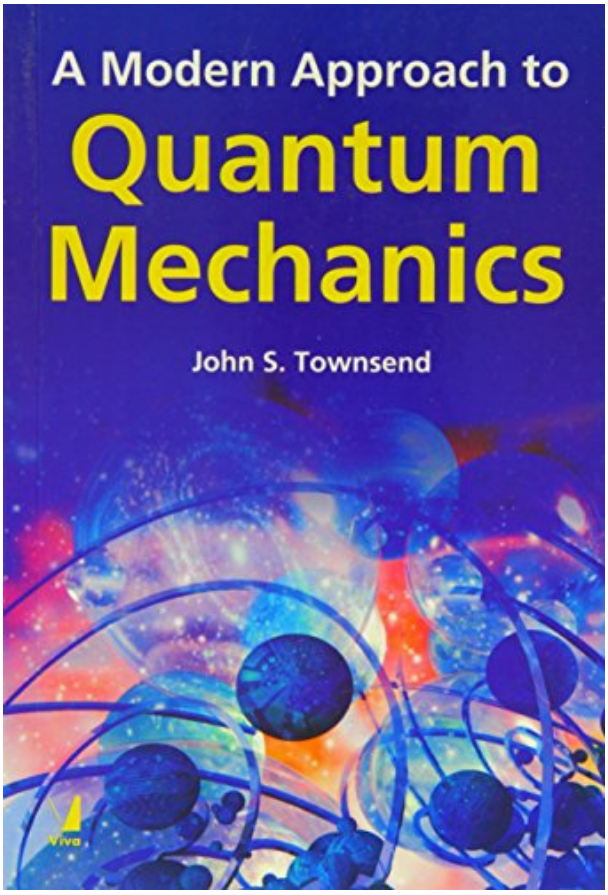
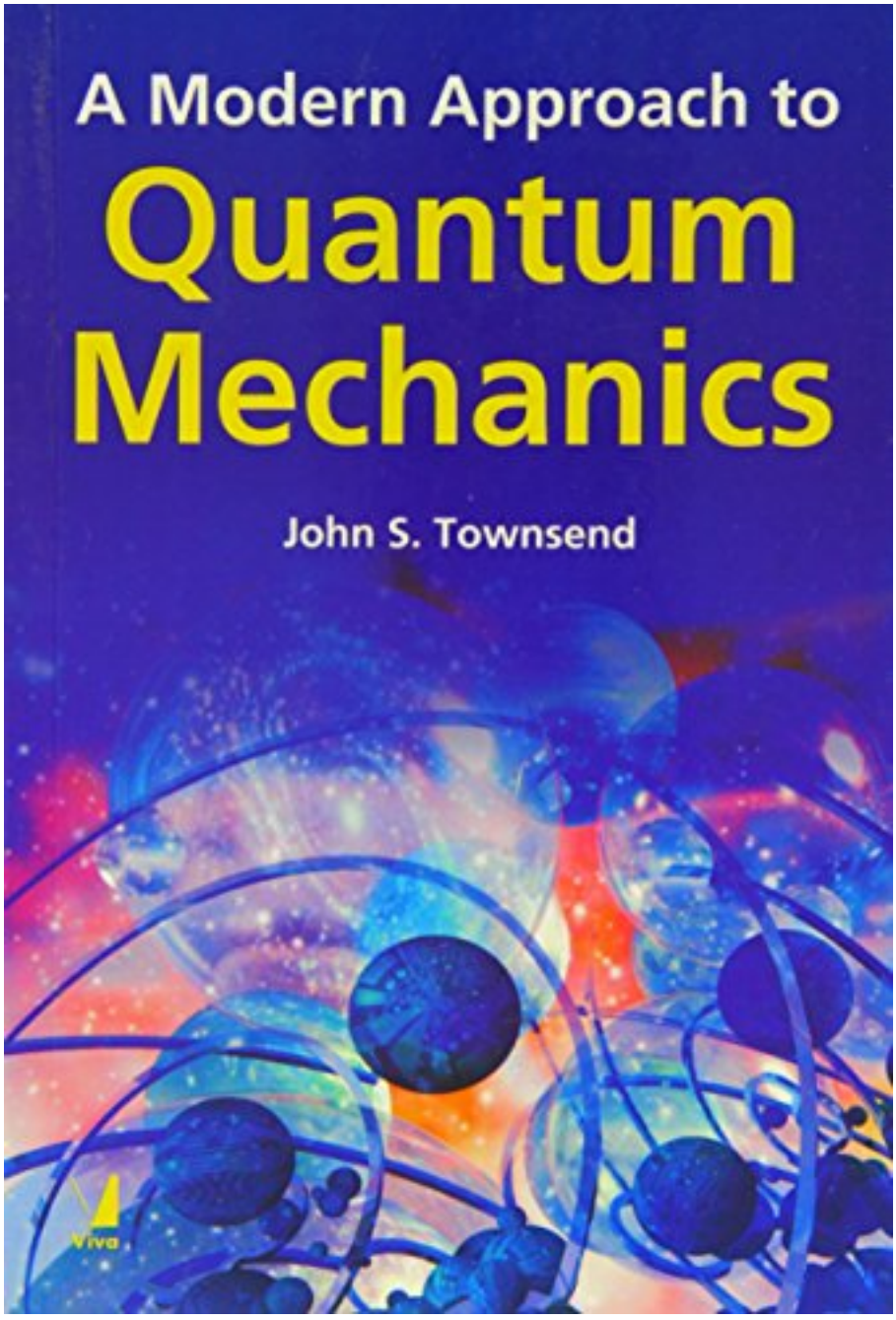
A MODERN APPROACH TO QUANTUM MECHANICS BY JOHN S. TOWNSEND





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Review

This is an excellent book for a course on advanced undergraduate quantum mechanics...refreshing in its approach. --Randy Hulet, Rice University

The best aspect of this book is its consistently sound pedagogy. The point is that Townsend is not showing off, not being fussy or pedantic. He has recognized a potential confusion and neatly headed it off. The book is full of such smart, sensitive teaching. --Richard Hazeltine, University of Texas, Austin

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About the Author

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Inspired by Richard Feynman and J.J. Sakurai, A Modern Approach to Quantum Mechanics lets professors expose their undergraduates to the excitement and insight of Feynman's approach to quantum mechanics while simultaneously giving them a textbook that is well-ordered, logical, and pedagogically sound. This book covers all the topics that are typically presented in a standard upper-level course in quantum mechanics, but its teaching approach is new: Rather than organizing his book according to the historical development of the field and jumping into a mathematical discussion of wave mechanics, Townsend begins his book with the quantum mechanics of spin. Thus, the first five chapters of the book succeed in laying out the fundamentals of quantum mechanics with little or no wave mechanics, so the physics is not obscured by mathematics. Starting with spin systems gives students something new and interesting while providing elegant but straightforward examples of the essential structure of quantum mechanics. When wave mechanics is introduced later, students perceive it correctly as only one aspect of quantum mechanics and not the core of the subject. Praised for its pedagogical brilliance, clear writing, and careful explanations, this book is destined to become a landmark text.

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Townsend is the best book I know for advanced undergraduate quantum mechanics. --Ralph D. Amado, University of Pennsylvania

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John S. Townsend is a Professor of Physics at Harvey Mudd College.

Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful.
An excellent introduction to quantum mechanics
By A Customer
Having used this textbook for two semesters of upper-division quantum mechanics classes, I have become

very familiar with it. The strengths of the book are many: Dirac notation is used from the beginning; freedom of representation is streesed throughout and used as an aid to understanding; new topics are introduced through physical motivation before more detailed mathematical derivations; many advanced topics are covered as well as introductory material (Scattering, the Aharonov-Bohm effect, time-dependent perturbation theory, quantizing the radiation field); and the book is written at an approachable level, and can be read through by a dedicated student.
Certainly, the book has many weaknesses as well: the discussion of rotation operators in chapter 3 is plagued by mathematical mistakes and seemingly contradictory statements; certain mathematical "proofs" involve truncating Taylor series after a few terms - often with very little justification; and finally, the book does not present an axiomatic foundation to the subject, instead opting for physical justification and arguments.
All in all, I have enjoyed this text greatly -- the sections on Bell's inequality and quantizing the radiation field are particularly good. In my opinion, this book is great for people in its target audience: junior or senior physics majors. It does not attempt to be a mathematically rigorous text for applied mathematicians, but instead it succeeds in instilling a real sense of physical intuition in the reader -- anyone expecting differently will probably be disappointed.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.
A Very Sensible Presentation
By Sarang Gopalakrishnan
This is a good QM textbook if you know linear algebra. Townsend introduces all the important ideas of QM in the finite-dimensional case (mostly the two-state case) where it all makes sense in terms of matrices and vectors. Then, once we already know about generators, raising and lowering operators, time evolution, the uncertainty principle, etc., he introduces wave mechanics as the "limit" in which sums become integrals, and so on. The basic advantage of this approach is that commutators, generators, etc. sound reasonable in the two-state context; if the results are strange, at least the operations are familiar.

In later chapters there's still an above-average amount of operator talk, which is good because operators are more fun than differential equations. The treatment of the harmonic oscillator (ch. 7) is particularly elegant because of all the machinery that's already been built up (esp. raising and lowering operators). Later chapters are generally good, too, but the operator formalism helps less.

The chapter on Bell's inequalities (ch. 5) is concise and very clear.

The pace of the exposition is gentle but I didn't find it _too_ gentle. The lack of mathematical rigor in ch. 6 (wave mechanics) is fair enough given the audience, and I guess it's too much to expect ch. 2 to talk about Lie groups (though Noether's theorem could have been discussed). There are confusing patches, e.g. on the Born approximation in ch. 13 (Scattering) and some of the material on angular momenta in ch. 3, but nothing terminal that I noticed. (The intro to Green's functions in ch. 13 is cursory and not very clear, but they can be looked up, I guess.)

The problems are a bit of a let-down; the challenging ones are relatively sparse and a lot of the others are either one-liners or just annoying.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.
A great undergrad text
By A Customer
I used this text for a course and was impressed with it. For those who claim Sakurai is a better text, I'd say that Sakurai is a text just a half a step above this on in difficulty. I've tried reading Sakurai and found that I only got anything out of it after having studied out of Townsend's book extensively. Sakurai is more on an intro graduate level, while Townsend was written specifically to be an upper-division undergraduate text.

In other words, I learned a whole heck of a lot from this book, but don't get Townsend expecting a complete and thorough graduate-level treatment of QM. It's a really good introduction that provides a few dips into more advanced topics (particulary chapter 14).

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