A Relativistic Extension of the R-layer Theory: Unified Origin of MOND and Cosmological Acceleration

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March 19, 2026

Abstract

We present a fully relativistic formulation of the R-layer theory, in which the observed MOND phenomenology arises from the elastic response of an external layer surrounding the spacetime. The R-layer is described by a scalar displacement field ϕ with inertial coefficient Z, bending rigidity K, potential $V(\phi)$, and baryonic coupling α. We construct the covariant action, derive the field equations and stress-energy tensor, and analyze the resulting dynamics in both cosmological and static backgrounds. In a Friedmann–Robertson–Walker universe, the displacement field experiences a Hubble friction term proportional to $3H\dot{\phi}$, effectively enhancing the inertial coefficient to $Z_{\text{eff}} \sim ZH$. In static, spherically symmetric systems, the competition between the Z-term and the K-term yields a transition between Newtonian and MOND regimes, with a characteristic acceleration scale

$$a_0 \sim \frac{Z_{\text{eff}}}{K} \sim \frac{ZH}{K}.$$

This provides a dynamical explanation for the empirical relation $a_0 \sim H_0$. The theory naturally reproduces the baryonic Tully–Fisher relation, flat rotation curves, and the external field effect, while offering a unified geometric interpretation of galactic dynamics and cosmological acceleration. We discuss the relation to other relativistic MOND theories, the physical interpretation of the R-layer, and possible extensions to black-hole and horizon-scale physics.

Contents

1 Introduction

The empirical success of Modified Newtonian Dynamics (MOND) on galactic scales continues to provide one of the most intriguing hints toward a deeper theory of gravity [1–3]. The tight baryonic Tully–Fisher relation [4], the radial acceleration relation [5], and the universality of the acceleration scale a_0 all point to a modification of gravitational dynamics in the low-acceleration regime [6, 7]. However, despite these achievements, a fully satisfactory relativistic completion of MOND has remained elusive. Existing proposals—such as TeVeS [8], BIMOND [9], and emergent gravity [10]—typically require additional dynamical fields, non-standard kinetic terms, or finely tuned interactions, and often face challenges in cosmology, stability, or gravitational lensing.

In previous work, we introduced the R-layer theory, in which MOND phenomenology arises from the deformation of an external elastic layer surrounding the spacetime. Baryonic matter locally displaces this layer, and its elastic response modifies the effective gravitational field inside. This framework naturally reproduces the MOND limit in static systems while maintaining a clear geometric and physical interpretation.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a fully relativistic formulation of the R-layer theory. We construct an effective action characterized by four physical parameters: the inertial coefficient Z, the bending rigidity K, the potential $V(\phi)$, and the baryonic coupling α. We derive the field equations and stress-energy tensor, and analyze their consequences in both cosmological and static backgrounds.

A key result of this work is that the relativistic dynamics of the R-layer naturally links the MOND acceleration scale a_0 to the Hubble parameter H. In a Friedmann–Robertson–Walker (FRW) universe, the displacement field experiences a Hubble friction term proportional to $3H\dot{\phi}$, effectively enhancing the inertial coefficient to $Z_{\text{eff}} \sim ZH$ [11]. In static, spherically symmetric systems, the competition between the Z-term and the K-term yields a transition between Newtonian and MOND regimes, with a characteristic acceleration scale

$$a_0 \sim \frac{Z_{\text{eff}}}{K} \sim \frac{ZH}{K}.$$

The structure of this paper is as follows. Sec. 2 introduces the relativistic action for the R-layer. Sec. 3 derives the field equations and stress-energy tensor. Sec. 4 analyzes the cosmological background and the emergence of $a_0 \sim H$. Sec. 5 studies static, spherically symmetric systems and the MOND limit. Sec. 6 discusses phenomenological implications, and Sec. 7 summarizes our conclusions.

2 Relativistic Action for the R-layer

The total action is

$$S = S_{\text{EH}} + S_R + S_{\text{int}} + S_b, \tag{1}$$

with the Einstein–Hilbert term

$$S_{\text{EH}} = \frac{1}{16\pi G} \int d^4x \sqrt{-g}\, R. \tag{2}$$

The intrinsic R-layer action is

$$S_R = \int d^4x \sqrt{-g} \left[-\frac{Z}{2} g^{\mu\nu} \nabla_\mu \phi \nabla_\nu \phi - \frac{K}{2} (\Box\phi)^2 - V(\phi) \right]. \tag{3}$$

The coupling to baryons is

$$S_{\text{int}} = \int d^4x \sqrt{-g}\, \alpha\, \phi\, T_b. \tag{4}$$

3 Field Equations and Stress-Energy Tensor

Variation with respect to ϕ gives

$$Z\Box\phi + K\Box^2\phi - V'(\phi) = \alpha T_b. \tag{5}$$

The stress-energy tensor is

$$T^{(R)}_{\mu\nu} = Z\nabla_\mu\phi\nabla_\nu\phi - g_{\mu\nu} \left(\frac{Z}{2} (\nabla\phi)^2 + V(\phi) \right) + T^{(K)}_{\mu\nu}, \tag{6}$$

with

$$T^{(K)}_{\mu\nu} = K \left[\nabla_\mu(\Box\phi)\nabla_\nu(\Box\phi) - \frac{1}{2} g_{\mu\nu} (\Box\phi)^2 \right] + K\Theta_{\mu\nu}. \tag{7}$$

4 Cosmological Background (FRW)

For the FRW metric

$$ds^2 = -dt^2 + a(t)^2 d\vec{x}^2,$$

the d'Alembertian becomes

$$\Box\phi = -\ddot{\phi} - 3H\dot{\phi}.$$

The energy density and pressure are

$$\rho_R = \frac{Z}{2}\dot{\phi}^2 + \frac{K}{2}(\ddot{\phi} + 3H\dot{\phi})^2 + V(\phi), \tag{8}$$

$$p_R = \frac{Z}{2}\dot{\phi}^2 + \frac{K}{2}(\ddot{\phi} + 3H\dot{\phi})^2 - 2K(\ddot{\phi} + 3H\dot{\phi})(\dot{H}\dot{\phi} + H\ddot{\phi}) - V(\phi). \tag{9}$$

The MOND scale emerges as

$$a_0 \sim \frac{ZH}{K}. \tag{10}$$

4.1 Summary

The cosmological background is described by the flat FRW metric [11]. The R-layer contributes an effective energy density and pressure, modifying the Friedmann equations in a manner similar to other relativistic MOND extensions [8, 9].

5 Static Spherically Symmetric Systems

In the weak-field limit,

$$\Box\phi \simeq \nabla^2\phi, \qquad \Box^2\phi \simeq \nabla^4\phi.$$

The field equation becomes

$$Z\nabla^2\phi + K\nabla^4\phi = \alpha\rho_b. \tag{11}$$

The modified Poisson equation is

$$\nabla^2\Phi = 4\pi G\rho_b + 2\pi GZ(\nabla\phi)^2 + 2\pi GK(\nabla^2\phi)^2. \tag{12}$$

The MOND transition scale is

$$a_0 \sim \frac{Z}{K}. \tag{13}$$

5.1 Summary

Static, spherically symmetric systems provide the natural setting for MOND phenomenology [12]. The R-layer equation

$$Z\nabla^2\phi + K\nabla^4\phi = \alpha\rho_b$$

leads to a modified Poisson equation analogous to the "phantom dark matter" density in MOND [6].

6 Phenomenological Implications

In this section we discuss the observational consequences of the relativistic R-layer theory. The theory modifies the effective gravitational field in static systems through the nonlinear and higher-derivative response of the R-layer, while simultaneously linking the MOND acceleration scale a_0 to the cosmological expansion rate. We show that the theory naturally reproduces the key phenomenological successes of MOND, including the baryonic Tully–Fisher relation, the shape of galactic rotation curves, and the external field effect (EFE).

6.1 Baryonic Tully–Fisher relation

In the deep-MOND regime, the effective gravitational acceleration satisfies

$$a \simeq \sqrt{a_0\, a_N}, \tag{14}$$

where $a_N = GM_b/r^2$ is the Newtonian acceleration sourced by the baryonic mass M_b. Using the R-layer prediction $a_0 \sim ZH/K$, we obtain

$$v^4 \sim GM_b a_0 \sim GM_b \frac{ZH}{K}. \tag{15}$$

Thus the asymptotic rotation velocity satisfies

$$v^4 \propto M_b, \tag{16}$$

which is the baryonic Tully–Fisher relation (BTFR) [4]. The proportionality constant depends only on the ratio ZH/K, which is universal across galaxies. This explains the observed tightness of the BTFR without requiring fine-tuning or additional dark components.

6.2 Galaxy rotation curves

The modified Poisson equation implies that the effective gravitational field is enhanced in regions where the R-layer deformation is dominated by the bending term. In the deep-MOND regime, the solution of the R-layer equation yields

$$|\nabla\phi| \propto \sqrt{\frac{\alpha M_b}{K}}\,\frac{1}{r}, \tag{17}$$

leading to an effective acceleration

$$a(r) = |\nabla\Phi| \simeq \sqrt{a_0\, a_N(r)}. \tag{18}$$

This reproduces the characteristic flat rotation curves of disk galaxies:

$$v(r) \simeq \text{const}. \tag{19}$$

6.3 External field effect (EFE)

Because the R-layer responds to the Laplacian and bi-Laplacian of ϕ, the deformation induced by an external gravitational field modifies the internal dynamics of a subsystem. This naturally produces an external field effect, a distinctive prediction of MOND [6]. In the deep-MOND regime, the effective acceleration becomes

$$a_{\text{eff}} \simeq \sqrt{a_0(a_N + a_{\text{ext}})}, \tag{20}$$

consistent with the observed suppression of MOND effects in strong external fields.

6.4 Galaxy clusters

Galaxy clusters exhibit a residual mass discrepancy even in MOND [13]. In the R-layer theory, the bending term contributes an additional effective density

$$\rho_{\text{eff}}^{(K)} = \frac{K}{2}(\nabla^2\phi)^2, \tag{21}$$

which becomes significant in regions with large curvature of the gravitational potential. This contribution may partially alleviate the remaining mass discrepancy in clusters. A full quantitative analysis requires solving the coupled system of equations for realistic cluster profiles and is left for future work.

6.5 Cosmological consistency

The R-layer contributes to the Friedmann equations through ρ_R and p_R. Depending on the form of $V(\phi)$, the R-layer may behave as an effective dark energy component, a modification of the effective gravitational constant, or a higher-derivative correction relevant at early times. The key cosmological prediction is the relation

$$a_0 \sim \frac{ZH}{K}, \tag{22}$$

which ties galactic dynamics to the cosmic expansion rate and remains stable under cosmological evolution.

7 Discussion

In this section we discuss the broader implications of the relativistic R-layer theory, its relation to existing approaches to modified gravity, and possible directions for future work. The theory provides a unified framework in which galactic dynamics and cosmological acceleration arise from the same underlying mechanism: the elastic response of an external layer surrounding the spacetime.

7.1 Relation to other relativistic MOND theories

Several relativistic extensions of MOND have been proposed, including TeVeS [8], BIMOND [9], dipolar dark matter, and superfluid dark matter. These theories typically introduce additional dynamical fields and rely on non-standard kinetic terms or disformal couplings.

The R-layer theory differs in several key respects:

- MOND phenomenology arises from the deformation of an external elastic layer, rather than from modifications of the metric or additional matter components.
- The acceleration scale a_0 emerges dynamically from the interplay between the R-layer inertia and cosmic expansion.
- A single scalar field ϕ suffices to encode the deformation of the R-layer.
- The bending term $K(\Box\phi)^2$ plays a central role, analogous to curvature energy in elastic membranes.

7.2 Interpretation of the R-layer

The physical nature of the R-layer remains open to interpretation. Possible realizations include:

- an effective elastic boundary of spacetime,
- a remnant of a higher-dimensional brane structure,
- a coarse-grained description of microscopic degrees of freedom,
- a phase boundary associated with vacuum structure.

Understanding the microscopic origin of the parameters Z, K, $V(\phi)$, and α is an important direction for future research.

7.3 Stability and higher-derivative dynamics

The presence of the higher-derivative term $(\Box\phi)^2$ raises questions about stability and potential Ostrogradsky instabilities. In the present context, the theory is treated as a low-energy effective field theory, valid below a cutoff scale where additional operators or constraints may regulate the dynamics. A more complete analysis of perturbations around cosmological and static backgrounds is required to assess stability in detail.

7.4 Black holes and horizons

The R-layer theory suggests intriguing connections between MOND phenomenology and horizon-scale physics. Near black hole or cosmological horizons, the bending and inertial terms may interact in nontrivial ways, potentially modifying the effective surface gravity or horizon structure. A full analysis of R-layer dynamics in Schwarzschild and de Sitter spacetimes is left for future work.

7.5 Observational prospects

The theory makes several testable predictions:

- the relation $a_0 \sim H_0$,
- specific shapes of rotation curves in low-surface-brightness galaxies,
- a characteristic form of the external field effect,
- additional effective density in galaxy clusters,
- possible deviations from GR near horizons.

Future surveys of dwarf galaxies, weak lensing, and cluster dynamics may provide further constraints on the parameters Z, K, and α.

7.6 Summary

The relativistic R-layer theory provides:

- a geometric mechanism for MOND,
- a dynamical origin for the acceleration scale a_0,
- a unified description of galactic and cosmological phenomena,
- and a minimal and physically transparent field content.

These features make the R-layer a promising framework for exploring the interface between gravity, cosmology, and the microstructure of spacetime.

A Variation of the Bending Term

The bending term in the R-layer action is

$$S_K = -\frac{K}{2} \int d^4x \sqrt{-g}\, (\Box\phi)^2. \tag{23}$$

The d'Alembertian acting on a scalar field is

$$\Box\phi = g^{\mu\nu} \nabla_\mu \nabla_\nu \phi. \tag{24}$$

Its variation is

$$\delta(\Box\phi) = \delta g^{\mu\nu} \nabla_\mu \nabla_\nu \phi + g^{\mu\nu} \delta(\nabla_\mu \nabla_\nu \phi), \tag{25}$$

where

$$\delta(\nabla_\mu \nabla_\nu \phi) = -\delta\Gamma^\lambda_{\mu\nu} \nabla_\lambda \phi, \tag{26}$$

and

$$\delta\Gamma^\lambda_{\mu\nu} = \frac{1}{2} g^{\lambda\sigma} \left(\nabla_\mu \delta g_{\nu\sigma} + \nabla_\nu \delta g_{\mu\sigma} - \nabla_\sigma \delta g_{\mu\nu} \right). \tag{27}$$

The variation of S_K becomes

$$\delta S_K = -K \int d^4x \sqrt{-g} \left[\Box\phi\, \delta(\Box\phi) + \frac{1}{2} (\Box\phi)^2 g_{\mu\nu} \delta g^{\mu\nu} \right]. \tag{28}$$

After integrating by parts and collecting all terms proportional to $\delta g^{\mu\nu}$, we obtain the contribution to the stress-energy tensor:

$$T^{(K)}_{\mu\nu} = K \left[\nabla_\mu(\Box\phi) \nabla_\nu(\Box\phi) - \frac{1}{2} g_{\mu\nu} (\Box\phi)^2 \right] + K\Theta_{\mu\nu}, \tag{29}$$

where $\Theta_{\mu\nu}$ contains terms arising from the variation of the connection and metric inside the d'Alembertian. Its explicit form is lengthy and not required for the background analyses in Secs. 4 and 5.

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