On the anomalous secular increase of the eccentricity of the orbit of the Moon

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ABSTRACT
A recent analysis of a Lunar Laser Ranging (LLR) data record spanning 38.7 yr revealed an anomalous increase of the eccentricity $e$ of the lunar orbit amounting to $\dot{e}_{\text{meas}} = (9 \pm 3) \times 10^{-12} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. The present-day models of the dissipative phenomena occurring in the interiors of both the Earth and the Moon are not able to explain it. In this paper, we examine several dynamical effects, not modelled in the data analysis, in the framework of long-range modified models of gravity and of the standard Newtonian/Einsteinian paradigm. It turns out that none of them can accommodate $\dot{e}_{\text{meas}}$. Many of them do not even induce long-term changes in $e$; other models do, instead, yield such an effect, but the resulting magnitudes are in disagreement with $\dot{e}_{\text{meas}}$. In particular, the general relativistic gravitomagnetic acceleration of the Moon due to the Earth’s angular momentum has the right order of magnitude, but the resulting Lense-Thirring secular effect for the eccentricity vanishes. A potentially viable Newtonian candidate would be a trans-Plutonian massive object (Planet X/Nemesis/Tyche) since it, actually, would affect $e$ with a non-vanishing long-term variation. On the other hand, the values for the physical and orbital parameters of such a hypothetical body required to obtain at least the right order of magnitude for $\dot{e}$ are completely unrealistic: suffices it to say that an Earth-sized planet would be at 30 au, while a jovian mass would be at 200 au. Thus, the issue of finding a satisfactorily explanation for the anomalous behaviour of the Moon’s eccentricity remains open.

Key words: gravitation – celestial mechanics – ephemerides – Moon – planets and satellites: general.

1 INTRODUCTION
Anderson & Nieto (2010), in a review of some astrometric anomalies, recently detected in the Solar system by several independent groups, mentioned also an anomalous secular increase of the eccentricity $e$ of the orbit of the Moon,

$$\dot{e}_{\text{meas}} = (9 \pm 3) \times 10^{-12} \text{ yr}^{-1},$$

based on an analysis of a long Lunar Laser Ranging (LLR) data record spanning 38.7 yr (1970 March 16 to 2008 November 22) performed by Williams & Boggs (2009) with the suite of accurate dynamical force models of the DE421 ephemerides (Folkner, Williams & Boggs 2008; Williams, Boggs & Folkner 2008) including all relevant Newtonian and Einsteinian effects. Note that equation (1) is statistically significant at a $3\sigma$ level. The first presentation of such an effect appeared in Williams et al. (2001), in which an extensive discussion of the state-of-the-art in modelling the tidal dissipation in both the Earth and the Moon was given. Later, Williams & Dickey (2003), relying upon Williams et al. (2001), yielded an anomalous eccentricity rate as large as $\dot{e}_{\text{meas}} = (1.6 \pm 0.5) \times 10^{-11} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. Anderson & Nieto (2010) commented that equation (1) is not compatible with present, standard knowledge of dissipative processes in the interiors of both the Earth and Moon, which were, actually, modelled by Williams & Boggs (2009). The relevant physical and osculating orbital parameters of the Earth and the Moon are reported in Table 1.

In this paper we look for a possible candidate for explaining such an anomaly in terms of both Newtonian and non-Newtonian gravitational dynamical effects, general relativistic or not.

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1 It is a dimensionless numerical parameter for which $0 \leq e < 1$ holds. It determines the shape of the Keplerian ellipse: $e = 0$ corresponds to a circle, while values close to unity yield highly elongated orbits.
To this aim, let us make the following, preliminary remarks. Naive, dimensional evaluations of the effect caused on \( e \) by an additional anomalous acceleration \( A \) can be made by noticing that
\[
\dot{e} \approx \frac{A}{na}, \tag{2}
\]
with
\[
na = 1.0 \times 10^5 \text{ m s}^{-1} = 3.2 \times 10^{10} \text{ m yr}^{-1} \tag{3}
\]
for the geocentric orbit of the Moon. In it, \( a \) is the orbital semimajor axis, while \( n = \sqrt{\mu/a^3} \) is the Keplerian mean motion in which \( \mu = GM(1 + m/M) \) is the gravitational parameter of the Earth–Moon system; \( G \) is the Newtonian constant of gravitation. It turns out that an extra-acceleration as large as
\[
A \approx 3 \times 10^{-16} \text{ m s}^{-2} = 0.3 \text{ m yr}^{-2} \tag{4}
\]
would satisfy equation (1). In fact, a mere order-of-magnitude analysis based on equation (2) would be insufficient to draw meaningful conclusions: finding simply that this or that dynamical effect induces an extra-acceleration of the right order of magnitude may be highly misleading. Indeed, exact calculations of the secular variation of \( e \) caused by such putative promising candidate extra-accelerations \( A \) must be performed with standard perturbative techniques in order to check if they, actually, cause an averaged non-zero change of the eccentricity.

Moreover, also in such potentially favourable cases caution is still in order. Indeed, it may well happen, in principle, that the resulting dynamical effects in terms of the standard Newtonian/Einsteinian laws of gravitation. The conclusions are in Section 4.

2 EXOTIC MODELS OF MODIFIED GRAVITY

2.1 A Rindler-type acceleration

As a practical example of the aforementioned caveat, let us consider the effective model for gravity of a central object of mass \( M \) at large scales recently constructed by Grumiller (2010). Among other things, it predicts the existence of a constant and uniform acceleration
\[
A = A_{\text{Rin}} \ddot{r}, \tag{5}
\]
radially directed towards \( M \). As shown in Iorio (2010a), the Earth–Moon range residuals \( \delta \rho \) over \( \Delta t = 20 \text{ yr} \) yield the following constrain for a terrestrial Rindler-type extra-acceleration
\[
A_{\text{Rin}} \lesssim 5 \times 10^{-16} \text{ m s}^{-2} = 0.5 \text{ m yr}^{-2}, \tag{6}
\]
which is in good agreement with .

The problem is that, actually, a radial and constant acceleration like that of equation (5) does not induce any secular variation of the eccentricity. Indeed, from the standard Gauss\(^{3}\) perturbation equation for \( e \) (Bertotti et al. 2003):
\[
\frac{de}{dt} = \frac{\sqrt{1 - e^2}}{na} \left\{ A_R \sin f + A_T \left[ \cos f + \frac{1}{e} \left( 1 - \frac{r}{a} \right) \right] \right\}, \tag{7}
\]
in which \( f \) is the true anomaly,\(^{1}\) and \( A_R, A_T \) are the radial and transverse components of the perturbing acceleration \( A \), it turns out (Iorio 2010a)
\[
\Delta e = -\frac{A_{\text{Rin}}(1 - e^2)(\cos E - \cos E_0)}{n^2}, \tag{8}
\]
\(^{2}\) Here \( e \) denotes the eccentricity: it is not the Napier number.
\(^{3}\) It is just the case to remind that the Gauss perturbative equations are valid for any kind of perturbing acceleration \( A \), whatever its physical origin may be.
\(^{4}\) It is an angle counted from the pericenter, i.e. the point of closest approach to the central body, which instantaneously reckons the position of the test particle along its Keplerian ellipse.

\(^{5}\) Relevant physical and osculating orbital parameters of the Earth–Moon system. \( a \) is the semimajor axis. \( e \) is the eccentricity. The inclination \( I \) is referred to the mean ecliptic at J2000.0. \( \Omega \) is the longitude of the ascending node and is referred to the mean equinox and ecliptic at J2000.0. \( \omega \) is the argument of pericenter. \( G \) is the Newtonian gravitational constant. The masses of the Earth and the Moon are \( M \) and \( m \), respectively. The orbital parameters of the Moon were retrieved from the WEB interface HORIZONS, by JPL, NASA, at the epoch J2000.0.

| \( a \) (m) | \( e \) | \( I \) (°) | \( \Omega \) (°) | \( \omega \) (°) | \( GM(\text{m}^3\text{s}^{-2}) \) | \( m/M \) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \( 3.81219 \times 10^8 \) | 0.0647 | 5.24 | 123.98 | −51.86 | \( 3.98600 \times 10^{14} \) | 0.012 |
where $E$ is the eccentric anomaly,\(^3\) so that
\[
\Delta e_{\text{Io}}^2 = 0. \tag{9}
\]

### 2.2 A Yukawa-type long-range modification of gravity

It is well known that a variety of theoretical paradigms (Adelberger, Heckel & Nelson 2003; Bertolami & Páramos 2005) allow for Yukawa-like deviations from the usual Newtonian inverse-square law of gravitation (Burgess & Cloutier 1988). The Yukawa-type correction to the Newtonian gravitational potential $U_N = -\mu r$, where $\mu = GM$ is the gravitational parameter of the central body which acts as source of the supposedly modified gravitational field, is
\[
U_Y = -\frac{\alpha \mu \infty}{r} \exp \left( -\frac{r}{\lambda} \right), \tag{10}
\]
where $\mu_{\infty}$ is the gravitational parameter evaluated at distances $r$ much larger than the scale length $\lambda$.

In order to compute the long-term effects of equation (10) on the eccentricity of a test particle it is convenient to adopt the Lagrange perturbative scheme (Bertotti et al. 2003). In such a framework, the equation for the long-term variation of $e$ is (Bertotti et al. 2003)
\[
\frac{\partial \langle e \rangle}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{na^2} \left( 1 - e^2 \right) \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - e^2}} \frac{\partial R}{\partial \omega} - \frac{\partial R}{\partial M} \right), \tag{11}
\]
where $\omega$ is the argument of pericentre,\(^6\) $M = n(t - t_p) = E - e \sin E$ is the mean anomaly of the test particle,\(^7\) and $R$ denotes the average of the perturbing potential over one orbital revolution. In the case of a Yukawa-type perturbation,\(^8\) equation (10) yields
\[
\langle U_Y \rangle = -\frac{a \alpha \mu \infty}{a} \frac{\partial \langle e \rangle}{\partial \omega} \left( \frac{ae}{\lambda} \right), \tag{12}
\]
where $I_0(x)$ is the modified Bessel function of the first kind $I_0(x)$ for $k = 0$. An inspection of equations (11) and (12) immediately tells us that there is no secular variation of $e$ caused by an anomalous Yukawa-type perturbation which, thus, cannot explain equation (1).

### 2.3 Other long-range exotic models of gravity

The previous analysis has the merit of elucidating certain general features pertaining to a vast category of long-range modified models of gravity. Indeed, equation (11) tells us that a long-term change of $e$ occurs only if the averaged extrapotential considered explicitly depends on $\omega$ and on time through $M$ or, equivalently, $E$. Actually, the anomalous potentials arising in the majority of long-range modified models of gravity are time-independent and spherically symmetric (Dvali, Gabadadze & Porrati 2000; Capozziello et al. 2001; Capozziello & Lambiase 2003; Dvali, Gruzinov & Zaldarriaga 2003; Kerr, Hauck & Mashhoon 2003; Allemandi et al. 2005; Gruzinov 2005; Jaekel & Reynaud 2005a,b; Navarro & van Acoleyen 2005; Reynaud & Jaekel 2005; Apostolopoulou & Tetradis 2006; Brownstein & Moffat 2006; Capozziello, Cardone & Francaviglia 2006; Jaekel & Reynaud 2006a,b; Moffat 2006; Navarro & van Acoleyen 2006a,b; Sanders 2006; Adkins & McDonnell 2007; Adkins, McDonnell & Fell 2007; Bertolami et al. 2007; Capozziello 2007; Capozziello & Francaviglia 2008; Nojiri & Odintsov 2007; Bertolami & Santos 2009; de Felice & Tsujikawa 2010; Ruggiero 2010; Sotiriou & Faraoni 2010; Fabrina et al. 2011). Anomalous accelerations $A$ exhibiting a dependence on the test particle’s velocity $v$ were also proposed in different frameworks (Jaekel & Reynaud 2005a,b; Hořava 2009a,b; Kehagias & Sfetsos 2009). Since they have to be evaluated on to the unperturbed Keplerian ellipse, for which the following relations hold (Murray & Correia 2010):
\[
\begin{align*}
    r &= a \left( 1 - e \cos E \right), \\
    \frac{dt}{dE} &= \frac{(1 - e \cos E)}{n} \, dE, \\
    v_R &= \frac{na \sin \omega}{1 - e \cos E}, \\
    v_T &= \frac{na \sqrt{1 - e^2}}{1 - e \cos E},
\end{align*}
\tag{13}
\]
where $v_R$ and $v_T$ are the unperturbed, Keplerian radial and transverse components of $v$, it was straightforward to infer from equation (7) that no long-term variations of the eccentricity arose at all (Iorio 2007; Iorio & Ruggiero 2010).

\(^3\) Basically, $E$ can be regarded as a parametrization of the polar angle in the orbital plane.

\(^6\) It is an angle in the orbital plane reckoning the position of the point of closest approach with respect to the line of the nodes which is the intersection of the orbital plane with the reference $\{x, y\}$ plane.

\(^7\) $t_p$ is the time of passage at pericentre.

\(^8\) Several investigations of Yukawa-type effects on the lunar data, yielding more and more tight constraints on its parameters, are present in the literature: see, e.g. Müller & Biskupek (2007), Müller et al. (2007), Müller, Williams & Turyshhev (2008), Müller et al. (2009).
An example of time-dependent anomalous potentials occurs if either a secular change of the Newtonian gravitational constant\(^9\) (Milne 1935; Dirac 1937) or of the mass of the central body is postulated, so that a percent time variation \(\dot{\mu}/\mu\) of the gravitational parameter can be considered. In such a case, it was recently shown with the Gauss perturbative scheme that the eccentricity experiences a secular change given by (Iorio 2010b)

\[
\langle \dot{e} \rangle = (1 + e) \frac{\dot{\mu}}{\mu}.
\]

(14)

As remarked in Iorio (2010b), equations (1) and (14) would imply an increase

\[
\frac{\dot{\mu}}{\mu} = +8.5 \times 10^{-12} \text{yr}^{-1}.
\]

(15)

If attributed to a change in \(G\), equation (15) would be one order of magnitude larger than the present-day bounds on \(\dot{G}/G\) obtained from\(^{10}\) LLR (Müller & Biskupek 2007; Williams, Turyshev & Boggs 2007). Moreover, Pitjeva (2010) recently obtained a secular decrease of \(G\) as large as

\[
\frac{\dot{G}}{G} = (-5.9 \pm 4.4) \times 10^{-14} \text{yr}^{-1}
\]

(16)

from planetary data analyses; if applied to equation (14), it is clearly insufficient to explain the empirical result of equation (1). Putting aside a variation of \(G\), the gravitational parameter of the Earth may experience a time variation because of a steady mass accretion of non-annihilating Dark Matter (Blinnikov & Khlopov 1983; Khlopov et al. 1991; Khlopov 1999; Foot 2004; Adler 2008). Khriplovich & Shepelyansky (2009) and Xu & Siegel (2008) assume for the Earth

\[
\frac{\dot{M}}{M} \approx +10^{-17} \text{yr}^{-1},
\]

(17)

which is far smaller than equation (15), as noted by Iorio (2010c). Adler (2008) yields an even smaller figure for \(\dot{M}/M\).

3 STANDARD NEWTONIAN AND EINSTEINIAN DYNAMICAL EFFECTS

In this section we look at possible dynamical causes for equation (1) in terms of standard Newtonian and general relativistic gravitational effects which were not modelled in processing the LLR data.

3.1 The general relativistic Lense-Thirring field and other stationary spin-dependent effects

It is interesting to note that the magnitude of the general relativistic Lense & Thirring (1918) acceleration experienced by the Moon because of the Earth’s angular momentum \(S = 5.86 \times 10^{33} \text{kg m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}\) (McCarthy & Petit 2004) is just

\[
A_{LT} \approx \frac{2\pi G S}{c^2 a^3} = 1.6 \times 10^{-16} \text{m s}^{-2} = 0.16 \text{ m yr}^{-2},
\]

(18)

i.e. close to \(\psi\). On the other hand, it is well known that the Lense-Thirring effect does not cause long-term variations of the eccentricity. Indeed, the integrated shift of \(e\) from an initial epoch corresponding to \(f_0\) to a generic time corresponding to \(f\) is (Soffel 1989)

\[
\Delta e = \frac{-2G S \cos I}{c^2 a^2} \left( \cos f - \cos f_0 \right) \sqrt{1 - e^2}.
\]

(19)

From equation (19) it straightforwardly follows that after one orbital revolution, i.e. for \(f \rightarrow f_0 + 2\pi\), the gravitomagnetic shift of \(e\) vanishes. In fact, equation (19) holds only for a specific orientation of \(S\), which is assumed to be directed along the reference \(z\)-axis; incidentally, let us remark that, in this case, the angle \(I\) in equation (19) is to be intended as the inclination of the Moon’s orbit with respect to the Earth’s equator\(^{11}\). Actually, in Iorio (2010d) it was shown that \(e\) does not secularly change also for a generic orientation of \(S\) since\(^{12}\)

\[
\mathcal{R}_{LT} = \frac{2Gn}{c^2 a(1 - e^2)} [S_x \cos I + \sin I (S_z \sin \Omega - S_y \cos \Omega)].
\]

(20)

Thus, standard general relativistic gravitomagnetism cannot be the cause of equation (1).

Iorio & Ruggiero (2009) explicitly worked out the trajectory of a test particle by the weak-field approximation of the Kerr-de Sitter metric. No long-term variations for \(e\) occur. Also the general relativistic spin–spin effects à la Stern–Gerlach do not cause long-term variations in the eccentricity (Iorio 2010d).

\(^9\) According to Dirac (1937), \(G\) should decrease with the age of the Universe.

\(^{10}\) Because of the secular tidal effects, the LLR-based determinations of \(G\) depend more strongly on the solar perturbations, and the \(\dot{\mu}/\mu\) values should be interpreted as being sensitive to changes in the Sun’s gravitational parameter \(GM\).

\(^{11}\) It approximately varies between 18° and 29° (Seidelmann 1992; Williams & Dickey 2003)

\(^{12}\) Here \(I, \Omega\) can be thought as referring to the mean ecliptic at J2000.0. Generally speaking, the longitude of the ascending node \(\Omega\) is an angle in the reference \(\{x, y\}\) plane determining the position of the line of the nodes with respect to the reference \(x\) direction.

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3.2 General relativistic gravitomagnetic time-varying effects

By using the Gauss perturbative equations, Ruggiero & Iorio (2010) analytically worked out the long-term variations of all the Keplerian orbital elements caused by general relativistic gravitomagnetic time-varying effects. For the eccentricity, Ruggiero & Iorio (2010) found a non-vanishing secular change given by

\[ \dot{e} = - \frac{GS_1 (2 + e) \cos I}{c^2 a^2 n}, \]

in which \( S_1 \) denotes a linear change of the magnitude of the angular momentum of the central rotating body.

In the case of the Earth, Ruggiero & Iorio (2010) quote

\[ S_1 = -5.6 \times 10^{16} \text{ kg m}^2 \text{ s}^{-2} \]

due to the secular decrease of the Earth’s diurnal rotation period (Brosche & Schuh 1998) \( \dot{P}/P = -3 \times 10^{-10} \text{ yr}^{-1} \). Thus, equations (21) and (22) yield for the Moon’s eccentricity

\[ \dot{e} = \sim -2 \times 10^{-21} \text{ yr}^{-1}, \]

which is totally negligible with respect to equation (1).

3.3 The first and second post-Newtonian static components of the gravitational field

Also the first post-Newtonian, Schwarzschild-type, spherically symmetric static component of the gravitational field, which was, in fact, fully modelled by Williams & Boggs (2009), does not induce long-term variations of \( e \) (Soffel 1989). The same holds also for the spherically symmetric second post-Newtonian terms of order \( O(c^{-4}) \) (Damour & Schäfer 1988; Schäfer & Wex 1993; Wex 1995), which were not modelled by Williams & Boggs (2009). Indeed, let us recall that the components of the space–time metric tensor \( g_{\mu\nu}, \mu, \nu = 0, 1, 2, 3 \), are, up to the second post-Newtonian order, (Nordvedt 1996)

\[
\begin{align*}
g_{00} & \equiv 1 - 2 \frac{M}{r} + 2 \left( \frac{M}{r} \right)^2 - \frac{3}{2} \left( \frac{M}{r} \right)^3 + \ldots, \\
g_{ij} & \equiv -\delta_{ij} \left[ 1 + 2 \left( \frac{M}{r} \right) + \frac{3}{2} \left( \frac{M}{r} \right)^2 + \ldots \right], \quad i, j = 1, 2, 3,
\end{align*}
\]

where \( M \equiv \mu/c^2 \). Note that equations (24) are written in the standard isotropic gauge, suitable for a direct comparison with the observations. Incidentally, let us remark that the second post-Newtonian acceleration for the Moon is just

\[ A_{2\text{PN}} \approx \frac{\mu^2 n^2}{c^4 r} = 4 \times 10^{-25} \text{ m s}^{-2} = 4 \times 10^{-10} \text{ m yr}^{-2}. \]

3.4 The general relativistic effects for an oblate body

Soffel et al. (1988), by using the Gauss perturbative scheme and the usual Keplerian orbital elements, analytically worked out the first-order post-Newtonian orbital effects in the field of an oblate body with adimensional quadrupole mass moment \( J_2 \) and equatorial radius \( R \).

It turns out that the eccentricity undergoes a non-vanishing harmonic long-term variation which, in general relativity, is\(^{13}\) (Soffel et al. 1988)

\[ \langle \dot{e} \rangle = \frac{21 n J_2 e \sin^2 I}{8(1 - e^2)^3} \left( \frac{R}{a} \right)^2 \left( \frac{\mu}{c^2 a} \right) \left( 1 + \frac{e^2}{2} \right) \sin 2\omega'. \]

In view of the fact that, for the Earth, it is \( J_2 = 1.08263 \times 10^{-3} \) (McCarthy & Petit 2004) and \( R = 6.378 \times 10^7 \text{ m} \) (McCarthy & Petit 2004), it turns out that the first-order general relativistic \( J_2 c^{-2} \) effect is not capable to explain equation (1) since it is

\[ \langle \dot{e} \rangle \lesssim 4 \times 10^{-19} \text{ yr}^{-1} \]

as a limiting value for the periodic perturbation of equation (26).

Soffel et al. (1988) pointed out that the second-order mixed perturbations due to the Newtonian quadrupole field and the general relativistic Schwarzschild acceleration are of the same order of magnitude of the first-order ones: their orbital effects were analytically worked out by Heimberger, Soffel & Ruder (1990) with the technique of the canonical Lie transformations applied to the Delaunay variables. Given their negligible magnitude, we do not further deal with them.

\(^{13}\) Here \( \omega' \) refers to the Earth’s equator, so that its period amounts to 8.85 yr (Roncoli 2005).
### 3.5 A massive ring of minor bodies

A Newtonian effect which was not modelled is the action of the Trans-Neptunian Objects (TNOs) of the Edgeworth-Kuiper belt (Edgeworth 1943; Kuiper 1951). It can be taken into account by means of a massive circular ring having mass $m_{\text{ring}} \leq 5.26 \times 10^{-8} \, M_{\odot}$ (Pitjeva 2010) and radius $R_{\text{ring}} = 43$ au (Pitjeva 2010). Following Fienga et al. (2008), it causes a perturbing radial acceleration

$$A_{\text{ring}} = \frac{G m_{\text{ring}}}{2 R_{\text{ring}}^2} \left[ b^{(1)}(\alpha) - \alpha b^{(0)}(\alpha) \right] r, \quad \alpha \equiv \frac{r}{R_{\text{ring}}}.$$  \hfill (28)

The Laplace coefficients are defined as (Murray & Dermott 1999)

$$b^{(j)}_{s} = \frac{1}{\pi} \int_{0}^{2\pi} \cos(j \psi) \left( 1 - 2 \alpha \cos \psi + \alpha^2 \right)^{s} d\psi,$$  \hfill (29)

where $s$ is a half-integer. Since for the Moon $\alpha \approx 3 \times 10^{-10}$, equation (28) becomes

$$A_{\text{ring}} \approx \frac{G m_{\text{ring}}}{2 R_{\text{ring}}^2} \alpha r,$$  \hfill (30)

with

$$A_{\text{ring}} \approx 10^{-23} \, \text{m} \, \text{s}^{-2} \approx 10^{-8} \, \text{m} \, \text{yr}^{-2},$$  \hfill (31)

which is far smaller than.

Actually, the previous results holds, strictly speaking, in a heliocentric frame since the distribution of the TNOs is assumed to be circular with respect to the Sun. Thus, it may be argued that a rigorous geocentric calculation should take into account for the non-exact circularity of the TNOs belt with respect to the Earth. Anyway, in view of the distances involved, such departures from azimuthal symmetry would plausibly display as small corrections to the main term of equation (28). Given the negligible orders of magnitude involved by equation (31), we feel it is unnecessary to perform such further calculations.

The dynamical action of the belt of the minor asteroids (Krasinsky et al. 2002) was, actually, modelled, so that we do not consider it here.

### 3.6 A distant massive object: Planet X/Nemesis/Tyche

A promising candidate for explaining the anomalous increase of the lunar eccentricity may be, at least in principle, a trans-Plutonian massive body of planetary size located in the remote peripheries of the Solar system: Planet X/Nemesis/Tyche (Lykawka & Mukai 2008; Melott & Bambach 2010; Fernández 2011; Matese & Whitmire 2011). Indeed, as we will see, the perturbation induced by it would actually cause a non-vanishing long-term variation of $e$. Moreover, since it depends on the spatial position of X in the sky and on its tidal parameter

$$K_{X} = \frac{G m_{X}}{d_{X}^2},$$  \hfill (32)

where $m_{X}$ and $d_{X}$ are the mass and the distance of X, respectively, it may happen that a suitable combination of them is able to reproduce the empirical result of equation (1).

Let us recall that, in general, the perturbing potential felt by a test particle orbiting a central body due to a very distant, point-like mass can be cast into the following quadrupolar form (Hogg, Quinlan & Tremaine 1991)

$$U_{X} = \frac{K_{X}}{2} \left[ r^2 - 3 (\hat{r} \cdot \hat{l})^2 \right],$$  \hfill (33)

where $\hat{l} = \{ l_x, l_y, l_z \}$ is a unit vector directed towards X determining its position in the sky; its components are not independent since the constraint

$$l_x^2 + l_y^2 + l_z^2 = 1$$  \hfill (34)

holds. By introducing the ecliptic latitude $\beta_{X}$ and longitude $\lambda_{X}$ in a geocentric ecliptic frame, it is possible to write

$$\begin{cases} l_x = \cos \beta_{X} \cos \lambda_{X}, \\ l_y = \cos \beta_{X} \sin \lambda_{X}, \\ l_z = \sin \beta_{X}. \end{cases}$$  \hfill (35)

In equation (33) $r = \{ x, y, z \}$ is the geocentric position vector of the perturbed particle, which, in the present case, is the Moon. Iorio (2011) has recently shown that the average of equation (33) over one orbital revolution of the particle is

$$\langle U_{X} \rangle = \frac{K_{X} a^2}{32} \mathcal{U}(e, I, \Omega, \omega; \hat{l}).$$  \hfill (36)
with $\mathcal{U}(e, I, \Omega, \omega; \dot{I})$ given by equation (37).

\[
\mathcal{U} = -(2 + 3e^2)(-8 + 9l_x^2 + 9l_y^2 + 6l_z^2) - 120e^2 \sin 2\omega_l \cos \Omega + I \sin \Omega \left[ l_x \sin I + \cos I \cos \Omega - l_y \sin \Omega \right] \\
+ \cos I \left[ l_x \cos \Omega - l_y \sin \Omega \right] - 15e^2 \cos 2\omega_0 \left[ 3 \left( l_x^2 - l_y^2 \right) \cos 2\Omega + 2 \left( l_x^2 + l_y^2 - 2l_z^2 \right) \sin^2 I \right] \\
- 4l_x \sin 2I \left( l_x \cos \Omega - l_y \sin \Omega \right) + 6l_y \sin 2\Omega_0 - 6(2 + 3e^2) \left[ \left( l_x^2 - l_y^2 \right) \cos 2\Omega \sin^2 I \right] \\
+ 2l_x \sin 2I \left( l_x \cos \Omega - l_y \sin \Omega \right) + 2l_y \sin I \cos 2\Omega_0 - 3 \cos 2I \left( 2 + 3e^2 \right) \left( l_x^2 + l_y^2 - 2l_z^2 \right) \\
+ 5e^2 \cos 2\omega \left[ \left( l_x^2 - l_y^2 \right) \cos 2\Omega + 2l_y \sin 2\Omega_0 \right] .
\]  

(37)

Note that equations (36) and (37) are exact: no approximations in $e$ were used. In the integration $\dot{I}$ was kept fixed over one orbital revolution of the Moon, as it is reasonable given the assumed large distance of $X$ with respect to it.

The Lagrange planetary equation of equation (11) straightforwardly yields (Iorio 2011)

\[
\langle \dot{e} \rangle = \frac{15K_X e \sqrt{1 - e^2}}{16m} \mathcal{E}(I, \Omega, \omega; \dot{I}),
\]

(38)

with $\mathcal{E}(I, \Omega, \omega; \dot{I})$ given by equation (39).

\[
\mathcal{E} = -8l_x \cos 2\omega \sin I \left( l_x \cos \Omega + I \sin \Omega \right) + 4 \cos I \cos 2\omega \left[ -2l_y \cos 2\Omega \right. \\
+ \left( l_x^2 - l_y^2 \right) \sin 2\Omega \right] + \sin 2\omega \left[ \left( l_x^2 - l_y^2 \right) \left( 3 + \cos 2I \right) \cos 2\Omega \right. \\
+ 2 \left( l_x^2 + l_y^2 - 2l_z^2 \right) \cos 2\Omega \sin^2 I \left. \right] \\
- 4l_x \sin 2I \left( l_x \cos \Omega - l_y \sin \Omega \right) + 2l_y \sin I \cos 2\Omega + 3 \cos 2I \left( 3 + \cos 2I \right) \sin 2\Omega_0 \right] .
\]

(39)

Actually, the expectations concerning $X$ are doomed to fade away. Indeed, apart from the modulation introduced by the presence of the time-varying $I$, $\omega$ in equation (39), the values for the tidal parameter which would allow to obtain equation (1) are too large for all the conceivable positions $\{\beta_X, \lambda_X\}$ of $X$ in the sky. This can easily be checked by keeping $\omega$ and $\Omega$ fixed at their J2000.0 values as a first approximation.

Fig. 1 depicts the $X$-induced variation of the lunar eccentricity, normalized to equation (1), as a function of $\lambda_X$ in equation (39), the values for the tidal parameter which would allow to obtain equation (1) are too large for all the conceivable positions $\{\beta_X, \lambda_X\}$ of $X$ in the sky. This can easily be checked by keeping $\omega$ and $\Omega$ fixed at their J2000.0 values as a first approximation.

Fig. 1 depicts the $X$-induced variation of the lunar eccentricity, normalized to equation (1), as a function of $\lambda_X$ in equation (39), the values for the tidal parameter which would allow to obtain equation (1) are too large for all the conceivable positions $\{\beta_X, \lambda_X\}$ of $X$ in the sky. This can easily be checked by keeping $\omega$ and $\Omega$ fixed at their J2000.0 values as a first approximation.

\[
K_X = 4.46 \times 10^{-24} \text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-2}
\]

(40)

would yield the result of equation (1). Actually, equation (40) is totally unacceptable since it corresponds to distances of $X$ as absurdly small as $d_X = 30$ au for a terrestrial body, and $d_X = 200$ au for a Jovian mass (Iorio 2011). We must conclude that not even the hypothesis of Planet $X$ is a viable one to explain the anomalous increase of the lunar eccentricity of equation (1).

Figure 1. Long-term variation of the lunar eccentricity, normalized to equation (1), induced by a trans-Plutonian, point-like object $X$ as a function of its ecliptic latitude $\beta_X$ and longitude $\lambda_X$. The node $\Omega$ and the perigee $\omega$ of the Moon were kept fixed to the J2000.0 values quoted in Table 1. The scenarios for the perturbing body $X$ are those by Lykawka & Mukai (2008) (left panel), and by Matese & Whitmire (2011) (right-hand panel).
4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we dealt with the anomalous increase of the eccentricity $e$ of the orbit of the Moon recently reported from an analysis of a multidecadal record of LLR data points.

We looked for possible explanations in terms of unmodelled dynamical features of motion within either the standard Newtonian/Einsteinian paradigm or several long-range models of modified gravity. As a general rule, we, first, noted that it would be misleading to simply find the right order of magnitude for the extra-acceleration due to this or that candidate effect. Indeed, it is mandatory to explicitly check if a potentially viable candidate does actually induce a non-vanishing averaged variation of the eccentricity. This holds, in principle, for the search of an explanation of any other possible anomalous effect. Quite generally, it turned out that any time-independent and spherically symmetric perturbation does not affect the eccentricity with long-term changes.

Thus, most of the long-range modified models of gravity proposed in more or less recent times for other scopes are automatically ruled out. The present-day limits on the magnitude of a terrestrial Rindler-type perturbing acceleration are of the right order of magnitude, but it does not secularly affect $e$. As time-dependent candidates capable to cause secular shifts of $e$, we considered the possible variation of the Earth’s gravitational parameter $\mu$ both because of a temporal variation of the Newtonian constant of gravitation $G$ and of its mass itself due to a steady mass accretion of non-annihilating Dark Matter. In both cases, the resulting time variations of $e$ are too small by several orders of magnitude.

Moving to standard general relativity, we found that the gravitomagnetic Lense-Thirring lunar acceleration due to the Earth’s angular momentum, not modelled in the data analysis, has the right order of magnitude, but it, actually, does not induce secular variations of $e$. The same holds also for other general relativistic spin-dependent effects. Conversely, $e$ undergoes long-term changes caused by the general relativistic first-order effects due to the Earth’s oblateness, but they are far too small. The second-order post-Newtonian part of the gravitational field does not affect the eccentricity.

Within the Newtonian framework, we considered the action of an almost circular massive ring modelling the Edgeworth-Kuiper belt of TNOs, but it does not induce secular variations of $e$. In principle, a viable candidate would be a putative trans-Plutonian massive object (PlanetX/Nemesis/Tyche), recently revamped to accommodate certain features of the architecture of the Kuiper belt and of the distribution of the comets in the Oort cloud, since it would cause a non-vanishing long-term variation of the eccentricity. Actually, the values for its mass and distance needed to explain the empirically determined increase of the lunar eccentricity would be highly unrealistic and in contrast with the most recent viable theoretical scenarios for the existence of such a body. For example, a terrestrial-sized body should be located at just 30 au, while an object with the mass of Jupiter should be at 200 au.

Thus, in conclusion, the issue of finding a satisfactorily explanation of the observed orbital anomaly of the Moon still remains open. Our analysis should have effectively restricted the field of possible explanations, indirectly pointing towards either non-gravitational, mundane effects or some artifacts in the data processing. Further data analyses, hopefully performed by independent teams, should help in shedding further light on such an astrometric anomaly.

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