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Article:

Stannett, M.P. and Németi, I. (2013) Using Isabelle/HOL to verify first-order relativity theory. *Journal of Automated Reasoning*, 52. pp. 361-378. ISSN: 0168-7433

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10817-013-9292-7>

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Using Isabelle/HOL to verify first-order relativity theory

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August 22, 2013

Abstract Logicians at the Rényi Mathematical Institute in Budapest have spent several years developing versions of relativity theory (special, general, and other variants) based wholly on first-order logic, and have argued in favour of the physical decidability, via exploitation of cosmological phenomena, of formally unsolvable questions such as the Halting Problem and the consistency of set theory. As part of a joint project, researchers at Sheffield have recently started generating rigorous machine-verified versions of the Hungarian proofs, so as to demonstrate the soundness of their work. In this paper, we explain the background to the project and demonstrate a first-order proof in Isabelle/HOL of the theorem “no inertial observer can travel faster than light”. This approach to physical theories and physical computability has several pay-offs, because the precision with which physical theories need to be formalised within automated proof systems forces us to recognise subtly hidden assumptions.

Keywords Isabelle/HOL · first-order relativity theory · hypercomputation · physics and computation

CR Subject Classification F.4.1 · J.2

1 Introduction

The Hungarian team of Andr eka et al. have formalised a series of relativity theories (including special and general relativity) using first-order logic [1,2]. These first-order foundations ensure that their theories are easy to reason with, but also introduce a number of nonstandard features. This school uses the intuition-friendly and logically benign framework of first-order logic for formalizing and elaborating

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relativity theories. However, their proofs are often formulated in the intuitive, informal language of model theory (as opposed to proof theory). Therefore, a theoretical doubt may arise whether these proofs can always be pushed through on the purely syntactical (i.e., proof theoretical) level. We have, therefore, recently started a joint project verifying their theories using the Isabelle proof assistant [3]. We explain our approach below, and outline an Isabelle/HOL proof of the well-known statement “no inertial observer can travel faster than light” [4,5].

While the initial encoding of the underlying axioms within Isabelle/HOL is essentially straightforward, automating the proof proved unexpectedly challenging. In Sect. 2 we explain the logical foundations of the proof construction, and show how the axiom systems are encoded in Sect. 3. The proof itself is presented in Sect. 4, and follow-on questions are discussed in Sect. 5.

An example of a situation where the correctness of a relativity theoretic proof can be challenging is the following. In his seminal analysis of computation, Turing [6] discussed the nature of human computation, and showed that certain tasks – most famously, the Halting Problem (HP) – are not decidable by computational means. Subsequent theoretical investigation by various researchers suggests, however, that physical systems may exist which can in fact decide HP by exploiting cosmological phenomena [7–12]. We focus here on one particular scheme for cosmological hypercomputation [9,13], and consider the extent to which it rests on secure logical foundations. Doing so we can rely on the above described FOL axiomatic foundations of relativity theories. We return to this question in more detail in Sect. 5.

2 Logical foundations

The statement we wish to prove (“no inertial observer can travel faster than light”) says that when one inertial observer, m , sees another, k , at two distinct spacetime locations e and f , the latter cannot be spacelike separated (see Sect. 4). To prove this statement we turn to Andréka et al.’s [1,5] first-order formalisation of relativity theory. Our focus on first-order logic (FOL) is motivated by several important considerations. Foremost is the Hungarian team’s desire to demystify relativity theory by expressing its postulates and conclusions in a form that is intelligible to as large an audience as possible. By choosing simple language and a very simple axiom system, the underlying assumptions of the theory are made as straightforward as possible (see Sect. 3.2), while the use of first-order logic and its simple reliance on Modus Ponens makes it relatively easy for newcomers to follow the proofs. Having reformulated relativity in purely logical terms, the group is also able to investigate which axioms underpin which results and which are superfluous. Given the physical nature of the theory in question, this information can then be reflected back into physics: if an axiom plays no role in establishing an experimentally observed result, then that result can neither support nor undermine the validity of the axiomatic property in question.

It is important to note, however, that the use of first-order logic has important consequences when attempting to model physical phenomena, because FOL is not powerful enough to characterise the real number field, \mathbb{R} – the numbers typically used to represent coordinates, masses, and so forth, in physical models. Consequently, many of the real-number properties we take for granted in physics,

like the existence of suprema of bounded sequences, are unavailable in a rigorous first-order logical proof (this existence condition is called the *Continuity Axiom* in the mathematical and logical literature).¹ In particular, the statement that any decreasing sequence of real numbers, bounded below, has a greatest lower bound is not a first-order statement, because it refers to ordered *sets* of real values.² Moreover, as Andréka and her colleagues have shown, many interesting theorems for relativity can be proven using less restrictive fields like the rationals, \mathbb{Q} , for which the real-number property *every positive number has a positive square root* fails³ (such fields are said to be *non-Euclidean*), cf. [14].

2.1 The need for formal verification

Given that “first-order numbers” need not exhibit the properties typically expected of them by physicists, it is important that we treat traditional explanations of relativistic phenomena with caution. To this end, as part of a Royal Society International Exchanges Scheme project, researchers in Sheffield joined forces with the Hungarian team at the start of 2012, to develop a comprehensive formal framework for relativity theory, with full machine-verification of all derived theorems. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time such a large-scale physical theory has been treated in this way (but cf. [15,16]), and it is hoped that the lessons learned will be useful in extending the approach more widely. The project has been planned in four main stages, and it is hoped that the end result will be a formal machine-verified proof of the controversial claim that the power of a computational system depends on the nature of its spacetime environment, with super-Turing capabilities emerging in the context of more complex spacetime geometries.

The project itself has four broad aims:

- GOAL 1. Implement first-order axiomatizations of general relativity using the proof assistant Isabelle [3];
- GOAL 2. Add a general model of computational mobility to the theory, to enable the modelling of computations carried out by machines travelling along specific spacetime trajectories;
- GOAL 3. Consider how the power of these computational systems changes according to the underlying topology of spacetime [17];
- GOAL 4. Select a recursively uncomputable problem \mathbf{P} (for example, the Halting Problem) and machine-verify the following claims:
 - (a) in simpler relativistic settings, \mathbf{P} remains uncomputable;
 - (b) in some spacetimes, \mathbf{P} can be solved.

¹ For completeness, we note that this difficulty can be solved within FOL in many ways, e.g., it can be solved by focussing attention on definable sets.

² There are fields which have the same first-order properties as \mathbb{R} , but which contain infinitesimals. In such a field, the bounded decreasing sequence $\frac{1}{1} > \frac{1}{2} > \frac{1}{3} > \dots$ has no greatest lower bound. For suppose α were its greatest lower bound; then given any positive infinitesimal ϵ , the value $(1 + \epsilon)\alpha$ would be a slightly larger lower bound, thereby contradicting the definition of α .

³ The statement cited is first-order: $(\forall x).((x > 0) \rightarrow (\exists y.((y > 0) \wedge (y \times y = x))))$.

Taken together, these steps are intended to add weight to the claim that the computational power of a device may depend on the physical setting in which it finds itself.

3 The theories and their implementation

There are various versions of relativity theory, depending on what is being modelled. For special relativity (SPECREL) the two key axioms (suitably formalised) are [4]:

Principle of relativity: The laws of nature are the same for every inertial observer;

Light postulate: Any ray of light moves in the ‘stationary’ system of coordinates with the determined velocity c , whether the ray be emitted by a stationary or by a moving body;

while for general relativity (GENREL) we add the

Equivalence Principle: It is not possible to distinguish locally between the effects of acceleration and those of gravity.

In addition to special and general relativity, Székely and his colleagues have made a detailed study of *accelerated observers* (with or without the equivalence principle in place). The corresponding theory, ACCREL, provides a convenient stepping stone from special to general relativity [14].

Our Isabelle implementation⁴ has been constructed in three parts, a program structure that ensures that different versions of relativity theory can easily be added later. For example, to add GENREL we would simply add a new file `GenRel.thy` which merges the required axiom classes and includes proofs of relevant theorems. We focus here on the first-order theory SPECREL of special relativity. This theory is 2-sorted, the sorts being `Quantities` (the values used to specify coordinates, speeds, masses, etc) and `Body` (*bodies* or *test particles*).

3.1 Background geometry (`SpaceTime.thy`, approx. 830 lines)

This Isabelle/HOL code file models the geometric structures common to all models of spacetime (`Vectors`, `Points`, `Lines`, `Planes`, `Cones`), each represented as a separate record structure with axioms attached. The axioms describe basic geometric relationships including, for example, what it means for three points to be collinear, what it means for two vectors to be orthogonal, and so forth. In particular, a key lemma for our main proof is the assertion that distinct parallel lines cannot meet (the proof is by contradiction). Having defined these classes, we take `SpaceTime` to be their conjunction:

```
class SpaceTime = Quantities + Vectors + Points + Lines + Planes + Cones
```

⁴ The files referred to in this paper are available from <http://www.dcs.shef.ac.uk/~mps/isabelle/noFTLobserver/index.html>.

The set of `Quantities` is assumed to carry an ordered field structure. We shall sometimes need to assume that the field is also Euclidean – i.e., that square roots exist for positive values – but this is not a general requirement, so it will be added as a separate axiom class later. Since Isabelle/HOL already includes a suitable class, the implementation of `Quantities` is particularly simple:

```
class Quantities = linordered_field
```

For simplicity we assume that spacetime is $(1 + 3)$ -dimensional (one time dimension + three space dimensions), so that `Points` and `Vectors` are both specified as 4-tuples of `Quantities`. In more complex relativity theories, we allow both the number of space dimensions, and the number of time dimensions, to range over arbitrary positive integers. Lines are specified by giving a point (the line’s *basepoint*) and a vector (its *direction*), while planes are specified by a basepoint and two vectors. These formalisations are not unique with respect to the underlying abstract pointsets they are intended to represent (for example, there are infinitely many representations of each line, because we can choose any of its points as basepoint), but in practice this makes no difference, since all relevant functions remain well-defined.

Because we are dealing here with special relativity, all lightcones can be considered to be ‘upright’ (for general relativity we need to allow cones that are ‘tilted’ by curvature effects); each cone can therefore be specified by giving a point (its *vertex*) and a quantity (its *slope*). However, the freedom with which we can specify quantities has certain concomitant side-effects, and these need to be taken into account. In real-number physics, we would consider the slope of the cone

$$x^2 + y^2 + z^2 = \alpha t^2 \quad \text{where } \alpha > 0$$

to be $\sqrt{\alpha}$, but when `Quantities` is non-Euclidean we cannot be certain that $\sqrt{\alpha}$ is defined. Consequently, we take the slope of the cone to be α rather than $\sqrt{\alpha}$, and adjust all associated formulae and proofs accordingly.

3.2 Axioms (`Axioms.thy`, approx. 260 lines)

This file includes various axioms used by the Hungarian group, each implemented as a separate class. Different relativity theories can then be constructed by merging the relevant axiom classes and omitting those that are not required; we focus here on the axioms that will be needed to specify `SPECREL`.

The axioms describe the events in which bodies can participate, and how their descriptions change from one observer’s viewpoint to another. Here, a `Body` can be either a *photon* (which always travels at constant speed) or an *inertial observer* (which always travels at constant speed, and in addition is capable of making observations). Since we do *not* assume a priori that the classes of photons and inertial observers are disjoint, we represent bodies using an Isabelle/HOL record structure:

```
record Body =
  Ph :: "bool"
  IOb :: "bool"
```

At first sight, this formalisation appears slightly odd, since it suggests the possibility of four types of body (one which is neither photon nor inertial observer, one which is purely a photon, one which is purely an inertial observer, and one which is both at the same time), but in keeping with our goal of placing as few restrictions as possible on the underlying theory, we have resisted the temptation to separate out photons from inertial observers a priori (e.g. by specifying them using distinct type variables in a locale). Instead, we note that such type confusions can never actually occur, since it is a theorem, for example, that no object can be simultaneously a photon and an inertial observer (according to our axioms, inertial observers see themselves as stationary in space, while photons have no choice but to move at lightspeed, which is strictly positive; the two are clearly incompatible).

For more complex relativistic theories we also need to consider non-inertial observers (those which can accelerate), as well as more general types of body, and in this regard the use of Isabelle/HOL record structures is particularly convenient, since we can easily extend the `Body` record structure to include new descriptions (once again, we can prove from the axioms introduced to describe these bodies that no type confusions arise when we do so). The distinction between inertial observers and more general body types emerges in these more advanced theories. For example, we demonstrate below that inertial observers can never travel faster than (what they consider to be) the speed of light, but this property need *not* be provable of more general bodies [18,19].

In addition to the ordered field axioms associated with `Quantities`, `SpecRel` is formally generated using just the four axioms described below (`AxPh`, `AxEv`, `AxSelf`, `AxSym`), but in practice we have found it sensible to replace `Quantities` with a larger `WorldView` class (below) so as to have available the necessary abbreviations and functions. This simplifies proofs considerably. Moreover, our proof that inertial observers cannot travel faster than light requires us to find the intersection of a line with a cone, and this in turn requires the existence of square roots – we have therefore included the Euclidean axiom (`AxEuclidean`). Finally, we make use of various additional properties of cones, lines and planes (given in `SpaceTime.thy`). These define various relatively complicated concepts, such as what it means for a plane to be tangent to a (light)cone:

```
class Cones = Quantities + Lines + Planes +
fixes
  tangentPlane :: "'a Point  $\Rightarrow$  'a Cone  $\Rightarrow$  'a Plane"

assumes (* The basepoint of the tangent-plane-at-e is e *)
  AxTangentBase: "pbasepoint (tangentPlane e cone) = e"

and (* The tangent plane contains the vertex *)
  AxTangentVertex: "inPlane (vertex cone) (tangentPlane e cone)"

and (* The tangent plane meets the cone in a line *)
  AxConeTangent: "(onCone e cone)  $\longrightarrow$ 
    (inPlane pt (tangentPlane e cone)  $\wedge$  onCone pt cone)
     $\longleftrightarrow$  collinear (vertex cone) e pt)"

and (* The tangent plane is tangential to all cones with vertex
```

```

    in that plane, and the intersection lines are parallel. *)
  AxParallelCones: "(onCone e econe  $\wedge$  e  $\neq$  vertex econe
 $\wedge$  onCone f fcone  $\wedge$  f  $\neq$  vertex fcone
 $\wedge$  inPlane f (tangentPlane e econe))
 $\longrightarrow$  (samePlane (tangentPlane e econe) (tangentPlane f fcone)
 $\wedge$  ((lineJoining (vertex econe) e)  $\parallel$  (lineJoining (vertex fcone) f)))"
```

and (* If f is outside a cone, there is a tangent plane to that cone which contains f. The tangent plane is determined by some e lying on the intersection line with the cone. *)

```

  AxParallelConesE: "outsideCone f cone  $\longrightarrow$  ( $\exists$ e.(onCone e cone
 $\wedge$  e  $\neq$  vertex cone  $\wedge$  inPlane f (tangentPlane e cone)))"
```

3.2.1 Square roots

The *Euclidean field axiom*, AXEUCLIDEAN, states that every positive quantity has a positive square root, and defines the `sqrt` function.

```

class AxEuclidean = Quantities +
assumes
  AxEuclidean: "(x  $\geq$  (0::'a))  $\implies$  ( $\exists$ r. ((r  $\geq$  0)  $\wedge$  (r*r = x)))"
begin
  fun sqrt :: "'a  $\Rightarrow$  'a" where
    "sqrt x = (SOME r. ((r  $\geq$  (0::'a))  $\wedge$  (r*r = x)))"
end
```

In keeping with our policy of keeping the axioms as unrestrictive as possible, we do not assume that the positive square root is uniquely defined, though this is, of course, an easy theorem.

3.2.2 The WorldView relation

Two key features of first-order relativity theory are the *worldview relation* (`W`) and the *worldview transformation* (`wvt`).

```

class WorldView = SpaceTime +
fixes
  (* Worldview relation *)
  W :: "Body  $\Rightarrow$  Body  $\Rightarrow$  'a Point  $\Rightarrow$  bool" ("_ sees _ at _")
and
  (* Worldview transformation *)
  wvt :: "Body  $\Rightarrow$  Body  $\Rightarrow$  'a Point  $\Rightarrow$  'a Point"
assumes
  AxWVT: "[[ IOb m; IOb k ]  $\implies$  (W k b x  $\longleftrightarrow$  W m b (wvt m k x))"
and
  AxWVTSym: "[[ IOb m; IOb k ]  $\implies$  (y = wvt k m x  $\longleftrightarrow$  x = wvt m k y)"
begin
```

end

The relation W tells us which bodies an inertial observer m sees at each space-time location. Thus, $W\ m\ b\ p$ is **True** precisely when m considers the body (whether inertial observer or photon) b to be present at location p . We can use W to define various standard concepts; for example, the worldline of b (from m 's point of view) is simply the set $\{p \mid W\ m\ b\ p\}$.

The worldview transformation tells us how one observer's viewpoint is related to another. As $AxWVT$ explains, if $wvt\ m\ k\ x\ is\ y$, this means that whatever k sees at x , m sees at y .

3.2.3 Photons and the speed of light

The *photon axiom*, $AxPh$, says that for any inertial observer, the speed of light (c) is the same in every (spatial) direction everywhere and is positive. Furthermore, it is possible to send out a light signal in any (spatial) direction. (The auxiliary functions `space2` and `time2` give the squared spatial and temporal separations, respectively, of two spacetime locations x and y .)

```
class AxPh = WorldView +
assumes
AxPh: "IOb(m)
  => (∃v. ( (v > (0::'a)) ∧ ( ∀x y . (
    (∃p. (Ph p ∧ W m p x ∧ W m p y))
    ←→ (space2 x y = (v * v)*(time2 x y))
  ))))"
begin
  fun c :: "Body ⇒ 'a" where
    "c m = (SOME v. ( (v > (0::'a)) ∧ ( ∀x y . (
      ∃p. (Ph p ∧ W m p x ∧ W m p y))
      ←→ (space2 x y = (v * v)*(time2 x y))
    )))"

  fun lightcone :: "Body ⇒ 'a Point ⇒ 'a Cone" where
    lightcone m v = mkCone v (c m)

  (* various lemmas follow that are not included here *)
```

Notice, however, that the speed of light is not assumed to be the same for all observers: the value c is therefore parametrised according to the inertial observer in question. Note also that the speed of light $c\ p$ is technically specified relative to photons p as well as inertial observers, but in this case the precondition required to establish the value's existence cannot be established using $AxPh$. This avoids the (non)question, "at what speed does one photon consider another photon to be travelling?"

3.2.4 Events

The *event axiom*, AXEVENT, says that all inertial observers are participating in the same universe – if one observer sees two bodies meeting at some spacetime location, they all see them meeting (though they may disagree as to where and when that meeting takes place).

```
class AxEv = WorldView +
assumes
  AxEv: "[[ IOb m; IOb k ]]  $\implies$  ( $\exists y. (\forall b. (W m b x \longleftrightarrow W k b y))$ )"
begin
end
```

3.2.5 Self-observation

The *self axiom*, AXSELF, says that inertial observers consider themselves to be stationary in space (so they consider their worldline to be the time axis).

```
class AxSelf = WorldView +
assumes
  AxSelf: "IOb m  $\implies$  (W m m x)  $\longrightarrow$  (onAxisT x)"
begin
end
```

3.2.6 Spatial calibration

The *symmetry axiom*, AXSYM, says that inertial observers agree as to the spatial distance between two spacetime events if these two events are simultaneous for both of them. This is essentially an auxiliary axiom, explaining how inertial observers calibrate their measuring rods to allow comparison of measurements.

```
class AxSym = WorldView +
assumes
  AxSym: "[[ IOb m; IOb k ]]  $\implies$ 
    (W m e x  $\wedge$  W m f y  $\wedge$  W k e x'  $\wedge$  W k f y'  $\wedge$ 
      tval x = tval y  $\wedge$  tval x' = tval y' )
     $\longrightarrow$  (space2 x y = space2 x' y')"
begin
end
```

3.3 SPECREL (SpecRel.thy, approx. 340 lines)

This file defines the theory SPECREL. The theory is remarkably sparse, being based on just five main axioms, together with a few simplifying definitions concerning the worldview relation.

```

class SpecRel = WorldView + AxPh + AxEv + AxSelf + AxSym
(*
  The following proof assumes that the quantity field is Euclidean.
*)
+ AxEuclidean
(*
  We also assume for now that lines, planes and lightcones are
  preserved by the worldview transformation. This can be proven.
*)
+ AxLines + AxPlanes + AxCones

```

4 The proof

We have formalised the statement “no inertial observer can travel faster than light” as:

```

lemma noFTLObserver:
  assumes iobm: "IOb m"
  and iobk: "IOb k"
  and mke: "m sees k at e"
  and mkf: "m sees k at f"
  and enotf: "e ≠ f"
  shows "space2 e f ≤ (c m * c m) * time2 e
        f"

```

To see why, notice that the statement “*k* cannot travel faster than light” is meaningless as it stands. We need to say *in whose opinion* this statement is true, since speeds depend on the observer. We therefore have to introduce a second inertial observer, *m*, in whose opinion the judgment is to be made. To find the speed at which *k* is moving, *m* needs to observe *k* at two different locations, *e* and *f*, and then determine the (square of the) ratio of the associated spatial and temporal separations.

The proof itself is in five basic stages.

Step 1. Assume the converse

Suppose *k* is going faster than light (FTL) from *m*’s viewpoint:

```

assume converse: "space2 e f > (c m * c m) * time2 e f"

```

Informally, we are saying that *f* lies outside *m*’s lightcone at *e*.

Step 2. Consider the cone at *e*

Consider *m*’s lightcone at *e*, and note that *e* is itself on this cone (since it is the cone’s vertex).

```

def eCone ≡ "mkCone e (c m)"
have e_on_econe: "onCone e eCone" by (simp add: eCone_def)

```

Step 3. Identify the tangent plane containing f

Step 1 tells us to assume that f is outside the cone. We can use the cone axioms to find a tangent plane containing f . Being a tangent plane, it will necessarily contain the vertex, e , as well. In addition, the axioms allow us to fix a point g so that the line joining g to the vertex is the line of intersection between the cone and the tangent plane. Notice that g is distinct from both e and f , and together the three points define the tangent plane (Fig. 1).

```

have e_is_vertex: "e = vertex eCone" by (simp add: eCone_def)
have cm_is_slope: "c m = slope eCone" by (simp add: eCone_def)
hence outside: "outsideCone f eCone"
  by (metis (lifting) e_is_vertex cm_is_slope converse outsideCone.simps)

have "outsideCone f eCone
  → (∃x. (onCone x eCone ∧ x ≠ vertex eCone
    ∧ inPlane f (tangentPlane x eCone)))"
by (rule AxParallelConesE)

hence tplane_exists: "∃x. (onCone x eCone ∧ x ≠ vertex eCone
  ∧ inPlane f (tangentPlane x eCone))"
  by (smt outside)
then obtain g where g_props: "(onCone g eCone ∧ g ≠ vertex eCone
  ∧ inPlane f (tangentPlane g eCone))"
  by auto
have g_on_econe: "onCone g eCone" by (metis g_props)
have g_not_vertex: "g ≠ vertex eCone" by (metis g_props)

(* ... and more ... *)

```

Step 4. Switch to k 's viewpoint

Because m sees k at the distinct points e and f , k should also see itself at (its transformed versions of) those points, by $AxEv$. But each observer considers itself to be stationary, so k considers e and f to be distinct points on his time axis, by $AxSelf$. If k 's worldline also passed through g , the points e , f and g would be collinear in k 's worldview, and hence also in m 's, and we know this not to be the case because e and g are both in the tangent intersection line, while f is outside the cone. Consequently, g is not on k 's time axis.

```

def wvte ≡ "wvt k m e"

```

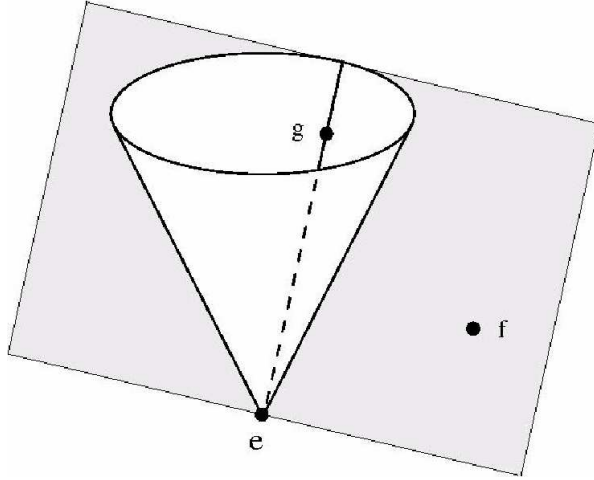


Fig. 1 Given a light cone with vertex e and a point f outside the cone, we can find a plane that contains f and which is tangent to the cone. We choose g to be any point (apart from e) which lies on the line of intersection between the plane and the cone.

```

def wvtf ≡ "wvt k m f"
def wvtg ≡ "wvt k m g"

have "W k k wvte" by (metis wvte_def AxWVT mke iobm iobk)
hence wvte_onAxis: "onAxisT wvte" by (metis AxSelf iobk)

have "W k k wvtf" by (metis wvtf_def AxWVT mkf iobm iobk)
hence wvtf_onAxis: "onAxisT wvtf" by (metis AxSelf iobk)

have wvte_inv: "e = wvt m k wvte" by (metis AxWTSym iobk iobm wvte_def)
have wvtf_inv: "f = wvt m k wvtf" by (metis AxWTSym iobk iobm wvtf_def)
have wvtg_inv: "g = wvt m k wvtg" by (metis AxWTSym iobk iobm wvtg_def)

have e_not_g: "e ≠ g" by (metis e_is_vertex g_not_vertex)
have f_not_g: "f ≠ g" by (metis outside lemOutsideNotOnCone g_on_eCone)

have wvt_e_not_f: "wvte ≠ wvtf" by (metis wvte_inv wvtf_inv e_not_f)
have wvt_f_not_g: "wvtf ≠ wvtg" by (metis wvtf_inv wvtg_inv f_not_g)
have wvt_g_not_e: "wvtg ≠ wvte" by (metis wvtg_inv wvte_inv e_not_g)

have if_g_onAxis: "onAxisT wvtg → collinear wvte wvtg wvtf"
  by (metis lemAxisIsLine wvte_onAxis wvtf_onAxis
      wvt_e_not_f wvt_f_not_g wvt_g_not_e)

have "collinear wvte wvtg wvtf → collinear e g f"
  by (metis AxLines iobm iobk wvte_inv wvtf_inv wvtg_inv)
hence "onAxisT wvtg → collinear e g f" by (metis if_g_onAxis)

```

```
hence wvtg_offAxis: "¬ (onAxisT wvtg)" by (metis g_not_collinear)
```

Step 5. Find a point z with impossible properties

We have seen that e and f define the time axis (from k 's point of view), and g lies off this axis. Consequently, because all lightcones are upright in special relativity, the line joining e to g has non-empty intersection with the k -lightcone at f . Call the point of intersection z , and observe that the k -lightcone at z contains both e and f . [Notice, however, that determining the coordinates of the point z typically involves the use of square roots, which is why we have assumed $AxEuclidean$.]

Having obtained z , we will prove that its properties are contradictory.

```
have "∀s.(∃p.( collinear wvte wvtg p
  ∧ (space2 p wvtf = (s*s)*time2 p wvtf)))"
  by (metis lemSlopedLineInVerticalPlane
    wvte.onAxis wvtf.onAxis wvtg.offAxis wvt.e.not.f)
hence exists_wvtz: "∃p.( collinear wvte wvtg p
  ∧ (space2 p wvtf = (c k * c k)*time2 p wvtf))"
  by metis
then obtain wvtz where
  wvtz_props: "collinear wvte wvtg wvtz
    ∧ (space2 wvtz wvtf = (c k * c k)*time2 wvtz wvtf)" by auto
hence wvtz_speed: "space2 wvtz wvtf = (c k * c k)*time2 wvtz wvtf"
  by metis

def z ≡ "wvt m k wvtz"
```

We know that f is on k 's lightcone at z , and that lightcones are mapped to lightcones under worldview transformations. We can therefore switch to m 's viewpoint, and at the same time deduce that z is on the lightcone at f .

```
(* f is on the lightcone at z *)
def zCone ≡ "lightcone m z"
have z_is_vertex: "z = vertex zCone" by (simp add: zCone_def)
have cm_is_zSlope: "c m = slope zCone" by (simp add: zCone_def)

have f_on_zCone: "onCone f zCone"
  by (metis wvtf_inv wvtf_on_wvtzCone zCone_def)

(* whence z is on the lightcone at f *)
hence "space2 (vertex zCone) f
  = (slope zCone * slope zCone)*time2 (vertex zCone) f"
  by (simp add: zCone_def)
hence "space2 z f = (c m * c m)*time2 z f"
  by (metis z_is_vertex cm_is_zSlope)
hence fz_speed: "space2 f z = (c m * c m)*time2 f z"
  by (metis lemSpace2Sym lemTime2Sym)
```

```

def fCone ≡ "lightcone m f"
have f_is_fVertex: "f = vertex fCone" by (simp add: fCone_def)
have cm_is_fSlope: "c m = slope fCone" by (simp add: fCone_def)
hence "space2 (vertex fCone) z
      = ((slope fCone) *(slope fCone))*time2 (vertex fCone) z"
  by (metis fz_speed f_is_fVertex cm_is_fSlope)
hence z_on_fCone: "onCone z fCone" by (metis onCone.simps)

```

Similarly, we can show that z is on the lightcone at e . However, the cones at e and f share the same tangent plane (because f lies in that plane), whence the intersection lines at e and f are parallel (this is part of what it means to be a tangent plane, as expressed in the cone axioms). It follows that we have two distinct lines that intersect in a common point, z , despite being parallel.

This provides the required contradiction.

5 Concluding Remarks

5.1 Discussion

The approach to physical theories and physical computability we have outlined above allows us not only to check results based on intuition, but also to identify which axioms are required in the proof of each theorem and to what extent those axioms can be weakened (the fewer assumptions we make up-front, the stronger the results). As we have seen, for example, we may use square roots in a FOL proof of a relativistic theorem not involving square roots, while originally in the physical theory we may have only assumed the existence of the rational numbers. A similar phenomenon with the so-called Continuity Axiom (see Sect. 2) is studied and explained in detail in [20]. The precision with which physical theories need to be formalised within automated proof systems forces us to recognise such hidden assumptions.

Moreover, the very close agreement that currently exists between experimental evidence and the predictions of theoretical physics, suggests that the world-as-is may indeed satisfy these additional axioms. This is itself of interest, since it adds to the burden on theoretical physics: can the standard model, for example, explain *why* the number field associated with spacetime coordinates should necessarily satisfy the Euclidean axiom? Or are experimental results in fact compatible with a non-Euclidean number system, in which case the standard model is arguably over-specified?

In addition, the use of an automated proof assistant to study physical theories also has other pay-offs in terms of efficiency. In practice, all standard models of general relativity are locally special relativistic. Consequently, we expect that work already invested in the construction of `SpaceTime.thy` (itself built on top of existing Isabelle/HOL libraries) will largely be re-usable. We would also like to know to what extent the work developed here can be extended to encompass other physical systems – for example quantum mechanics, the other version of physics of such importance in modern computing theory – and whether new proof techniques or capabilities would be useful in that effort. For example, in the proof above it was

necessary for us to determine the existence of a point z with certain coordinates. Although these coordinates can be identified manually, this is a messy process which requires subsequent stringent proof that the results obtained do indeed satisfy the properties required of them; it would be convenient to have a system built into Isabelle/HOL that could do the identification on our behalf.

5.2 Wider relevance to computability theory

Turing's [6] analysis of (human) computation provided a convincing demonstration that certain problems cannot be solved by computational means. In particular, if P_0, P_1, P_2, \dots is a fixed enumeration of all programs that take a single natural number as input, it is not possible to compute the function $HP: \mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \{yes, no\}$ given by

$$HP(m, n) = \begin{cases} yes & \text{if } P_m(n) \text{ will eventually halt} \\ no & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Powerful as it is, Turing's analysis is nonetheless susceptible to attack due to an unexamined assumption built into his description of human computation. For, as he explains [21]:

The human computer is supposed to be following fixed rules; he has no authority to deviate from them in any detail. We may suppose that these rules are supplied in a book, which is altered whenever he is put on to a new job. He has also an unlimited supply of paper on which he does his calculations. He may also do his multiplications and additions on a "desk machine," but this is not important.

In fact, the consequences of using a "desk machine" cannot be so readily dismissed, because this implies that the computation may involve coordination between two physically separated agents (the human and the machine) [22]. Being physically separated, the two agents may be subject to different forces and accelerations, and this can affect the rate at which they perceive each other's clocks to be running. This in turn provides scope for extreme computational speed-up, to the extent that HP becomes solvable. For example, astronomical observations suggest the presence of a massive slowly rotating ("slow Kerr") black hole at the centre of the Milky Way [23]. Such black holes are associated, in relativity theory, with a computationally useful spacetime geometry (*Malament-Hogarth spacetime* [8]), containing a worldline w and a point p (not on w), with the following properties:

- w has infinite proper length;
- it is possible to send a signal to p from any point along w .

Suppose, then, that we are given m and n , and want to determine whether or not $P \equiv P_m(n)$ will eventually halt. We send a computer along w having first loaded an interpreter with behaviour:

```
run P;
send a signal to spacetime location p
```

If P doesn't halt, the second instruction will never be reached, and no signal will be sent. On the other hand, because w has infinite proper length, the computer has unbounded time available to it for its computation, and so P has enough time to run to completion if this is its underlying behaviour. Consequently, a signal will arrive at p if and only if $P_m(n)$ eventually halts. It is therefore enough for us to follow a trajectory that takes us through p . When we arrive there, we look for the presence of the signal, saying *yes* if the signal is present, and *no* otherwise.

5.3 The road ahead

Formalising this concept as a candidate solution to GOAL 4 on page 3 is our ultimate, and somewhat challenging, task. In addition to adding concepts from general relativity (and deducing the possibility and necessary properties of slow Kerr blackholes!) we need to formalise both the computer and the user as independent communicating agents, so as to embed them as active participants in the processes involved.

There remains, of course, a great deal more to be done. In addition to completing the proofs of other standard features of special relativity (for example, time dilation), we need to extend our work to both accelerating observers and their associated theorems (for example, the “twin paradox”), and observers in a gravitational field. Only then will we be in a position to model what it means for a spacetime to exhibit the Malament-Hogarth timing structures relevant to existing suggestions for cosmological (hyper)computation. We also plan to continue the investigation into the physical realism of computing with Malament-Hogarth spacetimes started in [24, 25], not necessarily sticking with Kerr spacetime (cf. [11, 12]).

These are exciting challenges, which promise to expand our basic understanding of the best way to model advanced physical theories for use with automated theorem proving environments.

Acknowledgements This research is supported under the Royal Society International Exchanges Scheme (ref. IE110369). Németi's research was also supported by OTKA grant No 81188. This work was partially undertaken whilst Stannett was a visiting fellow at the Isaac Newton Institute for the Mathematical Sciences in the programme *Semantics & Syntax: A Legacy of Alan Turing*. We would like to thank our colleagues in Budapest and Sheffield for their many helpful insights. Figure 1 was constructed for us by Judit X. Madarász.

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