

# Metric measure spacetimes: a nonsmooth approach to gravity

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Adopting a reference measure  $m$

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8. **Laplacian comparison** with constant curvature: 'd'Alembert comparison'  
 $p$ -d'Alembertian becomes elliptic(!) for homogeneity  $p - 1 < 0$
9. **nonsmooth** splitting: extremizing timelike line yields product geometry  
(currently open; possible future work)

# A nonsmooth framework for gravity

- replace Lorentz manifold  $(M, g_{ij})$  of relativity with *metric spacetime*  $M$  (variant on Kunzinger-Sämman's '18 Lorentzian prelength spaces; also Minguzzi-Suhr's '24 bounded Lorentzian metric spaces, [M.24], Müller...)

- $\ell : M^2 \rightarrow \{-\infty\} \cup [0, \infty)$  is called a *time-separation* function if

$$\ell(x, y) + \ell(y, z) \leq \ell(x, z) \quad \forall x, y, z \in M$$

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- $\ell$  defines the *transitive* relations *causality*  $\leq$  and *chronology*  $\ll$  by:

$$\begin{array}{ll} \leq := \{\ell \geq 0\} & \ll := \{\ell > 0\} \\ \text{future } J^+(x) = \{y \in M \mid y \geq x\} & I^+(x) := \{y \in M \mid y \gg x\} \\ \text{past } J^-(z) := \{y \in M \mid y \leq z\} & I^-(z) := \{y \in M \mid y \ll z\} \end{array}$$

- assume  $\ell(y, y) = 0 \forall y \in M$ , so (the preorder)  $\leq$  is *reflexive*
- *chronological topology*: the coarsest topology with  $I^\pm(y)$  open  $\forall y \in M$

- a topology is called *Polish* if it has a complete, separable metrization

### Definition (Metric spacetime; time-reversal)

A time-separation function  $\ell : M^2 \rightarrow \{-\infty\} \cup [0, \infty)$  as above makes  $(M, \ell)$  a *metric spacetime* if the chronological topology it induces is Polish. The *time-reversal*  $(M, \ell^*)$  of  $(M, \ell)$  refers to  $\ell^*(y, x) = \ell(x, y)$ .

- metrizability implies  $\leq$  is partial-order: i.e.  $(x \leq z \ \& \ z \leq x) \Rightarrow (x = z)$
- $\leq$  is *forward-complete*  $\Leftrightarrow \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} x_i$  **exists** whenever  $x_i \leq x_{i+1} \leq z (\forall i \in \mathbf{N})$

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### Definition (Forward spacetime — our standing assumption)

A metric spacetime  $(M, \ell)$  (with its causal and chronological relations  $\leq$  and  $\ll$  and Polish chronological topology) is called *forward* if the partial order  $\leq$  is *forward-complete* and  $\ell$  is *upper semicontinuous*.

- write  $(M, \ell)$  is *backward*  $\Leftrightarrow$  its time-reversal  $(M, \ell^*)$  is forward
- let  $J^+(X) := \cup_{x \in X} J^+(x)$  and  $J^-(Z) := \cup_{z \in Z} J^-(z)$

## Definition (Emeralds)

An *emerald* refers to  $J(X, Z) := J^+(X) \cap J^-(Z)$  with  $X, Z \subset M$  **compact**.

We say  $(M, \ell)$  *has compact emeralds* if every emerald is compact.

## Example (Manifolds)

- any globally hyperbolic Lorentzian length space is a forward spacetime
- [MiH19] a smooth Lorentzian manifold of dimension  $n \geq 3$  is *globally hyperbolic*  $\Leftrightarrow$  it has compact emeralds

## Example (Manifolds with boundary)

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## Example (Manifolds with boundary)

The closed interval  $[-1, 1]$  with the time-separation

$$\ell(x, y) := \begin{cases} y - x & \text{if } y \geq x, \\ -\infty & \text{else,} \end{cases}$$

is a forward spacetime (not a Lorentzian length space nor a manifold, but its interior  $(-1, 1)$  is a smooth globally hyperbolic Lorentzian manifold)

# Calculus of worldlines (i.e. nondecreasing curves)

Definition (Causal curve and  $\ell$ -speed; c.f. Ambrosio '90 for  $(M, d)$ )

$\sigma : [0, 1] \rightarrow M$  is *causal*  $\Leftrightarrow \sigma_s := \sigma(s) \leq \sigma(t)$  for all  $0 \leq s < t \leq 1$ ;  
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Its  $\ell$ -speed refers to the limit on  $(0, 1)$  (Lemma: it exists pointwise a.e.!).

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- in a *metric* (resp. *forward*) spacetime, discontinuities of a causal curve  $\sigma$  are *countable* (and  $\sigma$  may be taken *left-continuous* without loss, resp.)
- the set  $LCC([0, 1]; M)$  of *Left-Continuous Causal* curves metrized by

$$D(\sigma, \tau) := d(\sigma_0, \tau_0) + \int_0^1 d(\sigma_s, \tau_s) ds$$

is *Polish*, if  $d$  makes the chronological topology Polish on  $(M, \ell)$

- *Limit-curve theorem*:  $C \subset M$  compact makes  $LCC([0, 1]; C)$  *D-compact*

# 'Concave' $q$ -Lagrangian action and (rough) $\ell$ -geodesics

Definition ( $q$ -Lagrangian action, geodesics c.f. [Mi19,M.20,MoS23])

Given  $0 \neq q < 1$ , the *action* of a causal curve refers to

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Causal curves *maximizing* this action (for given endpoints) are called *rough geodesics*; if  $\sigma \in LCC([0, 1]; M)$  then simply *geodesic*.

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- maximizers are **independent of  $q$** ;
- the set of geodesics is denoted  $C\text{Geo}(M)$ ;
- curves in  $T\text{Geo}(M) := \{\sigma \in C\text{Geo}(M) \mid A_q[\sigma] \neq 0\}$  are called *timelike* or  *$\ell$ -geodesics*.

- Caveat: cannot interpret '**concavity**' without a tangent space (or cone)

# Nonbranching conditions; characterizing geodesics

Lemma (Independence of  $q$ ; affine parameterization)

A curve  $\sigma : [0, 1] \rightarrow M$  is a *rough ( $\ell$ -)geodesic* iff  $\forall 0 \leq s < t \leq 1$ ,

$$\ell(\sigma(s), \sigma(t)) = (t - s)\ell(\sigma(0), \sigma(1)) \geq 0 \quad (> 0).$$

Definition (Timelike nonbranching conditions; c.f. [CM24])

The metric spacetime is called *timelike nonbranching* if

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Definition (Timelike nonbranching conditions; c.f. [CM24])

The metric spacetime is called *timelike nonbranching* if any pair of rough  $\ell$ -geodesics that agree on  $(\frac{1}{3}, \frac{2}{3})$  also agree on  $[0, 1]$ .

Lemma (Regularity of geodesics; c.f. [M.24])

If a *forward spacetime is timelike nonbranching*, any *rough  $\ell$ -geodesic is left-continuous* (but *not necessarily right-continuous*).

# Fuzzy events: lifting the geometry from events to measures

Optimal transport on forward spacetimes: for  $0 \neq q < 1$  the linear program

$$l_q(\mu, \nu) := \sup_{\gamma \in \Gamma_{\leq}(\mu, \nu)} \left( \int_{M^2} \ell(x, y)^q d\gamma(x, y) \right)^{1/q}$$

defines a **time-separation** (and  $q$ -independent causal relation [EMi17]) between Borel probability measures  $\mu, \nu \in \mathcal{P}_{em}(M)$  on **emeralds** in  $M$ . Here

$$\Gamma_{\leq}(\mu, \nu) := \left\{ \gamma \geq 0 \text{ on } M^2 \mid \gamma[\{\ell \geq 0\}] = 1, \quad \mu[Y] = \gamma[Y \times M] \right. \\ \left. \forall Y \subset M, \quad \gamma[M \times Y] = \nu[Y] \right\}$$

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- **maximizers**  $\gamma$  exist if  $\Gamma_{\leq}(\mu, \nu) \neq \emptyset$  and are called  **$q$ -optimal couplings**
- thus  **$l_q$ -speed** along any causal curve  $(\mu_s)_{s \in [0,1]}$  of measures exists a.e.:

$$|\dot{\mu}_s|_q := \lim_{h \downarrow 0} \frac{l_q(\mu_s, \mu_{s+h})}{h}$$

# Tangent fields; lifting curves $(\mu_t)_t$ to measures $\pi$ on curves

Definition (Rough  $\ell_q$ -geodesics can be defined like rough  $\ell$ -geodesics)

Given  $0 \neq q < 1$ , the action of a causal curve  $(\mu_t)_{t \in [0,1]} \subset \mathcal{P}(M)$  is

$$\mathcal{A}_q[\mu] := \frac{1}{q} \int_0^1 |\dot{\mu}_t|_q^q dt \leq \frac{1}{q} \ell_q(\mu_0, \mu_1)^q < \infty \text{ if } \mu_0, \mu_1 \in \mathcal{P}_{em}(M).$$

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Theorem (Lifting curves of measures in forward spacetimes c.f.[Lis07])

Conversely, if  $(\mu_t)_{t \in [0,1]} \subset \mathcal{P}_{em}(M)$  is *causal, narrowly left-continuous* on  $[0, 1]$ , and  $(M, \ell)$  has compact emeralds\* (= or is locally causally convex) then it's induced by a *plan*  $\pi \in \mathcal{P}(LCC([0, 1]; M))$  with expected action

$$\int \mathcal{A}_q[\sigma] d\pi(\sigma) = \mathcal{A}_q[\mu]$$

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$$\int \mathcal{A}_q[\sigma] d\pi(\sigma) = \mathcal{A}_q[\mu] \quad (= \ell_q(\mu_0, \mu_1)^q / q \text{ if } \pi \text{ is "q-optimal"})$$

# Consequences in forward spacetimes

- these measures  $\pi$  on curves (i.e. 'plans') represent tangent fields

Corollary (Optimal plans concentrate on geodesics)

If  $\pi \in \mathcal{P}(LCC([0, 1]; M))$  is  $q$ -optimal, then  $\pi[C\text{Geo}] = 1$ .

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## Corollary (Narrow forward-completeness in a forward spacetime)

If  $\mu_i \leq \mu_{i+1} \leq \nu$  in  $(\mathcal{P}(M), \ell_q)$ , then  $\lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} \mu_i$  converges narrowly.

- plays a crucial role in our eventual construction of  $q$ -optimal ‘test’ plans; i.e. plans  $\pi$  with uniformly bounded instantaneous densities  $(e_t)_{\#}\pi$

Definition (Strict timelike  $q$ -dualizability; c.f. [M.20] [CM24])

The pair  $\mu, \nu \in \mathcal{P}_{em}(M)$  is *strictly timelike  $q$ -dualizable* iff every  $q$ -optimal coupling  $\gamma \in \Gamma_{\leq}(\mu, \nu)$  vanishes outside  $\{\ell > 0\}$ .

Lemma (Narrow continuity of rough  $\ell_q$ -geodesics)

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## Lemma (Narrow continuity of rough $\ell_q$ -geodesics)

If  $(M, \ell)$  is a **forward** spacetime is **timelike nonbranching** and  $(\mu_t)_{t \in [0,1]}$  is a rough  $\ell_q$ -geodesic with **strictly timelike  $q$ -dualizable endpoints**  $\mu_0, \mu_1 \in \mathcal{P}_{em}(M)$ , then  $t \in [0, 1] \mapsto \mu_t$  is **narrowly continuous** wherever it is **locally tight**.

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- **local tightness** can come from e.g., compact emeralds or narrow forward-completeness or **density bounds** wrt a suitable **reference measure  $m$**  as in a **metric-measure spacetime**

# (Exact, future-directed) cotangent fields; their magnitudes

Definition (Causal functions (nondecreasing); form a convex cone)

$u : M \rightarrow [-\infty, \infty]$  is *causal*  $\Leftrightarrow \ell(x, y) \geq 0$  implies  $u(x) \leq u(y)$ .

Definition (Metric-measure spacetime; test plan; maximal subslope)

Fix a Radon measure  $m$  on  $(M, \ell)$  assigning finite mass to each emerald.

A plan  $\pi \in \mathcal{P}(LCC([0, 1]; M))$  is called (initially) *test*  $\Leftrightarrow$

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$$u(\sigma_1) - u(\sigma_0) \geq \int_0^1 v(\sigma_t) |\dot{\sigma}_t| dt$$

for every *test plan*  $\pi$  and  $\pi$ -a.e. *curve*  $\sigma$ . They form a stable lattice. Each  $m$ -measurable causal  $u$  admits a *maximal weak subslope*, denoted  $v = |du|$ .

c.f. [AGS14]

# Infinitesimal Minkowskianity

Lemma (Examples of weak subslopes; (equality  $m$ -a.e. for nice  $u, M$ ))

Continuity of causal  $u$  and  $\ell_+ = \max\{\ell, 0\}$  imply  $m$ -a.e.  $y$  satisfies

$$\liminf_{x \ll y} \frac{u(y) - u(x)}{\ell(x, y)} \leq |du(y)|, \quad \liminf_{z \gg y} \frac{u(z) - u(y)}{\ell(y, z)} \leq |du(y)|.$$

Definition (c.f. infinitesimally Hilbertian [G15] rather than [AGS14d])

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- equivalently, the following polarization is **positively bilinear**  $m$ -a.e.:

$$((du, dv)) := \frac{1}{2}|d(u + v)|^2 - \frac{1}{2}|du|^2 - \frac{1}{2}|dv|^2$$

- distinguishes Lorentz from Lorentz-Finsler metrics on e.g.  $\mathbf{R}^n$  [BO24]

# Convex analysis; *horizontal derivatives*; raising indices

Like smooth causal curves  $\sigma$  and functions  $u$  on a Lorentz manifold satisfy

$$\langle du, \dot{\sigma} \rangle \geq \frac{1}{p} \|du\|_*^p + \frac{1}{q} \|\dot{\sigma}\|^q \quad \text{when } p^{-1} + q^{-1} = 1$$

with equality iff  $\langle \dot{\sigma}, \cdot \rangle = \|du\|_*^{p-2} du(\cdot)$ , i.e. iff  $\dot{\sigma} = \|\nabla u\|^{p-2} \nabla u$  [M.20],

Theorem (Nonsmooth Fenchel-Young inequality for  $0 < q < 1$ )

If  $(e_s)_{\#} \pi \rightarrow (e_0)_{\#} \pi$  narrowly,  $|du|^p \in L^1(m)$ , and  $\pi$  initially test then

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- **limit** on left called *horizontal* (*inner*, *Lagrangian*) **derivative** of  $u$  along  $\pi$
- **aims at bilinear pairing** of  $\pi$  with  $u$ ; (NB **concave**  $p$ -Dirichlet energy of  $u$ )

Definition (Identified tangent and cotangent fields; **optimal transport**)

If  $\lim_{s \downarrow 0}$  exists and **equality** holds, we say  $\pi$  *represents the  $p$ -gradient* of  $u$ .  
A nonlinear duality between some **tangent** and **cotangent fields** ( $\pi$  and  $u$ )

# Perturbation & variational derivative of $p$ -Dirichlet energy

- given  $m$ -measurable  $E \subset M$ , write  $v \in \text{Pert}_p(u, E)$  if for all  $\epsilon > 0$  small enough,  $u + \epsilon v$  is causal and  $|d(u + \epsilon v)|^p \in L^1(E, dm)$ .

Theorem (Horizontal dominates vertical derivative; c.f. [G15])

*If  $u : M \rightarrow \bar{\mathbf{R}}$  is causal,  $v \in \text{Pert}_p(u, E)$ , and  $\pi$  represents the  $p$ -gradient of  $u$  and is concentrated on curves remaining initially in  $E$ , then*

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- last is direction  $v$  *vertical* (/ *outer* / *Eulerian*) *derivative* of  $p$ -energy at  $u$
- nonlinear in  $u$  but becomes *linear* in  $v$  if *two-sided limit in  $\epsilon$  exists*

Corollary (If  $(M, \ell, m)$  is infinitesimally Minkowskian)

and if  $-v, v \in \text{Pert}_p(u, E)$  then  $\lim_{\epsilon \rightarrow 0}$  and  $\lim_{s \downarrow 0}$  exist & *equality* holds above!

# Curvature bounds via entropy

Given  $N \in (1, \infty)$ , define  **$N$ -Renyi** (or Boltzmann) **entropy** of  $\mu \in \mathcal{P}(M)$  by

$$S_N(\mu) := - \int_M \left( \frac{d\mu}{dm} \right)^{-1/N} d\mu \quad (\text{and } S_\infty(\mu) := \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} N + NS_N(\mu))$$

- in the smooth globally hyperbolic setting, **convexity properties** of  $t \in [0, 1] \mapsto S_N(\mu_t)$  along  $\ell_q$ -geodesics (or of  $S_\infty(\mu_t)$ ) are well-known to characterize **timelike lower Ricci curvature bounds** [B23] [MoS23] [M.20]; c.f. [RS04][CM.S01][OV00][M.94] (or [EKS15])

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**$TMCP^\pm$**  (or  $TMCP_e^+$ ): a nonsmooth timelike lower Ricci bound

- we impose only **sublinearity** of  $S_N(\mu_t)$  along  $\ell_q$ -geodesics starting or ending at a **Dirac point mass** — the **timelike measure contraction properties  $TMCP^\pm$**  of [B23]; c.f. [CMo24] [LV09] [O07] [S06]
- if  $(\mu_0, \delta_z)$  are strictly timelike  $q$ -dualizable,  $\mu_0 \in L^\infty(m)$  and  $(M, \ell)$  timelike nonbranching has **compact emeralds\*** **precisely one  $\ell_q$ -geodesic links  $\mu_0$  to  $\delta_z$** ; normalization  $S_N(\delta_z) = 0$  but  $S_\infty(\delta_z) := +\infty$ .

# A nonsmooth timelike lower Ricci curvature bound

Definition (Future timelike measure contraction property; c.f. [B23])

For  $K \in \mathbf{R}$  write  $(M, \ell, m) \in \text{TMCP}^+(K, N)$  if  $\forall \mu_0 \in \mathcal{P}_{em}(M) \cap L^1(m)$  and each  $z \in \text{spt } m$  with  $\mu_0[I^-(z)] = 1$ , for some (hence all)  $0 \neq q < 1$ , there exists a (rough)  $\ell_q$ -geodesic from  $\mu_0$  to  $\mu_1 := \delta_z$  such that all  $t \in [0, 1]$  and  $N' \geq N$  satisfy

$$S_{N'}(\mu_t) \leq - \int \tau_{K, N'}^{(1-t)}(\ell(x, z)) \left( \frac{d\mu_0}{dm}(x) \right)^{-1/N'} d\mu_0(x).$$

Past version:  $(M, \ell, m) \in \text{TMCP}^-(K, N) \Leftrightarrow (M, \ell^*, m) \in \text{TMCP}^+(K, N)$ .

- $\tau_{0, N}^{(1-t)}(\ell) := 1 - t$  for  $K = 0$ ;

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- $\tau_{0, N'}^{(1-t)}(\ell) := 1 - t$  for  $K = 0$ ; asserts sublinearity of  $t \in [0, 1] \mapsto S_{N'}(\mu_t)$ , and follows from the strong energy condition, a case of primary interest
- a smooth globally hyperbolic Lorentzian manifold  $(M^n, g, d\text{vol}_g)$  satisfies  $\text{TMCP}^\pm(K, n) \Leftrightarrow \text{Ric}(v, v) \geq Kg(v, v)$  for all timelike  $v \in TM$

# Test plans: finding $\ell_q$ -geodesics having density bounds

Theorem (**Initial test plans** with Dirac targets; c.f. [B23,CMo17,R13])

Fix ( $K \in \mathbf{R}$  or)  $K = 0 \neq q < 1 < N < \infty$ , a *timelike nonbranching forward* spacetime  $(M, \ell, m) \in (TMCP^+ \cap TMCP_e^+)(K, N)$  and  $z \in M$ . If  $\mu_0[I^-(z)] = 1$  for  $\mu_0 \in L^\infty(m) \cap \mathcal{P}_{em}(M)$  then there exists a  *$q$ -optimal plan*  $\pi$  inducing (an  $\ell_q$ -geodesic)  $\mu_t := (e_t)_\# \pi$  from  $\mu_0$  to  $\mu_1 := \delta_z$  such that  $t \in [0, 1] \mapsto S_{N'}(\mu_t)$  is (*suitably*) *sublinear* for each  $N' \geq N$  and

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- $c_{0,N,\ell} = 1$  if  $K = 0$  (else  $c_{K,N,\ell} := \exp(t \|\ell\|_{L^\infty(\mu_0 \times \mu_1)} \sqrt{K_-(N-1)})$ )
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- [B23] Boltzmann version  $TMCP_e^+$  can be replaced by compact emeralds
- extends to non-Dirac targets if  $(\mu_0, \mu_1)$  strictly timelike  $q$ -dualizable

COROLLARY (Busemann and Lorentz distance functions have unit slope)

For  $\nu(\cdot) = -\ell(\cdot, z)$ , compact emeralds\* imply  $|d\nu| = 1$   $m$ -a.e. on  $I^-(z)$

When is the  $p$ -gradient of  $u$  represented by a test plan  $\pi$ ?

$$u^{(q)}(z) := \sup_{x \in I^-(z)} u(x) + \frac{\ell(x, z)^q}{q} \quad v_q(x) := \inf_{z \in I^+(x)}$$

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- then  $u$  is causal, upper semicontinuous, and  $\partial_{\ell^q/q} u$  relatively closed in  $\ll$

$$\partial_{\ell^q/q} u := \{x \ll z \mid u^{(q)}(z) = u(x) + \frac{\ell(x, z)^q}{q} \in \mathbf{R}\} \subset M^2, \text{ if } \ell_+ \in C(M)$$

**Theorem (A metric Brenier-M. thm; cf.[MoS23,M.20,AGS14])**

Fix  $0 \neq q < 1$  and  $p^{-1} + q^{-1} = 1$ . Let  $(M, \ell, m)$  timelike nonbranching have compact emeralds\*,  $\ell_+$  continuous and  $u = (u^{(q)})_q$  with  $|du|^p \in L^1(E, m)$ .

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$$|du|(\sigma_0) = \ell(\sigma_0, \sigma_1)^{q-1}.]$$

$$\text{dom } \partial_{\ell^q/q} u := \{x \in M \mid \partial_{\ell^q/q} u \cap (\{x\} \times M) \neq \emptyset\}$$

Theorem (d'Alembert comparison theorem:  $\square_p u \leq N$  if  $K = 0$ )

Fix  $0 \neq q < 1 = p^{-1} + q^{-1} < N < \infty$ , a *timelike nonbranching* spacetime  $(M, \ell, m) \in \text{TMCP}_{(e)}^+(K, N)$  with *compact emeralds\**,  $\ell_+ \in C(M)$ ,  $K \in \mathbf{R}$  and  $\frac{\ell^q}{q}$ -concave  $u = (u^{(q)})_q$ .

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$$\int_M d^+ v (\nabla u) |du|^{p-2} dm \leq \int_M \tilde{\tau}_{K,N} (|du|^{p-1}) v dm$$

$$\tilde{\tau}_{K,N}(r) := N \frac{\partial \tau_{K,N}^t(r)}{\partial t|_{t=1}} = \begin{cases} N & \text{if } K = 0 \\ 1 + r \sqrt{(N-1)|K|} \cot(r \sqrt{\frac{K}{N-1}}) & \text{else.} \end{cases}$$

e.g.

$$u(x) = \begin{cases} -\ell(x, z)^q/q & \forall x \in I^-(z), \\ +\infty & \text{else.} \end{cases}$$

## Corollary

Same nonsmooth sense and setting with e.g.  $K = 0$ , a chain rule yields

$$\square_p(-\ell(\cdot, z)) \leq \frac{N-1}{\ell(\cdot, z)} \quad \text{on } I^-(z)$$

- Analogous results also hold true in **backward** spacetimes and  $K \neq 0$ . After time-reversing them, the **forward**  $(M, \ell, m) \in \text{TMCP}^-(K, N)$  satisfies

$$\square_p(\ell(x, \cdot)) \geq -\frac{N-1}{\ell(x, \cdot)} \quad \text{on } I^+(x)$$

- It is conceivable that  $\text{Pert}_p(u, M)$  is sometimes too sparse to be of use
- However,

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- **[BGM.OS25+]** extends his timelike splitting theorem to  $g_{ij} \in C^1(M)$

# Defining the $p$ -d'Alembertian

- thus even on smooth globally hyperbolic manifolds we obtain new results
- functional analysis:  $\square_q u$  is a **measure**, **nonunique** unless infinitesimally Minkowskian,  $TMCP_{(e)}^{\pm}(K, N)$ , and  $Pert_p(u, E)$  is dense; c.f. [G15]
- localization: [B24+] establishes many fundamental properties of  $\square_p u$  by developing an approach based on needle decompositions; c.f. [CMo20]

Proof: Fix  $s_N(r) = -r^{(N-1)/N}$ ,  $u(\cdot) = -\ell^q(\cdot, z)/q$ ,  $v \in \text{Pert}_p(u, I^-(z))$  and  $d\mu_0 = \rho_0 dm$  with  $\rho_0 = (c_0 v)^{N/(N-1)} \in L^\infty$  cptly supported in  $I^-(z)$ . Our metric Brenier-M. theorem yields an initial test plan  $\pi$  representing the  $p$ -gradient of  $u$  with  $\mu_1 = \delta_z$  and  $\mu_t := (e_t)_\# \pi$  satisfying **sublinearity**:

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On the other hand, **ordinary convexity of  $s_N$**  gives

$$\begin{aligned} \liminf_{t \downarrow 0} \frac{S_N(\mu_t) - S_N(\mu_0)}{t} &\geq \liminf_{t \downarrow 0} \int \frac{s'_N \circ \rho_0(\gamma_t) - s'_N \circ \rho_0(\gamma_0)}{t} d\pi(\gamma) \\ &\geq \liminf_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} \int_M \frac{|d(u + \varepsilon s'_N \circ \rho_0)|^p - |du|^p}{p\varepsilon} d\mu_0 \\ &=: \int_M d^+(s'_N \circ \rho_0)(\nabla u) |du|^{p-2} d\mu_0 \\ &= \frac{c_0}{N} \int_M d^+ v(\nabla u) |du|^{p-2} dm, \end{aligned}$$

where the last identity follows from a suitable chain rule and the specific choice of  $\rho_0$ . Cancelling  $c_0$  gives  $\square_p u \leq N$  **distributionally!** □

## Selected references (apologies for omissions/oversights):

Beran-Braun-Calisto-Gigli-M.-Ohanyan-Rott-Sämman 2408.15968 (2507.06836)

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[AGS14,AGS14d] Ambrosio-Gigli-Savaré (Inventiones, Duke)

[B23,B23,B24+] Braun (Nonlinear Analysis, JMPA, arXiv:2408.16525)

[BO24,BM.23+] Braun-Ohta (TAMS), Braun-M. (arXiv:2312.17158)

[CMo17,CMo20,CMo24] Cavalletti-Mondino (CCM, APDE, Camb J Math)

[EKS15] Erbar-Kuwada-Sturm (Inventiones)

[EMi17] Eckstein-Miller (AIHP)

[G15] Gigli (MAMS)

[Lis07] Lisini (CVPDE)

[KS18] Kunzinger-Sämman (Ann Global Anal Geom)

[M.94,M.20,M.24] M. (PhD, Cambridge J Math, CMP)

[Mi19,MiH19,MiS24] Minguzzi, Hounnonkpe-Minguzzi, Minguzzi-Suhr

[MoS23] Mondino-Suhr (J Euro Math Soc)

[O07,O14] Ohta (CM Helvetica, Anal Geom Metric Spaces)

[OV00,LV09] Otto-Villani (J. Funct. Anal.), Lott-Villani (Annals)

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[RS04,S06] von Renesse-Sturm (CPAM), Sturm (Acta x 2) **THANK YOU!**

