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Communication: Heavy Rydberg states: The \( \text{H}^+\text{H}^- \) system

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Heavy Rydberg states are analogs of electronic Rydberg states, but with the electron replaced by a much heavier ion. We calculate \( \text{ab initio} \) the extremely long-range vibrational \( \text{H}^+\text{H}^- \) heavy Rydberg states in \( \text{H}_2 \), and compare these to recent experiments. The calculated resonance positions and widths agree well with experiment, but we predict additional sharp interloper resonances corresponding to vibrational states trapped inside the barrier on potential energy curve \( 7 \, ^1\Sigma_g^+ \).


Rydberg states, characterized by long range Coulomb interactions, normally between an electron and a positively charged atomic or molecular ion or even a positron, also occur in ionic bonds between atoms. In a series of recent experiments, Vieitez et al.\textsuperscript{1,2} observed \( \text{H}^+\text{H}^- \) vibrational heavy Rydberg states in photoexcited \( \text{H}_2 \). These exotic states exhibit extremely large amplitude vibrations and can be regarded as molecular analogs of excited electronic states of alkali atoms, but with a positively charged proton orbiting a negative closed shell ion, \( \text{H}^-(1s^2) \). Nonadiabatic couplings in the \( \text{H}^+\text{H}^- \) collision complex lead to electron transfer and subsequent dissociation into neutral atomic fragments. This mutual neutralization affects the astrophysically important \( \text{H}_2 \) formation rate.\textsuperscript{3} More generally, molecular ion-pair states participate in the dissociative photodynamics of a wide range of molecules and appear in the context of threshold ion-pair product spectroscopy.\textsuperscript{4}

In this Communication, we calculate \( \text{ab initio} \) the dynamics of the heavy Rydberg states observed by Vieitez et al. We confirm the experimental conclusion\textsuperscript{2} that the lifetimes do not follow the established \( n_{ip}^3 \) scaling law for Rydberg states and trace the cause to the large difference in reduced mass between electronic and heavy Rydberg states. The large mass of the latter leads to greater spacing of energy levels and hence greater variation in the short range interactions, meaning that much higher principal quantum numbers \( n_{ip} \) are required before the \( n_{ip}^3 \) scaling law is valid. In \( \text{H}_2 \), we suggest a Landau–Zener type mechanism, where coupling to dissociation decreases with increasing energy, as partial explanation to the long lifetimes observed for \( n_{ip} \approx 2000 \) states.\textsuperscript{7} Finally, our calculations predict not yet observed, inside-the-barrier resonances on potential energy curve \( 7 \, ^1\Sigma_g^+ \), which could well exist in many molecules.\textsuperscript{6} Overall, the agreement between experiment and theory is good.

Our first-principles quantum mechanical calculation uses available \( \text{ab initio} \) potential energy curves and nonadiabatic couplings. The close-coupled equations for nuclear motion on the potential energy curves are integrated using the log derivative method.\textsuperscript{7} For heavy Rydberg states with high principal quantum number this is combined with the highly accurate elimination of long-range closed channels by generalized multichannel quantum defect theory (MQDT).\textsuperscript{8,9} Essentially the nuclear dynamics is considered to take place in two regions, depending on the internuclear coordinate \( R \), separated by the matching radius \( R_f \) and the classical turning point for the heavy Rydberg state, \( R_{ip} \). In the inner region, \( 0 < R < R_f \), the strong nonadiabatic coupling leads to electron transfer and dissociation into neutral atoms, \( \text{H}(1s) + \text{H}(n=2–4) \). In the outer region, \( R_f < R < R_{ip} \), couplings between channels are absent, but the ion-pair channel gives rise to long-range resonances. Asymptotically, for \( R > R_{ip} \), only dissociated neutral atoms persist. For \( n_{ip} = 2000 \), \( R_f = 350 \) and \( R_{ip} = 8710 \) a.u., as shown in Fig. 1.

The calculated resonances are assigned a principal quantum number, \( n_{ip} \), and a quantum defect, \( \mu \), by reference to the Rydberg formula,

\[
\frac{E_n}{\hbar c} = D_{\text{H}^+\text{H}^-} - \frac{\text{Ry}_n (M/m_e)}{(n_{ip} - \mu)^2},
\]

where \( \text{Ry}_n \) is the infinite-mass Rydberg constant, \( (M/m_e) = 918.5761 \) is a mass-scaling factor with \( M \) the reduced mass of \( \text{H}^+ \) and \( m_e \) the mass of an electron, and \( D_{\text{H}^+\text{H}^-} = 139 \, 713.83 \, \text{cm}^{-1} (\approx 0.527 \, 751 \, 014 \text{ a.u.}) \).\textsuperscript{2,10} is the ion-pair dissociation energy. The quantum defect, \( \mu \), gives the shift in the heavy Rydberg state position compared to a pure Coulomb state. The shift is caused by nonadiabatic couplings and the non-Coulombic nature of the potentials at short range, and also, in some smaller part by the long-range polarizability of the ion-pair potential. The ion-pair potential\textsuperscript{11} shown in Fig. 1 is given by

\[
E_{\text{Ion}}(R) = D_{\text{H}^+\text{H}^-} - \frac{1}{R} - \frac{\alpha_{\text{H}^-}}{2R^4},
\]

in atomic units, where the polarizability of \( \text{H}^- (1s^2) \) is \( \alpha_{\text{H}^-} = 211.897 \) a.u.\textsuperscript{3,12}

We solve the close-coupled equations for nonadiabatic nuclear motion in the standard form, obtained by a Cayley transform of the nonadiabatic equations.

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Ab initio potential energy curves 2–9 $\Sigma^+_g$ for H$_2$ (Refs. 11, 13, and 14). The dotted line is the ion-pair potential [see Eq. (2)]. The sharp interloper resonances around $n_{IP}=130$ and 190 (see Table I) trapped inside the repulsive barrier on $7 \Sigma^+_g$ are indicated with horizontal lines, as is the $n_{IP}=2000$ heavy Rydberg state, with corresponding matching radius $R_f$ =350 a.u. and classical turning point $R_{tp}$=8710 a.u. indicated by arrows. Potential energy curves EF, GK, HH, and 7 are labelled. The next step deals with the outer region where the $N_e$ potential energy curves 2–9 $\Sigma^+_g$ are fitted. Overall, the nonadiabatic coupling elements. The diagonal matrix elements are diagonal and is particularly prominent in the $1\Sigma^+_g$ state, leading to a Rydberg series with total angular momentum $J=1$ or via a $J'=1$ state, leading to $J=0$ and 2 series. In the $J=0$,2 experiments, only one Rydberg series is observed. From our calculations for $n_{IP}=130–230$ shown in Fig. 2, it is evident that the energy splitting between the two series is too small to be resolved in the experiments. In all three calculated $J=0–2$ series, the heavy Rydberg states shift smoothly as a function of $J$, and sharp non-Rydberg interlopers appear around $n_{IP}=130$ and $n_{IP}=190$. These resonances, listed in Table I, correspond to states trapped inside the broad repulsive barrier on $7 \Sigma^+_g$ around $R=7–12$ a.u. (see Fig. 1), which is due to electronic interaction between atom and Rydberg atom in the collision complex, in a mechanism analogous to the one proposed for the formation of ultra-long-range Rydberg molecules in ultracold dense gases. Barriers such as the barrier on 7 $\Sigma^+_g$ are a general occurrence in diatomic molecules, and therefore similarly trapped vibrational states could be expected in other molecules. In H$_2$, the barrier appears in the $\Pi_g$ manifold, and is particularly prominent in the $1\Sigma^+_g$ and $1\Sigma^+_u$ symmetries, which both support H$^+$ heavy Rydberg states. Since these sharp inside-the-barrier resonances are confined to small-
ternuclear distances, they are more sensitive to the value of $J$ than the heavy Rydberg states, and strong coupling to ionization is expected. Note finally the pronounced change in the background phase for energies just above the barrier, marked by an arrow in Fig. 2.

The positions of the resonances are analyzed in terms of the quantum defect assigned to each resonance, which gives the shift compared to a pure Coulomb state. In Fig. 3, the quantum defects $\mu$ are given as a function of the principal quantum number $n_{IP}$ for the series $J=0–2$ and compared to experimental measurements by Vieitez et al. Overall, we see good agreement. Note that the energy dependence is almost linear. Also included in Fig. 3 are quantum defects calculated from a simple diabatic model that uses a constructed HH $→$ H$^+$ potential curve to calculate the $J=0$ series for $n_{IP} = 160–230$. This gives quite good agreement, indicating that the heavy Rydberg dynamics is dominated by the HH potential at short internuclear distances.

The calculated widths in Fig. 4 are narrower than the experimental observations, but within one $\sigma$-error of the fitted experimental data. The existing discrepancies can most likely be attributed to coupling to ionization, which is known to be significant. It is possible, for instance, that the jump in quantum defects and widths in the experimental data at $n_{IP} \approx 160$, see Figs. 3 and 4, is due to an electronic Rydberg resonance. The calculated widths do not follow the established $n_{IP}^{-3}$ scaling law for Rydberg states even when the very narrow interloper resonances are excluded. On the contrary, for $n_{IP}=136–141$ the widths increase, while for $n_{IP} > 141$ the widths decrease more rapidly than $n_{IP}^{-3}$. In previous experiments, Reinhold and Ubachs observed wave packets formed from $H^+H^-$ heavy Rydberg states with principal quantum number $n_{IP} \approx 2000$, finding lifetimes close to 90 ns, two orders of magnitude longer than expected based on $n_{IP}^{-3}$ extrapolation of the widths at $n_{IP} \approx 200$. This was attributed to J-mixing by external fields, analogous to the $\ell$-mixing in electronic zero electron kinetic energy (ZEKE) spectroscopy. In our calculations, we find that the line widths for $n_{IP}=2000$ are $5 \times 10^{-4}$ cm$^{-1}$, corresponding to lifetimes around 10 ns, already much closer to the experimental observations, suggesting that the effect of J-mixing is less dramatic than previously assumed.

The origin of the apparent failure of the $n_{IP}^{-3}$ scaling law is the great difference in reduced mass between a negative ion and an electron. Consequently, while the energy levels of the electron occupy a narrow band just below the ionization limit, the levels of the heavy Rydberg system span a wider energy range. Only once the short range interactions, or equivalently the reaction matrix $K$, become independent of the principal quantum number ($n_{IP} \approx 500$ in $H^+H^-$) is the $n_{IP}^{-3}$

---

TABLE I. Inside-the-barrier interloper resonances for $J=0–2$, including the energy relative to the $H_2$ ground state, effective quantum number, $(n_{IP}−n_{IP}−\mu)$, and full width at half maximum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$J$</th>
<th>$E$ (cm$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>$n_{IP}$</th>
<th>Width (cm$^{-1}$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>133 696</td>
<td>129.42</td>
<td>5.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136 929</td>
<td>190.26</td>
<td>0.215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>133 707</td>
<td>129.55</td>
<td>1.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136 941</td>
<td>190.69</td>
<td>0.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>133 723</td>
<td>129.72</td>
<td>6.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136 966</td>
<td>191.52</td>
<td>0.746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

FIG. 2. The calculated resonances (density of states) for $H_2(^{1}Σ^+)$ $J=0,2$ plotted as a function of principal quantum number $n_{IP}$ (spectroscopic energies relative to the $H_2$ ground state in cm$^{-1}$ along upper x-axis). The two insets show the interloper resonances at $n_{IP}=130$ and $n_{IP}=190$ more clearly. The arrow marks the change in background phase above the potential barrier on $^7Σ^+_g$ (see text).

FIG. 3. Quantum defects as a function of principal quantum number $n_{IP}$ for $J=0–2$. The sharp interloper resonances in Table I are not included. Experimental data from Vieitez et al. (Refs. 1 and 2). The calculated data for the $J=0$ (model) correspond to dynamics on a single diabatic potential (see text).

FIG. 4. Line widths in cm$^{-1}$ as a function of principal quantum number $n_{IP}$ for $J=0–2$. Least-square fits $Γ = Γ_0 n_{IP}^{-3}$ to the experimental data (Refs. 1 and 2) (dashed line) together with $\pm \sigma$-error (dotted lines).
scaling law recouped. For instance, in our calculations in the region of $n_I P = 2000$, the $n_I^{-3}$ scaling law is valid and the quantum defects are essentially constant. In H$_2$, the $n_I P$-dependence of the $K$-matrix leads to increasingly narrow lines, possibly by a Landau–Zener type mechanism that results in reduced coupling to dissociation at higher energies as the interactions in the H$^+H^-$ collision complex become increasingly diabatic.

In summary, we have combined generalized MQDT and the log derivative method. The method is applied to recent observations of photoexcited H$_2$ by Vieitez et al.\textsuperscript{1,2} and the calculations provide a step toward elucidating the molecular dynamics behind the observed heavy Rydberg spectra. The calculated line positions and widths agree with experiments, and a simple calculation using a single diabatic state indicates that the heavy Rydberg dynamics is dominated by the H$^+H^-$ potential at short range. We also find that the predicted energy splitting between the $J=0$ and 2 series is below the experimental resolution, explaining why only one series is observed in experiments via a $J'=1$ intermediate state.\textsuperscript{3} In our calculations, we see evidence for vibrational states trapped inside the barrier on 7 $1\Sigma_g^+$. These, as yet not observed very sharp resonances, should couple strongly to ionization, and could occur in a wide range of diatomic molecules.\textsuperscript{4} For the highly excited $n_I P = 2000$ heavy Rydberg states, the widths are an order of magnitude narrower than predicted by $n_I^{-3}$ scaling laws, in qualitative agreement with experimental findings.

Given the agreement between observed and calculated line widths and positions, it seems likely that the ionization continuum does not cause major shifts in the heavy Rydberg spectrum, but it should be noted that the present calculations do not include rotational coupling, coupling to ionization, nor provide actual intensities for the spectra. Work is underway to include these effects, which requires the extension of the present approach at short internuclear distances.

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