Stellar Modeling

Okay, let's solve a star. We will proceed from microphysics to macrophysics, and will continue to rely on spherical symmetry and lack of rotation.

In principle, to construct a full stellar model we need to specify the total mass and the composition as a function of a coordinate such as radius (or total mass). Note also that we are still restricting ourselves to spherical, nonrotating models; we'll talk in a later lecture about some of the complexity introduced by rotation. We therefore need to know the microphysical relations

$$P(\rho, T, \mathbf{X}),\ E(\rho, T, \mathbf{X}),\ \kappa(\rho, T, \mathbf{X}),\ \epsilon(\rho, T, \mathbf{X}) \tag{1}$$

(pressure, energy per gram, opacity, and energy generation rate, as a function of the density ρ, the temperature T, and the composition $\mathbf{X}$). We also need some derivatives of these quantities. The relations to be satisfied are the fundamental equations of stellar physics. The structural equations are

$$\frac{dP}{dr} = -\frac{GM_r}{r^2}\rho\,, \quad \frac{dM_r}{dr} = 4\pi r^2 \rho\,, \quad \frac{dL_r}{dr} = 4\pi r^2 \epsilon \rho \tag{2}$$

or their Lagrangian equivalents

$$\frac{dP}{dM_r} = -\frac{GM_r}{4\pi r^4}\,, \quad \frac{dr}{dM_r} = 1/(4\pi r^2 \rho)\,, \quad \frac{dL_r}{dM_r} = \epsilon\,. \tag{3}$$

In addition, we need to know the run of temperature with pressure, or

$$\nabla \equiv \frac{d\ln T}{d\ln P} = -\frac{r^2 P}{GM_r \rho}\frac{1}{T}\frac{dT}{dr}\,. \tag{4}$$

If the run of temperature assuming radiative transfer

$$\nabla_{\rm rad} = \frac{3}{16\pi ac}\frac{P\kappa}{T^4}\frac{L_r}{GM_r} \tag{5}$$

is less steep than the adiabatic value, $\nabla_{\rm rad} < \nabla_{\rm ad}$, then $\nabla = \nabla_{\rm rad}$. If instead $\nabla_{\rm rad} > \nabla_{\rm ad}$, then $\nabla = \nabla_{\rm ad}$. **Ask class:** why is this true? Because convection brings any super-adiabatic gradient very close to adiabatic.

Now we need to solve for the structure. We have four first-order differential equations. For our independent variable we can take either mass or radius, but mass is often more convenient. We also need to specify the composition. **Ask class:** how many boundary conditions do we need to close the equations? Four, for our four first-order ODEs. This is conveniently expressed as two boundary conditions at the center, and two at the surface. **Ask class:** if we take M_r as the independent variable, what are our four dependent variables? They are r, L_r, P, and T. **Ask class:** what are boundary conditions at the center? We

have $r = 0$ and $L_r = 0$ at the center. The first is obvious. The second occurs because L_r is the total luminosity generated inside r, which is therefore zero at $r = 0$ even though the energy generation *rate* is maximal there. How about at the surface? $\rho = 0$, and to a good approximation $T = 0$.

Now that we have this setup, can we always solve for structure corresponding to a real star? No, as it turns out. Consider for example a $10\,M_\odot$ star that is composed entirely of iron. There is no equilibrium solution, because it cannot hold itself up against gravity (iron doesn't generate energy by fusion, and this mass is in excess of the Chandrasekhar limit, so the star would collapse). For that matter, how about a 1 $M_\odot$ star composed of pure plutonium? That's not so stable either! **Ask class:** If there is a solution, is it unique? No again. The reason turns out to be that the opacity and equation of state of matter is complicated enough that multiple solutions are possible. However, in practice the solution is unique, in the sense that only one of the possibilities is realistic. So we'll assume "practical uniqueness".

Therefore, in principle if you're armed with detailed microphysics then you can construct a whole star and, for that matter, see it evolve. This is what stellar specialists do (see the MESA code, for Modules for Experiments in Stellar Astrophysics). But for our purposes we are more interested in the general structure, so we'll look at something a bit easier.

Polytropes

Before embarking on full stellar modeling, let's use a simplification and see how far that gets us. Let's assume that the equation of state is polytropic, meaning that the pressure is a power-law function of the density:

$$P(r) = K\rho^{1+1/n}(r)\ . \tag{6}$$

We talked about this approach in an earlier lecture. The difficulty is that the equation of state and run of pressure versus density don't have to satisfy this relation, so in introducing it we are guaranteeing that we will be self-inconsistent with the full set of stellar structure equations. Yikes! If we stick to just the hydrostatic and mass equations we're okay, so we can just ignore the others. That's a massive approximation. However, I hope I've convinced you in this course that many times such approximations give us pretty good insight anyway. This is such a case.

When the polytropic function is put into the equation of hydrostatic equilibrium and dimensionless parameters are introduced, we end up with the Lane-Emden equation:

$$\frac{1}{\xi^2}\frac{d}{d\xi}\left(\xi^2\frac{d\theta}{d\xi}\right) = -\theta^n\ . \tag{7}$$

Here the dimensionless coordinates θ and ξ are defined by $\rho(r) = \rho_c\theta^n(r)$ (ρ_c is the central density) and $r = r_n\xi$, where r_n is the scale length, $r_n^2 = (n+1)P_c/4\pi G\rho_c^2$. The boundary

conditions reflect the physical constraints. If ρ_c is the central density, then $\theta(\xi = 0) = 1$. Spherical symmetry means that $dP/dr = 0$ at $r = 0$, so $\theta' = d\theta/d\xi = 0$ at $\xi = 0$. Finally, if we define the surface as where the pressure vanishes, then the surface must be at the first zero of $\theta(\xi)$. Calling this ξ_1, the last condition is $\theta(\xi_1) = 0$. Therefore, the total dimensional radius of the surface is

$$R = r_n \xi_1 = \left[\frac{(n+1)P_c}{4\pi G \rho_c^2} \right]^{1/2} \xi_1 \ . \tag{8}$$

Analytic solutions are possible for n=0, 1, and 5, and are given in the book. However, our primary interest is in $n = 3$ (a 4/3 power law) and $n = 3/2$ (a 5/3 power law). Since neither of those is on our list of analytical solutions, we therefore need to appeal to numerical solutions.

Numerical solutions

WARNING! WARNING! DANGER WILL ROBINSON! We are now about to discuss how to solve the Lane-Emden equation numerically. The techniques discussed in our textbook are generally useful, but remember that the point is to solve the equations quickly and accurately. If this can be done by a simple, easily-coded algorithm, great! In particular, you can solve the LE equation easily by the crude technique of solving for $d^2\theta/d\xi^2$, then updating $d\theta/d\xi$ and θ as a function of ξ. It works. However, some of the other techniques are generally useful and can be applied in more complicated circumstances. I know that there is a strong tendency to simply import your favorite routine from the Web and pound away at an equation like this, but regardless of how you do it the most important thing is that it WORKS CORRECTLY! The way you test this is to look at limits, to compare with analytic solutions, and so on. Here, in the realm of numerics, is a place where you can easily go slack-jawed and drooling as you gaze vacantly at the screen of scrolling numbers, without understanding what to expect (I did this for ~ 2 years while working on my thesis before finally getting it together!).

So, before looking at some specific methods, let's brainstorm about how we will know that our numerical solution is correct. The Lane-Emden equation is simple enough that much of this will be overkill, but in real applications you can easily get bitten by apparently minor errors. A good approach is to think of any problem as a cockroach; it probably isn't the only one around, and if you ignore it you'll have much bigger problems later! Some ways to check are:

(1) Compare with exact analytical solutions. If these exist (as for the L-E equation), this is a powerful check. When you do this, make *sure* that the level of agreement is in line with what you expect. If you expect 0.01% agreement and you get 0.1% agreement, maybe the difference is benign or maybe it's an indication of a deeper problem.

(2) Look at limiting expansions. For example, you can get a $\xi \to 0$ expansion for θ. Similarly, you can go through more general central expansions for M_r, P, L_r, and T. Even when an exact analytical solution is impossible, first order expansions are often easy.

(3) Check the results against your intuition. When you increase x, should y go up or down (even if you don't know by how much)? Should there be a limit to a particular quantity, and does your numerical answer fit within that? Is the dependence likely to be $y \propto x^2$ or $y \propto x^3$? Any deviation from your expectations should be tracked down carefully.

(4) If possible, use visualization software to look at the results. This may allow you to see things you can't from tables of numbers.

(5) Double or halve your resolution to see whether the results change significantly. If not, at least you're numerically stable. If so, you may be dealing with a resolution effect. When changing resolution and checking against a known answer, make sure that your convergence is as you expect. For some methods, the error should go as your step size squared; for others, as the step size to another power. If the convergence is different than you expect, find out why!

(6) Check with previous numerical results. Depending on your problem, many people may have looked at variants before. No doubt they lacked your brilliance and deep intuition, but at least you can see if they got the same answer you did!

Now let's talk about some general categories of numerical solution approaches to differential equations.

Shooting methods.—These methods (generally, but also in our specific case) involve starting at one end of a domain where the solution is known, then integrating to the other end where the solution is not known. The simple integrator I mentioned above does this, and it is the basis of Runge-Kutta integrators as well. If you apply RK integration to our problem, then you have as an independent variable ξ and as dependent variables θ, θ', and θ''. Then, you integrate away with some step size h and weightings as determined in the RK method. The fourth-order RK method is the most commonly used, but others are available.

A comment on this. RK integrators are fast, stable ways to solve many differential equations. However, whether you want to use them depends on the circumstance. Just as you wouldn't use an adaptive Reimannian routine to integrate a simple, smooth function (where a trapezoidal rule or even a rectangular integrator will do just as well and be easier to code), you shouldn't necessarily stampede straight for an RK. The reason is that the complexity of coding, although not much, introduces a small but finite error probability, which you have to weigh against the gains.

A last comment about shooting methods is that if the equations to be solved are somewhat unstable, shooting methods can err grievously. A place to be careful about that in

the LE case is at the surface of the star, where the mass and density are small and larger errors are the result. It's not that bad, really, but some stiff differential equations are not amenable to shooting methods for this reason. Numerically, one way to tell if your shooting methods are good or bad is to try very slightly different initial conditions, or to change your resolution somewhat. If the solution at some point changes drastically, you've got problems.

Fitting methods.—One way around this potential problem is to start a solution at both ends of the region, then try to match them in the center. This is called a fitting method, and it has similarities to root-finding using the Newton-Raphson method. Recall that in that circumstance, you guess at the location of the root, then correct using the value of the function and its first derivative. Here, suppose that we define $x \equiv \xi$, $y \equiv \theta$, and $z \equiv d\theta/d\xi$. Integrate outward from $x = 0$ and inward from some $x = x_s$, which is your first guess as to where the surface is (therefore $y(x_s) = 0$, and you also need to compute z_s). Compare the two solutions at some fitting radius x_f. Barring supernaturally good intuition on your part, the solutions won't match at x_f. The idea, then, is to correct one's guess in the way described in the book.

In more detail, let us define $Y(x_s, z_s) = y_i(x_f) - y_o(x_f)$ and $Z(x_s, z_s) = z_i(x_f) - z_o(x_f)$. Continuity will eventually demand that $Y = Z = 0$. Now see what happens when x_s is varied by δx_s (keeping z_s constant) and when z_s is varied by δz_s (keeping x_s constant). This will produce changes in both Y and Z. You can therefore calculate numerical partial derivatives: $\partial Y/\partial x_s$, for example. You then expand a first-order Taylor expansion for $Y(x_s + \Delta x_s, z_s + \Delta z_s)$ (and similarly for Z). Since you want $Y = Z = 0$, you set this $Y(x_s + \Delta x_s, z_s + \Delta z_s)$ to zero, getting finally two linear equations for Δx_s and Δy_s

$$\left(\frac{\partial Y}{\partial x_s}\right)\Delta x_s + \left(\frac{\partial Y}{\partial z_s}\right)\Delta z_s = -Y(x_s, z_s) \tag{9}$$

and

$$\left(\frac{\partial Z}{\partial x_s}\right)\Delta x_s + \left(\frac{\partial Z}{\partial z_s}\right)\Delta z_s = -Z(x_s, z_s) \tag{10}$$

Solving for $x_s + \Delta x_s$ and $z_s + \Delta z_s$, you iterate to a solution. The same principle can be applied to the real equations, in which (since it's a fourth-order differential system), four quantities must be specified (e.g., P and ρ at both the center and the surface). In this case, again you want to ensure continuity of quantities that must be continuous. This includes the pressure (otherwise you get infinite acceleration) and mass, but not density, because having, e.g., air on lead is fine!

Relaxation ("Henyey") schemes.—Another approach, which is in a sense a logical extension of the previous one, is a relaxation scheme. As a particular example, suppose you have the second-order system

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = f(x, y, z)\,, \qquad \frac{dz}{dx} = g(x, y, z) \tag{11}$$

with boundary conditions on y and z specified at the endpoints of an interval $x_1 \leq x \leq x_N$:

$$b_1(x_1, y_1, z_1) = 0\,, \qquad b_N(x_N, y_N, z_N) = 0\,. \tag{12}$$

In the usual case we assume all the x_i are specified (this is different from the Lane-Emden case where ξ_1 had to be determined, but we'll get to that in a second). The differential equations can then be replaced by difference equations

$$\frac{y_{i+1} - y_i}{x_{i+1} - x_i} = \frac{1}{2}(f_{i+1} + f_i)\,, \qquad \frac{z_{i+1} - z_i}{x_{i+1} - x_i} = \frac{1}{2}(g_{i+1} + g_i)\,. \tag{13}$$

We then make guesses at the correct y_i and z_i. These won't satisfy the equations, so we make corrections $y_i \longrightarrow y_i + \Delta y_i$, $z_i \longrightarrow z_i + \Delta z_i$, plug these into the equations again, and expand to first order (see book for the result). We then end up with equations for each of the i grid points, and can put these in the form of a matrix equation

$$\mathbf{M} \cdot \mathbf{U} = \mathbf{R}\,, \tag{14}$$

where $\mathbf{U}$ has the desired quantities Δy_i, Δz_i, $\mathbf{R}$ contains the boundary conditions, and $\mathbf{M}$ is the coefficient matrix that comes from linearizing the difference equations. Details about this are in the book. As with the fitting methods, after one round the y_i and z_i are corrected, hopefully we're closer to the answer than we were before, and the scheme is iterated. This can be a fast and rigorous way to solve equations, but nothing is guaranteed: in particular, if the initial guess is far enough off, the subsequent corrections may land the solution into some local minimum instead of the true solution.

If you don't know one end of the grid (as in the Lane-Emden problem), a way to deal with this is to define a variable $x = \xi/\xi_1 = \xi/\lambda$, so that the grid now goes from $x = 0$ to $x = 1$. This introduces another variable (λ), but also increases the number of boundary conditions (now $\theta = 0$ at $x = 1$ in addition to $y = 1,\ z = 0$ at $x = 0$), so the system of equations is closed.