

# A Brief Analysis of Mermin's GHZ Thought Experiment

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Twenty years ago N. David Mermin published two articles (*Physics Today*, June 1990; *American Journal of Physics*, August 1990) in the general physics literature on a Greenberger-Horne-Zeilinger (*American Journal of Physics*, December 1990; *Nature*, 3 February 2000) gedanken experiment involving spins that sharply revealed the clash between local realism and the quantum view of reality.

Three spin-1/2 particles are created in a single event and move apart in the horizontal y-z plane. Subsequent spin measurements will be carried out in units of  $\hbar/4\pi$  in the z-basis with spin operators in the x- and y-directions.

The z-basis eigenfunctions are:  $Sz_{\text{up}} := \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$   $Sz_{\text{down}} := \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$

The x- and y-direction spin operators in the z-basis are the Pauli matrices:  $\sigma_x := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$   $\sigma_y := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ i & 0 \end{pmatrix}$

The initial entangled spin state for the three spin-1/2 particles in tensor notation is:

$$|\Psi\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \left[ \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} - \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right] = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix} \quad \Psi := \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix}$$

The following operators represent the measurements to be carried out on spins 1, 2 and 3, in that order.

$$\sigma_x^1 \otimes \sigma_y^2 \otimes \sigma_y^3 \quad \sigma_y^1 \otimes \sigma_x^2 \otimes \sigma_y^3 \quad \sigma_y^1 \otimes \sigma_y^2 \otimes \sigma_x^3 \quad \sigma_x^1 \otimes \sigma_x^2 \otimes \sigma_x^3$$

The matrix tensor product is also known as the Kronecker product, which is available in Mathcad. The four operators in tensor format are formed as follows.

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma_{xyy} &:= \text{kroncker}(\sigma_x, \text{kroncker}(\sigma_y, \sigma_y)) & \sigma_{yxy} &:= \text{kroncker}(\sigma_y, \text{kroncker}(\sigma_x, \sigma_y)) \\ \sigma_{yyx} &:= \text{kroncker}(\sigma_y, \text{kroncker}(\sigma_y, \sigma_x)) & \sigma_{xxx} &:= \text{kroncker}(\sigma_x, \text{kroncker}(\sigma_x, \sigma_x)) \end{aligned}$$

The expectation values of the operators are now calculated.

$$\Psi^T \cdot \sigma_{xyy} \cdot \Psi = 1 \quad \Psi^T \cdot \sigma_{yxy} \cdot \Psi = 1 \quad \Psi^T \cdot \sigma_{yyx} \cdot \Psi = 1 \quad \Psi^T \cdot \sigma_{xxx} \cdot \Psi = -1$$

Consequently the product of the four operators has the expectation value of -1.

$$\Psi^T \cdot \sigma_{xyy} \cdot \sigma_{yxy} \cdot \sigma_{yyx} \cdot \sigma_{xxx} \cdot \Psi = -1$$

Local realism assumes that objects have definite properties independent of measurement. In this example it assumes that the x- and y-components of the spin have definite values prior to measurement. This position leads to a contradiction with the above result. The following analysis is taken from "Quantum Information Science" by Seth Lloyd.

Looking again at the measurement operators, notice that there is a  $\sigma_x$  measurement on the first spin in the first and fourth experiment. If the spin state is well-defined before measurement those results have to be the same, either both +1 or both -1, so that the product of the two measurements is +1.

$$\sigma_x^1 \otimes \sigma_y^2 \otimes \sigma_y^3 \quad \sigma_y^1 \otimes \sigma_x^2 \otimes \sigma_y^3 \quad \sigma_y^1 \otimes \sigma_y^2 \otimes \sigma_x^3 \quad \sigma_x^1 \otimes \sigma_x^2 \otimes \sigma_x^3$$

Likewise there is a  $\sigma_y$  measurement on the second spin in experiments one and three. By similar arguments those results will lead to a product of +1 also. Continuing with all the pairs in the total operator using local realistic reasoning unambiguously shows that its expectation value should be +1, in sharp disagreement with the quantum mechanical result of -1.