

The Fundamentals of Stellar Astrophysics

George W. Collins, II

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Contents

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	Page
Preface to the Internet Edition	xiv
Preface to the W. H. Freeman Edition	xv
Part I Stellar Interiors	
Chapter 1	
Introduction and Fundamental Principles	3
1.1 Stationary or “Steady” Properties of matter	5
<i>a Phase Space and Phase Density</i>	5
<i>b Macrostates and Microstates.</i>	6
<i>c Probability and Statistical Equilibrium</i>	6
<i>d Quantum Statistics</i>	9
<i>e Statistical Equilibrium for a Gas</i>	11
<i>f Thermodynamic Equilibrium – Strict and Local</i>	15
1.2 Transport Phenomena	15
<i>a. Boltzmann Transport Equation</i>	15
<i>b. Homogeneous Boltzmann Transport Equation and Liouville’s Theorem</i>	17
<i>c. Moments of the Boltzmann Transport Equation and Conservation Laws</i>	18
1.3 Equation of State for the Ideal Gas and Degenerate Matter	26
Problems	32
References and Supplemental Reading	33

Chapter 2	
Basic Assumptions, Theorems, and Polytropes	34
2.1 Basic Assumptions	34
2.2 Integral Theorems from Hydrostatic Equilibrium	36
<i>a Limits of State Variables</i>	36
<i>b β^* Theorem and Effects of Radiation Pressure</i>	38
2.3 Homology Transformations	40
2.4 Polytropes	42
<i>a Polytropic Change and the Lane-Emden Equation</i>	43
<i>b Mass-Radius Relationship for Polytropes</i>	46
<i>c Homology Invariants</i>	47
<i>d Isothermal Sphere</i>	49
<i>e Fitting Polytropes Together</i>	51
Problems	53
References and Supplemental Reading	54
Chapter 3	
Sources and Sinks of Energy	56
3.1 "Energies" of Stars	57
<i>a Gravitational Energy</i>	57
<i>b Rotational Energy</i>	59
<i>c Nuclear Energy</i>	60
3.2 Time Scales	61
<i>a Dynamical Time Scale</i>	61
<i>b Kelvin-Helmholtz (Thermal) Time Scale</i>	62
<i>c Nuclear (Evolutionary) Time Scale</i>	63
3.3 Generation of Nuclear Energy	64
<i>a General Properties of the Nucleus</i>	65
<i>b The Bohr Picture of Nuclear Reactions</i>	66
<i>c Nuclear Reaction Cross Sections</i>	68
<i>d Nuclear Reaction Rates</i>	70
<i>e Specific Nuclear Reactions</i>	72
Problems	75
References and Supplemental Reading	75

Chapter 4	
Flow of Energy through the Star and Construction of Stellar Models	77
4.1 The Ionization, Abundances, and Opacity of Stellar Material	78
<i>a Ionization and the Mean Molecular Weight</i>	78
<i>b Opacity</i>	80
4.2 Radiative Transport and the Radiative Temperature Gradient	86
<i>a Radiative Equilibrium</i>	86
<i>b Thermodynamic Equilibrium and Net Flux</i>	86
<i>c Photon Transport and the Radiative Gradient</i>	87
<i>d Conservation of Energy and the Luminosity</i>	89
4.3 Convective Energy Transport	90
<i>a Adiabatic Temperature Gradient</i>	90
<i>b Energy Carried by Convection</i>	91
4.4 Energy Transport by Conduction	94
<i>a Mean Free Path</i>	94
<i>b Heat Flow</i>	95
4.5 Convective Stability	96
<i>a Efficiency of Transport Mechanisms</i>	96
<i>b Schwarzschild Stability Criterion</i>	97
4.6 Equations of Stellar Structure	100
4.7 Construction of a Model Stellar Interior	101
<i>a Boundary Conditions</i>	102
<i>b Schwarzschild Variables and Method</i>	102
<i>c Henyey Relaxation Method for Construction of Stellar Models</i>	105
Problems	109
References and Supplemental Reading	110

Chapter 5	
Theory of Stellar Evolution	112
5.1 The Ranges of Stellar Masses, Radii, and Luminosity	113
5.2 Evolution onto the Main Sequence	114
<i>a Problems concerning the Formation of Stars</i>	114
<i>b Contraction out of the Interstellar Medium</i>	116
<i>c Contraction onto the Main Sequence</i>	119
5.3 The Structure and Evolution of Main Sequence Stars	125
<i>a Lower Main Sequence Stars</i>	126
<i>b Upper Main Sequence Stars</i>	128
5.4 Post Main Sequence Evolution	129
<i>a Evolution off the Lower Main Sequence</i>	129
<i>b Evolution away from the Upper Main Sequence</i>	136
<i>c The Effect of Mass-loss on the Evolution of Stars</i>	138
5.5 Summary and Recapitulation	139
<i>a Core Contraction - Envelope Expansion: Simple Reasons</i>	140
<i>b Calculated Evolution of a $5 M_{\odot}$ star</i>	143
Problems	144
References and Supplemental Reading	145
Chapter 6	
Relativistic Stellar Structure	149
6.1 Field Equations of the General Theory of Relativity	150
6.2 Oppenheimer-Volkoff Equation of Hydrostatic Equilibrium	152
<i>a Schwarzschild Metric</i>	152
<i>b Gravitational Potential and Hydrostatic Equilibrium</i>	154
6.3 Equations of Relativistic Stellar Structure and Their Solutions	154
<i>a A Comparison of Structure Equations</i>	155
<i>b A Simple Model</i>	156
<i>c Neutron Star Structure</i>	158

6.4	Relativistic Polytrope of Index 3	161
	<i>a</i> Virial Theorem for Relativistic Stars	161
	<i>b</i> Minimum Radius for White Dwarfs	164
	<i>c</i> Minimum Radius for Super-massive Stars	165
6.5	Fate of Super-massive Stars	167
	<i>a</i> Eddington Luminosity	167
	<i>b</i> Equilibrium Mass-Radius Relation	168
	<i>c</i> Limiting Masses for Super-massive Stars	168
	Problems	172
	References and Supplemental Reading	173
Chapter 7		
	Structure of Distorted Stars	175
7.1	Classical Distortion: The Structure Equations	176
	<i>a</i> A Comparison of Structure Equations	176
	<i>b</i> Structure Equations for Cylindrical Symmetry	177
7.2	Solution of Structure Equations for a Perturbing Force	184
	<i>a</i> Perturbed Equation of Hydrostatic Equilibrium	185
	<i>b</i> Number of Perturbative Equations versus Number of Unknowns	186
7.3	Von Zeipel's Theorem and Eddington-Sweet Circulation Currents	187
	<i>a</i> Von Zeipel's Theorem	187
	<i>b</i> Eddington-Sweet Circulation Currents	190
7.4	Rotational Stability and Mixing	195
	<i>a</i> Shear Instabilities	195
	<i>b</i> Chemical Composition Gradient and Suppression of Mixing	196
	<i>c</i> Additional Types of Instabilities	198
	Problems	199
	References and Supplemental Reading	199
Chapter 8		
	Stellar Pulsation and Oscillation	201
8.1	Linear Adiabatic Radial Oscillations	202
	<i>a</i> Stellar Oscillations and the Variational Virial theorem	203

<i>b</i>	<i>Effect of Magnetic Fields and Rotation on Radial Oscillations</i>	205
<i>c</i>	<i>Stability and the Variational Virial Theorem</i>	206
<i>d</i>	<i>Linear Adiabatic Wave Equation</i>	207
8.2	Linear Nonadiabatic Radial Oscillations	208
<i>a</i>	<i>Adiabatic Exponents</i>	209
<i>b</i>	<i>Nonadiabatic Effects and Pulsational Stability</i>	209
<i>c</i>	<i>Constructing Pulsational Models</i>	211
<i>d</i>	<i>Pulsational Behavior of Stars</i>	212
8.3	Nonradial Oscillations	214
<i>a</i>	<i>Nature and Form of Oscillations</i>	214
<i>b</i>	<i>Homogeneous Model and Classification of Modes</i>	216
<i>c</i>	<i>Toroidal Oscillations</i>	219
<i>d</i>	<i>Nonradial Oscillations and Stellar Structure</i>	220
	Problems	221
	References and Supplemental Reading	221
	Epilogue to Part I: Stellar Interiors	224
	Part II Stellar Atmospheres	225
	Chapter 9	
	The Flow of Radiation Through the Atmosphere	227
9.1	Basic Assumptions for the Stellar Atmosphere	228
<i>a</i>	<i>Breakdown of Strict Thermodynamic Equilibrium</i>	228
<i>b</i>	<i>Assumption of Local Thermodynamic Equilibrium</i>	229
<i>c</i>	<i>Continuum and Spectral Lines</i>	230
<i>d</i>	<i>Additional Assumptions of Normal Stellar Atmospheres</i>	231
9.2	Equation of Radiative Transfer	233
<i>a</i>	<i>Specific Intensity and Its Relation to the Density of Photons in Phase Space</i>	233
<i>b</i>	<i>General Equation of Radiative Transfer</i>	235
<i>c</i>	<i>"Creation" Rate and the Source Function</i>	236

<i>d</i>	<i>Physical Meaning of the Source Function</i>	240
<i>e</i>	<i>Special Forms of the Redistribution Function</i>	241
9.3	Moments of the Radiation Field	243
<i>a</i>	<i>Mean Intensity</i>	244
<i>b</i>	<i>Flux</i>	244
<i>c</i>	<i>Radiation Pressure</i>	245
9.4	Moments of the Equation of Radiative Transfer	247
<i>a</i>	<i>Radiative Equilibrium and Zeroth Moment of the Equation of Radiative Transfer</i>	248
<i>b</i>	<i>First Moment of the Equation of Radiative Transfer and the Diffusion Approximation</i>	248
<i>c</i>	<i>Eddington Approximation</i>	249
Problems		251
Supplemental Reading		252
Chapter 10		
Solution of the Equation of Radiative Transfer		253
10.1	Classical Solution to the Equation of Radiative Transfer and Integral Equations for the Source Function	254
<i>a</i>	<i>Classical Solution of the Equation of Transfer for the Plane-Parallel Atmosphere</i>	254
<i>b</i>	<i>Schwarzschild-Milne Integral Equations</i>	257
<i>c</i>	<i>Limb-darkening in a Stellar Atmosphere</i>	260
10.2	Gray Atmosphere	263
<i>a</i>	<i>Solution of Schwarzschild-Milne Equations for the Gray Atmosphere</i>	265
<i>b</i>	<i>Solutions for the Gray Atmosphere Utilizing the Eddington Approximation</i>	266
<i>c</i>	<i>Solution by Discrete Ordinates: Wick-Chandrasekhar Method</i>	268
10.3	Nongray Radiative Transfer	274
<i>a</i>	<i>Solutions of the Nongray Integral Equation for the Source Function</i>	275
<i>b</i>	<i>Differential Equation Approach: The Feautrier Method</i>	276
10.4	Radiative Transport in a Spherical Atmosphere	279

<i>a</i>	<i>Equation of Radiative Transport in Spherical Coordinates</i>	280
<i>b</i>	<i>An Approach to Solution of the Spherical Radiative Transfer Problem</i>	283
Problems		287
References and Supplemental Reading		289
Chapter 11		
Environment of the Radiation Field		291
11.1	Statistics of the Gas and the Equation of State	292
<i>a</i>	<i>Boltzmann Excitation Formula</i>	292
<i>b</i>	<i>Saha Ionization Equilibrium Equation</i>	293
11.2	Continuous Opacity	296
<i>a</i>	<i>Hydrogenlike Opacity</i>	296
<i>b</i>	<i>Neutral Helium</i>	297
<i>c</i>	<i>Quasi-atomic and Molecular States</i>	297
<i>d</i>	<i>Important Sources of Continuous Opacity for Main Sequence Stars</i>	299
11.3	Einstein Coefficients and Stimulated Emission	300
<i>a</i>	<i>Relations among Einstein Coefficients</i>	301
<i>b</i>	<i>Correction of the Mass Absorption Coefficient for Stimulated Emission</i>	302
11.4	Definitions and Origins of Mean Opacities	303
<i>a</i>	<i>Flux-Weighted (Chandrasekhar) Mean Opacity</i>	304
<i>b</i>	<i>Rosseland Mean Opacity</i>	304
<i>c</i>	<i>Planck Mean Opacity</i>	306
11.5	Hydrostatic Equilibrium and the Stellar Atmosphere	307
Problems		308
References		309
Chapter 12		
The Construction of a Model Stellar Atmosphere		310
12.1	Statement of the Basic Problem	310
12.2	Structure of the Atmosphere, Given the Radiation Field	312
<i>a</i>	<i>Choice of the Independent Variable of Atmospheric Depth</i>	314

<i>b</i>	<i>Assumption of Temperature Dependence with Depth</i>	314
<i>c</i>	<i>Solution of the Equation of Hydrostatic Equilibrium</i>	314
12.3	Calculation of the Radiation Field of the Atmosphere	316
12.4	Correction of the Temperature Distribution and Radiative Equilibrium	318
<i>a</i>	<i>Lambda Iteration Scheme</i>	318
<i>b</i>	<i>Avrett-Krook Temperature Correction Scheme</i>	319
12.5	Recapitulation	325
	Problems	326
	References and Supplemental Reading	328
Chapter 13		
	Formation of Spectral Lines	330
13.1	Terms and Definitions Relating to Spectral Lines	331
<i>a</i>	<i>Residual Intensity, Residual Flux, and Equivalent Width</i>	331
<i>b</i>	<i>Selective (True) Absorption and Resonance Scattering</i>	333
<i>c</i>	<i>Equation of Radiative Transfer for Spectral Line Radiation</i>	335
13.2	Transfer of Line Radiation through the Atmosphere	336
<i>a</i>	<i>Schuster-Schwarzschild Model Atmosphere for Scattering Lines</i>	336
<i>b</i>	<i>Milne-Eddington Model Atmosphere for the Formation of Spectral Lines</i>	339
	Problems	346
	Supplemental Reading	347
Chapter 14		
	Shape of Spectral Lines	348
14.1	Relation between the Einstein, Mass Absorption, and Atomic Absorption Coefficients	349
14.2	Natural or Radiation Broadening	350
<i>a</i>	<i>Classical Radiation Damping</i>	351

	<i>b</i>	<i>Quantum Mechanical Description of Radiation Damping</i>	354
	<i>c</i>	<i>Ladenburg <i>f</i>-value</i>	355
14.3		Doppler Broadening of Spectral Lines	357
	<i>a</i>	<i>Microscopic Doppler Broadening</i>	358
	<i>b</i>	<i>Macroscopic Doppler Broadening</i>	364
14.4		Collisional Broadening	369
	<i>a</i>	<i>Impact Phase-Shift Theory</i>	370
	<i>b</i>	<i>Static (Statistical) Broadening Theory</i>	378
14.5		Curve of Growth of the Equivalent Width	385
	<i>a</i>	<i>Schuster-Schwarzschild Curve of Growth</i>	385
	<i>b</i>	<i>More Advanced Models for the Curve of Growth</i>	389
	<i>c</i>	<i>Uses of the Curve of Growth</i>	390
		Problems	392
		References and Supplemental Reading	395
Chapter 15			
		Breakdown of Local Thermodynamic Equilibrium	398
15.1		Phenomena Which Produce Departures from Local Thermodynamic Equilibrium	400
	<i>a</i>	<i>Principle of Detailed Balancing</i>	400
	<i>b</i>	<i>Interlocking</i>	401
	<i>c</i>	<i>Collisional versus Photoionization</i>	402
15.2		Rate Equations for Statistical Equilibrium	403
	<i>a</i>	<i>Two-Level Atom</i>	403
	<i>b</i>	<i>Two-Level Atom plus Continuum</i>	407
	<i>c</i>	<i>Multilevel Atom</i>	409
	<i>d</i>	<i>Thermalization Length</i>	410
15.3		Non-LTE Transfer of Radiation and the Redistribution Function	411
	<i>a</i>	<i>Complete Redistribution</i>	412
	<i>b</i>	<i>Hummer Redistribution Functions</i>	413
15.4		Line Blanketing and Its Inclusion in the construction of Model Stellar Atmospheres and Its Inclusion in the Construction of Model Stellar Atmospheres	425
	<i>a</i>	<i>Opacity Sampling</i>	426

<i>b</i>	<i>Opacity Distribution Functions</i>	427
Problems		429
References and Supplemental Reading		430
Chapter 16		
Beyond the Normal Stellar Atmosphere		432
16.1 Illuminated Stellar Atmospheres		434
<i>a</i>	<i>Effects of Incident Radiation on the Atmospheric Structure</i>	434
<i>b</i>	<i>Effects of Incident Radiation on the Stellar Spectra</i>	439
16.2 Transfer of Polarized Radiation		440
<i>a</i>	<i>Representation of a Beam of Polarized Light and the Stokes Parameters</i>	440
<i>b</i>	<i>Equations of Transfer for the Stokes</i>	445
<i>c</i>	<i>Solution of the Equations of Radiative Transfer for Polarized Light.</i>	454
<i>d</i>	<i>Approximate Formulas for the Degree of Emergent Polarization</i>	457
<i>e</i>	<i>Implications of the Transfer of Polarization for Stellar Atmospheres</i>	465
16.3 Extended Atmospheres and the Formation of Stellar Winds		469
<i>a</i>	<i>Interaction of the Radiation Field with the Stellar Wind</i>	470
<i>b</i>	<i>Flow of Radiation and the Stellar Wind</i>	474
Problems		477
References and Supplemental Reading		478
Epilog		480
Index		483
Errata to the W. H. Freeman edition.		495

Preface

To the (2003) WEB Edition

One may justifiably wonder why anyone would take the time to put a decade-old book on astrophysics on the WEB. Several events of the past few months have led me to believe that may well be some who wish to learn about the basics of stellar structure. Since the fundamentals of stellar astrophysics have changed little in the past decade and as this book has been out of print for nearly that long, I felt that some may still find it useful for learning the basics. The task was somewhat facilitated by my discovery of some old machine-readable disks that contained a version of the book including some of the corrections to the published version. With considerable help from Charles Knox, I was able to retrieve the information from the out-dated format and transfer the text to a contemporary word processor. However, the equations were lost in the process so that their inclusion in this edition had to take another form. This was accomplished by scanning the originals from the book and correcting those with errors in a variety of ways. This accounts for the fonts of the equations being somewhat at variance with that of the text. However, I believe that difference does not detract significantly from the understandability of the material. The most common form of correction was to simply re-set them with an equation editor embedded in the WORD processor. Equations look somewhat different from the others. However, the ability to correct errors that arose in the published edition seemed to outweigh any visual inconvenience.

The reader will notice that all the recommended reading is to books published prior to 1987. Some of this is a result of a predilection of mine to cite initial references, but most of it is a result of my failure to update the references to contemporary times. There have been a number of books and many articles during the past decade or so which would greatly enlighten the reader, but to include them would be a major part of a new book and lies beyond the scope of this effort.

While I have been able to correct the errors resulting from the first production of the book, I am sure new ones have materialized during its regeneration. Since special character and all the Greek alphabet letters did not convert correctly during the recovery it is likely that some have escaped my attempts to replace them. For this and any other errors that may have occurred I apologize in advance. In addition, I have simply copied the index for the W. H. Freeman edition so that the page numbers may not correspond to the values presented here. However, the pagination at the beginning and end of each chapter does correspond to the W. H. Freeman edition so that the error within any chapter is likely to be less than a page or so. This was felt to be sufficiently close so that much of the value of an index would be preserved. Finally, I have included errata to the W. H. Freeman edition as the final part of the book. It was initially prepared in 1991, but the publisher refused to permit it to accompany the first printing. However, I have

always felt the value of any text book was materially enhanced by knowing the errors incurred during its preparation. While it is not considered to be complete, I feel that most of the substantive errors are covered. They, and others, have been corrected in the WEB edition.

I have resisted the temptation to update the material since that would have been a monumental task approaching the original generation of the book itself with little increase in the reader's depth of understanding. In the original version of this text I included only that astrophysics that one could be reasonably confident was correct and would pass the test of time. Thus there were several subject sketchily addressed due to lack of knowledge. Sadly few of the "skeletons" that reside in the "closet" of stellar astrophysics have been properly buried in the past decade. Stellar evolution beyond the helium-flash in low mass stars still is a bit murky. While the evolution of massive stars toward their final demise is clearer than a decade ago, models of the final collapse to a Type II supernova remain unsatisfactory. The role of rotation in the evolution of stars onto the Main Sequence, while clearly important also seems poorly understood. However, I am confident that application of the fundamental physics of stellar astrophysics along with the explosive expansion of computing power will lead to the solutions of these problems in the present century.

While the copyright for ISBN# 7176-1993-2) was returned to me by W.H. Freeman in May of 1997 when the book went out of print, I have no real desire financially profit from its further distribution. As others can readily attest, one doesn't get rich writing graduate texts in astronomy. I will find payment enough should others find it helpful in understanding stars. However, should anyone find its contents helpful and wish to cite them, I would appreciate that proper attribution be made.

Finally, in addition to being indebted to Charlie Knox for his help in rescuing the text from an old computer-readable form, I am beholden to John Martin for helping me get these sections ready for the Internet.

George W. Collins, II
Case Western Reserve University
January 2003

Preface

To the (1989) W.H. Freeman Edition

Since I began studying the subject some 30 years ago, its development has continued at a slow steady pace. There have been few of the breakthroughs of leaps forward that characterize the early development of a discipline. Perhaps that is because the foundations of the understanding of stars were provided by the generations that preceded mine. Names like Eddington, Milne, Schuster, Schwarzschild, Cowling, Chandrasekhar, and many others echo down through the history of this subject as the definers and elucidators of stellar structure. The outline of the theory of the structure and evolution of the stars clearly has belonged to the first half of the twentieth century. In the second half of this century, we have seen that outline filled in so that there are very few aspects of either a star's structure or life history for which our understanding is incomplete. Certainly the advent of pulsars, black holes and the other unusual objects that are often called stars has necessitated broadening the scope of the theory of stellar astrophysics. Then there are areas concerning both the birth and death of stars that largely elude our understanding. But the overall picture of the structure and evolution of most stars now seem, in the main, to be well understood.

When I say that "the overall picture of the structure and evolution of most stars now seem, in the main, to be well understood," I do not imply that there is not much to be learned. Nothing should humble a theorist more than supernova 1987A, whose progenitor was a blue supergiant, when conventional wisdom said it should be a red supergiant. Theorists instantly explained such a result with the benefit of perfect hindsight, but the event should give us pause for thought. It was indeed a massive star that exploded, and contemporary models firmly rooted in the physics described in this text and elsewhere describe the event qualitatively quite well. Even with such an unexpected event the basic picture has been confirmed, but as time passes, the picture will become clearer. It is even likely that the outliers of the picture defined in the twentieth century may be resolved in a unanticipated manner in the twenty first. But the fundamentals of that picture are unlikely to change.

I suspect that there are few astronomers alive who would not be astounded if we found that stars do not form from the interstellar medium, burn hydrogen as main sequence stars for 90 percent of their life and undergo complex, but understandable changes during the last moments of their life. It is in this sense that the foundations of stellar astrophysics are understood. I am convinced that there will continually be surprises as we probe more carefully into the role of rotation, magnetic fields, and companion-induced distortion on the structure and evolution of stars. But the understanding of these issues will be built on the foundation of spherical stars that

I have attempted to present in this book, and it is this foundation that must be understood before one can move on to the more complicated problems.

The general speculation and excitement that encompassed the growing theory of stellar structure 50 years ago has moved on to the poorly understood realm of the galaxies and cosmology. The theoretical foundations of galactic structure seem to be in a state akin to that of stellar structure in the early part of this century, while recent developments in cosmology may actually have elevated that discipline to the status of a science. The pressure exerted by the burgeoning information from these areas on graduate curricula has provided a substantial squeeze on the more traditional aspects of an astronomer's education.

This is as it should be. If a discipline does not develop and expand, it will stagnate. Change is the hallmark of any vital intellectual enterprise. Few graduate programs in the United States now offer courses in celestial mechanics. Yet, half a century ago, no one would have been called an astronomer who could not determine planetary positions from the orbital elements or determine those elements from several independent observations. However, we all know where to look for that information if we ever actually have to perform such a task. Such is the evolution of that subject matter we call astronomy. It is a time-dependent thing, for one individual can only hold so much information in mind at one time. Thus a course of study in stellar astrophysics that used to cover 2 years is now condensed into 1 year or less and this pressure can only increase. I have always felt that in addition to discovering "new" things about the universe, it is important to "sift and winnow" the old in order to save that which will be important for the understanding of the new. This is a responsibility that all academicians have, and it must be assumed if the next generation is to have the limited room of their minds filled with the essentials of the old that is required so that they may continue the development of the new. Such is the basic motivation for this book.

Over the years, a number of books have been written about various aspects of stellar astrophysics, and many have deservedly become classics. It is not my intention to compete with these classics; indeed, the reader will find them referenced often, and it is my sincere hope that the reader will take the time to read and learn from them. A major purpose of this effort is to make, in some cases, that reading a little easier. Thus the primary aim of this book differs from others used as graduate texts in astronomy. Traditionally, they have taken a discipline as far as it could be developed at the time and in some cases beyond. That is not my intent. Instead, I present the basic material required to advance to the understanding of contemporary research in a wide variety of areas related to the study of stars. For example, it would be fruitless to attempt to grapple with contemporary work in the theory of non-radial oscillations without understanding the basis for pulsation theory such as is given in Chapter 8.

As stellar astrophysics has developed, attention has increasingly become focused on the details and refinements that make the current models of stars so quantitatively accurate. While this accuracy is important for the advancement of the subject, it can form a barrier to the understanding of its foundations. Thus, I have left many of these details to others in the hopes that the student interested in advancing the understanding of stellar astrophysics will search them out. Some will observe that I have not sifted and winnowed enough and that too many of the blind alleys and unproductive directions of development have been included. This may be so, for it is difficult to shrug off those formalisms with which one has struggled and found rewarding in youth. I leave further sifting to the next generation. Suffice it to say that I have included in this book what I feel is either necessary or at least enjoyable for the understanding of stars.

This book is aimed at first year graduate students or the very advanced undergraduates. I assume throughout that the readers have considerable factual knowledge of stars and astronomy. Readers should be acquainted with the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram and know something of the ranges of the parameters that define stars. The student who wants to make a contribution to astronomy, must understand how this knowledge about stars was gained from observation. Only then can the accuracy of that knowledge be assessed, and without such an assessment, deception of self and perhaps others is guaranteed.

Given such a background, I shall attempt to describe the development of a nearly axiomatic theory of stellar structure that is consistent with what we know about stars. This theory is incomplete for there is much that we still do not know about stars. The terminal phases of stellar evolution are treated schematically. The structure of distorted stars is barely touched, and the theory of the evolution of close binaries is ignored entirely. The decision to downplay or ignore this material does not arise from a disdain of these subjects on my part, but is simply a question of time and space. It is my sincere hope that the student upon finishing this book will seize some of these areas for future research and being interested and prepared, pick up the gauntlet and advance the subject. At the end of the sections on stellar interiors and atmospheres I have included several topics that represent logical extensions of the traditional theory of stellar structure. These should not be considered as either complete or exhaustive, but merely illustrative for the selection of the subjects was dictated by personal interest as opposed to fundamental importance. In a curriculum pressed for time, some can be safely ignored.

The relatively complete foundation of the theory of stellar structure has one minor psychological drawback that results from a contemporary penchant in some of the physical sciences. The rapid development of astronomy into new areas of research during the past two decades has tended to produce research papers that emphasize only the most contemporary work. Thus papers and books that reference older work are likely to be regarded as out of date. In this instance, this view is exacerbated by my

tendency to give original references wherever possible. Thus the reader may find that many of the references date to the middle part of this century or earlier. Hopefully the reader will forgive this tendency of mine and remember that this book is about the fundamentals of stellar astrophysics and not intended to bring the reader to the current state of research effort in stellar astronomy. To answer the need of the student who wishes to go beyond an introduction, I have included some additional references at the end of some chapters that represent reviews of a few more contemporary concerns of stellar structure.

Some will inevitably feel that more problems in stellar structure and atmospheres should be discussed. I can only counter by saying that it is easy to add, but difficult to take away. For any topic that you might add, find one that you would remove without endangering the basic understanding of the student. Regrettably, only a finite amount of time and space can be devoted to the teaching of this subject, devoted to the teaching of this subject, and the hard choices are not what to include, but what to leave out. With the exception of a few topics that I included purely for my own enjoyment, I regard the vast majority of this book as fundamental to the understanding of stars.

To those that would say, "Yes models are well understood, but models are not stars", I would shout "Amen!" I have spent most of my professional career modeling the outer layers of distorted stars, and I am acutely aware of the limitations of such models. Nevertheless, modeling as a model for understanding nature is becoming a completely acceptable method. For stellar astrophysics, it has been an extremely productive approach. When combined critically with observation, modeling can provide an excellent avenue toward the understanding of how things work. Indeed, if pressed in a thoughtful way, most would find that virtually any comparison of theory with observation or experiment involves the modeling of some aspect of the physical world. Thus while one must be ever mindful of the distinction between models of the real world and the world itself, one cannot use that distinction as an excuse for failing to try to describe the world.

For the student who feels that it is unnecessary to understand all this theory simply to observe the stars, ask yourself how you will decide what you will observe. If that does not appear to be a significant question, then consider another line of endeavor. For those who suffer through this material on their way to what they perceive as the more challenging and interesting subjects of galaxies and cosmology, consider the following argument.

While the fascinating areas of galactic and extragalactic astronomy deservedly fill larger and larger parts of the graduate curricula, let us not forget that galaxies are made of stars and ultimately our conception of the whole can be no better than our understanding of the parts. In addition, the physical principles that govern stars are at work throughout the universe. Stars are the basic building blocks from which our larger world is made and remain the fundamental probes with which we test our

theories of that world. The understanding of stars and the physical principles that rule their existence is, and I believe will remain, central to our understanding of the universe.

Do not take this argument as an apology for the study of stars. The opposite is true for I feel some of the most difficult problems in astronomy involve the detailed understanding of stars. Consider the following example. Thomas Gold described the basic picture and arguments for believing that pulsars are spinning magnetic neutron stars nearly 25 years ago. In the main, he was correct although many details of his picture have been changed. However, we do not yet have a fully self-consistent picture of pulsars in spite of the efforts of a substantial number of astronomers. Such a self-consistent and complete picture is very difficult to formulate. Without it, our understanding of pulsars will not be complete, but that is not to say that the basic picture of a pulsar as a spinning magnetic neutron star is wrong. Rather it is simply incomplete.

A considerable number of the problems of stellar astrophysics are of this type. They are not to be undertaken by the timid for they are demanding in the extreme. Nor should these problems be regarded as merely filing in details. This is the excuse of the dilettante who would be well advised to follow Isaac Newton's admonition:

“To explain all nature is too difficult a task for any man
or even for any one age. 'Tis much better to do a little
with certainty, and leave the rest for others that come after you
than to explain all things” _

I believe that many astronomers will choose, as I have chosen, to spend the majority of their professional careers involved in the study of stars themselves. It is my hope that they will recognize the fundamental nature of the material in this book and use it to attack the harder problems of today and the future.

I cannot conclude this preface without some acknowledgment of those who made this effort possible. Anyone who sets out to codify some body of knowledge which he or she has spent the greater part of life acquiring, cannot expect to achieve any measure of success unless he or she is surrounded by an understanding family and colleagues. Particular thanks are extended to the students of stellar interiors and atmospheres at The Ohio State University who used this book in its earliest form and found and eliminated numerous errors. Many more were revealed by the core of reviewers who scrutinized the text. My thanks to Richard Boyd, Joe Cassinelli, George Field, Arne Henden, John Mathis, Peter Mészáros, Dimitri Mihalas, Donald Osterbrock, Michael Sitko, and Sydney Wolf for being members of that core. Their comments and constructive criticism were most helpful in shaping this book. The remaining shortcomings, mistakes, and blunders are mine and mine alone.

Certainly little of the knowledge contained here originated from my own efforts. I have merely chewed and digested material fed to me by mentors dedicated to the search and preservation of that body of knowledge known as astronomy. To name them all would require considerable space, possibly be construed as self-serving, and perhaps be embarrassing to some of them. Nevertheless, they have my undying admiration and gratitude for passing on some of what they know and sharing with me that most precious of commodities; their knowledge, wisdom, and mostly their time.

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