

GRADUATE TEXTS IN PHYSICS

Florian Scheck

Mechanics

From Newton's Law
to Deterministic
Chaos

5th

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to Deterministic Chaos

Fifth Edition

 Springer

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by Florian Scheck

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Mechanics

GRADUATE TEXTS IN PHYSICS

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Preface

Purpose and Emphasis. Mechanics not only is the oldest branch of physics but was and still is the basis for all of theoretical physics. Quantum mechanics can hardly be understood, perhaps cannot even be formulated, without a good knowledge of general mechanics. Field theories such as electrodynamics borrow their formal framework and many of their building principles from mechanics. In short, throughout the many modern developments of physics where one frequently turns back to the principles of classical mechanics its model character is felt. For this reason it is not surprising that the *presentation* of mechanics reflects to some extent the development of modern physics and that today this classical branch of theoretical physics is taught rather differently than at the time of Arnold Sommerfeld, in the 1920s, or even in the 1950s, when more emphasis was put on the theory and the applications of partial-differential equations. Today, *symmetries* and *invariance principles*, the *structure of the space-time continuum*, and the *geometrical structure* of mechanics play an important role. The beginner should realize that mechanics is not primarily the art of describing block-and-tackles, collisions of billiard balls, constrained motions of the cylinder in a washing machine, or bicycle riding. However fascinating such systems may be, mechanics is primarily the field where one learns to develop general principles from which equations of motion may be derived, to understand the importance of symmetries for the dynamics, and, last but not least, to get some practice in using theoretical tools and concepts that are essential for all branches of physics.

Besides its role as a basis for much of theoretical physics and as a training ground for physical concepts, mechanics is a fascinating field in itself. It is not easy to master, for the beginner, because it has many different facets and its structure is less homogeneous than, say, that of electrodynamics. On a first assault one usually does not fully realize both its charm and its difficulty. Indeed, on returning to various aspects of mechanics, in the course of one's studies, one will be surprised to discover again and again that it has new facets and new secrets. And finally, one should be aware of the fact that mechanics is not a closed subject, lost forever in the archives of the nineteenth century. As the reader will realize in Chap. 6, if he or she has not realized it already, mechanics is an exciting field of research with many important questions of qualitative dynamics remaining unanswered.

Structure of the Book and a Reading Guide. Although many people prefer to skip prefaces, I suggest that the reader, if he or she is one of them, make an

exception for once and read at least this section and the next. The short introductions at the beginning of each chapter are also recommended because they give a summary of the chapter's content.

Chapter 1 starts from Newton's equations and develops the elementary dynamics of one-, two-, and many-body systems for unconstrained systems. This is the basic material that could be the subject of an introductory course on theoretical physics or could serve as a text for an integrated (experimental and theoretical) course.

Chapter 2 is the "classical" part of general mechanics describing the principles of canonical mechanics following Euler, Lagrange, Hamilton, and Jacobi. Most of the material is a MUST. Nevertheless, the sections on the symplectic structure of mechanics (Sect. 2.28) and on perturbation theory (Sects. 2.38–2.40) may be skipped on a first reading.

Chapter 3 describes a particularly beautiful application of classical mechanics: the theory of spinning tops. The rigid body provides an important and highly non-trivial example of a motion manifold that is not a simple Euclidean space \mathbb{R}^{2f} , where f is the number of degrees of freedom. Its rotational part is the manifold of $SO(3)$, the rotation group in three real dimensions. Thus, the rigid body illustrates a Lie group of great importance in physics within a framework that is simple and transparent.

Chapter 4 deals with relativistic kinematics and dynamics of pointlike objects and develops the elements of special relativity. This may be the most difficult part of the book, as far as the physics is concerned, and one may wish to return to it when studying electrodynamics.

Chapter 5 is the most challenging in terms of the mathematics. It develops the basic tools of differential geometry that are needed to formulate mechanics in this setting. Mechanics is then described in geometrical terms and its underlying structure is worked out. This chapter is conceived such that it may help to bridge the gap between the more "physical" texts on mechanics and the modern mathematical literature on this subject. Although it may be skipped on a first reading, the tools and the language developed here are essential if one wishes to follow the modern literature on qualitative dynamics.

Chapter 6 provides an introduction to one of the most fascinating recent developments of classical dynamics: stability and deterministic chaos. It defines and illustrates all important concepts that are needed to understand the onset of chaotic motion and the quantitative analysis of unordered motions. It culminates in a few examples of chaotic motion in celestial mechanics.

Chapter 7, finally, gives a short introduction to continuous systems, i.e. systems with an infinite number of degrees of freedom.

Exercises and Practical Examples. In addition to the exercises that follow Chaps. 1–6, the book contains a number of practical examples in the form of exercises followed by complete solutions. Most of these are meant to be worked out on a personal computer, thereby widening the range of problems that can be solved with elementary means, beyond the analytically integrable ones. I have tried to

choose examples simple enough that they can be made to work even on a programmable pocket computer and in a spirit, I hope, that will keep the reader from getting lost in the labyrinth of computational games.

Length of this Book. Clearly there is much more material here than can be covered in one semester. The book is designed for a two-semester course (i.e., typically, an introductory course followed by a course on general mechanics). Even then, a certain choice of topics will have to be made. However, the text is sufficiently self-contained that it may be useful for complementary reading and individual study.

Mathematical Prerequisites. A physicist must acquire a certain flexibility in the use of mathematics. On the one hand, it is impossible to carry out all steps in a deduction or a proof, since otherwise one will not get very far with the physics one wishes to study. On the other hand, it is indispensable to know analysis and linear algebra in some depth, so as to be able to fill in the missing links in a logical deduction. Like many other branches of physics, mechanics makes use of many and various disciplines of mathematics, and one cannot expect to have all the tools ready before beginning its study. In this book I adopt the following, somewhat generous attitude towards mathematics. In many places, the details are worked out to a large extent; in others I refer to well-known material of linear algebra and analysis. In some cases the reader might have to return to a good text in mathematics or else, ideally, derive certain results for him- or herself. In this connection it might also be helpful to consult the appendix at the end of the book.

General Comments and Acknowledgements. This fifth English edition follows closely the eighth German edition (volume 1 of a series of five textbooks). As compared to the third English edition published in 1999, there are a number revisions and additions. Some of these are the following. In Chap. 1 more motivation for the introduction of phase space at this early stage is given. A paragraph on the notion of hodograph is added which emphasizes the special nature of Keplerian bound orbits. Chap. 2 is supplemented by some extensions and further explanations, specifically in relation with Legendre transformation. Also, a new section on a generalized version of Noether's theorem was added, together with some enlightening examples. In Chap. 3 more examples are given for inertia tensors and the use of Steiner's theorem. Here and in Chap. 4 the symbolic "bra" and "ket" notation is introduced in characterizing vectors and their duals. The present, fifth edition differs from the previous, fourth edition of 2005 by a few corrections and some additions in response to specific questions asked by students and other readers.

The book contains the solutions to all exercises, as well as some historical notes on scientists who made important contributions to mechanics and to the mathematics on which it rests. The index of names, in addition to the subject index, may also be helpful in locating quickly specific items in mechanics.

This book was inspired by a two-semester course on general mechanics that I have taught on and off over the last decades at the Johannes Gutenberg University at Mainz and by seminars on geometrical aspects of mechanics. I thank my collaborators, colleagues, and students for stimulating questions, helpful remarks, and profitable discussions. I was happy to realize that the German original, since its

first appearance in October 1988, has become a standard text at German speaking universities and I can only hope that it will continue to be equally successful in its English version. I am grateful for the many encouraging reactions and suggestions I have received over the years. Among those to whom I owe special gratitude are P. Hagedorn, K. Hepp, D. Kastler, H. Leutwyler, L. Okun, N. Papadopoulos, J.M. Richard, G. Schuster, J. Smith, M. Stingl, N. Straumann, W. Thirring, E. Vogt, and V. Vento. Special thanks are due to my former student R. Schöpf who collaborated on the earlier version of the solutions to the exercises. I thank J. Wisdom for his kind permission to use four of his figures illustrating chaotic motions in the solar system, and P. Beckmann who provided the impressive illustrations for the logistic equation and who advised me on what to say about them.

The excellent cooperation with the team of Springer-Verlag is gratefully acknowledged. Last but not least, I owe special thanks to Dörte for her patience and encouragement.

As with the German edition, I dedicate this book to all those students who wish to study mechanics at some depth. If it helps to make them aware of the fascination of this beautiful field and of physics in general then one of my goals in writing this book is reached.

Mainz, March 2010

Florian Scheck

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Contents

1. Elementary Newtonian Mechanics	1
1.1 Newton's Laws (1687) and Their Interpretation	1
1.2 Uniform Rectilinear Motion and Inertial Systems	4
1.3 Inertial Frames in Relative Motion	6
1.4 Momentum and Force	6
1.5 Typical Forces. A Remark About Units	8
1.6 Space, Time, and Forces	10
1.7 The Two-Body System with Internal Forces	11
1.7.1 Center-of-Mass and Relative Motion	11
1.7.2 Example: The Gravitational Force Between Two Celestial Bodies (Kepler's Problem)	13
1.7.3 Center-of-Mass and Relative Momentum in the Two-Body System	19
1.8 Systems of Finitely Many Particles	20
1.9 The Principle of Center-of-Mass Motion	21
1.10 The Principle of Angular-Momentum Conservation	21
1.11 The Principle of Energy Conservation	22
1.12 The Closed n -Particle System	23
1.13 Galilei Transformations	24
1.14 Space and Time with Galilei Invariance	27
1.15 Conservative Force Fields	29
1.16 One-Dimensional Motion of a Point Particle	32
1.17 Examples of Motion in One Dimension	34
1.17.1 The Harmonic Oscillator	34
1.17.2 The Planar Mathematical Pendulum	36
1.18 Phase Space for the n -Particle System (in \mathbb{R}^3)	37
1.19 Existence and Uniqueness of the Solutions of $\dot{\mathbf{x}} = \mathcal{F}(\mathbf{x}, t)$	38
1.20 Physical Consequences of the Existence and Uniqueness Theorem	40
1.21 Linear Systems	42
1.21.1 Linear, Homogeneous Systems	42
1.21.2 Linear, Inhomogeneous Systems	43
1.22 Integrating One-Dimensional Equations of Motion	43
1.23 Example: The Planar Pendulum for Arbitrary Deviations from the Vertical	45

1.24	Example: The Two-Body System with a Central Force	48
1.25	Rotating Reference Systems: Coriolis and Centrifugal Forces	55
1.26	Examples of Rotating Reference Systems	56
1.27	Scattering of Two Particles that Interact via a Central Force:	
	Kinematics	64
1.28	Two-Particle Scattering with a Central Force: Dynamics	68
1.29	Example: Coulomb Scattering of Two Particles	
	with Equal Mass and Charge	72
1.30	Mechanical Bodies of Finite Extension	76
1.31	Time Averages and the Virial Theorem	80
	Appendix: Practical Examples	82
2.	The Principles of Canonical Mechanics	89
2.1	Constraints and Generalized Coordinates	89
	2.1.1 Definition of Constraints	89
	2.1.2 Generalized Coordinates	91
2.2	D'Alembert's Principle	91
	2.2.1 Definition of Virtual Displacements	91
	2.2.2 The Static Case	92
	2.2.3 The Dynamical Case	92
2.3	Lagrange's Equations	94
2.4	Examples of the Use of Lagrange's Equations	95
2.5	A Digression on Variational Principles	97
2.6	Hamilton's Variational Principle (1834)	100
2.7	The Euler–Lagrange Equations	100
2.8	Further Examples of the Use of Lagrange's Equations	101
2.9	A Remark About Nonuniqueness of the Lagrangian Function	103
2.10	Gauge Transformations of the Lagrangian Function	104
2.11	Admissible Transformations of the Generalized Coordinates	105
2.12	The Hamiltonian Function and Its Relation	
	to the Lagrangian Function L	106
2.13	The Legendre Transformation for the Case of One Variable	107
2.14	The Legendre Transformation for the Case of Several Variables . .	109
2.15	Canonical Systems	110
2.16	Examples of Canonical Systems	111
2.17	The Variational Principle Applied to the Hamiltonian Function . .	113
2.18	Symmetries and Conservation Laws	114
2.19	Noether's Theorem	115
2.20	The Generator for Infinitesimal Rotations About an Axis	117
2.21	More About the Rotation Group	119
2.22	Infinitesimal Rotations and Their Generators	121
2.23	Canonical Transformations	123
2.24	Examples of Canonical Transformations	127
2.25	The Structure of the Canonical Equations	128
2.26	Example: Linear Autonomous Systems in One Dimension	129

2.27	Canonical Transformations in Compact Notation	131
2.28	On the Symplectic Structure of Phase Space	133
2.29	Liouville's Theorem	136
2.29.1	The Local Form	137
2.29.2	The Global Form	138
2.30	Examples for the Use of Liouville's Theorem	139
2.31	Poisson Brackets	142
2.32	Properties of Poisson Brackets	145
2.33	Infinitesimal Canonical Transformations	147
2.34	Integrals of the Motion	148
2.35	The Hamilton–Jacobi Differential Equation	151
2.36	Examples for the Use of the Hamilton–Jacobi Equation	152
2.37	The Hamilton–Jacobi Equation and Integrable Systems	156
2.37.1	Local Rectification of Hamiltonian Systems	156
2.37.2	Integrable Systems	160
2.37.3	Angle and Action Variables	165
2.38	Perturbing Quasiperiodic Hamiltonian Systems	166
2.39	Autonomous, Nondegenerate Hamiltonian Systems in the Neighborhood of Integrable Systems	169
2.40	Examples. The Averaging Principle	170
2.40.1	The Anharmonic Oscillator	170
2.40.2	Averaging of Perturbations	172
2.41	Generalized Theorem of Noether	174
	Appendix: Practical Examples	182
3.	The Mechanics of Rigid Bodies	187
3.1	Definition of Rigid Body	187
3.2	Infinitesimal Displacement of a Rigid Body	189
3.3	Kinetic Energy and the Inertia Tensor	191
3.4	Properties of the Inertia Tensor	193
3.5	Steiner's Theorem	197
3.6	Examples of the Use of Steiner's Theorem	198
3.7	Angular Momentum of a Rigid Body	203
3.8	Force-Free Motion of Rigid Bodies	205
3.9	Another Parametrization of Rotations: The Euler Angles	207
3.10	Definition of Eulerian Angles	209
3.11	Equations of Motion of Rigid Bodies	210
3.12	Euler's Equations of Motion	213
3.13	Euler's Equations Applied to a Force-Free Top	216
3.14	The Motion of a Free Top and Geometric Constructions	220
3.15	The Rigid Body in the Framework of Canonical Mechanics	223
3.16	Example: The Symmetric Children's Top in a Gravitational Field	227
3.17	More About the Spinning Top	229
3.18	Spherical Top with Friction: The “Tippe Top”	231

3.18.1	Conservation Law and Energy Considerations	232
3.18.2	Equations of Motion and Solutions with Constant Energy	234
	Appendix: Practical Examples	238
4.	Relativistic Mechanics	241
4.1	Failures of Nonrelativistic Mechanics	242
4.2	Constancy of the Speed of Light	245
4.3	The Lorentz Transformations	246
4.4	Analysis of Lorentz and Poincaré Transformations	252
4.4.1	Rotations and Special Lorentz Transformations ("Boosts")	254
4.4.2	Interpretation of Special Lorentz Transformations	258
4.5	Decomposition of Lorentz Transformations into Their Components	259
4.5.1	Proposition on Orthochronous, Proper Lorentz Transformations	259
4.5.2	Corollary of the Decomposition Theorem and Some Consequences	261
4.6	Addition of Relativistic Velocities	264
4.7	Galilean and Lorentzian Space-Time Manifolds	266
4.8	Orbital Curves and Proper Time	270
4.9	Relativistic Dynamics	272
4.9.1	Newton's Equation	272
4.9.2	The Energy-Momentum Vector	274
4.9.3	The Lorentz Force	277
4.10	Time Dilatation and Scale Contraction	279
4.11	More About the Motion of Free Particles	281
4.12	The Conformal Group	284
5.	Geometric Aspects of Mechanics	285
5.1	Manifolds of Generalized Coordinates	286
5.2	Differentiable Manifolds	289
5.2.1	The Euclidean Space \mathbb{R}^n	289
5.2.2	Smooth or Differentiable Manifolds	291
5.2.3	Examples of Smooth Manifolds	293
5.3	Geometrical Objects on Manifolds	297
5.3.1	Functions and Curves on Manifolds	298
5.3.2	Tangent Vectors on a Smooth Manifold	300
5.3.3	The Tangent Bundle of a Manifold	302
5.3.4	Vector Fields on Smooth Manifolds	303
5.3.5	Exterior Forms	307
5.4	Calculus on Manifolds	309
5.4.1	Differentiable Mappings of Manifolds	309
5.4.2	Integral Curves of Vector Fields	311

5.4.3	Exterior Product of One-Forms	313
5.4.4	The Exterior Derivative	315
5.4.5	Exterior Derivative and Vectors in \mathbb{R}^3	317
5.5	Hamilton–Jacobi and Lagrangian Mechanics	319
5.5.1	Coordinate Manifold Q , Velocity Space TQ , and Phase Space T^*Q	319
5.5.2	The Canonical One-Form on Phase Space	323
5.5.3	The Canonical, Symplectic Two-Form on M	326
5.5.4	Symplectic Two-Form and Darboux’s Theorem	328
5.5.5	The Canonical Equations	331
5.5.6	The Poisson Bracket	334
5.5.7	Time-Dependent Hamiltonian Systems	337
5.6	Lagrangian Mechanics and Lagrange Equations	339
5.6.1	The Relation Between the Two Formulations of Mechanics	339
5.6.2	The Lagrangian Two-Form	341
5.6.3	Energy Function on TQ and Lagrangian Vector Field	342
5.6.4	Vector Fields on Velocity Space TQ and Lagrange Equations	344
5.6.5	The Legendre Transformation and the Correspondence of Lagrangian and Hamiltonian Functions	346
5.7	Riemannian Manifolds in Mechanics	349
5.7.1	Affine Connection and Parallel Transport	350
5.7.2	Parallel Vector Fields and Geodesics	352
5.7.3	Geodesics as Solutions of Euler–Lagrange Equations	353
5.7.4	Example: Force-Free Asymmetric Top	354
6.	Stability and Chaos	357
6.1	Qualitative Dynamics	357
6.2	Vector Fields as Dynamical Systems	358
6.2.1	Some Definitions of Vector Fields and Their Integral Curves	360
6.2.2	Equilibrium Positions and Linearization of Vector Fields	362
6.2.3	Stability of Equilibrium Positions	365
6.2.4	Critical Points of Hamiltonian Vector Fields	369
6.2.5	Stability and Instability of the Free Top	371
6.3	Long-Term Behavior of Dynamical Flows and Dependence on External Parameters	373
6.3.1	Flows in Phase Space	374
6.3.2	More General Criteria for Stability	375
6.3.3	Attractors	378
6.3.4	The Poincaré Mapping	382
6.3.5	Bifurcations of Flows at Critical Points	386
6.3.6	Bifurcations of Periodic Orbits	390

6.4	Deterministic Chaos	392
6.4.1	Iterative Mappings in One Dimension	392
6.4.2	Qualitative Definitions of Deterministic Chaos	394
6.4.3	An Example: The Logistic Equation	398
6.5	Quantitative Measures of Deterministic Chaos	403
6.5.1	Routes to Chaos	403
6.5.2	Liapunov Characteristic Exponents	407
6.5.3	Strange Attractors	409
6.6	Chaotic Motions in Celestial Mechanics	411
6.6.1	Rotational Dynamics of Planetary Satellites	411
6.6.2	Orbital Dynamics of Asteroids with Chaotic Behavior	417
7.	Continuous Systems	421
7.1	Discrete and Continuous Systems	421
7.2	Transition to the Continuous System	425
7.3	Hamilton's Variational Principle for Continuous Systems	427
7.4	Canonically Conjugate Momentum and Hamiltonian Density	429
7.5	Example: The Pendulum Chain	430
7.6	Comments and Outlook	434
Exercises	.....	439
Chapter 1:	Elementary Newtonian Mechanics	439
Chapter 2:	The Principles of Canonical Mechanics	446
Chapter 3:	The Mechanics of Rigid Bodies	454
Chapter 4:	Relativistic Mechanics	457
Chapter 5:	Geometric Aspects of Mechanics	460
Chapter 6:	Stability and Chaos	463
Solution of Exercises	.....	467
Chapter 1:	Elementary Newtonian Mechanics	467
Chapter 2:	The Principles of Canonical Mechanics	483
Chapter 3:	The Mechanics of Rigid Bodies	503
Chapter 4:	Relativistic Mechanics	511
Chapter 5:	Geometric Aspects of Mechanics	523
Chapter 6:	Stability and Chaos	528
Appendix	.....	537
A.	Some Mathematical Notions	537
B.	Historical Notes	540
Bibliography	.....	547
Index	.....	549

1. Elementary Newtonian Mechanics

This chapter deals with the kinematics and the dynamics of a finite number of mass points that are subject to internal, and possibly external, forces, but whose motions are not further constrained by additional conditions on the coordinates. (The mathematical pendulum will be an exception). Constraints such as requiring some mass points to follow given curves in space, to keep their relative distance fixed, or the like, are introduced in Chap. 2. Unconstrained mechanical systems can be studied directly by means of Newton's equations and do not require the introduction of new, generalized coordinates that incorporate the constraints and are dynamically independent. This is what is meant by "elementary" in the heading of this chapter – though some of its content is not elementary at all. In particular, at an early stage, we shall discover an intimate relationship between invariance properties under coordinate transformations and conservation laws of the theory, which will turn out to be a basic, constructive element for all of mechanics and which, for that matter, will be felt like a *cantus firmus*¹ throughout the whole of theoretical physics. The first, somewhat deeper analysis of these relations already leads one to consider the nature of the spatial and temporal manifolds that carry mechanical motions, thereby entering a discussion that is of central importance in present-day physics at both the smallest and the largest dimensions.

We also introduce the notion of *phase space*, i.e. the description of physical motions in an abstract space spanned by coordinates and corresponding momenta, and thus prepare the ground for canonical mechanics in the formulation of Hamilton and Jacobi.

We begin with Newton's fundamental laws, which we interpret and translate into precise analytical statements. They are then illustrated by a number of examples and some important applications.

1.1 Newton's Laws (1687) and Their Interpretation

We begin by stating Newton's fundamental laws in a formulation that is close to the original one. They are as follows:

¹ *cantus firmus*: a preexisting melody, such as a plainchant excerpt, which underlies a polyphonic musical composition.