Why Gravity Is Weaker Than Other Fundamental Forces

Sandeep Dhaliwal

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Abstract

Gravity, though fundamentally important at astronomical scales, is remarkably weaker than the other fundamental forces at atomic and quantum levels. This article explores the underlying reasons for this relative weakness by comparing gravity's geometric nature to the gauge-based interactions of the Standard Model. By drawing analogies between curvature in spacetime and curvature in internal gauge fields, we show that the energy required to generate gravitational curvature is vastly higher than that needed for gauge interactions. Using Einstein's field equations, Yang–Mills theory, and the geodesic deviation equation, we argue that gravity's coupling to the external structure of spacetime demands more effort to excite, making it significantly weaker at small scales. Finally, we discuss how the absence of negative mass and nonlinearity of curvature allows gravity to become dominant at cosmic scales.

1 Introduction

It is a well-known fact that gravity is significantly weaker than the other fundamental forces at the atomic or quantum scale. In this article, we explore the nature of this disparity and aim to identify the probable cause of this phenomenon. Our approach combines both conceptual insights and mathematical reasoning to offer a comprehensive understanding.

2 Relative weakness of Gravity

At quantum and atomic scales, gravity is approximately 10^{29} times weaker than the electromagnetic force and around 10^{36} times weaker than the strong nuclear force. However, as we transition to macroscopic or classical scales, gravitational strength gradually increases. At astronomical scales, it becomes stronger than the electromagnetic force, which is the only other long-range gauge interaction.

This behavior contrasts with the short-range nature of the strong and weak nuclear forces. The strong force is short-ranged due to confinement, while the weak force becomes short-ranged due to the spontaneous symmetry breaking associated with the Higgs field.

The extreme weakness of gravity at small scales is underscored by the fact that we are currently unable to measure the gravitational force exerted by an object as small as a sugar crystal or a grain of rice. This limitation highlights the challenge in experimentally probing gravity at microscopic scales.

3 Geometric Interpretation of Weakness

A compelling and plausible explanation for the relative weakness of gravity lies in its geometric interpretation: gravity is understood as the curvature of spacetime itself. Curving spacetime is intrinsically more difficult than curving gauge fields, which represent internal symmetries and excitations in quantum field theory (QFT).

In QFT, gauge fields can be interpreted as curvature associated with an internal symmetry. Thus, while both gravity and gauge forces involve curvature, it is significantly more difficult to curve the spacetime manifold than to excite a gauge field to an equivalent level of interaction.

This idea can be illustrated with a physical analogy: consider spacetime as a metal sheet and a gauge field as a rubber sheet. Applying the same amount of force, it is much harder to bend the metal sheet than the rubber one. This difference in "stiffness" offers an intuitive picture of why gravity is harder to excite and therefore weaker.

Gravity is governed by Einstein's field equations:

$$R_{\mu\nu} - \frac{1}{2} R g_{\mu\nu} = 8\pi G T_{\mu\nu} \tag{1}$$

Here, $R_{\mu\nu}$ is the Ricci tensor, derived from the Riemann curvature tensor. This Riemann tensor serves as an analog to the field strength tensor in Yang–Mills theory. For a non-abelian gauge field, the field strength tensor is given by:

$$F_{\mu\nu} = \partial_\mu A_\nu - \partial_\nu A_\mu + ig[A_\mu, A_\nu] \tag{2}$$

Similarly, the curvature of spacetime is encapsulated by the Riemann tensor:

$$R^\rho{}_{\sigma\mu\nu} = \partial_\mu \Gamma^\rho_{\nu\sigma} - \partial_\nu \Gamma^\rho_{\mu\sigma} + \Gamma^\rho_{\mu\lambda}\Gamma^\lambda_{\nu\sigma} - \Gamma^\rho_{\nu\lambda}\Gamma^\lambda_{\mu\sigma} \tag{3}$$

In this analogy, the gauge potential A_μ corresponds to the affine connection $\Gamma^\rho_{\mu\nu}$. In highly symmetric scenarios, such as diagonal metrics, the Riemann tensor can be rewritten in terms of the metric and its derivatives, replacing the connection with direct expressions involving the metric in a bold sense as:

$$R_{\rho\sigma\mu\nu} \approx \partial\partial g - \partial\partial g + \partial g\, \partial g - \partial g\, \partial g \tag{4}$$

This symbolic expression shows that the curvature tensor can be written as a polynomial involving first and second derivatives of the metric, particularly in symmetric configurations. We have not included index explicitly because it does not matter for our discussion here.

From this curvature, we can derive the relative acceleration between nearby free-falling particles using the geodesic deviation equation.The tidal tensor (or geodesic deviation) is an indirect but fundamental measure of gravity's effect:

$$a^{\mu} = -R^{\mu}{}_{\nu\rho\sigma} u^{\nu} \xi^{\rho} u^{\sigma} \tag{5}$$

Multiplying this acceleration by mass gives the gravitational force four-vector:

$$f^{\mu} = m\, a^{\mu} = -m\, R^{\mu}{}_{\nu\rho\sigma} u^{\nu} \xi^{\rho} u^{\sigma} \tag{6}$$

This expression yields a force vector with units of newtons—identical to the units of the electromagnetic force four-vector, which is given by:

$$f^{\mu} = q\, F^{\mu}{}_{\nu} u^{\nu} \tag{7}$$

These two expressions allow us to make a meaningful common baseline. From this formal structure we can derive that, the energy required to generate a gravitational field is vastly greater than that required for an electromagnetic field:

$$E_{\text{Gravity}} \gg E_{\text{EM}}$$

It suggests for same energy you can produce huge spin 1 field(Electromagnetic field)compared to spin 2 field(Spacetime). This is one of the reason gravitons are harder to produce than photons. This inequality also implies it requires huge mass energy to produce measurable spacetime excitations because it is not a field similar to gauge fields. This leads to another important distinction that gravity couples to an external, physical field—spacetime—while gauge fields couple to internal symmetry structures. If gravity is shown to exhibit quantum superposition (a hallmark of quantum systems), then the spacetime diffeomorphism symmetry and internal gauge symmetries might be unified within a larger, more fundamental symmetry group:

$$\text{Diff}(M) \times SU(3) \times SU(2) \times U(1) \subset \mathcal{G}_{\text{unified}} \tag{8}$$

This expression suggests that both external (gravitational) and internal (gauge) symmetries could emerge from a deeper unifying structure in theoretical physics, such as string theory or a quantum gravity framework.

4 Strength at Cosmic Scales

A natural question follows: Why does gravity become the dominant force at cosmic scales if it is so weak at microscopic scales?

The answer lies in the structure and nonlinear nature of spacetime curvature. In weak field regime explanation, gravity has no negative mass like electromagnetism has positive and negative charges that can cancel out which cause gravitational effects to accumulate. But in strong fields, as equation (3) shows, the Riemann tensor includes terms quadratic in the connection (or derivatives of the metric), making it a highly nonlinear object. In contrast, abelian gauge theories such as electromagnetism are linear.

According to equation (1), the curvature of spacetime grows nonlinearly with the energy–momentum tensor. Thus, even small increases in energy density can lead to disproportionately large increases in spacetime curvature.

At cosmic scales, where the energy–momentum content becomes massive (e.g., galaxies, black holes), these nonlinear effects accumulate. As a result, gravity surpasses the other fundamental forces in strength, despite its relative weakness at quantum scales.

5 Conclusion

The observed weakness of gravity relative to the other fundamental forces is not merely a numerical disparity—it arises from profound differences in the nature of how each force interacts with the physical world. While gauge forces act within internal symmetry spaces and are easily excited at quantum scales, gravity emerges from the curvature of spacetime itself, making it inherently more rigid and difficult to manipulate.

Through the comparison of Einstein's equations and Yang–Mills theory, we established a structural analogy between gravitational curvature and gauge field strength, illustrating that the potential (connection) plays a similar role in both frameworks. However, the geometric stiffness of spacetime means that the energy required to produce measurable gravitational effects is substantially greater than for gauge interactions, explaining gravity's apparent weakness at microscopic scales.

Nevertheless, due to absence of negative mass and the nonlinear nature of spacetime curvature, gravity's strength increases rapidly with energy–momentum, eventually dominating at large, cosmic scales. This dual behavior suggests that gravity is not intrinsically weak—it is simply less responsive at low energies.

Finally, the possibility of a unified framework encompassing both diffeomorphism invariance and internal gauge symmetries points toward a deeper underlying theory, potentially linking general relativity and quantum field theory within a common symmetry structure. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9]

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