantum timescales — both the dispersal time and the revival time $t_{\text{rev}} \sim 2\pi\hbar/|d^2E/dm^2|$ of Remark 5.1 — are algebraic in \hbar . For classically chaotic systems with maximal Lyapunov exponent λ , exponential

trajectory divergence compresses this to $t_E \sim (1/\lambda) \ln(1/\hbar)$ — logarithmic in $1/\hbar$, hence far shorter (Berman and Zaslavsky, 1978). This dramatic contrast — algebraic versus logarithmic — is the temporal counterpart of the phase-space and spectral transitions described in Remarks 7.1 and 7.2: the coherent packets of Section 5 remain classical for polynomially long times in integrable systems, but only logarithmically long in chaotic ones.

Remark 7.4 (Gutzwiller trace formula: periodic orbits as the non-integrable spectral bridge). The EBK quantization of Remark 6.3 connects eigenvalues to classical tori in integrable systems. For non-integrable (chaotic) systems, invariant tori do not exist, and the Gutzwiller trace formula (1971) replaces them with isolated periodic orbits: the oscillatory part of the density of states is $g_{\text{osc}}(E) \approx \sum_{\gamma} A_{\gamma} \cos(S_{\gamma}(E)/\hbar - \mu_{\gamma}\pi/2)$, where the sum runs over all periodic orbits γ (primitive and repeated), $S_{\gamma} = \oint_{\gamma} p \cdot dq$ is the classical action, μ_{γ} is the Maslov index, and the amplitude $A_{\gamma} \propto T_{\gamma}/|\det(M_{\gamma} - I)|^{1/2}$ involves the orbit period T_{γ} and the stability determinant of the monodromy matrix M_{γ} restricted to the transverse directions. For marginally stable orbits (M_{γ} has eigenvalue 1), this amplitude diverges — these are the torus orbits of integrable systems, and the trace formula degenerates to EBK quantization. This formula also underlies the spectral statistics of Remark 7.2: the Poisson statistics of integrable systems follow from the incommensurate action phases on independent tori, while the random-matrix (GOE/GUE) statistics of chaotic systems emerge from the exponentially proliferating periodic orbits (their number grows as $\sim e^{hT}/T$ with topological entropy h) through semiclassical sum rules (Berry, 1985). The Gutzwiller formula is generically asymptotic ($\hbar \rightarrow 0$), but for surfaces of constant negative curvature, the Selberg trace formula provides an exact identity between the Laplacian spectrum and closed geodesics.

Remark 7.5 (Geometric quantization: the action-angle framework made systematic). The action-angle structure underlying Sections 2–6 has a systematic mathematical home in geometric quantization (Kostant and Souriau, 1970). Given a symplectic manifold (M, ω) , the prequantization condition requires $[\omega/(2\pi\hbar)]$ to be an integral cohomology class — precisely the EBK quantization condition of Remark 6.3, expressed as integrality of the Chern class of a line bundle $L \rightarrow M$. A polarization — a choice of Lagrangian foliation — then reduces the prequantum Hilbert space to the physical one. For integrable systems with action-angle coordinates (I, θ) , the real (action) polarization gives wave functions depending on I alone, yielding the number/Fock states of Example 6.1 — the “rings” of Remark 6.4 — while the complex (Kähler) polarization gives holomorphic wave functions, recovering the Bargmann representation of Remark 6.9 — the “blobs.” The metaplectic correction (Blattner, Kostant, Sternberg) accounts for the half-density structure of the cornerstone manuscript, adding the $\frac{1}{2}\hbar\omega$ zero-point energy that naive geometric quantization misses. For spin- j systems, geometric quantization of $S^2 \cong \mathbb{CP}^1$ with symplectic form proportional to the area form produces the spin coherent

states of Remark 6.8, with the prequantization condition forcing $2j \in \mathbb{Z}$ — the integrality of spin as a topological constraint.

Remark 7.6 (Coherent-state path integral: the action-angle structure as a path integral). The coherent states of Example 6.1 provide not only a phase-space portrait (Remarks 6.4–6.9) but also a path integral formulation that makes the action-angle structure dynamical. The resolution of identity $1 = \pi^{-1} \int |\alpha\rangle\langle\alpha| d^2\alpha$ allows writing the quantum propagator as a functional integral over phase-space trajectories: $K = \int \mathcal{D}^2\alpha \exp(iS_{\text{cs}}/\hbar)$, where the coherent-state action is $S_{\text{cs}} = \int dt [i\hbar \dot{\alpha}^* \alpha - H(\alpha^*, \alpha)]$. The kinetic term $i\hbar \dot{\alpha}^* \alpha$ is the symplectic one-form $p dq$ written in the complex coordinate $\alpha = (q + ip)/\sqrt{2\hbar}$ — the same geometric connection whose holonomy gives the Berry phase (Remark 3.5 of the companion uncuttable note). In the semiclassical limit, stationary phase selects trajectories satisfying Hamilton’s equations in complex form $i\hbar \dot{\alpha} = \partial H / \partial \alpha^*$; fluctuations around these yield the semiclassical corrections that connect to the Gutzwiller trace formula of Remark 7.4. For spin systems, replacing oscillator coherent states by spin coherent states (Remark 6.8) gives a path integral on S^2 with a Wess–Zumino topological term that encodes the spin quantum number j — the path-integral expression of the prequantization integrality condition in Remark 7.5.

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