A Thermodynamic Interpretation of the Vacuum Catastrophe via a Λ-Selected Quantum Scale

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Abstract

Cosmological observations require a small, positive cosmological constant Λ, whereas conventional quantum field theory predicts a vacuum energy density exceeding the observed value by many orders of magnitude. We demonstrate that this discrepancy—the vacuum catastrophe—may be traced to treating spacetime as a mechanically infinite system, while a positive Λ implies a vacuum with finite entropy governed by horizon thermodynamics. Building on Jacobson's thermodynamic interpretation of the Einstein equations, and treating de Sitter space as a genuine thermodynamic system, we derive the observed vacuum energy density both from horizon entropy via the Clausius relation and independently from a curvature–regulated zero–point spectrum. The agreement of these two derivations selects a physically meaningful quantum scale constructed from G, $\hbar$, c, and Λ, and renders the vacuum energy finite and radiatively stable without requiring fine tuning. Within this framework, gravity may be interpreted as a thermodynamic response of a finite–entropy vacuum, and both Newton's constant and the Principle of Equivalence arise as macroscopic consequences of this structure rather than as independent postulates. We further show that the Planck system, while mechanically complete, is thermodynamically incomplete in the presence of cosmological horizons, attaining thermodynamic closure only when Λ is included. The resulting Λ–framework provides a thermodynamic completion of natural units and a unified description of the quantum and cosmological vacua.

1 Introduction

Observations of distant Type Ia supernovae, baryon acoustic oscillations, and the cosmic microwave background establish with high confidence that the expansion of the Universe is accelerating [1–3]. Within the standard FLRW framework, this behaviour is described with remarkable empirical success by the ΛCDM concordance model, in which a positive cosmological constant Λ dominates the late–time dynamics of the Universe (Figure 1) [4, 5].

In this description, Λ is interpreted as a constant vacuum energy density [6],

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}, \tag{1.1}$$

whose inclusion is essential for consistency with current cosmological data [7].

Despite this observational success, the theoretical status of Λ remains unsettled. In semiclassical gravity, Eq. (1.1) is commonly identified with the energy density of the quantum vacuum. However, standard quantum field theory formulated in flat spacetime predicts a zero–point energy density exceeding the observed value by approximately 10^{120} orders of magnitude [5, 8]. This discrepancy—often termed the vacuum catastrophe—represents one of the most severe and persistent tensions between quantum theory and gravitation. Its longevity suggests that the difficulty may not lie in the detailed calculation of vacuum fluctuations, but in the conceptual framework used to relate them to spacetime dynamics in a Universe with $\Lambda > 0$.

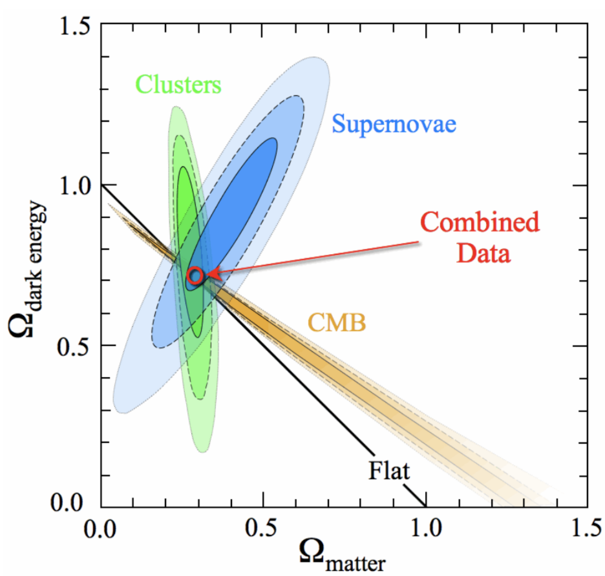


Figure 1: Observational foundations of cosmic acceleration. Distance–redshift data from Type Ia supernovae, BAO measurements, and the CMB jointly support an accelerating universe consistent with a positive cosmological constant [1–3].

A crucial point, often implicit in discussions of the vacuum catastrophe, concerns the choice of physical scale used to characterise quantum vacuum fluctuations. Standard estimates typically adopt the Planck scale—constructed solely from $(G, \hbar, c)$—as a natural ultraviolet cutoff (Figure 2) [5, 8]. This choice is appropriate for a hypothetical Minkowski spacetime with $\Lambda = 0$:

a vacuum that is cold, empty, and lacks a causal horizon. It does not, however, correspond to the accelerating Universe inferred from observation.

In a spacetime with $\Lambda > 0$, the relevant vacuum is instead the de Sitter vacuum, which is characterised by a cosmological event horizon of radius $R_\Lambda = (\Lambda/3)^{-1/2}$, an associated Gibbons–Hawking temperature, and a finite horizon entropy [9, 10],

$$S_{\text{dS}} = \frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}. \tag{1.2}$$

The existence of this finite entropy implies a finite information capacity and therefore a finite number of independent vacuum degrees of freedom. Any consistent account of vacuum energy in a Universe with $\Lambda > 0$ must therefore incorporate the thermodynamic structure imposed by de Sitter horizons, rather than relying on ultraviolet prescriptions inherited from flat spacetime.

$$L_P = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{c^3}\right)^{1/2}$$

$$t_P = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{c^5}\right)^{1/2}$$

$$M_P = \left(\frac{\hbar c}{G}\right)^{1/2}$$

$$\Theta_P = \left(\frac{\hbar c^5}{k_B^2 G}\right)^{1/2}$$

Figure 2: The Planck scale, constructed from the mechanical constants $(G, \hbar, c)$ and therefore defined at the level of mass–length–time (MLT) units, leads to an ultraviolet mismatch underlying the vacuum catastrophe. The associated Planck temperature Θ_P enters only by adjoining Boltzmann's constant k_B and is not intrinsic to the mechanical unit system. This Planck-scale cutoff is appropriate only for a $\Lambda = 0$ Minkowski vacuum. When applied to a universe with $\Lambda > 0$, it overshoots the observed vacuum energy by more than 120 orders of magnitude [5].

Strong support for a thermodynamic interpretation of gravity was provided by Jacobson, who showed that the Einstein field equations can be derived from the Clausius relation $\delta Q = T\,\mathrm{d}S$ applied to local Rindler horizons [11]. In this approach, gravity emerges as an equation of state rather than a fundamental mechanical interaction (Figure 3). The cosmological constant, however, enters Jacobson's derivation only as an undetermined integration constant and, as Jacobson himself noted, "remains as enigmatic as ever." Thus, while the thermodynamic origin of the Einstein equations is clarified, the physical meaning of Λ is left unresolved.

The present work examines this gap from a global thermodynamic perspective. When the thermodynamic nature of spacetime is taken seriously at this level, the cosmological constant is no longer arbitrary but emerges as a quantum–thermodynamic parameter that fixes the maximum entropy of spacetime, thereby determining the admissible microscopic structure of the vacuum.

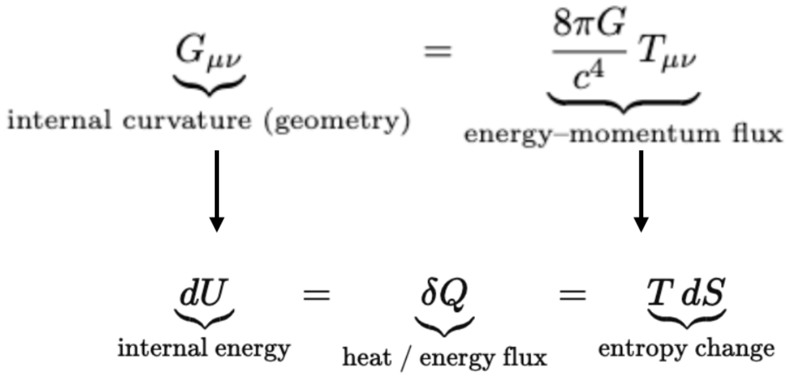


Figure 3: Thermodynamic interpretation of Einstein's equation. Jacobson showed that equating spacetime curvature with energy–momentum flux via the Clausius relation $\delta Q = T\,dS$, applied to local Rindler horizons, allows the Einstein field equations to be viewed as an equation of state [11].

A key observation underlying this result is that dimensional analysis alone cannot select a unique quantum scale when the four constants $(G, \hbar, c, \Lambda)$ are available [12]. Infinitely many length, time, and energy scales may be constructed from these constants. The emergence of a physically meaningful quantum scale therefore requires an additional physical principle beyond dimensional consistency.

In this work, the required selection principle arises from a condition of thermodynamic equilibrium in de Sitter spacetime. The outward zero–point pressure associated with quantum vacuum fluctuations must balance the inward curvature–induced pressure associated with Λ. Within this framework, this pressure–balance condition removes the arbitrariness inherent in purely dimensional constructions and selects a preferred characteristic wavelength and frequency for vacuum fluctuations.

Specifically, we show that this vacuum–curvature equilibrium condition singles out a unique quantum scale, shown schematically in Figure 4.

A central result of this work is that the observed vacuum energy density u_Λ admits two independent and mutually consistent derivations based on distinct physical principles. First, applying the Clausius relation to the de Sitter horizon yields directly the finite thermodynamic value given in Eq. (1.1) [9]. Second, an explicit quantum calculation shows that the same expression arises when the zero–point spectrum is regulated at the Λ–selected scale, such that the vacuum pressure equilibrates with the curvature–induced pressure associated with de Sitter spacetime. The agreement of these two derivations—one global and thermodynamic, the other local and quantum—provides strong evidence that the Λ–scale represents the physical saturation scale of vacuum fluctuations.

$$
\begin{aligned}
L_\Lambda &= \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} \\
t_\Lambda &= \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4} \\
M_\Lambda &= \left(\frac{\hbar c}{G\Lambda}\right)^{1/2} \\
\Theta_\Lambda &= \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{G k_B^4}\right)^{1/4}
\end{aligned}
$$

Figure 4: Thermodynamic selection of the Λ–scale from vacuum–curvature equilibrium. In a universe with $\Lambda > 0$, the outward pressure associated with quantum zero–point fluctuations is constrained by the inward curvature–induced pressure of de Sitter spacetime [9]. This condition of thermodynamic equilibrium uniquely selects a characteristic quantum scale, expressed here through the Λ–based length, time, mass, and temperature. The inclusion of Λ ensures that these base units intrinsically encode the thermodynamic structure of spacetime through the presence of a cosmological horizon. The result is a physical saturation scale for vacuum fluctuations, replacing the ad hoc Planck cutoff with a horizon–selected quantum scale.

To make this correspondence explicit, we formulate a statistical description of the vacuum in which the zero–point spectrum is geometrically regulated in a manner consistent with the finite entropy of de Sitter spacetime [13]. Adopting a de Sitter–invariant quantum vacuum as the reference state ensures consistency with quantum field theory in curved spacetime [14], while replacing the unphysical Planck cutoff with a thermodynamically motivated Λ–scale.

Within this Λ–thermodynamic framework, the Planck scale plays no fundamental ultraviolet role. The combination $c^3/(G\hbar)$ survives only as a quantum of entropy, while the total entropy budget of spacetime is fixed by the de Sitter horizon. This motivates the introduction of a dimensionless gravitational constant,

$$
\alpha_\Lambda \equiv \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{1.3}
$$

which we refer to as the gravitational fine–structure constant. This quantity plays a role analogous to the electromagnetic fine–structure constant, but arises only once the cosmological constant is recognised as a fundamental thermodynamic parameter. The historical origin and structural interpretation of α_Λ are discussed in Appendix A.

Just as α_E encodes the strength of electromagnetic interactions in dimensionless form, α_Λ encodes the coupling between quantum vacuum fluctuations and spacetime curvature. Equivalently, it may be interpreted as the maximum entropy of de Sitter spacetime expressed in Planck units. The physical implications of this invariant are developed in later sections.

An important consequence of this framework is that it connects cosmological vacuum physics with laboratory phenomena. If the Λ–scale governs the structure of the physical vacuum, then it must also manifest in situations where vacuum fluctuations are probed under controlled boundary conditions. In particular, the Casimir effect—long regarded as the most direct experimental evidence for quantum zero–point energy—provides a natural arena in which the Λ–regulated vacuum may be tested [15, 16]. Within the present framework, Casimir phenomena are not independent curiosities but manifestations of the same vacuum structure that underlies cosmic acceleration. Precision measurements of Casimir forces therefore offer a potential laboratory probe of the Λ–selected vacuum, bridging cosmology and experiment.

Contributions of this work

The principal conceptual and technical contributions of this work may be summarised as follows:

- We identify the conceptual origin of the vacuum catastrophe as the inappropriate application of the Planck scale to a Universe with $\Lambda > 0$, and show that the physically relevant vacuum is the finite–entropy de Sitter vacuum.
- We show that the vacuum catastrophe is resolved when the quantum vacuum is treated as a thermodynamic system subject to a finite de Sitter entropy bound, eliminating both the ultraviolet divergence and the radiative instability of the vacuum energy density.
- We show that dimensional analysis alone cannot determine a unique quantum vacuum scale in the presence of $(G, \hbar, c, \Lambda)$, and that a physical vacuum–curvature equilibrium condition uniquely selects the Λ–scale.
- We derive the vacuum energy density

  $$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}, \tag{1.4}$$

  independently from horizon thermodynamics and from a curvature–regulated zero–point spectrum.
- We introduce a Λ–regularised vacuum spectrum consistent with the finite entropy of de Sitter spacetime and demonstrate its radiative stability.
- We identify the gravitational fine–structure constant $\alpha_\Lambda = c^3/(G\hbar\Lambda)$ as an unavoidable dimensionless invariant once Λ is treated thermodynamically, resolving the long–standing concern regarding the logical unity between G and Λ first articulated by Einstein.
- We show that Newton's constant and the Principle of Equivalence emerge as macroscopic consequences of spacetime thermodynamics when the vacuum is treated as a finite–entropy system, rather than as independent postulates.
- We establish cross–domain consistency of the Λ–scale across Casimir phenomena, quantum gases, force quanta, and electromagnetic energy flux, thereby identifying potential laboratory probes of the Λ–regulated vacuum.
- We propose a shift from a Planck–mechanical ontology to a Λ–thermodynamic ontology, in which the cosmological constant completes rather than complicates gravitational physics by revealing a physically selected quantum scale.

Notation and conventions

Throughout this work we distinguish carefully between dynamical variables and fundamental scale quantities. Uppercase symbols are reserved for natural–unit scales constructed from fundamental constants, while lowercase symbols denote dynamical or kinematical variables.

In particular, length, time, and mass scales are written as L_P, t_P, and M_P for Planck units, and as L_Λ, t_Λ, and M_Λ for Λ–units. Lowercase symbols r, t, and m denote spatial position, time, and particle mass, respectively. Time scales are written with lowercase t to avoid conflict with the standard thermodynamic use of T for temperature.

Temperatures are denoted exclusively by uppercase T or by the symbol Θ. In particular, Θ_Λ denotes the Λ–selected vacuum temperature scale, while T_{dS} denotes the de Sitter (Gibbons–Hawking) horizon temperature.

The vacuum energy density fixed by spacetime curvature is denoted by u_Λ, defined implicitly by

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{1.5}$$

It is treated as a fundamental reference scale and is not repeatedly expanded unless required for derivational clarity.

Dimensionless coupling constants are written explicitly to avoid ambiguity: α_E denotes the electromagnetic fine–structure constant, while $\alpha_\Lambda = c^3/(G\hbar\Lambda)$ denotes the gravitational fine–structure constant. Acronyms are defined on first use; in particular, QFT denotes quantum field theory and ZPE denotes zero–point energy. General–relativistic quantities are referred to explicitly rather than abbreviated.

2 Thermodynamic derivation of the vacuum energy

In this section we derive the vacuum energy density u_Λ using horizon thermodynamics alone, without reference to microscopic quantum fields.

2.1 Gravity as emergent thermodynamics

Our starting point is the now–well–developed paradigm in which gravity and spacetime are viewed as emergent thermodynamic phenomena [11]. Jacobson's seminal 1995 result showed that the Einstein field equations can be derived from the Clausius relation

$$\delta Q = T\,\mathrm{d}S, \tag{2.1}$$

applied not to a global horizon, but to local Rindler horizons [11] associated with all timelike observers. In this picture the Einstein tensor $G_{\mu\nu}$ plays the role of an *equation of state* for an underlying spacetime medium whose microscopic degrees of freedom obey the first law of thermodynamics.

Subsequent work has reinforced this thermodynamic viewpoint. Verlinde recast gravity as an entropic force [17] arising from information gradients on holographic screens, while Padmanabhan developed a surface–bulk description [18] in which cosmic expansion reflects an imbalance between horizon and bulk degrees of freedom. In all of these approaches, thermodynamic quantities such as temperature, entropy and heat flux acquire a direct geometric meaning through their association with causal horizons [18].

2.2 De Sitter horizon data and entropy bound

We now specialise to de Sitter spacetime, the maximally symmetric solution of Einstein's equations with positive cosmological constant Λ [9]. In static coordinates the line element may be written as

$$\mathrm{d}s^2 = -\left(1 - \tfrac{\Lambda r^2}{3}\right)c^2\mathrm{d}t^2 + \left(1 - \tfrac{\Lambda r^2}{3}\right)^{-1}\mathrm{d}r^2 + r^2\mathrm{d}\Omega_2^2. \tag{2.2}$$

This geometry contains a cosmological horizon at radius [9],

$$R_\Lambda = \sqrt{\frac{3}{\Lambda}}, \tag{2.3}$$

which encloses the causal domain of a comoving observer.

The horizon carries a Gibbons–Hawking temperature and a Bekenstein–Hawking entropy [9, 19],

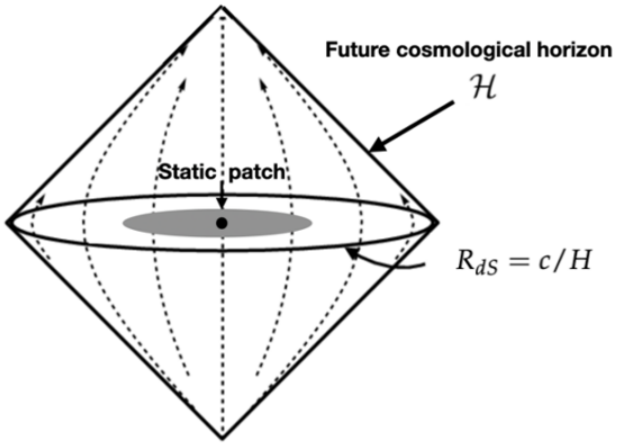
$$T_\Lambda = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_B}\sqrt{\frac{\Lambda}{3}}, \qquad S_{\mathrm{dS}} = \frac{k_B A}{4G\hbar/c^3} = \frac{\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{2.4}$$

where $A = 4\pi R_\Lambda^2$ is the area of the cosmological horizon. The second expression shows that de Sitter space possesses a *maximum* entropy

$$S_{\max} = S_{\mathrm{dS}} = 3\pi\alpha_\Lambda, \tag{2.5}$$

which fixes the total information content of our causal patch [9]. Any microscopic account of vacuum energy must respect this finite entropy bound [19]: the number of independent vacuum degrees of freedom inside the horizon cannot exceed the Bekenstein–Hawking limit.

(a) de Sitter causal diamond and observer-independent horizon



(b) de Sitter horizon as a universal entropy bound

$$R_{\rm dS} = \sqrt{\frac{3}{\Lambda}}, \quad A_{\rm dS} = \frac{12\pi}{\Lambda}$$

$$T_{\rm GH} = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_{\rm B} R_{\rm dS}} = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_{\rm B}}\sqrt{\frac{\Lambda}{3}}$$

$$S_{\rm dS} = \frac{k_{\rm B} c^3 A}{4G\hbar} = \frac{3\pi k_{\rm B} c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda} = 3\pi k_{\rm B}\,\alpha_\Lambda$$

$$\alpha_\Lambda \equiv \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}$$

Figure 5: (a) De Sitter causal diamond and observer–independent cosmological horizon. The shaded region represents the static patch accessible to a comoving observer, bounded by the future event horizon at radius $R_{\rm dS}$ [9]. Note that the symbol $\mathcal{H}$ denotes the cosmological event horizon, distinct from the Hubble parameter H; in pure de Sitter spacetime these are related by $R_{\rm dS} = c/H$ but represent conceptually different quantities. (b) De Sitter horizon as a universal entropy bound. The cosmological horizon at radius $R_{\rm dS}$ carries a Gibbons–Hawking temperature $T_{\rm GH}$ and a finite entropy $S_{\rm dS}$ [9, 19]. The resulting entropy may be written equivalently in terms of the horizon area, the cosmological constant, or the gravitational fine–structure constant α_Λ. This expresses the finite information capacity of de Sitter spacetime and establishes α_Λ as the dimensionless measure of the maximum entropy allowed by the vacuum.

2.3 Completing the first law: Λ as a pressure term

Jacobson's original derivation of the Einstein equation used only the heat term $\delta Q = T\,\mathrm{d}S$ and neglected mechanical work [11]. As a result the cosmological constant appears only as an undetermined integration constant and "remains as enigmatic as ever" [11]. To remove this ambiguity we restore the *full* first law,

$$\mathrm{d}U = \delta Q + \delta W = T\,\mathrm{d}S - p\,\mathrm{d}V, \tag{2.6}$$

and apply it to a horizon–bearing spacetime.

In de Sitter space the vacuum itself carries a pressure [5]. The effective stress–energy tensor [5] of a cosmological constant term is

$$T^{(\Lambda)}_{\mu\nu} = -\frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}\, g_{\mu\nu} \equiv -u_\Lambda\, g_{\mu\nu}, \tag{2.7}$$

so that in perfect–fluid form the vacuum energy density and pressure are

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}, \qquad p_\Lambda = -u_\Lambda. \tag{2.8}$$

The associated work term in (2.6) is therefore

$$\delta W = -p_\Lambda\,\mathrm{d}V = +\frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}\,\mathrm{d}V. \tag{2.9}$$

Including this work term restores the exact correspondence between thermal bookkeeping and geometric dynamics:

$$\text{First law:}\quad \mathrm{d}U = \underbrace{T\,\mathrm{d}S}_{\text{heat/entropy flux}} - \underbrace{p\,\mathrm{d}V}_{\text{mechanical work}}, \tag{2.10}$$

$$\text{Einstein eq.:}\quad G_{\mu\nu} = \underbrace{\frac{8\pi G}{c^4}T_{\mu\nu}}_{\text{energy–momentum flux}} - \underbrace{\Lambda g_{\mu\nu}}_{\text{vacuum work term}}. \tag{2.11}$$

Identifying $\delta Q \leftrightarrow (8\pi G/c^4)\,T_{\mu\nu}$ and $\delta W \leftrightarrow -\Lambda g_{\mu\nu}$, we can read the Einstein equation with Λ

$$G_{\mu\nu} + \Lambda g_{\mu\nu} = \frac{8\pi G}{c^4}T_{\mu\nu} \tag{2.12}$$

as the *equation of state* of a horizon–bearing spacetime. The extra term $\Lambda g_{\mu\nu}$ is no longer an optional add–on; it represents the pressure–volume contribution required to complete the thermodynamic identity.

In this thermodynamic formulation:

- The Einstein tensor $G_{\mu\nu}$ represents the internal energy density stored in spacetime curvature.
- The matter term $(8\pi G/c^4)\,T_{\mu\nu}$ represents the energy flux across a causal horizon and, via $\delta S = \delta Q/T$, the associated entropy flow.
- The cosmological constant term $\Lambda g_{\mu\nu}$ represents the mechanical work contribution $-p_\Lambda\,\mathrm{d}V$ arising from the uniform vacuum pressure.

Once the first law is written in the form (2.6), the cosmological constant is fixed by thermodynamic consistency rather than by mathematical freedom.

2.4 Deriving the vacuum energy density

We now show explicitly how the de Sitter horizon data in Fig. 5, together with the first law, determine the vacuum energy density u_Λ.

Consider a comoving observer at the centre of the causal domain. The interior region of radius R_Λ has volume

$$V_\Lambda = \frac{4\pi}{3} R_\Lambda^3, \tag{2.13}$$

and we assume that the vacuum energy within this volume is homogeneous,

$$U_\Lambda = u_\Lambda V_\Lambda. \tag{2.14}$$

For a small virtual change in Λ the horizon radius, entropy and volume all vary. Applying the first law (2.6) with $T = T_\Lambda$ and $p = p_\Lambda$ gives

$$\mathrm{d}U_\Lambda = T_\Lambda \, \mathrm{d}S_{\mathrm{dS}} - p_\Lambda \, \mathrm{d}V_\Lambda. \tag{2.15}$$

2.5 Setting $dU_\Lambda = 0$ is the correct thermodynamic statement for de Sitter spacetime

A static patch of de Sitter spacetime is a *self-contained thermodynamic system* [9]. Its defining properties are given in Fig. 5. There are *no fluxes of matter or radiation* crossing the horizon of a pure de Sitter patch [9]. Everything outside the horizon is causally inaccessible, and the interior contains no matter fields whose energy could vary. Thus the *total internal energy* of the patch is simply

$$U_\Lambda = u_\Lambda \, V, \tag{2.16}$$

and this quantity is constant under an infinitesimal deformation of Λ (or equivalently of R_Λ), provided the system remains in stationary equilibrium.

This is why

$$dU_\Lambda = 0 \tag{2.17}$$

is *not* an assumption but the defining thermodynamic property of a stationary de Sitter state. It is the precise analogue of setting $dU = 0$ for a box of gas in thermal equilibrium whose boundaries are deformed quasistatically while no heat or particles enter or leave.

2.6 Reduction of the first law to $T_\Lambda \, dS_{\mathrm{dS}} = p_\Lambda \, dV$

Imposing again the stationary de Sitter condition $dU = 0$, the first law (2.6) reduces to

$$T_\Lambda \, dS_{\mathrm{dS}} = p_\Lambda \, dV. \tag{2.18}$$

This identity is the central dynamical statement underlying the derivation in this section.

It expresses the fact that the expansion of the de Sitter horizon is entirely driven by the *vacuum work term* $p_\Lambda dV$, and the associated entropy change of the horizon saturates the Clausius relation.

2.7 Horizon Energy E

To obtain the total energy content E of the de Sitter universe, we now explicitly evaluate the entropy derived above:

$$S = \frac{k_B c^3 A}{4G\hbar}, \quad A = 4\pi R^2, \quad R = \sqrt{\frac{3}{\Lambda}}. \tag{2.19}$$

Substituting the de Sitter radius into this expression:

$$A = 4\pi \left(\frac{3}{\Lambda}\right) = \frac{12\pi}{\Lambda} \tag{2.20}$$

$$S = \frac{k_B c^3}{4G\hbar} \cdot \frac{12\pi}{\Lambda} = \frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda} \tag{2.21}$$

Note that Eq.(2.21) has the gravitational fine structure defined in Eq.(1.3) embedded within it, making this a maximum bound on entropy. Next, we use the Gibbons–Hawking temperature [9]:

$$T = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_B R} = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_B} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{\Lambda}{3}}. \tag{2.22}$$

Combining:

$$E = TS = \left(\frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_B}\sqrt{\frac{\Lambda}{3}}\right)\left(\frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}\right) = \frac{3}{2}\frac{c^4}{G} \cdot \frac{1}{\sqrt{3\Lambda}} \tag{2.23}$$

2.8 Horizon Volume and Energy Density

The spatial volume enclosed by the de Sitter horizon is:

$$V = \frac{4\pi}{3} R^3 = \frac{4\pi}{3}\left(\frac{3}{\Lambda}\right)^{3/2}. \tag{2.24}$$

The vacuum energy density is then:

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{E}{V} = \left(\frac{3c^4}{2G} \cdot \frac{1}{\sqrt{3\Lambda}}\right) \Big/ \left(\frac{4\pi}{3}\left(\frac{3}{\Lambda}\right)^{3/2}\right) \tag{2.25}$$

Simplifying:

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{3c^4}{2G} \cdot \frac{1}{\sqrt{3\Lambda}} \cdot \frac{3}{4\pi} \cdot \left(\frac{\Lambda}{3}\right)^{3/2} = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{2.26}$$

This is the thermodynamic origin of the cosmological constant.

In other words, once the Einstein equation is interpreted as an equation of state and the horizon work term is properly included, the cosmological constant is no longer a free parameter. The thermodynamic properties of the de Sitter horizon fix a unique, finite vacuum energy density in Eq. 2.26 which we will recover again, from an independent quantum–statistical perspective, in Section 3.

In conventional general relativity, Eq. (2.26) enters only as a dimensional identification within the Einstein field equations. Here, by contrast, the observed vacuum energy density is derived from first principles by applying thermodynamics to the geometry of de Sitter spacetime.

2.9 A Thermodynamic Interpretation of the Cosmological Constant

The thermodynamic derivation carried out in this section transforms the cosmological constant from an enigmatic parameter into a necessary thermodynamic quantity. By enforcing the first law, $dU = 0$ for a stationary de Sitter patch, we showed that the horizon satisfies the balance relation

$$T_\Lambda \, dS_{\mathrm{dS}} = p_\Lambda \, dV_\Lambda, \tag{2.27}$$

and that substituting the geometric expressions for $(T_\Lambda,\, S_{\mathrm{dS}},\, V_\Lambda)$ yields uniquely the vacuum energy density u_Λ without appealing to microscopic fields, ultraviolet physics, or any cancellation mechanism. The smallness of u_Λ is thus not a mystery: it is the unavoidable consequence of the enormous but *finite* de Sitter entropy $S_\Lambda \propto 1/\Lambda$, which fixes the number of available microstates inside a cosmic causal patch.

This result also clarifies and completes a conceptual omission in Jacobson's thermodynamic derivation of Einstein's equation [11]. Jacobson assumed—as an input—a universal entropy density for local Rindler horizons, and noted that the cosmological constant enters the field equations as an undetermined integration constant. In the present work, the situation is reversed: by imposing the global entropy bound associated with the de Sitter horizon, the value of Λ is no longer a free addition to the Einstein equation. It is fixed by the requirement that the thermodynamic bookkeeping of spacetime be internally consistent. In this sense, Λ is not a parameter that may be inserted "by hand" or removed at whim; it is a thermodynamic inevitability of a spacetime endowed with a finite information capacity.

In this thermodynamic interpretation, Λ is more naturally associated with a *maximum entropy* than with a small vacuum energy density. The enormous number

$$S_{max} \sim \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda} \sim 10^{120} \tag{2.28}$$

is therefore not a fine tuning, but the maximal number of microstates, $W_\Lambda = \exp(S_\Lambda/k_B)$, allowed within our cosmological horizon. This perspective turns the traditional formulation of the cosmological constant problem on its head: one should focus not on the small value of u_Λ, but on the large value of S_Λ, which is the more fundamental thermodynamic quantity.

Finally, this section reveals a further structural feature of the theory: the emergence of a *dimensionless gravitational fine–structure constant*

$$\alpha_\Lambda = \frac{R_\Lambda^2}{L_P^2} = \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{2.29}$$

obtained as the ratio of the classical area of the de Sitter horizon to the Planck area. Just as the electromagnetic fine–structure constant quantifies the dimensionless scale at which quantum action constrains classical electrodynamics, the quantity α_Λ characterises the coupling between quantum geometric degrees of freedom and the thermodynamic horizon, encoding the finite information capacity of spacetime.

Although implicit in the standard expressions for de Sitter entropy, its physical significance has not been widely emphasised (See Appendix A for historical and structural context).

In summary, Section 2 resolves the thermodynamic side of the cosmological constant problem: Λ is fixed not by microscopic physics or renormalisation ambiguities, but by the thermodynamic requirement that a finite causal horizon supports a finite entropy.

This prepares the way for Section 3, where we show that zero–point fluctuations in quantum field theory saturate exactly this thermodynamic bound, providing an independent quantum derivation of the same vacuum energy density u_Λ.

3 Quantum Derivation of the de Sitter Vacuum Energy Density

3.1 Conceptual Overview: Pressure Balance, Horizon Regulation, and the Emergence of a Coherence Scale

Section 2 established the vacuum energy density u_Λ from the first law of de Sitter horizon thermodynamics. We now consider the vacuum-curvature equilibrium in relation to the quantum ZPE and show that *the same value* emerges from an entirely independent quantum–statistical analysis of zero–point fluctuations. This section therefore provides the statistical counterpart to the preceding thermodynamic derivation: the de Sitter vacuum behaves as a regulated quantum ensemble whose microscopic fluctuations saturate the same entropy bound that fixes u_Λ.

The underlying logic mirrors that of classical kinetic theory. A gas confined to a box reaches equilibrium when the outward particle pressure is balanced by the inward force exerted by the walls. This balance selects a characteristic correlation length—the mean free path—and an associated energy scale. An analogous structure arises in the quantum vacuum of de Sitter spacetime. Here, the outward pressure generated by zero–point fluctuations is balanced by an inward geometric pressure associated with positive curvature.

The causal horizon provides the physical boundary within which this equilibrium is established. This balance selects a unique resonant mode of the vacuum, characterised by a frequency ω_Λ whose zero–point energy density matches the gravitational vacuum energy density implied by general relativity. This equilibrium simultaneously identifies a natural ultraviolet saturation scale and fixes the physical renormalisation point for the quantum vacuum energy. See Figure. 6.

3.2 The horizon as a physical regulator.

In conventional quantum field theory the vacuum energy is written schematically as [5],

$$u_{\rm vac}^{(\rm phys)} = u_{\rm vac}^{(\rm bare)} + u_{\rm vac}^{(\rm div)}, \tag{3.1}$$

and both the ultraviolet regulator and the renormalisation scale must be introduced by hand [5]. Whether one chooses a particle mass, a momentum cutoff, or the Planck scale [5], the resulting vacuum energy remains arbitrary and grossly inconsistent with observation [20]. In de Sitter space, by contrast, the causal horizon imposes a physical limitation on the number of

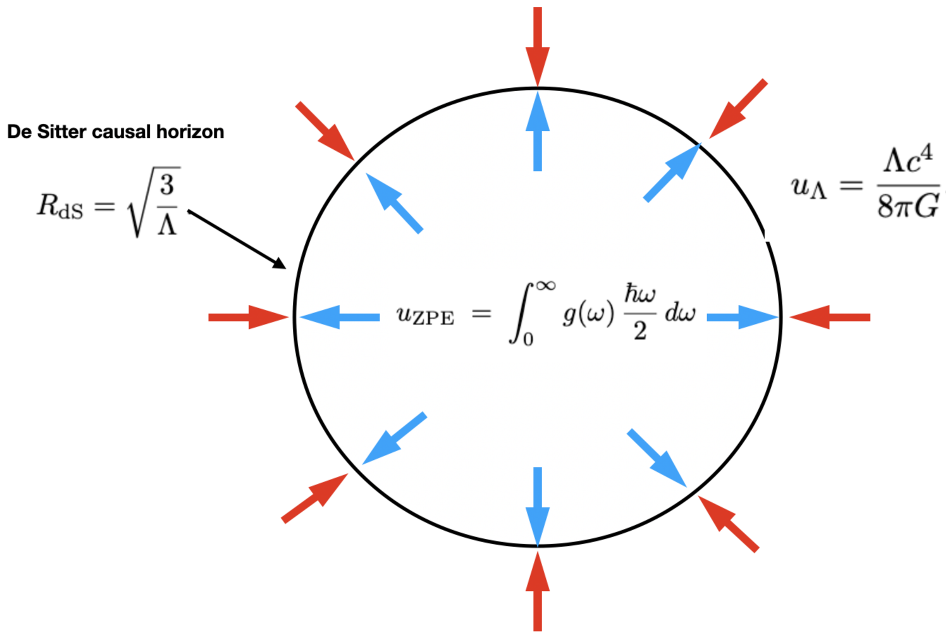


Figure 6: Balance of zero–point vacuum pressure and gravitational pressure in de Sitter spacetime, $u_{ZPE} = u_\Lambda$. Zero–point fluctuations contribute a physically finite outward pressure associated with the integral $u_{\rm ZPE} = \int_0^\infty g(\omega)\,(\hbar\omega/2)\,d\omega$ [14], while the inward geometric pressure is fixed by the de Sitter vacuum energy density $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$ [9]. The causal horizon at radius $R_{\rm dS} = \sqrt{3/\Lambda}$ defines the thermodynamic boundary within which this vacuum–curvature equilibrium is established.

independent degrees of freedom. This geometric constraint regulates the ultraviolet behaviour of the vacuum in the same way that the walls of a box regulate the kinetic degrees of freedom of a classical gas.

3.3 Pressure Balance and the Emergence of the Λ–Coherence Scale

The thermodynamic analysis of Section 2 yields the observed vacuum energy density

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{3.2}$$

A quantum fluctuation with characteristic wavelength λ_C carries energy $E \sim hc/\lambda_C$ and occupies a phase–space cell of volume λ_C^3, giving an energy density estimate

$$u_{\rm ZPE} \sim \frac{hc}{\lambda_C^4}. \tag{3.3}$$

Equating this with u_Λ—the essence of the pressure balance—gives

$$\frac{hc}{\lambda_C^4} \sim \frac{\Lambda c^4}{G}. \tag{3.4}$$

Solving for the wavelength yields a unique characteristic scale,

$$\lambda_C \sim \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} \equiv L_\Lambda. \tag{3.5}$$

The equilibrium of zero–point pressure with geometric curvature therefore selects a coherence length L_Λ: the wavelength of the resonant vacuum fluctuation whose energy density saturates the thermodynamic bound. This dimensional equilibrium already captures the essential physics.

De Sitter space thus acts as a resonant cavity for quantum fluctuations. The coherence length L_Λ is selected not by dimensional analysis alone, but by the requirement that zero–point pressure and geometric curvature be in thermodynamic and statistical equilibrium.

3.4 The Λ–Selected System of Natural Units

Once the coherence length L_Λ is fixed, an entire associated set of natural scales follows immediately. A fluctuation of wavelength L_Λ defines a characteristic time

$$t_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4} = \frac{L_\Lambda}{c}, \tag{3.6}$$

a corresponding mass scale

$$M_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda}{cG}\right)^{1/4} = \frac{\hbar}{c\,L_\Lambda}, \tag{3.7}$$

and an associated quantum of energy

$$E_\Lambda = M_\Lambda c^2 = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{G}\right)^{1/4} = \frac{\hbar c}{L_\Lambda}. \tag{3.8}$$

Associating this fluctuation energy with thermal energy $k_B\Theta$ further defines a natural quantum temperature,

$$\Theta_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{k_B^4 G}\right)^{1/4} = \frac{\hbar c}{k_B L_\Lambda}. \tag{3.9}$$

Taken together, the quartet

$$(L_\Lambda,\, t_\Lambda,\, M_\Lambda,\, \Theta_\Lambda) \tag{3.6}$$

constitutes a physically selected system of natural units. Unlike the Stoney or Planck constructions, these scales are not postulated algebraically but arise from the requirement that quantum fluctuations saturate the thermodynamic bound of de Sitter space. The Λ–scale therefore functions as a genuine quantum scale of the Universe: not an extremal limit, but the unique resonant scale at which vacuum fluctuations and horizon thermodynamics are in equilibrium. Its consequences for radiative stability and force structure are developed in Sections 4 and 5.

Why this perspective matters. This physical picture resolves several conceptual issues simultaneously. First, it gives the Λ–scale a concrete interpretation: L_Λ is the coherence or resonant length of the vacuum, selected dynamically rather than introduced as an abstract natural unit. Second, it identifies a renormalisation point fixed by spacetime geometry itself, rather than imposed by hand. Third, the large hierarchy between the Planck length and L_Λ is no longer arbitrary but follows from the requirement that a single quantum fluctuation saturates the thermodynamic vacuum energy density. In this sense the usual fine–tuning problem does not arise: the resonant wavelength L_Λ is fixed by equilibrium, not by a delicate cancellation.

Outline of the statistical derivation. We now develop the statistical mechanics of the de Sitter vacuum explicitly. Starting from the partition function of a quantum mode in a thermal de Sitter background, we convert the discrete mode sum into an integral over frequencies, introduce a curvature–dependent weighting function encoding the finite horizon entropy, and show that the resulting regulated spectrum integrates to a finite vacuum energy density,

$$u_{\mathrm{ZPE},\Lambda} = u_\Lambda \tag{3.7}$$

The vacuum–curvature equillibrium condition then explicitly becomes the point at which the geometric thermodynamic scale L_Λ coincides with the statistical resonance scale selected by the curvature–weighted spectrum.

3.5 Historical Context: Zero–Point Energy and the Failure of Flat–Space QFT

The cosmological constant problem has been recognised since the pioneering work of Zel'dovich [21] and Sakharov [22], who observed that a naive summation of zero–point energies of quantum fields yields a vacuum energy density vastly larger than that inferred from cosmology.

In flat Minkowski spacetime, a bosonic field with angular frequency $\omega = c|\mathbf{k}|$ contributes a zero–point energy $\frac{1}{2}\hbar\omega$, giving the spectral density [14],

$$\rho^{\mathrm{flat}}_{\mathrm{ZPE}}(\omega) = \frac{1}{2}\hbar\omega\, g(\omega) = \frac{\hbar\omega^3}{2\pi^2 c^3}. \tag{3.8}$$

The corresponding vacuum energy density,

$$u^{\mathrm{flat}}_{\mathrm{ZPE}} = \int_0^\infty \rho^{\mathrm{flat}}_{\mathrm{ZPE}}(\omega)\, d\omega, \tag{3.9}$$

diverges quartically [14]. Introducing a hard ultraviolet cutoff, for example at the Planck scale, yields the familiar "vacuum catastrophe" [20].

These divergences reflect structural assumptions intrinsic to flat–space quantum field theory: an infinite density of independent modes, the absence of an intrinsic ultraviolet scale, and renormalisation performed at an arbitrary reference scale μ. In a universe with $\Lambda > 0$, none of these assumptions remain valid. De Sitter spacetime possesses a finite temperature and entropy, implying a finite information capacity, and the vacuum mode spectrum must reflect this global thermodynamic structure.

3.6 Following Planck's method: infrared fidelity and ultraviolet suppression

The strategy adopted here parallels Planck's resolution of the ultraviolet catastrophe in black–body radiation [23]. Planck did not abandon the classical Rayleigh–Jeans behaviour at low frequencies [23],

$$u_{\mathrm{RJ}}(\nu, T) = \frac{8\pi\nu^2}{c^3} k_{\mathrm{B}} T, \tag{3.10}$$

but instead introduced a new constant of nature, $\hbar$, whose presence modifies the microscopic physics and enforces an exponential suppression at high frequencies. His key postulate was the quantisation of oscillator energies,

$$E_n = nh\nu, \qquad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots, \tag{3.11}$$

leading to the partition function [23],

$$Z(\beta) = \frac{1}{1 - e^{-h\nu/k_{\mathrm{B}}T}}, \tag{3.12}$$

and the mean oscillator energy

$$E(\nu, T) = -\frac{\partial}{\partial \beta} \ln Z = \frac{h\nu}{e^{h\nu/k_{\mathrm{B}}T} - 1}. \tag{3.13}$$

Multiplication by the density of states,

$$g(\nu)\, d\nu = \frac{8\pi\nu^2}{c^3}\, d\nu, \tag{3.14}$$

yields Planck's spectral law,

$$u_{\mathrm{Planck}}(\nu, T) = \frac{8\pi h\nu^3}{c^3} \frac{1}{e^{h\nu/k_{\mathrm{B}}T} - 1}. \tag{3.15}$$

The ultraviolet catastrophe was resolved not by imposing a cutoff, but by the introduction of a new constant that enforces statistical suppression through the Boltzmann factor.

An analogous strategy is adopted for the quantum vacuum. We retain the classically expected low–frequency behaviour of zero–point fluctuations embodied in Eq. 3.8, and introduce a curvature–dependent weighting function $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ that suppresses high–frequency modes. In the present context, the suppression scale is not arbitrary: it is set by the resonant coherence length L_Λ determined by the equilibrium between zero–point pressure and geometric curvature. The explicit construction of the corresponding curvature–weighted spectrum is carried out in the following subsection.

3.7 Why a curvature–dependent weighting $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ must appear

The introduction of a new physical scale necessarily modifies the vacuum spectrum. In a universe with a positive cosmological constant, the de Sitter horizon carries a finite entropy and therefore supports only a finite number of independent degrees of freedom.

Vacuum modes with frequencies $\omega \gg \omega_\Lambda$ correspond to wavelengths so short that they cannot be realised as independent excitations within this finite information capacity. Such modes must therefore be *suppressed*, rather than sharply removed.

The statistical analogue of Planck's Boltzmann factor is a curvature–dependent weighting function $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ multiplying the flat–space zero–point spectrum. Thermodynamic consistency requires that this function satisfy

- $f_\Lambda(\omega) \to 1$ for $\omega \ll \omega_\Lambda$, preserving the infrared ω^3 scaling;
- $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ decays rapidly for $\omega \gg \omega_\Lambda$, suppressing ultraviolet contributions;
- the scale ω_Λ is fixed by the finite entropy and information capacity of de Sitter space.

This structure ensures that the horizon does not impose a hard cutoff, which would merely define an effective field theory, but instead enforces the soft, thermodynamic suppression characteristic of an equilibrium system.

The resulting curvature–regularised spectrum may be represented schematically as

$$\rho_\Lambda(\omega) \;\propto\; \omega^3 \,\exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda}\right)^4\right], \tag{3.16}$$

which reproduces the flat–space behaviour at low frequencies and rapidly suppresses high–frequency modes. See Figure 7. The precise functional form is not fundamental; what matters is the emergence of a smooth suppression controlled by a physically selected scale. In the present case, this scale is fixed by the thermodynamic properties of the de Sitter horizon.

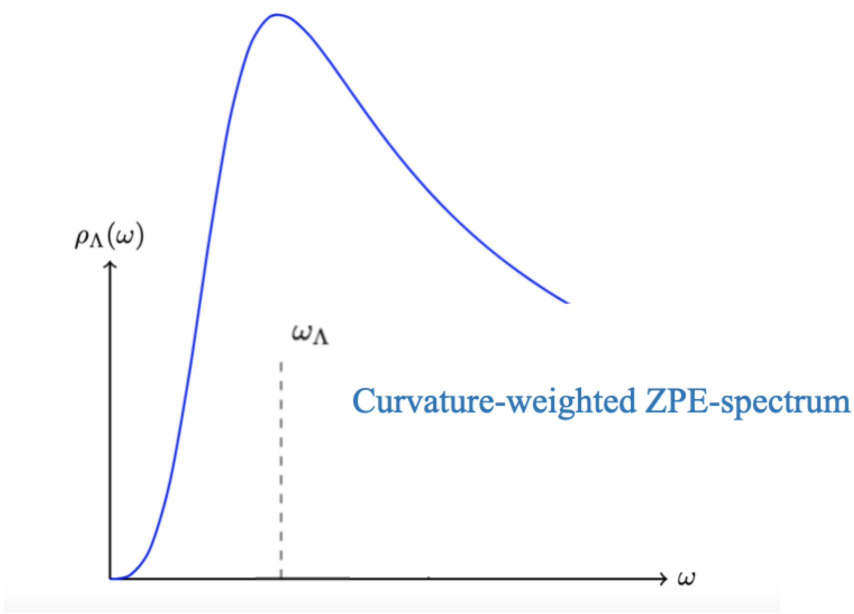


Figure 7: Curvature–regularised zero–point spectrum in de Sitter spacetime. At low frequencies the density reproduces the flat–space behaviour $\rho_\Lambda(\omega) \propto \omega^3$. Near the curvature–selected resonance scale ω_Λ the spectrum saturates, while modes with $\omega \gg \omega_\Lambda$ are smoothly and thermodynamically suppressed. The resulting curvature–weighted spectrum yields a finite integrated vacuum energy, fixed by the de Sitter entropy bound rather than by an imposed ultraviolet cut-off.

It is important to emphasise that no experiment probes a frequency–resolved spectrum of zero–point fluctuations. The vacuum does not radiate, and all empirical signatures of vacuum structure—including Casimir forces, Lamb shifts, and radiative corrections—depend only on *differences* in vacuum energy or loop effects, not on a spectral density itself. Consequently, the detailed shape of the regulator $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ is not observable.

The physically meaningful quantity is the integrated vacuum energy,

$$u_{\text{vac}} = \int_0^\infty \rho(\omega)\, d\omega, \tag{3.17}$$

which must reproduce the finite, thermodynamically fixed value

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{3.18}$$

Any smooth weighting function selected by the horizon scale,

$$f_\Lambda(\omega) \to 1 \quad (\omega \ll \omega_\Lambda), \qquad f_\Lambda(\omega) \to 0 \quad (\omega \gg \omega_\Lambda), \tag{3.19}$$

belongs to the same universality class and yields the same finite result. The illustrative curve shown in Figure. 7 should therefore be understood as schematic: it represents the Λ–weighted zero–point fluctuations in de Sitter spacetime whose *integrated* effect is uniquely fixed by horizon thermodynamics.

3.8 The Canonical Partition Function and Statistical Derivation

The analogy with Planck's derivation can now be made explicit [23]. In the blackbody problem, the electromagnetic field is decomposed into normal modes, each behaving as an independent quantum harmonic oscillator [23] whose thermal properties follow from its canonical partition function. The same construction applies to a quantum field in curved spacetime [14], with one crucial refinement: each mode carries a non–vanishing zero–point contribution.

For a single field mode of frequency ω, the energy spectrum is therefore

$$E_n = \hbar\omega\left(n + \tfrac{1}{2}\right), \tag{3.20}$$

the standard result for a quantum harmonic oscillator and the origin of zero–point fluctuations.

Because the de Sitter horizon acts as a thermal surface with temperature T_Λ, each mode must be placed in equilibrium with this background. Introducing $\beta_\Lambda = 1/(k_B T_\Lambda)$, the canonical partition function of a single mode is

$$Z_\omega = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} e^{-\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega(n+1/2)}. \tag{3.21}$$

This sum evaluates to the closed form

$$Z_\omega = \frac{e^{-\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega/2}}{1 - e^{-\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega}}, \qquad \beta_\Lambda = \frac{1}{k_B T_\Lambda}. \tag{3.22}$$

The full vacuum partition function is obtained by taking the product over all modes,

$$Z_\Lambda = \prod_{\mathbf{k}} Z_{\omega_{\mathbf{k}}} = \prod_k \frac{e^{-\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega_k/2}}{1 - e^{-\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega_k}}. \tag{3.23}$$

The associated internal energy follows from the standard thermodynamic identity

$$U_\Lambda = -\frac{\partial}{\partial \beta_\Lambda} \ln Z_\Lambda. \tag{3.24}$$

For a single mode this yields the mean energy

$$\langle E(\omega)\rangle = \frac{\hbar\omega}{2} + \frac{\hbar\omega}{e^{\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega} - 1}, \tag{3.25}$$

containing both the zero–point contribution and the thermal excitation term.

Using the density of states $g(\omega) = \omega^2/(\pi^2 c^3)$, defined in Eq. 3.8 the total vacuum energy becomes

$$U_\Lambda = \int_0^\infty \left(\frac{\hbar\omega}{2} + \frac{\hbar\omega}{e^{\beta_\Lambda \hbar\omega} - 1} \right) g(\omega)\, d\omega. \tag{3.26}$$

The thermal contribution is exponentially suppressed at the extremely low de Sitter temperature T_Λ, leaving the zero–point term, which diverges as ω^3. The central problem is therefore to understand how this divergence is regulated once the finite entropy and information capacity of the de Sitter horizon are properly taken into account.

3.9 Curvature–weighted zero–point spectrum

To cure the ω^3 divergence we now apply the curvature–dependent weighting function $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ introduced earlier in Eq. 3.16, which plays the role of the ultraviolet suppression factor in direct analogy with Planck's Boltzmann weight. This step provides the regularisation of the otherwise divergent flat–space zero–point spectrum, with the curvature of de Sitter space supplying the physical mechanism for suppressing high–frequency modes. The renormalised spectrum is obtained by replacing the flat–space density by

$$\rho_\Lambda(\omega) = \rho_{\mathrm{ZPE}}^{\mathrm{flat}}(\omega)\, f_\Lambda(\omega),$$

$$\rho_\Lambda(\omega) = \frac{\hbar\omega^3}{2\pi^2 c^3} f_\Lambda(\omega), \qquad f_\Lambda(\omega) \to \begin{cases} 1, & \omega \ll \omega_\Lambda \\ 0, & \omega \gg \omega_\Lambda, \end{cases} \tag{3.27}$$

where the renormalisation scale is fixed by the resonant frequency ω_Λ, itself determined by the balance of the ZPE and gravitational pressures.

The vacuum energy becomes

$$u_{\mathrm{ZPE},\Lambda} = \int_0^\infty \rho_\Lambda(\omega)\, d\omega = \frac{\hbar}{2\pi^2 c^3} \int_0^\infty \omega^3 \exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda} \right)^4 \right] d\omega \tag{3.28}$$

The remaining analysis is purely technical: we now evaluate the curvature–weighted spectrum explicitly by expressing the integral in dimensionless form by introducing a dimensionless variable x,

$$x \equiv \frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \omega = \omega_\Lambda x, \qquad d\omega = \omega_\Lambda \, dx. \tag{3.29}$$

Then

$$\omega^3 = (\omega_\Lambda x)^3 = \omega_\Lambda^3 x^3, \tag{3.30}$$

and the integral in (3.28) becomes

$$\int_0^\infty \omega^3 \exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda} \right)^4 \right] d\omega = \omega_\Lambda^4 \int_0^\infty x^3 e^{-x^4} \, dx. \tag{3.31}$$

Thus

$$u_{\mathrm{ZPE},\Lambda} = \frac{\hbar \omega_\Lambda^4}{2\pi^2 c^3} \int_0^\infty x^3 e^{-x^4} \, dx. \tag{3.32}$$

The remaining integral is elementary. Let

$$t = x^4 \quad \Rightarrow \quad dt = 4x^3 \, dx, \qquad x^3 \, dx = \frac{1}{4} \, dt. \tag{3.33}$$

Performing the integral using $\int_0^\infty x^3 e^{-x^4} \, dx = 1/4$ gives

$$u_{\mathrm{ZPE},\Lambda} = \frac{\hbar \omega_\Lambda^4}{8\pi^2 c^3}. \tag{3.34}$$

At this stage the spectrum has been regularised and rendered finite; the subsequent step is to determine the physical renormalisation scale by imposing the vacuum–matching condition introduced earlier.

3.10 Vacuum–Curvature Equilibrium and Fixing the Saturation Scale

The Λ-units introduced in Section 1 encode this renormalisation choice and fix a unique physical scale; their role in ensuring radiative stability will be examined in detail in Section 4. The Λ–units selected by this equilibrium fix a natural length, time, and (linear) frequency,

$$L_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3} \right)^{1/4}, \qquad t_\Lambda = \frac{L_\Lambda}{c}, \qquad \nu_\Lambda = \frac{1}{t_\Lambda} = \left(\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G} \right)^{1/4}. \tag{3.35}$$

A naive identification of the saturation scale with the inverse Λ–time scale is most naturally expressed in terms of the ordinary frequency, $\nu_\Lambda \sim 1/t_\Lambda$. This fixes the correct quartic scaling of the vacuum energy density but leaves an overall dimensionless normalisation undetermined. When expressed in terms of the angular frequency $\omega = 2\pi\nu$, this freedom appears as an undetermined numerical factor. The normalisation is fixed uniquely, as a result of vacuum-curvature equilibrium by requiring that the curvature–weighted spectrum integrate to the thermodynamic vacuum energy density u_Λ The resulting condition selects a universal numerical factor ζ and corresponds to a rescaling of the saturation frequency to

$$\omega_c = \frac{\pi^{1/4}}{t_\Lambda}, \tag{3.36}$$

with no adjustable freedom.

Horizon thermodynamics fixes this remaining normalisation by selecting a unique saturation point for the ultraviolet spectrum. Expressed in terms of the ordinary frequency, the saturation scale is

$$\nu_\Lambda^* = \frac{\zeta}{t_\Lambda}, \tag{3.37}$$

where $t_\Lambda = L_\Lambda/c$ is the characteristic Λ–time scale and ζ is a pure numerical constant. This constant is fixed uniquely by the requirement that the curvature–weighted quartic spectrum saturate the thermodynamic vacuum energy, and carries no adjustable freedom.

Passing to the angular frequency $\omega = 2\pi\nu$, the corresponding saturation frequency is

$$\omega_c \equiv \omega_\Lambda^* = 2\pi\nu_\Lambda^*. \tag{3.38}$$

Using

$$t_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4}, \qquad \zeta = (16\pi^3)^{-1/4}, \tag{3.39}$$

one finds

$$\omega_c = \frac{\pi^{1/4}}{t_\Lambda} = \pi^{1/4}\left(\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}\right)^{1/4}, \tag{3.40}$$

and hence

$$\omega_c^4 = \pi\,\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}. \tag{3.41}$$

Giving,

$$\omega_c^4 = \left[\pi^{1/4}\left(\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}\right)^{1/4}\right]^4 = \pi\,\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}. \tag{3.42}$$

Substituting Eq. 3.42 into Eq. 3.34 implements the renormalisation of the vacuum energy: the apparent cutoff is in reality a saturation point and is no longer arbitrary but fixed dynamically by horizon thermodynamics, giving,

$$\begin{aligned} u_\Lambda &= \frac{\hbar}{8\pi^2 c^3}\left(\pi\,\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}\right) \\ &= \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \end{aligned} \tag{3.43}$$

Thus the same quartic ZPE integral, evaluated at the Λ saturation point ω_Λ^*, reproduces exactly the general relativistic result for u_Λ. The Λ–regularised and Λ–renormalised spectrum does this without the need for an arbitrary and ad hoc ultraviolet cutoff.

3.11 Radiative Stability and Physical Interpretation

This completes the statistical counterpart to the thermodynamic derivation of Section 2. Two entirely independent physical routes—one based on horizon thermodynamics and the Clausius relation, the other on the quantum statistics and kinetic balance of vacuum modes—converge to the same finite value of u_Λ. The familiar 10^{120} discrepancy of flat–space quantum field theory is eliminated not by fine tuning, but by the intrinsic thermodynamic structure of de Sitter spacetime.

The resulting Λ–scale is universal. It depends only on the constants $(\hbar, G, c, \Lambda)$ and is independent of particle species, ultraviolet thresholds, or assumptions about Planck–scale microphysics. In contrast to standard ΛQFT, where the renormalisation scale μ is arbitrary and quantum corrections destabilise the vacuum energy, the present framework fixes the renormalisation point dynamically. The de Sitter horizon selects a unique resonant frequency ω_Λ at which zero–point fluctuations and curvature come into equilibrium.

Because this scale is geometric and thermodynamic rather than arbitrary, radiative corrections cannot shift the vacuum energy away from its equilibrium value. Radiative stability therefore follows automatically. The Λ–scale marks the emergence of a physically selected quantum scale that replaces renormalisation freedom with a unique, horizon–determined normalisation. The consequences of this for radiative stability are analysed in detail in Section 4.

4 Radiative Stability of the Λ-Selected Vacuum

The results of Sections 2 and 3 show that horizon thermodynamics and the curvature–weighted zero–point spectrum both single out the same finite vacuum energy density, thereby providing a consistent account of the enormous mismatch between naive quantum field theory (QFT) estimates and the value inferred from cosmological observations. Within this framework, this addresses the *first* cosmological constant problem: why the vacuum energy is small and positive [5]. A second difficulty remains: *radiative instability* [5]. In standard QFT, the vacuum energy is extremely sensitive to ultraviolet (UV) physics and to the renormalisation scheme. The purpose of this section is to show that, in the Λ–framework, the horizon–selected scale k_Λ acts as a physical renormalisation point, such that high–energy modes do not destabilise the vacuum energy.

4.1 Radiative instability in flat–space QFT

In flat–space QFT each massive field contributes a loop correction to the vacuum energy [5]. For a species of mass m the zero–point term is

$$u_{\rm vac}^{\rm flat}(m) = \frac{1}{2}\int \frac{d^3k}{(2\pi)^3}\,\hbar\,\omega_k, \qquad \omega_k = \sqrt{c^2k^2 + \left(\frac{mc^2}{\hbar}\right)^2}, \tag{4.1}$$

and introducing an explicit ultraviolet cutoff $k_{\rm max}$ yields the standard asymptotic expansion [5],

$$u_{\rm vac}^{\rm flat}(m; k_{\rm max}) \simeq \frac{\hbar}{16\pi^2}\left[c\,k_{\rm max}^4 + \frac{m^2c^3}{\hbar^2}k_{\rm max}^2 - \frac{m^4c^5}{2\hbar^4}\ln\!\left(\frac{2\hbar k_{\rm max}}{mc}\right) + \cdots\right]. \tag{4.2}$$

The quartic term $\propto k_{\rm max}^4$ is independent of m and dominates the integral.

Suppression of massive fields. Equation (4.2) also shows that, for fixed $k_{\rm max}$, massive contributions are parametrically smaller than the massless contribution. A useful way to display the hierarchy is to compare the leading mass–dependent term with the $m = 0$ result. One finds

$$u^{(m)} \;=\; \mathcal{O}\!\left(\frac{mc^2}{12\pi^2}\,k_{\max}^3\right) \;\ll\; u_{\text{massless}}, \tag{4.3}$$

for $k_{\max} \gg mc/\hbar$. Thus heavy fields contribute far less than effectively massless ones. This suppression, however, does not resolve the vacuum energy problem: the dominant quartic divergence remains, and all terms depend sensitively on the arbitrary cutoff $k_{\max}$.

Summing over all species yields

$$u_{\text{vac}}^{\text{flat}}(k_{\max}) = u_0(k_{\max}) + \sum_i \Delta u_i(m_i, k_{\max}), \tag{4.4}$$

where u_0 collects regulator–dependent terms [5]. After renormalisation one writes schematically

$$u_{\text{phys}}(\mu) = u_{\text{bare}}(\mu) + \sum_i u_{\text{loop}}^{(i)}(m_i, \mu), \tag{4.5}$$

with μ an *arbitrary* renormalisation scale [5]. Because the loop terms contain $m^4 \ln(\mu/m)$ contributions, even small shifts in μ or in heavy–sector physics induce order–m^4 changes in u_{phys}. This extreme UV sensitivity is the standard statement of *radiative instability.* In flat spacetime, no physical principle exists that fixes the renormalisation scale μ, and radiative instability reflects a genuine physical ambiguity rather than a technical artefact.

4.2 Horizon–selected renormalisation scale and decoupling of heavy fields

In flat–space quantum field theory the renormalisation scale is not fixed by any physical principle: in the absence of a horizon or entropy bound, no criterion exists that singles out a preferred ultraviolet scale. In a universe with a positive cosmological constant, this situation changes fundamentally. The de Sitter horizon possesses a finite information capacity and thereby selects a unique physical scale associated with vacuum fluctuations, fixing the renormalisation point through geometry and thermodynamics rather than through microscopic detail. In the Λ–framework this occurs in two essential ways.

First, the natural momentum scale is set by the horizon–selected coherence length as $k_\Lambda = \omega_\Lambda/c$,

$$k_\Lambda \sim \frac{\pi^{1/4}}{L_\Lambda}, \tag{4.6}$$

where L_Λ arises from the vacuum–curvature equilibrium. Modes with $k \gg k_\Lambda$ fluctuate on wavelengths far shorter than L_Λ and are strongly suppressed by the curvature–weighted factor $f_\Lambda(\omega_k)$. The effective renormalisation point is therefore fixed by the horizon rather than chosen arbitrarily.

Second, writing the spectrum as $\rho_\Lambda(\omega) = \rho_{\text{ZPE}}^{\text{flat}}(\omega) f_\Lambda(\omega)$ implies

$$u_\Lambda = \int_0^\infty \rho_\Lambda(\omega)\, d\omega = C\,\hbar\,\omega_\Lambda^4, \tag{4.7}$$

with C a numerical constant only weakly dependent on the detailed form of f_Λ. Heavy fields with

$m_i \gg \omega_\Lambda$ decouple: their fluctuations occur on length scales far below L_Λ and are suppressed in the curvature–weighted spectrum. They therefore cannot shift u_Λ by an amount of order m_i^4, in sharp contrast with the flat–space analysis.

In this way the Λ–framework eliminates the dependence on arbitrary ultraviolet scales such as $k_{\max}$ or μ. The vacuum energy becomes a thermodynamic state variable fixed by horizon entropy. Radiative corrections may modify the detailed microphysical weighting encoded in $f_\Lambda(\omega)$, but they do not alter the macroscopic value of u_Λ selected by the horizon. The remaining question is therefore not whether ultraviolet modes must be regulated, but how this horizon–selected scale manifests itself in the statistical distribution of zero–point fluctuations.

4.3 From Divergence to Saturation: Λ-Weighted Spectra

Once the renormalisation scale is fixed by the de Sitter horizon, the behaviour of the zero–point spectrum changes qualitatively. In flat spacetime the vacuum energy density is controlled by the quartically divergent integral

$$\int_0^\infty \omega^3 \, d\omega, \tag{4.8}$$

which reflects the absence of any physical ultraviolet scale. In the Λ–framework this divergence is replaced by a finite, saturating contribution governed by a curvature–weighted spectrum, in which high–frequency modes are thermodynamically suppressed rather than sharply excluded.

In flat spacetime the corresponding spectral density scales as,

$$\rho_{\rm ZPE}^{\rm flat}(\omega) \;\propto\; \omega^3, \tag{4.9}$$

while the curvature–weighted spectrum is

$$\rho_\Lambda(\omega) = \rho_{\rm ZPE}^{\rm flat}(\omega)\, f_\Lambda(\omega), \tag{4.10}$$

where $f_\Lambda(\omega)$ is a smooth curvature–dependent weighting function that preserves the infrared ω^3 behaviour and suppresses ultraviolet modes above the horizon scale ω_Λ. A simple representative choice, used in Section 3, Eq 3.16, is

$$f_\Lambda(\omega) = \exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda}\right)^4\right]. \tag{4.11}$$

The cumulative energy fraction

$$F(\omega) \equiv \frac{\displaystyle\int_0^\omega \rho_\Lambda(\omega')\, d\omega'}{\displaystyle\int_0^\infty \rho_\Lambda(\omega')\, d\omega'} = 1 - \exp\left[-\left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_\Lambda}\right)^4\right]. \tag{4.12}$$

grows as ω^4 for $\omega \ll \omega_\Lambda$ and rapidly saturates for $\omega \gtrsim \omega_\Lambda$.

The knee–shaped saturation behaviour in Figure 8 shows that almost all high–frequency modes remain present but contribute negligibly to the total.

Unlike a hard cutoff, which simply discards ultraviolet modes, saturation is a thermodynamic constraint. The vacuum spectrum fills a finite energy and entropy capacity in direct analogy with the way the Planck distribution fills a cavity in blackbody radiation.

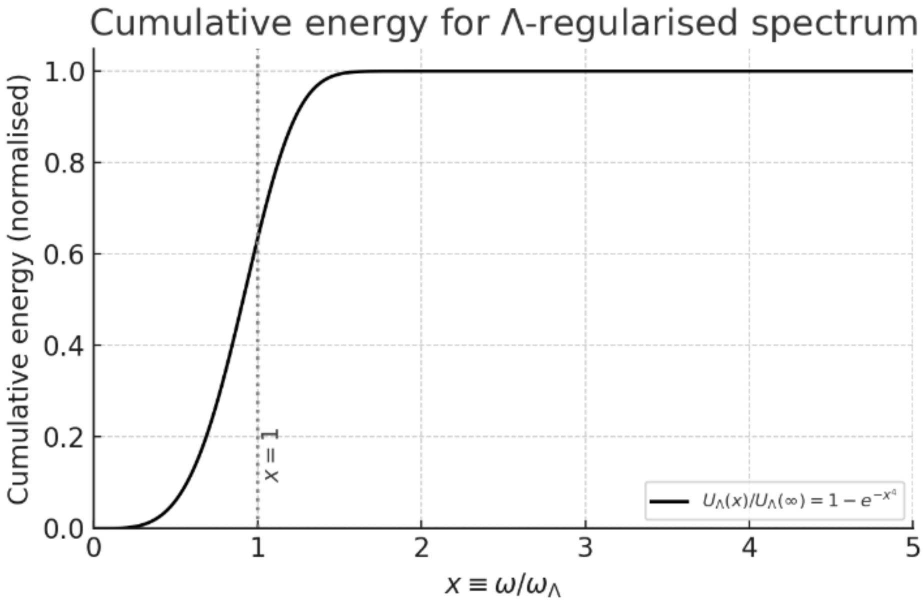


Figure 8: Knee–shaped saturation of the Λ–weighted vacuum spectrum. Shown is the cumulative vacuum–energy fraction $U_\Lambda(\omega)/U_\Lambda(\infty) = 1 - \exp\left[-(\omega/\omega_\Lambda)^4\right]$, as a function of the dimensionless frequency $x \equiv \omega/\omega_\Lambda$, $U_\Lambda(\omega)$ denotes the frequency–integrated vacuum energy corresponding to the spectral density $u_\Lambda(\omega)$. The cumulative contribution rises rapidly for $\omega \lesssim \omega_\Lambda$ and saturates for $\omega \gtrsim \omega_\Lambda$, indicating thermodynamic equilibration with the de Sitter horizon. High–frequency zero–point modes remain present but are smoothly suppressed rather than sharply cut off, yielding a finite total vacuum energy. The resulting plateau therefore reflects a *soft thermodynamic bound* imposed by horizon entropy, not the exclusion of ultraviolet modes.

4.4 Horizon–imposed stability and the physical meaning of renormalisation

Sections 4.2 and 4.3 show that radiative stability of the vacuum does not arise from cancellations among ultraviolet contributions, but emerges directly from horizon thermodynamics. Once the de Sitter horizon fixes a characteristic scale $k_\Lambda \sim 1/L_\Lambda$, the vacuum energy becomes a macroscopic thermodynamic quantity rather than a running parameter sensitive to ultraviolet physics.

Massive fields do not destabilise the vacuum energy because their short–wavelength fluctuations lie far below the horizon scale and are suppressed in the curvature–weighted spectrum. High–frequency zero–point modes remain present, but their contributions saturate a finite energy and entropy capacity set by the de Sitter horizon.

As a result, additional radiative corrections cannot shift the vacuum energy away from the equilibrium value u_Λ, which is fixed by the geometry and thermodynamics of de Sitter spacetime rather than by ultraviolet microphysics. The Λ–selected vacuum is therefore radiatively stable: its energy density is a macroscopic thermodynamic quantity, not a running parameter sensitive to high–energy physics.

From the renormalisation–group perspective, the Λ–framework replaces the arbitrary subtraction scale μ of flat–space quantum field theory with a physical scale selected by spacetime itself. In conventional QFT one writes

$$u_{\mathrm{phys}}(\mu) = u_{\mathrm{bare}}(\mu) + u_{\mathrm{loop}}(\mu), \tag{4.13}$$

and chooses μ by hand so that the renormalised vacuum energy matches observation. In the present framework the only meaningful renormalisation point is $\mu_* \sim k_\Lambda$, fixed by the de Sitter horizon, and at this scale

$$u_{\mathrm{phys}}(\mu_*) = u_\Lambda. \tag{4.14}$$

Radiative stability therefore follows from two intertwined facts: the de Sitter horizon imposes a finite information capacity, leading to saturation of the zero–point spectrum, and the same horizon selects a unique physical scale that replaces the arbitrary renormalisation freedom intrinsic to flat–space quantum field theory. In a spacetime endowed with a finite–entropy horizon, the renormalisation point is fixed geometrically and thermodynamically rather than imposed by hand.

5 The Λ-Scale: From Dimensional Freedom to Physical Uniqueness

The introduction of the cosmological constant Λ alongside the familiar constants $G, \hbar$ and c, enlarges the dimensional algebra and fundamentally changes the structure of natural units. This section shows how this enlargement leads to a genuine degeneracy in dimensional constructions, why dimensional analysis alone cannot resolve it, and how thermodynamic vacuum–curvature equillibrium in de Sitter spacetime uniquely selects the Λ-scale.

In the three-constant systems of Stoney and Planck, the number of dimensional bases (M, L, T) matches the number of defining constants, leaving no algebraic freedom: once the usual kinematic anchors are supplied — $L/T = c$ and $ML^2/T = \hbar$ — the resulting length, time, and mass scales are uniquely fixed. With four constants acting on three bases, however, admitting Λ necessarily introduces a one-parameter family of solutions.

In ordinary flat-space quantum field theory the quartic divergences for large k in Eq. 4.2 is handled by a bookkeeping scheme in which the measured vacuum density is written as a sum of bare and counterterm contributions, see Eq. 4.5. Because no physical scale is present, the subtraction is arbitrary. In a de Sitter universe, however, the vacuum energy is not arbitrary: general relativity supplies a definite stress–energy tensor corresponding to Λ, and horizon thermodynamics assigns a temperature and entropy to this vacuum. For consistency the regulated QFT vacuum must match the thermodynamic–geometric vacuum. The quartic divergence therefore signals that one must identify a physically motivated ultraviolet scale rather than impose an arbitrary cutoff.

To make the dimensional algebra explicit, we consider a generic monomial built from the four constants,

$$X = G^p \, \hbar^q \, \Lambda^r \, c^s, \tag{5.1}$$

and demand that it carry dimensions

$$[X] = M^a L^b T^c. \tag{5.2}$$

By–inspection solutions (one–parameter families). For $X \propto G^p \hbar^q \Lambda^r c^s$ the required exponents for the base units are:

$$\text{Mass } M: \ (p,q,r,s) = \left(p,\, 1+p,\, p+\tfrac{1}{2},\, -1-3p\right), \ \Rightarrow \ M \propto G^p \hbar^{1+p} \Lambda^{p+1/2} c^{-1-3p}.$$

$$\text{Length } L: \ (p,q,r,s) = \left(p,\, p,\, p-\tfrac{1}{2},\, -3p\right), \ \Rightarrow \ L \propto G^p \hbar^p \Lambda^{p-1/2} c^{-3p},$$

$$\text{Time } T: \ (p,q,r,s) = \left(p,\, p,\, p-\tfrac{1}{2},\, -3p-1\right), \ \Rightarrow \ T \propto G^p \hbar^p \Lambda^{p-1/2} c^{-3p-1},$$

Two instructive choices.

$$\textbf{Planck} \quad p = \tfrac{1}{2} \text{ in } L, T, \ \ p = -\tfrac{1}{2} \text{ in } M: \ \begin{cases} L_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{c^3}\right)^{1/2} \\ t_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{c^5}\right)^{1/2} \\ M_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar c}{G}\right)^{1/2} \end{cases}$$

$$\boldsymbol{\Lambda}\textbf{–scale} \quad p = \tfrac{1}{4} \text{ in } L, T, \ \ p = -\tfrac{1}{4} \text{ in } M: \ \begin{cases} L_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} \\ t_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4} \\ M_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar^3 \Lambda}{cG}\right)^{1/4} \end{cases}$$

Figure 9: Dimensional analysis of natural units constructed from the four constants $\{G, \hbar, c, \Lambda\}$. For a generic monomial $X \propto G^p \hbar^q \Lambda^r c^s$, dimensional consistency with the base units (M, L, T) yields a one–parameter affine family of solutions for the exponents (p, q, r, s). Each value of the free parameter defines a consistent natural–unit system, demonstrating that dimensional analysis alone admits an infinite landscape of possible length, time, and mass scales. Two instructive slices of this family are shown: the familiar Planck system corresponding to $p = 1/2$, and the Λ–scale quarter–power system corresponding to $p = 1/4$. Only when the vacuum–matching condition in de Sitter spacetime is imposed does this degeneracy collapse, selecting the Λ–scale as the unique thermodynamically consistent system of natural units.

Using

$$[G] = \frac{L^3}{MT^2}, \qquad [\hbar] = ML^2T^{-1}, \qquad [\Lambda] = L^{-2}, \qquad [c] = LT^{-1},$$

matching the exponents of M, L, T gives the linear system

$$\begin{pmatrix} -1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 3 & 2 & -2 & 1 \\ -2 & -1 & 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} p \\ q \\ r \\ s \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} a \\ b \\ c \end{pmatrix}. \tag{5.3}$$

This 3×4 matrix has rank 3 and therefore a one–dimensional nullspace. See Figure 9. A basis vector for the nullspace is

$$n = (1, 1, 1, -3)^T, \qquad \begin{pmatrix} -1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 3 & 2 & -2 & 1 \\ -2 & -1 & 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} n = 0, \tag{5.4}$$

so any particular solution (p_0, q_0, r_0, s_0) can be shifted along this null direction:

$$(p, q, r, s) = (p_0, q_0, r_0, s_0) + \lambda\,(1, 1, 1, -3), \tag{5.5}$$

with arbitrary real parameter λ. Equation (5.5) shows explicitly that the dimensional algebra admits an *affine one-parameter family* of natural-unit systems: without additional physical input (such as the vacuum-matching condition with the de Sitter horizon) the constants $\{G, \hbar, c, \Lambda\}$ can be mapped into the three base units in infinitely many ways, and the Planck and Λ scales are just two distinguished choices within this larger landscape.

Dimensional analysis with $\{G, \hbar, c, \Lambda\}$ therefore yields an infinity of possible length scales, each corresponding to a different weighting of the four constants. In the Planck construction the absence of Λ eliminates this degeneracy; in Stoney's system a charge scale plays the analogous role. In both cases uniqueness comes for free. With Λ included, by contrast, the nullspace is unavoidable and no purely dimensional choice of exponents is physically privileged.

The usual kinematic anchors only partially constrain the family. Requiring $L/T = c$ identifies the unit of velocity with the invariant speed of relativity, and requiring $ML^2/T = \hbar$ identifies the action per cycle with the quantum of action. These conditions fix two linear combinations of the exponents but leave the affine freedom intact. A third principle is required to isolate a unique solution.

In a universe with $\Lambda > 0$ this principle is supplied by nature herself as described in Section 3, Figure 6. The classical stress–energy of de Sitter space associates with Λ a vacuum energy density u_Λ and an isotropic pressure $p_\Lambda = -u_\Lambda$. The quantum vacuum contributes an analogous pressure through the spatial components of the stress tensor, so that

$$p_{\text{vac}} = -\frac{1}{3}\sum_{i=1}^{3} \langle 0|\hat{T}_{ii}|0\rangle \tag{5.6}$$

Thermodynamic consistency requires these pressures to balance. Interpreted at the level of the mode integral, this means that the ultraviolet contribution of the zero-point fluctuations must equal the thermodynamic vacuum density of de Sitter space. If the high-frequency modes are regulated at a wavelength L, then the leading contribution is proportional to $\hbar c/L^4$, and the balance condition becomes

$$\frac{\hbar c}{L^4} = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{G} \tag{5.7}$$

This results from the *vacuum-curvature equilibrium* defined in Section 3, Eq. 3.4: the regulated quantum pressure matches the geometric–thermodynamic vacuum pressure encoded by Λ. Crucially, it is not mathematically automatic; it is a physical requirement arising from horizon thermodynamics and the observed de Sitter equation of state. Equation (5.7) eliminates the

Table 1: Elimination of dimensional degeneracy in natural–unit systems. The table compares the Stoney [24], Planck [23], and Λ–scale constructions in terms of the constants employed, the base dimensions assumed, and the physical anchors imposed. In the Stoney and Planck systems, the number of defining constants matches the number of base dimensions, so the imposed kinematic anchors uniquely fix the resulting length, time, and mass scales. When the cosmological constant Λ is included alongside $\{G, \hbar, c\}$, dimensional analysis alone admits a one–parameter family of possible scales. The additional vacuum–matching condition, interpreted as a thermodynamic pressure balance in de Sitter spacetime, removes this freedom and selects a unique Λ–scale $(L_\Lambda, t_\Lambda, M_\Lambda)$, with the associated temperature scale Θ_Λ when k_B is included.

System	**Constants used**	**Base dims.**	**Anchors imposed**	**Unique outcome**
Stoney (1881)	$\{G, c, e\}$ (with ε_0)	(M, L, T, Q)	(i) $L/T = c$; (ii) G; (iii) EM normalisation (Coulomb const.)	Recovers c, G and natural charge/action scale $e^2/(4\pi\varepsilon_0 c)$
Planck (1899)	$\{G, \hbar, c\}$ (opt. k_B)	(M, L, T) or (M, L, T, Θ)	(i) $L/T = c$; (ii) $McL = \hbar$; (opt. iii) k_B for Θ	Unique (L_P, t_P, M_P); with k_B, Planck temperature Θ_P
Λ–scale (present)	$\{G, \hbar, c, \Lambda\}$ (opt. Θ with k_B)	(M, L, T)	(i) $L/T = c$; (ii) $McL = \hbar$; (iii) $\hbar c/L^4 = \Lambda c^4/G$	Unique $(L_\Lambda, t_\Lambda, M_\Lambda)$; with k_B, $\Theta_\Lambda \sim \hbar c/(k_B L_\Lambda)$

nullspace freedom in (5.5) and identifies a unique length scale.

Comparing (5.7) with the general monomial (5.1) fixes the exponents as

$$(p, q, r, s) = \left(\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{4}, -\frac{1}{4}, -\frac{3}{4}\right) \tag{5.8}$$

yielding the Λ-length

$$L_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} \tag{5.9}$$

The kinematic anchors $L/T = c$ and $ML^2/T = \hbar$ then determine the associated time and mass scales,

$$t_\Lambda = \frac{L_\Lambda}{c}, \qquad M_\Lambda = \frac{\hbar}{c\, L_\Lambda} \tag{5.10}$$

Thus, once Λ is admitted and the vacuum–curvature equillibrium is enforced, the Λ-unit system becomes unique in exactly the same structural sense that Stoney and Planck units become unique once their respective anchors are supplied. The difference is that in the Λ-system the third anchor is not electromagnetic (as in Stoney) nor a mathematical convenience (as in Planck's optional temperature scale), but a thermodynamic constraint arising from the entropy and temperature of the cosmic horizon. See Figure 6.

The Λ-scale derived in this way possesses an elegant geometric interpretation. It lies midway,

$$u_\Lambda = M_\Lambda \, L_\Lambda^{-1} \, t_\Lambda^{-2}$$

$$u_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda}{Gc}\right)^{\frac{1}{4}} \cdot \left(\frac{\Lambda c^3}{\hbar G}\right)^{\frac{1}{4}} \cdot \left(\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}$$

$$u_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^2 \Lambda^2 c^2}{G^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{4}} \cdot \left(\frac{\Lambda c^7}{\hbar G}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}$$

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{G}$$

Figure 10: Vacuum energy density expressed in Λ–units. When written in the natural units selected by vacuum–curvature equilibrium, the vacuum energy density takes the form $u_\Lambda = M_\Lambda L_\Lambda^{-1} t_\Lambda^{-2}$. Substituting the Λ–based mass, length, and time scales shows that this combination reduces identically to $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/G$, demonstrating that the observed vacuum energy density is the natural energy scale of the Λ–system. The agreement with the general–relativistic expression (up to the geometric normalisation factor $1/(8\pi)$) highlights how the vacuum catastrophe is resolved by adopting the physically selected Λ–scale rather than Planck units.

on a logarithmic scale, between the ultraviolet and infrared lengths characterising quantum gravity and cosmology:

$$L_\Lambda = (L_\mathrm{P} R_\mathrm{dS})^{1/2} \times 3^{-1/4} \tag{5.11}$$

so it represents the geometric mean of the Planck length $L_\mathrm{P} = \sqrt{\hbar G/c^3}$ and the horizon radius $R_\mathrm{dS} = \sqrt{3/\Lambda}$.

In summary, introducing Λ as a fundamental constant enlarges the dimensional algebra and produces a one-parameter family of potential natural units. The thermodynamic balance between the quantum and geometric vacua removes this freedom and uniquely identifies the Λ–scale. The resulting units possess a transparent geometric meaning and ensure radiative stability, thereby providing a coherent bridge between quantum fluctuations, horizon thermodynamics, and the observed acceleration of the universe.

Importantly, unlike the Planck and Stoney scales, the Λ–scale *cannot* be obtained by dimensional analysis alone. Dimensional freedom among $\{G, \hbar, c, \Lambda\}$ is broken only when one imposes the condition,

$$p_\mathrm{ZPE} = u_\mathrm{vac}^\mathrm{dS}, \tag{5.12}$$

which expresses the thermodynamic *vacuum-curvature* equilibrium between the curvature–weighted quantum vacuum and the de Sitter horizon. It is this condition that selects the coherence length L_Λ and thereby fixes all Λ–units. The resulting energy density,

$$u_\Lambda \sim \frac{\Lambda c^4}{G}, \tag{5.13}$$

coincides with the GR value (up to the geometric factor $1/(8\pi)$). As illustrated in Figure 10, the Λ–scale thereby *eliminates the vacuum catastrophe*: what appears as a 10^{120}–fold mismatch is in fact nothing more than a physicist's ghost, veiled in Planck units. Instead, what is revealed is that the universe itself selects a natural dimensional scale, that is a consequence of a finite causal horizon entropy. In this sense, the Λ-system constitutes the thermodynamic completion of natural units: dimensional closure is achieved not by algebra alone, but by the physical requirement of vacuum–curvature equilibrium imposed by horizon thermodynamics. This observation has a further conceptual consequence. If the vacuum possesses a finite entropy and a horizon–selected quantum scale, then gravity cannot behave as a conventionally renormalisable interaction. Newton's constant does not function as a microscopic coupling to be renormalised order by order, but as a macroscopic response parameter encoding the thermodynamic stiffness of spacetime. The failure of perturbative renormalisation is therefore not accidental, but reflects the thermodynamic character of the gravitational vacuum.

6 Thermodynamic Interpretation of the Principle of Equivalence

The Principle of Equivalence (PoE) asserts the local universality of inertial and gravitational response: all freely falling bodies follow identical trajectories, independent of their composition. This principle is empirical and foundational. In this section we do not seek to derive, modify, or replace it. Rather, we show that both inertial and gravitational dynamics admit a common thermodynamic interpretation rooted in horizon entropy and temperature. This interpretation does not rely on the cosmological constant Λ. However, in a universe with $\Lambda > 0$, the de Sitter horizon supplies a finite entropy bound that renders this thermodynamic description globally well defined.

6.1 Entropy gradients and entropic force

A basic result of thermodynamics is that a system subject to an entropy gradient supports an effective force. For a quasi–static displacement x at fixed temperature T, the Clausius relation gives

$$\delta Q = T\, dS, \tag{6.1}$$

and identifying δQ with mechanical work $\delta W = F\, dx$ yields the entropic force law

$$F = T\, \frac{dS}{dx}. \tag{6.2}$$

Equation (6.2) is purely thermodynamic. The physical content enters through the choice of temperature and the entropy change associated with the displacement. This relation underlies entropic interpretations of force and was emphasised in the modern context by Verlinde [17].

6.2 Inertial response from horizon temperature and Bekenstein entropy

Consider an observer undergoing proper acceleration a. Such an observer perceives a causal horizon and associates with it the Unruh temperature [25],

$$T_U = \frac{\hbar a}{2\pi c k_B}. \tag{6.3}$$

Following Bekenstein [19], the entropy change associated with displacing a particle of rest mass m by a distance dx toward a horizon is

$$\frac{dS}{dx} = \frac{2\pi k_B m c}{\hbar}. \tag{6.4}$$

Substituting Eqs. (6.3) and (6.4) into the entropic force relation (6.2) yields

$$F = T_U \frac{dS}{dx} = \left(\frac{\hbar a}{2\pi c k_B}\right)\left(\frac{2\pi k_B m c}{\hbar}\right) = ma. \tag{6.5}$$

Thus the inertial law $F = ma$ appears as the thermodynamic response associated with horizon temperature and entropy change. This result does not rely on Λ and applies equally to local Rindler horizons in flat spacetime. It therefore provides a thermodynamic interpretation of inertial resistance to acceleration.

6.3 Gravitational force from horizon thermodynamics

A closely related thermodynamic construction yields the Newtonian gravitational force. Consider a spherical holographic screen of radius r enclosing mass M. Associating with the screen a Bekenstein–Hawking entropy,

$$S = \frac{k_B c^3}{4G\hbar} A, \qquad A = 4\pi r^2, \tag{6.6}$$

the number of microscopic degrees of freedom (bits) on the screen is

$$N = \frac{4S}{k_B} = \frac{Ac^3}{G\hbar}. \tag{6.7}$$

Assuming equipartition of energy on the screen,

$$E = \frac{1}{2} N k_B T, \tag{6.8}$$

and identifying E with the enclosed rest energy Mc^2, the associated temperature is

$$T = \frac{2Mc^2}{Nk_B} = \frac{GM\hbar}{2\pi r^2 c k_B}. \tag{6.9}$$

Using the same Bekenstein entropy gradient, Eq. (6.4), for a test mass m displaced radially by dx, the entropic force law (6.2) gives

$$F = T\frac{dS}{dx} = \left(\frac{GM\hbar}{2\pi r^2 c k_B}\right)\left(\frac{2\pi k_B m c}{\hbar}\right) = \frac{GMm}{r^2}. \tag{6.10}$$

The Newtonian inverse–square law therefore emerges as a thermodynamic response associated with horizon entropy and equipartition. As in the inertial case, this construction does not require the cosmological constant Λ and applies equally to local holographic screens in flat spacetime. Similar entropic interpretations of gravity were emphasised in the modern context by Verlinde [17].

6.4 Equivalence principle and shared thermodynamic origin

Equations (6.5) and (6.10) show that inertial and gravitational responses arise from the same underlying thermodynamic ingredient: the Bekenstein entropy gradient, Eq. 6.4. In both constructions, the force law follows from combining horizon temperature with the universal entropy change associated with displacing a mass m toward a causal horizon. It is this entropy–displacement relation, rather than any dynamical assumption, that introduces the mass parameter and ensures that the same m governs both inertial and gravitational responses. The principle of equivalence thus reflects the universality of the Bekenstein entropy law: the same entropy gradient governs both acceleration relative to a horizon and gravitational attraction toward a mass. In this sense, the equality of inertial and gravitational mass is not an independent postulate, but a consequence of the shared thermodynamic origin of both effects.

6.5 Role of Λ as a global thermodynamic bound

The thermodynamic interpretation of the equivalence principle exists with or without Λ. In asymptotically flat spacetime, however, horizon thermodynamics is scale–free: there is no finite entropy bound and no preferred global normalisation for entropy changes. As a result, the interpretation remains local and qualitative.

In a universe with a positive cosmological constant, the de Sitter horizon supplies a finite entropy,

$$S_{\mathrm{dS}} = \frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{6.11}$$

and an associated temperature [9]. The presence of Λ therefore does not generate the thermodynamic origin of the equivalence principle, but it fixes the global entropy bound that renders this interpretation quantitative and complete. Entropy changes associated with acceleration can now be normalised relative to a finite horizon entropy, ensuring consistent thermodynamic bookkeeping across observers.

6.6 Summary

Inertial and gravitational dynamics admit a unified thermodynamic interpretation based on horizon entropy and temperature, as originally anticipated by Bekenstein [19] and developed in modern form by Verlinde [17]. This interpretation exists independently of the cosmological constant. The role of Λ is to provide the finite entropy bound associated with the de Sitter horizon, completing the thermodynamic picture without altering the empirical content of the equivalence principle.

6.7 Force Structure in Λ-Units and the Limits of the Planck Scale

Having established that both inertial and gravitational forces admit a common thermodynamic interpretation, it is natural to examine how the corresponding force scales organise themselves in different natural–unit systems. Table 2 shows the characteristic force scales associated with inertia, gravitation, and electromagnetism when expressed in Λ–units and Table 3 compares them in Stoney, Planck, and Λ–units.

In both the Stoney and Planck systems, all force scales collapse to a single mechanical quantity of order c^4/G, up to dimensionless coupling constants. Inertial and gravitational forces are therefore indistinguishable at the level of natural units, with electromagnetism appearing only as a suppressed fraction through the electromagnetic fine–structure constant α_E. This collapse reflects the purely mechanical construction of these unit systems: dimensional closure is enforced without reference to entropy, horizons, or vacuum structure.

Table 2: Force scales in Λ–units. Shown are the characteristic inertial, gravitational, and electromagnetic force scales when expressed in terms of the Λ–selected base quantities. The intermediate lines list the fundamental inputs required in each case: (a_Λ, M_Λ) for inertia, (M_Λ, L_Λ) for gravitation, and (α_E, L_Λ) for electromagnetism. In Λ–units the inertial force scale is $F_\Lambda^{(i)} = (\hbar\Lambda c^5/G)^{1/2}$, the gravitational force reduces to the pure vacuum scale $F_\Lambda^{(G)} = \Lambda\hbar c$ independent of Newton's constant, and the electromagnetic force appears as a suppressed fraction of the inertial scale controlled by $\alpha_E = e^2/(4\pi\varepsilon_0\hbar c) \simeq 1/137$.

Inertial Force	**Gravitational Force**	**Electromagnetic Force**
$F = ma$	$F_G = \dfrac{Gm_1m_2}{r^2}$	$F_E = \dfrac{1}{4\pi\varepsilon_0}\dfrac{e^2}{r^2}$
$a_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{c^{11}\Lambda}{\hbar G}\right)^{1/2}$	$M_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar^3\Lambda}{cG}\right)^{1/4}$	$\alpha_E = \dfrac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\hbar c}$
$M_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar^3\Lambda}{cG}\right)^{1/4}$	$L_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4}$	$L_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4}$
$\boxed{F_\Lambda^{(i)} = M_\Lambda a_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar\Lambda c^5}{G}\right)^{1/2}}$	$\boxed{F_\Lambda^{(G)} = \dfrac{GM_\Lambda^2}{L_\Lambda^2} = \Lambda\hbar c}$	$\boxed{F_\Lambda^{(E)} = \alpha_E\left(\dfrac{\hbar\Lambda c^5}{G}\right)^{1/2}}$

Table 3: Comparison of characteristic force scales in Stoney, Planck, and Λ–unit systems. In the Stoney and Planck frameworks, inertial, gravitational, and electromagnetic forces all collapse to the same mechanical scale c^4/G, up to dimensionless coupling constants, obscuring their distinct physical origins. In the Λ–framework this degeneracy is lifted: inertial forces scale as $(\hbar\Lambda c^5/G)^{1/2}$, gravitational forces reduce to the pure vacuum scale $\Lambda\hbar c$, and electromagnetic forces appear as a further suppressed fraction controlled by the electromagnetic fine–structure constant α_E. The table illustrates how inclusion of Λ restores thermodynamic structure that is absent in purely mechanical unit systems.

Force Type	**Stoney Units**	**Planck Units**	**Lambda Units**
Inertial	$\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\left(\frac{\hbar\Lambda c^5}{G}\right)^{1/2}$
Gravitational	$\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\Lambda\hbar c$
Electromagnetic	$\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\alpha_E\frac{c^4}{G}$	$\alpha_E\left(\frac{\hbar\Lambda c^5}{G}\right)^{1/2}$

While this mechanical unification is often regarded as a virtue, it comes at a conceptual cost. By forcing all forces to coincide at a single scale, Planck units obscure the distinct physical origins of inertia and gravitation. From the thermodynamic perspective developed above, inertial resistance arises from acceleration–induced horizons, while gravitational attraction reflects curvature–induced horizon structure. These distinctions are erased when Λ is excluded.

The Λ–unit system restores this missing structure. Once the cosmological constant is included as a thermodynamic constant fixing the entropy budget of spacetime, the force scales separate in a physically meaningful way. In Λ–units, inertial forces are characterised by the scale

$$F_\Lambda^{(i)} = M_\Lambda a_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar \Lambda c^5}{G}\right)^{1/2}, \tag{6.12}$$

while gravitational forces reduce to the remarkably simple vacuum scale

$$F_\Lambda^{(G)} = \Lambda \hbar c, \tag{6.13}$$

independent of Newton's constant. Electromagnetic forces appear as a further suppressed fraction of the inertial scale, controlled by the electromagnetic fine–structure constant α_E.

This separation exposes a hierarchy that is invisible in Planck units. In Λ–units, inertia, gravitation, and electromagnetism no longer coincide trivially, but appear as distinct responses tied to the thermodynamic structure of the vacuum. In particular, gravitation emerges as a pure vacuum response governed by Λ, $\hbar$, and c, while Newton's constant enters only through the coupling of matter to this vacuum structure.

The force table therefore illustrates more than a change of units. It shows that the Planck scale, while natural from a mechanical standpoint, is thermodynamically incomplete. By excluding Λ, Planck units necessarily erase information about horizon entropy and vacuum response, causing inertial and gravitational forces to appear artificially identical. Λ–units complete the thermodynamic description and expose the underlying structure governing how different interactions couple to spacetime.

6.8 The disappearance of Newton's constant and its interpretation

A striking feature of the Λ–unit force hierarchy displayed in Table 2 and Table 3 is the absence of Newton's constant from the fundamental gravitational force scale. Expressed in Λ–units, the characteristic gravitational force reduces to the vacuum expression

$$F_\Lambda^{(G)} = \Lambda \hbar c, \tag{6.14}$$

depending only on the cosmological constant, Planck's constant, and the speed of light. This contrasts sharply with the Stoney and Planck systems, in which gravitational forces are inseparably tied to the mechanical scale c^4/G.

The disappearance of G from the Λ–gravitational force scale admits a clear physical interpretation. In the Λ–framework, gravitation is understood as a response of the vacuum itself to curvature, governed by the finite entropy and energy density associated with the cosmological horizon. The scale $F_\Lambda^{(G)}$ therefore characterises a vacuum self–response, determined by the thermodynamic properties of spacetime rather than by the coupling of matter to geometry.

Newton's constant enters only when matter is present. It appears in inertial force scales and in the coupling of material sources to spacetime curvature, but not in the intrinsic gravitational response of the vacuum. From this perspective, G does not function as a fundamental limiting constant on the same footing as c, $\hbar$, and Λ. Instead, it parametrises how matter couples to a finite–entropy vacuum background.

This interpretation is made explicit by rewriting Newton's constant in terms of the Λ–scale and a dimensionless invariant,

$$G = \frac{1}{\alpha_\Lambda}\frac{c^3}{\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{6.15}$$

where α_Λ is the gravitational fine–structure constant introduced earlier. In this decomposition, the truly fundamental quantities are those that impose physical bounds: c as a limit on causal propagation, $\hbar$ as a quantum of action, and Λ as a bound on the entropy and energy content of spacetime. Newton's constant is derived from these bounds rather than standing alongside them.

The absence of G from the gravitational force scale is therefore not an artifact of unit choice, but a reflection of the underlying thermodynamic structure of the vacuum. Planck units, constructed from purely mechanical constants, necessarily conceal this distinction by forcing all force scales to coincide. Λ–units retain the thermodynamic information carried by the vacuum and expose the separation between vacuum self–response and matter–vacuum coupling. Viewed in this way, the Λ–framework clarifies why gravitation differs fundamentally from other interactions: it is governed by the thermodynamic properties of spacetime itself, while Newton's constant quantifies how matter participates in that response.

7 Validation of the Λ Framework

The Λ–scale was derived by imposing a thermodynamic equilibrium condition in which the outward pressure associated with quantum zero–point fluctuations balances the inward pressure due to spacetime curvature. In this equilibrium, the quantum vacuum energy saturates to the general–relativistic vacuum density u_Λ. For this scale to be physically meaningful, it must also be consistent with phenomena that do not treat Λ as an input.

In this section we show that, in addition to force scales, three further independent domains — Casimir forces, electromagnetic energy flux, and quantum gases — all naturally organise themselves around the same vacuum quantity u_Λ. In each case, extremal or saturation configurations are expressed as fixed fractions of u_Λ when written in Λ–units. This cross–domain consistency supports the identification of u_Λ as a distinguished physical vacuum scale rather than an arbitrary parameter.

7.1 Casimir Vacuum Test

Quantum field theory contains a powerful and experimentally verified probe of the vacuum: the Casimir effect. Since Casimir's original 1948 calculation [16], this phenomenon has served as the canonical demonstration that zero–point fluctuations are physically real. Yet despite its status as the "go–to" example of quantum vacuum physics, its relation to the cosmological vacuum of general relativity has remained obscure. The Casimir energy is routinely treated as a local, geometry–dependent effect, while the cosmological constant Λ is taken to measure a global, gravitationally active vacuum energy. The two have therefore been widely regarded as unrelated, reinforcing the view that the cosmological constant arises from some exotic new physics rather than from the familiar quantum vacuum.

In the Λ system of natural units this separation is not fundamental. Once the coherence length L_Λ is recognised as the characteristic vacuum wavelength that saturates the horizon entropy bound, the apparent distinction between "Casimir vacuum" and "cosmic vacuum" collapses: they may be viewed as two manifestations of one and the same underlying zero–point field. The Casimir effect provides a clean, non–gravitational measurement of vacuum stress, while Λ measures the same vacuum in its gravitational guise. This section makes that identification explicit.

To set the stage, recall how Casimir obtained his celebrated result. Imposing perfect–conductor boundary conditions on the electromagnetic field between two parallel plates restricts the admissible modes to $k_n = n\pi/d$. The formal zero–point energy is the difference

$$E_{\mathrm{ZP}}(d) = \frac{\hbar}{2}\sum_{\mathbf{k}} \omega_{\mathbf{k}} \; - \; \frac{\hbar}{2}\sum_{\mathbf{k}} \omega_{\mathbf{k}}^{(\infty)}, \tag{7.1}$$

which is divergent term–by–term. Casimir used analytic continuation (zeta regularisation) to evaluate the regulated sum [16], obtaining a finite and unambiguous energy shift. Differentiating $E_{\mathrm{ZP}}(d)$ with respect to d gives the vacuum pressure

$$P_{\mathrm{Casimir}} = -\frac{\pi^2 \hbar c}{240\, d^4}. \tag{7.2}$$

The negative sign indicates that the vacuum behaves as a tension: the suppression of modes between the plates makes the interior zero–point pressure lower than outside, producing an inward force (Figure. 11).

This textbook expression is our starting point. By inserting the Λ–length into the Casimir pressure and matching it to the gravitational vacuum energy density u_Λ, we show that the quantum vacuum probed in the laboratory is numerically and conceptually identical to the vacuum that sources cosmic acceleration.

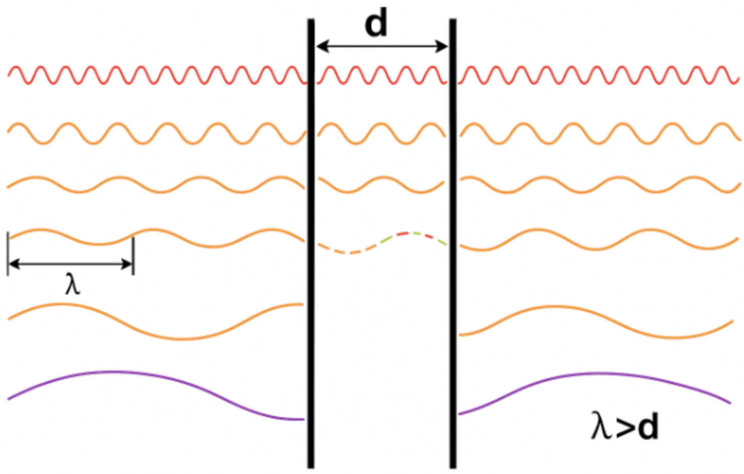


Figure 11: Mode suppression in the Casimir geometry. Imposing conducting boundary conditions at separation d restricts the admissible vacuum modes between the plates, suppressing fluctuations with wavelengths $\lambda \gtrsim d$ relative to those in the exterior region. The resulting imbalance in zero-point pressure produces an attractive force between the plates. This schematic illustrates how a bounded geometry modifies the vacuum mode spectrum. Within the Λ–framework, the same physical mechanism — suppression of long-wavelength vacuum fluctuations by a finite boundary — underlies both the Casimir effect and the regulation of vacuum energy by the de Sitter horizon.

Introducing the Λ–length cutoff

$$L_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4}, \tag{7.3}$$

and substituting $d = L_\Lambda$ into Eq. (7.2) shows that the Casimir pressure is a fixed fraction of the vacuum scale:

$$P_{\mathrm{Cas}}(d) = -\frac{\pi^2 \hbar c}{240\, d^4} = -\frac{\pi^2 \hbar c}{240}\frac{\Lambda c^3}{\hbar G} = -\left(\frac{\pi^3}{30}\right)\frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{7.4}$$

Thus

$$P_{\mathrm{Cas}}(L_\Lambda) = -\frac{\pi^3}{30}\, u_\Lambda \approx -1.03\, u_\Lambda. \tag{7.5}$$

A laboratory–scale quantum effect therefore reproduces, up to a factor of order unity, the same negative pressure that general relativity attributes to the cosmological constant. In this way the Λ–framework reveals the quantum vacuum and the cosmological vacuum to be quantitatively and conceptually continuous.

The Λ–length in the Casimir window. Using CODATA values in which $\Lambda = 1.10 \times 10^{-52} m^{-2}$,

$$L_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} \approx 3.9 \times 10^{-5}\,\mathrm{m} = 39\,\mu\mathrm{m}, \qquad \nu_\Lambda \equiv \frac{c}{L_\Lambda} \approx 7.7\,\mathrm{THz}, \tag{7.6}$$

which lies squarely in the mid–IR/THz regime, precisely the range where Casimir forces have been experimentally probed (e.g. torsion–pendulum and subsequent precision measurements; see Refs. [15]). Evaluating the ideal ($T \to 0$) plate–plate pressure at the Λ–length yields a quartic correspondence with the GR vacuum density. This suggests, in principle, a laboratory route to infer Λ from micron–scale force measurements, far above the Planck length (Figure. 12).

The Casimir effect therefore does more than provide a consistency check on the Λ–framework: it defines a direct operational route from laboratory measurements to an effective cosmological constant.

An effective cosmological constant from Casimir data. Because pressure and energy density share the same physical dimensions, a Casimir measurement at plate separation d defines an effective vacuum energy scale through the magnitude of the measured vacuum tension,

$$u_{\text{Cas}}(d) \equiv |P_{\text{Cas}}(d)| = \frac{\pi^2 \hbar c}{240\, d^4}, \tag{7.7}$$

where $P_{\text{Cas}}(d)$ is the Casimir pressure between ideal parallel conductors. In general relativity, a positive cosmological constant corresponds to a vacuum energy density

$$u_\Lambda = \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}. \tag{7.8}$$

Equating the laboratory vacuum scale with the general relativistic vacuum scale at a characteristic separation d^* defines an effective cosmological constant inferred from Casimir physics,

$$u_{\text{Cas}}(d_*) = u_\Lambda^{\text{Cas}} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \Lambda_{\text{Cas}} = \frac{8\pi G}{c^4}\,\frac{\pi^2 \hbar c}{240\, d_*^4} = \frac{\pi^3}{30}\,\frac{\hbar G}{c^3}\, d_*^{-4}. \tag{7.9}$$

Here d_* denotes the characteristic separation at which the measured Casimir response saturates, as indicated in Fig. 12. Physically, d_* is identified as the scale beyond which further reduction in plate separation produces no additional change in the inferred vacuum energy density, corresponding to the levelling–off of the vacuum response curve. This saturation reflects the onset of the Λ–regulated regime, where vacuum fluctuations are bounded by the finite entropy of the de Sitter horizon.

The quantity Λ_{Cas} is therefore the value of the cosmological constant that reproduces the same vacuum energy density in the general–relativistic relation. Within the Λ–framework, d_* is naturally compared with the horizon–selected coherence length L_Λ, so that Casimir experiments become a laboratory probe of the same vacuum structure that fixes the cosmological vacuum energy.

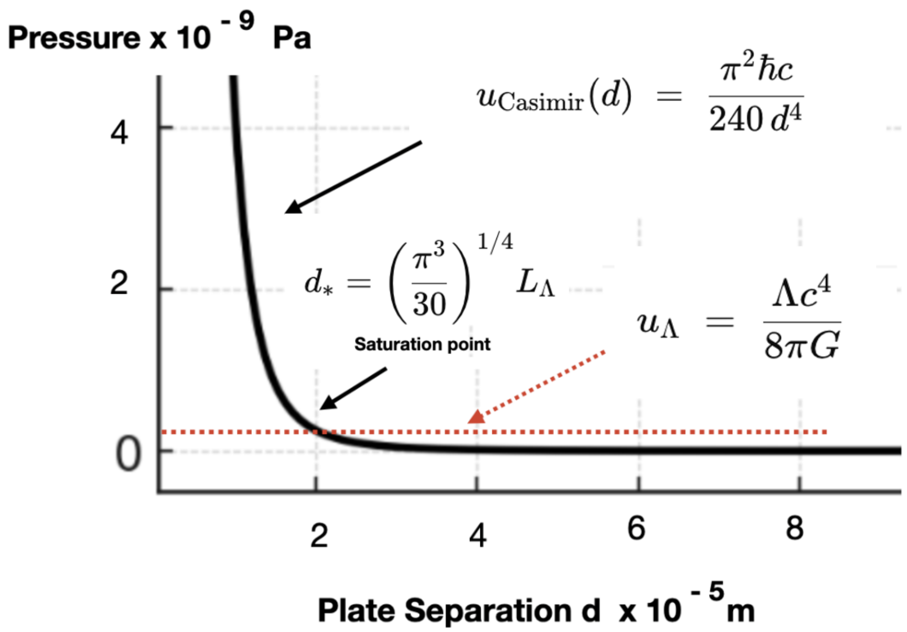


Figure 12: Casimir pressure versus plate separation. Schematic (not to scale) showing the ideal Casimir pressure $P_{\text{Cas}}(d) = \pi^2\hbar c/(240\, d^4)$ (black curve) compared with the constant vacuum reference level $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$ (red dashed line). The intersection defines a crossover or saturation separation d_* at which the laboratory vacuum pressure matches the cosmological vacuum energy density. Measuring d_* therefore determines an effective cosmological constant $\Lambda_{\text{Cas}} \propto d_*^{-4}$. For ideal conductors the crossover occurs at $d_* = (\pi^3/30)^{1/4} L_\Lambda$, where $L_\Lambda = (\hbar G/\Lambda c^3)^{1/4}$ is the horizon–selected coherence length. Material and thermal corrections shift the detailed curve but preserve the quartic matching structure, as treated within Lifshitz theory [26].

7.2 Electromagnetic Poynting–Flux Test

Electromagnetic radiation, like inertial and gravitational phenomena, propagates within the vacuum structure implied by a nonzero cosmological constant. In standard notation, the time–averaged Poynting flux for a plane electromagnetic wave in vacuum is

$$\langle S_{\text{EM}} \rangle \;=\; \tfrac{1}{2}\, \varepsilon_0 c\, E_0^2. \tag{7.10}$$

To probe this expression at the Λ–scale, we evaluate the electric field associated with a point charge at a distance $r = L_\Lambda$:

$$E_\Lambda = \frac{1}{4\pi\varepsilon_0}\, \frac{e}{L_\Lambda^2}. \tag{7.11}$$

The corresponding flux magnitude is

$$\begin{aligned} \langle S_{\text{EM}} \rangle &= \frac{1}{2}\, \varepsilon_0 c\, E_\Lambda^2 \\ &= \frac{1}{2}\, \varepsilon_0 c \left(\frac{e}{4\pi\varepsilon_0 L_\Lambda^2} \right)^2 = \frac{e^2 c}{32\pi^2 \varepsilon_0 L_\Lambda^4}. \end{aligned} \tag{7.12}$$

Introducing the electromagnetic fine–structure constant,

$$\alpha_E = \frac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\hbar c} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \frac{e^2}{\varepsilon_0} = 4\pi\alpha_E\hbar c, \tag{7.13}$$

yields

$$\langle S_{\mathrm{EM}}\rangle = \frac{\alpha_E\hbar c^2}{8\pi L_\Lambda^4}. \tag{7.14}$$

Using the defining relation for the Λ–length,

$$L_\Lambda^4 = \frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \frac{1}{L_\Lambda^4} = \frac{\Lambda c^3}{\hbar G}, \tag{7.15}$$

Eq. (7.14) becomes

$$\langle S_{\mathrm{EM}}\rangle = \frac{\alpha_E\Lambda c^5}{8\pi G} = \alpha_E\, c\, u_\Lambda, \tag{7.16}$$

where $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$ is the vacuum energy density fixed by de Sitter spacetime.

$$\boxed{\langle S_{\mathrm{EM}}\rangle = \alpha_E\, c\, u_\Lambda} \tag{7.17}$$

This result should be interpreted as a normalisation statement rather than a new dynamical coupling. The vacuum energy density u_Λ characterises a universal background property of spacetime, while the fine–structure constant α_E determines the fraction of that background scale accessible to electromagnetic processes. Electromagnetism does not couple universally to the vacuum, as gravity does; instead it may be viewed as probing the Λ–vacuum in a coupling–weighted manner set by α_E.

The Poynting–flux analysis therefore shows that radiative transport, like boundary–induced Casimir stresses, is naturally normalised against the same finite vacuum scale fixed by Λ,

reinforcing the role of u_Λ as a common reference scale across distinct physical sectors.

7.3 Quantum–Matter Test: Bosons and Fermions

Both bosonic and fermionic gases exhibit the same thermodynamic law: their equilibrium energy densities scale quartically with temperature, $u(T) \propto T^4$ [27, 28]. For massless bosons such as photons, the energy density is

$$u_\gamma = \frac{\pi^2}{15}\frac{(k_B T)^4}{\hbar^3 c^3}, \tag{7.18}$$

while fermionic gases such as relic neutrinos forming the cosmic neutrino background (CνB) have

$$u_\nu = \frac{7}{8}N_\nu\frac{\pi^2}{15}\frac{(k_B T)^4}{\hbar^3 c^3}, \qquad N_\nu = 3. \tag{7.19}$$

It is important to distinguish two Λ–dependent temperature scales that appear in gravitational thermodynamics. De Sitter spacetime possesses a *horizon temperature* (Gibbons–Hawking) associated with the cosmological horizon,

$$T_{\mathrm{dS}} = \frac{\hbar c}{2\pi k_B}\sqrt{\frac{\Lambda}{3}}, \tag{7.20}$$

an infrared quantity fixed by the surface gravity at a distant horizon. By contrast, the Λ–framework introduces a *vacuum temperature scale* Θ_Λ, defined by the Λ–selected quantum scale and the quartic Stefan–Boltzmann form,

$$\Theta_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{G k_B^4} \right)^{1/4}, \tag{7.21}$$

which characterises the ultraviolet normalisation of equilibrium energy densities in Λ–units. These two temperatures are not identical: $T_{\rm dS} \propto \Lambda^{1/2}$ is a horizon (IR) temperature, whereas $\Theta_\Lambda \propto \Lambda^{1/4}$ is a vacuum (UV) temperature scale fixed by the Λ–selected quantum length L_Λ and the vacuum energy density u_Λ.

Bosons

$$U_\gamma = 2 \cdot \frac{\pi^2}{15} \cdot \frac{(k_B \theta_\Lambda)^4}{\hbar^3 c^3}$$

$$U_\gamma = 2 \cdot \frac{\pi^2}{15} \cdot \frac{k_B^4}{\hbar^3 c^3} \cdot \frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{k_B^4 G}$$

$$U_\gamma = \frac{16\pi^3}{15} \cdot \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}$$

$$U_\gamma = \frac{16\pi^3}{15} u_\Lambda$$

Fermions

$$U_\nu = 3 \cdot \frac{7}{8} \cdot \frac{\pi^2}{15} \cdot \frac{(k_B \theta_\Lambda)^4}{\hbar^3 c^3}$$

$$U_\nu = \left(\frac{21\pi^2}{120} \right) \cdot \frac{k_B^4}{\hbar^3 c^3} \cdot \frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{k_B^4 G}$$

$$U_\nu = \left(\frac{7\pi^3}{5} \right) \cdot \frac{\Lambda c^4}{8\pi G}$$

$$U_\nu = \frac{7\pi^3}{5} u_\Lambda$$

Figure 13: Quantum gases at the Λ–vacuum scale. Bosonic (photons, u_γ) and fermionic (relic neutrinos, u_ν) equilibrium energy densities obey the universal quartic law $u \propto T^4$. When evaluated at the Λ–selected vacuum temperature Θ_Λ, both reduce to fixed numerical fractions of the vacuum energy density $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$. Bosons saturate the scale more rapidly, while fermions are Pauli–suppressed by the factor 7/8 (with $N_\nu = 3$ shown). This demonstrates that quantum statistical equilibrium provides an independent consistency check of the Λ–framework: thermal occupation, like Casimir stresses and radiative flux, normalises to the same finite vacuum scale.

Substituting the vacuum temperature scale Θ_Λ Eqs. (7.18) and (7.19) shows that both bosonic and fermionic equilibrium energy densities reduce to fixed numerical fractions of the vacuum scale u_Λ (Fig. 13). Bosonic gases approach this scale most directly, while fermionic gases are Pauli–suppressed by the factor 7/8. In all cases, the resulting energy densities remain finite and bounded by the same Λ–selected vacuum normalisation.

The physical significance of this result is not the numerical coefficients themselves, but the existence of a natural normalisation point for the universal quartic T^4 law shared by bosons and fermions. The temperature Θ_Λ is not a horizon temperature and does not correspond to radiation emitted by a cosmological horizon; rather, it is the microscopic equilibrium scale that emerges when the Stefan–Boltzmann form is normalised to the finite vacuum energy density fixed by Λ. In this sense, statistical occupation in quantum gases provides an independent consistency check of the Λ–framework, complementary to Casimir stresses and radiative flux.

Substituting the vacuum temperature scale Θ_Λ, into Eqs. (7.18) and (7.19) reveals that both bosonic and fermionic equilibrium energy densities become fixed fractions of the vacuum scale u_Λ (Figure 13). Bosonic gases approach this scale rapidly, while fermionic gases are Pauli–suppressed by the factor 7/8. In both cases, however, the resulting energy densities remain finite and bounded by the same Λ–selected vacuum normalisation.

The physical content of this result is that the quartic T^4 law, shared by bosons and fermions, admits a natural normalisation when evaluated at the Λ–vacuum scale. The temperature Θ_Λ is not a horizon temperature and does not describe radiation emitted by a distant cosmological horizon; rather, it is the microscopic equilibrium scale that arises when the Stefan–Boltzmann form is normalised to the finite vacuum energy density fixed by Λ. In this sense, statistical occupation in quantum gases provides an independent consistency test of the Λ–framework: boundary stresses (Casimir), radiative transport (Poynting flux), and thermal equilibrium (quantum gases), all normalise to the same finite vacuum scale u_Λ.

7.4 Synthesis: a unified vacuum scale

Across Casimir geometry, electromagnetic energy transport, quantum statistical gases, and mechanical force scales, the same vacuum quantity repeatedly emerges: u_Λ.

None of the systems examined in this section were constructed using the cosmological constant as an explicit input. Each begins from standard, well–established quantum or classical expressions that make no reference to Λ. Yet when these expressions are recast in Λ–units, their characteristic or extremal configurations naturally organise themselves as fixed fractions of the same vacuum energy density u_Λ. This convergence is a central outcome of the analysis. It indicates that u_Λ functions as a distinguished reference scale of the vacuum itself, fixed by horizon thermodynamics.

Casimir stresses probe this scale through geometric confinement, electromagnetic radiation through energy flux, and quantum gases through thermal occupation. Each sector accesses the same vacuum normalisation, weighted only by its appropriate coupling or statistical structure.

The significance of this synthesis is that u_Λ provides the scale around which low–energy physical processes self–consistently organise themselves. That this organisation appears across independent domains—without Λ being imposed by hand—constitutes a nontrivial consistency check of the Λ–framework and supports the interpretation of the cosmological constant as a fundamental thermodynamic parameter of spacetime: a limit to the entropy of the universe rather than a sector–dependent energy density.

8 The Thermodynamic Completion of Natural Units

The Planck system of natural units has long occupied a central role in discussions of quantum gravity. Constructed from the constants G, $\hbar$, and c, it provides a unique set of mechanical scales by dimensional analysis alone. This uniqueness, however, is mathematical rather than physical: it reflects dimensional inevitability, not the selection of a scale by an underlying physical principle or equilibrium condition. Dimensional analysis constrains the form of possible scales, but by itself cannot determine which of them are physically realised.

This limitation becomes particularly evident in the context of the quantum vacuum. In the absence of a boundary condition or thermodynamic principle, dimensional analysis can propose characteristic scales, but it cannot fix the vacuum state itself. As has been noted in the literature, the assumption that quantum gravity must be based exclusively on the constants $\{G, \hbar, c\}$ is historically unwarranted [29]: new fundamental constants have repeatedly entered physics when new phenomena were identified. Planck's own introduction of $\hbar$ subsumed the earlier Stoney system of units, and in doing so revealed a dimensionless invariant, the electromagnetic fine-structure constant, linking quantum mechanics and electromagnetism.

A direct way to make this distinction concrete is to compare the Planck system with a natural unit system constructed from $G, \hbar, c, \Lambda$. Table 4 summarises the key structural differences between these two frameworks. Planck units are mechanically complete in the sense that dimensional analysis uniquely fixes characteristic length, time, and mass scales, but this closure is achieved without reference to entropy, horizons, or vacuum structure. By contrast, once a positive cosmological constant is admitted as a fundamental input, causal horizons acquire a finite entropy and a preferred thermodynamic scale. In the resulting Λ–system, the vacuum energy density is no longer arbitrary or externally regulated, but is fixed intrinsically by horizon thermodynamics. The comparison illustrates that the inclusion of Λ does not merely append an additional parameter to an otherwise complete scheme, but qualitatively alters the foundational role of natural units by embedding thermodynamic information at the fundamental level.

Table 4: Comparison of Planck and Λ natural-unit systems.

Feature	**Planck System ($G, \hbar, c$)**	**Λ System ($G, \hbar, c, \Lambda$)**
Core base units	Length $L_P = \sqrt{\hbar G/c^3}$, Time $t_P = \sqrt{\hbar G/c^5}$, Mass $M_P = \sqrt{\hbar c/G}$.	Length $L_\Lambda = (\hbar G/\Lambda c^3)^{1/4}$, Time $t_\Lambda = (\hbar G/\Lambda c^7)^{1/4}$, Mass $M_\Lambda = (\hbar c/\sqrt{G\Lambda})^{1/2}$.
Method of derivation	Dimensional analysis of $\{G, \hbar, c\}$. Unique by construction but lacking an intrinsic thermodynamic principle.	Thermodynamics of causal horizons (Bekenstein–Hawking, Gibbons–Hawking). Vacuum–curvature equilibrium, in which $p_{ZPE} = u_\Lambda$.
Role of k_B	Present in Planck's original set but drops out of L_P, M_P, t_P. Thermodynamics not built in; temperature enters only through an auxiliary Planck temperature.	Reappears naturally via horizon thermodynamics. The Bekenstein–Hawking relation yields a fundamental entropy scale $S_\Lambda = 3\pi k_B \alpha_\Lambda$.
Entropy and thermodynamics	Absent from core base units. No natural unit of entropy. Essentially a mechanical system.	Entropy is intrinsic. Causal horizons saturate a finite entropy bound fixed by horizon area, embedding thermodynamics at the foundation.
Dimensionless invariants	None intrinsic. No dimensionless combination can be formed from $\{G, \hbar, c\}$.	Unique invariant $\alpha_\Lambda = c^3/(G\hbar\Lambda)$ encoding horizon entropy and vacuum structure.
Vacuum energy	No preferred vacuum energy scale. Requires external regularisation and subtraction.	Vacuum energy density $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$ fixed intrinsically by horizon thermodynamics.
Renormalisation	Arbitrary subtraction scale μ required. Vacuum energy radiatively unstable.	Physical renormalisation point selected by horizon scale L_Λ. Vacuum energy radiatively stable.
Cosmological constant	Implicitly assumes $\Lambda = 0$, appropriate to asymptotically flat spacetime. No scale associated with vacuum energy.	$\Lambda > 0$ fundamental. Uniquely fixes the vacuum energy density $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$, linking quantum, gravitational, and thermodynamic structure.

An analogous structure emerges once the cosmological constant is admitted as a fundamental parameter. The Λ–system subsumes the Planck scale in much the same way that Planck's quantum units subsumed the earlier Stoney system—retaining its physically meaningful elements while embedding them within a broader theoretical framework—but with an essential distinction. A compact schematic comparison of the Stoney, Planck, and Λ unit systems is given in Appendix A (Fig. 15).

The Planck area survives as a meaningful physical quantity, representing the smallest unit of information, while the global structure of the vacuum is fixed by horizon thermodynamics. In this framework, the Planck combination $c^3/(G\hbar)$ functions as an informational density rather than as a vacuum-setting scale. The gravitational fine-structure constant then appears naturally as a ratio of areas—the de Sitter horizon area to the Planck area—and may be interpreted as the maximum entropy of the universe measured in fundamental information units. The corresponding scaling relations linking the Stoney, Planck, and Λ systems (and the associated emergence of α_E and α_Λ) are summarised in Appendix A.

From this perspective, the Planck system is not incorrect, but incomplete. It is mechanically closed yet thermodynamically sterile: although Boltzmann's constant appears in Planck's original four-constant construction, it does not survive in the core mechanical units, and no intrinsic entropy scale remains. As a consequence, the Planck system contains no built-in entropy bound and cannot constrain the number of vacuum degrees of freedom.

This incompleteness propagates into familiar difficulties, including the absence of a natural infrared scale, the lack of horizon thermodynamics, and the appearance of the vacuum catastrophe when zero-point energies are referenced to Planckian benchmarks. These issues do not signal a failure of the Planck scale as a microscopic descriptor, but rather its inadequacy as a thermodynamic reference. Once the cosmological constant is included, spacetime acquires a finite information capacity, causal horizons become thermodynamically active, and the vacuum energy density is fixed uniquely. Seen in this light, the cosmological constant problem reflects not fine tuning in nature, but the application of an incomplete unit system to the description of the vacuum.

9 Discussion

9.1 Entropy as a Fundamental Organising Principle

A recurring theme in gravitational physics is that entropy, rather than energy, plays the primary organising role. Energy is frame dependent, gauge dependent, and renormalisation sensitive: its zero point may be shifted freely, and vacuum energy can always be absorbed into a redefinition of the cosmological constant Λ. Entropy, by contrast, is a geometrically defined and observer–independent quantity in gravitational settings. It counts microstates, survives coarse–graining, and provides a natural measure of the physically accessible degrees of freedom.

This distinction becomes decisive in gravitational settings. Black hole thermodynamics assigns entropy directly to geometry through the universal Bekenstein–Hawking relation,

$$S_{\mathrm{BH}} = \frac{k_B c^3 A}{4G\hbar}, \tag{9.1}$$

while Jacobson showed that the Einstein field equations themselves may be interpreted as an equation of state derived from the Clausius relation

$$\delta Q = T\,\mathrm{d}S, \tag{9.2}$$

applied to local Rindler horizons. More generally, holographic entropy bounds impose limits on the information content of spacetime regions that are independent of matter content or local energy densities.

In de Sitter spacetime this viewpoint reaches its sharpest expression. The cosmological constant does not primarily fix a vacuum energy density, but instead determines the maximum entropy accessible within the cosmological horizon,

$$S_{\mathrm{dS}} = \frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}. \tag{9.3}$$

Interpreting Λ solely through vacuum energy in Planck units therefore inverts its physical meaning. When viewed thermodynamically, $1/\Lambda$ naturally appears as a large, dimensionless count of horizon microstates. From this perspective, the smallness of Λ is not a fine–tuning problem but a direct reflection of the enormous information capacity of spacetime. This inversion of perspective is illustrated schematically in Fig. 14.

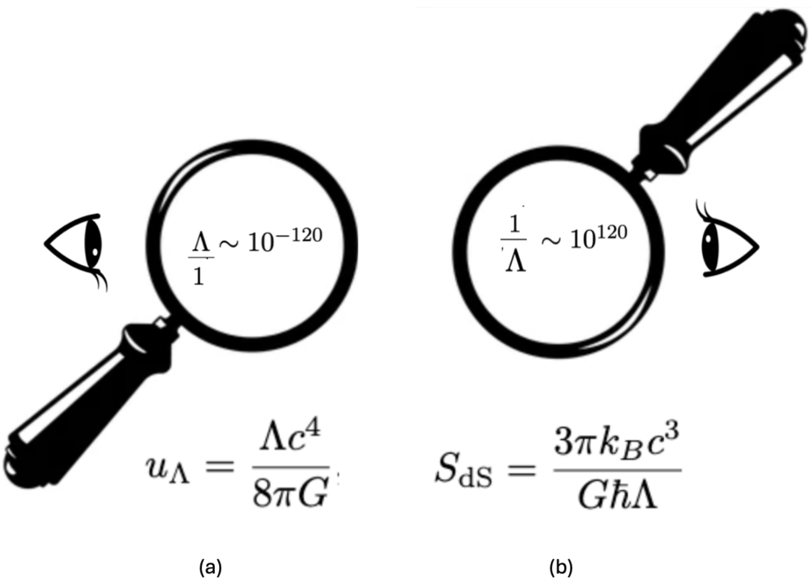


Figure 14: Inversion of perspective underlying the cosmological constant problem. (a) When viewed through a mechanical, quantum–field–theoretic lens, the cosmological constant is interpreted as a vacuum energy density $u_\Lambda = \Lambda c^4/(8\pi G)$ and appears extremely small, $\Lambda \sim 10^{-120}$ in Planck units, motivating the notion of extreme fine tuning. (b) When viewed thermodynamically, the same quantity is naturally interpreted through the de Sitter horizon entropy $S_{\mathrm{dS}} = 3\pi k_B c^3/(G\hbar\Lambda)$ and appears instead via its inverse, $1/\Lambda \sim 10^{120}$, corresponding to the maximum number of accessible vacuum microstates within the cosmological horizon. The apparent smallness of Λ and the largeness of $1/\Lambda$ are therefore not competing physical facts but complementary descriptions distinguished solely by whether the vacuum is characterised mechanically (energy density) or thermodynamically (entropy bound).

9.2 Why the Gravitational Fine–Structure Constant Was Never Recognised

The dimensionless ratio R_{dS}^2/L_P^2 has appeared implicitly in gravitational physics since the work of Gibbons and Hawking, who expressed the de Sitter entropy as $S = A/(4L_P^2)$. Holographic entropy bounds likewise measure areas in Planck units, so comparisons between macroscopic and microscopic geometric scales have long been present in the formalism. Nevertheless, the associated dimensionless combination

$$\Lambda L_P^2 \tag{9.4}$$

was never elevated to the status of a fundamental gravitational parameter.

The reason is conceptual rather than mathematical. Nearly all natural–unit constructions inherited Planck's paradigm, treating $\{G, \hbar, c\}$ as the only fundamental constants while regarding Λ as contingent or optional. In such a framework the maximal entropy of spacetime is formally infinite ($\Lambda = 0$), cosmological horizons are absent, and ratios comparing microscopic and macroscopic entropy scales are undefined. The quantity ΛL_P^2 was therefore present in the equations but conceptually invisible.

Numerically, this dimensionless combination is extremely small,

$$\Lambda L_P^2 \sim 10^{-122}, \tag{9.5}$$

and it is this smallness that came to be interpreted as a fine–tuning problem when expressed in Planck units. Only when the vacuum is treated thermodynamically, and Λ is recognised as fixing the finite information capacity of spacetime, does the inverse of this quantity acquire physical meaning. The present framework shows instead that this smallness is the reciprocal of a vast thermodynamic invariant: the finite information capacity of the universe (Fig. 14). This motivates the definition of the gravitational fine–structure constant,

$$\alpha_\Lambda \equiv \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda} = \frac{1}{\Lambda L_P^2} \sim 10^{120}. \tag{9.6}$$

The significance of α_Λ becomes clearer when contrasted with its electromagnetic analogue. While the electromagnetic fine–structure constant α controls the coupling between charged matter and the electromagnetic field, α_Λ links three sectors that are usually treated independently: quantum fluctuations ($\hbar$), gravitational geometry (G/c^3), and the thermodynamic structure of spacetime ($1/\Lambda$). In this sense α_Λ represents the unique dimensionless coupling between the quantum vacuum and spacetime curvature (See also Fig. 15 in Appendix A for a schematic comparison).

This interpretation also explains why no natural–unit system can consistently impose $G = \hbar = c = \Lambda = 1$. The persistence of α_Λ is not a defect of unit choice but a reflection of a physical fact: spacetime possesses a finite information capacity. The ratio of the de Sitter horizon area to the Planck area,

$$\frac{A_{\mathrm{dS}}}{A_P} = \alpha_\Lambda, \tag{9.7}$$

cannot be removed by rescaling mechanical units, because it is a property of the vacuum itself. In this sense α_Λ plays for gravity the role that α plays for electromagnetism: it is the irreducible, universal constant linking quantum fluctuations, spacetime geometry, and horizon thermodynamics.

9.3 Reinterpreting the Vacuum Catastrophe

The cosmological constant problem is conventionally framed as a numerical mismatch between the vacuum energy density predicted by quantum field theory and the value inferred from cosmological observations. In this formulation the difficulty appears computational: a presumed failure to sum or regularise zero–point contributions correctly. The present work suggests a different diagnosis. The vacuum catastrophe does not arise because quantum field theory "adds up the wrong modes," but because it is being asked to determine a quantity that is not fixed by microscopic summation alone.

In a universe with a positive cosmological constant, the vacuum energy density is not a free parameter to be renormalised arbitrarily. Instead, it is a macroscopic scale fixed by the thermodynamic structure of spacetime itself. The observed value of u_Λ reflects the maximum vacuum energy density compatible with the finite entropy of the de Sitter horizon. This establishes a global equilibrium condition: the outward pressure associated with quantum zero–point fluctuations is balanced by the inward gravitational response encoded in horizon curvature.

From this perspective, conventional bottom–up approaches fail not because they are internally inconsistent, but because they are incomplete. When zero–point fluctuations are evaluated without reference to the vacuum–curvature equilibrium, their contribution appears unbounded and radiatively unstable. Once the thermodynamic constraint imposed by the de Sitter horizon is recognised, however, the bottom–up calculation becomes well defined: ultraviolet contributions are regulated by the same horizon–selected scale that fixes the total vacuum energy. The resulting energy density converges to the same value obtained from global thermodynamic considerations.

The cosmological constant problem is therefore not resolved by discarding quantum field theory, nor by invoking delicate cancellations between microscopic contributions. It is resolved by recognising that microscopic vacuum physics must be evaluated in equilibrium with the macroscopic thermodynamic structure of spacetime. The apparent catastrophe reflects the use of an incomplete framework, rather than a failure of quantum field theory itself.

9.4 The Role and Limits of the Planck Scale

Once the vacuum energy density is understood as fixed by global thermodynamic equilibrium, the traditional role assigned to the Planck scale must be reassessed. This subsection clarifies which elements of Planck's construction remain physically meaningful in a universe with a positive cosmological constant, and which do not.

The Planck scale is often assumed to represent the natural ultraviolet cutoff of quantum gravity. Within the present framework this assumption is misplaced. The combination $c^3/(G\hbar)$ does not define a physical vacuum energy density, nor does it set a saturation scale for zero–point fluctuations. Instead, it survives as an informational quantity: the Planck area L_P^2, which represents the smallest unit of horizon entropy.

This reinterpretation does not invalidate the Planck scale, but it sharply circumscribes its domain of applicability. The Planck length characterises the granularity of spacetime information, not the energy content of the vacuum. When the cosmological constant is neglected, the Planck scale appears as the only available length and is therefore incorrectly promoted to regulate vacuum fluctuations. Once Λ is included, the structure of the vacuum is governed instead by the Λ–scale, while the Planck scale enters only as an informational unit embedded within the horizon entropy.

In this way, the Λ–framework completes the Planck system thermodynamically without displacing it. The Planck area remains the smallest meaningful unit of spacetime information, while the cosmological constant fixes the global entropy budget and the equilibrium vacuum energy density. The failure of the Planck scale to regulate the vacuum is therefore not a flaw of Planck's construction, but a consequence of applying a mechanically complete yet thermodynamically incomplete unit system to a problem governed by horizon entropy.

9.5 Vacuum Energy as an Entropy–Bound Quantity

A central result of this work is that the vacuum energy density is fixed by the maximum entropy of de Sitter spacetime. Starting from the horizon entropy S_{dS}, application of the Clausius relation determines the associated energy and pressure, yielding uniquely the general–relativistic vacuum energy density u_Λ. In this sense the vacuum energy density is not a fundamental input of the theory, but a derived quantity determined by an underlying entropy bound.

This perspective clarifies the relationship between the cosmological constant and quantum zero–point fluctuations. The cosmological constant is a global geometric parameter and does not itself fluctuate, whereas quantum fields exhibit local vacuum fluctuations. In a spacetime with a positive cosmological constant, however, these fluctuations cannot accumulate without limit: they are constrained by the finite entropy of the de Sitter horizon and forced into global equilibrium with spacetime curvature. The observed vacuum energy density thus reflects a balance between quantum fluctuations and the gravitational response encoded in the horizon geometry.

From this viewpoint, the familiar divergences of quantum field theory in flat Minkowski spacetime are not unexpected. In the absence of horizons there is no finite entropy bound and no global equilibrium condition, so vacuum fluctuations remain unconstrained. As shown in Section 3, once spacetime curvature and horizon thermodynamics are taken into account, the same zero–point contributions organise themselves naturally around a finite vacuum scale.

The vacuum catastrophe is therefore not resolved by imposing a hard ultraviolet cutoff or by delicate cancellations among microscopic contributions. Instead, it is resolved by recognising vacuum energy as an entropy–bound quantity, regulated by spacetime curvature and the finite information capacity of the de Sitter horizon.

9.6 Curvature as Regulator and Renormaliser

In conventional quantum field theory, regularisation and renormalisation are formal procedures introduced to control ultraviolet divergences and to define finite physical quantities. Within the present framework, both roles are played physically by spacetime curvature itself. A positive cosmological constant implies the existence of a cosmological horizon with finite entropy and, consequently, a finite number of independent vacuum degrees of freedom. This finite information capacity acts as a natural ultraviolet regulator for quantum vacuum fluctuations.

At the same time, the requirement of pressure equilibrium between zero–point fluctuations and de Sitter curvature uniquely fixes the finite value of the vacuum energy density. This equilibrium condition therefore replaces the arbitrary subtraction schemes of flat–space quantum field theory with a physical renormalisation prescription determined by horizon thermodynamics. The renormalisation point is no longer chosen by hand, but is selected geometrically by the horizon scale associated with Λ.

This curvature–driven regularisation and renormalisation eliminates the radiative instability that afflicts standard treatments of the cosmological constant, as demonstrated explicitly in Section 4. Quantum corrections cannot shift the vacuum energy arbitrarily without violating the finite entropy bound imposed by the de Sitter horizon. The vacuum energy is therefore not only finite but radiatively stable, fixed by global thermodynamic equilibrium rather than by fine tuning.

9.7 Two Independent Routes to the Vacuum Energy

The physical significance of the Λ–scale is underscored by the existence of two independent derivations of the vacuum energy density. The first is thermodynamic, proceeding from horizon entropy and the Clausius relation and depending only on the global properties of de Sitter spacetime. The second is quantum, based on a curvature–regulated zero–point spectrum in which the outward vacuum pressure equilibrates with the curvature–induced pressure associated with the cosmological horizon.

These two routes are conceptually distinct. One is macroscopic and thermodynamic, the other microscopic and quantum. Neither presupposes the validity of the other, and each relies on different physical inputs and levels of description. Yet both converge on the same value of the general–relativistic vacuum energy density u_Λ.

Their agreement is therefore nontrivial. It shows that the Λ–scale is not a model–dependent artefact, nor a consequence of a particular regularisation prescription. Instead, it reflects a genuine physical scale encoded consistently in both the thermodynamic and quantum descriptions of the vacuum, providing strong evidence that u_Λ represents a physically selected saturation value rather than an arbitrary parameter.

9.8 Cross–Domain Consistency and Laboratory Access

An important implication of the Λ–framework is its consistency across disparate physical domains. As shown in Section 7, the same Λ–selected vacuum scale appears in analyses of Casimir phenomena, bosonic and fermionic quantum gases, force quanta, and electromagnetic energy flux. These are not independent coincidences, but complementary manifestations of a single underlying vacuum structure fixed by horizon thermodynamics.

Among these examples, the Casimir effect plays a particularly significant role. Long regarded as the most direct experimental evidence for quantum zero–point fluctuations, the Casimir effect has traditionally been treated as unrelated to the cosmological vacuum of general relativity. Within the present framework this separation disappears. The Casimir effect probes the same vacuum whose energy density sources cosmic acceleration, but does so through laboratory boundary conditions rather than gravitational dynamics.

Precision Casimir experiments therefore offer a potential laboratory window onto the Λ–regulated vacuum. Although such measurements do not access gravity directly, they constrain the same vacuum stress whose global manifestation is encoded by the cosmological constant. In this sense, laboratory vacuum phenomena provide an empirical handle on the thermodynamic structure of the cosmic vacuum, well removed from Planckian energies and accessible to controlled experiment.

9.9 Implications for Quantum Gravity and Cosmology

The results presented here motivate a revision of how the quantum vacuum is understood in gravitational settings. Rather than requiring increasingly elaborate ultraviolet completions to suppress vacuum energy contributions, the analysis indicates that spacetime itself imposes a thermodynamic bound on the admissible quantum fluctuations. The cosmological constant is therefore not an anomaly to be eliminated, but a fundamental parameter that fixes the maximal entropy of spacetime and constrains the ultraviolet structure of the vacuum.

From this perspective, the vacuum catastrophe is resolved neither by delicate cancellations, protective symmetries, nor fine tuning, but by the emergence of a new quantum scale constructed from $G, \hbar, c$ and Λ. Once this scale is recognised and consistently implemented, the vacuum energy density becomes finite, radiatively stable, and physically meaningful within a thermodynamic description of spacetime.

Within this framework, Λ is not a dynamical field but a constant fixed by global horizon thermodynamics. Models in which cosmic acceleration is attributed to time–varying dark energy components—such as quintessence, phantom fields, or scalar–field realisations with evolving equations of state—correspond to non–equilibrium configurations of the horizon degrees of freedom. Such scenarios therefore lie outside the equilibrium regime assumed in the present analysis.

Recent observational analyses have explored the possibility that the effective dark energy equation of state may deviate from a strict cosmological constant, motivating models with time–dependent dark energy. Such indications, however, remain sensitive to data selection, calibration, and modelling assumptions. Within the present framework, any apparent departure from $\omega = -1$ is more naturally interpreted as a signature of thermodynamic relaxation rather than as evidence for a genuinely dynamical vacuum component. In many physical systems, transient evolution of effective parameters precedes equilibrium— examples include cooling gases, chemical equilibration, and the relaxation of horizons following perturbations—without implying that the equilibrium constants themselves are time dependent.

The present results therefore support an interpretation of late–time cosmic acceleration as the equilibrium endpoint of spacetime thermodynamics rather than as evidence for new dynamical vacuum components. In this view, the cosmological constant reflects a fundamental property of spacetime itself; if observations ever convincingly indicate evolution, this would provide insight into how spacetime relaxes toward equilibrium, not evidence that Λ is itself dynamical or non–fundamental.

9.10 Resolution of the Vacuum Catastrophe

The central conclusion of this work is that the vacuum catastrophe does not reflect a failure of quantum field theory or general relativity, but rather the application of an inappropriate quantum scale to the vacuum of an accelerating universe. When the thermodynamic structure of de Sitter spacetime is taken seriously, the cosmological constant acquires a clear physical interpretation and uniquely fixes the quantum saturation scale of the vacuum. The vacuum energy density is then neither arbitrary nor divergent, but determined by equilibrium between quantum fluctuations and spacetime curvature.

The resolution of the vacuum catastrophe therefore lies not in modifying microscopic physics, but in recognising that nature admits an additional quantum scale—one that becomes operative only when the cosmological constant is treated as a fundamental ingredient of quantum physics rather than as a parameter to be renormalised away.

10 Conclusions

The central result of this work is that the existence of an experimentally established, positive cosmological constant—one that is manifestly incompatible with naive quantum–theoretical estimates of vacuum energy—admits a natural and coherent resolution when gravity is interpreted thermodynamically. Building on Jacobson's formulation of the Einstein field equations as an equation of state, we have shown that the cosmological constant acquires a precise physical meaning once horizon thermodynamics is taken seriously.

When applied consistently to de Sitter spacetime, horizon thermodynamics promotes the cosmological constant to a pressure term that completes the first law of thermodynamics for spacetime itself. Rather than representing an arbitrary or mysterious parameter, Λ emerges as a thermodynamic constant that fixes the maximum entropy and information capacity of the universe.

Within this framework, the vacuum energy density is not obtained by summing microscopic zero–point contributions. Instead, it appears as a macroscopic limit that must be respected by all quantum fields and is fixed by global thermodynamic equilibrium between vacuum fluctuations and spacetime curvature. The vacuum catastrophe is therefore reframed as a problem of thermodynamic consistency rather than one of ultraviolet regularisation.

A necessary consequence of this interpretation is a revision of the foundations of natural units. The conventional Planck system, constructed by dimensional analysis of $\{G, \hbar, c\}$ alone, is mechanically complete but thermodynamically incomplete. In contrast, the inclusion of Λ introduces a physically selected quantum scale determined by vacuum–curvature equilibrium, in which the outward pressure of zero–point fluctuations balances the inward gravitational response of the de Sitter horizon. This Λ–selected scale therefore constitutes a thermodynamic completion of natural units rather than an alternative choice of convention.

Within this setting, the Principle of Equivalence acquires a natural thermodynamic interpretation. Both inertial and gravitational forces arise from the same entropy–displacement relation governing the response of spacetime to horizons. The equality of inertial and gravitational mass thus follows as a condition of thermodynamic consistency rather than as an independent postulate.

A striking implication of the Λ–framework appears in the force sector. When gravitational interactions are expressed in Λ–units, the Newtonian force law

$$F = \frac{GMm}{r^2} \longrightarrow F_\Lambda^{(G)} = \Lambda\,\hbar c, \tag{10.1}$$

reduces to a universal vacuum force scale. Here the arrow denotes evaluation in Λ–units rather than equality in conventional units. In this formulation, the characteristic gravitational force depends only on the fundamental limits $\hbar$, c, and Λ, with no explicit dependence on Newton's constant. Newton's constant may therefore be written as

$$G = \frac{1}{\alpha_\Lambda}\,\frac{c^3}{\hbar\Lambda}, \tag{10.2}$$

revealing G not as a primary limiting constant, but as a derived coupling that encodes how matter responds to a finite–entropy vacuum.

This perspective clarifies the origin of gravity's non–renormalisability. Perturbative quantum gravity treats G as a microscopic coupling subject to ultraviolet renormalisation. In a spacetime with positive Λ, however, the vacuum possesses a finite entropy and an associated thermodynamic saturation scale. Newton's constant then characterises a macroscopic response of the vacuum rather than a fundamental interaction strength, and attempts to renormalise it misidentify a thermodynamic coefficient as a microscopic parameter. From this viewpoint, meaningful probes of the gravitational coupling lie not in arbitrarily high–energy extrapolations, but in physical situations that test the vacuum's thermodynamic response, such as Casimir–type configurations or force measurements sensitive to the Λ–selected scale.

This entropy–first viewpoint also resolves the vacuum catastrophe itself. The longstanding focus on vacuum energy density has obscured the more fundamental quantity: the finite information capacity of spacetime. When interpreted through Planck units, the mismatch between zero–point estimates and observation appears as a profound incompatibility between quantum field theory and general relativity. Within the present framework this interpretation is inverted. The smallness of Λ reflects the enormous entropy of the universe, and the convergence of independent thermodynamic and quantum–statistical derivations onto the same vacuum energy density identifies a physically selected quantum scale. Radiative stability then follows naturally, without fine tuning.

Within this thermodynamic interpretation, observational indications of evolving dark energy may be understood not as evidence for a time-dependent cosmological constant, but as signatures of a non-equilibrium relaxation toward a final de Sitter equilibrium, in which the horizon entropy increases monotonically and the observed value of Λ corresponds to the asymptotic late-time state.

Against this backdrop, the historical unease surrounding the cosmological constant acquires a different significance. The cosmological constant has undergone a cycle of introduction, rejection, and empirical resurrection, reflecting a deeper conceptual concern articulated most clearly by Einstein himself. In correspondence with Lemaître in 1947, Einstein wrote:

> "The introduction of such a constant implies a considerable renunciation of the logical

simplicity of the theory ... I am unable to believe that such an ugly thing should be realised in nature."

For Einstein, the difficulty was not observational but structural. Having already introduced Newton's constant G to set the strength of gravitation, the appearance of an apparently unrelated constant Λ, entering the field equations additively, seemed to compromise the unity of the theory.

From a thermodynamic perspective, however, this concern is resolved rather than compounded. Interpreted as an equation of state, the Einstein field equations are completed by the cosmological constant, which fixes the maximum entropy of spacetime. The vacuum is no longer an arbitrary background but a finite thermodynamic system characterised by the dimensionless invariant

$$\alpha_\Lambda = \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}. \tag{10.3}$$

Unlike the Planck system, which yields only dimensional quantities, the inclusion of Λ introduces a genuine dimensionless invariant that unifies quantum mechanics, gravitation, and horizon thermodynamics. In this sense, G and Λ do not represent independent inputs but are linked through the requirement of global thermodynamic consistency. It is therefore the gravitational fine structure constant α_Λ that restores the logical unity between G and Λ that Einstein sought.

Taken together, these results identify Λ as the missing thermodynamic constant required to restore coherence to gravitation and to reconcile quantum vacuum physics with cosmology. The Λ–framework therefore realises the thermodynamic completion of the natural units of spacetime.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

A Natural Units, Dimensionless Invariants, and Historical Completion

The historical development of natural units discussed here follows the original work of Stoney (1881) [24], Planck (1900) [23], Sommerfeld (1916) [30], and the thermodynamic interpretation of horizons developed by Bekenstein and Hawking [31, 32].

A.1 Natural Units

The first system of natural units was introduced by George Stoney in 1881, motivated by the desire to construct a system of measurement based entirely on the constants of Nature, free from arbitrary human conventions. In this way he hoped to eliminate the anthropocentric nature of unit systems (Fig. 15). Stoney's aim was not dimensional elegance, but physical universality.

Stoney	Planck	Lambda
$L_S = \left(\dfrac{Ge^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\, c^4}\right)^{1/2}$	$L_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{c^3}\right)^{1/2}$	$L_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4}$
$t_S = \left(\dfrac{Ge^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\, c^6}\right)^{1/2}$	$t_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{c^5}\right)^{1/2}$	$t_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4}$
$M_S = \left(\dfrac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\, G}\right)^{1/2}$	$M_P = \left(\dfrac{\hbar c}{G}\right)^{1/2}$	$M_\Lambda = \left(\dfrac{\hbar^3 \Lambda}{Gc}\right)^{1/4}$
No dimensionless constant	$\alpha_E = \dfrac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0 \hbar c}$	$\alpha_\Lambda = \dfrac{c^3}{G\,\hbar\,\Lambda}$

Figure 15: Stoney, Planck, and Λ natural unit systems. The Stoney system yields characteristic length, time, and mass scales but no intrinsic dimensionless constant. With the recognition of the quantum of action $\hbar$ as a new fundamental constant, the Stoney system is subsumed into the Planck system and the electromagnetic fine–structure constant α_E emerges. The admission of a positive cosmological constant Λ completes the historical sequence, leading to a new set of Λ–selected units and the appearance of a dimensionless gravitational constant α_Λ.

At the time, however, the conceptual foundations of fundamental physics were incomplete. In particular, the quantity now recognised as central to microscopic physics—the action—was yet to be discovered as a fundamental primitive and so was never penned by Stoney himself.

As a result, the Stoney system contained no intrinsic dimensionless invariant. All characteristic scales constructed within it carried dimensions, and no natural dimensionless constant could be formed from the available constants alone. This absence did not reflect a failure of the Stoney programme, but rather the physical knowledge of the era.

The situation changed decisively with Planck's discovery of the quantum of action h in 1900, later written in its reduced form $\hbar = h/2\pi$. Once action was recognised as a universal lower bound, a comparison between the Stoney action scale and Planck's quantum of action became meaningful. Only at this stage were the ingredients in place for the first dimensionless constant constructed purely from the constants of Nature to emerge: the electromagnetic fine–structure constant.

A.2 Stoney Units: Action Before the Fine–Structure Constant

From the Stoney system, one may construct a natural unit of angular momentum (action),

$$\ell_S = \frac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\, c}. \tag{A.1}$$

Only after Planck's discovery of the quantum of action $\hbar$ does the physical significance of ℓ_S become clear. With $\hbar$ recognised as a universal lower bound on action, the ratio

$$\frac{\ell_S}{\hbar} \tag{A.2}$$

emerges as a pure number: the electromagnetic fine–structure constant,

$$\alpha_E = \frac{e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\, \hbar c}. \tag{A.3}$$

Thus α_E does not represent a mysterious combination of unrelated constants. It is the ratio of two like–dimensioned quantities, both measures of action. The dimensionless term appears only once the correct quantum scale is identified.

With the introduction of $\hbar$, the Stoney system is naturally subsumed into the Planck system. It is worth emphasising a historical subtlety. The fine–structure constant was introduced to physics by Sommerfeld in 1916 through atomic spectroscopy and a relativistic interpretation of Bohr's atomic model. It therefore appeared as an apparently inexplicable combination of unrelated constants, rather than as a ratio of two like dimensioned terms as in Eq. A.2. This historical ordering contributed to the enduring perception of α_E as mysterious or numerological, a perception that has long coloured physicists' attitudes towards dimensionless constants more generally.

With hindsight, this mysticism was unnecessary. Had the Stoney scale been re–examined after the discovery of $\hbar$, the ratio $\ell_S/\hbar$ would have been immediately recognised as a new dimensionless constant. In this sense, the electromagnetic fine–structure constant could, in principle, have been identified well before its formal introduction to physics in 1916. Its delayed recognition was not due to physical subtlety, but to the absence of a conceptual framework in which action itself was regarded as fundamental.

A.3 Planck Units and the Absence of a Thermodynamic Invariant

Planck units are constructed from $\{G, \hbar, c\}$ and map uniquely onto the base dimensions $[M]$, $[L]$, and $[T]$. This guarantees mechanical completeness, but it also ensures that no dimensionless invariant can be formed from these constants alone.

As a result, the Planck system contains no intrinsic entropy scale and no bound on the number of vacuum degrees of freedom. This limitation is not apparent until gravity is recognised as thermodynamic in character.

Once electromagnetism is considered, however, a dimensionless residue *does* appear, namely α_E. This becomes especially transparent when comparing Planck and Stoney units. One finds the simple relations

$$L_S = \sqrt{\alpha_E}\, L_P, \qquad t_S = \sqrt{\alpha_E}\, t_P, \qquad M_S = \sqrt{\alpha_E}\, M_P. \tag{A.4}$$

Thus the Stoney and Planck systems are not unrelated constructions: they differ by the single dimensionless coupling $\sqrt{\alpha_E}$.

A.4 The Cosmological Constant: Entropy Before the Gravitational Fine Structure Constant

In general relativity, the cosmological constant has dimensions of inverse area,

$$[\Lambda] \;=\; [L]^{-2}. \tag{A.5}$$

Once a positive Λ is admitted, spacetime possesses a de Sitter horizon with finite area

$$A_{\mathrm{dS}} \;\sim\; \Lambda^{-1}. \tag{A.6}$$

This introduces a new geometric scale, but *no dimensionless constant appears at this stage.*

Only when horizon thermodynamics is taken into account does the physical meaning of this area become clear. The de Sitter horizon carries a finite entropy,

$$S_{\mathrm{dS}} \;=\; \frac{3\pi k_B c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}. \tag{A.7}$$

Comparing the de Sitter horizon area with the Planck area $A_P = L_P^2$ yields the ratio

$$\frac{A_{\mathrm{dS}}}{A_P} \;=\; \alpha_\Lambda \;\equiv\; \frac{c^3}{G\hbar\Lambda}. \tag{A.8}$$

This ratio is not a numerical curiosity. As a consequence of the Bekenstein–Hawking bound (Eq. **??**), it is a ratio of entropies: the total horizon entropy to the fundamental unit of information. Only once the thermodynamic role of Λ is recognised does the gravitational fine–structure constant α_Λ emerge.

A.5 Structural Parallel and Completion

The relationship between the Planck and Λ systems parallels the Stoney–Planck relationship in Eq. (A.4), but with α_Λ replacing α_E and with a fourth-root scaling,

$$L_\Lambda = \alpha_\Lambda^{1/4}\, L_P, \qquad t_\Lambda = \alpha_\Lambda^{1/4}\, t_P, \qquad M_\Lambda = \alpha_\Lambda^{-1/4}\, M_P. \tag{A.9}$$

Thus the Λ system *subsumes* the Planck system in the same structural way that the Planck system subsumes the Stoney system. The essential lesson may be stated simply. In each historical case examined, the discovery of a new fundamental constant reveals that the existing natural unit system is incomplete. The introduction of the new constant forces a structural revision of the unit system, and in doing so a new *dimensionless invariant* must inevitably emerge. This invariant encodes the new physical limit associated with the constant. Historically, the structural pattern is therefore

$$\text{existing unit system} \xrightarrow{\text{new constant}} \text{new dimensionless constant} \rightarrow \text{new unit system} \qquad \text{(A.10)}$$

Thus the gravitational fine structure constant has been named as such in recognition of the precise structural analogy with the way the fine structure constant α_E emerged alongside a new system of natural units.

For completeness, it is instructive to note the explicit numerical values associated with the Λ–scale. Figure 16 illustrates the hierarchy of fundamental length scales, in which the Planck length L_P anchors the ultraviolet, the de Sitter horizon radius R_{dS} anchors the infrared, and the Λ–scale

$$L_\Lambda = \sqrt{L_P R_{dS}} \qquad \text{(A.11)}$$

appears as their geometric mean. Evaluated using current cosmological data, this scale lies at $L_\Lambda \sim 10^{-5}m$, far removed from both the Planck and cosmological extremes. This placement reinforces the interpretation of the Λ–scale as a physically emergent coherence length associated with vacuum–curvature equilibrium, rather than as an arbitrarily imposed cutoff.

Quantity	Λ–scale	Planck scale
Length	$L_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^3}\right)^{1/4} = 3.9 \times 10^{-5}\,\mathrm{m}$	$L_P = \sqrt{\frac{\hbar G}{c^3}} = 1.6 \times 10^{-35}\,\mathrm{m}$
Time	$t_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar G}{\Lambda c^7}\right)^{1/4} = 1.3 \times 10^{-13}\,\mathrm{s}$	$t_P = \sqrt{\frac{\hbar G}{c^5}} = 5.4 \times 10^{-44}\,\mathrm{s}$
Mass	$M_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda}{cG}\right)^{1/4} = 9.0 \times 10^{-39}\,\mathrm{kg}$	$M_P = \sqrt{\frac{\hbar c}{G}} = 2.2 \times 10^{-8}\,\mathrm{kg}$
Temperature	$\Theta_\Lambda = \left(\frac{\hbar^3 \Lambda c^7}{G k_B^4}\right)^{1/4} = 5.8 \times 10^{1}\,\mathrm{K}$	$\Theta_P = \sqrt{\frac{\hbar c^5}{G k_B^2}} = 1.4 \times 10^{32}\,\mathrm{K}$

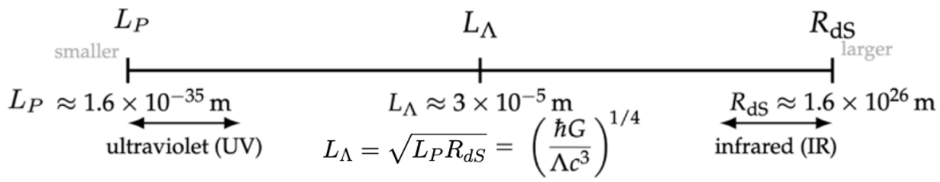

Figure 16: Hierarchy of fundamental length scales in a universe with a positive cosmological constant. The Planck length L_P sets the ultraviolet (UV) scale, the de Sitter horizon R_{dS} sets the infrared (IR) scale, and the emergent Λ–scale L_Λ lies between them. Numerical values are evaluated using CODATA constants and the late–time cosmological value $\Lambda \simeq 1.1 \times 10^{-52}\,\mathrm{m}^{-2}$.