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ON THE PROBLEM OF CONFORMAL
COUPLING IN FIELD THEORY IN CURVED
SPACETIME



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ABSTRACT - In this paper we study the properties of the solutions of the minimal and conformal coupled scalar fields in curved spacetime. We show that, contrary to claims published in the literature, anomalous R -forces between two "scalar charged" particles don't exist for the conformal coupled scalar fields.

Even more, it is the minimal coupled scalar field that has a pathological and unexpected behavior. The origin of the erroneous claim is investigated due to its great methodological meaning.

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On the problem of conformal coupling in field theory in curved spacetime

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Abstract

In this paper we study the properties of the solutions of the minimal and conformal coupled scalar fields in curved spacetime. We show that, contrary to claims published in the literature, anomalous R -forces between two "scalar charged" particles don't exist for the conformal coupled scalar fields.

Even more, it is the minimal coupled scalar field that has a pathological and unexpected behavior. The origin of the erroneous claim is investigated due to its great methodological meaning.

As it is well known in field theory, in curved space-time we have an ambiguity [1,2] concerning massless scalar particles. The Klein-Gordon equation in curved space-time for these particles can be written in two different forms. The first results from the principle of minimal coupling and is:

$$(\nabla_i \nabla^i) \varphi(x) = 0, \quad (1)$$

where ∇_i is the Levi-Civita connection of the metric g_{ik} which has the signature $(+, -, -, -)$ and $\varphi(x)$ is a scalar field. The second possible form results from conformal coupling and is:

$$(\nabla_i \nabla^i + \frac{R}{6}) \varphi(x) = 0. \quad (2)$$

Here R is the scalar curvature of spacetime.

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This ambiguity is preserved for massive scalar particles, for which one can write either

$$(\nabla_i \nabla^i + m^2)\varphi(x) = 0, \text{ minimal coupling} \quad (3)$$

or

$$(\nabla_i \nabla^i + \frac{R}{6} + m^2)\varphi(x) = 0, \text{ conformal coupling.} \quad (4)$$

a) One of the advantages of eq.(2) is that it is conformally invariant (invariant under Weyl scale transformations). This means that if one changes the metric g_{ik} into $\tilde{g}_{ik} = \exp[-2\sigma(x)]g_{ik}$, and the function $\varphi(x)$ into $\tilde{\varphi}(x) = \exp(\sigma(x))\varphi(x)$, then $\tilde{\varphi}(x)$ is the solution of eq.(2) in the metric \tilde{g}_{ik} .

Eq.(1) doesn't share the property of conformal invariance with equation (2).

It is interesting to notice here, that the Dirac equation for a massless particle (for example a neutrino) in curved space-time is conformally invariant. The same is true for Maxwell's equations in curved space-time. But there is no conformal invariance for the graviton, which is described by a massless tensor field $h_{ik}(x)$ with spin 2 [2]. It satisfies the linearized equation:

$$\nabla^j \nabla_j h_{ik}(x) + 2R_{jikl}h^{jl}(x) = 0 \quad (5)$$

with the gauge conditions

$$\nabla_k h_i^k(x) = 0, \quad h(x) = h_i^i(x) = 0, \quad (6)$$

where R_{jikl} is the curvature tensor of the background space-time. Notations are the same as in [2].

b) The other advantage of the eq.(2), and also of the eq.(4) for the massive case, concerns the properties of quasiclassical solutions. As shown by Chernikov and Tagirov, [3] only for eq.(2) or eq.(4) we have in the quasiclassical limit particles moving along geodesics of the corresponding space-time. This occurs if R is large enough, so that it has the order $R \sim m^2$ in units $\hbar = c = 1$ and we can't neglect this term using the quasiclassical approximation.

For massive vector bosons, when we use the Proca equation in the Riemannian space-time we don't have the $R/6$ term. Instead we have

$$\nabla_i f^{ik}(x) + m^2 \varphi^k(x) = 0 \quad (7)$$

where $f^{ik}(x) = \nabla_i \varphi_k - \nabla_k \varphi_i = \partial_i \varphi_k - \partial_k \varphi_i$, where φ_i is a vector field.

As shown in [4], the longitudinal component of a vector field behaves as some minimally coupled scalar massive field.

From all this it seems that in nature one can have both kinds of fields and we must investigate their different physical manifestations.

In this paper we shall discuss carefully the scalar case. The minimally coupled scalar field, as it is well known [5], plays an important role in inflation theory, being popular in cosmology. If we choose the conformal coupling we don't have the properties necessary for inflation.

Lack of conformal invariance of eq. (1) can be interpreted in the sense that this field is not really massless and has some scale, defined by the curved space-time. On the opposite, eq. (2) describes really massless particles.

This is confirmed by the structure of the Green functions $G(x, x')$ for the scalar fields for eqs. (1) and (2). Generally for an arbitrary coupling of the form ξR we have [2] for the Green function the following equation:

$$\sqrt{-g}(\nabla_i \nabla^i + m^2 + \xi R)G(x, x') = \delta(x - x'), \quad (8)$$

where $\xi = 0$ corresponds to minimal coupling and $\xi = \frac{1}{6}$ to conformal coupling. Here g is the determinant of the metrical tensor. The singularities of the Green function can be obtained by the Schwinger-DeWitt technique [6, 7] and has the following representation [1]:

$$G(x, x') = \frac{\Delta^{1/2} m^2}{4\pi^2} \left\{ -\frac{1}{m^2 \sigma} + L \left(1 - \frac{m^2 \sigma}{4} \right) - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{5}{16} m^2 \sigma + \dots - \frac{a_1(x, x')}{m^2} \left[L \left(1 - \frac{m^2 \sigma}{2} \right) + \frac{m^2 \sigma}{2} + \dots \right] + \frac{a_2(x, x')}{m^4} \left[\frac{1}{2} - \frac{L m^2 \sigma}{2} + \frac{m^2 \sigma}{4} + \dots \right] + \dots \right\}, \quad (9)$$

where $\sigma(x, x') = \eta_{ik}(x^i - x'^i)(x^k - x'^k)/2$ and $\eta_{ik} = \text{diag}(1, -1, -1, -1)$ is the metrical tensor of Minkowski spacetime:

$$\Delta(x, x') = -\det\left(\frac{\partial^2 \sigma(x, x')}{\partial x'^k}\right) \cdot [g(x)g(x')]^{-1/2} \quad (10)$$

$$\Delta(x, x) = 1$$

and

$$L = \frac{1}{2} \ln\left[\left(\frac{1}{2}\right) m^2 \sigma\right] + c; \quad (11)$$

where $c = 0,577, \dots$ is the Euler constant, and

$$a_1(x, x) = a_1 = \left(\frac{1}{6} - \xi\right) R \quad (12)$$

$$a_2(x, x) = a_2 = \frac{1}{180} (R^{iklm} R_{iklm} - R^{ik} R_{ik}) - \frac{1}{6} \left(\frac{1}{5} - \xi\right) \nabla^k \nabla_k R + \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{1}{6} - \xi\right)^2 R^2. \quad (13)$$

Eq.(9) is written for terms up to $0(m^2 \sigma)$ and $0((m\rho)^{-k})$ included, where $R_{ijkl} R^{ijkl} \sim \rho^{-k}$.

So from eq.(9) it can be seen that, when $x \rightarrow x'$ and $m \rightarrow 0$, the structure of the singularity for $\xi = \frac{1}{6}$ (when $a_1 = 0$) is the same as in flat space-time. But if $\xi = 0$ we have an additional singularity, as if we had some mass due to the curvature R of the space-time.

Nevertheless, in the literature as, e.g., in [8], we can find claims that eq.(2) leads to violation of the strong equivalence principle and to the appearance of anomalous R -term forces between two "scalar charged" particles! In this paper we shall show that the situation is quite the opposite! The argumentation of [8] is the following: write eq.(2) in a locally Lorentz coordinate system (with origin in a given point P_0) where a point source lives. We have

$$\square \varphi + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = \mu_1 \delta(\vec{r}). \quad (14)$$

Then we obtain a Yukawa's potential solution;

$$\varphi = -\frac{\mu_1}{r} \exp - \left[\left(\frac{r}{a\sqrt{6}} \right) \right], \quad (15)$$

where $a = R^{-\frac{1}{2}}$.

It is easy to see, nevertheless, that, if we find an exact solution of eq.(2) with the source term, we don't arrive at the Yukawa solution. To see this, take the most simple case of a conformally flat Friedmann quasieuclidean space-time with the metric:

$$ds^2 = a^2(\eta)(d\eta^2 - d\vec{l}^2) \quad (16)$$

$$d\vec{l}^2 = dx^2 + dy^2 + dz^2,$$

where η is the conformal time.

Write eq.(2) as:

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{-g}} \frac{\partial}{\partial x^i} \left(\sqrt{-g} g^{ik} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x^k} \right) + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = 0 \quad (17)$$

or as

$$\frac{1}{a^4} \frac{\partial}{\partial x^i} \left(a^4 \frac{1}{a^2} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x^i} \right) + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = 0 \quad (18)$$

Here

$$R = 6a^{-2} \left(\frac{a''}{a} \right), \quad a'' = \frac{d^2 a}{d\eta^2}. \quad (19)$$

From eq.(18) we have

$$\frac{1}{a^4} \frac{\partial}{\partial \eta} \left(a^2 \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \eta} \right) - \frac{1}{a^2} \Delta \varphi + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = 0 \quad (20)$$

or

$$\frac{a^2}{a^4} \frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial \eta^2} + \frac{2}{a^3} a' \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \eta} - \frac{1}{a^2} \Delta \varphi + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = 0. \quad (21)$$

To find a solution of eq.(21) we make a conformal transformation of φ by

$$\varphi \mapsto \tilde{\varphi} \quad ; \quad \varphi = \frac{1}{a} \tilde{\varphi}. \quad (22)$$

Then we get from eq.(21):

$$\frac{1}{a^2} \left[\frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial \eta^2} + \frac{2a'}{a} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \eta} - \Delta \varphi + \left(\frac{R}{6} \right) a^2 \varphi \right] = 0 \quad (23)$$

or for $\tilde{\varphi}$

$$\frac{1}{a^2} \left[\tilde{\varphi}'' - \tilde{\varphi} \frac{a''}{a^2} + \frac{R}{6} a \tilde{\varphi} - \frac{1}{a} \Delta \tilde{\varphi} \right] = 0 \quad (24)$$

Using R from eq.(19) we see that due to compensation of terms we get

$$\frac{1}{a^3} [\tilde{\varphi}'' - \Delta \tilde{\varphi}] = 0 \quad (25)$$

Now let us put the source on the right hand side of (2). Instead of eq.(2) we now have

$$(\nabla_i \nabla^i + \frac{R}{6}) \varphi(x) = \mu \frac{\delta(\vec{x})}{\sqrt{g^{(3)}}} \quad (26)$$

Here $\delta(\vec{x})$ is the usual δ -function, but we must have $\sqrt{g^{(3)}}$ where $g^{(3)}$ is the determinant of the 3-metric, i.e., $\sqrt{g^{(3)}} = a^3$.

So, from (25) we have that eq.(26) can be written,

$$\frac{1}{a^3} [\tilde{\varphi}'' - \Delta \tilde{\varphi}] = \frac{1}{a^3} \mu \delta(\vec{x}), \quad (27)$$

and the static solution of this equation is the usual Coulomb potential, but with a conformal factor:

$$\tilde{\varphi} = -\frac{\mu}{r} \quad \text{and} \quad \varphi = -\frac{1}{a} \frac{\mu}{r}. \quad (28)$$

On the contrary, for minimal coupling instead of eq.(25) we get

$$\frac{1}{a^2} \left(\tilde{\varphi}'' - \tilde{\varphi} \frac{a''}{a^2} - \frac{1}{a} \Delta \tilde{\varphi} \right) = 0 \quad (29)$$

or

$$\frac{1}{a^3} \left(\tilde{\varphi}'' - \tilde{\varphi} \frac{a''}{a} - \Delta \tilde{\varphi} \right) = 0, \quad (30)$$

so that, if there is a source, we have

$$\frac{1}{a^3} \left(\tilde{\varphi}'' - \tilde{\varphi} \frac{a''}{a} - \Delta \tilde{\varphi} \right) = \mu \delta(\vec{x}) / \sqrt{g^{(3)}} \quad (31)$$

The situation is the same as if in flat space-time we had some mass term due to $\frac{a''}{a} \neq 0$. This is the reason why, contrary to [8], it is here that we don't have the usual massless behaviour.

For a dust-like Universe we have $R \neq 0$ and $a(\eta) = a_0 \eta^2$, so that the term $\frac{a''}{a} > 0$ and for $\eta \approx \text{const}$ it has properties of $m^2 a^2 < 0$, i.e., of "tachyonic mass".

Now let us discuss for this case the quasiclassical behaviour. We write

$$\varphi = \frac{1}{a} \rho e^{i \frac{\delta}{\hbar}} \quad (32)$$

Then it is easy to see that for eq.(2) and eq.(25) we have the following equations (33) and (34), respectively, valid until the order \hbar^{-2} :

$$\frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} - \sum_{\alpha=1}^3 \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} = 0, \quad (33)$$

$$\frac{1}{a^2} \left\{ \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} - \sum_{\alpha=1}^3 \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} \right\} = m^2 \quad (34)$$

which is just $g^{00} \frac{\partial \delta}{\partial \eta} \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} - g^{\alpha\beta} \frac{\partial S}{\partial x^\alpha} \frac{\partial S}{\partial x^\beta} = m^2$.

For the minimal coupling case we obtain from eq.(30)

$$\frac{1}{a^2} \left\{ \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} \frac{\partial S}{\partial \eta} - \sum_{\alpha=1}^3 \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} \frac{\partial S}{\partial x_\alpha} \right\} = -\frac{a''}{a^3} = -\frac{R}{6} \quad (35)$$

So, it is easy to see that geodesics for these particles can't live on light-cones. Even worse, they can be space like (the meaning of this for gravitons and vector mesons for large η is still to be understood!).

And now in the end of our presentation we return to the question: what is the error, when we naively (as it was done in [8]) write eq.(2) in a locally Lorentz coordinate system as

$$\square\varphi + \frac{R}{6}\varphi = \mu_1\delta(\vec{r}), \quad (36)$$

or better

$$\square\varphi + \frac{R}{6}\varphi = \frac{\mu_1}{\sqrt{g^{(3)}}}\delta(\vec{r}) \quad (37)$$

The answer to this question has a great metodological meaning.

The operator $\nabla_i\nabla^i$ in eq.(2) acting on the scalar field has only one Christoffel symbol, so it seems that at "the point" (i.e., in P_0 , the origin of the locally Lorentz coordinate system) we can write $\square\varphi$ as in Minkowski spacetime. But, as discussed in [9] in order to find the solution of a given differential equation at a given point of the manifold, one must look for properties of this solution in the neighborhood of this point taking the boundary conditions properly into account. Indeed, if $\langle\xi^\mu\rangle$ are locally Lorentz coordinates and $\langle x^\mu\rangle$ are arbitrary coordinates and if $\langle X^\mu\rangle$ are the coordinates of P_0 (the origin of the locally Lorentz coordinate system), then as is well known

$$\xi^\alpha(x) = a^\alpha + b_\mu^\alpha(x^\mu - X^\mu) + \frac{1}{2}b_\lambda^\alpha\Gamma_{\mu\nu}^\lambda(X)(x^\mu - X^\mu)(x^\nu - X^\nu),$$

$$\text{with } a^\alpha = \xi^\alpha(x)|_{x=X}; \quad b_\lambda^\alpha = \left.\frac{\partial\xi^\alpha}{\partial x^\lambda}\right|_{x=X}.$$

Also:

$$\Gamma_{\beta\gamma,\mu}^\alpha(\xi^\mu)\Big|_{\xi_0^\mu} = -\frac{1}{3}(R_{\beta\gamma\mu}^\alpha(\xi^\mu) + R_{\gamma\beta\mu}^\alpha(\xi^\mu))\Big|_{\xi_0^\mu}.$$

Then, for $\xi^\mu \neq \xi^\mu(P_0) = \xi_0^\mu$, quantities $\Gamma_{\beta\mu}^\alpha(\xi^\mu)$ are not null. This means that, in order to get a solution for eq.(2) with a source term in the $\langle\xi^\mu\rangle$ coordinates valid for all spacetime and taking into account the boundary conditions, we can't simply solve eq.(36). What is necessary is to solve a very complicated equation in these coordinates. If this is done carefully we must obtain the right result founded above.

Before ending we find useful to discuss how to solve eq.(2) in a coordinate system used by astronomers. To do this, besides the synchronous reference frame

$$ds^2 = c^2dt^2 - a^2(t)d\vec{l}^2 = c^2dt^2 - a^2(t)[dr^2 + r^2(\sin^2\theta'd\varphi^2 + d\theta'^2)] \quad (38)$$

connected with the conformal one [(16)] by $c dt = a d\eta$, we introduce another coordinate system where the space distance is given by $D = a(t)r$, so, that

$$dD = adr + rda \quad (39)$$

and

$$ds^2 = (1 - D^2\frac{\dot{a}^2}{c^2a^2})c^2dt^2 + 2D\frac{\dot{a}}{ca}dDcdt - dD^2 - D^2(\sin^2\theta'd\varphi^2 + d\theta'^2). \quad (40)$$

The advantage of the reference frame associated to these coordinates is that for an observer on the Earth, when $\varepsilon = D\frac{\dot{a}}{ca}$ is small, one has a good approximation to the Minkowski metric, and only for large enough D one has curved spacetime. Really, we can use the parameter ε as a small parameter. Let us write equation ((7) in these coordinates. From:

$$\begin{cases} g_{00} = 1 - \left(\frac{D\dot{a}}{ca}\right)^2 \\ g_{01} = 2D\left(\frac{\dot{a}}{ca}\right); g_{ii} = -1; g_{0\theta} = -D^2, \\ g_{\varphi\varphi} = -D^2\sin^2\theta' \end{cases} \quad (41)$$

and using the relations [9]

$$\begin{cases} g^{0r}g_{r0} + g^{00}g_{00} = 1 \\ g^{r0}g_{00} + g^{rr}g_{r0} = 0 \\ 2g^{r0}g_{0r} + g^{rr}g_{rr} = 1 \end{cases}, \quad (42)$$

we obtain

$$g^{0r} = \frac{2D\frac{\dot{a}}{ca}}{1 + 7\left(D\frac{\dot{a}}{ca}\right)^2}. \quad (43)$$

Then, on the first approximation in ϵ we have:

$$g^{0r} = 2D \frac{\dot{a}}{ca} = g_{0r} \quad (44)$$

Putting this into eq (17), noting that terms depending on ϵ^2 after differentiation still will contain ϵ , we can put them away when $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$. The only term which can't be put away is the one containing derivatives in D of g^{0r} . So, taking for $\sqrt{-g}$ the Minkowski value, we obtain the equation:

$$\left[\frac{1}{c^2} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial t^2} - \Delta \right] \varphi + 2 \frac{\dot{a}}{ca} \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \varphi + \frac{R}{6} \varphi = 0 \quad (45)$$

So, the nondiagonal components g_{0r} lead to an extra term in the approximation $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$.

But in order to solve this equation we must take

$$\varphi = \frac{1}{a} \tilde{\varphi} \quad (46)$$

which, as in the previous case of conformal, time, immediately leads to a cancellation of the $\frac{R}{6}$ term, so that we end with:

$$\frac{1}{c^2 a} \ddot{\tilde{\varphi}} - \frac{1}{a} \Delta \tilde{\varphi} = 0. \quad (47)$$

Can we put away the term $2 \frac{\dot{a}}{c^2 a} \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \varphi$ but retain the $\frac{R}{6}$ term? From Einstein's equations, we can see that for the usual cosmological models we must put away the term $\frac{R}{6} \varphi$ if we take $\frac{\dot{a}}{a}$, the Hubble's constant, equal to zero. At the modern epoch of evolution of the universe, we can do this and use the Minkowski metric as a very good approximation near the Earth.

But for R large enough in the early epochs one can't do this. But, then, the nondiagonal terms $g^{0r} \neq 0$ lead to the impossibility of having a unique time and to define space distance unambiguously. It follows that we can't write the usual $\delta(\vec{r})$ -function for the charge distribution and eq (36) doesn't have unambiguous sense.

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