

Nested Sampling and Likelihood Free Inference

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What is Nested Sampling?

- ▶ Nested sampling is a multi-purpose numerical mathematical tool.
- ▶ Given a (scalar) function f with a vector of parameters θ , it can be used for:

Optimisation

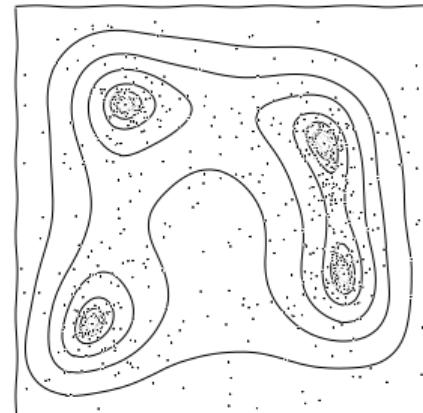
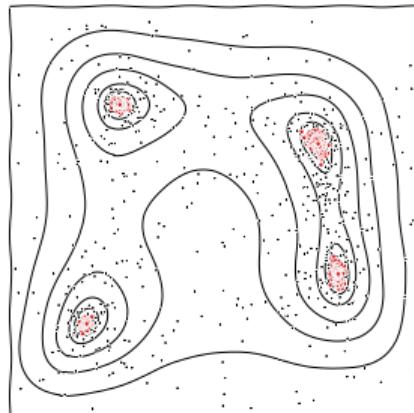
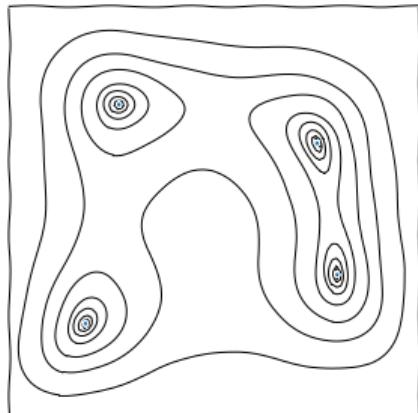
Sampling

Integration

$$\theta_{\max} = \max_{\theta} f(\theta)$$

draw $\theta \sim f$

$$\int f(\theta) dV$$



MCMC sampling

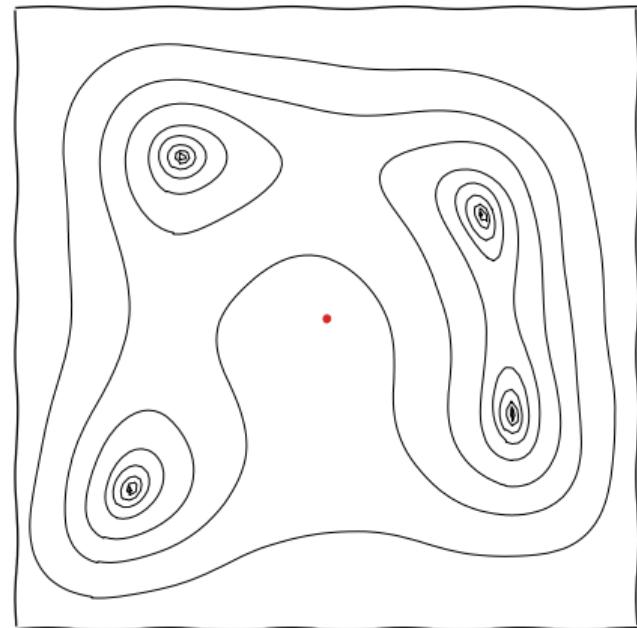
- ▶ Markov chain based methods generate samples from posterior distribution by a stepping procedure
- ▶ This can get stuck in local peaks
- ▶ Cannot compute normalisation \mathcal{Z} of Bayes theorem:

$$P(\theta|D, M) = \frac{P(D|\theta, M)P(\theta|M)}{P(D|M)}$$

$$\mathcal{P} = \frac{\mathcal{L} \times \pi}{\mathcal{Z}} \quad \text{posterior} = \frac{\text{likelihood} \times \text{prior}}{\text{evidence}}$$

- ▶ We generally want $\mathcal{Z} = P(D|M)$ for the second stage of inference: model comparison

$$P(M|D) = \frac{P(D|M)P(M)}{P(D)} \quad \text{Science}(M) = \frac{\mathcal{Z}_M \Pi_M}{\sum_m \mathcal{Z}_m \Pi_m}$$



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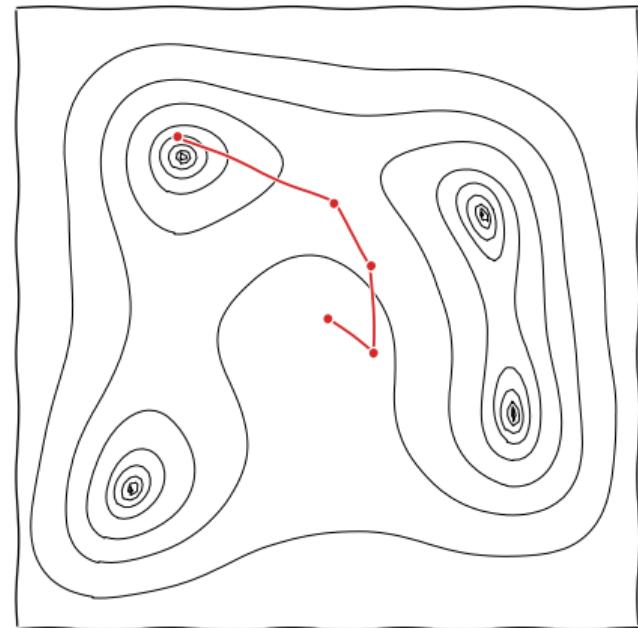
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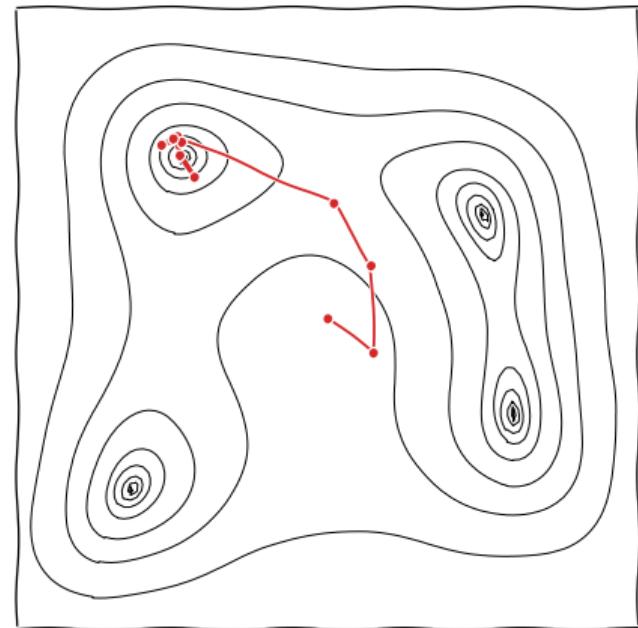
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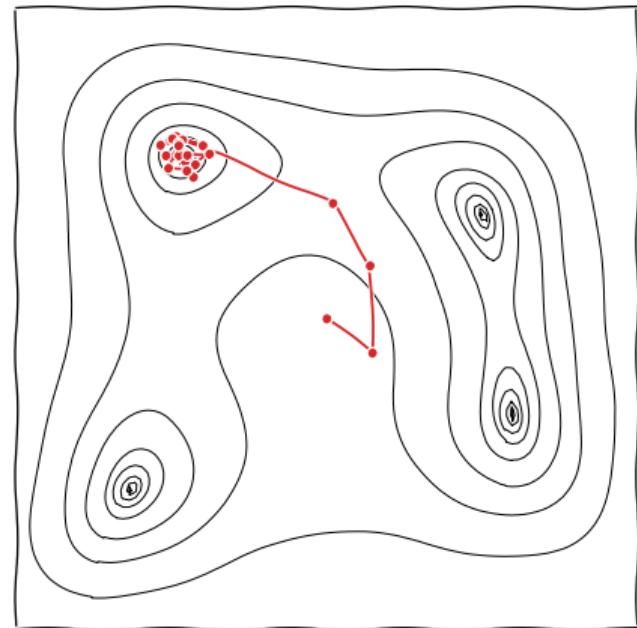
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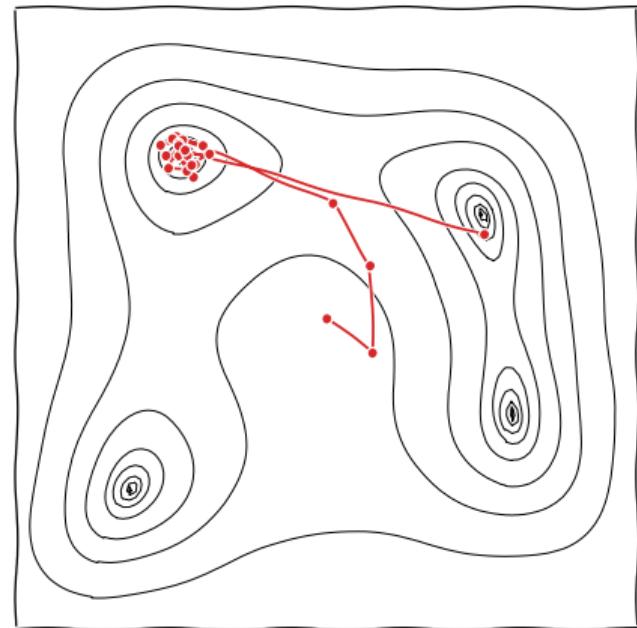
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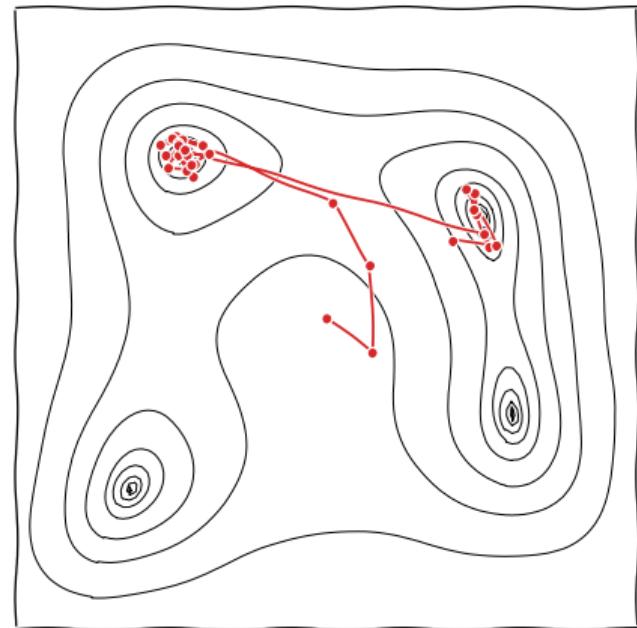
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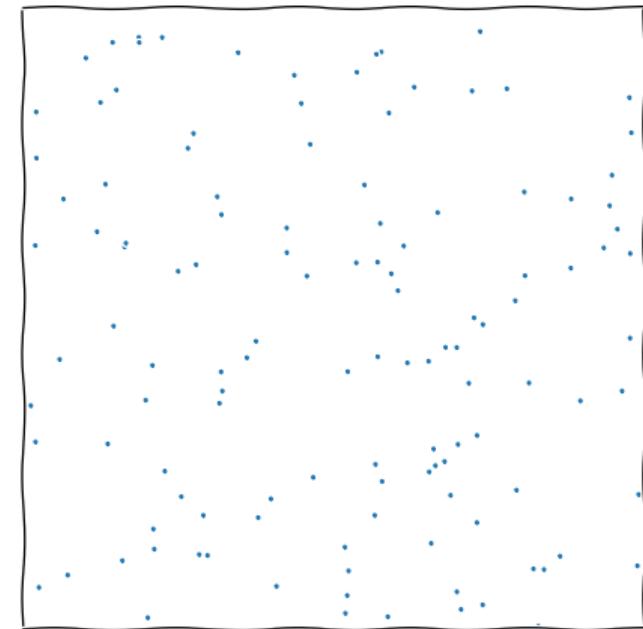
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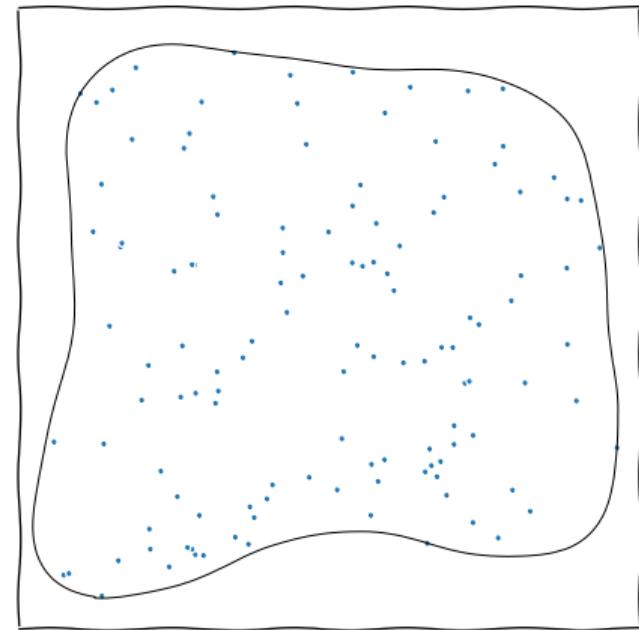
Nested sampling

- ▶ Nested sampling: completely different way to sample
- ▶ Ensemble sampling to compress prior to posterior.
- ▶ Sequentially update a set S of n samples:
 - S_0 : Generate n samples uniformly over the space (from the prior π).
 - S_{n+1} : Delete the lowest likelihood sample in S_n , and replace it with a new uniform sample with higher likelihood
- ▶ Requires one to be able to sample uniformly within a region, subject to a *hard likelihood constraint*:
$$\{\theta \sim \pi : \mathcal{L}(\theta) > \mathcal{L}_*\}$$
- ▶ This procedure optimises (multimodally), and can calculate the normalisation & posterior weights.



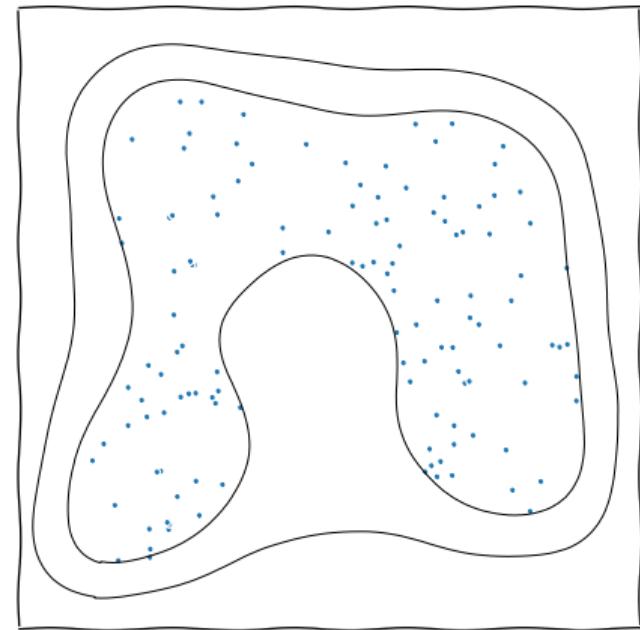
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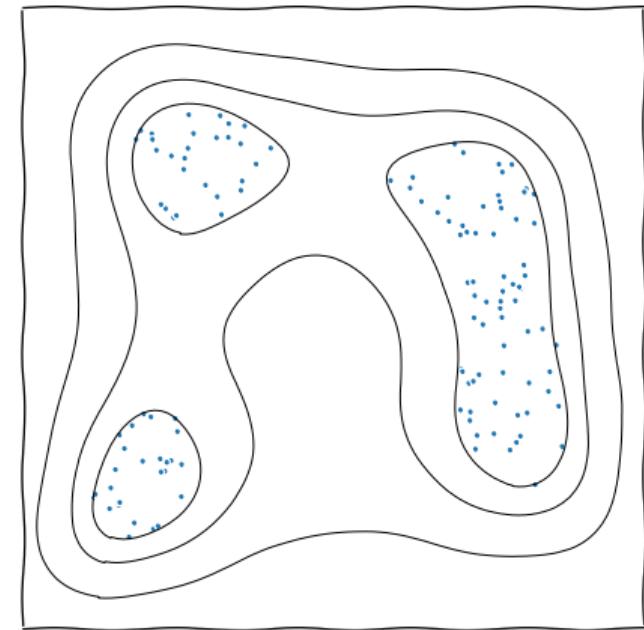
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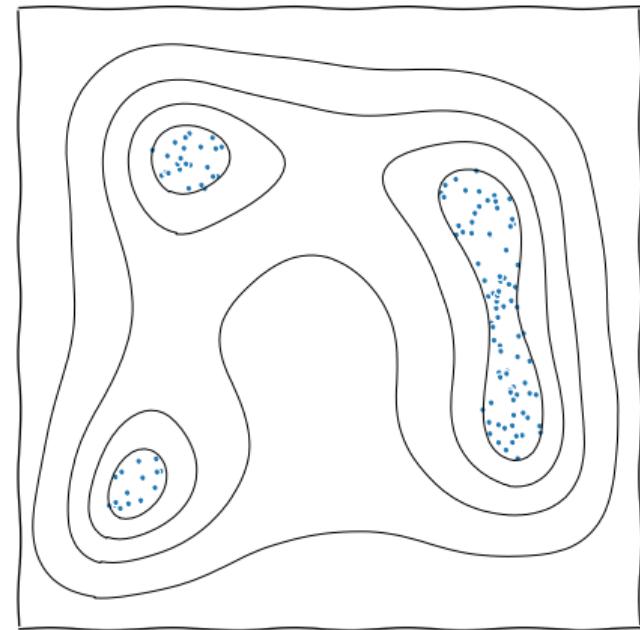
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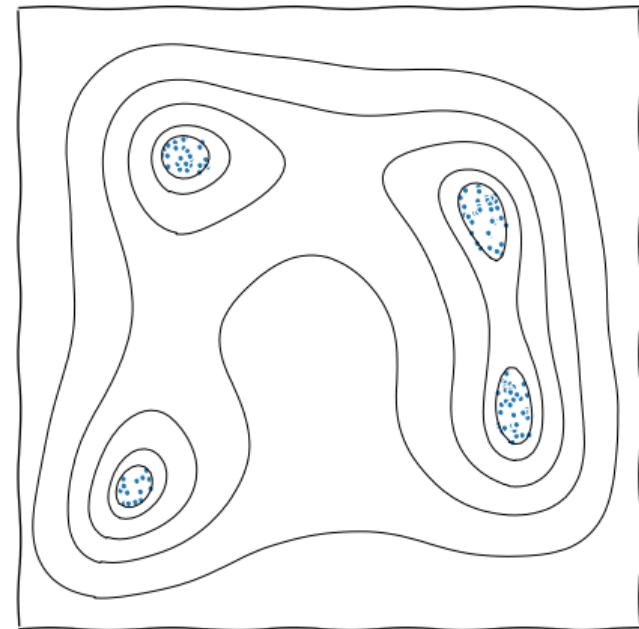
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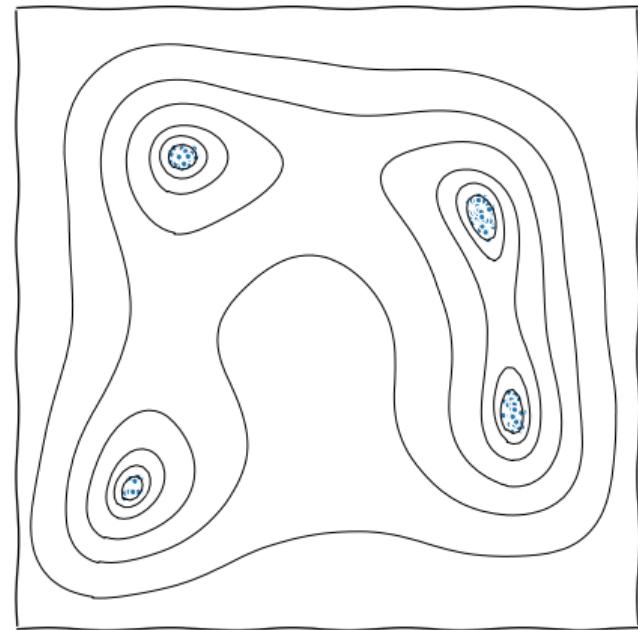
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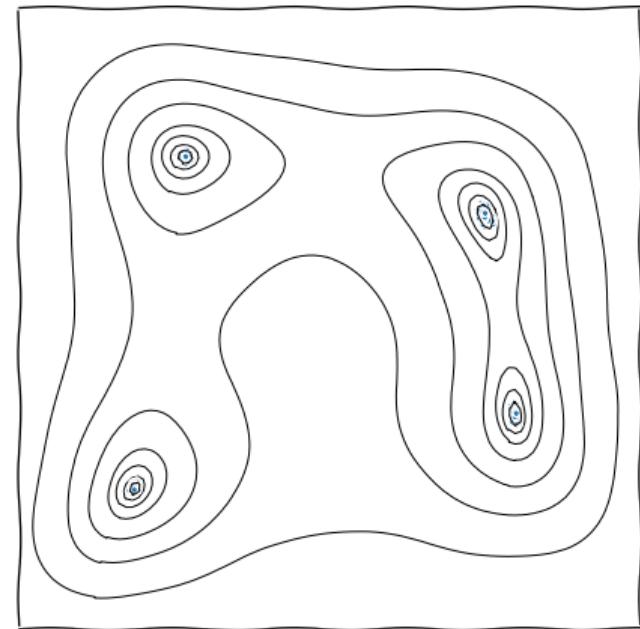
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Mathematics of Nested Sampling

A probabilistic Lebesgue integrator

- ▶ At each iteration, the likelihood contour will shrink in volume by $\approx 1/n$.
- ▶ Nested sampling zooms in to the peak of the function \mathcal{L} exponentially.

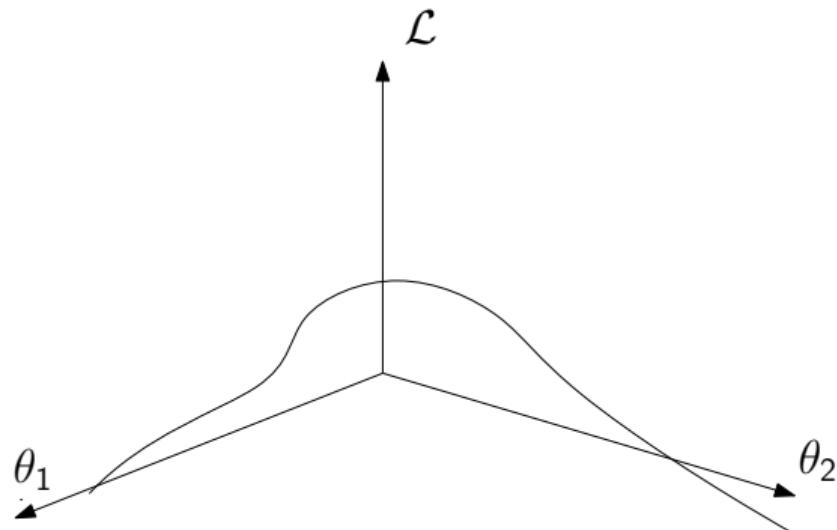
$$\mathcal{Z} \approx \sum_i \Delta \mathcal{L}_i X_i, \quad X_{i+1} \approx \frac{n}{n+1} X_i, \quad X_0 = 1$$

- ▶ Although this is only approximate, we can quantify the error

$$P(X_i | X_{i-1}) = \frac{X_i^{n-1}}{n X_{i-1}^n} \times [0 < X_i < X_{i-1}]$$

- ▶ Integral can be expressed in one of two ways

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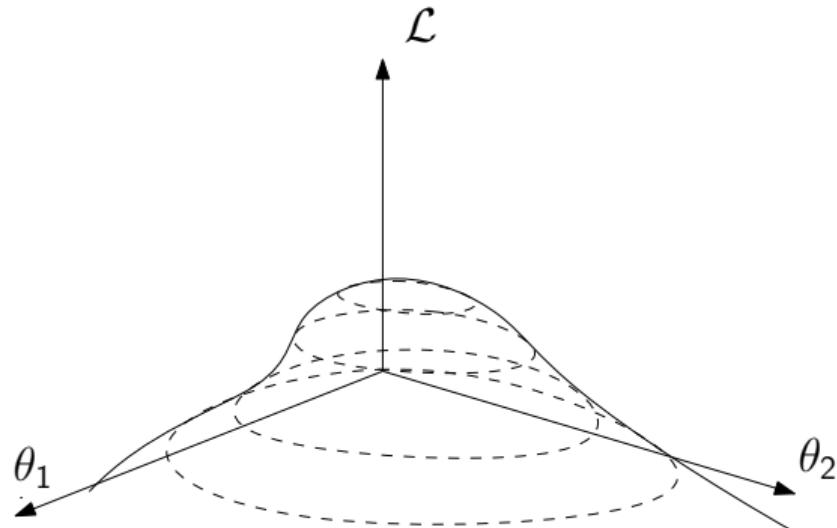
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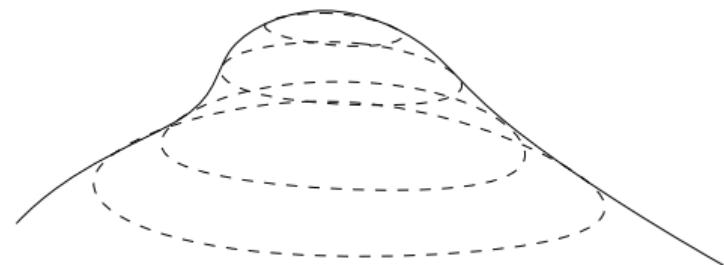
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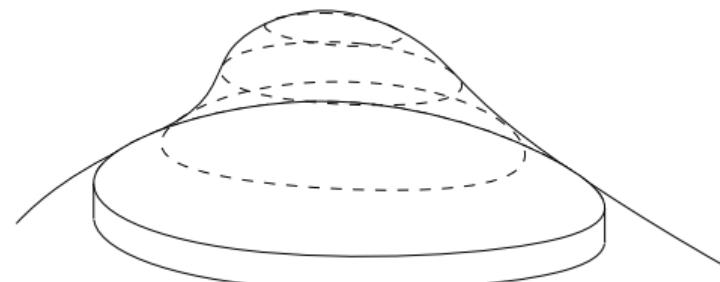
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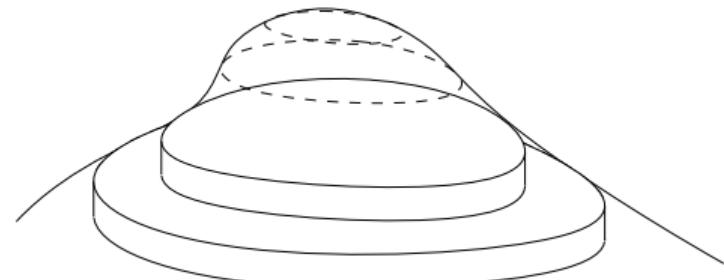
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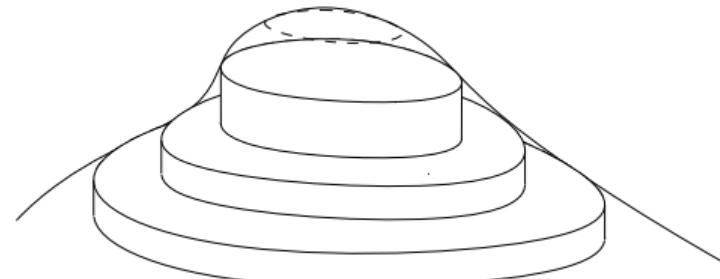
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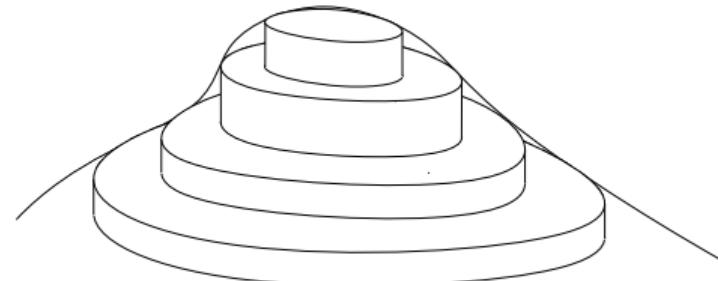
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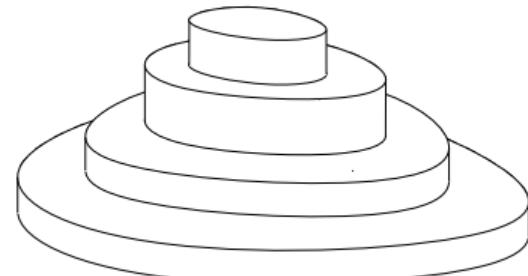
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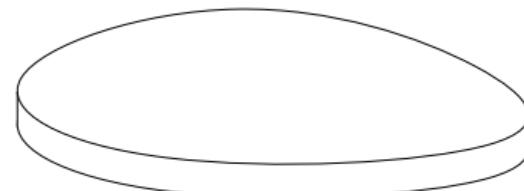
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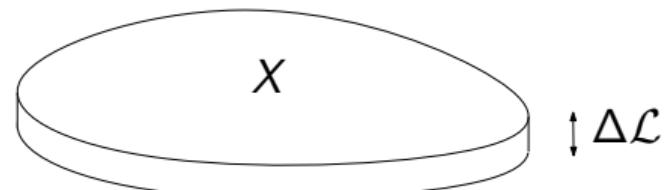
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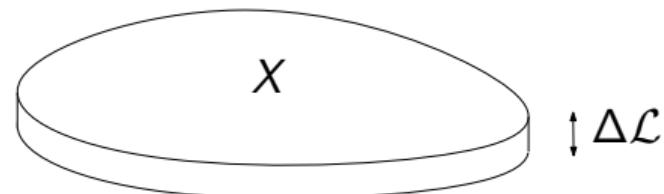
$$\mathcal{Z} \approx \sum_i \Delta \mathcal{L}_i X_i, \quad X_{i+1} \approx \frac{n}{n+1} X_i, \quad X_0 = 1$$

- ▶ Although this is only approximate, we can quantify the error

$$P(X_i | X_{i-1}) = \frac{X_i^{n-1}}{n X_{i-1}^n} \times [0 < X_i < X_{i-1}]$$

- ▶ Integral can be expressed in one of two ways

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$$\text{Volume} = X \Delta \mathcal{L}$$

Mathematics of Nested Sampling

A probabilistic Lebesgue integrator

- ▶ At each iteration, the likelihood contour will shrink in volume by $\approx 1/n$.
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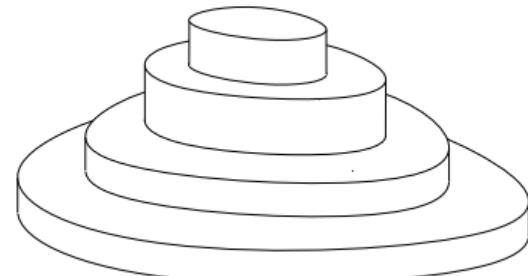
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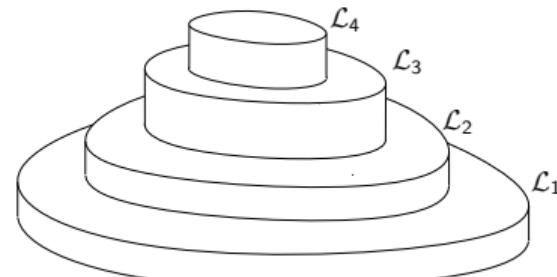
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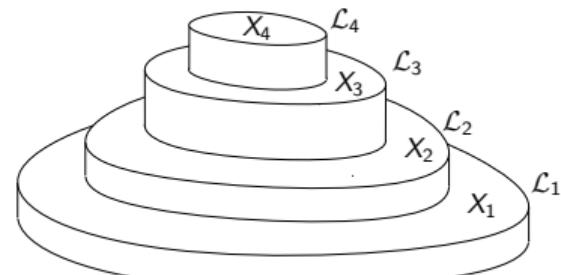
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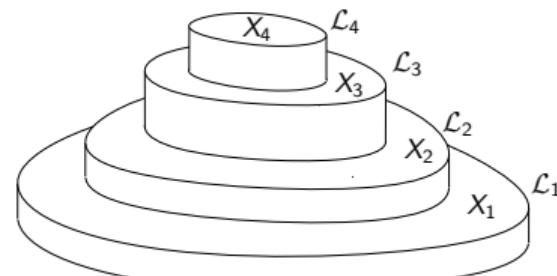
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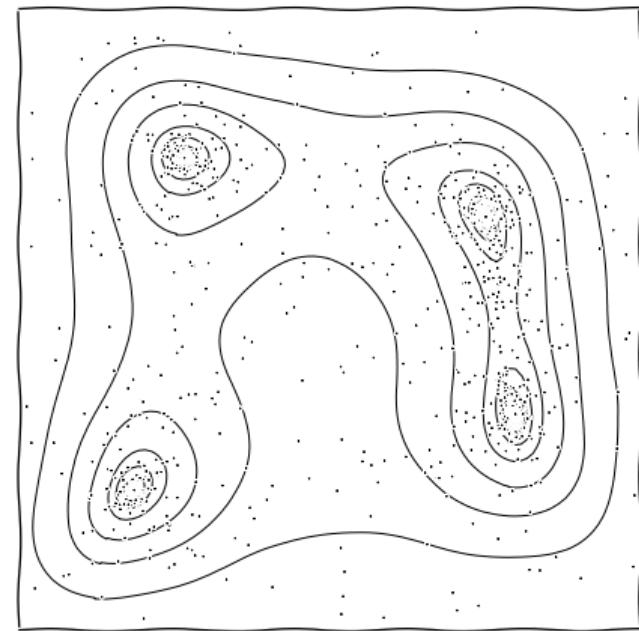


Dead points: posteriors & evidences

- ▶ At the end, one is left with a set of discarded points
- ▶ These may be weighted to form weighted posterior samples using $w_i = \mathcal{L}_i \Delta X_i$
- ▶ They can also be used to calculate the normalisation $\mathcal{Z} = \sum \mathcal{L}_i \Delta X_i$, or more generally $\sum_i f(\mathcal{L}_i) \Delta X_i$.
 - ▶ Nested sampling probabilistically estimates the volume of the parameter space

$$X_i \approx \left(\frac{n}{n+1} \right) X_{i-1} \quad \Rightarrow \quad X_i \approx \left(\frac{n}{n+1} \right)^i \approx e^{-i/n}$$

- ▶ only statistical estimates, but we know the error bar
- ▶ Nested sampling thus estimates the density of states
- ▶ it is therefore a partition function calculator
- ▶ The evolving ensemble of live points allows algorithms to perform self-tuning and mode clustering.

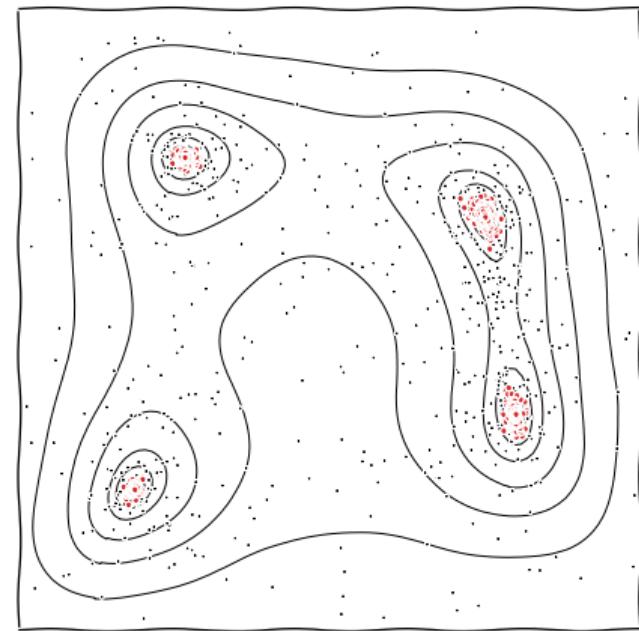


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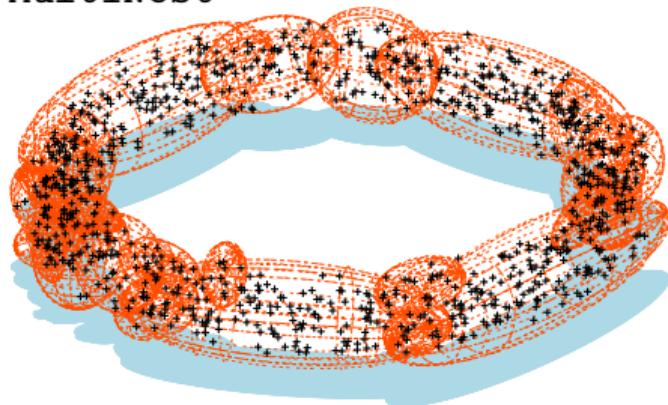
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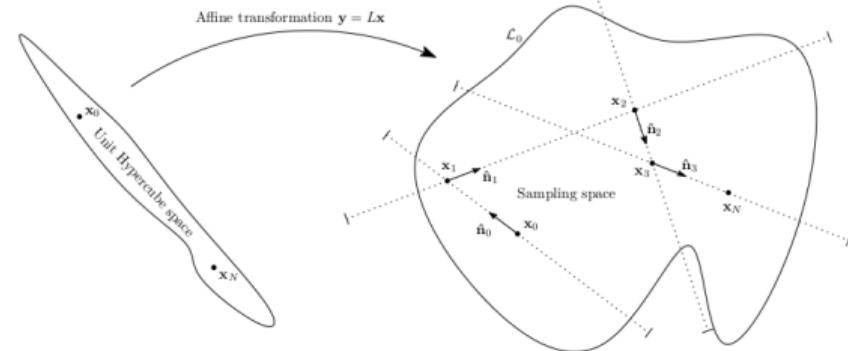


Implementations of Nested Sampling

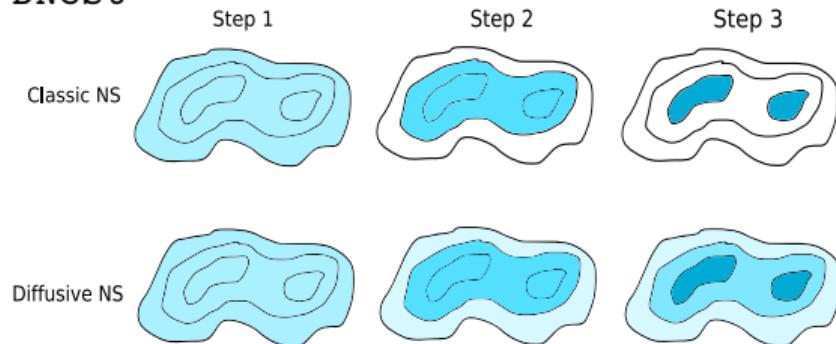
MultiNest



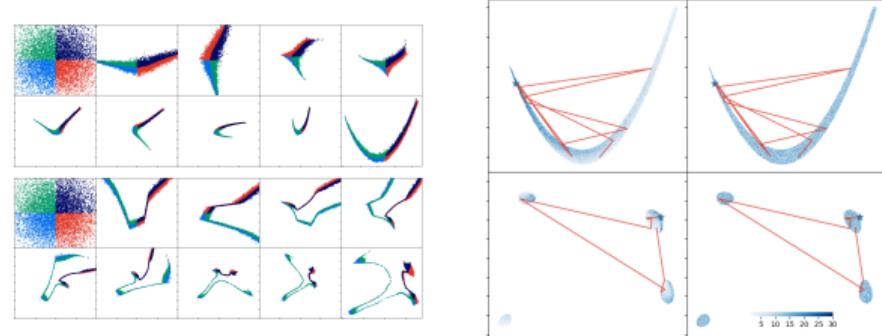
PolyChord



DNest



NeuralNest



How does Nested Sampling compare to other approaches?

- ▶ In all cases:
 - + NS can handle multimodal functions
 - + NS computes evidences, partition functions and integrals
 - + NS is self-tuning/black-box
- Modern Nested Sampling algorithms can do this in $\sim \mathcal{O}(100s)$ dimensions

Optimisation

- ▶ Gradient descent
 - + NS does not require gradients

- ▶ Genetic algorithms
 - + NS discarded points have statistical meaning

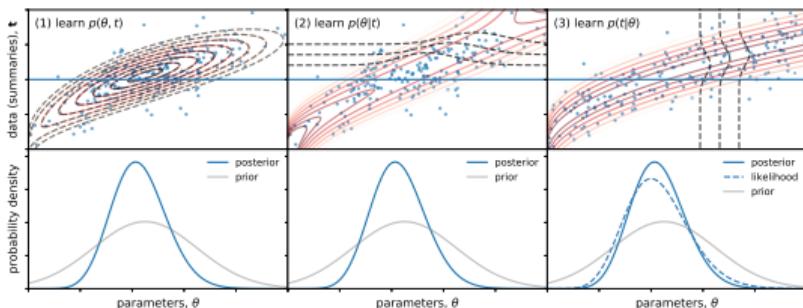
Sampling

- ▶ Metropolis-Hastings?
 - Very little beats a well-tuned, customised MH
 - + NS is self tuning
- ▶ Hamiltonian Monte Carlo?
 - In millions of dimensions, HMC is king
 - + NS does not require gradients

Integration

- ▶ Thermodynamic integration
 - + protective against phase transitions
 - + No annealing schedule tuning
- ▶ Sequential Monte Carlo
 - Some people (SMC experts) classify NS as a kind of SMC
 - + NS is athermal

Nested Sampling with Likelihood Free Inference



Alsing et al. [1903.00007]

- In density estimation likelihood free inference, the output is to learn one/all of:

Likelihood $P(D|\theta)$
Posterior $P(\theta|D)$
Joint $P(D, \theta)$

- In the first instance, nested sampling can be used to scan these learnt functions

- Data are compressed, so joint space (D, θ) is navigable by off-the-shelf codes.
 - Sanity checking the solution
 - Computing evidences/Kullback Liebler divergences from likelihoods
- Its self-tuning capacity and ability to handle multi-modal distributions can be very useful for diagnosing incompletely learnt functions
- Emulated likelihoods (e.g. normalising flows) are generally fast, so can deploy more likelihood hungry techniques like NS.
- As Pablo Lemos & David Yallup will discuss, in principle can use it to train emulators by marginalisation rather than maximisation.

Nested Sampling for Approximate Bayesian Computation/SBI

- ▶ Assume one has a generative model capable of turning parameters into mock data $D(\theta)$
- ▶ Given infinite computing power, ABC works by selecting $\{\theta : D(\theta) = D_{\text{observed}}\}$
- ▶ These are samples from the posterior, without using a likelihood.
- ▶ In practice $D = D_{\text{obs}}$ becomes $D \approx D_{\text{obs}}$
- ▶ i.e. $|D - D_{\text{obs}}| < \varepsilon$, or more generally $\rho(D, D_{\text{obs}}) < \varepsilon$, where ρ is some suitably chosen objective function
- ▶ Main challenges are
 1. Choice of ρ /summary stats
 2. Choice of ε schedule
 3. Rejection sampling
- ▶ Nested sampling fits this well: In principle, can just change the usual hard likelihood constraints $\{\theta \sim \pi : \mathcal{L}(\theta) > \mathcal{L}_*\}$ to $\{\theta \sim \pi : \rho(D(\theta), D_{\text{obs}}) < \varepsilon\}$
- (Brewer & Foreman-Mackey [1606.03757])
- ▶ Ongoing work with Andrew Fowlie & Sebastian Hoof
 - ▶ How to deal with nondeterminism
 - ▶ How to interpret ρ as a “likelihood”
 - ▶ How to interpret the evidence \mathcal{Z}

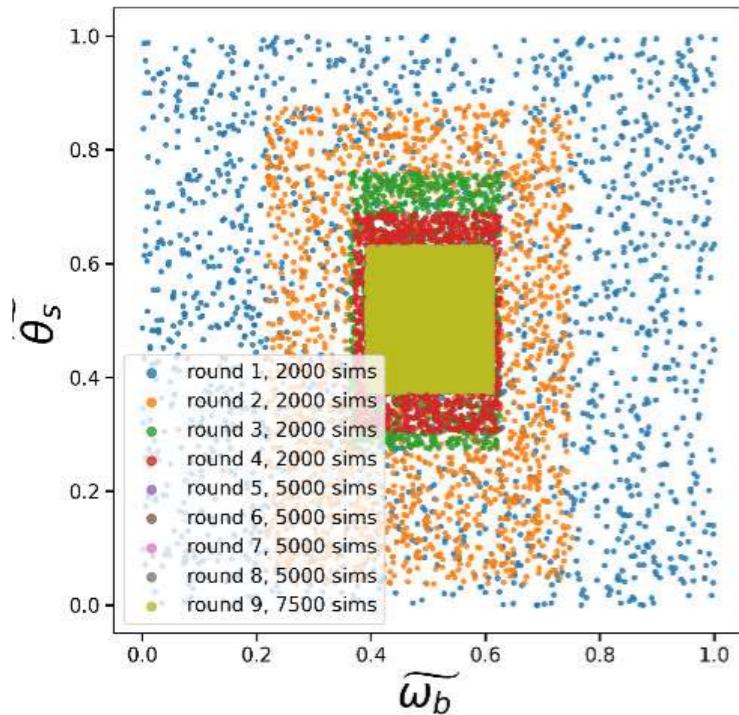
Nested sampling for truncated methods

- ▶ Will hear more on this tomorrow from Christoph
- ▶ Many Likelihood implicit approaches at the moment have some element of sampling direct from the prior
- ▶ Inefficient if number of parameters $> \mathcal{O}(\text{a few})$
- ▶ Can get round this by truncating to region:

$$\Gamma\{\theta \in \text{supp}(p) \mid p(\theta|x_0) > \bar{\varepsilon}\}$$

- ▶ At the moment regions defined by nested boxes
- ▶ This seems ripe for replacement by NS
 - ▶ Has anybody tried this?
 - ▶ If not, why not?
 - ▶ Why not why not?

(call me)



Cole et al. [2111.08030]

Nested Sampling: a user's guide

1. Nested sampling is a likelihood scanner, rather than posterior explorer.
 - ▶ This means typically most of its time is spent on burn-in rather than posterior sampling
 - ▶ Changing the stopping criterion from 10^{-3} to 0.5 does little to speed up the run, but can make results very unreliable
2. The number of live points n_{live} is a resolution parameter.
 - ▶ Run time is linear in n_{live} , posterior and evidence accuracy goes as $\frac{1}{\sqrt{n_{\text{live}}}}$.
 - ▶ Set low for exploratory runs $\sim \mathcal{O}(10)$ and increased to $\sim \mathcal{O}(1000)$ for production standard.
3. Most algorithms come with additional reliability parameter(s).
 - ▶ e.g. MultiNest: eff, PolyChord: n_{repeats}
 - ▶ These are parameters which have no gain if set too conservatively, but increase the reliability
 - ▶ Check that results do not degrade if you reduce them from defaults, otherwise increase.

Key tools for Nested Sampling

`anesthetic` Nested sampling post processing [1905.04768]

`insertion` cross-checks using order statistics [2006.03371]

github.com/williamjameshandley/anesthetic

`nestcheck` cross-checks using unthreaded runs [1804.06406]

github.com/ejhigson/nestcheck

`MultiNest` Ellipsoidal rejection sampling [0809.3437]

github.com/farhanferoz/MultiNest

`PolyChord` Python/C++/Fortran state of the art [1506.00171]

github.com/PolyChord/PolyChordLite

`dynesty` Python re-implementation of several codes [1904.02180]

github.com/joshspeagle/dynesty

`& UltraNest` github.com/JohannesBuchner/UltraNest [2101.09604]