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Cosmological Considerations in the General Theory of Relativity [1]

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IT is well known that Poisson's equation

$$\nabla^2\phi = 4\pi K\rho \quad (1)$$
 in combination with the equations of motion of a material point is not as yet a perfect substitute for Newton's theory of action at a distance. There is still to be taken into account the condition that at spatial infinity the potential ϕ tends toward a fixed limiting value. There is an analogous state of things in the theory of gravitation in general relativity. Here, too, we must supplement the differential equations by limiting conditions at spatial infinity, if we really have to regard the universe as being of infinite spatial extent. [2]

In my treatment of the planetary problem I chose these limiting conditions in the form of the following assumption : it is possible to select a system of reference so that at spatial infinity all the gravitational potentials $g_{\mu\nu}$ become constant. [3]
 But it is by no means evident *a priori* that we may lay down the same limiting conditions when we wish to take larger portions of the physical universe into consideration. In the following pages the reflexions will be given which, up to the present, I have made on this fundamentally important question.

§ 1. The Newtonian Theory

It is well known that Newton's limiting condition of the constant limit for ϕ at spatial infinity leads to the view that the density of matter becomes zero at infinity. For we imagine that there may be a place in universal space round about which the gravitational field of matter, viewed on a large scale, possesses spherical symmetry. It then follows from Poisson's equation that, in order that ϕ may tend to a

limit at infinity, the mean density ρ must decrease toward zero more rapidly than $1/r^2$ as the distance r from the centre increases.* In this sense, therefore, the universe according to Newton is finite, although it may possess an infinitely great total mass.

From this it follows in the first place that the radiation emitted by the heavenly bodies will, in part, leave the Newtonian system of the universe, passing radially outwards, to become ineffective and lost in the infinite. May not entire heavenly bodies fare likewise? It is hardly possible to give a negative answer to this question. For it follows from the assumption of a finite limit for ϕ at spatial infinity that a heavenly body with finite kinetic energy is able to reach spatial infinity by overcoming the Newtonian forces of attraction. By statistical mechanics this case must occur from time to time, as long as the total energy of the stellar system—transferred to one single star—is great enough to send that star on its journey to infinity, whence it never can return.

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We might try to avoid this peculiar difficulty by assuming a very high value for the limiting potential at infinity. That would be a possible way, if the value of the gravitational potential were not itself necessarily conditioned by the heavenly bodies. The truth is that we are compelled to regard the occurrence of any great differences of potential of the gravitational field as contradicting the facts. These differences must really be of so low an order of magnitude that the stellar velocities generated by them do not exceed the velocities actually observed.

If we apply Boltzmann's law of distribution for gas molecules to the stars, by comparing the stellar system with a gas in thermal equilibrium, we find that the Newtonian stellar system cannot exist at all. For there is a finite ratio of densities corresponding to the finite difference of potential between the centre and spatial infinity. A vanishing of the density at infinity thus implies a vanishing of the density at the centre.

* ρ is the mean density of matter, calculated for a region which is large as compared with the distance between neighbouring fixed stars, but small in comparison with the dimensions of the whole stellar system.

It seems hardly possible to surmount these difficulties on the basis of the Newtonian theory. We may ask ourselves the question whether they can be removed by a modification of the Newtonian theory. First of all we will indicate a method which does not in itself claim to be taken seriously; it merely serves as a foil for what is to follow. In place of Poisson's equation we write

$$\nabla^2\phi - \lambda\phi = 4\pi\kappa\rho \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad (2)$$

where λ denotes a universal constant. If ρ_0 be the uniform density of a distribution of mass, then

$$\phi = -\frac{4\pi\kappa}{\lambda}\rho_0 \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad (3)$$

is a solution of equation (2). This solution would correspond to the case in which the matter of the fixed stars was distributed uniformly through space, if the density ρ_0 is equal to the actual mean density of the matter in the universe. The solution then corresponds to an infinite extension of the central space, filled uniformly with matter. If, without making any change in the mean density, we imagine matter to be non-uniformly distributed locally, there will be, over and above the ϕ with the constant value of equation (3), an additional ϕ , which in the neighbourhood of denser masses will so much the more resemble the Newtonian field as $\lambda\phi$ is smaller in comparison with $4\pi\kappa\rho$.

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A universe so constituted would have, with respect to its gravitational field, no centre. A decrease of density in spatial infinity would not have to be assumed, but both the mean potential and mean density would remain constant to infinity. The conflict with statistical mechanics which we found in the case of the Newtonian theory is not repeated. With a definite but extremely small density, matter is in equilibrium, without any internal material forces (pressures) being required to maintain equilibrium.

§ 2. The Boundary Conditions According to the General Theory of Relativity

In the present paragraph I shall conduct the reader over the road that I have myself travelled, rather a rough and winding road, because otherwise I cannot hope that he will

take much interest in the result at the end of the journey. The conclusion I shall arrive at is that the field equations of gravitation which I have championed hitherto still need a slight modification, so that on the basis of the general theory of relativity those fundamental difficulties may be avoided which have been set forth in § 1 as confronting the Newtonian theory. This modification corresponds perfectly to the transition from Poisson's equation (1) to equation (2) of § 1. We finally infer that boundary conditions in spatial infinity fall away altogether, because the universal continuum in respect of its spatial dimensions is to be viewed as a self-contained continuum of finite spatial (three-dimensional) volume.

[6] The opinion which I entertained until recently, as to the limiting conditions to be laid down in spatial infinity, took its stand on the following considerations. In a consistent theory of relativity there can be no inertia *relatively to "space,"* but only an inertia of masses *relatively to one another.* If, therefore, I have a mass at a sufficient distance from all other masses in the universe, its inertia must fall to zero. We will try to formulate this condition mathematically.

According to the general theory of relativity the negative momentum is given by the first three components, the energy by the last component of the covariant tensor multiplied by $\sqrt{-g}$

$$m\sqrt{-g} \quad g_{\mu\alpha} \frac{dx_\alpha}{ds} \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad (4)$$

where, as always, we set

$$ds^2 = g_{\mu\nu} dx_\mu dx_\nu \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad (5)$$

In the particularly perspicuous case of the possibility of choosing the system of co-ordinates so that the gravitational field at every point is spatially isotropic, we have more simply

$$ds^2 = -A(dx_1^2 + dx_2^2 + dx_3^2) + Bdx_4^2.$$

If, moreover, at the same time

$$\sqrt{-g} = 1 = \sqrt{A^3 B}$$

we obtain from (4), to a first approximation for small velocities,

$$m \frac{A}{\sqrt{B}} \frac{dx_1}{dx_4}, m \frac{A}{\sqrt{B}} \frac{dx_2}{dx_4}, m \frac{A}{\sqrt{B}} \frac{dx_3}{dx_4}$$

for the components of momentum, and for the energy (in the static case)

$$m\sqrt{B}.$$

From the expressions for the momentum, it follows that $m\frac{A}{\sqrt{B}}$ plays the part of the rest mass. As m is a constant peculiar to the point of mass, independently of its position, this expression, if we retain the condition $\sqrt{g} = 1$ at spatial infinity, can vanish only when A diminishes to zero, while B increases to infinity. It seems, therefore, that such a degeneration of the co-efficients $g_{\mu\nu}$ is required by the postulate of relativity of all inertia. This requirement implies that the potential energy $m\sqrt{B}$ becomes infinitely great at infinity. Thus a point of mass can never leave the system; and a more detailed investigation shows that the same thing applies to light-rays. A system of the universe with such behaviour of the gravitational potentials at infinity would not therefore run the risk of wasting away which was mooted just now in connexion with the Newtonian theory.

I wish to point out that the simplifying assumptions as to the gravitational potentials on which this reasoning is based, have been introduced merely for the sake of lucidity. It is possible to find general formulations for the behaviour of the $g_{\mu\nu}$ at infinity which express the essentials of the question without further restrictive assumptions.

At this stage, with the kind assistance of the mathematician J. Grommer, I investigated centrally symmetrical, static gravitational fields, degenerating at infinity in the way mentioned. The gravitational potentials $g_{\mu\nu}$ were applied, and from them the energy-tensor $T_{\mu\nu}$ of matter was calculated on the basis of the field equations of gravitation. But here it proved that for the system of the fixed stars no boundary conditions of the kind can come into question at all, as was also rightly emphasized by the astronomer de Sitter recently.

For the contravariant energy-tensor $T^{\mu\nu}$ of ponderable matter is given by

$$T^{\mu\nu} = \rho \frac{dx_\mu}{ds} \frac{dx_\nu}{ds},$$

where ρ is the density of matter in natural measure. With

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an appropriate choice of the system of co-ordinates the stellar velocities are very small in comparison with that of light. We may, therefore, substitute $\sqrt{g_{44}} dx_4$ for ds . This shows us that all components of $T^{\mu\nu}$ must be very small in comparison with the last component T^{44} . But it was quite impossible to reconcile this condition with the chosen boundary conditions. In the retrospect this result does not appear astonishing. The fact of the small velocities of the stars allows the conclusion that wherever there are fixed stars, the gravitational potential (in our case $\sqrt{B}$) can never be much greater than here on earth. This follows from statistical reasoning, exactly as in the case of the Newtonian theory. At any rate, our calculations have convinced me that such conditions of degeneration for the $g_{\mu\nu}$ in spatial infinity may not be postulated.

After the failure of this attempt, two possibilities next present themselves.

(a) We may require, as in the problem of the planets, that, with a suitable choice of the system of reference, the $g_{\mu\nu}$ in spatial infinity approximate to the values

$$\begin{array}{cccc} -1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{array}$$

(b) We may refrain entirely from laying down boundary conditions for spatial infinity claiming general validity; but at the spatial limit of the domain under consideration we have to give the $g_{\mu\nu}$ separately in each individual case, as hitherto we were accustomed to give the initial conditions for time separately.

The possibility (b) holds out no hope of solving the problem, but amounts to giving it up. This is an incontestable position, which is taken up at the present time by de Sitter.* But I must confess that such a complete resignation in this fundamental question is for me a difficult thing. I should not make up my mind to it until every effort to make headway toward a satisfactory view had proved to be vain.

Possibility (a) is unsatisfactory in more respects than one.

* de Sitter, Akad. van Wetensch. te Amsterdam, 8 Nov., 1916.

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In the first place those boundary conditions pre-suppose a definite choice of the system of reference, which is contrary to the spirit of the relativity principle. Secondly, if we adopt this view, we fail to comply with the requirement of the relativity of inertia. For the inertia of a material point of mass m (in natural measure) depends upon the $g_{\mu\nu}$; but these differ but little from their postulated values, as given above, for spatial infinity. Thus inertia would indeed be *influenced*, but would not be *conditioned* by matter (present in finite space). If only one single point of mass were present, according to this view, it would possess inertia, and in fact an inertia almost as great as when it is surrounded by the other masses of the actual universe. Finally, those statistical objections must be raised against this view which were mentioned in respect of the Newtonian theory.

From what has now been said it will be seen that I have not succeeded in formulating boundary conditions for spatial infinity. Nevertheless, there is still a possible way out, without resigning as suggested under (b). For if it were possible to regard the universe as a continuum which is *finite (closed) with respect to its spatial dimensions*, we should have no need at all of any such boundary conditions. We shall proceed to show that both the general postulate of relativity and the fact of the small stellar velocities are compatible with the hypothesis of a spatially finite universe; though certainly, in order to carry through this idea, we need a generalizing modification of the field equations of gravitation.

§ 3. The Spatially Finite Universe with a Uniform Distribution of Matter

According to the general theory of relativity the metrical character (curvature) of the four-dimensional space-time continuum is defined at every point by the matter at that point and the state of that matter. Therefore, on account of the lack of uniformity in the distribution of matter, the metrical structure of this continuum must necessarily be extremely complicated. But if we are concerned with the structure only on a large scale, we may represent matter to ourselves as being uniformly distributed over enormous spaces, so that its density of distribution is a variable function which varies

extremely slowly. Thus our procedure will somewhat resemble that of the geodesists who, by means of an ellipsoid, approximate to the shape of the earth's surface, which on a small scale is extremely complicated.

The most important fact that we draw from experience as to the distribution of matter is that the relative velocities of the stars are very small as compared with the velocity of light. So I think that for the present we may base our reasoning upon the following approximative assumption. There is a system of reference relatively to which matter may be looked upon as being permanently at rest. With respect to this system, therefore, the contravariant energy-tensor $T^{\mu\nu}$ of matter is, by reason of (5), of the simple form

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$$\left. \begin{array}{cccc} 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \rho \end{array} \right\} \cdot \cdot \cdot \quad (6)$$

The scalar ρ of the (mean) density of distribution may be *a priori* a function of the space co-ordinates. But if we assume the universe to be spatially finite, we are prompted to the hypothesis that ρ is to be independent of locality. On this hypothesis we base the following considerations.

As concerns the gravitational field, it follows from the equation of motion of the material point

$$\frac{d^2 x_\nu}{ds^2} + \{a\beta, \nu\} \frac{dx_a}{ds} \frac{dx_\beta}{ds} = 0$$

that a material point in a static gravitational field can remain at rest only when g_{44} is independent of locality. Since, further, we presuppose independence of the time co-ordinate x_4 for all magnitudes, we may demand for the required solution that, for all x_ν ,

$$g_{44} = 1 \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad (7)$$

Further, as always with static problems, we shall have to set

$$g_{14} = g_{24} = g_{34} = 0 \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad (8)$$

It remains now to determine those components of the gravitational potential which define the purely spatial-geometrical relations of our continuum ($g_{11}, g_{12}, \dots, g_{33}$). From

which equation, in combination with (7) and (8), perfectly defines the behaviour of measuring-rods, clocks, and light-rays.

§ 4. On an Additional Term for the Field Equations of Gravitation

[13] My proposed field equations of gravitation for any chosen system of co-ordinates run as follows:—

$$\left. \begin{aligned} G_{\mu\nu} &= -\kappa(T_{\mu\nu} - \frac{1}{2}g_{\mu\nu}T), \\ G_{\mu\nu} &= -\frac{\partial}{\partial x_a}\{\mu\nu, \alpha\} + \{\mu\alpha, \beta\}\{\nu\beta, \alpha\} \\ &\quad + \frac{\partial^2 \log \sqrt{-g}}{\partial x_\mu \partial x_\nu} - \{\mu\nu, \alpha\} \frac{\partial \log \sqrt{-g}}{\partial x_\alpha} \end{aligned} \right\} \quad (13)$$

The system of equations (13) is by no means satisfied when we insert for the $g_{\mu\nu}$ the values given in (7), (8), and (12), and for the (contravariant) energy-tensor of matter the values indicated in (6). It will be shown in the next paragraph how this calculation may conveniently be made. So that, if it were certain that the field equations (13) which I have hitherto employed were the only ones compatible with the postulate of general relativity, we should probably have to conclude that the theory of relativity does not admit the hypothesis of a spatially finite universe.

[14] However, the system of equations (14) allows a readily suggested extension which is compatible with the relativity postulate, and is perfectly analogous to the extension of Poisson's equation given by equation (2). For on the left-hand side of field equation (13) we may add the fundamental tensor $g_{\mu\nu}$, multiplied by a universal constant, $-\lambda$, at present unknown, without destroying the general covariance. In place of field equation (13) we write

$$G_{\mu\nu} - \lambda g_{\mu\nu} = -\kappa(T_{\mu\nu} - \frac{1}{2}g_{\mu\nu}T) \quad (13a)$$

This field equation, with λ sufficiently small, is in any case also compatible with the facts of experience derived from the solar system. It also satisfies laws of conservation of momentum and energy, because we arrive at (13a) in place of (13) by introducing into Hamilton's principle, instead of the scalar of Riemann's tensor, this scalar increased by a

universal constant; and Hamilton's principle, of course, guarantees the validity of laws of conservation. It will be shown in § 5 that field equation (13a) is compatible with our conjectures on field and matter.

§ 5. Calculation and Result

Since all points of our continuum are on an equal footing, it is sufficient to carry through the calculation for *one* point, e.g. for one of the two points with the co-ordinates

$$x_1 = x_2 = x_3 = x_4 = 0.$$

Then for the $g_{\mu\nu}$ in (13a) we have to insert the values

$$\begin{array}{cccc} -1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{array}$$

wherever they appear differentiated only once or not at all. We thus obtain in the first place

$$G_{\mu\nu} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x_1}[\mu\nu, 1] + \frac{\partial}{\partial x_2}[\mu\nu, 2] + \frac{\partial}{\partial x_3}[\mu\nu, 3] + \frac{\partial^2 \log \sqrt{-g}}{\partial x_\mu \partial x_\nu}.$$

From this we readily discover, taking (7), (8), and (13) into account, that all equations (13a) are satisfied if the two relations

$$-\frac{2}{R^2} + \lambda = -\frac{\kappa\rho}{2}, \quad -\lambda = -\frac{\kappa\rho}{2},$$

or

$$\lambda = \frac{\kappa\rho}{2} = \frac{1}{R^2} \quad . \quad . \quad . \quad (14)$$

are fulfilled.

Thus the newly introduced universal constant λ defines both the mean density of distribution ρ which can remain in equilibrium and also the radius R and the volume $2\pi^2 R^3$ of spherical space. The total mass M of the universe, according to our view, is finite, and is in fact

$$M = \rho \cdot 2\pi^2 R^3 = 4\pi^2 \frac{R}{\kappa} = \pi^2 \sqrt{\frac{32}{\kappa^3 \rho}} \quad . \quad . \quad (15) \quad [15]$$

Thus the theoretical view of the actual universe, if it is in correspondence with our reasoning, is the following. The

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curvature of space is variable in time and place, according to the distribution of matter, but we may roughly approximate to it by means of a spherical space. At any rate, this view is logically consistent, and from the standpoint of the general theory of relativity lies nearest at hand; whether, from the standpoint of present astronomical knowledge, it is tenable, will not here be discussed. In order to arrive at this consistent view, we admittedly had to introduce an extension of the field equations of gravitation which is not justified by our actual knowledge of gravitation. It is to be emphasized, however, that a positive curvature of space is given by our results, even if the supplementary term is not introduced. That term is necessary only for the purpose of making possible a quasi-static distribution of matter, as required by the fact of the small velocities of the stars.