

❖ Radial Distribution Function

The radial distribution function is the behavior of $R_{n,l}^2 \cdot 4\pi r^2 dr$ as a function of distance r from the center of the nucleus. These plots solve the problem posed by the simple “probability distribution curves” which suggested that the probability of finding the electron must be highest at the center of the nucleus in the ground electronic state. In the radial distribution plots, we assume that the probability of finding the particle at a distance r from the nucleus depends not only upon the density of electron wave but also varies with the magnitude of the volume of the spherical shell of dr thickness at the same distance. This is quite rational because the r can be in any direction around the nucleus.

Consider that the space around the nucleus is divided into an infinite number of concentric shells of thickness dr . Now though the electron density will show a decrease with increasing r , the volume of the concentric shells will increase. More volume at distance r means more the chances of finding the electron at same. The two effects will try to counter each other, and therefore, the resultant probability at distance r must be the multiplication of the two effects i.e.

$$\text{Radial probability} = \psi_{n,l,m}^2 \times dV_{shell} \quad (433)$$

Nevertheless, since it is only the radial part ($R_{n,l}$) that varies with the distance from the nucleus, the above expression for simplicity can be reduced to

$$\text{Radial probability} = R_{n,l}^2 \times dV_{shell} \quad (434)$$

Now as we have already derived the mathematical expression of radial wavefunction hydrogen atom already in this previously, the only thing we need is the mathematical expression of the volume element also.

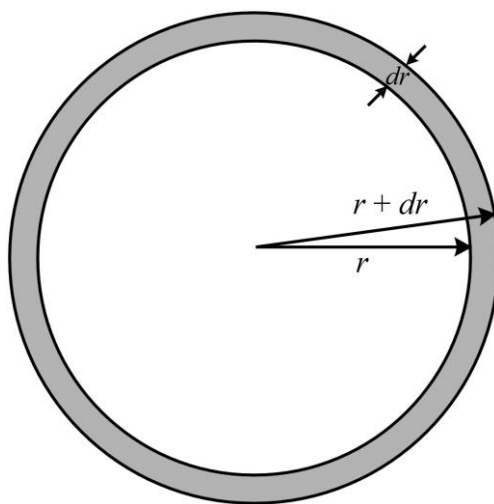


Figure 23. The depiction of a concentric shell of thickness dr around the nucleus of a hydrogen atom at a distance r .

The volume of the shaded portion (spherical shell of thickness dr) can be obtained subtracting the volume of the inner sphere from the outer sphere i.e.

$$dV = \frac{4}{3}\pi(r + dr)^3 - \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \quad (435)$$

$$= \frac{4}{3}\pi(r^3 + dr^3 + 3r^2dr + 3r dr^2) - \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \quad (436)$$

$$= \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 + \frac{4}{3}\pi dr^3 + 4\pi r^2 dr + 4\pi r dr^2 - \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \quad (437)$$

$$dV = \frac{4}{3}\pi dr^3 + 4\pi r^2 dr + 4\pi r dr^2 \quad (438)$$

Since dr is very small, the terms involving square and cube of dr can be neglected for simplicity. All this leaves us with only one term i.e. $dV = 4\pi r^2 dr$. After using the value of dV in equation (434), we get

$$\text{Radial probability} = R_{n,l}^2 \times 4\pi r^2 dr \quad (439)$$

To understand this more precisely, consider the plot for the ground quantum mechanical state of an electron in a hydrogen atom i.e. $1s$ orbital.

➤ **Radial Probability Distribution Curve for Ground State of Hydrogen Atom**

The valid values of n , l and m that can be put in the general form of the hydrogenic wavefunction to obtain ground state are 1, 0 and 0, respectively. Therefore, we can start by writing the mathematical expression for the same i.e.

$$R_{1,0} = 2 \left(\frac{1}{a_0} \right)^{3/2} e^{-r/a_0} \quad (440)$$

The probability distribution function can be obtained by squaring equation (440) i.e.

$$R_{1,0}^2 = \frac{4}{a_0^3} e^{-2r/a_0} \quad (441)$$

After multiplying the “probability distribution function” with “volume element”, the expression for the “radial distribution function” can be formulated. Mathematically, we can say that

$$P(r) = \frac{4}{a_0^3} e^{-2r/a_0} \times 4\pi r^2 dr \quad (442)$$

It is obvious from the equation (442) that probability will become zero if we put $r = 0$ ($4\pi r^2 dr = 0$). Now, if we increase the r , the radial probability will first increase due to increasing volume element, attaining maxima; and then it will start declining due to the dominance of $R_{1,0}^2$ part. In other words, the density of electron-wave decreases exponentially but the volume of the concentric shell increases continuously.

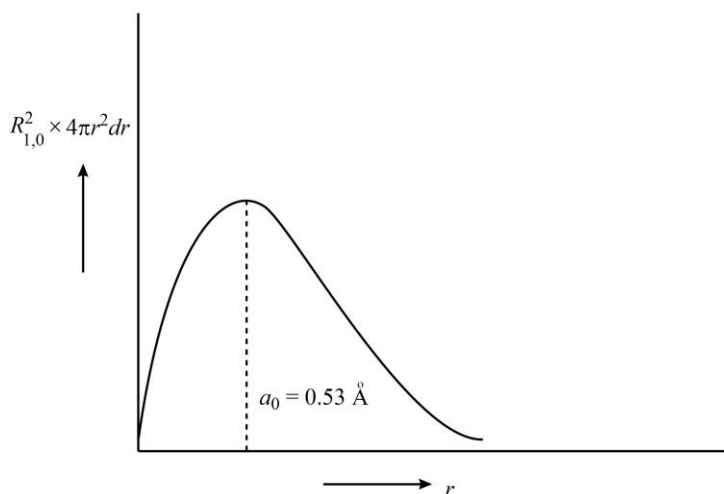


Figure 24. The variation of radial probability as a function of r ($1s$ orbital).

In order to find the radius of maximum probability, we need to put dP/dr equal to zero. It has been found that the radius of maximum probability will come out to be 0.53×10^{-10} m, which is exactly equal to the radius of the first Bohr orbit (a_0).

➤ **Radial Probability Distribution Curves for Other Hydrogenic Wavefunctions**

The other valid sets of n, l can be put in the general form of radial part of the wavefunction, to obtain $R_{n,l}^2$, and hence the corresponding “radial distribution functions”.

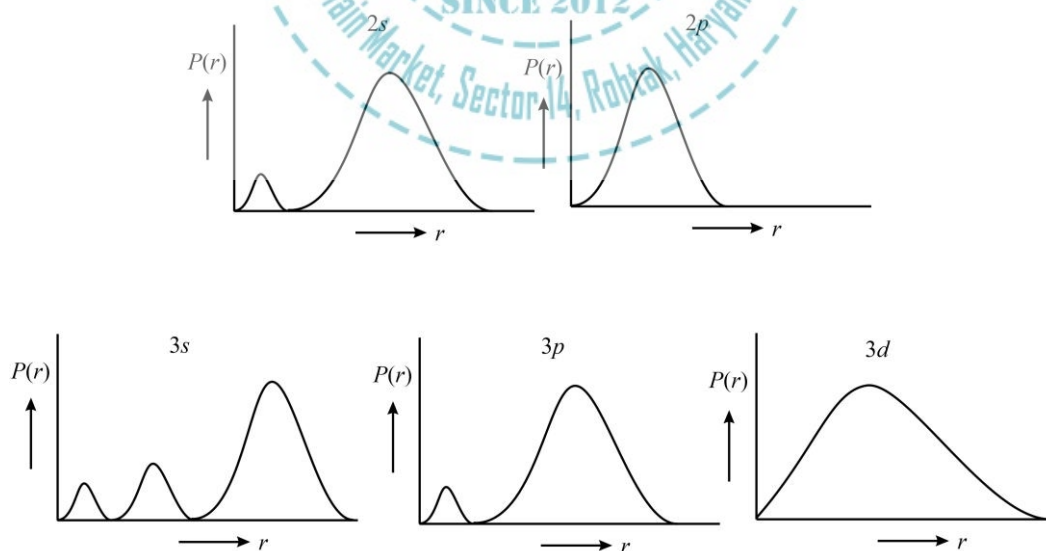


Figure 25. The variation of radial probability as a function of distance from the center of the nucleus.

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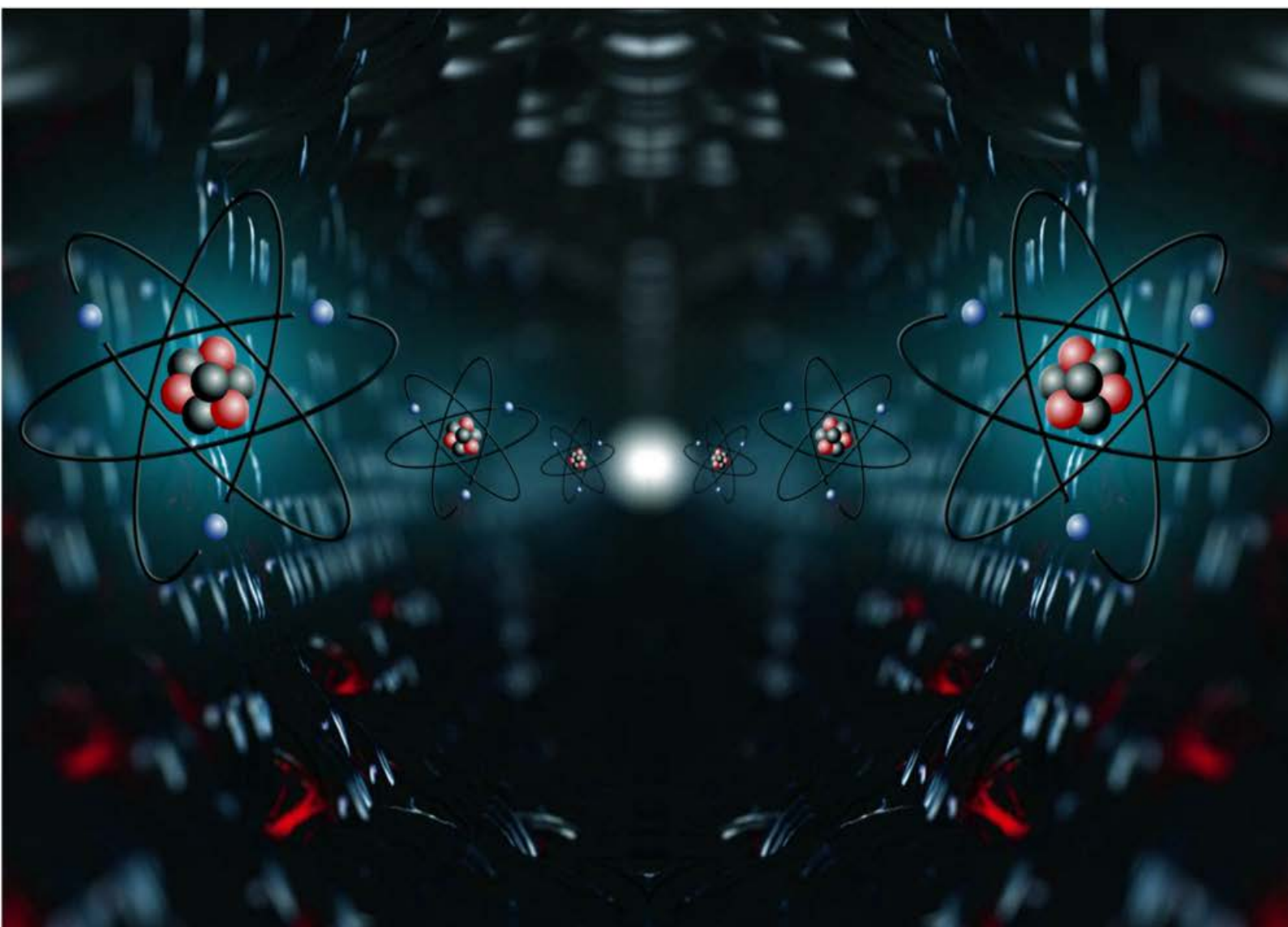
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Volume I

MANDEEP DALAL



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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	11
Quantum Mechanics – I	11
❖ Postulates of Quantum Mechanics	11
❖ Derivation of Schrodinger Wave Equation.....	16
❖ Max-Born Interpretation of Wave Functions	21
❖ The Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle.....	24
❖ Quantum Mechanical Operators and Their Commutation Relations.....	29
❖ Hermitian Operators – Elementary Ideas, Quantum Mechanical Operator for Linear Momentum, Angular Momentum and Energy as Hermitian Operator	52
❖ The Average Value of the Square of Hermitian Operators	62
❖ Commuting Operators and Uncertainty Principle (x & p ; E & t).....	63
❖ Schrodinger Wave Equation for a Particle in One Dimensional Box.....	65
❖ Evaluation of Average Position, Average Momentum and Determination of Uncertainty in Position and Momentum and Hence Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle.....	70
❖ Pictorial Representation of the Wave Equation of a Particle in One Dimensional Box and Its Influence on the Kinetic Energy of the Particle in Each Successive Quantum Level	75
❖ Lowest Energy of the Particle	80
❖ Problems	82
❖ Bibliography	83
CHAPTER 2	84
Thermodynamics – I	84
❖ Brief Resume of First and Second Law of Thermodynamics.....	84
❖ Entropy Changes in Reversible and Irreversible Processes.....	87
❖ Variation of Entropy with Temperature, Pressure and Volume	92
❖ Entropy Concept as a Measure of Unavailable Energy and Criteria for the Spontaneity of Reaction	94
❖ Free Energy, Enthalpy Functions and Their Significance, Criteria for Spontaneity of a Process ...	98
❖ Partial Molar Quantities (Free Energy, Volume, Heat Concept).....	104
❖ Gibb’s-Duhem Equation.....	108
❖ Problems	111
❖ Bibliography	112

CHAPTER 3	113
Chemical Dynamics – I	113
❖ Effect of Temperature on Reaction Rates.....	113
❖ Rate Law for Opposing Reactions of Ist Order and IInd Order.....	119
❖ Rate Law for Consecutive & Parallel Reactions of Ist Order Reactions	127
❖ Collision Theory of Reaction Rates and Its Limitations	135
❖ Steric Factor.....	141
❖ Activated Complex Theory	143
❖ Ionic Reactions: Single and Double Sphere Models	147
❖ Influence of Solvent and Ionic Strength.....	152
❖ The Comparison of Collision and Activated Complex Theory	157
❖ Problems.....	158
❖ Bibliography	159
CHAPTER 4	160
Electrochemistry – I: Ion-Ion Interactions	160
❖ The Debye-Huckel Theory of Ion-Ion Interactions	160
❖ Potential and Excess Charge Density as a Function of Distance from the Central Ion.....	168
❖ Debye-Huckel Reciprocal Length	173
❖ Ionic Cloud and Its Contribution to the Total Potential	176
❖ Debye-Huckel Limiting Law of Activity Coefficients and Its Limitations.....	178
❖ Ion-Size Effect on Potential.....	185
❖ Ion-Size Parameter and the Theoretical Mean - Activity Coefficient in the Case of Ionic Clouds with Finite-Sized Ions.....	187
❖ Debye-Huckel-Onsager Treatment for Aqueous Solutions and Its Limitations.....	190
❖ Debye-Huckel-Onsager Theory for Non-Aqueous Solutions.....	195
❖ The Solvent Effect on the Mobility at Infinite Dilution	196
❖ Equivalent Conductivity (Λ) vs Concentration $C^{1/2}$ as a Function of the Solvent	198
❖ Effect of Ion Association Upon Conductivity (Debye-Huckel-Bjerrum Equation)	200
❖ Problems.....	209
❖ Bibliography	210
CHAPTER 5	211
Quantum Mechanics – II	211
❖ Schrodinger Wave Equation for a Particle in a Three Dimensional Box	211

❖ The Concept of Degeneracy Among Energy Levels for a Particle in Three Dimensional Box	215
❖ Schrodinger Wave Equation for a Linear Harmonic Oscillator & Its Solution by Polynomial Method	217
❖ Zero Point Energy of a Particle Possessing Harmonic Motion and Its Consequence	229
❖ Schrodinger Wave Equation for Three Dimensional Rigid Rotator.....	231
❖ Energy of Rigid Rotator	241
❖ Space Quantization.....	243
❖ Schrodinger Wave Equation for Hydrogen Atom: Separation of Variable in Polar Spherical Coordinates and Its Solution	247
❖ Principal, Azimuthal and Magnetic Quantum Numbers and the Magnitude of Their Values.....	268
❖ Probability Distribution Function.....	276
❖ Radial Distribution Function	278
❖ Shape of Atomic Orbitals (<i>s</i> , <i>p</i> & <i>d</i>).....	281
❖ Problems.....	287
❖ Bibliography	288
CHAPTER 6	289
Thermodynamics – II.....	289
❖ Clausius-Clapeyron Equation.....	289
❖ Law of Mass Action and Its Thermodynamic Derivation	293
❖ Third Law of Thermodynamics (Nernst Heat Theorem, Determination of Absolute Entropy, Unattainability of Absolute Zero) And Its Limitation.....	296
❖ Phase Diagram for Two Completely Miscible Components Systems	304
❖ Eutectic Systems (Calculation of Eutectic Point).....	311
❖ Systems Forming Solid Compounds A_xB_y with Congruent and Incongruent Melting Points	321
❖ Phase Diagram and Thermodynamic Treatment of Solid Solutions.....	332
❖ Problems.....	342
❖ Bibliography	343
CHAPTER 7	344
Chemical Dynamics – II	344
❖ Chain Reactions: Hydrogen-Bromine Reaction, Pyrolysis of Acetaldehyde, Decomposition of Ethane.....	344
❖ Photochemical Reactions (Hydrogen-Bromine & Hydrogen-Chlorine Reactions).....	352
❖ General Treatment of Chain Reactions (Ortho-Para Hydrogen Conversion and Hydrogen-Bromine Reactions).....	358

❖ Apparent Activation Energy of Chain Reactions	362
❖ Chain Length	364
❖ Rice-Herzfeld Mechanism of Organic Molecules Decomposition (Acetaldehyde)	366
❖ Branching Chain Reactions and Explosions (H ₂ -O ₂ Reaction)	368
❖ Kinetics of (One Intermediate) Enzymatic Reaction: Michaelis-Menten Treatment	371
❖ Evaluation of Michaelis's Constant for Enzyme-Substrate Binding by Lineweaver-Burk Plot and Eadie-Hofstee Methods	375
❖ Competitive and Non-Competitive Inhibition	378
❖ Problems	388
❖ Bibliography	389
CHAPTER 8	390
Electrochemistry – II: Ion Transport in Solutions	390
❖ Ionic Movement Under the Influence of an Electric Field	390
❖ Mobility of Ions	393
❖ Ionic Drift Velocity and Its Relation with Current Density	394
❖ Einstein Relation Between the Absolute Mobility and Diffusion Coefficient	398
❖ The Stokes-Einstein Relation	401
❖ The Nernst-Einstein Equation	403
❖ Walden's Rule	404
❖ The Rate-Process Approach to Ionic Migration	406
❖ The Rate-Process Equation for Equivalent Conductivity	410
❖ Total Driving Force for Ionic Transport: Nernst-Planck Flux Equation	412
❖ Ionic Drift and Diffusion Potential	416
❖ The Onsager Phenomenological Equations	418
❖ The Basic Equation for the Diffusion	419
❖ Planck-Henderson Equation for the Diffusion Potential	422
❖ Problems	425
❖ Bibliography	426
INDEX	427



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