

## 14.3: Matter As a Wave

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[In] a few minutes I shall be all melted... I have been wicked in my day, but I never thought a little girl like you would ever be able to melt me and end my wicked deeds. Look out --- here I go! -- *The Wicked Witch of the West*

As the Wicked Witch learned the hard way, losing molecular cohesion can be unpleasant. That's why we should be very grateful that the concepts of quantum physics apply to matter as well as light. If matter obeyed the laws of classical physics, molecules wouldn't exist.

Consider, for example, the simplest atom, hydrogen. Why does one hydrogen atom form a chemical bond with another hydrogen atom? Roughly speaking, we'd expect a neighboring pair of hydrogen atoms, A and B, to exert no force on each other at all, attractive or repulsive: there are two repulsive interactions (proton A with proton B and electron A with electron B) and two attractive interactions (proton A with electron B and electron A with proton B). Thinking a little more precisely, we should even expect that once the two atoms got close enough, the interaction would be repulsive. For instance, if you squeezed them so close together that the two protons were almost on top of each other, there would be a tremendously strong repulsion between them due to the  $1/r^2$  nature of the electrical force. The repulsion between the electrons would not be as strong, because each electron ranges over a large area, and is not likely to be found right on top of the other electron. Thus hydrogen molecules should not exist according to classical physics.

Quantum physics to the rescue! As we'll see shortly, the whole problem is solved by applying the same quantum concepts to electrons that we have already used for photons.

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