

# confused w/ decoherence

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Hi

In the density matrix formalism, it's said that after a measurement of an observable

$$A = \sum (a_i P_i),$$

with  $P_i$  projection operators and  $a_i$  eigenvalues of  $A$ , a system which was originally described by a density matrix  $\rho$  is now described by  $\rho' = \sum P_i \rho P_i$ .

This states, among many things, that a pure state can become a mixed state by means of a measurement. What I don't understand is as follows:

Before the measurement, the ensemble average of  $A$  is given by

$$\text{Exp}(A) = \text{Tr}(\rho A).$$

After the measurement,

$$\text{Exp}(A) = \text{Tr}(\rho' A) = \text{Tr}(\rho A),$$

by a straightforward calculation. Thus the average value of  $A$  is unchanged before and after the measurement. Again this is reasonable for an ensemble.

But what about a single particle? The density matrix is equally well used for an ensemble and a for part of a big system (when the system has a state vector but the part doesn't). For a single particle, traditional experiments (double slit, etc.) indicated that the successive experiments' results depend on the previous ones'. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the decoherence approach (devised to get rid of the wave function reduction) states that a measurement (even on a single particle, not an ensemble) is just the interaction of the system with the environment in such a way to convert a pure state to a mixed one as above. So how can then the result of a further measurement depend on the outcome of the previous one?

Any explanation is appreciated.

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