

Absence of resonant decay for metastable vacua in gauge theories of scalar fields

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Absence of resonant decay for metastable vacua in gauge theories of scalar fields

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ABSTRACT: We prove the impossibility of resonant decay of a metastable vacuum in a theory of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field. Our result extends to gauge theories of scalar fields a recent no go theorem for resonant tunneling in a pure scalar field theory.

KEYWORDS: Solitons Monopoles and Instantons, Nonperturbative Effects.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Resonant tunneling: From QM to QFT	2
3. Vacuum decay in a landscape potential and the question of quantum interference	6
3.1 No resonant tunneling in a scalar field theory	6
3.2 No quantum interference in the decay of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field	9
4. Conclusions	11
A. Wave mechanics methods for tunneling amplitudes through multiple barriers	12
A.1 Tunneling through one potential barrier	12
A.2 Tunneling through a double barrier potential	15
A.3 Tunneling through N barriers	17

1. Introduction

Understanding in detail the mobility patterns in the landscape is a challenging problem. In fact rather little is known about it and thus even a study of what may seem non generic paths is of interest. For example Tye [1, 2] has suggested to apply the phenomena of rapid tunneling [4–8] to shed a different light on the issue of the cosmological constant. Tunneling is generically heavily suppressed. In quantum mechanics it is known that there are special barrier configurations for which the suppression factor is removed and tunneling proceeds as if the barrier were transparent, this phenomenon is called resonant tunneling.

Although resonant tunneling is a well understood and observed phenomenon in quantum mechanics [9, 10], it does not easily extend to systems with an infinite number of degrees of freedom. Indeed a no-go theorem for resonant tunneling from a metastable vacuum in a scalar quantum field theory (SQFT) has been recently proved [4]. The aim of the present paper is to study whether theories with more structure than SQFT give a different outcome. Gauge theories had provided exits out of no-go theorems for pure scalar field theories. One example is the existence of solitons in $D > 2$ in theories of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field, which are forbidden for a pure scalar field theory in $D > 2$ by Derrick theorem [11]. Motivated by that, we will analyze the possibility of resonant tunneling in theories of scalar fields coupled to gauge fields with several metastable vacua.

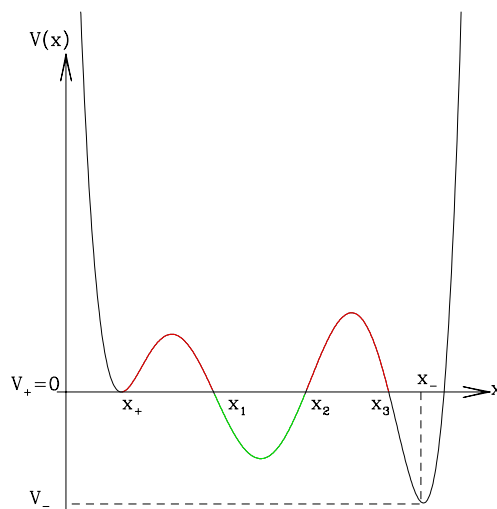


Figure 1: Double barrier particle decay: In the semiclassical regime a metastable state with wave function localized around $x = x_+$ decays to the true vacuum localized around $x = x_-$. If the length of the classically allowed region $x_1 < x < x_2$ contains a half-integer number of de Broglie particle wave-length then quantum interference leads to resonant tunneling.

We will follow the ideas of the proof of the no-go theorem for SQFT [4], generalizing it to a gauge theory in any space-time dimension. The result is that in a theory of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field a homogenous metastable vacuum does not decay in a resonant fashion. This provides a no go theorem for resonant vacuum decay which generalizes [4] in allowing the presence of gauge field with generic coupling to the scalar field.

The organization of the paper is the following: In the next section we review resonant tunneling in quantum mechanics, leaving for the appendix the details of the derivations of the tunneling amplitudes. We then discuss what it would be required in order to have a similar phenomenon in quantum field theory, such as the constraints imposed by time-analytic continuation. In section III we generalize to a generic number of space-time dimensions D the proof of the no go theorem of [4] for resonant tunneling in SQFT, in order to be able to discuss resonant tunneling in gauge theories of scalar fields. In the appendix a derivation of quantum mechanical tunneling amplitudes and resonance conditions for multi-barrier potentials is reviewed.

2. Resonant tunneling: From QM to QFT

Quantum interference is typical in systems with a degenerate set of classical trajectories. In the double barrier potential $V(x)$ in figure 1, in the semiclassical regime a point particle with wave function localized around the false vacuum $x = x_+$ will decay to the true vacuum localized around $x = x_-$. The tunneling process involves an infinite number of decay paths, labeled by the number of oscillations in the classical allowed region $x_1 < x < x_2$.

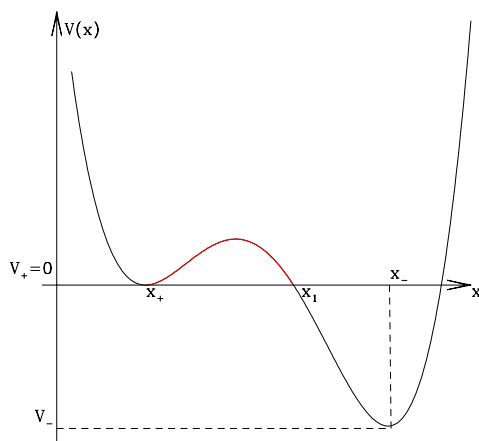


Figure 2: In the semiclassical regime, a particle with wave function localized around a false vacuum $x = x_+$ can decay to the true vacuum localized around $x = x_-$ by quantum tunneling the barrier $x_+ < x < x_1$.

Different oscillating paths can constructively interfere and, for specific particle wave lengths the double potential barrier becomes completely transparent. This phenomenon is called resonant tunneling, and it has been observed in various experiments [9, 10].

While the amplitude to decay by tunneling through the single barrier in figure 2 is at leading order in \hbar exponentially suppressed by a instanton action

$$T = \frac{1}{\cosh(S_I)} \sim \exp\left(-\frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^{x_1} dx \sqrt{2V(x)}\right), \quad (2.1)$$

in the double barrier case, if all the oscillating paths in region $x_1 < x < x_2$ have the same phase at $x = x_2$, they create a constructive interference for the wave function entering the second forbidden region $x_2 < x < x_3$. Constructive interference happens when the distance between the two inversion points $x = x_1$ and $x = x_2$ contains an half-integral number of de Broglie wave lengths

$$S_{II} = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_1}^{x_2} dx \sqrt{-2V(x)} = \left(N + \frac{1}{2}\right) \pi, \quad (2.2)$$

for integers N . Equation (2.2) denotes a resonance condition, since in this case the amplitude to decay to $x = x_-$ reaches its maximum modulus

$$|T_{+-}| = \frac{1}{\cosh(S_I - S_{III})}. \quad (2.3)$$

S_I and S_{III} are the instanton actions that dominate the amplitude in the two forbidden regions $x_+ < x < x_1$, and $x_2 < x < x_3$,

$$\begin{aligned} S_I &= \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^{x_1} dx \sqrt{2V(x)}, \\ S_{III} &= \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_2}^{x_3} dx \sqrt{2V(x)}. \end{aligned} \quad (2.4)$$

the Euclidean version of energy conservation

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial}{\partial t_E} \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial t_E} \right)^2 - \sum_{i=1}^d \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_i} \right)^2 - V(\varphi) \right] \\ = \frac{\partial}{\partial t_E} \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial t_E} \right)^2 - U[\varphi] \right] \\ = 0. \end{aligned} \tag{2.6}$$

In quantum field theory (QFT) in order to have quantum interference a periodic field path φ , solution of the equations of motion with Lorentzian signature, would be required. Resonant tunneling would then follow if its action $S[\varphi]$ satisfied

$$S[\varphi] = \left(N + \frac{1}{2} \right) \pi, \tag{2.7}$$

for integer N .

This periodic path should be connected via time analytic continuation to Euclidean paths, the latter describing tunneling in classically forbidden regions of the potential. The question is whether in quantum field theory there are oscillating phenomena that parallel the oscillating particle paths in the region $x_1 < x < x_2$ of figure 1.

In the classically allowed regions, where the potential for constant field configuration is less than the metastable vacuum energy density, the generalized potential $U[\varphi]$ of some classical field solution could become negative, (for example this could happen for the potential in figure 3 if on a sufficiently large space region φ assumes a value in the interval $\varphi_1 < \varphi < \varphi_2$). If this happens one is forced to analytically continue the solution to real time $t_E \rightarrow it_E = t$ at the point \tilde{t}_E where $\partial_{t_E} \varphi(\tilde{t}_E, \vec{x}) = 0$. Analytic continuation in $\tilde{t}_E = \tilde{t}$ requires $\partial_{t_E} \varphi(\tilde{t}_E, \vec{x}) = 0 = \partial_t \varphi(\tilde{t}, \vec{x})$.

In the following we will assume analytic continuation of an instanton $\varphi(t_E, \vec{x})$ to Lorentzian time and then back to Euclidean time

$$U[\varphi](t_E^1) = U[\varphi](t_E^2) = 0, \quad U[\varphi](t_E) < 0, \quad t_E^1 < t_E < t_E^2.$$

The Lorentzian continuation $\varphi(t, \vec{x})$ is defined on the interval $[t_1, t_2]$, where $t_1 = t_E^1$ and $t_2 = t_E^2$.

Together with this solution there are equally dominant contributions from paths in which the Euclidean instanton is continued to a Lorentzian classical field $\varphi_n(t, \vec{x})$, which is a periodic extension of φ for a time period $(2n+1)(t_2 - t_1)$, for integer n . $\varphi_n(t, \vec{x})$ would contribute to the path integral with action $S[\varphi_n] = S[\varphi]_{(2n+1)(t_1, t_2)} = (2n+1)S[\varphi]_{(t_1, t_2)}$, where

$$S[\varphi]_{(t_1, t_2)} = \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dt \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial t} \right)^2 - \sum_{i=1}^d \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x_i} \right)^2 - V(\varphi) \right], \tag{2.8}$$

thus creating quantum interference in the path-integral.

A necessary condition for quantum interference in a multi-vacua potential to affect field decay is therefore the existence of a finite action classical Lorentzian solution φ defined on

a time interval $[t_1, t_2]$. φ has vanishing time derivative $\partial_t \varphi(t_1, \vec{x}) = \partial_t \varphi(t_2, \vec{x}) = 0$ in order to be analytically continued to instanton field solution. In the following, we will check whether φ has non-vanishing action. We consider resonant decay in scalar fields theories, already discussed in [4], and the same issue in gauge theories of scalar fields, which is the focus of this paper.

3. Vacuum decay in a landscape potential and the question of quantum interference

As discussed at the end of the previous section, in order to have quantum interference in vacuum decay the existence of a Lorentzian solution $\varphi(t, \vec{x})$ defined on a time interval $[t_1, t_2]$ with non-vanishing action satisfying eq. (2.7) is required. Analytic continuation of φ to Euclidean signature in $t = t_1 = t_2$ requires $\partial_t \varphi(t_1, \vec{x}) = \partial_t \varphi(t_2, \vec{x}) = 0$. Moreover φ must respect the total energy constraint. Since we are studying the decay of the false vacuum, φ has to approach at spacial infinity the original metastable vacuum φ_+

$$\lim_{|\vec{x}| \rightarrow \infty} \varphi(t, \vec{x}) = \varphi_+, \tag{3.1}$$

and therefore

$$\lim_{|\vec{x}| \rightarrow \infty} \partial_\mu \varphi(t, \vec{x}) = 0. \tag{3.2}$$

3.1 No resonant tunneling in a scalar field theory

Let us consider a scalar field theory in $D = 1 + d$ space-time dimensions with Lagrangian

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \partial_\mu \varphi \partial^\mu \varphi - V(\varphi), \tag{3.3}$$

where $V(\varphi)$ is a generic potential with various metastable vacua.

A necessary condition for the field φ to have non-vanishing action in the interval $[t_1, t_2]$ is the strict positivity of the following functional

$$\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi] = \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[(\partial_0 \varphi)^2 + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d (\partial_i \varphi)^2 \right]. \tag{3.4}$$

In fact, if $\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi] = 0$, being an integral of a sum of positive terms, the derivatives of the field vanish identically and $S[\varphi] = S[\varphi_+] = 0$.

By using

$$\partial_\mu \varphi \partial_\nu \varphi = T_{\mu\nu} + \eta_{\mu\nu} \mathcal{L} \tag{3.5}$$

$\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi]$ can be written in terms of the following combinations of diagonal components of the energy-momentum tensor $T_{\mu\nu}$

$$\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi] = \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[T_{00} + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d T_{ii} \right]. \tag{3.6}$$

Energy-momentum conservation $\partial^\mu T_{\mu i} = 0$ for the i -spacial component gives

$$\begin{aligned} \partial_i T_{ii} &= \sum_{j \neq i} \partial_j T_{ji} - \partial_0 T_{0i} \\ &= \sum_{j \neq i} \partial_j (\partial_j \varphi \partial_i \varphi) - \partial_0 (\partial_0 \varphi \partial_i \varphi). \end{aligned} \tag{3.7}$$

This implies that

$$\partial_i \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j T_{ii} = \partial_i I_{ii} = 0, \tag{3.8}$$

the T_{ii} density integrated over the space-time domain orthogonal to the x_i -direction and containing the time interval (t_1, t_2) is constant along x_i . Therefore I_{ii} can be computed at $x_i = \infty$, where it depends only on $V(\varphi_+)$, since all the field derivatives go to zero at infinity

$$\begin{aligned} I_{ii} &= \lim_{x_i \rightarrow \infty} \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j \cdot \left(\frac{1}{2} (\partial_0 \varphi)^2 + \frac{1}{2} (\partial_i \varphi)^2 - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^d (\partial_i \varphi)^2 - V(\varphi) \right) \\ &= - \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j V(\varphi_+). \end{aligned} \tag{3.9}$$

On the other hand, $\partial^\mu T_{\mu 0} = 0$ gives

$$\partial_0 T_{00} = \sum_{i=1}^d \partial_i T_{i0} = \sum_{i=1}^d \partial_i (\partial_i \varphi \partial_0 \varphi), \tag{3.10}$$

that integrated all over the space gives energy conservation

$$\partial_0 I_{00} = \partial_0 \int d\vec{x} T_{00} = 0. \tag{3.11}$$

The energy equals the energy of our initial state at t_1 . This being the final configuration of the Euclidean tunneling, its Euclidean energy is the same as the Euclidean energy of the original decaying state. Since both configurations have zero time derivatives, there is no distinction between Euclidean and Lorentzian energy. Assuming a homogeneous original false vacuum $\varphi = \varphi_+$,

$$I_{00} = \int d\vec{x} V(\varphi_+). \tag{3.12}$$

By using eq. (3.9) and eq. (3.12) in the field functional $\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi]$ (3.4) one obtains

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{O}_L[\varphi] &= \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 I_{00} + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d \int dx_i I_{ii} \\ &= \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[V(\varphi_+) - \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d V(\varphi_+) \right] \\ &= 0. \end{aligned} \tag{3.13}$$

which shows that $\partial_0\varphi = |\vec{\nabla}\varphi| = 0$ in the time interval $[t_1, t_2]$, thus implying that the field φ has zero action in the time interval $[t_1, t_2]$. Moreover, since the field is constant in $[t_1, t_2]$ it must be equal to the false vacuum $\varphi = \varphi_+$. This shows that an intermediate analytic continuation to Lorentzian signature is impossible, and the full tunneling event is described by instanton fields in Euclidean signature. Thus one concludes that for the decaying of a metastable vacuum in a pure scalar field theory with a multi-vacua potential there is no quantum interference in the semiclassical approximation. This proves the no go theorem for resonant tunneling in a pure scalar field theory in a generic number of space-time dimensions D . Generalization of this result to an arbitrary number of interacting scalar fields is straightforward, since also in this case one can compute each of the terms in the space-like diagonal components of the energy-momentum tensor appearing in (3.6) by going at spacial infinity, where they all equals minus the energy of the metastable vacuum.

Recently, [7] have shown that special non-homogenous field configurations with finite energy with respect to a metastable vacuum do exhibit resonant decay. These states circumvent the no-go theorem of [4] in allowing a non-vanishing r.h.s. for eq. (3.12), which makes (3.13) strictly positive, thus allowing for oscillating in time field solutions.

It is also interesting to observe that instantons describing motion in forbidden regions are non constant fields connected by analytic continuation to two real time solutions, the field before and after tunneling, at point with vanishing Euclidean time derivative. Instantons are therefore the Euclidean version of the oscillating field forbidden by the no-go theorem. The no-go theorem must fail in Euclidean signature, and it does. The Euclidean version of eq. (3.4) is

$$\mathcal{O}_E[\varphi] = \int_{t_E^1}^{t_E^2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[(\partial_0\varphi)^2 + \sum_{i=1}^d (\partial_i\varphi)^2 \right]. \tag{3.14}$$

This functional can be written in terms of the Euclidean stress tensor $T_{\mu\nu}^E$ by summing over the diagonal components of

$$\partial_\mu\varphi\partial_\nu\varphi = T_{\mu\nu}^E + \delta_{\mu\nu}\mathcal{L}_E, \tag{3.15}$$

where the Euclidean Lagrangian is

$$\mathcal{L}_E = \frac{1}{2}\partial_\mu\varphi\partial_\mu\varphi + V(\varphi). \tag{3.16}$$

By using eq. (3.15) and the Euclidean conservation law $\partial_\mu T_{\mu\nu}^E = 0$, one can rewrite (3.14) as

$$\mathcal{O}_E[\varphi] = -2\frac{D}{D-2} \int_{t_E^1}^{t_E^2} dt_E \int d\vec{x} V(\varphi(t_E, \vec{x})). \tag{3.17}$$

The above equation makes sense only when the integral in the r.h.s. is non-negative. This is achieved when there is a large enough region of Euclidean space where the field acquires values in classically allowed regions where $V(\varphi) < 0$, such as the regions $\varphi_1 < \varphi < \varphi_2$ and $\varphi > \varphi_3$ for the potential in figure 3.

3.2 No quantum interference in the decay of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field

We study now whether a theory of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field admits non-constant classical field solutions of Lorentzian time signature that can be analytically continued to Euclidean signature in two separate occasions.

We consider the Lagrangian

$$\mathcal{L} = -\frac{1}{4}F_{\mu\nu}^a F^{a\mu\nu} + \frac{1}{2}D_\mu\varphi(D^\mu\varphi)^\dagger - V(\varphi). \quad (3.18)$$

In the semiclassical approximation the Euclidean path integral is dominated by Euclidean classical fields. These fields satisfy the global constraint

$$\partial_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^d (F_{0i}^a)^2 + \frac{1}{2} D_0\varphi(D_0\varphi)^\dagger - \frac{1}{4} \sum_{i,j=1}^d (F_{ij}^a)^2 - \sum_{i=1}^d D_i\varphi(D_i\varphi)^\dagger - V(\varphi) \right] = 0,$$

which is an Euclidean version of energy conservation. We choose the original metastable state energy equal to zero $V(\varphi_+) = 0$ so that the previous equation gives

$$\begin{aligned} & \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^d (F_{0i}^a)^2 + \frac{1}{2} D_0\varphi(D_0\varphi)^\dagger \right] \\ &= \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{1}{4} \sum_{i,j=1}^d (F_{ij}^a)^2 + \sum_{i=1}^d D_i\varphi(D_i\varphi)^\dagger + V(\varphi) \right] \\ &=: U[\varphi, A_\mu^a]. \end{aligned} \quad (3.19)$$

Given the Euclidean fields $\varphi(t_E, \vec{x})$, $A_\mu^a(t_E, \vec{x})$, (3.19) is an equation for t_E . For values of the Euclidean fields in regions where $V(\varphi) < 0$, the r.h.s of eq. (3.19) might become negative $U[\varphi, A_\mu^a] < 0$. We assume that this is the case on an interval $t_E^1 < t_E < t_E^2$, and check the possibility of a analytic continuation of the fields $\varphi(t_E, \vec{x})$ and $A_\mu^a(t_E, \vec{x})$ to Lorentzian signature $t_E \rightarrow it_E = t$ at $t_E^1 = t_1$ and back to Euclidean signature $t \rightarrow -it = t_E$ at $t_E^2 = t_2$. The Lorentzian classical solutions $\varphi(t, \vec{x})$ and $A_\mu^a(t, \vec{x})$ are then defined on the interval $[t_1, t_2]$, they dominate the path integral and have both vanishing time derivative at $t = t_1$ and $t = t_2$, as required by analytic continuation. In order to check if there is a degeneracy of Lorentzian motions that can produce interference in the path integral we will check if $\varphi(t, \vec{x})$ and $A_\mu^a(t, \vec{x})$ have a non vanishing action in the interval $[t_1, t_2]$.

To this aim we again use the energy-momentum tensor

$$T_{\mu\nu} = F_\mu^{\rho a} F_{\rho\nu}^a + D_\mu\varphi(D_\nu\varphi)^\dagger - \eta_{\mu\nu}\mathcal{L}, \quad (3.20)$$

and consider the following sum over the diagonal components of $T_{\mu\nu}$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \mathcal{O}_L[\varphi, A_\mu^a] &= \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[D_0\varphi(D_0\varphi)^\dagger + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d D_i\varphi(D_i\varphi)^\dagger \right] \\
 &\quad + \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[\frac{d-1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d (F_{0i}^a)^2 + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i,j=1}^d (F_{ij}^a)^2 \right] \\
 &= \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int d\vec{x} \left[T_{00} + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{i=1}^d T_{ii} \right]. \tag{3.21}
 \end{aligned}$$

$\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi, A_\mu^a] \geq 0$ is a semi-definite positive functional, and a field solution $(\tilde{\varphi}, \tilde{A}_\mu^a)$ with a non-vanishing action gives $\mathcal{O}_L[\tilde{\varphi}, \tilde{A}_\mu^a] > 0$. We use the component equations of $\partial^\mu T_{\mu\nu} = 0$ integrated over space-time subregions, in order to show that indeed for every classical solution $\mathcal{O}_L[\varphi, A_\mu^a] = 0$. This implies that every solution defined on a finite time interval $[t_1, t_2]$ which can be analytically continued to Euclidean signature has to be a constant field configuration equal to the false vacuum. The conclusion will be that field paths describing the full tunneling event are purely Euclidean and therefore there is no resonant decay.

The overall T_{00} space integral is set to be equal to the total false vacuum energy $V(\varphi_+) = 0$ that is our initial condition in time, therefore the space integral of T_{00} vanishes in the r.h.s of (3.21).

On the other hand, the component equation $\partial^\mu T_{\mu i} = 0$ gives

$$\begin{aligned}
 \partial_i T_{ii} &= \partial_0 T_{0i} - \sum_{j \neq i} \partial_j T_{ji} \\
 &= \partial_0 (F_0^{\rho a} F_{\rho i}^a + D_0\varphi(D_i\varphi)^\dagger) \\
 &\quad - \sum_{j \neq i} \partial_j (F_i^{\rho a} F_{\rho j}^a + D_i\varphi(D_j\varphi)^\dagger). \tag{3.22}
 \end{aligned}$$

By integrating the previous equation over a space-time volume orthogonal to the x_i direction one gets

$$\begin{aligned}
 \partial_i \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j T_{ii} &= \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \partial_0 \left(- \sum_{j \neq i} F_{0j}^a F_{ji}^a + D_0\varphi(D_i\varphi)^\dagger \right) \\
 &\quad - \int_{t_1}^{t_2} dx_0 \int \prod_{j \neq i} dx_j \sum_{j \neq i} \partial_j (F_i^{\rho a} F_{\rho j}^a + D_i\varphi(D_j\varphi)^\dagger) \\
 &= 0. \tag{3.23}
 \end{aligned}$$

The previous equation states that the above integral is constant along x_i , therefore it is equal to its value for $x_i \rightarrow \infty$, where it is easier to see that it vanishes, since all the field derivatives vanish at spacial infinity, and the potential goes to the false vacuum $V(\varphi_+) = 0$.

We have shown that the r.h.s of eq. (3.21) vanishes, from the same equation one can read that the two Lorentzian continuations $\varphi(t, \vec{x})$, $A_\mu^a(t, \vec{x})$ have a vanishing action (3.18) in the interval $[t_1, t_2]$. We conclude that there is no quantum interference in vacuum decay

in a theory of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field. Therefore even in the presence of a gauge field a metastable vacuum cannot decay in a resonant fashion. Generalization of the above result to a gauge theory of an arbitrary number of interacting scalar fields is straightforward, since all the steps of the proof we gave go through also in this case.

4. Conclusions

We studied whether in a theory of a scalar field coupled to a gauge field a homogeneous metastable vacuum can decay in a resonant fashion. The answer turns out to be negative and thus our result generalizes the no go theorem for resonant tunneling in a pure scalar field theory [4]. The proof follows the line of [4], appropriately generalized to arbitrary space-time dimensions and to the presence of a gauge field. Gauge interaction have exhibited in the past novel non-perturbative phenomena such as the existence of solitons in $D > 2$, forbidden for a pure scalar field theory by Derrick theorem [11]. Yet, in the present case they did not come to rescue, and resonant tunneling from a homogeneous false vacuum and its interesting implications for the dynamics of the landscape mentioned in the introduction are also forbidden for theories of scalar fields coupled to gauge fields.

The authors of the no go theorem for resonant tunneling in a pure scalar field theory [4] have recently proposed a way to circumvent their own no-go theorem [7]. They consider the decay of inhomogeneous excited states of a metastable vacuum, rather than the decay of the false vacuum itself. These states represent quite ad hoc non-homogeneous initial configurations of the scalar field, and whether they can emerge as the outcome of a previous tunneling event in the landscape it remains to be explained. Besides the need to supply a natural mechanism that makes the bubbles of [7] to contract, one should also estimate the occurrence of such events in the landscape. This would be an essential ingredient in order to determine whether the proposal of [7] represents an actual possibility for rapid vacuum decay. As stressed in [7], the present no go theorem does not apply to non homogeneous initial states. Notice that if indeed non homogeneous initial states can have resonant tunneling, solitonic solutions present in gauge theories may naturally supply such initial states as ground states in given topological sectors.

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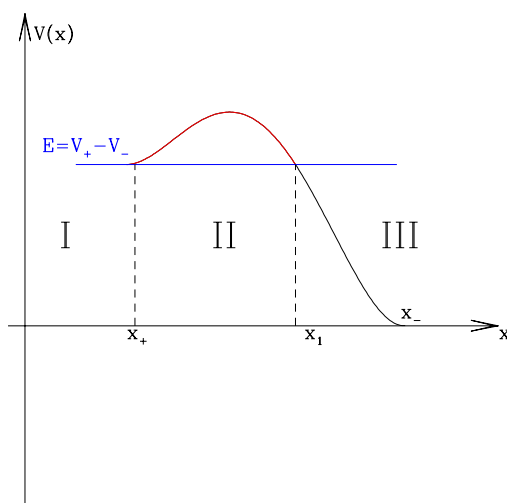


Figure 4: A particle in region I with energy $E = V_+ - V_-$ has a non vanishing probability to tunnel to region III through the classically forbidden potential barrier of region II

A. Wave mechanics methods for tunneling amplitudes through multiple barriers

In this appendix we review some well known but perhaps not so well recalled details of the derivation of the effect of resonant tunneling in quantum mechanics. We also derive and emphasize some less known features of such a computation. The use of analytic continuation on semiclassical wave functions makes possible to obtain the tunneling amplitudes without the knowledge of the exact wave function near a classical turning point, (see for example [14] for the application of this method for a single potential barrier, and [15] for a derivation of the tunneling amplitudes by using exact wave functions). With the inclusion of sub-leading contributions to the wave functions that can be neglected in the one potential barrier problem, this method is still efficient for multiple barriers potentials. Indeed, these terms encode quantum interference effects arising in classically allowed regions between the barriers.

A.1 Tunneling through one potential barrier

Let us consider the tunneling problem represented in figure 4, where an incoming particle of unit mass in region I with energy E is scattered by the potential barrier.

Due to the boundary conditions of the problem, in region III there is only a right moving wave function (the transmitted wave)

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) = \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{i}{\hbar} \int_{x_1}^x dx |p(x)|}}{|p(x)|^{1/2}}, \quad (\text{A.1})$$

where

$$p(x) = \sqrt{2(E - V(x))} \quad (\text{A.2})$$

is the classical momentum of the particle.

The semiclassical wave function (A.1) is a valid approximation only on a region on the right far enough from the turning point $x = x_1$

$$|x - x_1| \gg \left(\frac{\hbar^2}{2F_1} \right)^{1/3}, \quad (\text{A.3})$$

where F_1 is the classical force in $x = x_1$, (see for example [15] for a discussion on this condition).

The tunneling amplitude is given by the ratio between α_{III}^R in (A.1) and the coefficient α_I^R of the right moving component of the semiclassical wave functions in region I. One way to find the coefficients of the right moving and left moving semiclassical components of the wave function is to go beyond the semiclassical region near a classical turning point, and solve the Schrodinger equation for the linearized potential. One can then match the coefficients of the asymptotic expansions far on the left and on the right of the turning point of the obtained solutions. However, the matching conditions can also be obtained without the knowledge of the exact solution and their asymptotic expansions, by analytic continuation of the semiclassical wave functions on the complex plane along semicircular paths centered in the classical turning points.

In region III near the singularity $x = x_1$ of the semiclassical wave function (A.1) one can expand the momentum as

$$p(x) = \sqrt{2(E - V(x))} \sim \sqrt{2F_1}(x - x_1)^{1/2}. \quad (\text{A.4})$$

The function in (A.1) then for $x \sim x_1$ in region III reads

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) \sim \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{i}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2F_1}}{3}|x-x_1|^{3/2}}}{|2F_1(x - x_1)|^{1/4}}. \quad (\text{A.5})$$

By going on the complex plane $x - x_1 \rightarrow \rho e^{i\varphi}$ one can circumvent the turning point by a clockwise semicircular path $0 > \varphi > -\pi$ or by an anti-clockwise one $0 < \varphi < \pi$, to connect to region II.

The clockwise path at $\varphi = -\pi$ gives

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) \rightarrow e^{i\pi/4} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{1}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2F_1}}{3}|x-x_1|^{3/2}}}{|2F_1(x - x_1)|^{1/4}}, \quad (\text{A.6})$$

while the anti-clockwise one at $\varphi = \pi$ gives

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) \rightarrow e^{-i\pi/4} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{-\frac{1}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2F_1}}{3}|x-x_1|^{3/2}}}{|2F_1(x - x_1)|^{1/4}}. \quad (\text{A.7})$$

The continuations in the semiclassical region inside region II of these two contributions reads

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) \rightarrow e^{i\pi/4} e^{\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{-\frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^x dx |\kappa(x)|}}{|\kappa(x)|^{1/2}}, \quad (\text{A.8})$$

for the clockwise path, and

$$\Psi_{\text{III}}(x) \rightarrow e^{-i\pi/4} e^{-\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^x dx |\kappa(x)|}}{|\kappa(x)|^{1/2}}, \quad (\text{A.9})$$

for the anti-clockwise path.

In the last two expressions

$$\kappa(x) = \sqrt{2(V(x) - E)}, \quad (\text{A.10})$$

and

$$\Theta = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^{x_1} dx |\kappa(x)|. \quad (\text{A.11})$$

In region II, near the turning point $x \sim x_+$ one can again linearize the potential in $|x - x_+|$, and approximate (A.8), and (A.9) as

$$\Psi_{\text{II}}^-(x) \sim e^{i\pi/4} e^{\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{-\frac{1}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2|F_+|}}{3} |x-x_+|^{3/2}}}{|2F_+(x-x_+)|^{1/4}}, \quad (\text{A.12})$$

$$\Psi_{\text{II}}^+(x) \sim e^{-i\pi/4} e^{-\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{1}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2|F_+|}}{3} |x-x_+|^{3/2}}}{|2F_+(x-x_+)|^{1/4}}, \quad (\text{A.13})$$

where F_+ is the classical force in $x = x_+$.

Since the growing solution $\Psi_{\text{II}}^+(x)$ above is suppressed by a factor $e^{-2\theta}$ with respect to the decreasing one $\Psi_{\text{II}}^-(x)$, its analytic continuation to region I will produce corrections to the wave function $\Psi_I(x)$ by far negligible in the semiclassical approximation.

Thus, in order to compute the tunneling amplitude one can consider only the two analytic continuations of $\Psi_{\text{II}}^-(x)$ (A.12) to region I, $x - x_+ \rightarrow \rho e^{i\varphi}$ along both a clockwise semicircular path $\varphi = -\pi$ and an anti-clockwise one $\varphi = \pi$

$$\Psi_{\text{II}}^-(x) \rightarrow ie^{\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{\frac{i}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2|F_+|}}{3} |x-x_+|^{3/2}}}{|2F_+(x-x_+)|^{1/4}}, \quad (\text{A.14})$$

$$\Psi_{\text{II}}^-(x) \rightarrow e^{\Theta} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \frac{e^{-\frac{i}{\hbar} \frac{2\sqrt{2|F_+|}}{3} |x-x_+|^{3/2}}}{|2F_+(x-x_+)|^{1/4}}. \quad (\text{A.15})$$

The clockwise continuation gives the left-moving wave function (A.14) in region I, while the anti-clockwise continuation gives the right-moving wave function (A.15) on the same region. As explained in [14], one direction of continuation is reliable for the left moving part of the wave function but unable to recover its right moving part, while the other direction of continuation is reliable for the right moving part but fails to follow the left moving one. To recover the full wave function one has then to sum over both paths of continuation

$$\Psi_I(x) = \frac{ie^{\Theta}}{2} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \Psi_I^L(x) + \frac{e^{\Theta}}{2} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \Psi_I^R(x). \quad (\text{A.16})$$

From this last equation one reads the tunneling amplitude for the single potential barrier in the semiclassical approximation

$$T = \frac{\alpha_{\text{III}}^R}{\alpha_I^R} = 2e^{-\Theta}. \quad (\text{A.17})$$

If one had decided also to keep the exponentially suppressed contributions in region II from $\Psi_{\text{II}}^+(x)$ in (A.13), and perform both the clockwise and anti-clockwise analytic continuation to go to region I, the wave function (A.16) would have been corrected by

$$\begin{aligned} \Psi_I(x) &= \frac{i}{2}(e^\Theta - e^{-\Theta})\alpha_{\text{III}}^R \Psi_I^L(x) \\ &+ \frac{1}{2}(e^\Theta + e^{-\Theta})\alpha_{\text{III}}^R \Psi_I^R(x). \end{aligned} \quad (\text{A.18})$$

Although the corrections in $e^{-\Theta}$ appearing in eq. (A.18) are negligible for a single potential barrier, they become relevant in the presence of two (or more) potential barriers. Indeed, these corrections account for quantum interference in the region between the barriers, and they are essential in order to recover meaningful tunneling amplitudes.

Equation (A.18) can be cast in the following nice formula, that connects the wave function coefficients in two classical allowed regions separated by a potential barrier

$$\begin{aligned} \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_I^R \\ \alpha_I^L \end{pmatrix} &= \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \Theta & i \sinh \Theta \\ -i \sinh \Theta & \cosh \Theta \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \\ \alpha_{\text{III}}^L \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \mathcal{R}_\Theta \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{\text{III}}^R \\ \alpha_{\text{III}}^L \end{pmatrix}, \end{aligned} \quad (\text{A.19})$$

which shows that the wave function which enters from region III into the forbidden region II, it reappears in region I as "boosted" by the matrix \mathcal{R}_Θ

$$\mathcal{R}_\Theta = \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \Theta & i \sinh \Theta \\ -i \sinh \Theta & \cosh \Theta \end{pmatrix}. \quad (\text{A.20})$$

This gives for the transmission probability through the single barrier

$$|T|^2 = \left| \frac{\alpha_{\text{III}}^R}{\alpha_I^R} \right|^2 = \frac{1}{(\cosh \Theta)^2}, \quad (\text{A.21})$$

which has to be trusted only at leading term

$$|T|^2 = \frac{1}{(\cosh \Theta)^2} \sim 4e^{-2\Theta}. \quad (\text{A.22})$$

A.2 Tunneling through a double barrier potential

For tunneling through the double barrier in figure 5 one can compute the full matrix connecting the wave function in region V to the wave function in region I. This translates in matrix language the prescription that we have illustrated in the previous section

$$\vec{\alpha}_{\text{in}} = \mathcal{R}_{\Theta_1} \mathcal{R}_\delta \mathcal{R}_{\Theta_2} \vec{\alpha}_{\text{out}}, \quad (\text{A.23})$$

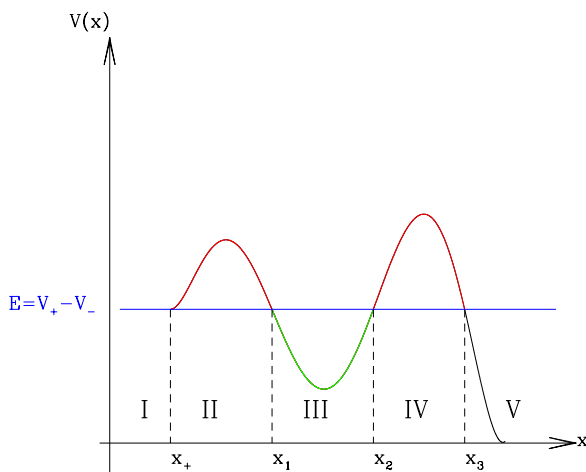


Figure 5: Double barrier potential: Due to quantum interference there is a finite spectrum of energies such that the probability to tunnel through the double barrier is higher than the probability to tunnel through a single barrier. This is due to the presence of the intermediate classically allowed region III, where the various oscillating paths between the classical turning points $x = x_1$, $x = x_2$ can quantum interfere in a constructive way, giving rise to resonant tunneling.

where $\mathcal{R}_{\Theta_1} \mathcal{R}_\delta \mathcal{R}_{\Theta_2}$ is given by

$$\begin{aligned} & \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \Theta_1 & i \sinh \Theta_1 \\ -i \sinh \Theta_1 & \cosh \Theta_1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} e^{-i\delta} & 0 \\ 0 & e^{i\delta} \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \Theta_2 & i \sinh \Theta_2 \\ -i \sinh \Theta_2 & \cosh \Theta_2 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \cos \delta \begin{pmatrix} \cosh(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2) & i \sinh(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2) \\ -i \sinh(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2) & \cosh(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2) \end{pmatrix} \\ & \quad - i \sin \delta \begin{pmatrix} \cosh(\Theta_1 - \Theta_2) & i \sinh(\Theta_1 - \Theta_2) \\ -i \sinh(\Theta_1 - \Theta_2) & \cosh(\Theta_1 - \Theta_2) \end{pmatrix}. \end{aligned}$$

$$\delta = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_1}^{x_2} dx \sqrt{2(E - V(x))}$$

is the interference phase responsible for resonant tunneling, while

$$\Theta_1 = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_+}^{x_1} dx \sqrt{2(V(x) - E)},$$

and

$$\Theta_2 = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int_{x_2}^{x_3} dx \sqrt{2(V(x) - E)}$$

are the corresponding (hyperbolic) angles in the classically forbidden regions II and IV in figure 5.

The transmission coefficient for double barrier tunneling is given by $T = \alpha_{\text{out}}^R / \alpha_{\text{in}}^R$. Computation gives the tunneling probability

$$|T|^2 = \frac{1}{\cos^2 \delta \cosh^2(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2) + \sin^2 \delta \cosh^2(\Theta_1 - \Theta_2)}. \quad (\text{A.24})$$

The term in $\cos \delta$ corresponds to the product of the decay probabilities, it is the non-resonant contribution, dominant in the limit $\delta \rightarrow 0$, where interference in the intermediate region plays no role. The term in $\sin \delta$ in (A.24) is the effect of the quantum interference, and it depends on the difference between Θ_1 and Θ_2 . This term is produced by the exponentially suppressed contributions in the intermediate region III that become relevant after analytic continuation to region I, (see discussion related to equation (A.18)).

The tunneling probability can be closed to one in the resonant condition

$$\delta = (n + 1/2) \pi, \quad \Theta_1 \sim \Theta_2. \quad (\text{A.25})$$

Notice that $\Theta_1 \sim \Theta_2$ requires a large amount of fine tuning, since in the semiclassical regime both Θ_1 and Θ_2 are large numbers in \hbar units.

If one had neglected exponentially suppressed contributions for the semiclassical wave functions obtained by analytic continuation toward the two classically forbidden regions, the result for the tunneling probability would have been

$$|T|^2 = \frac{1}{\cos^2 \delta \cosh^2(\Theta_1 + \Theta_2)}. \quad (\text{A.26})$$

This is a meaningless result since it diverges at resonance $\cos \delta = 0$.

A.3 Tunneling through N barriers

Given N barriers separated by $N - 1$ classically allowed regions, the matrix which connects the wave functions on the two regions extending to infinity is given by $\mathcal{R}_N = \prod_{k=1}^N \mathcal{R}_{\Theta_k} \mathcal{R}_{\delta_k}$

$$\mathcal{R}_N = \prod_{k=1}^N \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \Theta_k & -i \sinh \Theta_k \\ i \sinh \Theta_k & \cosh \Theta_k \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\delta_k} & 0 \\ 0 & e^{-i\delta_k} \end{pmatrix}, \quad (\text{A.27})$$

where

$$\Theta_k = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int dx \sqrt{2V(x)}, \quad (\text{A.28})$$

and

$$\delta_k = \frac{1}{\hbar} \int dx \sqrt{-2V(x)}. \quad (\text{A.29})$$

There may be various resonant tunneling conditions, the simplest one corresponds to the existence of an energy bound state common to all the $N - 1$ classical allowed regions. If the incoming particle has this bound state energy the total tunneling probability turns out to be

$$|T|^2 = \frac{1}{\cosh^2 \left(-\sum_{k=1}^N (-)^k \Theta_k \right)}, \quad (\text{A.30})$$

and resonant tunneling occurs for

$$\sum_{k=1}^N (-)^k \Theta_k = 0. \quad (\text{A.31})$$

This resonance condition extends to a generic number of barriers N the resonance condition

$$\Theta_1 - \Theta_2 = 0, \quad (\text{A.32})$$

which has been obtained for the double barrier potential in figure 5.

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