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Classical Field Theory

In what follows we will consider rather general field theories. The only guiding principles that we will use in constructing these theories are (a) symmetries and (b) a generalized Least Action Principle.

2.1 Relativistic invariance

Before we saw three examples of relativistic wave equations. They are the Maxwell equations for classical electromagnetism, the Klein-Gordon equation and the Dirac equation. Maxwell's equations govern the dynamics of a *vector* field, the vector potentials $A^\mu(x) = (A^0(x), \mathbf{A}(x))$, whereas the Klein-Gordon equation describes excitations of a *scalar* field $\phi(x)$ and the Dirac equation governs the behavior of the four-component spinor field $\psi_\alpha(x)$, ($\alpha = 0, 1, 2, 3$). Each one of these fields transforms in a very definite way under the group of Lorentz transformations, the Lorentz group. The Lorentz group is defined as a group of linear transformations Λ of Minkowski space-time \mathcal{M} onto itself $\Lambda : \mathcal{M} \mapsto \mathcal{M}$ such that the new coordinates are related to the old ones by a linear (Lorentz) transformation

$$x'^\mu = \Lambda^\mu_\nu x^\nu \tag{2.1}$$

The space-time components of a Lorentz transformation, Λ_i^0 , are the *Lorentz boosts*. Lorentz boosts relate inertial reference frames moving at relative velocity \mathbf{v} with respect to each other. Lorentz boosts along the x^1 -axis

have the familiar form

$$\begin{aligned} x^{0'} &= \frac{x^0 + vx^1/c}{\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}} \\ x^{1'} &= \frac{x^1 + vx^0/c}{\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}} \\ x^{2'} &= x^2 \\ x^{3'} &= x^3 \end{aligned} \tag{2.2}$$

where $x^0 = ct$, $x^1 = x$, $x^2 = y$ and $x^3 = z$ (note: the superscripts indicate components, not powers!). If we use the notation $\gamma = (1 - v^2/c^2)^{-1/2} \equiv \cosh \alpha$, we can write the Lorentz boost as a matrix:

$$\begin{pmatrix} x^{0'} \\ x^{1'} \\ x^{2'} \\ x^{3'} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \alpha & \sinh \alpha & 0 & 0 \\ \sinh \alpha & \cosh \alpha & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x^0 \\ x^1 \\ x^2 \\ x^3 \end{pmatrix} \tag{2.3}$$

The space components of Λ_j^i are conventional rotations R of three-dimensional Euclidean space.

Infinitesimal Lorentz transformations are generated by the hermitian operators

$$L_{\mu\nu} = i(x_\mu \partial_\nu - x_\nu \partial_\mu) \tag{2.4}$$

where $\partial_\mu = \frac{\partial}{\partial x^\mu}$ and $\mu, \nu = 0, 1, 2, 3$. The infinitesimal generators $L_{\mu\nu}$ satisfy the algebra

$$[L_{\mu\nu}, L_{\rho\sigma}] = ig_{\nu\rho}L_{\mu\sigma} - ig_{\mu\rho}L_{\nu\sigma} - ig_{\nu\sigma}L_{\mu\rho} + ig_{\mu\sigma}L_{\nu\rho} \tag{2.5}$$

where $g_{\mu\nu}$ is the metric tensor for flat Minkowski space-time (see below). This is the algebra of the Lie group $SO(3, 1)$. Actually, any operator of the form

$$M_{\mu\nu} = L_{\mu\nu} + S_{\mu\nu} \tag{2.6}$$

where $S_{\mu\nu}$ are 4×4 matrices satisfying the algebra of Eq.(2.5) are also generators of $SO(3, 1)$. Below we will discuss explicit examples.

Lorentz transformations form a *group*, since (a) the product of two Lorentz transformations is a Lorentz transformation, (b) there exists an identity

transformation, and (c) Lorentz transformations are invertible. Notice, however, that in general two transformations do not commute with each other. Hence, the Lorentz group is non-Abelian.

The Lorentz group has the *defining property* of leaving invariant the relativistic interval

$$x^2 \equiv x_0^2 - \mathbf{x}^2 = c^2 t^2 - \mathbf{x}^2 \quad (2.7)$$

The group of Euclidean rotations leave invariant the Euclidean distance \mathbf{x}^2 and it is a subgroup of the Lorentz group. The rotation group is denoted by $SO(3)$, and the Lorentz group is denoted by $SO(3,1)$. This notation makes manifest the fact that the signature of the metric has one + sign and three – signs.

The group $SO(3,1)$ of linear transformations is non-compact in the following sense. Let us consider first the group of rotations in three-dimensional space, $SO(3)$. The linear transformations in $SO(3)$ leave the Euclidean distance (squared) $R^2 = x_1^2 + x_2^2 + x_3^2$ invariant. The set of points with a fixed value of R is the two-dimensional surface of a sphere of radius R in three dimensions, that we will denote by S_2 . The elements of the group of rotations $SO(3)$ are in one-to-one correspondence with the points on S_2 . The area of a 2-sphere S_2 of unit radius is 4π . Then we will say that the “volume” of the group $SO(3)$ is finite and equal to 4π . A group of linear transformations with finite volume is said to be *compact*. In contrast, the Lorentz group is the set of linear transformations, denoted by $SO(3,1)$, that leave the relativistic interval $x_\mu x^\mu$ invariant, which is not positive definite. As we well know, Lorentz boosts which map points along hyperbolas of Minkowski space time. In this sense, the Lorentz group is non-compact since its “volume” is infinite.

We will adopt the following conventions and definitions:

- 1) *Metric Tensor*: We will use the standard (“Bjorken and Drell”) metric for Minkowski space-time in which the metric tensor $g_{\mu\nu}$ is

$$g_{\mu\nu} = g^{\mu\nu} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.8)$$

With this notation the infinitesimal relativistic interval is

$$ds^2 = dx^\mu dx_\mu = g_{\mu\nu} dx^\mu dx^\nu = dx_0^2 - d\mathbf{x}^2 = c^2 dt^2 - d\mathbf{x}^2 \quad (2.9)$$

- 2) *4-vectors*:

- i) x^μ is a *contravariant* 4-vector, $x^\mu = (ct, \mathbf{x})$

- ii) x_μ is a *covariant* 4-vector $x_\mu = (ct, -\mathbf{x})$
 iii) Covariant and contravariant vectors (and tensors) are related through the metric tensor $g_{\mu\nu}$

$$A^\mu = g^{\mu\nu} A_\nu \quad (2.10)$$

- iv) \mathbf{x} is a vector in \mathbb{R}^3
 v) $p^\mu = \left(\frac{E}{c}, \mathbf{p}\right)$ is the energy-momentum 4-vector . Hence, $p_\mu p^\mu = \frac{E^2}{c^2} - \mathbf{p}^2$ is a Lorentz scalar.

3) *Scalar Product:*

$$\mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{q} = p_\mu q^\mu = p_0 q_0 - \mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{q} \equiv p_\mu q_\nu g^{\mu\nu} \quad (2.11)$$

4) *Gradients:* $\partial_\mu \equiv \frac{\partial}{\partial x^\mu}$ and $\partial^\mu \equiv \frac{\partial}{\partial x_\mu}$. We define the D'Alembertian ∂^2

$$\partial^2 \equiv \partial^\mu \partial_\mu \equiv \frac{1}{c^2} \partial_t^2 - \nabla^2 \quad (2.12)$$

which is a Lorentz scalar. From now on we will use units of time $[T]$ and length $[L]$ such that $\hbar = c = 1$. Thus, $[T] = [L]$ and we will use units like centimeters (or any other unit of length).

5) *Interval:* The interval in Minkowski space is x^2 ,

$$x^2 = x_\mu x^\mu = x_0^2 - \mathbf{x}^2 \quad (2.13)$$

Time-like intervals have $x^2 > 0$ while space-like intervals have $x^2 < 0$.

Since a field is a function (or mapping) of Minkowski space onto some other (properly chosen) space, it is natural to require that the fields should have simple transformation properties under Lorentz transformations. For example, the vector potential $A^\mu(x)$ transforms like *4-vector* under Lorentz transformations, i.e. if $x'^\mu = \Lambda^\mu_\nu x^\nu$, then $A'^\mu(x') = \Lambda^\mu_\nu A^\nu(x)$. In other words, A^μ transforms like x^μ . Thus, it is a vector. All vector fields have this property. A *scalar* field $\Phi(x)$, on the other hand, remains *invariant* under Lorentz transformations,

$$\Phi'(x') = \Phi(x) \quad (2.14)$$

A 4-spinor $\psi_\alpha(x)$ transforms under Lorentz transformations. Namely, there exists an induced 4×4 linear transformation matrix $S(\Lambda)$ such that

$$S(\Lambda^{-1}) = S^{-1}(\Lambda) \quad (2.15)$$

and

$$\Psi'(\Lambda x) = S(\Lambda)\Psi(x) \quad (2.16)$$

Below we will give an explicit expression for $S(\Lambda)$.

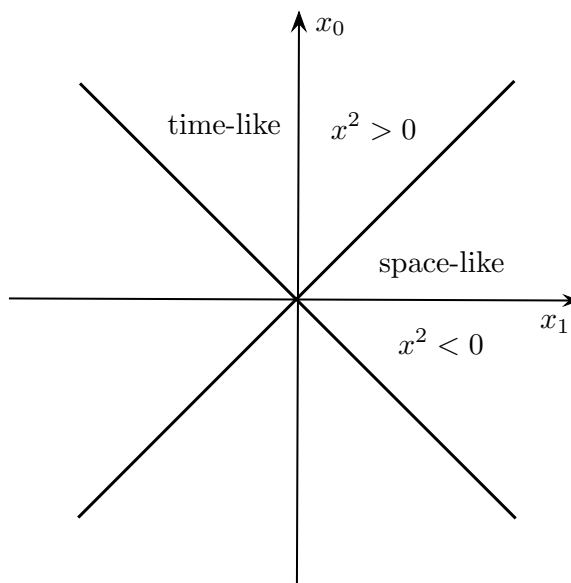


Figure 2.1 The Minkowski space-time and its light cone. Events at a relativistic interval with $x^2 = x_0^2 - \mathbf{x}^2 > 0$ are time-like (and are causally connected with the origin), while events with $x^2 = x_0^2 - \mathbf{x}^2 < 0$ are space-like and are not causally connected with the origin.

2.2 The Lagrangian, the action, and the Least Action Principle

The evolution of any dynamical system is determined by its Lagrangian. In the Classical Mechanics of systems of particles described by the generalized coordinates q , the Lagrangian L is a differentiable function of the coordinates q and their time derivatives. L must be differentiable since, otherwise, the equations of motion would not be local in time, *i.e.* could not be written in terms of differential equations. An argument à-la Landau and Lifshitz (Landau and Lifshitz, 1959a) enables us to “derive” the Lagrangian. For example, for a particle in free space, the homogeneity, uniformity and isotropy of space and time require that L be only a function of the absolute value of the velocity $|\mathbf{v}|$. Since $|\mathbf{v}|$ is not a differentiable function of \mathbf{v} , the Lagrangian must be a function of \mathbf{v}^2 . Thus, $L = L(\mathbf{v}^2)$. In principle there is no reason to assume that L cannot be a function of the acceleration \mathbf{a} (or rather \mathbf{a}^2) or of its higher derivatives. *Experiment* tells us that in Classical Mechanics it is sufficient to specify the initial position $\mathbf{x}(0)$ of a particle and its initial velocity $\mathbf{v}(0)$ in order to determine the time evolution of the

system. Thus we have to choose

$$L(\mathbf{v}^2) = \text{const} + \frac{1}{2}m\mathbf{v}^2 \quad (2.17)$$

The additive constant is irrelevant in classical physics. Naturally, the coefficient of \mathbf{v}^2 is just one-half of the inertial mass.

However, in Special Relativity, the natural invariant quantity to consider is not the Lagrangian but the *action* S . For a free particle the relativistic invariant (i.e. Lorentz invariant) action must involve the invariant interval, the *proper length* $ds = c\sqrt{1 - \frac{\mathbf{v}^2}{c^2}} dt$. Hence one writes the action for a relativistic massive particle as

$$S = -mc \int_{s_i}^{s_f} ds = -mc^2 \int_{t_i}^{t_f} dt \sqrt{1 - \frac{\mathbf{v}^2}{c^2}} \quad (2.18)$$

The relativistic Lagrangian then is

$$L = -mc^2 \sqrt{1 - \frac{\mathbf{v}^2}{c^2}} \quad (2.19)$$

As a power series expansion, it contains all powers of \mathbf{v}^2/c^2 . It is elementary to see that, as expected, the canonical momentum \mathbf{p} is

$$\mathbf{p} = \frac{\partial L}{\partial \mathbf{v}} = \frac{m\mathbf{v}}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{\mathbf{v}^2}{c^2}}} \quad (2.20)$$

from which it follows that the Hamiltonian (or energy) is given by

$$H = \frac{mc^2}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{\mathbf{v}^2}{c^2}}} = \sqrt{\mathbf{p}^2 c^2 + m^2 c^4}, \quad (2.21)$$

as it should be.

Once the Lagrangian is found, the classical equations of motion are determined by the *Least Action Principle*. Thus, we construct the action S

$$S = \int dt L(q, \dot{q}) \quad (2.22)$$

where $\dot{q} = \frac{dq}{dt}$, and demand that the physical trajectories $q(t)$ leave the action S stationary, i.e. $\delta S = 0$. The variation of S is

$$\delta S = \int_{t_i}^{t_f} dt \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial q} \delta q + \frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \delta \dot{q} \right) \quad (2.23)$$

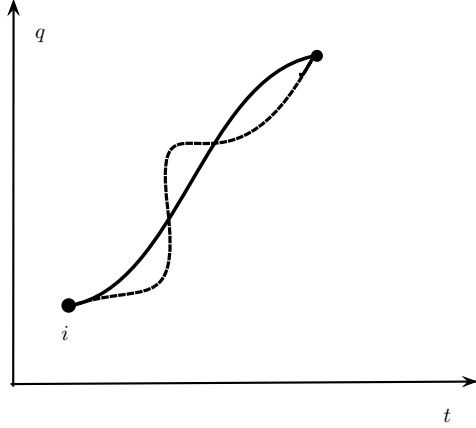


Figure 2.2 The Least Action Principle: the dark curve is the classical trajectory and extremizes the classical action. The curve with a broken trace represents a variation.

Integrating by parts, we get

$$\delta S = \int_{t_i}^{t_f} dt \dot{q} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \delta q \right) + \int_{t_i}^{t_f} dt \delta q \left[\frac{\partial L}{\partial q} - \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \right) \right] \quad (2.24)$$

Hence, we get

$$\delta S = \left. \frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \delta q \right|_{t_i}^{t_f} + \int_{t_i}^{t_f} dt \delta q \left[\frac{\partial L}{\partial q} - \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \right) \right] \quad (2.25)$$

If we assume that the variation δq is an arbitrary function of time that vanishes at the initial and final times t_i and t_f , i.e. $\delta q(t_i) = \delta q(t_f) = 0$, we find that $\delta S = 0$ if and only if the integrand of Eq.(2.25) vanishes identically. Thus,

$$\frac{\partial L}{\partial q} - \frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \right) = 0 \quad (2.26)$$

These are the equations of motion or *Newton's equations*. In general the equation that determine the trajectories that leave the action stationary is called the *Euler-Lagrange equation*.

2.3 Scalar field theory

For the case of a field theory, we can proceed very much in the same way. Let us consider first the case of a scalar field $\Phi(x)$. The action S must be invariant under Lorentz transformations. Since we want to construct *local*

theories it is natural to assume that S is given in terms of a Lagrangian *density* \mathcal{L}

$$S = \int d^4x \mathcal{L} \quad (2.27)$$

where \mathcal{L} is a *local* differentiable function of the field and its derivatives. These assumptions in turn guarantee that the resulting equations of motion have the form of partial differential equations. In other terms, the dynamics does not allow for action-at-a-distance.

Since the volume element of Minkowski space d^4x is invariant under Lorentz transformations, the action S is invariant if \mathcal{L} is a local, differentiable function of Lorentz invariants that can be constructed out of the field $\Phi(x)$. Simple invariants are $\Phi(x)$ itself and all of its powers. The gradient $\partial^\mu \Phi \equiv \frac{\partial \Phi}{\partial x_\mu}$ is not an invariant but the D'alambertian $\partial^2 \Phi$ is. Bilinears such as $\partial_\mu \Phi \partial^\mu \Phi$ are also Lorentz invariant as well as under a change of the sign of Φ . So, we can write the following simple expression for \mathcal{L} :

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \partial_\mu \Phi \partial^\mu \Phi - V(\Phi) \quad (2.28)$$

where $V(\Phi)$ is some potential, which we can assume is a polynomial function of the field Φ . Let us consider the simple choice

$$V(\Phi) = \frac{1}{2} \bar{m}^2 \Phi^2 \quad (2.29)$$

where $\bar{m} = mc/\hbar$. Thus,

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \partial_\mu \Phi \partial^\mu \Phi - \frac{1}{2} \bar{m}^2 \Phi^2 \quad (2.30)$$

This is the Lagrangian density for a *free scalar field*. We will discuss later on in what sense this field is “free”. Notice, in passing, that we could have added a term like $\partial^2 \Phi$. However this term, in addition of being odd under $\Phi \rightarrow -\Phi$, is a *total divergence* and, as such, it has an effect only on the boundary conditions but it does not affect the equations of motion. In what follows, unless stated to the contrary, we will not consider surface terms.

The Least Action Principle requires that S be stationary under arbitrary variations of the field Φ and of its derivatives $\partial_\mu \Phi$. Thus, we get

$$\delta S = \int d^4x \left[\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \Phi} \delta \Phi + \frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} \delta \partial_\mu \Phi \right] \quad (2.31)$$

Notice that since \mathcal{L} is a *functional* of Φ , we have to use functional derivatives, i.e. partial derivatives at each point of space-time. Upon integrating by parts,

we get

$$\delta S = \int d^4x \partial_\mu \left(\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} \delta \Phi \right) + \int d^4x \delta \Phi \left[\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \Phi} - \partial_\mu \left(\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} \right) \right] \quad (2.32)$$

Instead of considering initial and final conditions, we now have to imagine that the field Φ is contained inside some very large box of space-time. The term with the total divergence yields a surface contribution. We will consider field configurations such that $\delta \Phi = 0$ on that surface. Thus, the Euler-Lagrange equations are

$$\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \Phi} - \partial_\mu \left(\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} \right) = 0 \quad (2.33)$$

More explicitly, we find

$$\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \Phi} = -\frac{\partial V}{\partial \Phi} \quad (2.34)$$

and, since

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} = \partial^\mu \Phi, \quad (2.35)$$

Then

$$\partial_\mu \frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_\mu \Phi} = \partial_\mu \partial^\mu \Phi \equiv \partial^2 \Phi \quad (2.36)$$

By direct substitution we get the equation of motion (or *field equation*)

$$\partial^2 \Phi + \frac{\partial V}{\partial \Phi} = 0 \quad (2.37)$$

For the choice

$$V(\Phi) = \frac{\bar{m}^2}{2} \Phi^2, \quad \frac{\partial V}{\partial \Phi} = \bar{m}^2 \Phi \quad (2.38)$$

the field equation is

$$(\partial^2 + \bar{m}^2) \Phi = 0 \quad (2.39)$$

where $\partial^2 = \frac{1}{c^2} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial t^2} - \nabla^2$. Thus, we find that the equation of motion for the free massive scalar field Φ is

$$\frac{1}{c^2} \frac{\partial^2 \Phi}{\partial t^2} - \nabla^2 \Phi + \bar{m}^2 \Phi = 0 \quad (2.40)$$

This is precisely the Klein-Gordon equation if the constant \bar{m} is identified with $\frac{mc}{\hbar}$. Indeed, the plane-wave solutions of these equations are

$$\Phi = \Phi_0 e^{i(p_0 x_0 - \mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{x})/\hbar} \quad (2.41)$$

where p_0 and \mathbf{p} are related through the dispersion law

$$p_0^2 = \mathbf{p}^2 c^2 + m^2 c^4 \quad (2.42)$$

This means that, for each momentum \mathbf{p} , there are two solutions, one with *positive frequency* and one with *negative frequency*. We will see below that, in the quantized theory, the energy of the excitation is indeed equal to $|p_0|$. Notice that $\frac{\hbar}{m} = \frac{\hbar}{mc}$ has units of length and is equal to the Compton wavelength for a particle of mass m . From now on (unless it stated the contrary) I will use units in which $\hbar = c = 1$ in which $m = \bar{m}$.

2.4 Classical field theory in the canonical formalism

In Classical Mechanics it is often convenient to use the canonical formulation in terms of a Hamiltonian instead of the Lagrangian approach. For the case of a system of particles, the canonical formalism proceeds as follows. Given a Lagrangian $L(q, \dot{q})$, a canonical momentum p is defined to be

$$\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} = p \quad (2.43)$$

The classical Hamiltonian $H(p, q)$ is defined by the Legendre transformation

$$H(p, q) = p\dot{q} - L(q, \dot{q}) \quad (2.44)$$

If the Lagrangian L is quadratic in the velocities \dot{q} and separable, e.g.

$$L = \frac{1}{2}m\dot{q}^2 - V(q) \quad (2.45)$$

then, $H(p, q)$ is simply given by

$$H(p, q) = p\dot{q} - \left(\frac{m\dot{q}^2}{2} - V(q) \right) = \frac{p^2}{2m} + V(q) \quad (2.46)$$

where

$$p = \frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} = m\dot{q} \quad (2.47)$$

The (conserved) quantity H is then identified with the total energy of the system.

In this language, the Least Action Principle becomes

$$\delta S = \delta \int L dt = \delta \int [p\dot{q} - H(p, q)] dt = 0 \quad (2.48)$$

Hence

$$\int dt \left(\delta p \dot{q} + p \delta \dot{q} - \delta p \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} - \delta q \frac{\partial H}{\partial q} \right) = 0 \quad (2.49)$$

Upon an integration by parts we get

$$\int dt \left[\delta p \left(\dot{q} - \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} \right) + \delta q \left(-\frac{\partial H}{\partial q} - \dot{p} \right) \right] = 0 \quad (2.50)$$

which can only be satisfied for arbitrary variations $\delta q(t)$ and $\delta p(t)$ if

$$\dot{q} = \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} \quad \dot{p} = -\frac{\partial H}{\partial q} \quad (2.51)$$

These are Hamilton's equations.

Let us introduce the Poisson Bracket $\{A, B\}_{qp}$ of two functions A and B of q and p by

$$\{A, B\}_{qp} \equiv \frac{\partial A}{\partial q} \frac{\partial B}{\partial p} - \frac{\partial A}{\partial p} \frac{\partial B}{\partial q} \quad (2.52)$$

Let $F(q, p, t)$ be some differentiable function of q, p and t . Then the total time variation of F is

$$\frac{dF}{dt} = \frac{\partial F}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial q} \frac{dq}{dt} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial p} \frac{dp}{dt} \quad (2.53)$$

Using Hamilton's Equations we get the result

$$\frac{dF}{dt} = \frac{\partial F}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial q} \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} - \frac{\partial F}{\partial p} \frac{\partial H}{\partial q} \quad (2.54)$$

or, in terms of Poisson Brackets,

$$\frac{dF}{dt} = \frac{\partial F}{\partial t} + \{F, H\}_{qp} \quad (2.55)$$

In particular,

$$\frac{dq}{dt} = \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} = \frac{\partial q}{\partial q} \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} - \frac{\partial q}{\partial p} \frac{\partial H}{\partial q} = \{q, H\}_{qp} \quad (2.56)$$

since

$$\frac{\partial q}{\partial p} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\partial q}{\partial q} = 1 \quad (2.57)$$

Also the total rate of change of the canonical momentum p is

$$\frac{dp}{dt} = \frac{\partial p}{\partial q} \frac{\partial H}{\partial p} - \frac{\partial p}{\partial p} \frac{\partial H}{\partial q} \equiv -\frac{\partial H}{\partial q} \quad (2.58)$$

since $\frac{\partial p}{\partial q} = 0$ and $\frac{\partial p}{\partial p} = 1$. Thus,

$$\frac{dp}{dt} = \{p, H\}_{qp} \quad (2.59)$$

Notice that, for an isolated system, H is time-independent. So,

$$\frac{\partial H}{\partial t} = 0 \quad (2.60)$$

and

$$\frac{dH}{dt} = \frac{\partial H}{\partial t} + \{H, H\}_{qp} = 0 \quad (2.61)$$

since

$$\{H, H\}_{qp} = 0 \quad (2.62)$$

Therefore, H can be regarded as the generator of infinitesimal time translations. Since it is conserved for an isolated system, for which $\frac{\partial H}{\partial t} = 0$, we can indeed identify H with the total energy. In passing, let us also notice that the above definition of the Poisson Bracket implies that q and p satisfy

$$\{q, p\}_{qp} = 1 \quad (2.63)$$

This relation is fundamental for the quantization of these systems.

Much of this formulation can be generalized to the case of fields. Let us first discuss the canonical formalism for the case of a scalar field Φ with Lagrangian density $\mathcal{L}(\Phi, \partial_\mu \Phi)$. We will *choose* $\Phi(x)$ to be the (infinite) set of *canonical coordinates*. The *canonical momentum* $\Pi(x)$ is defined by

$$\Pi(x) = \frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial_0 \Phi(x)} \quad (2.64)$$

If the Lagrangian is *quadratic* in $\partial_\mu \Phi$, the canonical momentum $\Pi(x)$ is simply given by

$$\Pi(x) = \partial_0 \Phi(x) \equiv \dot{\Phi}(x) \quad (2.65)$$

The Hamiltonian *density* $\mathcal{H}(\Phi, \Pi)$ is a local function of $\Phi(x)$ and $\Pi(x)$ given by

$$\mathcal{H}(\Phi, \Pi) = \Pi(x) \partial_0 \Phi(x) - \mathcal{L}(\Phi, \partial_0 \Phi) \quad (2.66)$$

If the Lagrangian density \mathcal{L} has the simple form

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_\mu \Phi)^2 - V(\Phi) \quad (2.67)$$

then, the Hamiltonian density $\mathcal{H}(\Phi, \Pi)$ is

$$\mathcal{H} = \Pi \dot{\Phi} - \mathcal{L}(\Phi, \dot{\Phi}, \partial_j \Phi) \equiv \frac{1}{2} \Pi^2(x) + \frac{1}{2}(\nabla \Phi(x))^2 + V(\Phi(x)) \quad (2.68)$$

which is explicitly a positive definite quantity. Thus, the energy of a plane wave solution of a massive scalar field theory, i.e. a solution of the Klein-Gordon equation, is always positive, no matter the sign of the *frequency*.

In fact, the lowest energy state is simply $\Phi = \text{constant}$. A solution made of linear superpositions of plane waves (i.e. a wave packet) has positive energy. Therefore, in *field theory, the energy is always positive*. We will see that, in the quantized theory, in the case of a complex field, the negative frequency solutions are identified with antiparticle states and their existence do not signal a possible instability of the theory.

The canonical field $\Phi(x)$ and the canonical momentum $\Pi(x)$ satisfy the equal-time Poisson Bracket (PB) relations

$$\{\Phi(\mathbf{x}, x_0), \Pi(\mathbf{y}, x_0)\}_{PB} = \delta(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{y}) \quad (2.69)$$

where $\delta(\mathbf{x})$ is the Dirac δ -function and the Poisson Bracket $\{A, B\}_{PB}$ is defined to be

$$\{A, B\}_{PB} = \int d^3x \left[\frac{\delta A}{\delta \Phi(\mathbf{x}, x_0)} \frac{\delta B}{\delta \Pi(\mathbf{x}, x_0)} - \frac{\delta A}{\delta \Pi(\mathbf{x}, x_0)} \frac{\delta B}{\delta \Phi(\mathbf{x}, x_0)} \right] \quad (2.70)$$

for any two functionals A and B of $\Phi(x)$ and $\Pi(x)$. This approach can be extended to theories other than that of a scalar field without too much difficulty. We will come back to these issues when we consider the problem of quantization. Finally we should note that while Lorentz invariance is apparent in the Lagrangian formulation, it is not so in the Hamiltonian formulation of a classical field.

2.5 Field theory of the Dirac equation

We now turn to the problem of a field theory for spinors. We will discuss the theory of spinors as a classical field theory. We will find that this theory is not consistent unless it is properly quantized as a quantum field theory of spinors. We will return to this problem in chapter 7.

Let us rewrite the Dirac equation

$$i\hbar \frac{\partial \Psi}{\partial t} = \frac{\hbar c}{i} \boldsymbol{\alpha} \cdot \nabla \Psi + \beta m c^2 \Psi \equiv H_{\text{Dirac}} \Psi \quad (2.71)$$

in a manner in which relativistic covariance is apparent. The operator H_{Dirac} is the Dirac Hamiltonian.

We first recall that the 4×4 hermitian matrices $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ and β should satisfy the algebra

$$\{\alpha_i, \alpha_j\} = 2\delta_{ij} I, \quad \{\alpha_i, \beta\} = 0, \quad \alpha_i^2 = \beta^2 = I \quad (2.72)$$

where I is the 4×4 identity matrix.

A simple representation of this algebra are the 2×2 block (Dirac) matrices

$$\alpha^i = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \sigma^i \\ \sigma^i & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \beta = \begin{pmatrix} I & 0 \\ 0 & -I \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.73)$$

where the σ^i matrices are the three 2×2 Pauli matrices

$$\sigma^1 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \sigma^2 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ i & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \sigma^3 = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.74)$$

and I is the 2×2 identity matrix. This is the *Dirac representation* of the Dirac algebra.

It is now convenient to introduce the Dirac gamma matrices,

$$\gamma^0 = \beta \quad \gamma^i = \beta \alpha^i \quad (2.75)$$

The Dirac gamma matrices γ^μ have the block form

$$\gamma^0 = \beta = \begin{pmatrix} I & 0 \\ 0 & -I \end{pmatrix}, \quad \gamma^i = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \sigma^i \\ -\sigma^i & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.76)$$

and obey the Dirac algebra

$$\{\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu\} = 2g^{\mu\nu} I \quad (2.77)$$

where I is the 4×4 identity matrix.

In terms of the gamma matrices, the Dirac equation takes the much simpler, covariant, form

$$\left(i\gamma^\mu \partial_\mu - \frac{mc}{\hbar} \right) \Psi = 0 \quad (2.78)$$

where Ψ is a 4-spinor. It is also customary to introduce the notation (known as Feynman's slash)

$$\not{\partial} \equiv a_\mu \gamma^\mu \quad (2.79)$$

Using Feynman's slash, we can write the Dirac equation in the form

$$\left(i\not{\partial} - \frac{mc}{\hbar} \right) \Psi = 0 \quad (2.80)$$

From now on I will use units in which $\hbar = c = 1$. In these units energy has units of $(\text{length})^{-1}$ and time has units of length.

Notice that, if Ψ satisfies the Dirac equation, then it also satisfies

$$(i\not{\partial} + m)(i\not{\partial} - m)\Psi = 0 \quad (2.81)$$

Also, we find

$$\begin{aligned}\not{\phi} \cdot \not{\phi} &= \partial_\mu \partial_\nu \gamma^\mu \gamma^\nu = \partial_\mu \partial_\nu \left(\frac{1}{2} \{ \gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu \} + \frac{1}{2} [\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu] \right) \\ &= \partial_\mu \partial_\nu g^{\mu\nu} = \partial^2\end{aligned}\tag{2.82}$$

where we used that the commutator $[\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]$ is antisymmetric in the indices μ and ν . As a result, we find that each component of the 4-spinor Ψ must also satisfy the Klein-Gordon equation

$$(\partial^2 + m^2) \Psi = 0\tag{2.83}$$

2.5.1 Solutions of the Dirac equation

Let us briefly discuss the properties of the solutions of the Dirac equation. Let us first consider solutions representing particles at rest. Thus Ψ must be constant in space and all its space derivatives must vanish. The Dirac equation becomes

$$i\gamma^0 \frac{\partial \Psi}{\partial t} = m\Psi\tag{2.84}$$

where $t = x_0$ ($c = 1$). Let us introduce the *bispinors* ϕ and χ

$$\Psi = \begin{pmatrix} \phi \\ \chi \end{pmatrix}\tag{2.85}$$

We find that the Dirac equation reduces to a simple system of two 2×2 equations

$$i\frac{\partial \phi}{\partial t} = +m\phi, \quad i\frac{\partial \chi}{\partial t} = -m\chi\tag{2.86}$$

The four linearly independent solutions are

$$\phi_1 = e^{-imt} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \phi_2 = e^{-imt} \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}\tag{2.87}$$

and

$$\chi_1 = e^{imt} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \chi_2 = e^{imt} \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}\tag{2.88}$$

Thus, the upper component ϕ represents the solutions with positive energy $+m$, while χ represents the solutions with negative energy $-m$. The additional two-fold degeneracy of the solutions is related to the spin of the particle, as we will see below.

More generally, in terms of the bispinors ϕ and χ the Dirac Equation takes the form,

$$i\frac{\partial\phi}{\partial t} = m\phi + \frac{1}{i}\boldsymbol{\sigma} \cdot \nabla\chi \quad (2.89)$$

$$i\frac{\partial\chi}{\partial t} = -m\chi + \frac{1}{i}\boldsymbol{\sigma} \cdot \nabla\phi \quad (2.90)$$

Furthermore, in the non-relativistic limit, taking formally $c \rightarrow \infty$, it should reduce to the Schrödinger-Pauli equation. To see this, we define the slowly varying amplitudes $\tilde{\phi}$ and $\tilde{\chi}$

$$\begin{aligned} \phi &= e^{-imt}\tilde{\phi} \\ \chi &= e^{-imt}\tilde{\chi} \end{aligned} \quad (2.91)$$

The field $\tilde{\chi}$ is small and nearly static. We will now see that the field $\tilde{\phi}$ describes solutions with positive energies close to $+m$. In terms of $\tilde{\phi}$ and $\tilde{\chi}$, the Dirac equation becomes

$$i\frac{\partial\tilde{\phi}}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{i}\boldsymbol{\sigma} \cdot \nabla\tilde{\chi} \quad (2.92)$$

$$i\frac{\partial\tilde{\chi}}{\partial t} = -2m\tilde{\chi} + \frac{1}{i}\boldsymbol{\sigma} \cdot \nabla\tilde{\phi} \quad (2.93)$$

Indeed, in this limit, the l.h.s of Eq. (2.93) is much smaller than its r.h.s. Thus we can approximate

$$2m\tilde{\chi} \approx \frac{1}{i}\boldsymbol{\sigma} \cdot \nabla\tilde{\phi} \quad (2.94)$$

We can now eliminate the “small component” $\tilde{\chi}$ from Eq. (2.92) to find that $\tilde{\phi}$ satisfies

$$i\frac{\partial\tilde{\phi}}{\partial t} = -\frac{1}{2m}\nabla^2\tilde{\phi} \quad (2.95)$$

which is indeed the Schrödinger-Pauli equation.

2.5.2 Conserved current

Let us introduce one last bit of useful notation. Let us define $\bar{\Psi}$ by

$$\bar{\Psi} = \Psi^\dagger \gamma^0 \quad (2.96)$$

in terms of which we can write down the 4-vector j^μ

$$j^\mu = \bar{\Psi}\gamma^\mu\Psi \quad (2.97)$$

which is conserved, i.e.

$$\partial_\mu j^\mu = 0 \quad (2.98)$$

Notice that the time component of j^μ is the density

$$j^0 = \bar{\Psi} \gamma^0 \Psi \equiv \Psi^\dagger \Psi \quad (2.99)$$

and that the space components of j^μ are

$$\mathbf{j} = \bar{\Psi} \boldsymbol{\gamma} \Psi = \Psi^\dagger \boldsymbol{\gamma}^0 \boldsymbol{\gamma} \Psi = \Psi^\dagger \boldsymbol{\alpha} \Psi \quad (2.100)$$

Thus the Dirac equation has an associated 4-vector field, $j^\mu(x)$, which is conserved and obeys a local continuity equation

$$\partial_0 j_0 + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{j} = 0 \quad (2.101)$$

However it is easy to see that in general the density j_0 can be positive or negative. Hence this current cannot be associated with a probability current (as in non-relativistic quantum mechanics). Instead we will see that it is associated with the *charge* density and current.

2.5.3 Relativistic covariance

Let Λ be a Lorentz transformation. Let $\Psi(x)$ be a spinor field in an inertial frame and $\Psi'(x')$ be the same Dirac spinor field in the transformed frame. The Dirac equation is *covariant* if the Lorentz transformation

$$x'_\mu = \Lambda_\mu^\nu x_\nu \quad (2.102)$$

induces a linear transformation $S(\Lambda)$ in *spinor space*

$$\Psi'_\alpha(x') = S(\Lambda)_{\alpha\beta} \Psi_\beta(x) \quad (2.103)$$

such that the transformed Dirac equation has the same form as the original equation in the original frame, *i.e.* we will require that if

$$\left(i\gamma^\mu \frac{\partial}{\partial x^\mu} - m \right)_{\alpha\beta} \Psi_\beta(x) = 0, \quad \text{then} \quad \left(i\gamma^\mu \frac{\partial}{\partial x'^\mu} - m \right)_{\alpha\beta} \Psi'_\beta(x') = 0 \quad (2.104)$$

Notice two important facts: (1) both the field Ψ and the coordinate x change under the action of the Lorentz transformation, and (2) the gamma matrices and the mass m *do not* change under a Lorentz transformation. Thus, the gamma matrices are independent of the choice of a reference frame. However, they do depend on the choice of the basis in spinor space.

What properties should the representation matrices $S(\Lambda)$ have? Let us first observe that if $x'^{\mu} = \Lambda^{\mu}_{\nu} x^{\nu}$, then

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x'^{\mu}} = \frac{\partial x^{\nu}}{\partial x'^{\mu}} \frac{\partial}{\partial x^{\nu}} \equiv (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} \frac{\partial}{\partial x^{\nu}} \quad (2.105)$$

Thus, $\frac{\partial}{\partial x^{\mu}}$ is a covariant vector. By substituting this transformation law back into the Dirac equation, we find

$$i\gamma^{\mu} \frac{\partial}{\partial x'^{\mu}} \Psi'(x') = i\gamma^{\mu} (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} \frac{\partial}{\partial x^{\nu}} (S(\Lambda)\Psi(x)) \quad (2.106)$$

Thus, the Dirac equation now reads

$$i\gamma^{\mu} (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} S(\Lambda) \frac{\partial \Psi}{\partial x^{\nu}} - m S(\Lambda) \Psi = 0 \quad (2.107)$$

Or, equivalently

$$S^{-1}(\Lambda) i\gamma^{\mu} (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} S(\Lambda) \frac{\partial \Psi}{\partial x^{\nu}} - m \Psi = 0 \quad (2.108)$$

Therefore, covariance holds provided $S(\Lambda)$ satisfies the identity

$$S^{-1}(\Lambda) \gamma^{\mu} S(\Lambda) (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} = \gamma^{\nu} \quad (2.109)$$

Since the set of Lorentz transformations form a group, the representation matrices $S(\Lambda)$ should also form a group. In particular, it must be true that the property

$$S^{-1}(\Lambda) = S(\Lambda^{-1}) \quad (2.110)$$

holds. We now recall that the invariance of the relativistic interval $x^2 = x_{\mu} x^{\mu}$ implies that Λ must obey

$$\Lambda^{\nu}_{\mu} \Lambda^{\lambda}_{\nu} = g_{\mu}^{\lambda} \equiv \delta_{\mu}^{\lambda} \quad (2.111)$$

Hence,

$$\Lambda_{\mu}^{\nu} = (\Lambda^{-1})^{\nu}_{\mu} \quad (2.112)$$

So we can rewrite Eq.(2.109) as

$$S(\Lambda) \gamma^{\mu} S(\Lambda)^{-1} = (\Lambda^{-1})^{\mu}_{\nu} \gamma^{\nu} \quad (2.113)$$

Eq.(2.113) shows that a Lorentz transformation induces a *similarity* transformation on the gamma matrices which is equivalent to (the inverse of) a Lorentz transformation. From this equation it follows that, for the case of Lorentz boosts, Eq.(2.113) shows that the matrices $S(\Lambda)$ are *hermitian*. Instead, for the subgroup $SO(3)$ of rotations about a fixed origin, the matrices $S(\Lambda)$ are *unitary*. These different properties follow from the fact that the

matrices $S(\Lambda)$ are representation of the Lorentz group $SO(3,1)$ which is a non-compact Lie group.

We will now find the form of $S(\Lambda)$ for an infinitesimal Lorentz transformation. Since the identity transformation is $\Lambda_\nu^\mu = g_\nu^\mu$, a Lorentz transformation infinitesimally close to the identity should have the form

$$\Lambda_\nu^\mu = g_\nu^\mu + \omega_\nu^\mu, \quad \text{and} \quad (\Lambda^{-1})_\nu^\mu = g_\nu^\mu - \omega_\nu^\mu \quad (2.114)$$

where $\omega^{\mu\nu}$ is infinitesimal and antisymmetric in its space-time indices

$$\omega^{\mu\nu} = -\omega^{\nu\mu} \quad (2.115)$$

Let us parameterize $S(\Lambda)$ in terms of a 4×4 matrix $\sigma_{\mu\nu}$ which is also antisymmetric in its indices, i.e. $\sigma_{\mu\nu} = -\sigma_{\nu\mu}$. Then, we can write

$$\begin{aligned} S(\Lambda) &= I - \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \\ S^{-1}(\Lambda) &= I + \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \end{aligned} \quad (2.116)$$

where I stands for the 4×4 identity matrix. If we substitute back into Eq.(2.113), we get

$$(I - \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots) \gamma^\lambda (I + \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\alpha\beta} \omega^{\alpha\beta} + \dots) = \gamma^\lambda - \omega_\nu^\lambda \gamma^\nu + \dots \quad (2.117)$$

Collecting all the terms linear in ω , we obtain

$$\frac{i}{4} [\gamma^\lambda, \sigma_{\mu\nu}] \omega^{\mu\nu} = \omega_\nu^\lambda \gamma^\nu \quad (2.118)$$

Or, what is the same, the matrices $\sigma_{\mu\nu}$ must obey

$$[\gamma^\mu, \sigma_{\nu\lambda}] = 2i(g_\nu^\mu \gamma_\lambda - g_\lambda^\mu \gamma_\nu) \quad (2.119)$$

This matrix equation has the solution

$$\sigma_{\mu\nu} = \frac{i}{2} [\gamma_\mu, \gamma_\nu] \quad (2.120)$$

Under a finite Lorentz transformation $x'^I = \Lambda x$, the 4-spinors transform as

$$\Psi'(x') = S(\Lambda) \Psi \quad (2.121)$$

with

$$S(\Lambda) = \exp\left(-\frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu}\right) \quad (2.122)$$

The matrices $\sigma_{\mu\nu}$ are the *generators* of the group of Lorentz transformations in the spinor representation. From this solution we see that the space

components σ_{jk} are *hermitean* matrices, while the space-time components σ_{0j} are *antihermitean*. This feature is telling us that the Lorentz group is not a *compact* unitary group, since in that case all of its generators would be hermitian matrices. Instead, this result tells us that the Lorentz group is isomorphic to the *non-compact* group $SO(3, 1)$. Thus, the representation matrices $S(\Lambda)$ are unitary only under space rotations with fixed origin.

The linear operator $S(\Lambda)$ gives the field in the *transformed frame* in terms of the coordinates of the *transformed frame*. However, we may also wish to ask for the transformation $U(\Lambda)$ that *compensates* the effect of the coordinate transformation. In other words we seek for a matrix $U(\Lambda)$ such that

$$\Psi'(x) = U(\Lambda) \Psi(x) = S(\Lambda) \Psi(\Lambda^{-1}x) \quad (2.123)$$

For an infinitesimal Lorentz transformation, we seek a matrix $U(\Lambda)$ of the form

$$U(\Lambda) = I - \frac{i}{2} J_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \quad (2.124)$$

and we wish to find an expression for $J_{\mu\nu}$. We find

$$\begin{aligned} \left(I - \frac{i}{2} J_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \right) \Psi &= \left(I - \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \right) \Psi(x^\rho - \omega^\rho_\nu x^\nu + \dots) \\ &\cong \left(I - \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + \dots \right) (\Psi - \partial_\rho \Psi \omega^\rho_\nu x^\nu + \dots) \end{aligned} \quad (2.125)$$

Hence,

$$\Psi'(x) \cong \left(I - \frac{i}{4} \sigma_{\mu\nu} \omega^{\mu\nu} + x_\mu \omega^{\mu\nu} \partial_\nu + \dots \right) \Psi(x) \quad (2.126)$$

From this expression we see that $J_{\mu\nu}$ is given by the operator

$$J_{\mu\nu} = \frac{1}{2} \sigma_{\mu\nu} + i(x_\mu \partial_\nu - x_\nu \partial_\mu) \quad (2.127)$$

We easily recognize the second term as the *orbital* angular momentum operator (we will come back to this issue shortly). The first term is then interpreted as the *spin*.

In fact, let us consider purely spacial rotations, whose infinitesimal generator are the space components of $J_{\mu\nu}$, i.e.

$$J_{jk} = i(x_j \partial_k - x_k \partial_j) + \frac{1}{2} \sigma_{jk} \quad (2.128)$$

We can also define a three component *vector* J_ℓ as the 3-dimensional dual of J_{jk}

$$J_{jk} = \epsilon_{jkl} J_\ell \quad (2.129)$$

where ϵ^{ijk} is the third-rank Levi-Civita tensor:

$$\epsilon^{ijk} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } (ijk) \text{ is an even permutation of } (123) \\ -1 & \text{if } (ijk) \text{ is an odd permutation of } (123) \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (2.130)$$

Thus, we get (after restoring the factors of \hbar)

$$\begin{aligned} J_\ell &= \frac{i\hbar}{2} \epsilon_{\ell jk} (x_j \partial_k - x_k \partial_j) + \frac{\hbar}{4} \epsilon_{\ell jk} \sigma_{jk} \\ &= i \hbar \epsilon_{\ell jk} x_j \partial_k + \frac{\hbar}{2} \left(\frac{1}{2} \epsilon_{\ell jk} \sigma_{jk} \right) \\ J_\ell &\equiv (\mathbf{x} \times \hat{\mathbf{p}})_\ell + \frac{\hbar}{2} \sigma_\ell \end{aligned} \quad (2.131)$$

The first term is clearly the orbital angular momentum and the second term can be regarded as the spin. With this definition, it is straightforward to check that the spinors (ϕ, χ) , which are solutions of the Dirac equation, carry spin one-half.

2.5.4 Transformation properties of field bilinears in the Dirac theory

We will now consider the transformation properties of several physical observables of the Dirac theory under Lorentz transformations. Let Λ be a general Lorentz transformation, and $S(\Lambda)$ be the induced transformation for the Dirac spinors $\Psi_a(x)$ (with $a = 1, \dots, 4$):

$$\Psi'_a(x') = S(\Lambda)_{ab} \Psi_b(x) \quad (2.132)$$

Using the properties of the induced Lorentz transformation $S(\Lambda)$ and of the Dirac gamma matrices, is straightforward to verify that the following Dirac bilinears obey the following transformation laws:

Scalar:

$$\bar{\Psi}'(x') \Psi'(x') = \bar{\Psi}(x) \Psi(x) \quad (2.133)$$

which transforms as a *scalar*.

Pseudoscalar: Let us define the Dirac matrix $\gamma_5 = i\gamma_0\gamma_1\gamma_2\gamma_3$. Then the bilinear

$$\bar{\Psi}'(x') \gamma_5 \Psi'(x') = \det \Lambda \bar{\Psi}(x) \gamma_5 \Psi(x) \quad (2.134)$$

transforms as a *pseudo-scalar*.

Vector: Likewise

$$\bar{\Psi}'(x') \gamma^\mu \Psi'(x') = \Lambda_\nu^\mu \bar{\Psi}(x) \gamma^\nu \Psi(x) \quad (2.135)$$

transforms as a *vector*, and

Pseudovector:

$$\bar{\Psi}'(x') \gamma_5 \gamma^\mu \Psi'(x') = \det \Lambda \Lambda_\nu^\mu \bar{\Psi}(x) \gamma_5 \gamma^\nu \Psi(x) \quad (2.136)$$

transforms as a *pseudo-vector*. Finally,

Tensor:

$$\bar{\Psi}'(x') \sigma^{\mu\nu} \Psi'(x') = \Lambda_\alpha^\mu \Lambda_\beta^\nu \bar{\Psi}(x) \sigma^{\alpha\beta} \Psi(x) \quad (2.137)$$

transforms as a *tensor*

Above we have denoted by Λ_ν^μ a Lorentz transformation and $\det \Lambda$ is its determinant. We have also used that

$$S^{-1}(\Lambda) \gamma_5 S(\Lambda) = \det \Lambda \gamma_5 \quad (2.138)$$

Finally we note that the Dirac algebra provides for a natural basis of the space of 4×4 matrices, which we will denote by

$$\Gamma^S \equiv I, \quad \Gamma_\mu^V \equiv \gamma_\mu, \quad \Gamma_{\mu\nu}^T \equiv \sigma_{\mu\nu}, \quad \Gamma_\mu^A \equiv \gamma_5 \gamma_\mu, \quad \Gamma^P = \gamma_5 \quad (2.139)$$

where S , V , T , A and P stand for scalar, vector, tensor, axial vector (or pseudo-vector) and parity respectively. For future reference we will note here the following useful trace identities obeyed by products of Dirac gamma matrices

$$\text{tr} I = 4, \quad \text{tr} \gamma_\mu = \text{tr} \gamma_5 = 0, \quad \text{tr} \gamma_\mu \gamma_\nu = 4g_{\mu\nu} \quad (2.140)$$

Also, if we denote by a_μ and b_μ two arbitrary 4-vectors, then

$$\not{a} \not{b} = a_\mu b^\mu - i\sigma_{\mu\nu} a^\mu b^\nu, \quad \text{and} \quad \text{tr} (\not{a} \not{b}) = 4a \cdot b \quad (2.141)$$

2.5.5 The Dirac Lagrangian

We now seek a Lagrangian density \mathcal{L} for the Dirac theory. It should be a local differentiable Lorentz-invariant functional of the spinor field Ψ . Since the Dirac equation is first order in derivatives and it is Lorentz covariant, the Lagrangian should be Lorentz invariant and first order in derivatives. A simple choice is

$$\mathcal{L} = \bar{\Psi}(i\rlap{\not{\partial}} - m)\Psi \equiv \frac{1}{2}\bar{\Psi}i\overleftrightarrow{\not{\partial}}\Psi - m\bar{\Psi}\Psi \quad (2.142)$$

where $\bar{\Psi}\overleftrightarrow{\not{\partial}}\Psi \equiv \bar{\Psi}(\rlap{\not{\partial}}\Psi) - (\partial_\mu\bar{\Psi})\gamma^\mu\Psi$. This choice satisfies all the requirements.

The equations of motion are derived in the usual manner, i.e. by demanding that the action $S = \int d^4x \mathcal{L}$ be stationary

$$\delta S = 0 = \int d^4x \left[\frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\Psi_\alpha} \delta\Psi_\alpha + \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\partial_\mu\Psi_\alpha} \delta\partial_\mu\Psi_\alpha + (\Psi \leftrightarrow \bar{\Psi}) \right] \quad (2.143)$$

The equations of motion are

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\Psi_\alpha} - \partial_\mu \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\partial_\mu\Psi_\alpha} &= 0 \\ \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\bar{\Psi}_\alpha} - \partial_\mu \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\partial_\mu\bar{\Psi}_\alpha} &= 0 \end{aligned} \quad (2.144)$$

By direct substitution we find

$$(i\rlap{\not{\partial}} - m)\Psi = 0, \quad \text{and} \quad \bar{\Psi}(i\overleftarrow{\not{\partial}} + m) = 0 \quad (2.145)$$

Here, $\overleftarrow{\not{\partial}}$ indicates that the derivatives are acting *on the left*.

Finally, we can also write down the Hamiltonian density that follows from the Lagrangian of Eq.(2.142). As usual we need to determine the canonical momentum conjugate to the field Ψ , i.e.

$$\Pi(x) = \frac{\delta\mathcal{L}}{\delta\partial_0\Psi(x)} = i\bar{\Psi}(x)\gamma^0 \equiv i\Psi^\dagger(x) \quad (2.146)$$

Thus the Hamiltonian density is

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{H} &= \Pi(x)\partial_0\Psi(x) - \mathcal{L} = i\bar{\Psi}\gamma^0\partial_0\Psi - \mathcal{L} \\ &= \bar{\Psi}i\boldsymbol{\gamma} \cdot \boldsymbol{\nabla}\Psi + m\bar{\Psi}\Psi \\ &= \Psi^\dagger(i\boldsymbol{\alpha} \cdot \boldsymbol{\nabla} + m\beta)\Psi \end{aligned} \quad (2.147)$$

Thus we find that the ‘‘one-particle’’ Dirac Hamiltonian H_{Dirac} of Eq.(2.71) appears naturally in the field theory as well.

Since the Hamiltonian of Eq.(2.147) is first order in derivatives, unlike its

Klein-Gordon relative, it is not manifestly positive. Thus, there is a question of the stability of this theory. We will see below that the proper quantization of this theory as a quantum field theory of *fermions* solves this problem. In other words, it will be necessary to *impose* the *Pauli Principle* for this theory to describe a stable system with an energy spectrum that is bounded from below. In this way we will see that there is *natural* connection between the *spin* of the field and the *statistics*. This connection, which actually is an *axiom* of Quantum Field Theory, is known as the *Spin-Statistics Theorem*.

2.6 Classical electromagnetism as a field theory

We now turn to the problem of the electromagnetic field generated by a set of sources. Let $\rho(x)$ and $\mathbf{j}(x)$ represent the charge and current densities at a point x of space-time. Charge conservation requires that a continuity equation has to be obeyed,

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{j} = 0 \quad (2.148)$$

Given an initial condition, that specifies the values of the electric field $\mathbf{E}(x)$ and the magnetic field $\mathbf{B}(x)$ at some t_0 in the past, the time evolution is governed by the Maxwell equations

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} = \rho \quad \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0 \quad (2.149)$$

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{B} - \frac{1}{c} \frac{\partial \mathbf{E}}{\partial t} = \mathbf{j} \quad \nabla \times \mathbf{E} + \frac{1}{c} \frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} = 0 \quad (2.150)$$

It is possible to reformulate classical electrodynamics in a manner in which (a) relativistic covariance is apparent and (b) that the Maxwell equations follow from a Least Action Principle. A convenient way to see the above is to define the electromagnetic field tensor $F^{\mu\nu}$, which is the (contravariant) antisymmetric real tensor whose components are given by

$$F^{\mu\nu} = -F^{\nu\mu} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -E^1 & -E^2 & -E^3 \\ E^1 & 0 & -B^3 & B^2 \\ E^2 & B^3 & 0 & -B^1 \\ E^3 & -B^2 & B^1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.151)$$

Or, equivalently

$$\begin{aligned} F^{0i} &= -F^{i0} = -E^i \\ F^{ij} &= -F^{ji} = \epsilon^{ijk} B^k \end{aligned} \quad (2.152)$$

The *dual tensor* $\widetilde{F}_{\mu\nu}$ is defined as follows

$$\widetilde{F}^{\mu\nu} = -\widetilde{F}^{\nu\mu} = \frac{1}{2}\epsilon^{\mu\nu\rho\sigma} F_{\rho\sigma} \quad (2.153)$$

where $\epsilon^{\mu\nu\rho\sigma}$ is the fourth rank Levi-Civita tensor, defined similarly to the third rank Levi-Civita tensor of Eq.(2.130). In particular

$$\widetilde{F}^{\mu\nu} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -B^1 & -B^2 & -B^3 \\ B^1 & 0 & E^3 & -E^2 \\ B^2 & -E^3 & 0 & E^2 \\ B^3 & E^2 & -E^2 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.154)$$

With these notations, we can rewrite the left column of Maxwell equations, Eq.(2.150), in the more compact and manifestly covariant form

$$\partial_\mu F^{\mu\nu} = j^\nu \quad (2.155)$$

which we will interpret as the equations of motion of the electromagnetic field. The right column of the Maxwell equations, Eq.(2.150), become the *constraint*

$$\partial_\mu \widetilde{F}^{\mu\nu} = 0 \quad (2.156)$$

which is known as the Bianchi identity. Then, consistency of the Maxwell equations requires that the continuity equation

$$\partial_\mu j^\mu = 0 \quad (2.157)$$

be satisfied.

By inspection we see that the field tensor $F^{\mu\nu}$ and the dual field tensor $\widetilde{F}^{\mu\nu}$ map into each other upon exchanging the electric and magnetic fields. This *electro-magnetic duality* would be an exact property of electrodynamics if in addition to the electric charge current j^μ the Bianchi Identity Eq.(2.156) included a magnetic charge current (of magnetic monopoles).

At this point it is convenient to introduce the vector potential A^μ whose contravariant components are

$$A^\mu(x) = \left(\frac{A^0}{c}, \mathbf{A} \right) \quad (2.158)$$

The current 4-vector $j^\mu(x)$

$$j^\mu(x) = (\rho c, \mathbf{j}) \equiv (j^0, \mathbf{j}) \quad (2.159)$$

The electric field strength \mathbf{E} and the magnetic field \mathbf{B} are defined to be

$$\mathbf{E} = -\frac{1}{c}\nabla A^0 - \frac{1}{c}\frac{\partial \mathbf{A}}{\partial t}, \quad \mathbf{B} = \nabla \times \mathbf{A} \quad (2.160)$$

In a more compact, relativistically covariant, notation we write

$$F^{\mu\nu} = \partial^\mu A^\nu - \partial^\nu A^\mu \quad (2.161)$$

In terms of the vector potential A^μ , the Maxwell equations remain unchanged under the (local) *gauge transformation*

$$A^\mu(x) \mapsto A^\mu(x) + \partial^\mu \Phi(x) \quad (2.162)$$

where $\Phi(x)$ is an *arbitrary smooth* function of the space-time coordinates x^μ . It is easy to check that, under the transformation of Eq.(2.162), the field strength remains *invariant* i.e. $F^{\mu\nu} \mapsto F^{\mu\nu}$. This property is called *Gauge Invariance* and it plays a *fundamental* role in modern physics.

By directly substituting the definitions of the magnetic field \mathbf{B} and the electric field \mathbf{E} in terms of the 4-vector A^μ into the Maxwell equations, we obtain the wave equation. Indeed, the equation of motion

$$\partial_\mu F^{\mu\nu} = j^\nu \quad (2.163)$$

yields the equation for the vector potential

$$\partial^2 A^\nu - \partial^\nu (\partial_\mu A^\mu) = j^\nu \quad (2.164)$$

which is the *wave equation*.

We can now use gauge invariance to further restrict the vector potential A^μ , which is not completely determined. These restrictions are known as the procedure of *fixing a gauge*. The choice

$$\partial_\mu A^\mu = 0 \quad (2.165)$$

known as the Lorentz gauge, yields the simpler and standard form of the wave equation

$$\partial^2 A^\mu = j^\mu \quad (2.166)$$

Notice that the Lorentz gauge preserves Lorentz covariance.

Another popular choice is the radiation (or Coulomb) gauge

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{A} = 0 \quad (2.167)$$

which yields (in units with $c = 1$)

$$\partial^2 A^\nu - \partial^\nu (\partial_0 A^0) = j^\nu \quad (2.168)$$

which is not Lorentz covariant. In the absence of external sources, $j^\nu = 0$, we can further impose the restriction that $A^0 = 0$. This choice reduces the set of three equations, one for each spacial component of \mathbf{A} , which satisfy

$$\partial^2 \mathbf{A} = 0, \quad \text{provided} \quad \nabla \cdot \mathbf{A} = 0 \quad (2.169)$$

The solutions are, as we well know, plane waves of the form

$$\mathbf{A}(x) = \mathbf{A} e^{i(p_0 x_0 - \mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{x})} \quad (2.170)$$

which are only consistent if $p_0^2 - \mathbf{p}^2 = 0$ and $\mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{A} = 0$. For the last reason, this choice is also known as the *transverse* gauge.

We can also regard the electromagnetic field as a dynamical system and construct a Lagrangian picture for it. Since the Maxwell equations are local, gauge invariant and Lorentz covariant, we should demand that the Lagrangian density should be local, gauge invariant and Lorentz invariant. Since, in terms of the vector potential A_μ , the Maxwell equations are second order in derivatives, we seek a local Lagrangian density which is also second order in derivatives of the vector potential. A simple choice that satisfies all the requirements is

$$\mathcal{L} = -\frac{1}{4} F_{\mu\nu} F^{\mu\nu} - j_\mu A^\mu \quad (2.171)$$

This Lagrangian density is manifestly Lorentz invariant. Gauge invariance is satisfied if and only if j_μ is a conserved current, i.e. if $\partial_\mu j^\mu = 0$, since, under a gauge transformation $A_\mu \mapsto A_\mu + \partial_\mu \Phi(x)$ the field strength does not change. However, the source term changes as follows

$$\begin{aligned} \int d^4x j_\mu A^\mu &\mapsto \int d^4x [j_\mu A^\mu + j_\mu \partial^\mu \Phi] \\ &= \int d^4x j_\mu A^\mu + \int d^4x \partial^\mu (j_\mu \Phi) - \int d^4x \partial^\mu j_\mu \Phi \end{aligned} \quad (2.172)$$

If the sources vanish at infinity, $\lim_{|x| \rightarrow \infty} j_\mu = 0$, the surface term can be dropped. Thus the action $S = \int d^4x \mathcal{L}$ is gauge-invariant if and only if the current j^μ is locally conserved,

$$\partial_\mu j^\mu = 0 \quad (2.173)$$

which is the continuity equation.

We can now derive the equations of motion by demanding that the action S be stationary, i.e.

$$\delta S = \int d^4x \left[\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta A^\mu} \delta A^\mu + \frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial^\nu A^\mu} \delta \partial^\nu A^\mu \right] = 0 \quad (2.174)$$

Much as we did before, we can now proceed to integrate by parts to get

$$\delta S = \int d^4x \partial^\nu \left[\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial^\nu A^\mu} \delta A^\mu \right] + \int d^4x \delta A^\mu \left[\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta A^\mu} - \partial^\nu \left(\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial^\nu A^\mu} \right) \right] \quad (2.175)$$

By demanding that at the surface the variation vanishes, $\delta A^\mu = 0$, we get

$$\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta A^\mu} = \partial^\nu \left(\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial^\nu A^\mu} \right) \quad (2.176)$$

Explicitly, we find

$$\frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta A^\mu} = -j_\mu, \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\delta \mathcal{L}}{\delta \partial^\nu A^\mu} = F^{\mu\nu} \quad (2.177)$$

Thus, we obtain

$$j^\mu = -\partial_\nu F^{\mu\nu} \quad (2.178)$$

or, equivalently

$$j^\nu = \partial_\mu F^{\mu\nu} \quad (2.179)$$

Therefore, the Least Action Principle *implies* the Maxwell equations.

2.7 The Landau theory of phase transitions as a field theory

We now turn to the problem of the statistical mechanics of a magnet. In order to be a little more specific, we will consider the simplest *model* of a ferromagnet: the classical Ising model. In this model, one considers an array of atoms on some lattice (say cubic). Each site is assumed to have a net spin magnetic moment $\mathbf{S}(i)$. From elementary quantum mechanics we know that the simplest interaction among the spins is the Heisenberg exchange Hamiltonian

$$H = - \sum_{\langle i,j \rangle} J_{ij} \mathbf{S}(i) \cdot \mathbf{S}(j) \quad (2.180)$$

where $\langle i, j \rangle$ are nearest neighboring sites on the lattice. In many situations, in which there is magnetic anisotropy, only the z -component of the spin operators plays a role. The Hamiltonian now reduces to that of the Ising model

$$H_I = -J \sum_{\langle ij \rangle} \sigma(i)\sigma(j) \equiv E[\sigma] \quad (2.181)$$

where $[\sigma]$ denotes a configuration of spins with $\sigma(i)$ being the z -projection of the spin at each site i .

The equilibrium properties of the system are determined by the partition function Z which is the sum over all spin configurations $[\sigma]$ of the Boltzmann weight for each state,

$$Z = \sum_{\{\sigma\}} \exp\left(-\frac{E[\sigma]}{T}\right) \quad (2.182)$$

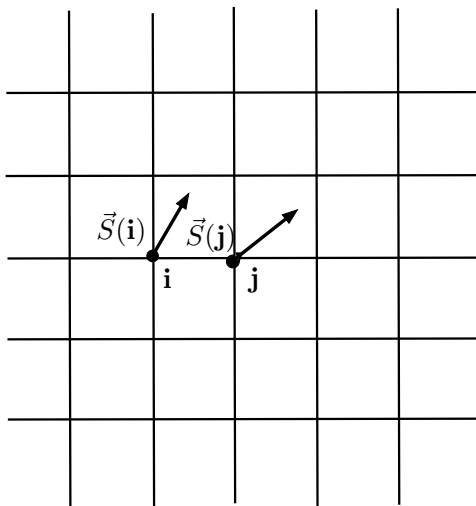


Figure 2.3 Spins on a lattice.

where T is the temperature and $\{\sigma\}$ is the set of all spin configurations.

In the 1950's, Landau developed a picture to study these type of problems which in general are very difficult. Landau first proposed to work not with the microscopic spins but with a set of *coarse-grained* configurations (Landau, 1937). One way to do this, using the more modern version of the argument due to Kadanoff (Kadanoff, 1966) and Wilson (Wilson, 1971), is to partition a large system of linear size L into regions or *blocks* of smaller linear size ℓ such that $a_0 \ll \ell \ll L$, where a_0 is the lattice spacing. Each one of these regions will be centered around a site, say \mathbf{x} . We will denote such a region by $\mathcal{A}(\mathbf{x})$. The idea is now to perform the sum, i.e. the partition function Z , while keeping the total magnetization of each region $\mathcal{A}(\mathbf{x})$ fixed to the values

$$M(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{N[\mathcal{A}]} \sum_{\mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{A}(\mathbf{x})} \sigma(\mathbf{y}) \quad (2.183)$$

where $N[\mathcal{A}]$ is the number of sites in $\mathcal{A}(\mathbf{x})$. The restricted partition function

is now a *functional* of the coarse-grained local magnetizations $M(\mathbf{x})$,

$$Z[M] = \sum_{\{\sigma\}} \exp\left\{-\frac{E[\sigma]}{T}\right\} \prod_{\mathbf{x}} \delta\left(M(\mathbf{x}) - \frac{1}{N(\mathcal{A})} \sum_{\mathbf{y} \in \mathcal{A}(\mathbf{x})} \sigma(\mathbf{y})\right) \quad (2.184)$$

The variables $M(\mathbf{x})$ have the property that, for $N(\mathcal{A})$ very large, they effectively take values on the real numbers. Also, the coarse-grained configurations $\{M(\mathbf{x})\}$ are smoother than the microscopic configurations $\{\sigma\}$.

At very high temperatures the average magnetization $\langle M \rangle = 0$ and the system is in a paramagnetic phase. On the other hand, at low temperatures the average magnetization may be non-zero and the system may be in a ferromagnetic phase. Thus, at high temperatures the partition function Z is dominated by configurations which have $\langle M \rangle = 0$ while at very low temperatures, the most frequent configurations have $\langle M \rangle \neq 0$. Landau proceeded to write down an approximate form for the partition function in terms of sums over *smooth, continuous*, configurations $M(\mathbf{x})$ which, formally, can be represented in the form

$$Z \approx \int \mathcal{D}M(\mathbf{x}) \exp\left(-\frac{E[M(\mathbf{x}), T]}{T}\right) \quad (2.185)$$

where $\mathcal{D}M(\mathbf{x})$ is an integration measure which means “sum over all configurations.” We will define this more properly later on, in chapter 15.

We will assume that for the dominant configurations in the sum (integral!) shown in Eq.(2.185) the local averages $M(\mathbf{x})$ are *smooth* functions of \mathbf{x} and are *small*. Then, the energy functional $E[M]$ can be written as an expansion in powers of $M(\mathbf{x})$ and of its space derivatives. With these assumptions the free energy of the magnet in D dimensions can be approximated by the Ginzburg-Landau form (Landau and Lifshitz, 1959b)

$$E(M) = \int d^D x \left(\frac{1}{2} K(T) |\nabla M(\mathbf{x})|^2 + \frac{1}{2} a(T) M^2(\mathbf{x}) + \frac{1}{4!} b(T) M^4(\mathbf{x}) + \dots \right) \quad (2.186)$$

Ginzburg and Landau made the additional (and drastic) assumption that there is a *single configuration* $M(\mathbf{x})$ that dominates the full partition function. Under this assumption, which can be regarded as a mean-field approximation, the free energy $F = -T \ln Z$ takes the same form as Eq.(2.186). In a later chapter we will develop the theory of the effective action and we will return to this point.

Thermodynamic stability requires that the stiffness $K(T)$ and the coefficient $b(T)$ of the quartic term must be positive. The second term has a

coefficient $a(T)$ which can have either sign. A simple choice of these parameters is

$$K(T) \simeq K_0, \quad b(T) \simeq b_0, \quad a(T) \simeq \bar{a} (T - T_c) \quad (2.187)$$

where T_c is an approximate value of the critical temperature.

The *free energy* $F(M)$ defines a *Classical*, or *Euclidean*, Field Theory. In fact, by rescaling the field $M(x)$ in the form

$$\Phi(x) = \sqrt{K} M(x) \quad (2.188)$$

we can write the free energy as

$$F(\Phi) = \int d^d x \left\{ \frac{1}{2} (\nabla \Phi)^2 + U(\Phi) \right\} \quad (2.189)$$

where the potential $U(\Phi)$ is

$$U(\Phi) = \frac{\bar{m}^2}{2} \Phi^2 + \frac{\lambda}{4!} \Phi^4 + \dots \quad (2.190)$$

where $\bar{m}^2 = \frac{a(T)}{K}$ and $\lambda = \frac{b}{K^2}$. Except for the absence of the term involving the canonical momentum $\Pi^2(x)$, $F(\Phi)$ has a striking resemblance to the *Hamiltonian* of a scalar field in Minkowski space! We will see below that this is not an accident, and that the Ginzburg-Landau theory is closely related to a quantum field theory of a scalar field with a Φ^4 potential.

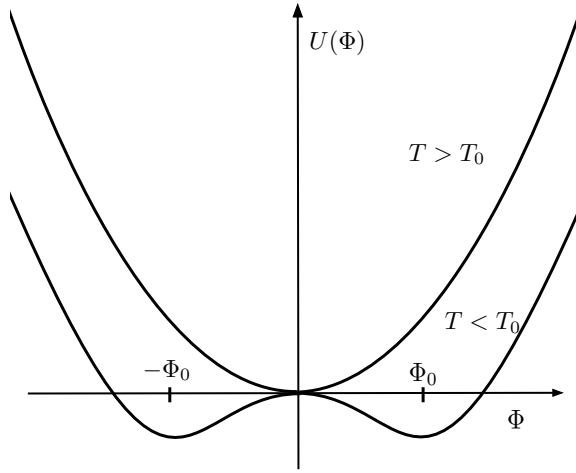


Figure 2.4 The Landau free energy for the order parameter field Φ : for $T > T_0$ the free energy has a unique minimum at $\Phi = 0$ while for $T < T_0$ there are two minima at $\Phi = \pm \Phi_0$

Let us now ask the following question: is there a configuration $\Phi_c(\mathbf{x})$ that gives the *dominant* contribution to the partition function Z ? If so, we should be able to approximate

$$Z = \int \mathcal{D}\Phi \exp\{-F(\Phi)\} \approx \exp\{-F(\Phi_c)\}\{1 + \dots\} \quad (2.191)$$

This statement is usually called the *Mean Field Approximation*. Since the integrand is an exponential, the dominant configuration Φ_c must be such that F has a (local) minimum at Φ_c . Thus, configurations Φ_c which leave $F(\Phi)$ *stationary* are good candidates (we actually need local minima!). The problem of finding extrema is simply the condition $\delta F = 0$. This is the same problem we solved for classical field theory in Minkowski space-time. Notice that in the derivation of F we have invoked essentially the same type of arguments as before: (a) invariance and (b) locality (differentiability).

The Euler-Lagrange equations can be derived by using the same arguments that we employed in the context of a scalar field theory. In the case at hand they become

$$-\frac{\delta F}{\delta \Phi(\mathbf{x})} + \partial_j \left(\frac{\delta F}{\delta \partial_j \Phi(\mathbf{x})} \right) = 0 \quad (2.192)$$

For the case of the Landau theory the Euler-Lagrange Equation becomes the Ginzburg-Landau Equation

$$0 = -\nabla^2 \Phi_c(\mathbf{x}) + \bar{m}^2 \Phi_c(\mathbf{x}) + \frac{\lambda}{3!} \Phi_c^3(\mathbf{x}) \quad (2.193)$$

The solution $\Phi_c(\mathbf{x})$ that *minimizes* the energy is uniform in space and thus has $\partial_j \Phi_c = 0$. Hence, Φ_c is the solution of the very simple equation

$$\bar{m}^2 \Phi_c + \frac{\lambda}{3!} \Phi_c^3 = 0 \quad (2.194)$$

Since λ is positive and \bar{m}^2 may have either sign, depending on whether $T > T_c$ or $T < T_c$, we have to explore both cases.

For $T > T_c$, \bar{m}^2 is also positive and the only real solution is $\Phi_c = 0$. This is the paramagnetic phase. But, for $T < T_c$, \bar{m}^2 is negative and *two* new solutions are available, namely

$$\Phi_c = \pm \sqrt{\frac{6 |\bar{m}^2|}{\lambda}} \quad (2.195)$$

These are the solutions with lowest energy and they are *degenerate*. They both represent the *magnetized* (or ferromagnetic) phase.

We now must ask if this procedure is correct or, rather, when can we

expect this approximation to work. The answer to this question is the central problem of the theory of phase transitions which describes the behavior of statistical systems in the vicinity of a continuous (or second order) phase transition. It turns out that this problem is also connected with a central problem of Quantum Field theory, namely when and how is it possible to remove the singular behavior of perturbation theory, and in the process remove all dependence on the short distance (or high energy) cutoff from physical observables. In Quantum Field Theory this procedure amounts to a definition of the continuum limit. The answer to these questions motivated the development of the Renormalization Group which solved both problems simultaneously.

2.8 Field theory and Statistical Mechanics

We are now going to discuss a mathematical procedure that will allow us to connect quantum field theory to classical statistical mechanics. We will use a mapping called a Wick rotation.

Let us go back to the action for a real scalar field $\Phi(x)$ in $D = d + 1$ space-time dimensions

$$S = \int d^D x \mathcal{L}(\Phi, \partial_\mu \Phi) \quad (2.196)$$

where $d^D x$ is

$$d^D x \equiv dx_0 d^d x \quad (2.197)$$

Let us *formally* carry out the *analytic continuation* of the *time* component x_0 of x_μ from *real* to *imaginary time* x_D

$$x_0 \mapsto -ix_D \quad (2.198)$$

under which

$$\Phi(x_0, \mathbf{x}) \mapsto \Phi(\mathbf{x}, x_D) \equiv \Phi(x) \quad (2.199)$$

where $x = (\mathbf{x}, x_D)$. Under this transformation, the action (or rather i times the action) becomes

$$iS \equiv i \int dx_0 d^d x \mathcal{L}(\Phi, \partial_0 \Phi, \partial_j \Phi) \mapsto \int d^D x \mathcal{L}(\Phi, -i\partial_D \Phi, \partial_j \Phi) \quad (2.200)$$

If \mathcal{L} has the form

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2}(\partial_\mu \Phi)^2 - V(\Phi) \equiv \frac{1}{2}(\partial_0 \Phi)^2 - \frac{1}{2}(\nabla \Phi)^2 - V(\Phi) \quad (2.201)$$

then the analytic continuation yields

$$\mathcal{L}(\Phi, -i\partial_D\Psi, \nabla\Phi) = -\frac{1}{2}(\partial_D\Phi)^2 - \frac{1}{2}(\nabla\Phi)^2 - V(\Phi) \quad (2.202)$$

Then we can write

$$iS(\Phi, \partial_\mu\Phi) \xrightarrow{x_0 \rightarrow -ix_D} - \int d^D x \left[\frac{1}{2}(\partial_D\Phi)^2 + \frac{1}{2}(\nabla\Phi)^2 + V(\Phi) \right] \quad (2.203)$$

This expression has the same form as (minus) the potential energy $E(\Phi)$ for a classical field Φ in $D = d + 1$ *space* dimensions. However it is also the same as the energy for a classical statistical mechanics problem in the same number of dimensions i.e. the Landau-Ginzburg free energy of the last section.

In Classical Statistical Mechanics, the equilibrium properties of a system are determined by the *partition function*. For the case of the Landau theory of phase transitions the partition function is

$$Z = \int \mathcal{D}\Phi e^{-E(\Phi)/T} \quad (2.204)$$

where the symbol “ $\int \mathcal{D}\Phi$ ” means *sum over all configurations*. We will discuss the meaning of this expression and the definition of the “measure” $\mathcal{D}\Phi$ later on. If we choose for energy functional $E(\Phi)$ the expression

$$E(\Phi) = \int d^D x \left[\frac{1}{2}(\partial\Phi)^2 + V(\Phi) \right] \quad (2.205)$$

where

$$(\partial\Phi)^2 \equiv (\partial_D\Phi)^2 + (\nabla\Phi)^2 \quad (2.206)$$

we see that the partition function Z is formally the analytic continuation of

$$\mathcal{Z} = \int \mathcal{D}\Phi e^{iS(\Phi, \partial_\mu\Phi)/\hbar} \quad (2.207)$$

where we have used \hbar which has units of action (instead of the temperature).

What is the physical meaning of \mathcal{Z} ? This expression suggests that \mathcal{Z} should have the interpretation of a sum of all possible functions $\Phi(\mathbf{x}, t)$ (i.e. the *histories* of the configurations of the field Φ) weighed by the phase factor $\exp\{\frac{i}{\hbar}S(\Phi, \partial_\mu\Phi)\}$. We will discover later on that if T is formally identified with the Planck constant \hbar , then \mathcal{Z} represents the *path-integral quantization* of the field theory! Notice that the *semiclassical* limit $\hbar \rightarrow 0$ is formally equivalent to the *low temperature* limit of the statistical mechanical system.

The analytic continuation procedure that we just discussed is called a *Wick rotation*. It amounts to a passage from $D = d+1$ -dimensional Minkowski

space to a D -dimensional Euclidean space. We will find that this analytic continuation is a very powerful tool. As we will see below, a number of difficulties will arise when the theory is defined directly in Minkowski space. Primarily, the problem is the presence of ill-defined integrals which are given precise meaning by a deformation of the integration contours from the real time (or frequency) axis to the imaginary time (or frequency) axis. The deformation of the contour amounts to a definition of the theory in Euclidean rather than in Minkowski space. It is an underlying *assumption* that the analytic continuation can be carried out without problems. Namely, the assumption is that the result of this procedure is unique and that, whatever singularities may be present in the complex plane, they do not affect the result. It is important to stress that the success of this procedure is not guaranteed. However, in almost all the theories that we know of this assumption holds. The only case in which problems are known to exist is the theory of Quantum Gravity (which we will not discuss in this book).