

Gala: A Python package for galactic dynamics

Adrian M. Price-Whelan^{*1, 2}, Author Without ORCID^{†2}, and Author with no affiliation^{‡3}

1 Lyman Spitzer, Jr. Fellow, Princeton University 2 Institution Name 3 Independent Researcher

Summary

The forces on stars, galaxies, and dark matter under external gravitational fields lead to the dynamical evolution of structures in the universe. The orbits of these bodies are therefore key to understanding the formation, history, and future state of galaxies. The field of “galactic dynamics,” which aims to model the gravitating components of galaxies to study their structure and evolution, is now well-established, commonly taught, and frequently used in astronomy. Aside from toy problems and demonstrations, the majority of problems require efficient numerical tools, many of which require the same base code (e.g., for performing numerical orbit integration).

Statement of need

Gala is an Astropy-affiliated Python package for galactic dynamics. Python enables wrapping low-level languages (e.g., C) for speed without losing flexibility or ease-of-use in the user-interface. The API for Gala was designed to provide a class-based and user-friendly interface to fast (C or Cython-optimized) implementations of common operations such as gravitational potential and force evaluation, orbit integration, dynamical transformations, and chaos indicators for nonlinear dynamics. Gala also relies heavily on and interfaces well with the implementations of physical units and astronomical coordinate systems in the Astropy package (Astropy Collaboration, 2013) (`astropy.units` and `astropy.coordinates`).

Gala was designed to be used by both astronomical researchers and by students in courses on gravitational dynamics or astronomy. It has already been used in a number of scientific publications (Pearson et al., 2017) and has also been used in graduate courses on Galactic dynamics to, e.g., provide interactive visualizations of textbook material (Binney & Tremaine, 2008). The combination of speed, design, and support for Astropy functionality in Gala will enable exciting scientific explorations of forthcoming data releases from the *Gaia* mission (Gaia Collaboration, 2016) by students and experts alike.

Mathematics

Single dollars (\$) are required for inline mathematics e.g. $f(x) = e^{\pi/x}$

Double dollars make self-standing equations:

$$\Theta(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } x < 0 \\ 1 & \text{else} \end{cases}$$




*co-first author

†co-first author

‡corresponding author

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You can also use plain \LaTeX for equations

$$\hat{f}(\omega) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x) e^{i\omega x} dx \quad (1)$$

and refer to [Equation 1](#) from text.

Citations

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If you want to cite a software repository URL (e.g. something on GitHub without a preferred citation) then you can do it with the example BibTeX entry below for Smith et al. (2020).

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Figures

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