Two-Step Enantio-Selective Optical Switch

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(Received 11 September 2002; published 23 January 2003)

We present an optical “enantio-selective switch” that, in two steps, turns a (“racemic”) mixture of left-handed and right-handed chiral molecules into the enantiomerically pure state of interest. The optical switch is composed of an “enantio-discriminator” and an “enantio-converter” acting in tandem. The method is robust, insensitive to decay processes, and does not require molecular preorientation. We demonstrate the method on the purification of a racemate of (transiently chiral) D2S2 molecules, performed on the nanosecond time scale.

Asymmetric synthesis [1] and chiral purification [2–4] of a (racemic) mixture of enantiomers (chiral molecules and their mirror images) are among the most important and difficult tasks in chemistry. The possibility of achieving purification solely by optical means has also been theorized [5–8]. In particular, this goal could be realized via a “laser distillation” scheme [8], in which a repetitive use of three light pulses [9] gradually purifies the system.

Recently, we suggested a method for achieving chiral separation, termed “cyclic population transfer” (CPT) [10]. The approach is akin to the adiabatic passage [11–13], used to completely transfer population between quantum states that are usually optically coupled as $|1\rangle \leftrightarrow |2\rangle \leftrightarrow |3\rangle$. In chiral molecules, lacking an inversion center and thus having eigenstates with ill defined parity, it is possible to close the “cycle” by introducing a third field which couples the states $|1\rangle \leftrightarrow |3\rangle$ directly. The interference of one and two-photon transitions along the two paths renders the evolution, in this CPT scheme, dependent on the total phase $\phi$ of the three (material + optical) coupling terms [10]. Since the transition dipoles of the two enantiomers differ in sign, the evolution in the two under the action of the three fields is different, and the enantiomers can be separated. In particular, if they initially occupy state $|1\rangle$, one enantiomer can be excited to state $|2\rangle$, while the other is transferred to state $|3\rangle$, or vice versa, depending on the phase $\phi$.

The great advantage of the CPT scheme is that the separation process can be completed in just one step. We can do it using optical transitions, taking place on the ground electronic surface, thereby avoiding disruptive competing processes, such as dissociation and internal conversion [8]. However, CPT is not particularly robust with respect to variation of the laser pulses, and it does not convert one enantiomer into another.

In this work, we demonstrate that optical chiral purification can be accomplished in just two (separation and conversion) steps, in a scheme which overcomes the above-mentioned drawbacks. In the first one, called “enantio-discriminator,” we excite one enantiomer while leaving the other in its initial state. In the second one, called “enantio-converter,” the enantiomer excited in the previous step is converted to its mirror-image form. Thus, in just two steps, the racemic mixture of chiral molecules could be converted into the enantiomer of choice.

We present the enantiomer switch on the (transiently chiral) D2S2 molecule, shown schematically in Fig. 1. The molecule has 6 vibrational degrees of freedom, with the large-amplitude torsional motion of the D atoms about the S-S bond. A one-dimensional cut of the ground

FIG. 1 (color online). The left and right D2S2 enantiomers, which undergo stereomutation about the S-S bond. Below is shown the double well potential energy for their torsional motion on the ground electronic state. In the considered 100 ns time scale, the lower energy rovibronic states, schematically shown here, have a definite (left and right) symmetry, while at higher energies they become split into symmetric and antisymmetric states.
electronic potential energy surface along the enantio-
mutative path is shown in Fig. 1. From our ab initio
calculation, we have determined that the enantio-
mulation of the molecules can be realized through a cis
barrier (θ = 0), 2700 cm⁻¹ in height, or the trans barrier
(θ = π), 1900 cm⁻¹ in height. The calculated tunneling
splitting of the lowest torsional states gives enantiomeric
lifetimes of several msec, in accordance with previous
reports on mode selective stereomutation [14]. Thus,
although D₂S₂ is not a chiral molecule in the conventional
sense, molecular configurations described by superpositions
of the lowest torsional states, localized in one
minimum of the double well potential, stay chiral for
sufficiently long times to be detected.

The two-step process makes use of five pairs of D₂S₂
rovibrotonal eigenstates. The vibrational states corre-
spond to the combined torsional and S-D asymmetric
stretching modes. The rotational states correspond to a
rigid rotor. Within the pairs used [15], each eigenstate has
an S/A (symmetric/antisymmetric) label denoting its
symmetry with respect to inversion, and the chiral states
with L/D labels are composed as |k⟩_L,D = (1/√2)(|k⟩_L ± |k⟩_D), k = 1, …, 4. The |k⟩_L → |k⟩_D interconversion peri-
odic is τₖ = 33, 3.3, 0.165 ms for k = 1, 2, 3, respectively,
and τₕ = 0.05 μs for k = 4. The higher lying |5⟩_S and
|5⟩_A states are separated by ΔE^S,A = 0.38 cm⁻¹, for
which τₖ = 0.1 ns, and can thus be separately addressed
by ns pulses that are strong enough to ensure adiabaticity.
The ns pulses are also long enough to address individual
lower lying rovibrional levels, but, since τ ≪ τₖ, they
cannot separately address the narrowly split S and A states,
so the symmetry-broken combination states
|k⟩_L,D (k = 1 – 4) become physically meaningful.

We now describe in detail the dynamics of the switch.
Denoting the energy of level |i⟩ by ωₖ (h = 1 in atomic
units), we choose the external electric field to be a sum of
components, each being in resonance with one of the
|i⟩ ↔ |j⟩ transition frequencies of interest, E(t) =
Σ_i,j R_i,j [δ δ_i,j(t)e −iω_0_i,jt], where ω_i,j = ω_i − ω_j, and δ is
the polarization direction. The Hamiltonian of the system
in the rotating wave approximation is

$$H = \sum_{i,j} \Omega_{i,j}(t)e^{-i\omega_j t}|i⟩⟨j| + H.c.$$

It depends on the Rabi frequencies, Ω_{i,j}(t) = μ_{i,j} E_{δ,i,j}(t),
where μ_{i,j} are the transition-dipole matrix elements.

Expanding the system wave function in the material states
|i⟩ as |φ(t)⟩ = Σ_i c_i(t)e −iω_j t |i⟩, the (column)
vector of the slow varying coefficients c = (c₁, c₂,
..., c₅)ᵀ, with T designating the matrix transpose, is
the solution of the matrix-Schrödinger equation
̇c(t) = −iH(t)ᵀc(t), where H(t) is an effective Hamiltonian
matrix, given explicitly below for the two processes.

The scheme of the three-level enantio-discriminator is
shown in the upper panel of Fig. 2. Assuming that the
system is at low temperature so that we can practically
start with a mixture of chiral D₂S₂ molecules in the
ground |1⟩_L and |1⟩_D states, the task of the discriminator
is to selectively transfer one enantiomer to the |3⟩ state
and to keep the other in the |1⟩ state. Because of the
degeneracy of the |1⟩_L and the |1⟩_D levels (i = 1, 2, 3),
the field E(t) simultaneously excites the resonant |j⟩_L,D ↔
|j⟩_L,D, i ≠ j = 1, 2, 3 transitions of both enantiomers [9].

In the first enantio-discriminator step, the effective
Hamiltonian matrix is

$$H(t) = \begin{bmatrix}
0 & \Omega_{1,2}(t) & \Omega_{1,3}(t) \\
\Omega_{1,2}(t) & 0 & \Omega_{2,3}(t) \\
\Omega_{1,3}(t) & \Omega_{2,3}(t) & 0
\end{bmatrix}.$$  \( \text{(2)} \)

The phases of the Rabi frequencies Ω_{i,j}(t) are given as in
the CPT scheme by φ_i,j = φ_{i,j} + φ_{i,j}^k, where φ_{i,j} are the
phases of the dipole matrix elements μ_{i,j} and φ_{i,j}^k are the
phases of the electric field components E_{δ,k}. The evolution of
the system is determined [10] by the total phase

![FIG. 2 (color online). (Upper panel) A schematic plot of the
enantio-discriminator. The three levels of each enantiomer are
resonantly coupled by three fields. (Middle panel) The time
evolution of the population of the three levels. Both enanti-
omers start in the |1⟩ state. At the end of the process the L
enantiomer is transferred to the |3⟩_L state, while the D enan-
tiomer remains in the initial |1⟩_D state. (Lower panel) The time
dependence of the eigenvalues of the Hamiltonian of Eq. (2).
The population initially follows the |E₀⟩ dark state. At t ≈ τ
the population crosses over diabatically to |E₋⟩ for one enan-
tiomer and to |E₊⟩ for the other.](image)
\( \varphi \equiv \phi_{12} + \phi_{23} + \phi_{31} \). This is most noticeable at the time \( t = \tau \), for which the three Rabi frequencies are equal in magnitude, \( |\Omega_{12}| = |\Omega_{13}| = |\Omega_{23}| = \Omega \). Denoting the eigenvalues of the Hamiltonian of Eq. (2) as \( E_+ \), \( E_- \), and \( E_0 \), it is easy to show that they exhibit exact degeneracies (crossings) at \( t = \tau \), with \( E_+ = 2 \Omega \) and \( E_- = 0 = E_0 = 2 \Omega \cos(2\pi/3) \), for \( \varphi = 0 \), and \( E_- = -2 \Omega \) and \( E_+ = E_0 = -2 \Omega \cos(2\pi/3) \), for \( \varphi = \pi \). Depending on the polarizations of the fields, one or all three Rabi frequencies \( \Omega_{ij} \) of the two enantiomers differ by a sign [10], making \( \varphi \) differ by \( \pi \) for the two. Therefore, the above two degeneracies (crossings) occur at different enantiomers, leading subsequently to their totally different dynamics, depicted in the lower panel of Fig. 2.

The overall enanti-discriminator works as follows: We start with a “dump” pulse \( \mathcal{E}_{23}(t) \) that couples the \( |2 \rangle \) and \( |3 \rangle \) states and has the Rabi frequency \( \Omega_{23}(t) = \Omega_{\max} f(t) \), where \( \Omega_{\max} = 1 \text{ ns}^{-1} \) and \( f(t) = \exp(-t^2/\gamma^2) \). At this stage of the process all the population resides in the \( |E_0 \rangle \) (adiabatic) eigenstate. In the second stage we simultaneously add two “pump” pulses of the Rabi frequencies \( \Omega_{12}(t) = |\Omega_{13}(t)| = \Omega_{\max} f(t-2\tau) \), that couple the \( |1 \rangle \leftrightarrow |2 \rangle \) and \( |1 \rangle \leftrightarrow |3 \rangle \) states. We choose the phases of the optical fields such that \( \varphi = 0 \) for one enantiomer and, inevitably, \( \varphi = \pi \) for the other. Therefore, the population, which has been following in both enantiomers the initial adiabatic level \( |E_0 \rangle \), goes at \( t = \tau \) smoothly through the crossing region and diabatically transfers to either \( |E_+ \rangle \) or \( |E_- \rangle \) states, depending on whether \( \varphi = 0 \) or \( \varphi = \pi \), i.e., on the identity of the enantiomer.

After the crossing is complete, at \( t > \tau \), the process becomes adiabatic again, with the enantiomer population residing fully in either \( |E_+ \rangle \) or \( |E_- \rangle \). At this stage we slowly switch off the \( \mathcal{E}_{12}(t) \) pulse while making sure that the \( \mathcal{E}_{13}(t) \) field remains on. This is done by choosing \( \Omega_{12}(t) = |\Omega_{13}(t)| = \Omega_{\max} [f(t-2\tau) + f(t-4\tau) \exp(-i t \Omega_{\max} f(t-6\tau))] \). As a result, the zero adiabatic eigenstate \( |E_0 \rangle \) correlates adiabatically with state 2, which thus becomes empty after this process, while the occupied \( |E_+ \rangle \) and \( |E_- \rangle \) states correlate to \( |E_+ \rangle \rightarrow (|1 \rangle \pm |3 \rangle)/\sqrt{2} \).

The chirp, \( \exp(-i t \Omega_{\max} f(t-6\tau)) \), in the second term of \( \Omega_{13}(t) \) causes a \( \pi/2 \) rotation in the \( |1 \rangle, |3 \rangle \) subspace at \( t = 5 \tau \). As a result, state \( |E_+ \rangle \) goes over to state \( |3 \rangle \) and state \( |E_- \rangle \) goes over to state \( |1 \rangle \), or vice versa, depending on \( \varphi \). The net result of the adiabatic passage and the rotation is that one enantiomer returns to its initial \( |1 \rangle \) state and the other switches over to the \( |3 \rangle \) state. As shown in the middle panel of Fig. 2, the enanti-discriminator is very robust, in contrast to the CPT scheme [10], with all the population transfer processes occurring in a smooth fashion.

Assuming that the \( L \) enantiomer has been excited to the \( |3 \rangle_L \) state, we now proceed to convert it into a \( D \) enantiomer in the \( |4 \rangle_D \) state, by going through a linear superposition of \( |5 \rangle_S \) and \( |5 \rangle_A \) states, while leaving intact the \( D \) enantiomer in the state \( |1 \rangle_D \). This enanti-converter process, based on a new multipath transfer technique [16], thus schematically follows the pathway \( |3 \rangle_L \rightarrow a e^{-i \omega_{SS}(5 \rangle_S + b e^{-i \omega_{SA}(5 \rangle_A \rightarrow |4 \rangle_D \}), \) shown in Fig. 3. The transfer is realized by simultaneously introducing two dump pulses \( \mathcal{E}_{4,SS}(t) \) and \( \mathcal{E}_{4,SA}(t) \) [of duration \( \tau \gg (\omega_{SS} - \omega_{SA})^{-1} \)], which resonantly couple each of the \( |5 \rangle_S \) and \( |5 \rangle_A \) states to the \( |4 \rangle_L \) and \( |4 \rangle_D \) states. After a delay of \( 2 \tau \), we introduce two (pump) pulses \( \mathcal{E}_{4,SS}(t) \) and \( \mathcal{E}_{4,SA}(t) \), which resonantly couple each of the \( |5 \rangle_S \) and \( |5 \rangle_A \) states to the \( |3 \rangle_L \) and \( |3 \rangle_D \) state. In this process only the \( |3 \rangle_D \) and \( |4 \rangle_L \) states are populated, while the \( |3 \rangle_L \) and \( |4 \rangle_D \) states, degenerate with them, respectively, stay empty. This is because the empty pair of states is coupled to the \( |5 \rangle_S \) and \( |5 \rangle_A \) states by vectors of Rabi frequencies \( \Omega_i \) that are orthogonal [16] to analogous vectors of the populated pair of states, respectively. The symmetry conversion of the excited enantiomer is achieved by choosing \( \Omega_{4,SS}(t) \) to have the same sign as \( \Omega_{3,SS}(t) \) and \( \Omega_{4,SA}(t) \) to have an opposite sign to \( \Omega_{3,SA}(t) \).

The enanti-converter is described by the Hamiltonian,

\[
H = \begin{pmatrix}
0 & 0 & -\Omega_{3,SS} & \Omega_{3,SA} & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & \Omega_{3,SS} & -\Omega_{3,SA} & 0 & 0 \\
-\Omega_{4,SS}^* & \Omega_{3,SS}^* & 0 & 0 & -\Omega_{4,SA}^* & \Omega_{4,SA}^* \\
0 & 0 & -\Omega_{4,SS} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & \Omega_{4,SS} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & -\Omega_{4,SA} & 0 & 0 & 0
\end{pmatrix},
\]

with the time-dependent wave function given by the vector \( \mathbf{c}(t) = (c_{3L}, c_{3R}, c_{5SS}, c_{5SA}, c_{4D}, c_{4D}) \) of expansion coefficients in the \( |j \rangle \) states. The Hamiltonian matrix above has four nonzero eigenvalues and two null eigenvalues, \( \lambda_{1,2} = 0 \), that correspond to two dark states with the coefficients \( c_{L}(t) = (-d_3, -d_3^*, 0, 0, 2 \Omega_{3,SS}, 0) \), \( c_{D}(t) = (-d_4, -d_4^*, 0, 0, 2 \Omega_{4,SS}, 0) \), where \( d_3 = \Omega_{4,SS} \pm d_4 \Omega_{4,SA} \), with \( r = \Omega_{3,SS}/|\Omega_{4,SA}| \). These expressions show that the system can follow two possible paths, where only one of them is flipping the symmetry of the initial state. Assuming, for simplicity, that \( r = 1 \) and \( r' = \Omega_{4,SS}/\Omega_{4,SA} = 1 \), we find out that at the beginning of the process only the dark state \( \mathbf{c}_L(t_{\text{fin}}) \) correlates with the initial state \( |3 \rangle_L \), i.e., the vector \( \mathbf{c}(t_{\text{fin}}) = (1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0) \). At the end of the process, this dark state correlates with the vector \( \mathbf{c}_D(t_{\text{end}}) = (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0) \) for the \( |4 \rangle_D \) state, so the symmetry is preserved. On the other hand, if we flip the phase of just one dump or one pump field component \( r = -1 \) or \( r' = -1 \) the system follows the dark state \( \mathbf{c}_D \), which correlates at the end with the state \( \mathbf{c}_D(t_{\text{end}}) = (0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0) \). The final population thus occupies the \( |4 \rangle_D \) state, with the opposite symmetry. This brings the whole population to a single enantiomer form.

In Fig. 3, we show evolution of the calculated populations \( P_j = |\mathbf{c}_j|^2 \). The process starts in the \( |3 \rangle_L \) state and ends in the \( |4 \rangle_D \) state. The Rabi frequencies are \( \Omega_{3,SS}(t) = \Omega_{\max} f(t-2\tau) \), \( \Omega_{3,SA}(t) = 0.5 \Omega_{\max} f(t-2\tau) \), and \( \Omega_{4,SS}(t) = \Omega_{\max} f(t-2\tau) \).
lated in the conversion, the switch is immune to
for several molecular states are initially populated at higher
temperatures. Then the purification can be completed by
repeating the described process several times with the
same set of pulses. We always let the system relax, so that
the process starts with reasonable populations on the
same initial states.

We believe that the new methodology presented here
can largely influence the science and technology of chiral
molecules purification, and lead to applications in organic
chemistry, biochemistry, and drug industry.

We acknowledge discussions with P. Brumer and
E. Frishman. This project was supported by the
Minerva Foundation, GIF, the EU IHP program HPRN-
CT-1999-00129, the Office of Naval Research, U.S.A., the
Swiss Friends of Weizmann Institute, and ISF Grant
No. 11/02.

\[ \Omega_{4,5S}(t) = 0.4\Omega_{\text{max}} f(t), \quad \Omega_{4,5A}(t) = -\Omega_{\text{max}} f(t), \] with
\( \Omega_{\text{max}} = 30 \text{ ns}^{-1} \) and \( f(t) \) as in the discriminator. Notice
that we have rather different \( r = 2 \), \( r' = -0.4 \), which
shows that this system is robust, i.e., it does not require
that \( |r| = 1 \) and \( |r'| = 1 \) to follow this complete-transfer
path, but these ratios need to have the right sign.

Because the higher excited \( |5\rangle_{S,A} \) states never get
populated in the conversion, the switch is immune to \( T_2 \)-like
dehasing processes, which destroy the relative phase
between the components of excited superposition states.
For the same reason, it is insensitive to dissociation and/or
internal conversion, even if higher electronic surfaces,
having well separated \( |5\rangle_{S,A} \) states, are used in truly chiral
molecules. These states should have reasonably strong
dipolar coupling with the \( |3 - 4\rangle_{L,D} \) states, from the
ground electronic surface, so that the light intensities
are not too high for parasitic processes to take place.
Then the only requirement is for the process to be over
before a \( T_1 \) type collisional relaxation of the states takes
place. Recently, we have successfully applied this ap-
proach on the permanently chiral molecule, that of
1,3-dimethylallene.

In experiments, we can tune the laser parameters to
match the molecular parameters, until the conversion
process becomes effective. We can, for example, continu-
ously check the product by sensitively testing its circular
birefringence [17]. The method can be applied even if the
conversion is not perfect from various reasons, like when

\[ \langle M \rangle = \frac{\langle M \rangle_S \langle M \rangle_A \langle M \rangle_{\text{max}}} {\langle M \rangle_S + \langle M \rangle_A + \langle M \rangle_{\text{max}}} \]

FIG. 3 (color online). (Upper plot) Scheme of the enanti-
converter. The population passes from the \( |3\rangle \), state to the \( |4\rangle_D \)
state, while going through the superposition of \( |5\rangle_{S,A} \) states.
(Lower plot) The time-dependent populations \( p_i \) on the levels.

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