

The equations of stellar structure. Energy generation and transport.

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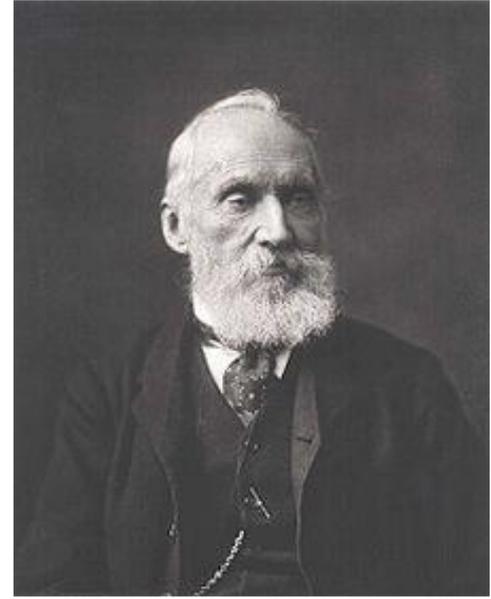
THE LIKELY FORM OF ENERGY GENERATION
THE EQUATION OF CONSERVATION OF ENERGY
HOW ENERGY IS TRANSPORTED IN THE SUN:
THE CRITERION FOR CONVECTION



Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington
(1882-1944)



Karl Schwarzschild
(1873-1916)



Lord Kelvin (William Thomson)
(1824-1907)

Energy generation in stars

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So far, we have only considered the dynamical properties of the star, and the state of the stellar material. We need to consider the source of the stellar energy.

Let's consider the origin of the energy, i.e. the conversion of energy from some form in which it is not immediately available into some form that it can radiate.

How much energy does the Sun need to generate in order to shine with its measured luminosity ?

$$L_{\odot} = 4 \times 10^{26} \text{ W} = 4 \times 10^{33} \text{ erg s}^{-1}$$

Sun has not changed flux in 10^9 yr (3×10^{16} s) \Rightarrow Sun has radiated at least 1.2×10^{50} erg

The rest mass energy: $E = mc^2 \Rightarrow m_{\text{lost}} = 10^{29} \text{ g} \approx 10^{-4} M_{\odot}$

What is the source of this energy ?

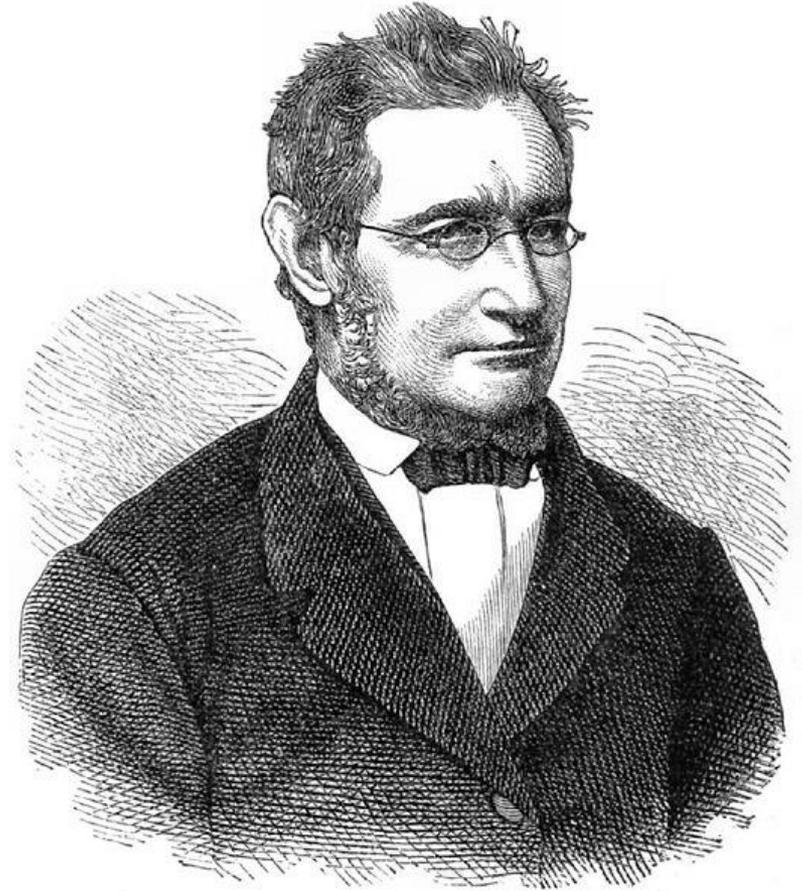
- Accretion (Mayer)
- Cooling
- Contraction (gravitational; Helmholtz, Lord Kelvin)
- Chemical reactions
- Nuclear reactions

Source of energy generation

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Accretion

- From the very beginning it was obvious that one of the energy source of the Sun could be gravitation. Mayer, one of the fathers of the energy conservation law, suggested that kinetic energy of meteorites would keep the Sun hot.
- This idea was not considered seriously. Now, however, we know that the most compact objects in the Galaxy, neutron stars in X-ray binaries, produce their large luminosity in a similar way, by accreting matter from a companion star.
- But for the Sun it cannot be important.



Julius Robert von Mayer
(1814-1878)

Source of energy generation

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Cooling and contraction

These are closely related, so we consider them together. Cooling is simplest idea of all. Suppose the radiative energy of the Sun is due to the Sun being much hotter when it was formed and has since been cooling down. We can test how plausible this is.

Or is the Sun slowly contracting with consequent release of gravitational potential energy, which is converted to radiation?

Recently, assuming that stellar material is ideal monatomic gas (negligible P_{rad}), we obtained this form of the Virial theorem:

$$2E_T + E_G = 0$$

The negative gravitational energy of a star is equal to twice its thermal energy. This means that the time for which the present thermal energy of the Sun can supply its radiation and the time for which the past release of gravitational potential energy could have supplied its present rate of radiation differ by only a factor two.

Total release of gravitational potential energy would have been sufficient to provide radiant energy at a rate given by the luminosity of the star L , for a time equal approximately to the thermal timescale (the time required for a star to radiate all its reservoir of thermal energy):

$$t_{th} \sim \frac{GM^2}{RL}$$

Cooling and contraction (1)

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Putting in values for the Sun: $t_{th,\odot} \sim 3 \times 10^7$ years. This limit of the age of the Sun obtained in 1862 by Lord Kelvin (William Thomson) was used as an argument against Charles Darwin's (1859) theory of evolution. Darwin's theory required geological time to be much larger, so as to account for the slow evolution of species of plants and animals by natural selection.

In 1899 geologists Thomas C. Chamberlin noted:

“Is present knowledge relative to the behaviour of matter under extraordinary conditions as obtain in the interior of the Sun sufficiently exhaustive to warrant assertion that no unrecognized sources of heat reside there? What is the internal constituents of atoms may be is yet an open question. Is it not improbable that they are complex organizations and the seats of enormous energy?”

Later, Arthur Eddington in *Observatory* (1920) predicts that stellar energy is subatomic: “Only the inertia of tradition keeps the contraction hypothesis alive - or rather, not alive, but an unburied corpse... A star is drawing on some vast reservoir of energy by means unknown to us. This reservoir can scarcely be other than the subatomic energy which, it is known, exists abundantly in all matter... There is sufficient in the Sun to maintain its output for 15 billion years... If, indeed, the subatomic energy in the star is being freely used to maintain their great furnaces, it seems to bring a little nearer to fulfilment our dream of controlling this latent power for the well-being of the human race - or for its suicide.”

Cooling and contraction (2)

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Now the Earth age 4.6×10^9 years is determined using nuclear physics (from halftime decay of some radioactive elements). However, already in XVIII century Edmond Halley proposed a method of measuring the age from the speed the salt increases in the ocean. In XIX century, geological method were used that measure the time for sedimentation of various materials.

Let us now consider gravitational contraction in other stars.

$$\frac{R}{R_{\odot}} \propto \left(\frac{M}{M_{\odot}} \right)^{\beta}, \quad \frac{L}{L_{\odot}} \propto \left(\frac{M}{M_{\odot}} \right)^l$$

$$t_{th} \sim \frac{GM^2}{RL}$$

$$\beta=1, \quad l=4 \quad \text{for } M < M_{\odot}, \quad E_G \propto M \quad \Rightarrow \quad t_{th} \propto M^{-3}$$

$$\beta = 3/4, \quad l = 3^{1/4} \quad \text{for } M > M_{\odot}, \quad E_G \propto M^{5/4} \quad \Rightarrow \quad t_{th} \propto M^{-2}$$

Nuclear energy $E_N \propto M$

$E_N / E_G \approx 100$, and varies only by a factor 2 - 3

Cooling and contraction (3)

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If the Sun was powered by either contraction or cooling, it would have changed substantially in the last 10 million years. A factor of ~ 100 too short to account for the constraints on age of the Sun imposed by fossil and geological records.

The Virial theorem: $2E_T + E_G = 0$

The total energy is $E = E_T + E_G = -E_T = E_G / 2 < 0$

If no energy source exist in a star, then its luminosity comes from the decreasing total energy:

$$L = -\dot{E} \Rightarrow L = \dot{E}_T \quad \text{as } L > 0 \Rightarrow \dot{E}_T > 0 \Rightarrow \dot{E}_T \uparrow$$

Thus, a star is heating up when it loses its energy!

Another important consequence: $L = -\dot{E}_G / 2$

a star can radiate only 1/2 of its gravitational energy released during contraction.

Source of energy generation

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Chemical Reactions

Can quickly rule these out as possible energy sources for the Sun. We calculated above that we need to find a process that can produce at least 10^{-4} of the rest mass energy of the Sun. Chemical reactions such as the combustion of fossil fuels release $\sim 5 \times 10^{-10}$ of the rest mass energy of the fuel.

Nuclear Reactions

Hence the only known way of producing sufficiently large amounts of energy is through nuclear reactions. There are two types of nuclear reactions, **fission** and **fusion**.

Fission reactions, such as those that occur in nuclear reactors, or atomic weapons can release $\sim 5 \times 10^{-4}$ of the rest mass energy through fission of heavy nuclei (uranium or plutonium).

Class task: Can you show that the fusion reactions can release enough energy to feasibly power a star? Assume atomic weight of H=1.008172 and He⁴=4.003875, atomic mass unit = 1.66054×10^{-24} g

Hence, we can see that both fusion and fission could in principle power the Sun. Which is the more likely? As light elements are much more abundant in the solar system than heavy ones, we would expect nuclear fusion to be the dominant source. Given the limits on P and T that we have obtained - are the central conditions suitable for fusion ? We will return to this later.

Equation of energy production (1)

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The third equation of stellar structure:
relation between energy release and
the rate of energy transport.

Consider a spherically symmetric star in
which energy transport is radial and in
which time variations are unimportant.

$L(r)$ = rate of energy flow across sphere of
radius r .

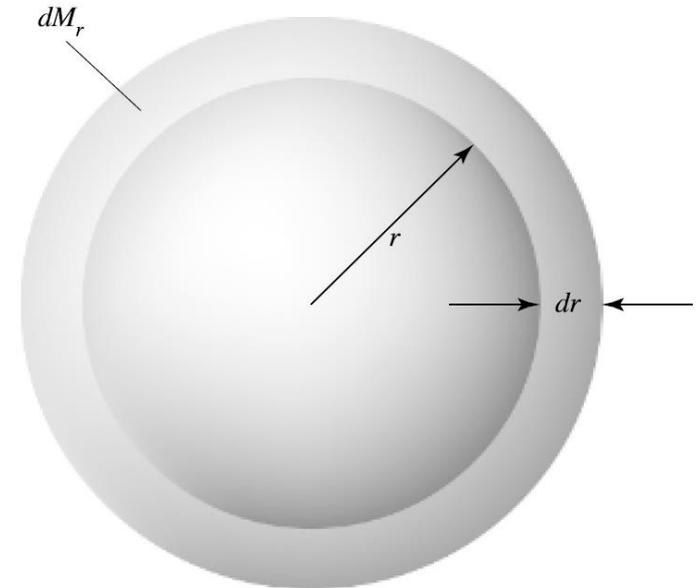
$L(r+dr)$ = rate of energy flow across sphere of
radius $r+dr$.

Because shell is thin:

$$dV(r) = 4\pi r^2 dr$$

and

$$dm = dV\rho(r) = 4\pi r^2 \rho(r) dr$$



Equation of energy production (2)

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We define ε = energy release per unit mass per unit time ($\text{erg s}^{-1} \text{g}^{-1}$)

Hence energy release rate in shell is written: $4\pi r^2 \rho(r) \varepsilon dr$

Conservation of energy leads us to

$$L(r + dr) = L(r) + 4\pi r^2 \rho(r) \varepsilon dr$$

\Rightarrow

$$\frac{L(r + dr) - L(r)}{dr} = 4\pi r^2 \rho(r) \varepsilon$$

And for $dr \rightarrow 0$:

$$\frac{dL(r)}{dr} = 4\pi r^2 \rho(r) \varepsilon$$

This is the **equation of energy production**.

We now have three of the equations of stellar structure. However, we have five unknowns:

$$P(r), m(r), L(r), \rho(r), \varepsilon(r).$$

In order to make further progress we need to consider energy transport in stars.