Introduction to Electrodynamics

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VECTOR DERIVATIVES

Cartesian. $d\mathbf{l} = dx\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + dy\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} + dz\,\hat{\mathbf{z}}$; $d\tau = dx\,dy\,dz$

Gradient : $$\nabla t = \frac{\partial t}{\partial x}\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \frac{\partial t}{\partial y}\hat{\mathbf{y}} + \frac{\partial t}{\partial z}\hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

Divergence : $$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{v} = \frac{\partial v_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial v_y}{\partial y} + \frac{\partial v_z}{\partial z}$$

Curl : $$\nabla \times \mathbf{v} = \left(\frac{\partial v_z}{\partial y} - \frac{\partial v_y}{\partial z}\right)\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \left(\frac{\partial v_x}{\partial z} - \frac{\partial v_z}{\partial x}\right)\hat{\mathbf{y}} + \left(\frac{\partial v_y}{\partial x} - \frac{\partial v_x}{\partial y}\right)\hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

Laplacian : $$\nabla^2 t = \frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial z^2}$$

Spherical. $d\mathbf{l} = dr\,\hat{\mathbf{r}} + r\,d\theta\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} + r\sin\theta\,d\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}}$; $d\tau = r^2\sin\theta\,dr\,d\theta\,d\phi$

Gradient : $$\nabla t = \frac{\partial t}{\partial r}\hat{\mathbf{r}} + \frac{1}{r}\frac{\partial t}{\partial \theta}\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} + \frac{1}{r\sin\theta}\frac{\partial t}{\partial \phi}\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}}$$

Divergence : $$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{v} = \frac{1}{r^2}\frac{\partial}{\partial r}(r^2 v_r) + \frac{1}{r\sin\theta}\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta}(\sin\theta\, v_\theta) + \frac{1}{r\sin\theta}\frac{\partial v_\phi}{\partial \phi}$$

Curl : $$\nabla \times \mathbf{v} = \frac{1}{r\sin\theta}\left[\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta}(\sin\theta\, v_\phi) - \frac{\partial v_\theta}{\partial \phi}\right]\hat{\mathbf{r}} + \frac{1}{r}\left[\frac{1}{\sin\theta}\frac{\partial v_r}{\partial \phi} - \frac{\partial}{\partial r}(r v_\phi)\right]\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} + \frac{1}{r}\left[\frac{\partial}{\partial r}(r v_\theta) - \frac{\partial v_r}{\partial \theta}\right]\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}}$$

Laplacian : $$\nabla^2 t = \frac{1}{r^2}\frac{\partial}{\partial r}\left(r^2\frac{\partial t}{\partial r}\right) + \frac{1}{r^2\sin\theta}\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta}\left(\sin\theta\frac{\partial t}{\partial \theta}\right) + \frac{1}{r^2\sin^2\theta}\frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial \phi^2}$$

Cylindrical. $d\mathbf{l} = ds\,\hat{\mathbf{s}} + s\,d\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} + dz\,\hat{\mathbf{z}}$; $d\tau = s\,ds\,d\phi\,dz$

Gradient : $$\nabla t = \frac{\partial t}{\partial s}\hat{\mathbf{s}} + \frac{1}{s}\frac{\partial t}{\partial \phi}\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} + \frac{\partial t}{\partial z}\hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

Divergence : $$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{v} = \frac{1}{s}\frac{\partial}{\partial s}(s v_s) + \frac{1}{s}\frac{\partial v_\phi}{\partial \phi} + \frac{\partial v_z}{\partial z}$$

Curl : $$\nabla \times \mathbf{v} = \left[\frac{1}{s}\frac{\partial v_z}{\partial \phi} - \frac{\partial v_\phi}{\partial z}\right]\hat{\mathbf{s}} + \left[\frac{\partial v_s}{\partial z} - \frac{\partial v_z}{\partial s}\right]\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} + \frac{1}{s}\left[\frac{\partial}{\partial s}(s v_\phi) - \frac{\partial v_s}{\partial \phi}\right]\hat{\mathbf{z}}$$

Laplacian : $$\nabla^2 t = \frac{1}{s}\frac{\partial}{\partial s}\left(s\frac{\partial t}{\partial s}\right) + \frac{1}{s^2}\frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial \phi^2} + \frac{\partial^2 t}{\partial z^2}$$

VECTOR IDENTITIES

Triple Products

(1) $\mathbf{A}\cdot(\mathbf{B}\times\mathbf{C}) = \mathbf{B}\cdot(\mathbf{C}\times\mathbf{A}) = \mathbf{C}\cdot(\mathbf{A}\times\mathbf{B})$

(2) $\mathbf{A}\times(\mathbf{B}\times\mathbf{C}) = \mathbf{B}(\mathbf{A}\cdot\mathbf{C}) - \mathbf{C}(\mathbf{A}\cdot\mathbf{B})$

Product Rules

(3) $\nabla(fg) = f(\nabla g) + g(\nabla f)$

(4) $\nabla(\mathbf{A}\cdot\mathbf{B}) = \mathbf{A}\times(\nabla\times\mathbf{B}) + \mathbf{B}\times(\nabla\times\mathbf{A}) + (\mathbf{A}\cdot\nabla)\mathbf{B} + (\mathbf{B}\cdot\nabla)\mathbf{A}$

(5) $\nabla\cdot(f\mathbf{A}) = f(\nabla\cdot\mathbf{A}) + \mathbf{A}\cdot(\nabla f)$

(6) $\nabla\cdot(\mathbf{A}\times\mathbf{B}) = \mathbf{B}\cdot(\nabla\times\mathbf{A}) - \mathbf{A}\cdot(\nabla\times\mathbf{B})$

(7) $\nabla\times(f\mathbf{A}) = f(\nabla\times\mathbf{A}) - \mathbf{A}\times(\nabla f)$

(8) $\nabla\times(\mathbf{A}\times\mathbf{B}) = (\mathbf{B}\cdot\nabla)\mathbf{A} - (\mathbf{A}\cdot\nabla)\mathbf{B} + \mathbf{A}(\nabla\cdot\mathbf{B}) - \mathbf{B}(\nabla\cdot\mathbf{A})$

Second Derivatives

(9) $\nabla\cdot(\nabla\times\mathbf{A}) = 0$

(10) $\nabla\times(\nabla f) = 0$

(11) $\nabla\times(\nabla\times\mathbf{A}) = \nabla(\nabla\cdot\mathbf{A}) - \nabla^2\mathbf{A}$

FUNDAMENTAL THEOREM

Gradient Theorem : $\int_{\mathbf{a}}^{\mathbf{b}}(\nabla f)\cdot d\mathbf{l} = f(\mathbf{b}) - f(\mathbf{a})$

Divergence Theorem : $\int(\nabla\cdot\mathbf{A})\,d\tau = \oint \mathbf{A}\cdot d\mathbf{a}$

Curl Theorem : $\int(\nabla\times\mathbf{A})\cdot d\mathbf{a} = \oint \mathbf{A}\cdot d\mathbf{l}$

BASIC EQUATIONS OF ELECTRODYNAMICS

Maxwell's Equations

In general :

$$\begin{cases} \nabla \cdot \mathbf{E} = \frac{1}{\epsilon_0}\rho \\ \nabla \times \mathbf{E} = -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} \\ \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0 \\ \nabla \times \mathbf{B} = \mu_0 \mathbf{J} + \mu_0\epsilon_0 \frac{\partial \mathbf{E}}{\partial t} \end{cases}$$

In matter :

$$\begin{cases} \nabla \cdot \mathbf{D} = \rho_f \\ \nabla \times \mathbf{E} = -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t} \\ \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0 \\ \nabla \times \mathbf{H} = \mathbf{J}_f + \frac{\partial \mathbf{D}}{\partial t} \end{cases}$$

Auxiliary Fields

Definitions :

$$\begin{cases} \mathbf{D} = \epsilon_0 \mathbf{E} + \mathbf{P} \\ \mathbf{H} = \frac{1}{\mu_0}\mathbf{B} - \mathbf{M} \end{cases}$$

Linear media :

$$\begin{cases} \mathbf{P} = \epsilon_0 \chi_e \mathbf{E}, \quad \mathbf{D} = \epsilon \mathbf{E} \\ \mathbf{M} = \chi_m \mathbf{H}, \quad \mathbf{H} = \frac{1}{\mu}\mathbf{B} \end{cases}$$

Potentials

$$\mathbf{E} = -\nabla V - \frac{\partial \mathbf{A}}{\partial t}, \qquad \mathbf{B} = \nabla \times \mathbf{A}$$

Lorentz force law

$$\mathbf{F} = q(\mathbf{E} + \mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{B})$$

Energy, Momentum, and Power

Energy : $U = \frac{1}{2}\int \left(\epsilon_0 E^2 + \frac{1}{\mu_0}B^2\right) d\tau$

Momentum : $\mathbf{P} = \epsilon_0 \int (\mathbf{E} \times \mathbf{B})\, d\tau$

Poynting vector : $\mathbf{S} = \frac{1}{\mu_0}(\mathbf{E} \times \mathbf{B})$

Larmor formula : $P = \frac{\mu_0}{6\pi c} q^2 a^2$

FUNDAMENTAL CONSTANTS

ϵ_0	=	$8.85 \times 10^{-12}\,\mathrm{C^2/Nm^2}$	(permittivity of free space)
μ_0	=	$4\pi \times 10^{-7}\,\mathrm{N/A^2}$	(permeability of free space)
c	=	$3.00 \times 10^{8}\,\mathrm{m/s}$	(speed of light)
e	=	$1.60 \times 10^{-19}\,\mathrm{C}$	(charge of the electron)
m	=	$9.11 \times 10^{-31}\,\mathrm{kg}$	(mass of the electron)

SPHERICAL AND CYLINDRICAL COORDINATES

Spherical

$$\begin{cases} x = r\sin\theta\cos\phi \\ y = r\sin\theta\sin\phi \\ z = r\cos\theta \end{cases} \qquad \begin{cases} \hat{\mathbf{x}} = \sin\theta\cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{r}} + \cos\theta\cos\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} - \sin\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} \\ \hat{\mathbf{y}} = \sin\theta\sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{r}} + \cos\theta\sin\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} + \cos\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} \\ \hat{\mathbf{z}} = \cos\theta\,\hat{\mathbf{r}} - \sin\theta\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} \end{cases}$$

$$\begin{cases} r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2} \\ \theta = \tan^{-1}(\sqrt{x^2 + y^2}/z) \\ \phi = \tan^{-1}(y/x) \end{cases} \qquad \begin{cases} \hat{\mathbf{r}} = \sin\theta\cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \sin\theta\sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} + \cos\theta\,\hat{\mathbf{z}} \\ \hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} = \cos\theta\cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \cos\theta\sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} - \sin\theta\,\hat{\mathbf{z}} \\ \hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} = -\sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} \end{cases}$$

Cylindrical

$$\begin{cases} x = s\cos\phi \\ y = s\sin\phi \\ z = z \end{cases} \qquad \begin{cases} \hat{\mathbf{x}} = \cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{s}} - \sin\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} \\ \hat{\mathbf{y}} = \sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{s}} + \cos\phi\,\hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} \\ \hat{\mathbf{z}} = \hat{\mathbf{z}} \end{cases}$$

$$\begin{cases} s = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \\ \phi = \tan^{-1}(y/x) \\ z = z \end{cases} \qquad \begin{cases} \hat{\mathbf{s}} = \cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} \\ \hat{\boldsymbol{\phi}} = -\sin\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{x}} + \cos\phi\,\hat{\mathbf{y}} \\ \hat{\mathbf{z}} = \hat{\mathbf{z}} \end{cases}$$

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Contents

Preface

This is a textbook on electricity and magnetism, designed for an undergraduate course at the junior or senior level. It can be covered comfortably in two semesters, maybe even with room to spare for special topics (AC circuits, numerical methods, plasma physics, transmission lines, antenna theory, etc.) A one-semester course could reasonably stop after Chapter 7. Unlike quantum mechanics or thermal physics (for example), there is a fairly general consensus with respect to the teaching of electrodynamics; the subjects to be included, and even their order of presentation, are not particularly controversial, and textbooks differ mainly in style and tone. My approach is perhaps less formal than most; I think this makes difficult ideas more interesting and accessible.

For the third edition I have made a large number of small changes, in the interests of clarity and grace. I have also modified some notation to avoid inconsistencies or ambiguities. Thus the Cartesian unit vectors $\hat{\imath}$, $\hat{\jmath}$, and $\hat{k}$ have been replaced with $\hat{\mathbf{x}}$, $\hat{\mathbf{y}}$, and $\hat{\mathbf{z}}$, so that all vectors are bold, and all unit vectors inherit the letter of the corresponding coordinate. (This also frees up $\mathbf{k}$ to be the propagation vector for electromagnetic waves.) It has always bothered me to use the same letter r for the spherical coordinate (distance from the origin) and the cylindrical coordinate (distance from the z axis). A common alternative for the latter is ρ, but that has more important business in electrodynamics, and after an exhaustive search I settled on the underemployed letter s; I hope this unorthodox usage will not be confusing.

Some readers have urged me to abandon the script letter $\boldsymbol{\mathscr{r}}$ (the vector from a source point $\mathbf{r}'$ to the field point $\mathbf{r}$) in favor of the more explicit $\mathbf{r} - \mathbf{r}'$. But this makes many equations distractingly cumbersome, especially when the unit vector $\hat{\boldsymbol{\mathscr{r}}}$ is involved. I know from my own teaching experience that unwary students are tempted to read $\boldsymbol{\mathscr{r}}$ as $\mathbf{r}$—it certainly makes the integrals easier! I have inserted a section in Chapter 1 explaining this notation, and I hope that will help. If you are a student, please take note: $\boldsymbol{\mathscr{r}} \equiv \mathbf{r} - \mathbf{r}'$, which is *not* the same as $\mathbf{r}$. If you're a teacher, please warn your students to pay close attention to the meaning of $\boldsymbol{\mathscr{r}}$. I think it's *good* notation, but it does have to be handled with care.

The main structural change is that I have removed the conservation laws and potentials from Chapter 7, creating two new short chapters (8 and 10). This should more smoothly accommodate one-semester courses, and it gives a tighter focus to Chapter 7.

I have added some problems and examples (and removed a few that were not effective). And I have included more references to the accessible literature (particularly the *American Journal of Physics*). I realize, of course, that most readers will not have the time or inclination to consult these resources, but I think it is worthwhile anyway, if only to emphasize that electrodynamics, notwithstanding its venerable age, is very much alive, and intriguing new discoveries are being made all the time. I hope that occasionally a problem will pique your curiosity, and you will be inspired to look up the reference—some of them are real gems.

As in the previous editions, I distinguish two kinds of problems. Some have a specific pedagogical purpose, and should be worked immediately after reading the section to which they pertain; these I have placed at the pertinent point within the chapter. (In a few cases the solution to a problem is used later in the text; these are indicated by a bullet (•) in the left margin.) Longer problems, or those of a more general nature, will be found at the end of each chapter. When I teach the subject I assign some of these, and work a few of them in class. Unusually challenging problems are flagged by an exclamation point (!) in the margin. Many readers have asked that the answers to problems be provided at the back of the book; unfortunately, just as many are strenuously opposed. I have compromised, supplying answers when this seems particularly appropriate. A complete solution manual is available (to instructors) from the publisher.

I have benefitted from the comments of many colleagues—I cannot list them all here. But I would like to thank the following people for suggestions that contributed specifically to the third edition: Burton Brody (Bard), Steven Grimes (Ohio), Mark Heald (Swarthmore), Jim McTavish (Liverpool), Matthew Moelter (Puget Sound), Paul Nachman (New Mexico State), Gigi Quartapelle (Milan), Carl A. Rotter (West Virginia), Daniel Schroeder (Weber State), Juri Silmberg (Ryerson Polytechnic), Walther N. Spjeldvik (Weber State), Larry Tankersley (Naval Academy), and Dudley Towne (Amherst). Practically everything I know about electrodynamics—certainly about teaching electrodynamics—I owe to Edward Purcell.

David J. Griffiths

Advertisement

What is electrodynamics, and how does it fit into the general scheme of physics?

Four Realms of Mechanics

In the diagram below I have sketched out the four great realms of mechanics:

Classical Mechanics (Newton)	**Quantum Mechanics** (Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, *et al.*)
Special Relativity (Einstein)	**Quantum Field Theory** (Dirac, Pauli, Feynman, Schwinger, *et al.*)

Newtonian mechanics was found to be inadequate in the early years of this century—it's all right in "everyday life," but for objects moving at high speeds (near the speed of light) it is incorrect, and must be replaced by special relativity (introduced by Einstein in 1905); for objects that are extremely small (near the size of atoms) it fails for different reasons, and is superseded by quantum mechanics (developed by Bohr, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, and many others, in the twenties, mostly). For objects that are both very fast *and* very small (as is common in modern particle physics), a mechanics that combines relativity and quantum principles is in order: this relativistic quantum mechanics is known as quantum field theory—it was worked out in the thirties and forties, but even today it cannot claim to be a completely satisfactory system. In this book, save for the last chapter, we shall work exclusively in the domain of classical mechanics, although electrodynamics extends with unique simplicity to the other three realms. (In fact, the theory is in most respects *automatically* consistent with special relativity, for which it was, historically, the main stimulus.)

Four Kinds of Forces

Mechanics tells us how a system will behave when subjected to a given *force*. There are just *four* basic forces known (presently) to physics: I list them in the order of decreasing strength:

1. Strong
2. Electromagnetic
3. Weak
4. Gravitational

The brevity of this list may surprise you. Where is friction? Where is the "normal" force that keeps you from falling through the floor? Where are the chemical forces that bind molecules together? Where is the force of impact between two colliding billiard balls? The answer is that *all* these forces are *electromagnetic*. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that we live in an electromagnetic world—for virtually every force we experience in everyday life, with the exception of gravity, is electromagnetic in origin.

The **strong forces**, which hold protons and neutrons together in the atomic nucleus, have extremely short range, so we do not "feel" them, in spite of the fact that they are a hundred times more powerful than electrical forces. The **weak forces**, which account for certain kinds of radioactive decay, are not only of short range; they are far weaker than electromagnetic ones to begin with. As for gravity, it is so pitifully feeble (compared to all of the others) that it is only by virtue of huge mass concentrations (like the earth and the sun) that we ever notice it at all. The electrical repulsion between two electrons is 10^{42} times as large as their gravitational attraction, and if atoms were held together by gravitational (instead of electrical) forces, a single hydrogen atom would be much larger than the known universe.

Not only are electromagnetic forces overwhelmingly the dominant ones in everyday life, they are also, at present, the *only* ones that are completely understood. There is, of course, a classical theory of gravity (Newton's law of universal gravitation) and a relativistic one (Einstein's general relativity), but no entirely satisfactory quantum mechanical theory of gravity has been constructed (though many people are working on it). At the present time there is a very successful (if cumbersome) theory for the weak interactions, and a strikingly attractive candidate (called **chromodynamics**) for the strong interactions. All these theories draw their inspiration from electrodynamics; none can claim conclusive experimental verification at this stage. So electrodynamics, a beautifully complete and successful theory, has become a kind of paradigm for physicists: an ideal model that other theories strive to emulate.

The laws of classical electrodynamics were discovered in bits and pieces by Franklin, Coulomb, Ampère, Faraday, and others, but the person who completed the job, and packaged it all in the compact and consistent form it has today, was James Clerk Maxwell. The theory is now a little over a hundred years old.

The Unification of Physical Theories

In the beginning, **electricity** and **magnetism** were entirely separate subjects. The one dealt with glass rods and cat's fur, pith balls, batteries, currents, electrolysis, and lightning; the other with bar magnets, iron filings, compass needles, and the North Pole. But in 1820 Oersted noticed that an *electric* current could deflect a *magnetic* compass needle. Soon afterward, Ampère correctly postulated that *all* magnetic phenomena are due to electric charges in motion. Then, in 1831, Faraday discovered that a moving *magnet* generates an *electric* current. By the time Maxwell and Lorentz put the finishing touches on the theory, electricity and magnetism were inextricably intertwined. They could no longer be regarded as separate subjects, but rather as two *aspects* of a *single* subject: **electromagnetism**.

Faraday had speculated that light, too, is electrical in nature. Maxwell's theory provided spectacular justification for this hypothesis, and soon **optics**—the study of lenses, mirrors, prisms, interference, and diffraction—was incorporated into electromagnetism. Hertz, who presented the decisive experimental confirmation for Maxwell's theory in 1888, put it this way: "The connection between light and electricity is now established ... In every flame, in every luminous particle, we see an electrical process ... Thus, the domain of electricity extends over the whole of nature. It even affects ourselves intimately: we perceive that we possess ... an electrical organ—the eye." By 1900, then, three great branches of physics, electricity, magnetism, and optics, had merged into a single unified theory. (And it was soon apparent that visible light represents only a tiny "window" in the vast spectrum of electromagnetic radiation, from radio through microwaves, infrared and ultraviolet, to x-rays and gamma rays.)

Einstein dreamed of a further unification, which would combine gravity and electrodynamics, in much the same way as electricity and magnetism had been combined a century earlier. His **unified field theory** was not particularly successful, but in recent years the same impulse has spawned a hierarchy of increasingly ambitious (and speculative) unification schemes, beginning in the 1960s with the **electroweak** theory of Glashow, Weinberg, and Salam (which joins the weak and electromagnetic forces), and culminating in the 1980s with the **superstring** theory (which, according to its proponents, incorporates all four forces in a single "theory of everything"). At each step in this hierarchy the mathematical difficulties mount, and the gap between inspired conjecture and experimental test widens; nevertheless, it is clear that the unification of forces initiated by electrodynamics has become a major theme in the progress of physics.

The Field Formulation of Electrodynamics

The fundamental problem a theory of electromagnetism hopes to solve is this: I hold up a bunch of electric charges *here* (and maybe shake them around)—what happens to some other charge, over *there?* The classical solution takes the form of a **field theory**: We say that the space around an electric charge is permeated by electric and magnetic **fields** (the electromagnetic "odor," as it were, of the charge). A second charge, in the presence of these fields, experiences a force; the fields, then, transmit the influence from one charge to the other—they mediate the interaction.

When a charge undergoes *acceleration*, a portion of the field "detaches" itself, in a sense, and travels off at the speed of light, carrying with it energy, momentum, and angular momentum. We call this **electromagnetic radiation**. Its existence invites (if not *compels*) us to regard the fields as independent dynamical entities in their own right, every bit as "real" as atoms or baseballs. Our interest accordingly shifts from the study of forces between charges to the theory of the fields themselves. But it takes a charge to *produce* an electromagnetic field, and it takes another charge to *detect* one, so we had best begin by reviewing the essential properties of electric charge.

Electric Charge

1. *Charge comes in two varieties,* which we call "plus" and "minus," because their effects tend to *cancel* (if you have $+q$ and $-q$ at the same point, electrically it is the same as having no charge there at all). This may seem too obvious to warrant comment, but I encourage you to contemplate other possibilities: what if there were 8 or 10 different species of charge? (In chromodynamics there are, in fact, *three* quantities analogous to electric charge, each of which may be positive or negative.) Or what if the two kinds did not tend to cancel? The extraordinary fact is that plus and minus charges occur in *exactly* equal amounts, to fantastic precision, in bulk matter, so that their effects are almost completely neutralized. Were it not for this, we would be subjected to enormous forces: a potato would explode violently if the cancellation were imperfect by as little as one part in 10^{10}.

2. *Charge is conserved:* it cannot be created or destroyed—what there is now has always been. (A plus charge can "annihilate" an equal minus charge, but a plus charge cannot simply disappear by itself—*something* must account for that electric charge.) So the total charge of the universe is fixed for all time. This is called **global** conservation of charge. Actually, I can say something much stronger: Global conservation would allow for a charge to disappear in New York and instantly reappear in San Francisco (that wouldn't affect the *total*), and yet we know this doesn't happen. If the charge *was* in New York and it *went* to San Francisco, then it must have passed along some continuous path from one to the other. This is called **local** conservation of charge. Later on we'll see how to formulate a precise mathematical law expressing local conservation of charge—it's called the **continuity equation**.

3. *Charge is quantized.* Although nothing in classical electrodynamics requires that it be so, the *fact* is that electric charge comes only in discrete lumps—integer multiples of the basic unit of charge. If we call the charge on the proton $+e$, then the electron carries charge $-e$, the neutron charge zero, the pi mesons $+e$, 0, and $-e$, the carbon nucleus $+6e$, and so on (never $7.392e$, or even $1/2e$).[1] This fundamental unit of charge is extremely small, so for practical purposes it is usually appropriate to ignore quantization altogether. Water, too, "really" consists of discrete lumps (molecules); yet, if we are dealing with reasonably large large quantities of it we can treat it as a continuous fluid. This is in fact much closer to Maxwell's own view; he knew nothing of electrons and protons—he must have pictured charge as a kind of "jelly" that could be divided up into portions of any size and smeared out at will.

[1] Actually, protons and neutrons are composed of three **quarks**, which carry fractional charges ($\pm\frac{2}{3}e$ and $\pm\frac{1}{3}e$). However, *free* quarks do not appear to exist in nature, and in any event this does not alter the fact that charge is quantized; it merely reduces the size of the basic unit.

These, then, are the basic properties of charge. Before we discuss the forces *between* charges, some mathematical tools are necessary; their introduction will occupy us in Chapter 1.

Units

The subject of electrodynamics is plagued by competing systems of units, which sometimes render it difficult for physicists to communicate with one another. The problem is far worse than in mechanics, where Neanderthals still speak of pounds and feet; for in mechanics at least all equations *look* the same, regardless of the units used to measure quantities. Newton's second law remains $\mathbf{F} = m\mathbf{a}$, whether it is feet-pounds-seconds, kilograms-meters-seconds, or whatever. But this is not so in electromagnetism, where Coulomb's law may appear variously as

$$\frac{q_1q_2}{\mathscr{r}^2}\hat{\mathscr{r}} \text{ (Gaussian), or } \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0}\frac{q_1q_2}{\mathscr{r}^2}\hat{\mathscr{r}} \text{ (SI), or } \frac{1}{4\pi}\frac{q_1q_2}{\mathscr{r}^2}\hat{\mathscr{r}} \text{ (HL).}$$

Of the systems in common use, the two most popular are **Gaussian** (cgs) and **SI** (mks). Elementary particle theorists favor yet a third system: **Heaviside-Lorentz**. Although Gaussian units offer distinct theoretical advantages, most undergraduate instructors seem to prefer SI, I suppose because they incorporate the familiar household units (volts, amperes, and watts). In this book, therefore, I have used SI units. Appendix C provides a "dictionary" for converting the main results into Gaussian units.