

Quantum harmonic oscillator

Anything quadratic is called harmonic. —A. Zee

A harmonic oscillator is anything with potential energy proportional to x^2 .

$$V(x) \propto x^2$$

For a quantum harmonic oscillator

$$V(x) = \frac{m\omega^2 x^2}{2}$$

Hence the hamiltonian

$$\hat{H} = \frac{\hat{p}^2}{2m} + \frac{m\omega^2 x^2}{2}$$

We seek to solve the eigenvalue equation

$$\hat{H}\psi_n = E_n\psi_n$$

The solution is

$$\psi_n(x) = C_n \exp\left(-\frac{m\omega x^2}{2\hbar}\right) H_n\left(x\sqrt{m\omega/\hbar}\right), \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

C_n is the normalization constant

$$C_n = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2^n n!}} \left(\frac{m\omega}{\pi\hbar}\right)^{\frac{1}{4}}$$

H_n is the n th hermite polynomial

$$H_n(y) = (-1)^n \exp(y^2) \frac{d^n}{dy^n} \exp(-y^2)$$

The eigenvalues are

$$E_n = \hbar\omega \left(n + \frac{1}{2}\right)$$

The ladder operators are

$$\hat{a} = \sqrt{\frac{m\omega}{2\hbar}} \left(x + \frac{i\hat{p}}{m\omega}\right)$$

$$\hat{a}^\dagger = \sqrt{\frac{m\omega}{2\hbar}} \left(x - \frac{i\hat{p}}{m\omega}\right)$$

Operator \hat{a} lowers ψ_n .

$$\hat{a}\psi_n = \sqrt{n}\psi_{n-1}$$

Operator \hat{a}^\dagger raises ψ_n .

$$\hat{a}^\dagger\psi_n = \sqrt{n+1}\psi_{n+1}$$

This is how ψ_n can be obtained from ψ_0 .

$$\psi_n = \frac{(\hat{a}^\dagger)^n}{\sqrt{n!}} \psi_0$$

Exercises

1. Verify ψ_n and E_n .
2. Verify ladder operators.
3. Let

$$\Psi(x) = \frac{\psi_2(x) + \psi_3(x)}{\sqrt{2}}$$

Verify that

$$\Pr(x \geq 0) = \int_0^\infty \Psi^* \Psi \, dx \approx 0.85$$