THE INVERSE MEAN CURVATURE FLOW IN
ROBERTSON-WALKER SPACES AND ITS APPLICATION
TO COSMOLOGY

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Abstract. We consider the inverse mean curvature flow in Robertson-Walker spacetimes that satisfy the Einstein equations and have a big crunch singularity and prove that under natural conditions the rescaled inverse mean curvature flow provides a smooth transition from big crunch to big bang. We also construct an example showing that in general the transition flow is only of class $C^3$.

Contents

0. Introduction 1
1. The Friedmann equation 3
2. The transition flow 4
3. A counter example 8
References 9

0. Introduction

In a recent paper \cite{2} we proved that the inverse mean curvature flow, properly rescaled, did provide a transition from big crunch to big bang. The transition flow was of class $C^3$. The underlying $(n+1)$-dimensional spacetime $N$ was fairly general, a cosmological spacetime satisfying some structural conditions, we called these spacetimes ARW spaces.

In this paper we shall show that in general the differentiability class $C^3$ is the best possible for the transition flow. If it should be of class $C^\infty$, then additional assumptions have to be satisfied.

We shall consider the problem in Robertson-Walker spaces $N = I \times S_0$, where $S_0$ is a spaceform with curvature $\kappa = -1, 0, 1$, it may be compact or

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not, and the metric in $N$ is of the form
\begin{equation}
\label{0.1}
ds^2 = e^{2f}(-dx^0)^2 + \sigma_{ij}(x)dx^i dx^j,
\end{equation}
where $x^0 = \tau$ is the time function, $(\sigma_{ij})$ the metric of $S_0$, $f = f(\tau)$, and $x^0$ ranges between $-a < x^0 < 0$. We assume that there is a big crunch singularity in $\{x^0 = 0\}$, i.e., we assume
\begin{equation}
\label{0.2}
\lim_{\tau \to 0} f(\tau) = -\infty \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{\tau \to 0} -f' = \infty.
\end{equation}

The Einstein equations should be valid with a cosmological constant $\Lambda$
\begin{equation}
\label{0.3}
G_{\alpha\beta} + \Lambda \bar{g}_{\alpha\beta} = \kappa T_{\alpha\beta}, \quad \kappa > 0,
\end{equation}
or equivalently,
\begin{equation}
\label{0.4}
G_{\alpha\beta} = \kappa(T_{\alpha\beta} - \sigma \bar{g}_{\alpha\beta}), \quad \sigma = \frac{\Lambda}{\kappa}.
\end{equation}

If $(T_{\alpha\beta})$ is the stress-energy tensor of a perfect fluid
\begin{equation}
\label{0.5}
T^0_0 = -\rho, \quad T^i_i = p\delta^i_i
\end{equation}
with an equation of state
\begin{equation}
\label{0.6}
p = \frac{\omega}{n}\rho,
\end{equation}
then the equation \eqref{0.3} is equivalent to the Friedmann equation
\begin{equation}
\label{0.7}
|f'|^2 = -\kappa + \frac{2\kappa}{n(n-1)}(\rho + \sigma)e^{2f},
\end{equation}
which can be easily derived by looking at the component $\alpha = \beta = 0$ in \eqref{0.4}.

Assuming that $\omega$ is of the form
\begin{equation}
\label{0.8}
\omega = \omega_0 + \lambda(f), \quad \omega_0 = \text{const},
\end{equation}
where $\lambda = \lambda(t)$ is smooth satisfying
\begin{equation}
\label{0.9}
\lim_{t \to -\infty} \lambda(t) = 0,
\end{equation}
such that there exists a primitive $\hat{\mu} = \hat{\mu}(t)$, $\hat{\mu}' = \lambda$, with
\begin{equation}
\label{0.10}
\lim_{t \to -\infty} \hat{\mu}(t) = 0,
\end{equation}
then $\rho$ obeys the conservation law
\begin{equation}
\label{0.11}
\rho = \rho_0 e^{-(n+\omega_0)f}e^{-\hat{\mu}},
\end{equation}
\text{cf. [2, Lemma 0.2]. Hence we deduce from (0.7)}
\begin{equation}
\label{0.12}
|f'|^2 = -\kappa + \frac{2\kappa}{n(n-1)}(\rho_0 e^{-(n+\omega_0)f}e^{-\hat{\mu}} + \sigma)e^{2f}.
\end{equation}

The main result of the paper can be summarized in the following theorem
0.1. Theorem. Let $\tilde{\gamma} = \frac{1}{2}(n + \omega_0 - 2) > 0$, and assume that $\lambda$ satisfies the condition (1.12) and that $\mu$ can be viewed as a smooth and even function in the variable $(-r)\tilde{\gamma}$, where $r = -e^{f} < 0$, or that it can be extended to a smooth and even function on $(-\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}, \tilde{\gamma}^{-1})$, then the transition flow $y = y(s, \xi)$, as defined in (2.16) and (2.17), is smooth in $(-\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}, \tilde{\gamma}^{-1}) \times S_0$, if either

$\omega_0 \in \mathbb{R}$ and $\sigma = 0$,

or

$\omega_0 = 4 - n$ and $\sigma \in \mathbb{R}$.

Let us emphasize that the smooth transition from big crunch to big bang does not constitute the existence of a cyclic universe, cf. the end of Section 2 for a detailed discussion.

In Section 3 we prove that in general the transition flow is only of class $C^3$ by constructing a counter example.

We believe that the results and even more the proofs indicate strongly that the inverse mean curvature flow is the right vehicle to offer a smooth transition from big crunch to big bang in case of abstract spacetimes that are not embedded in a bulk spacetime.

We refer to [1, Section 2] for a description of our notations and conventions.

1. The Friedmann equation

We want to solve the Friedmann equation (0.12) in an interval $I = (-a, 0)$ such that the resulting spacetime $N$ is an ARW space, cf. [4, Definition 0.8] for a definition that applies to closed spacetimes as well as to non-closed.

In a slightly different setting we proved in [2, Section 9] that a cosmological spacetime satisfying the Einstein equations for a perfect fluid with an equation of state (0.6), $\omega = \text{const}$, is an ARW space, if

$$\tilde{\gamma} = \frac{1}{2}(n + \omega_0 - 2) > 0.$$  (1.1)

This result will also be valid in the present situation.

1.1. Lemma. Let $\tilde{\gamma} = \frac{1}{2}(n + \omega_0 - 2)$ be positive and assume that $\lambda$ and $\tilde{\mu}$ satisfy the conditions stated in the previous section, and in addition suppose

$$|D^m \lambda(t)| \leq c_m \quad \forall \ m \in \mathbb{N}.  \tag{1.2}$$

Then the Friedmann equation (0.12) can be solved in an interval $I = (-a, 0)$ such that $f \in C^\infty(I)$ and the relations (1.2) are valid. Moreover, $N$ is an ARW space.

Proof. We want to apply the existence result [4, Theorem 3.1]. Multiply equation (1.12) by $e^{2\tilde{\gamma}f}$ and set

$$\varphi = e^{\tilde{\gamma}f}.$$  (1.3)
and

\begin{equation}
(1.4) \quad r = -e^f.
\end{equation}

Then \( \varphi \) satisfies the differential equation

\begin{equation}
(1.5) \quad \ddot{\varphi}^2 = -\tilde{\kappa}e^{2f} + \frac{2\kappa}{n(n-1)}(\sigma e^{2(\tilde{\gamma}+1)f} + \rho_0e^{-\mu}),
\end{equation}

where we defined \( \mu = \mu(r) \) by

\begin{equation}
(1.6) \quad \mu(r) = \tilde{\mu}(\log(-r)).
\end{equation}

Suppose the Friedmann equation were solvable with \( f \) satisfying (0.2), then the right-hand side of (1.5) would tend to \( 2\kappa n(n-1)\rho_0 \), if \( \tau \to 0 \). Thus, we see that solving (0.12) and (0.2) is equivalent to solving

\begin{equation}
(1.7) \quad \ddot{\varphi} = -\sqrt{F(\varphi)}
\end{equation}

with initial value \( \varphi(0) = 0 \), where

\begin{equation}
(1.8) \quad F(\varphi) = -\tilde{\kappa}\varphi^2 + \frac{2\kappa}{n(n-1)}(\rho_0e^{-\mu} + \sigma\varphi^{2(1+\tilde{\gamma})})
\end{equation}

and \( \mu \) should be considered to depend on

\begin{equation}
(1.9) \quad \mu(r) = \mu(-\varphi^{-1}).
\end{equation}

We can now apply the existence result in [4, Theorem 3.1] to conclude that (1.7) has a solution \( \varphi \in C^1((-a,0)) \cap C^\infty((-a,0)) \), where, if we choose \( a \) maximal, \( a \) is determined by the requirement

\begin{equation}
(1.10) \quad \lim_{\tau \to -a} \varphi = \infty \quad \text{or} \quad \lim_{\tau \to -a} F(\varphi) = 0.
\end{equation}

Set \( f = \tilde{\gamma}^{-1}\log \varphi \), then \( f \) satisfies (0.2), since \( F(0) > 0 \).

Moreover, differentiating (1.5) with respect to \( \tau \) and dividing the resulting equation by \( 2f'\tilde{\gamma}e^{2f} \) we obtain

\begin{equation}
(1.11) \quad f'' + \tilde{\gamma}|f'|^2 = -\tilde{\kappa}\tilde{\gamma} + \frac{\kappa}{n(n-1)}(2\sigma(\tilde{\gamma}+1)e^{2f} - \lambda\rho_0e^{-\mu}),
\end{equation}

from which we conclude that \( N \) is an ARW space, in view of (0.9), (0.10) and (1.2).

2. The Transition Flow

Let \( M_0 \) be a spacelike hypersurface with positive mean curvature with respect to the past directed normal, then the inverse mean curvature flow with initial hypersurface \( M_0 \) is given by the evolution equation

\begin{equation}
(2.1) \quad \dot{x} = -H^{-1}\nu,
\end{equation}

where \( \nu \) is the past directed normal of the flow hypersurfaces \( M(t) \) which are locally defined by an embedding

\begin{equation}
(2.2) \quad x = x(t, \xi), \quad \xi = (\xi^i),
\end{equation}

cf. [2] for details.

In general, even in Robertson-Walker spaces, this evolution problem can only be solved, if \( S_0 \) is compact. However, if, in the present situation, we
assume that $M_0$ is a coordinate slice $\{x^0 = \text{const}\}$, then the fairly complex parabolic system (2.1) is reduced to a scalar ordinary differential equation.

Look at the component $\alpha = 0$ in (2.1). Writing the hypersurfaces $M(t)$ as graphs over $S_0$

\begin{equation}
M(t) = \{ (u, x) : x \in S_0 \},
\end{equation}

we see that $u$ only depends on $t$, $u = u(t)$, and $u$ satisfies the differential equation

\begin{equation}
\dot{u} = \frac{1}{-nf'},
\end{equation}

where $f = f(u)$, with initial value $u(0) = u_0$, cf. [2, Section 2]. The mean curvature of the slices $M(t)$ is given by

\begin{equation}
H = e^{-f}(-nf').
\end{equation}

From (2.4) we immediately deduce

\begin{equation}
dt(nf + t) = nf'\dot{u} + 1 = 0,
\end{equation}

and hence

\begin{equation}
\text{e}^{nf}e^t = \text{const} = c,
\end{equation}

or equivalently,

\begin{equation}
\text{e}^{\tilde{\gamma}f}e^{\gamma t} = c,
\end{equation}

where $\gamma = \frac{1}{n}\tilde{\gamma}$, and where the symbol $c$ may represent different constants.

The conservation law (2.8) can be viewed as the integrated version of the inverse mean curvature flow.

In [2, Theorem 3.6] we proved that there are positive constants $c_1, c_2$ such that

\begin{equation}
-c_1 \leq \tilde{u} \leq -c_2 < 0.
\end{equation}

The old proof also works in the present situation, where $S_0$ is not necessarily compact, since $u$ doesn’t depend on $x$.

Moreover,

\begin{equation}
\lim_{t \to \infty} \tilde{u} \text{ exists},
\end{equation}

cf. [2, Lemma 7.1].

We shall define a new spacetime $\tilde{N}$ by reflection and time reversal such that the IMCF in the old spacetime transforms to an IMCF in the new one.

By switching the light cone we obtain a new spacetime $\tilde{N}$. The flow equation in $N$ is independent of the time orientation, and we can write it as

\begin{equation}
\dot{x} = -H^{-1}\nu = -(-H)^{-1}(-\nu) \equiv -\dot{H}^{-1}\bar{\nu},
\end{equation}

where the normal vector $\bar{\nu} = -\nu$ is past directed in $\tilde{N}$ and the mean curvature $\dot{H} = -H$ negative.
Introducing a new time function $\hat{x}^0 = -x^0$ and formally new coordinates $(\hat{x}^\alpha)$ by setting
\begin{equation}
(2.12) \quad \hat{x}^0 = -x^0, \quad \hat{x}^i = x^i,
\end{equation}
we define a spacetime $\hat{N}$ having the same metric as $N$—only expressed in the new coordinate system—such that the flow equation has the form
\begin{equation}
(2.13) \quad \dot{x} = -\hat{H}^{-1}\hat{\nu},
\end{equation}
where $M(t) = \text{graph } \hat{u}(t)$, $\hat{u} = -u$.

The singularity in $\hat{x}^0 = 0$ is now a past singularity, and can be referred to as a big bang singularity.

The union $N \cup \hat{N}$ is a smooth manifold, topologically a product $(-a, a) \times S_0$—we are well aware that formally the singularity $\{0\} \times S_0$ is not part of the union; equipped with the respective metrics and time orientation it is a spacetime which has a (metric) singularity in $x^0 = 0$. The time function
\begin{equation}
(2.14) \quad \hat{x}^0 = \begin{cases} x^0, & \text{in } N, \\ -x^0, & \text{in } \hat{N}, \end{cases}
\end{equation}
is smooth across the singularity and future directed.

Using the time function in (2.14) the inverse mean curvature flows in $N$ and $\hat{N}$ can be uniformly expressed in the form
\begin{equation}
(2.15) \quad \dot{x} = -\hat{H}^{-1}\hat{\nu},
\end{equation}
where (2.15) represents the original flow in $N$, if $\hat{x}^0 < 0$, and the flow in (2.13), if $\hat{x}^0 > 0$.

In [2] we then introduced a new flow parameter
\begin{equation}
(2.16) \quad s = \begin{cases} -\gamma^{-1}e^{-\gamma t}, & \text{for the flow in } N, \\ \gamma^{-1}e^{-\gamma t}, & \text{for the flow in } \hat{N}, \end{cases}
\end{equation}
and defined the flow $y = y(s)$ by $y(s) = \hat{x}(t)$. $y = y(s)$ is then defined in $[-\gamma^{-1}, \gamma^{-1}] \times S_0$, smooth in $\{s \neq 0\}$, and satisfies the evolution equation
\begin{equation}
(2.17) \quad y' = \frac{d}{ds}y = \begin{cases} -\hat{H}^{-1}\hat{\nu}e^{\gamma t}, & s < 0, \\ \hat{H}^{-1}\hat{\nu}e^{\gamma t}, & s > 0, \end{cases}
\end{equation}
or equivalently, if we only consider the salar version with $\eta = \eta(s)$ representing $y^0$
\begin{equation}
(2.18) \quad \eta' = \frac{d}{ds}\eta = \begin{cases} \hat{u}e^{\gamma t}, & s < 0, \\ -\hat{u}e^{\gamma t}, & s > 0. \end{cases}
\end{equation}

According to the results in [2, Theorem 8.1] $y$, and hence $\eta$, are of class $C^3$ across the singularity.
Now, looking at the relation (2.18) we see that the new parameter $s$ could just as well be defined by

\begin{align}
\tag{2.19}
s = \begin{cases} 
-\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}e^{\tilde{\gamma} f}, & s < 0, \\
\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}e^{\tilde{\gamma} f}, & s > 0,
\end{cases}
\end{align}

where in $N$ as well as in $\hat{N}$ $f$ is considered to be a function of $u(t)$, $f = f(u(t))$.

Defining $s$ by (2.19) we deduce for $s < 0$

\begin{align}
\tag{2.20}
\eta' = \dot{u} \frac{dt}{ds} = \dot{u} - \frac{1}{-f'e^{\tilde{\gamma} f} \dot{u}} = \frac{1}{-f'e^{\tilde{\gamma} f}} \equiv \varphi^{-1}.
\end{align}

The same relation is also valid for $s > 0$.

Suppose now that $\varphi$, or equivalently, $\varphi^2$,

\begin{align}
\varphi^2 = |f'|^2 e^{2\tilde{\gamma} f} = -\tilde{\kappa} e^{2\tilde{\gamma} f} + \frac{2\kappa}{n(n-1)}(\sigma e^{2(\tilde{\gamma}+1)f} + \rho_0 e^{-\mu}),
\end{align}

can be viewed as an even function in $e^{\tilde{\gamma} f}$, or equivalently, an even function in $s$, then $\eta$ would be of class $C^\infty$ across the singularity, and hence the transition flow $y = y(s)$ would be smooth.

We have thus proved

2.1. Theorem. Let $\tilde{\gamma} = \frac{1}{2}(n + \omega_0 - 2) > 0$, and assume that $\lambda$ satisfies the condition (1.2) and that $\mu$ is a smooth and even function in the variable $(-r)\tilde{\gamma}$, $r < 0$, or can be extended to a smooth and even function on $(-\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}, \tilde{\gamma}^{-1})$, then the transition flow $y = y(s, \xi)$ is smooth in $(-\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}, \tilde{\gamma}^{-1}) \times S_0$, if either

\begin{align}
\omega_0 \in \mathbb{R} \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma = 0,
\tag{2.22}
\end{align}

or

\begin{align}
\omega_0 = 4 - n \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma \in \mathbb{R}.
\tag{2.23}
\end{align}

If $n = 3$ and (2.23) is valid, this means that we consider a radiation dominated universe.

Let us also emphasize that in the preceding theorem we have only proved a smooth transition from big crunch to big bang. This does not necessarily mean that we have a cyclic universe—the same observation also applies to the transition results we obtained in [4] in a brane cosmology setting.

It could well be that the following scenario holds: The spacetime $N$ exists in $-\infty < \tau < 0$ with the only singularity in $\tau = 0$, a big crunch; the mean curvature of the slices \{ $x^0 = \text{const}$ \} is always positive and

\begin{align}
\lim_{{\tau \to -\infty}} e^f = \infty.
\tag{2.24}
\end{align}

After a smooth transition through the singularity the mirror image $\hat{N}$ develops.

Such a pair of universes ($N, \hat{N}$) can be easily constructed, in fact, this will always be the case, if the right-hand side of equation (1.8) never vanishes and
grows at most quadratically in $\varphi$, which will be the case, if $\sigma = 0$, since then equation (1.14) will be solvable in an interval $(-a, 0]$, where $a$ is determined by the requirement
\begin{equation}
\lim_{\tau \to -a} F(\varphi) = 0.
\end{equation}

Hence, if $F(\varphi)$ never vanishes, the solution of (1.7) will exist in $(-\infty, 0]$. Moreover, in $\tau = -\infty$ there cannot be a singularity, a big bang, since this would require that the mean curvature of the coordinate slices tend to $-\infty$. But this impossible, since $H$ never changes sign, there exist no maximal hypersurfaces in $N$.

To give an explicit example set $\sigma = \mu = 0$ and assume $\tilde{\kappa} = 0, -1$. Then equation (1.5) has the form
\begin{equation}
\dot{\varphi}^2 = -\tilde{\kappa} \gamma^2 \varphi^2 + \frac{2\kappa \gamma^2}{n(n-1)} \rho_0.
\end{equation}

If $\tilde{\kappa} = -1$, we deduce
\begin{equation}
\varphi = \lambda \sinh(c \tau), \quad \lambda < 0, \quad c > 0,
\end{equation}
and if $\tilde{\kappa} = 0$, then
\begin{equation}
\dot{\varphi} = -c^2,
\end{equation}
hence
\begin{equation}
\varphi = -c^2 \tau,
\end{equation}
i.e.,
\begin{equation}
e^f = (-c^2 \tau)^{\gamma^{-1}}.
\end{equation}

3. A COUNTER EXAMPLE

We shall show that, even in the case of Robertson-Walker spaces, the transition flow is in general only of class $C^3$, by constructing a counter example.

3.1. Theorem. Let $\omega = \omega_0$ be such that
\begin{equation}
\tilde{\gamma} = \frac{1}{2}(n + \omega - 2) \geq 2,
\end{equation}
and assume $\sigma \neq 0$. Then the Friedmann equation (1.12) has a solution in the interval $(-a, 0)$ such that corresponding spacetime is an ARW space. The transition flow $y = y(s)$, however, is only of class $C^3$. If $\tilde{\gamma} = 2$, then $y$ is of class $C^{3,1}$, but, if $\tilde{\gamma} > 2$, then
\begin{equation}
\lim_{s \to 0} \left| \frac{d^4 \eta}{(ds)^4} \right| = \infty,
\end{equation}
where $\eta = \eta(s)$ is defined as in (2.18).
Proof. Due to Lemma 1.1 the Friedman equation is solvable and the resulting spacetime is an ARW space.

Notice that
\begin{equation}
\begin{cases}
-\text{ce}^{\tilde{\gamma}f}, & s < 0, \\
\text{ce}^{\tilde{\gamma}f}, & s > 0,
\end{cases}
\end{equation}
and hence we conclude
\begin{equation}
\eta'(s) = \varphi^{-1},
\end{equation}
cf. equation (2.20), where \(\varphi^2\) can be expressed as
\begin{equation}
\varphi^2 = -\tilde{\kappa}c_1 s^2 + c_2 \rho_0 + c_3 \sigma(s^2)^{1+\tilde{\gamma}^{-1}}
\end{equation}
with positive constants \(c_i\).

The proof of the theorem can now be completed by elementary calculations.

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