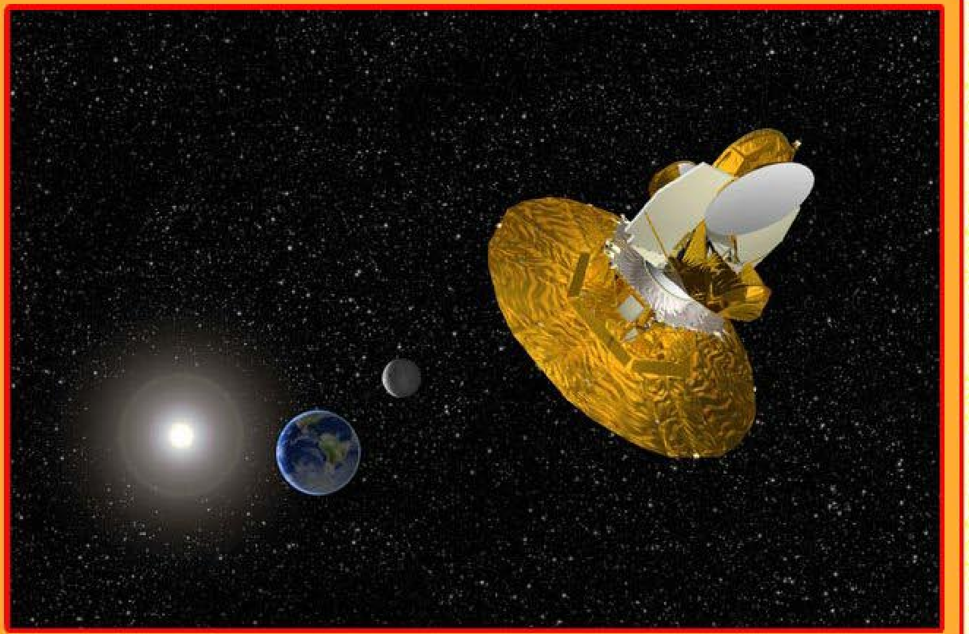
INFLATION AND THE STRING THEORY LANDSCAPE



— Alan Guth —

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

University of Toronto
Physics Colloquium
January 15, 2009

The Standard Big Bang

What it is:

- ☆ Theory that the universe as we know it began 13-15 billion years ago. (Latest estimate: 13.7 ± 0.2 billion years!)
- ☆ Initial state was a hot, dense, uniform soup of particles that filled space uniformly, and was expanding rapidly.

What it describes:

- ☆ How the early universe expanded and cooled
- ☆ How the light chemical elements formed
- ☆ How the matter congealed to form stars, galaxies, and clusters of galaxies

What it doesn't describe:

- ☆ What caused the expansion? (The big bang theory describes only the **aftermath** of the bang.)
- ☆ Where did the matter come from? (The theory assumes that **all matter** existed from the very beginning.)

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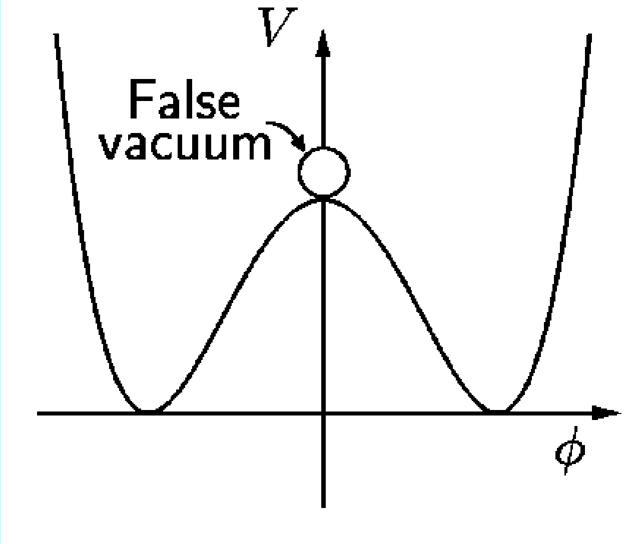
Gravitational Repulsion!

- ☆ According to general relativity, pressures as well as energy densities can create gravitational fields, and a negative pressure creates a repulsive gravitational field.

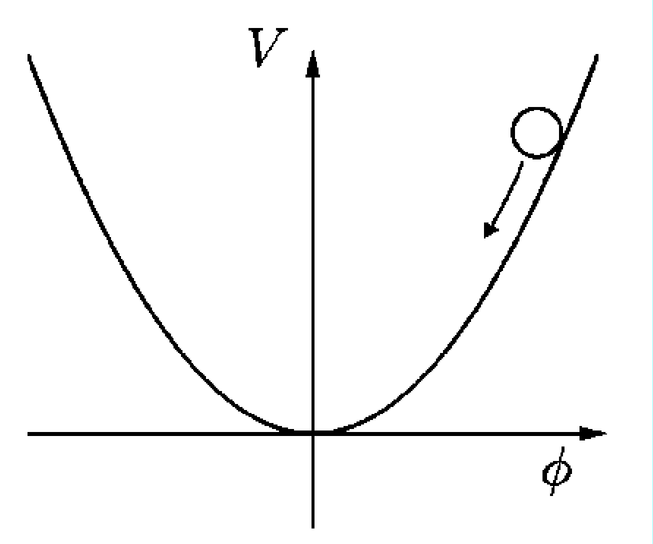
Inflationary Scenarios

- ☆ **Negative Pressure $\Longrightarrow$ Repulsive Gravity.**
- ☆ State dominated by scalar field potential energy $\Longrightarrow$ Negative Pressure.



New (Small Field) Inflation

Linde; Albrecht & Steinhardt (1982)



Chaotic (Large Field) Inflation

Linde (1983)

- Inflation proposes that a patch of negative pressure existed in the early universe — for inflation at the grand unified theory scale ($\sim 10^{16}$ GeV), the patch needs to be only as large as 10^{-28} cm. (Since any such patch is enlarged fantastically by inflation, the initial density or probability of such patches can be very low.)
- The gravitational repulsion created by the negative pressure was the driving force behind the big bang. The patch was driven into exponential expansion, with time constant $\sim 10^{-38}$ second.
- The patch expanded exponentially by a factor of at least 10^{28} (65 time constants), but it could have expanded much more.
- The scalar field eventually rolled down the hill and oscillated about the energy minimum. The energy from the false vacuum produced a hot soup of "ordinary" particles, which quickly reached thermal equilibrium. Standard cosmology began.

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☆ The positive energy of the false vacuum was compensated by the negative energy of gravity. The TOTAL ENERGY of the universe may very well be zero.

Evidence for Inflation

1) **Large scale uniformity.** The cosmic background radiation is uniform in temperature to one part in 100,000. It was released when the universe was about 400,000 years old. In standard cosmology without inflation, a mechanism to establish this uniformity would need to transmit energy and information at about 100 times the speed of light.

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Inflationary Solution: In inflationary models, the universe begins so small that uniformity is easily established — just like the air in the lecture hall spreading to fill it uniformly. Then inflation stretches the region to be large enough to include the visible universe.

2) **"Flatness problem:"**

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- Flat means Euclidean, as opposed to the non-Euclidean curved spaces that are also allowed by Einstein's general relativity.

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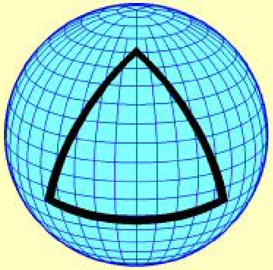
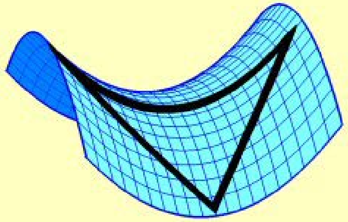
- ☆ Flat does not mean 2-dimensional.
- ☆ Flat means Euclidean, as opposed to the non-Euclidean curved spaces that are also allowed by Einstein's general relativity.
- ☆ 3-dimensional curved spaces are hard to visualize, but they are analogous to the 2-dimensional curved surfaces shown on the right.



Closed Geometry



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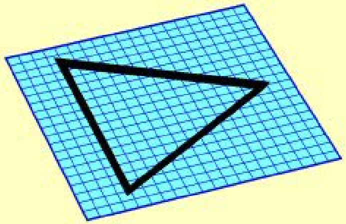
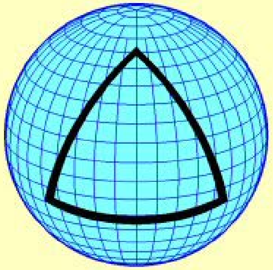


Flat Geometry

☆ According to general relativity, the flatness of the universe is related to its mass density:

$$\boxed{\Omega(Omega) = \frac{\text{actual mass density}}{\text{critical mass density}}\ ,}$$

where the "critical density" depends on the expansion rate. $\Omega = 1$ is flat, Ω greater than 1 is closed, Ω less than 1 is open.



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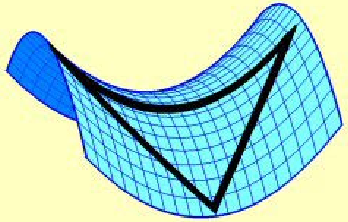

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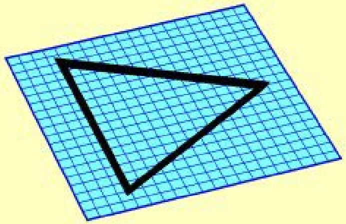

Flat Geometry

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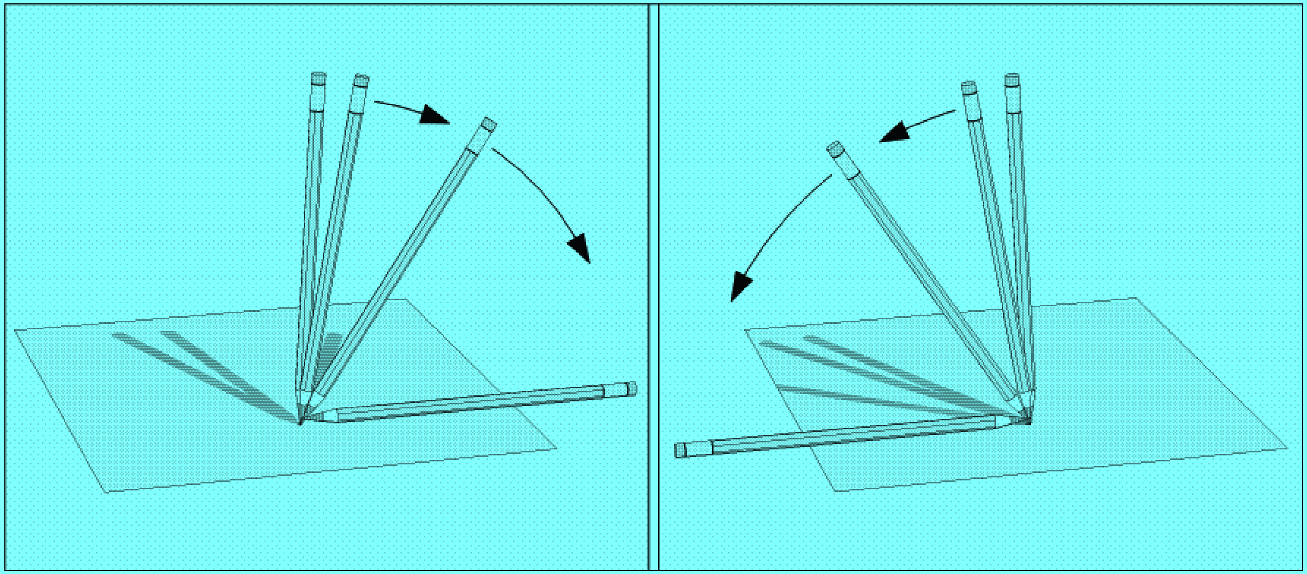

- If Ω in the early universe was slightly below 1, it would rapidly fall to zero — and no galaxies would form.
- If Ω was slightly greater than 1, it would rapidly rise to infinity, the universe would recollapse, and no galaxies would form.

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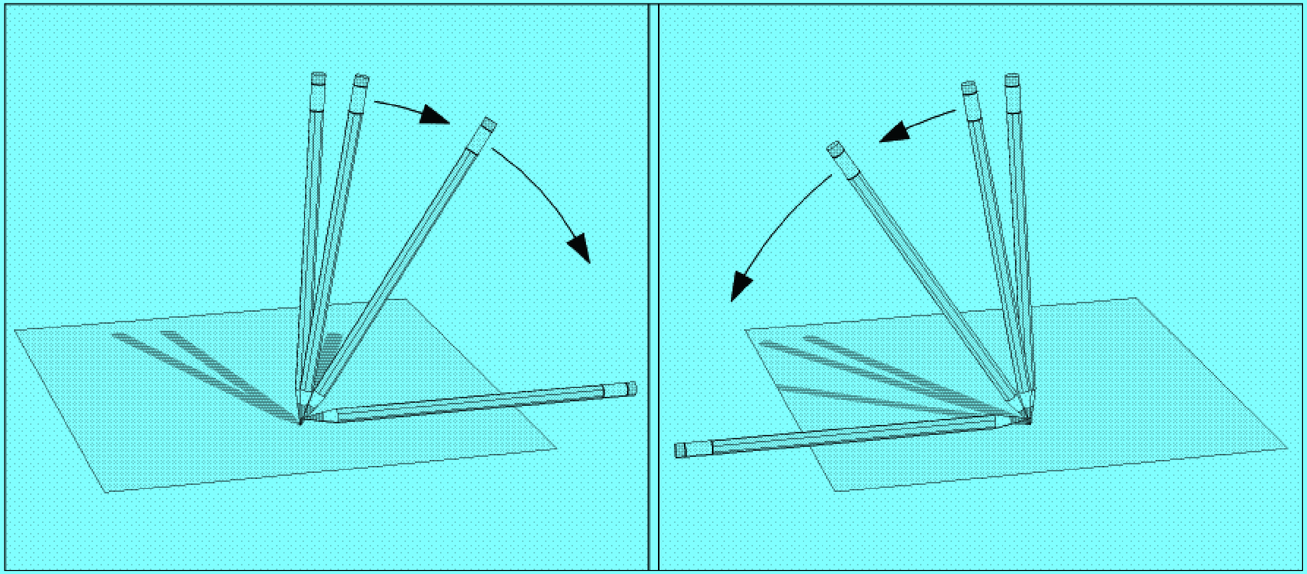

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- To be as close to critical density as we measure today, at one second after the big bang, Ω must have been equal to one **to 15 decimal places!**

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- New ingredient: Dark Energy. In 1998 it was discovered that the expansion of the universe has been accelerating for about the last 5 billion years. The "Dark Energy" is the energy causing this to happen.

3) **Small scale nonuniformity:** Can be measured in the cosmic background radiation. The intensity is almost uniform across the sky, but there are small ripples. Although these ripples are only at the level of 1 part in 100,000, these nonuniformities are now detectable! Where do they come from?

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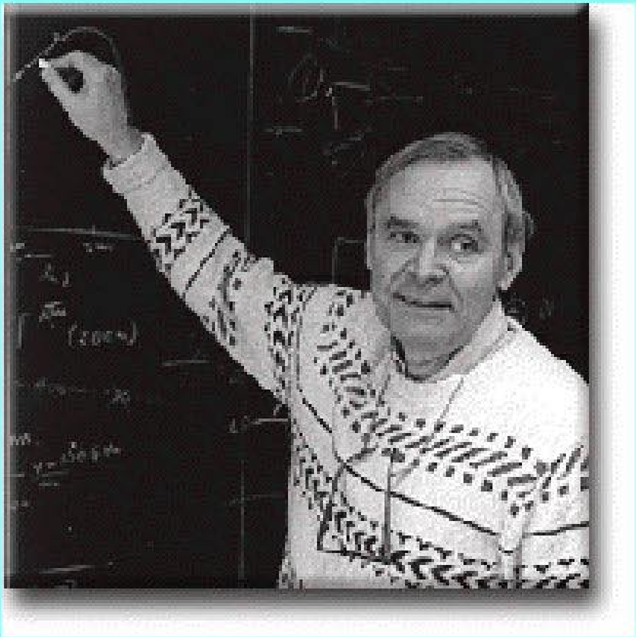
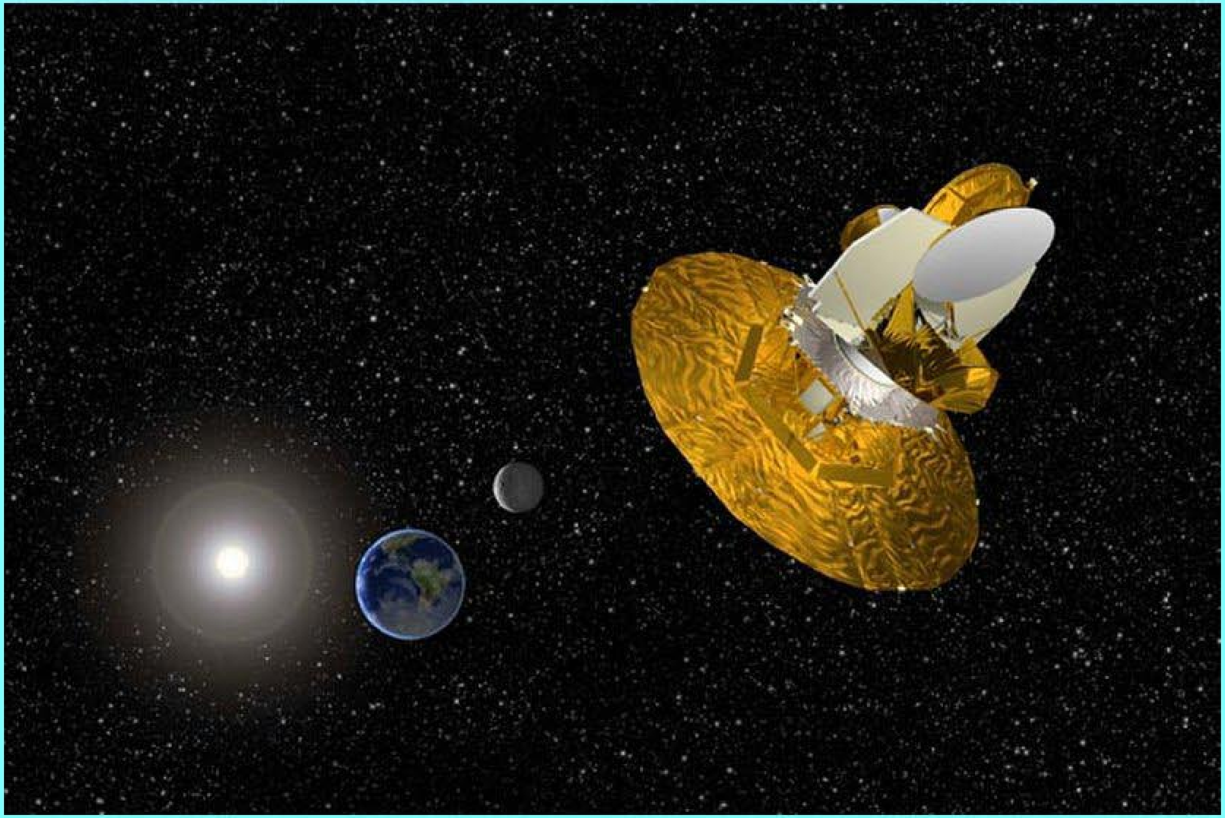
Inflationary Solution: Inflation attributes these ripples to *quantum fluctuations.* Inflation makes predictions for the pattern of the ripples, and the pattern measured so far agrees beautifully with inflation.

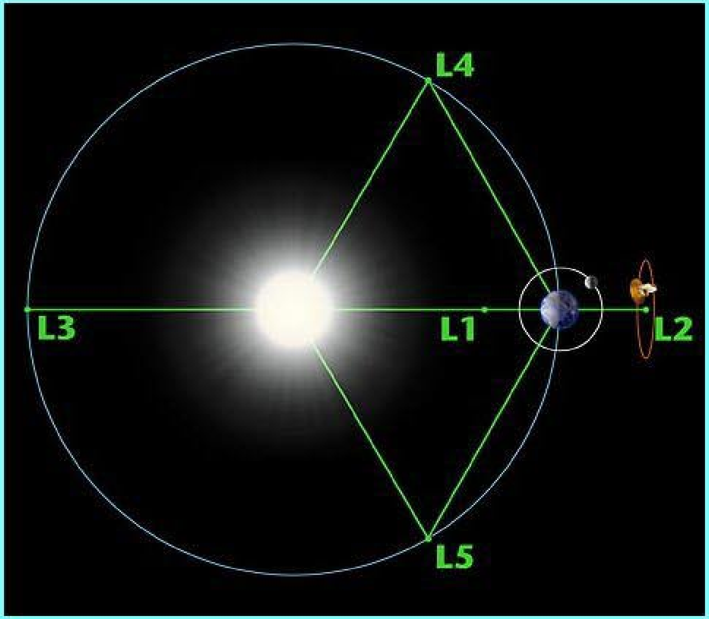
WMAP: Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe

Images courtesy of NASA/WMAP Science Team

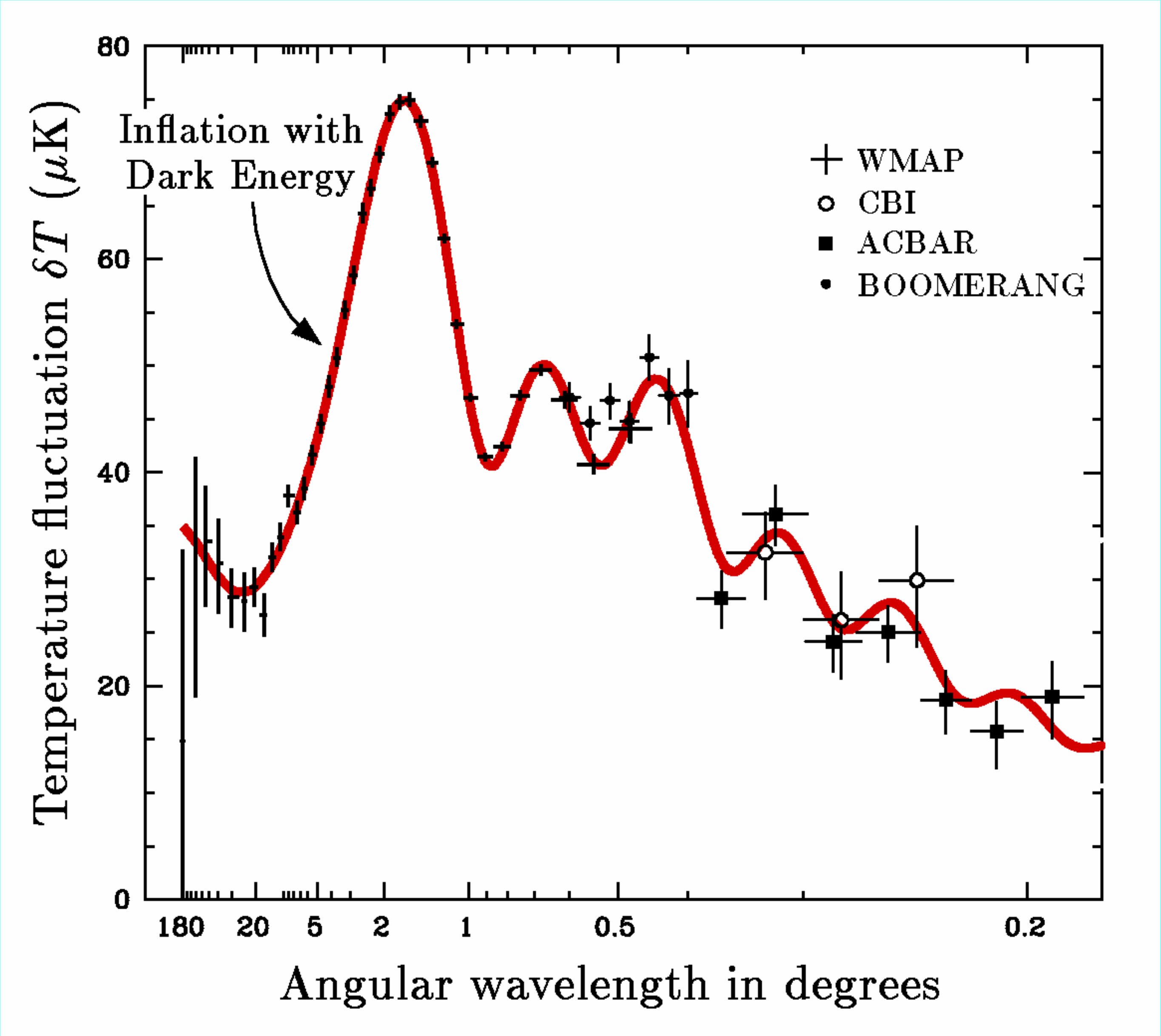


David T. Wilkinson





CMB: Comparison of Theory and Experiment



Graph by Max Tegmark, for A. Guth & D. Kaiser, *Science* **307, 884** (Feb 11, 2005), updated to include WMAP 3-year data.

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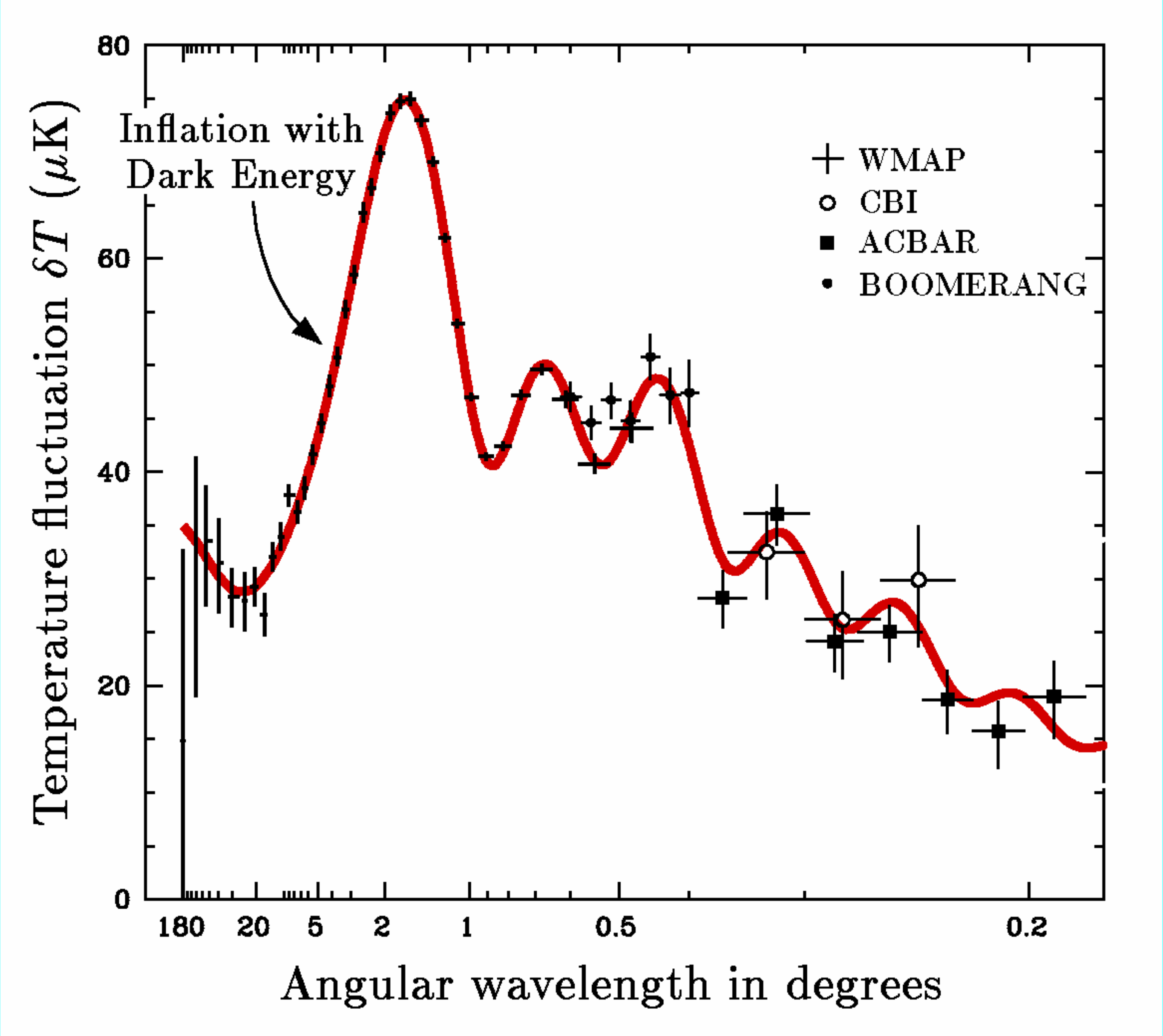

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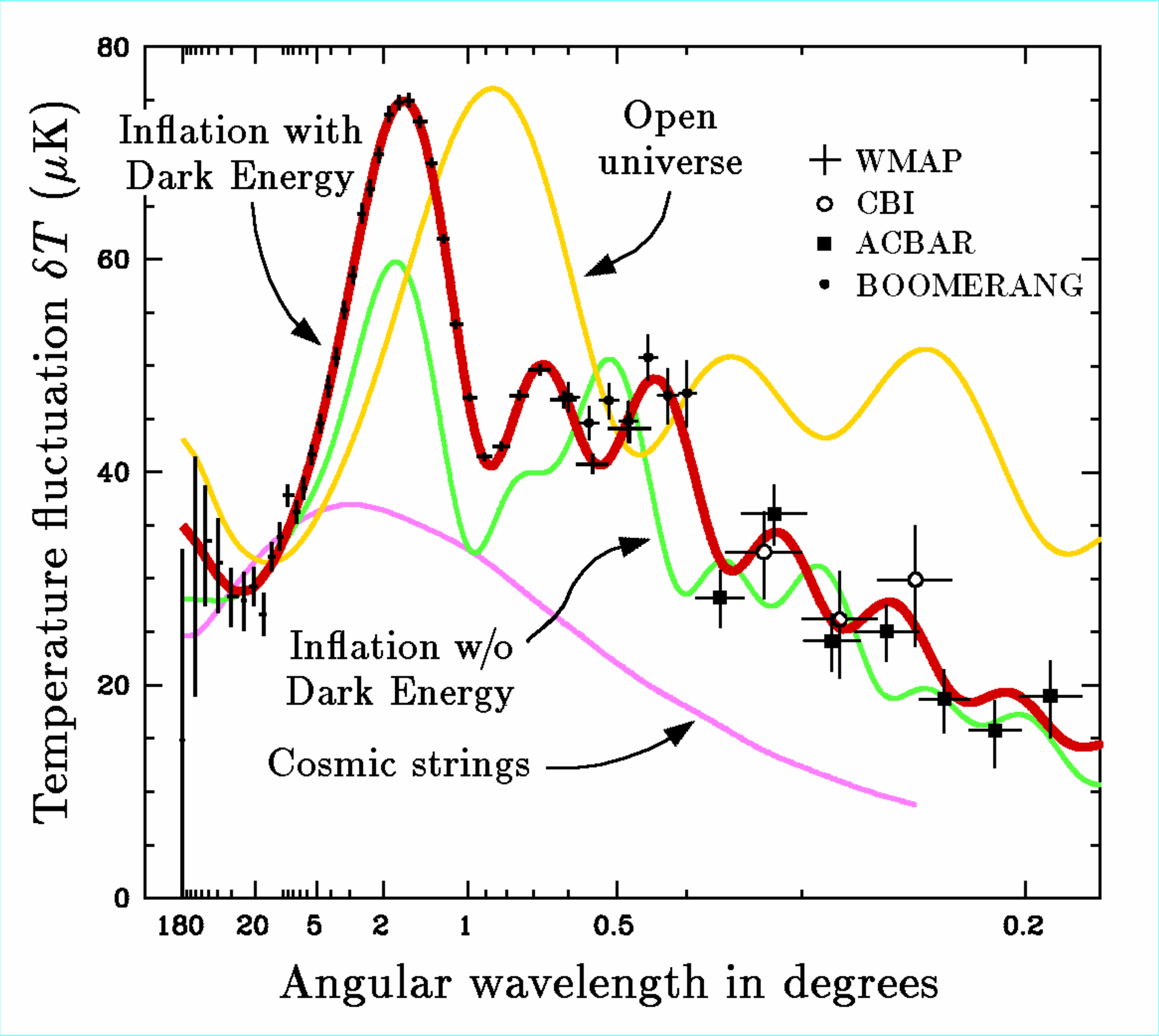

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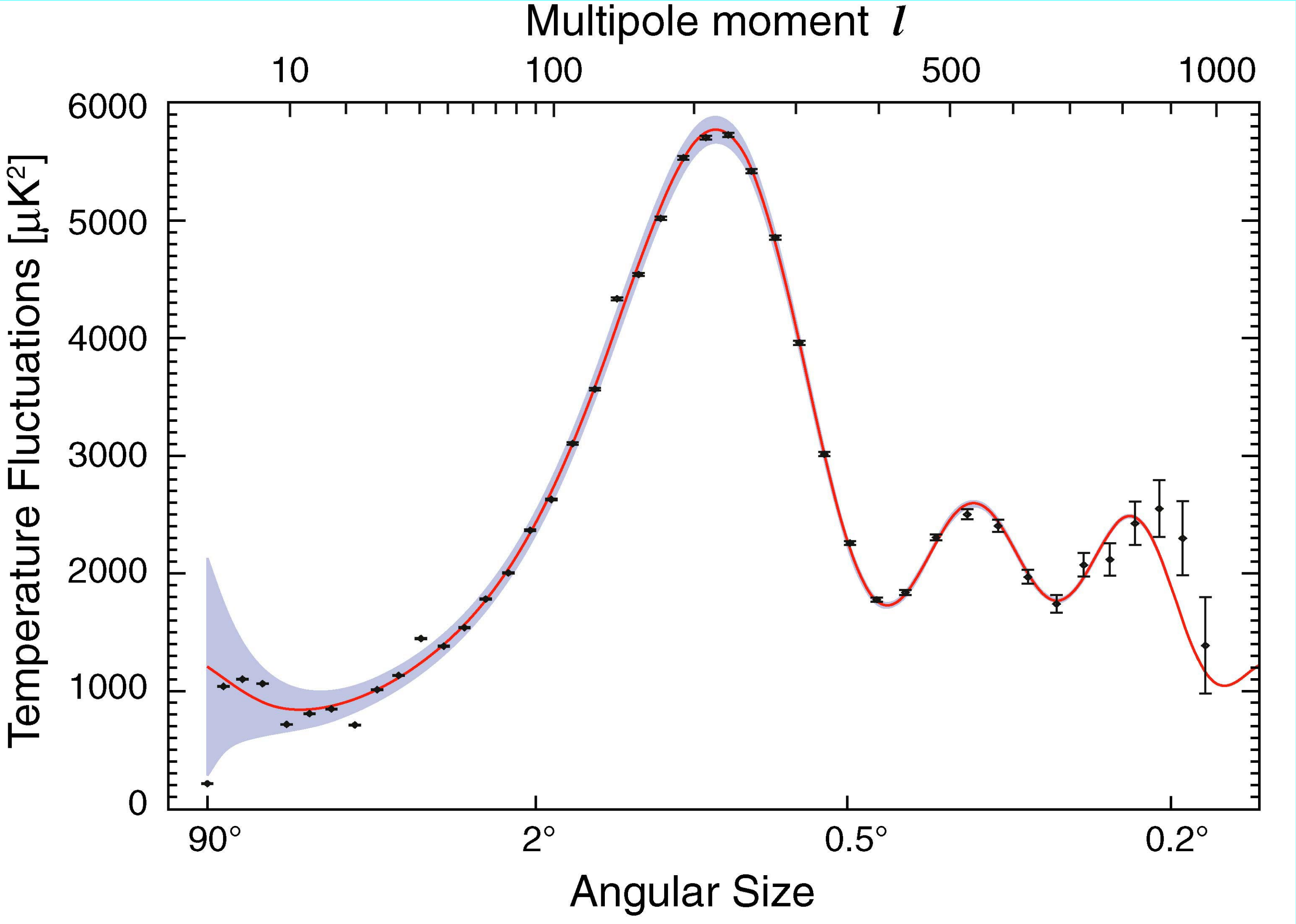
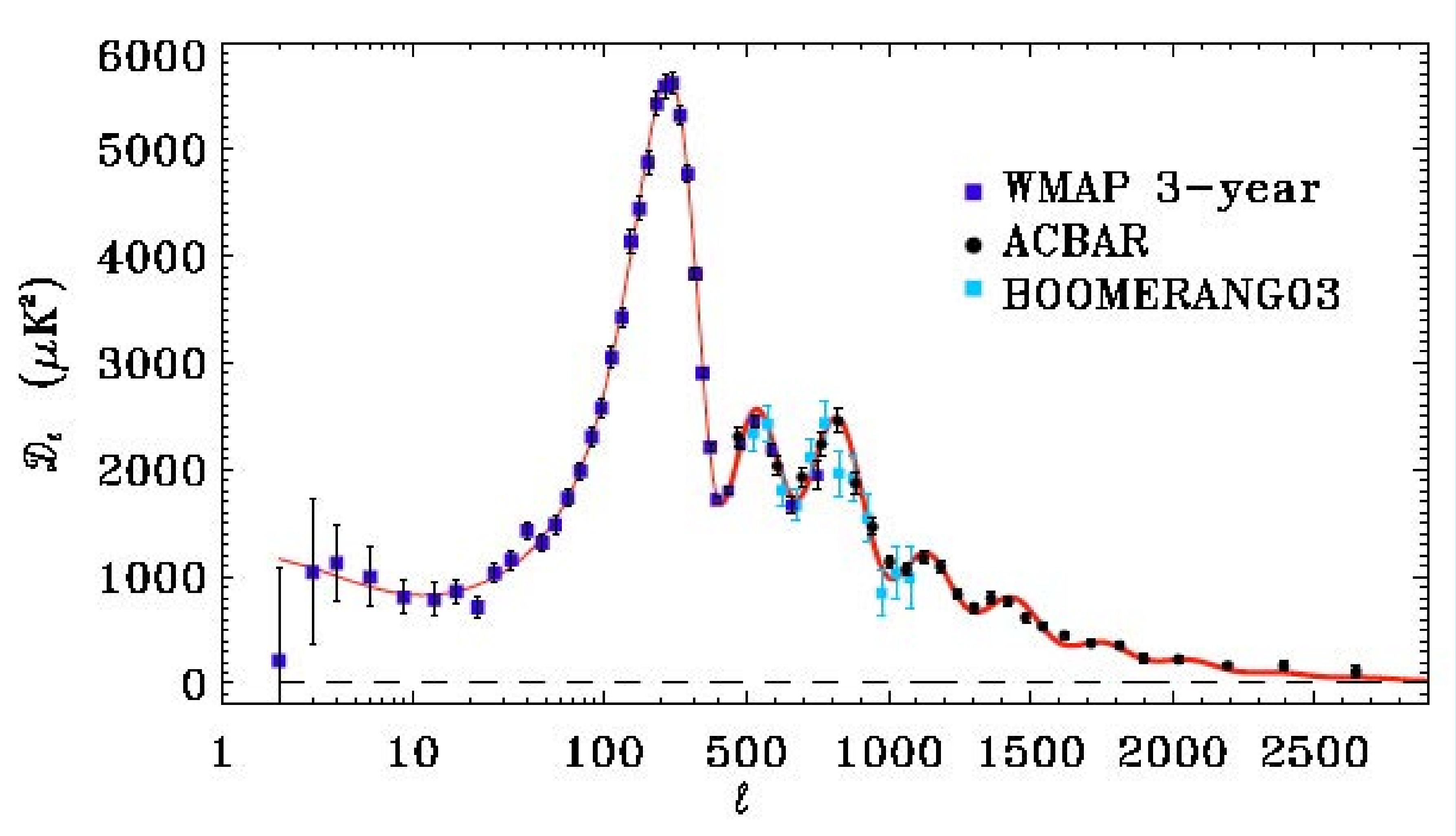
WMAP 5-YEAR FLUCTUATION SPECTRUM



2008 ACBAR, WMAP 3yr, BOOMERANG '03



DARK ENERGY
Key Mystery of the Universe

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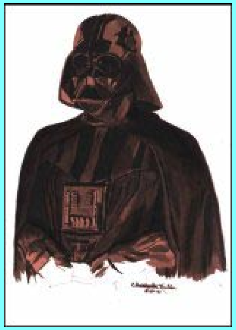

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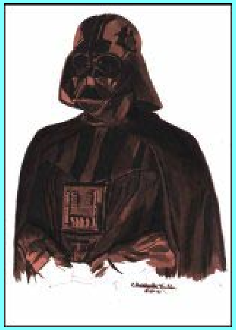

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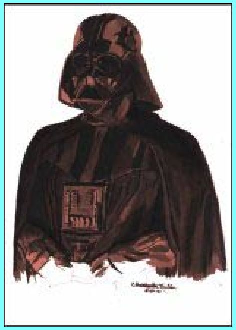

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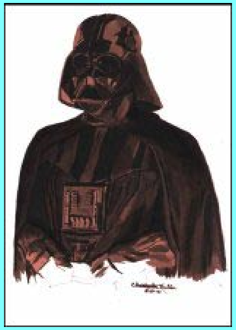

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SIMPLEST EXPLANATION: Dark energy = vacuum energy, also known as a cosmological constant.

The NIGHTMARE of DARK ENERGY

- The quantum vacuum is far from empty, so a nonzero energy density is no problem.
- In quantum field theory, the energy density of quantum fluctuations diverges.
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It is too large by 120 orders of magnitude!

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A Multiverse

THE LANDSCAPE OF STRING THEORY

- ☆ Since the inception of string theory, theorists have sought to find the vacuum of string theory — with no success.
- ☆ Within the past 10 years or so, most string theorists have come to the belief that there is no unique vacuum.
- ☆ Instead, there are maybe 10^{500} long-lived metastable states, any of which could serve as a substrate for a pocket universe. This is the landscape!
- ☆ Eternal inflation can presumably produce an infinite number of pocket universes of every type, populating the landscape.
- ☆ Although string theory would govern everywhere, each type of vacuum would have its own low-energy physics — its own "standard model," its own "constants" of nature, etc.

Environmental Selection AKA: The Anthropic Principle

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Environmental Selection
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- Consider, as an example, the local density of matter in which we find ourselves — it is about 10^{30} times larger than the mean density of the universe.
- Why is this so? Chance? Luck? Divine Providence?
- Most of us would presumably accept this as a selection effect: life can evolve only in those rare regions of the universe where the density of matter is unusually high.

- As early as 1987, Steve Weinberg pointed out that the cosmological constant might be explained in the same way.
- Maybe the cosmological constant ***IS*** huge in most pocket universes. Nonetheless, we must remember that a cosmological constant causes the expansion of the universe to accelerate. If negative, the universe quickly collapses. If large and positive, the universe flies apart before galaxies can form. It is plausible, therefore, that life can arise only if the cosmological constant is very near zero.
- In 1998 Martel, Shapiro, and Weinberg made a serious calculation of the effect of the cosmological constant on galaxy formation. They found that to within a factor of order 5, they could "explain" why the cosmological constant is as small as what we measure.

The Controversy

- A number of physicists regard these anthropic arguments as ridiculous.
- My recommendation is that the anthropic explanation (for anything) should be considered the explanation of last resort.
  - Until we actually understand the landscape, and the initiation of life, we can only give plausibility arguments for anthropic explanations.
  - Hence, the anthropic arguments only become attactive when the search for more deterministic explanations has failed, as so far is the case for the cosmological constant. (Anthropic explanations are also discussed for many other quantities, including the Higgs mass, the top quark mass, the magnitude of density perturbations.)

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- For the cosmological constant, because it seems so hard to explain any other way, it seems like it is time to strongly consider the selection-effect explanation.
- It is even hard to deny that, as of now, the selection-effect explanation is by far the most plausible that is known.

The Disappointment

- ☆ In earlier years, there was a widespread hope that eventually string theory would be able to predict the parameters of the standard model. From the point of view of theorists, this would be great.
- ☆ If the landscape picture is correct, it could be that all these values are determined, at least in part, by historical accidents — which means that we have much less predictive power than we hoped.
- ☆ This is not the first time something like this has happened. Keppler thought the radii of planetary orbits should be calculable from geometry. Now we treat planetary orbits as historical accidents.

SUMMARY

The inflationary paradigm is in great shape!

- Inflation can explain why the universe is so smooth and homogenous when averaged over large regions, why its mass density is so close to the critical value, and it can also explain the ripples that we see in the cosmic background radiation.
- Almost all inflationary models are eternal into the future: they produce a multiverse of pocket universes.
- String theorists mostly agree that string theory has no unique vacuum, but instead a landscape of perhaps 10^{500} long-lived metastable states, any of which could be our vacuum.
- Eternal inflation can populate the string theory landscape. The combination provides a natural setting for anthropic arguments: perhaps we see a small cosmological constant, for example, because conscious beings only form in those parts of the multiverse where the cosmological constant is small.

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Dark Energy