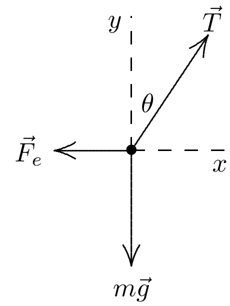
15. (a) A force diagram for one of the balls is shown below. The force of gravity $m\vec{g}$ acts downward, the electrical force $\vec{F}_e$ of the other ball acts to the left, and the tension in the thread acts along the thread, at the angle θ to the vertical. The ball is in equilibrium, so its acceleration is zero. The y component of Newton's second law yields $T\cos\theta - mg = 0$ and the x component yields $T\sin\theta - F_e = 0$. We solve the first equation for T and obtain $T = mg/\cos\theta$. We substitute the result into the second to obtain $mg\tan\theta - F_e = 0$.



Examination of the geometry of Figure 22-19 leads to

$$\tan\theta = \frac{x/2}{\sqrt{L^2 - (x/2)^2}} .$$

If L is much larger than x (which is the case if θ is very small), we may neglect $x/2$ in the denominator and write $\tan\theta \approx x/2L$. This is equivalent to approximating $\tan\theta$ by $\sin\theta$. The magnitude of the electrical force of one ball on the other is

$$F_e = \frac{q^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0 x^2}$$

by Eq. 22-4. When these two expressions are used in the equation $mg\tan\theta = F_e$, we obtain

$$\frac{mgx}{2L} \approx \frac{1}{4\pi\varepsilon_0}\frac{q^2}{x^2} \quad\Longrightarrow\quad x \approx \left(\frac{q^2 L}{2\pi\varepsilon_0 mg}\right)^{1/3} .$$

(b) We solve $x^3 = 2kq^2L/mg)$ for the charge (using Eq. 22-5):

$$q = \sqrt{\frac{mgx^3}{2kL}} = \sqrt{\frac{(0.010\,\text{kg})(9.8\,\text{m/s}^2)(0.050\,\text{m})^3}{2(8.99\times10^9\,\text{N}\cdot\text{m}^2/\text{C}^2)(1.20\,\text{m})}} = \pm 2.4\times10^{-8}\ \text{C} .$$