

Discussions Sections

Introduction to Quantum Mechanics

College of the Atlantic. Spring 2014

Readings and discussion sections are a chance for us to explore some of the philosophical, conceptual, historical, and social aspects of quantum mechanics. The readings we do will range widely in content, style, and difficulty. There are several goals and motivations I have for the discussion meetings:

1. The discussions are a chance to figure out some things together. We will be doing some readings that are sometimes difficult and subtle and, I hope, interesting. Working together we can solidify and deepen our understanding.
2. In some of the discussions it will be particularly valuable to hear a diversity of opinions. I expect there will be a range of reactions and responses to some of what we read, and I think that there is tremendous value to listening to and engaging with a diversity of thought.
3. Discussion meetings are also a chance to demonstrate to me that you are engaged with the material. More on this below.

Expectations for discussion meetings.

1. Prepare. Do the reading and think about it. Expect to spend an hour or two preparing. Take notes, write down questions, and prepare responses to any questions I might have posed.
2. Work with a hard copy of the reading. I think it is easier to engage with a text via a physical copy, and I don't want us to have laptops open when we meet.
3. Be present. Listen to others, respond, and contribute your own ideas and questions.

We should all work to create an inviting atmosphere and ensure that there is opportunity for all to contribute. At the same time, there is no need for everybody to contribute equally. It is natural for some people to talk more than others, and I think this is normal and good. Also, I expect that students will engage and contribute at different levels, depending on prior coursework. I see this diversity of backgrounds as a strength and not a weakness; there are roles for everyone to play. Asking good questions is as important as providing answers.

Finally, it goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: the point of discussions is not to figure out who is right and who is wrong, but to help all of us get to a deeper understanding.