

From Quarks to Hadrons: Simulation of the vacuum in a femto-box

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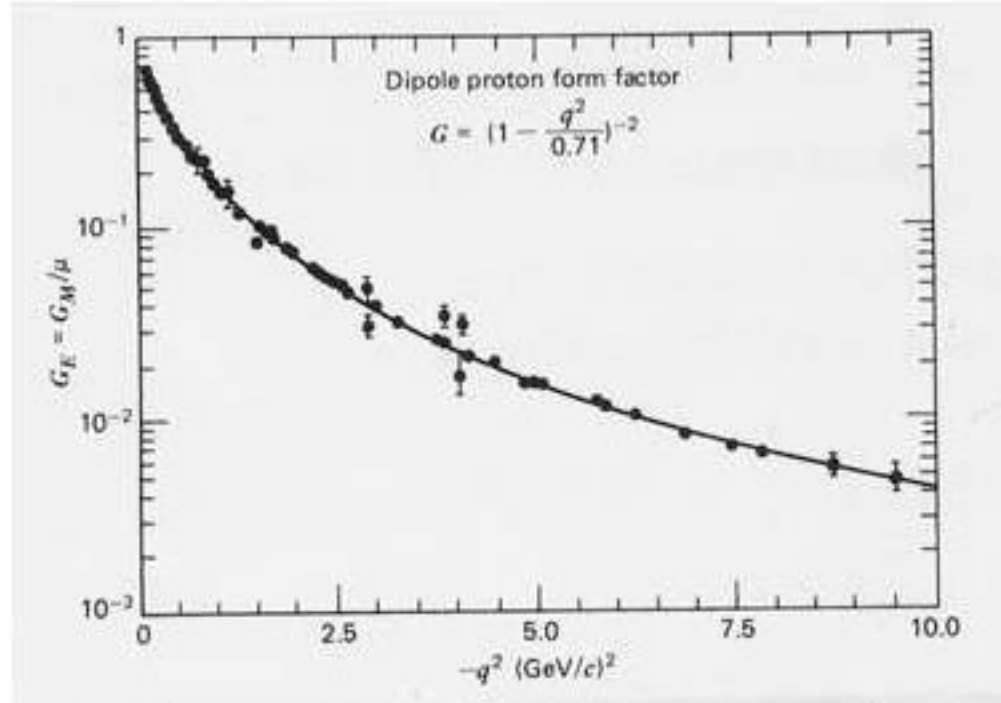
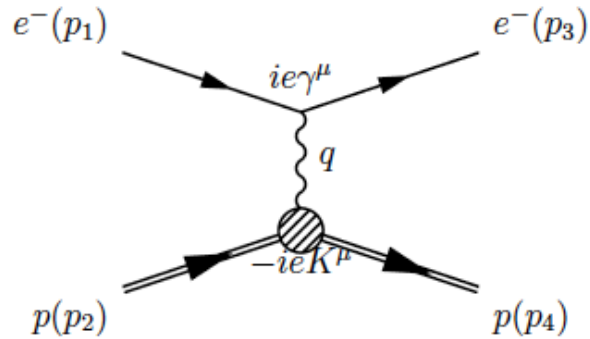
November 19, 2025



Historic overview

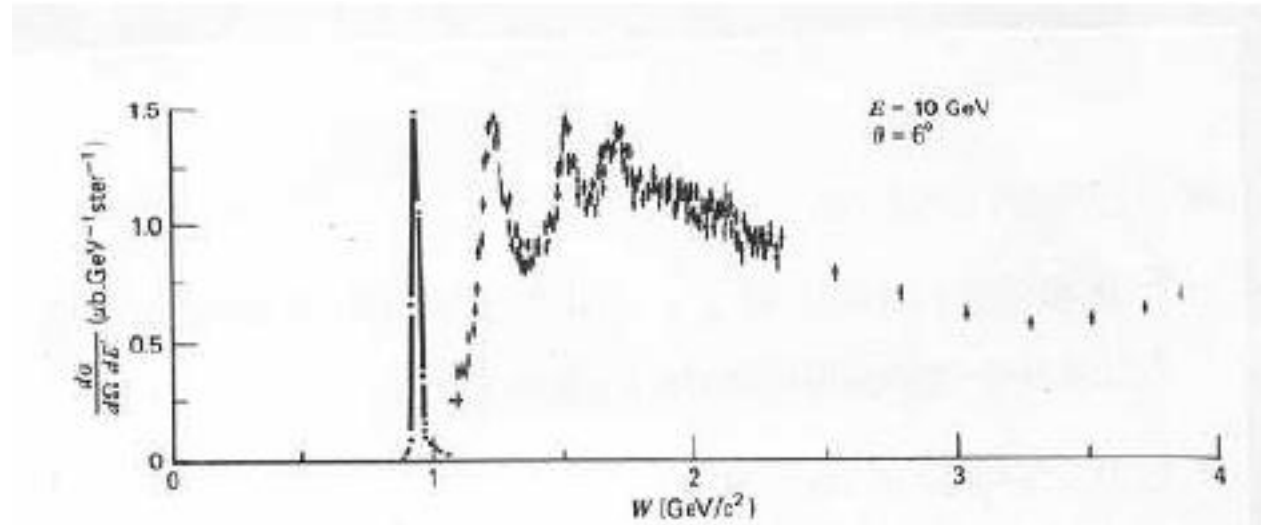
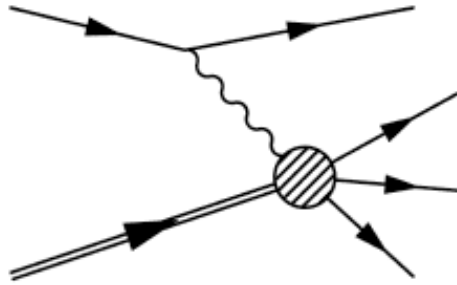


ep scattering = proton seems to have internal structure



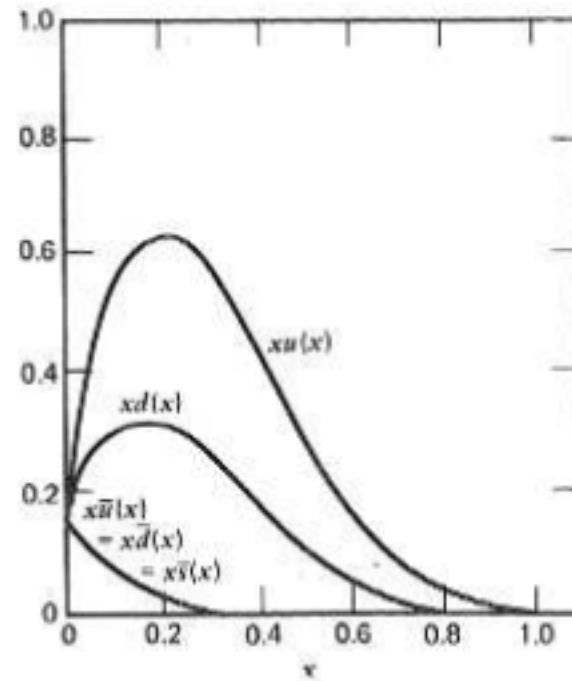
A proton extends as $\exp(-r/r_0)$; $r_0 \sim 1$ fm

Generates resonances at higher energies:



W : invariant mass of produced particles

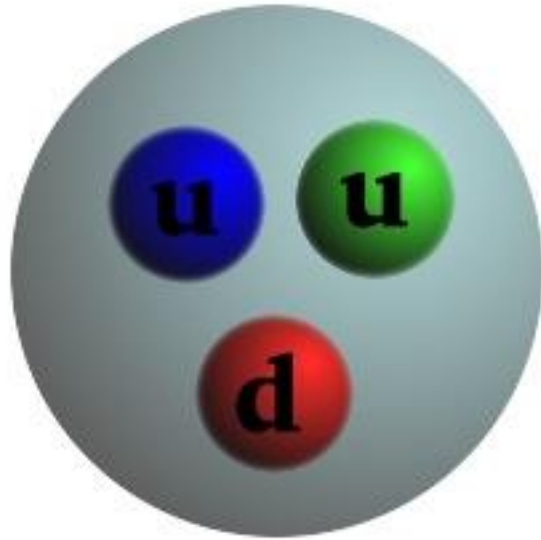
At higher energies, electron looks like hitting a free “parton” inside proton.



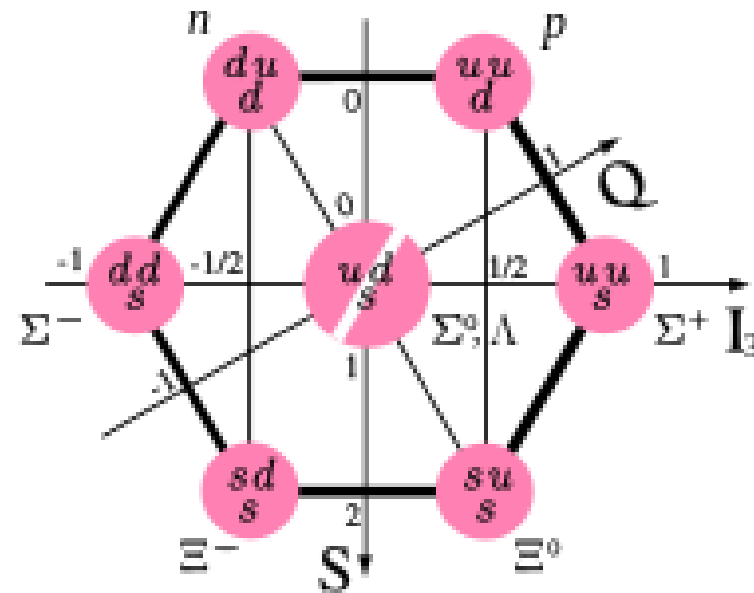
Each parton carries roughly 1/3 of proton's momentum.



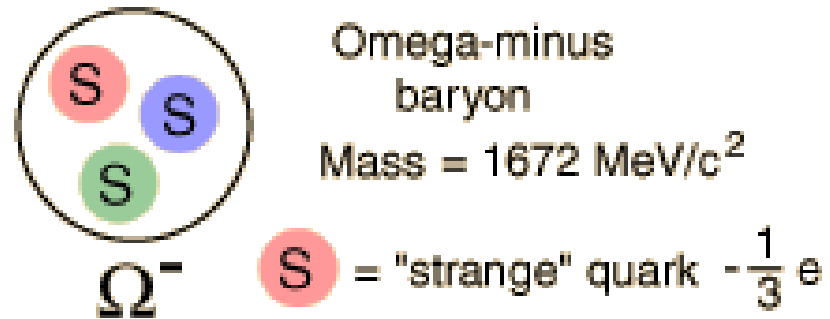
Three quarks: up, up, down



Can explain other baryons, as well.



Need to have three internal degrees of freedom
= color



Otherwise, forbidden by Pauli's exclusion principle.

Quarks

Requirements:

1. have fractional charge $+2/3 e$, $-1/3 e$
2. have internal degrees of freedom (=3)
3. may not appear as an isolated particle
4. (at high energy) behave as a free particle inside a proton

Model (or dynamics) to fulfill all of these → QCD



Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD)



Dirac equation

QED
(for electron)

$$\left(\gamma^\mu \left(i\hbar \partial_\mu - \frac{e}{c} A_\mu \right) - mc \right) \psi = 0$$

QCD
(for quark)

$$\left(\gamma^\mu \left(i\Box_\mu - gA_\mu \right) - mc \right) \psi = 0$$

3x3 matrix

three degrees of freedom



Maxwell's equation

QED
(for photon)

$$F_{\mu\nu} = \partial_\mu A_\nu - \partial_\nu A_\mu$$
$$\partial_\mu F^{\mu\nu} = j^\nu, \quad \varepsilon^{\mu\nu\rho\sigma} \partial_\mu F_{\nu\rho} = 0$$

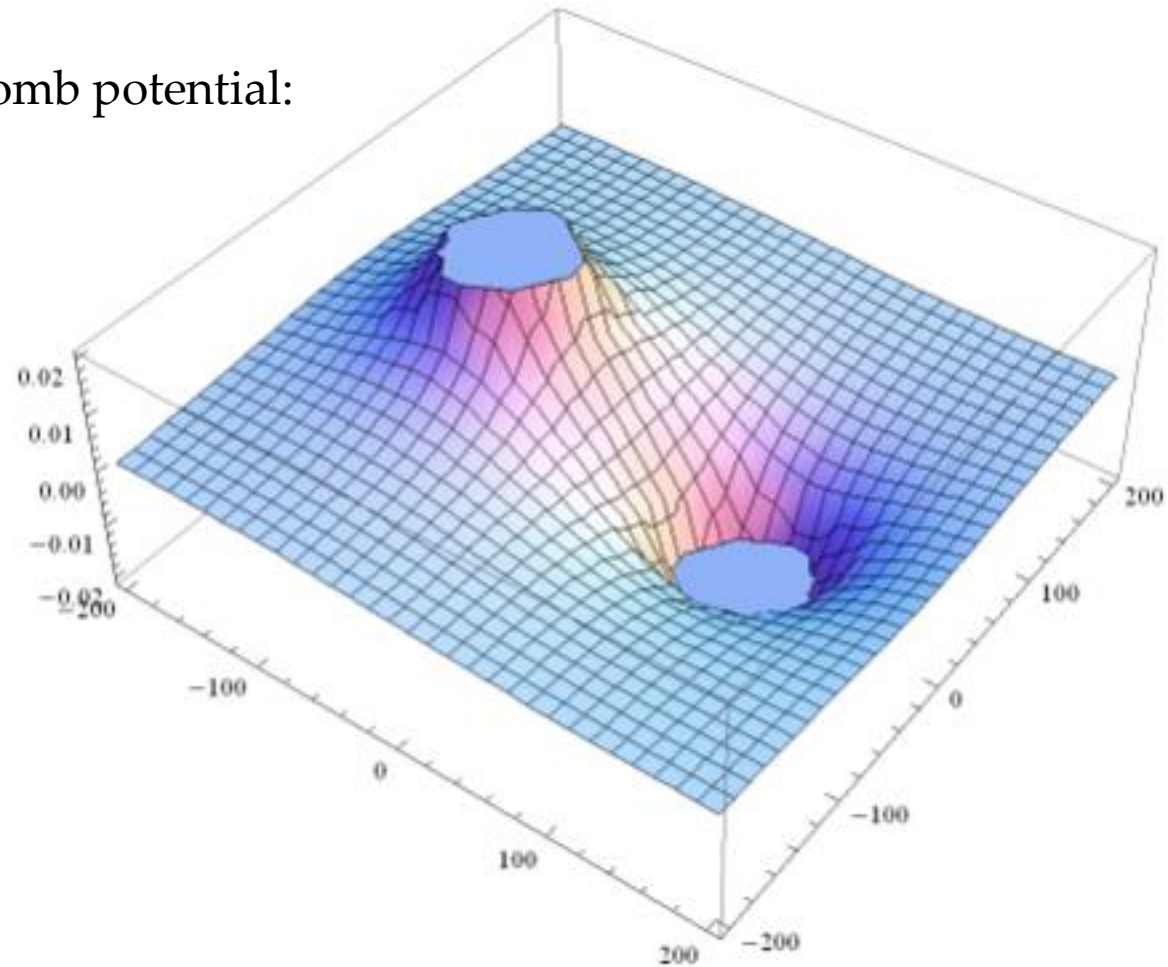
QCD
(for gluon)

$$F_{\mu\nu} = \partial_\mu A_\nu - \partial_\nu A_\mu + ig[A_\mu, A_\nu]$$
$$(\partial_\mu + igA_\mu)F^{\mu\nu} = j^\nu, \quad \varepsilon^{\mu\nu\rho\sigma} (\partial_\mu + igA_\mu)F_{\nu\rho} = 0$$

 gauge field itself plays the role of a source



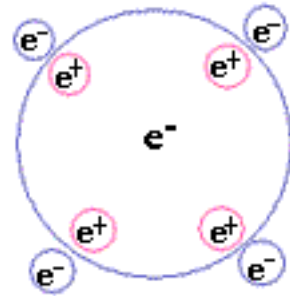
Coulomb potential:



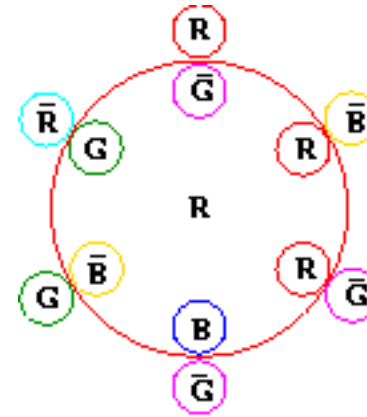
simply a sum of two sources; not the case for QCD!



Anti-screening



Vacuum polarization
weakens the EM charge
at long distances



Self-interaction enhances
the color charge



Okay, let's carry out!

- Sounds easy?
 - Super-multiple integral..., actually infinitely many!

$$Z = \int [d\phi] e^{iS}; \quad S = \int d^4x \mathcal{L}$$

- Possible when the integral is known = Gaussian

- Free field theory:

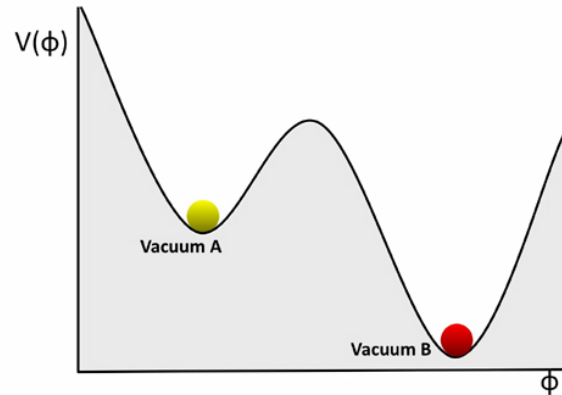
$$S \sim \phi^2$$

- Expansion around this simplest case = perturbation theory
- Good approximation if the reality is sufficiently “free”.



What is perturbation theory?

- Reduces to harmonic oscillator:
 - When the potential is complicated, try to expand around its bottom.



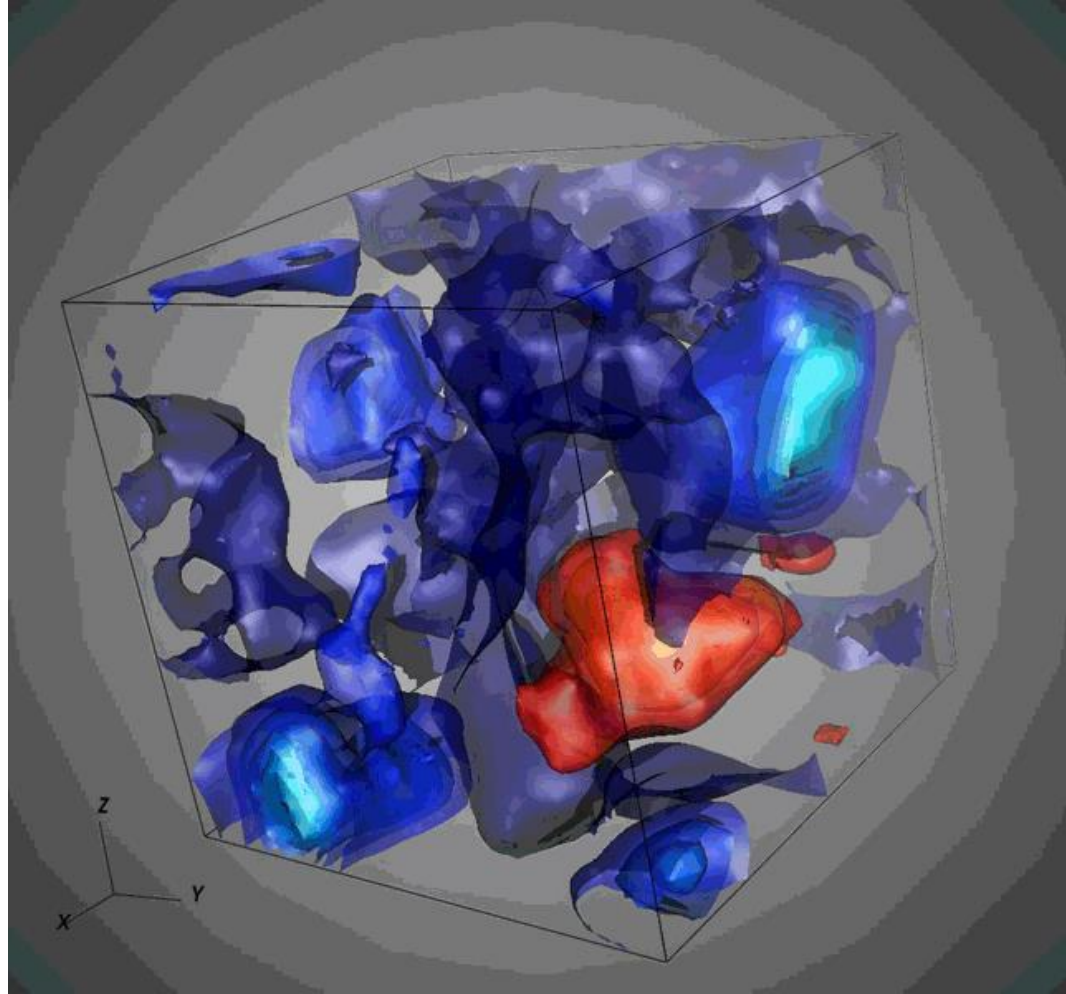
- Good approximation if the field actually fluctuates around there.
- If the fluctuation is bigger..., no way.



What is the *vacuum*?

- In QED,
 - $F_{\mu\nu}=0$ is the vacuum.
 - Photon is an excitation from there.
- In QCD,
 - More fluctuations. The vacuum is determined as the minimum of the “effective action”, which is the free energy in the language of statistical mechanics.
 - But, not completely random either.
 - Particles represent the excitations on this “vacuum”.





Correspondence

Statistical mechanics

- partition function; Hamiltonian

$$Z = \int [d\phi] e^{-H/T}; H \sim \int d^3x \mathcal{H}$$

Quantum field theory

- partition function; action

$$Z = \int [d\phi] e^{iS}; S = \int d^4x \mathcal{L}$$

- After the Wick rotation, it is made Euclidean

$$Z = \int [d\phi] e^{-S_E}; S_E = \int d^4x \mathcal{L}$$



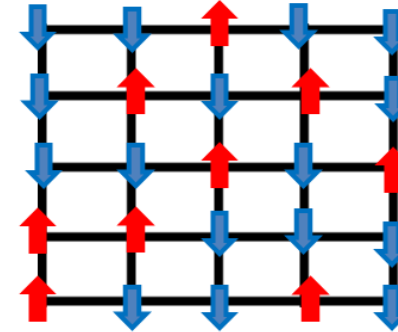
Monte Carlo simulation



Simple example

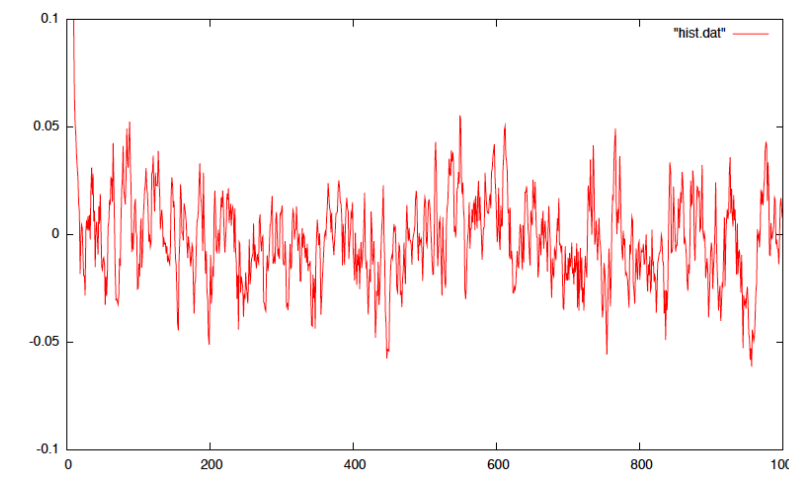
Ising model

$$Z = \sum_{\{s_i\}} \exp[-H\{s_i\}/T], \quad H\{s_i\} = -J \sum_{\{i,j\} \in n.n.} s_i s_j$$



How does the spontaneous magnetization emerge?

$$M = \frac{1}{L^2} \sum_i s_i$$



Monte Carlo method

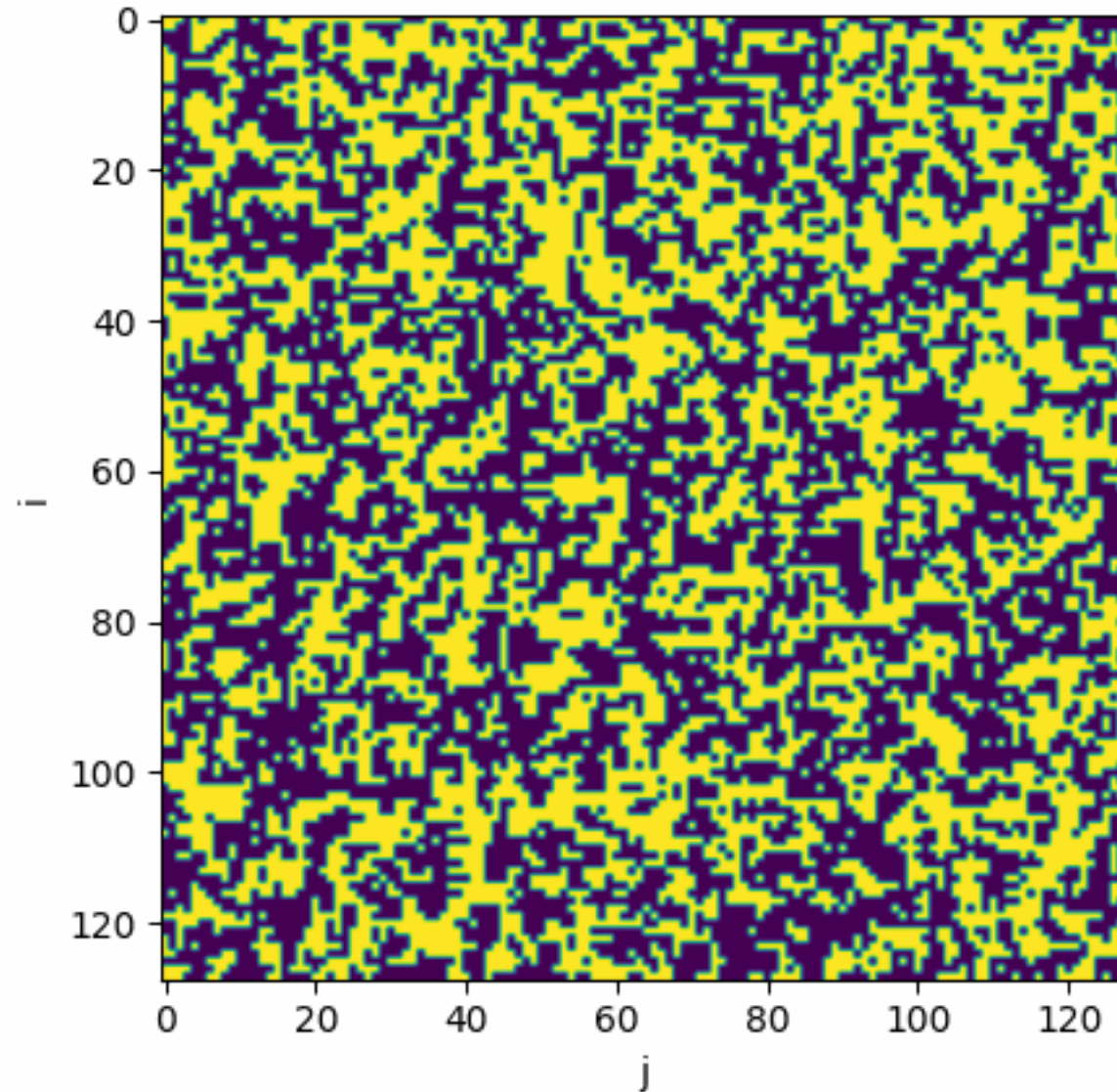
Basic idea:

$$Z = \sum_{\{s_i\}} \exp[-H\{s_i\}/T], \quad H\{s_i\} = -J \sum_{\{i,j\} \text{ n.n.}} s_i s_j$$

- The number of terms = $2^{(2L^2)}$. For $L=100$, it is $2^{20000} \sim 10^{2000}$. Impossible.
- Only some limited terms contribute to the sum:
 - $T = 0$: only those giving the minimum $H\{s_i\}$.
 - $T = \infty$: completely random.
- Pickup the relevant configurations only = MC



Ising Model with Temperature 2.00 and Field 0.00, starting with random spins



`ising_animate`



(intermediate) summary

- Quarks are inside nucleons; how do they look like?
- The theory is similar to QED (electromagnetism), but way more complicated.
- Tool to study = Monte Carlo simulation.



Lattice QCD



QCD calculation

Goes back to the Lagrangian and partition function

- SU(3) gauge theory
- plus, quarks (up, down, strange, ...)

$$S = \int d^4x \frac{1}{4} \text{Tr} F_{\mu\nu}^2 + \int_f \bar{\psi}_f (\not{D} + m_f) \psi_f,$$

$$F_{\mu\nu}^a = \partial_\mu A_\nu^a - \partial_\nu A_\mu^a + g f^{abc} A_\mu^b A_\nu^c$$

$$D_\mu = \partial_\mu - ig T^a A_\mu^a$$

$$Z = \int [dA_\mu] \int_f [d\psi][d\bar{\psi}] \exp(-S)$$

Non-Abelian nature



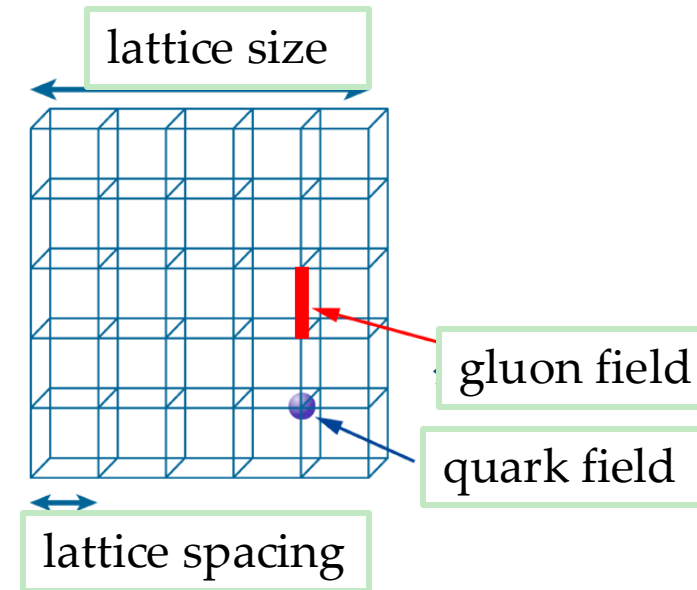
- Redefine on a 4D lattice



The lattice

4D Lattice

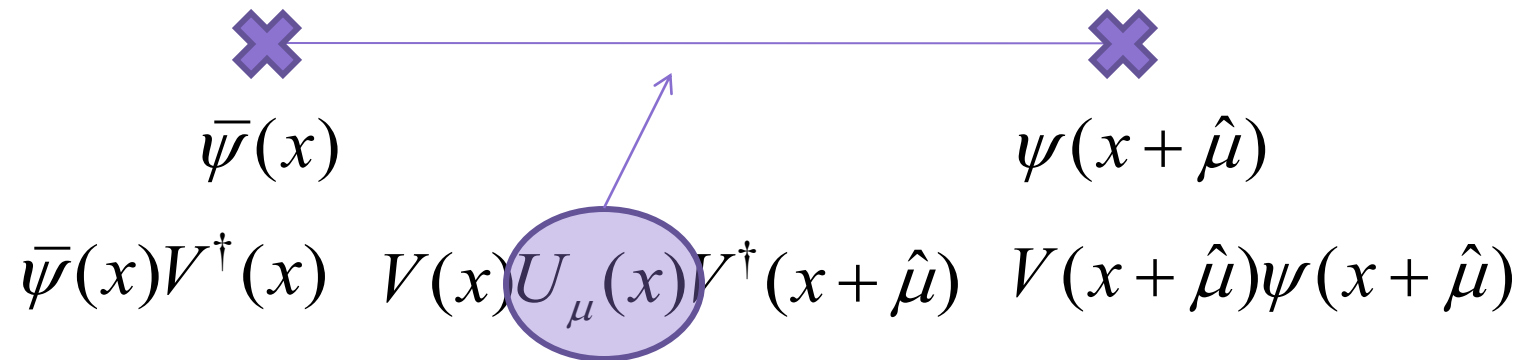
- of size $(L/a)^3 \times (T/a)$, typically $32^3 \times 64$ or $64^3 \times 128$.
- lattice spacing determined later with some input.



Gauge invariance

Gauge symmetry

- invariance under local SU(3) transformation
- guaranteed by introducing “link variables” (gauge field)



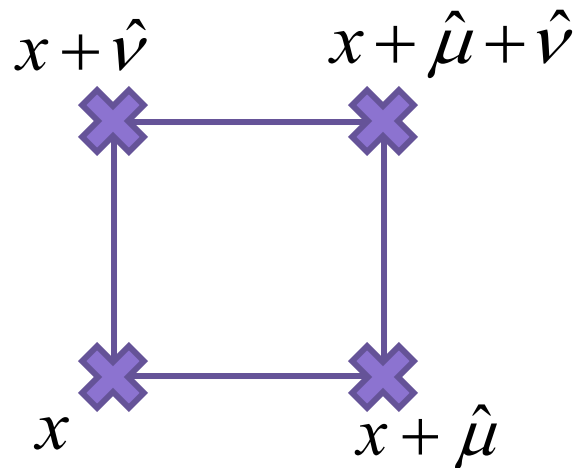
$$U_\mu(x) = \exp[igaA_\mu(x)] = 1 + igaA_\mu(x) + \dots$$

$$A_\mu(x) \rightarrow V(x) \left[A_\mu(x) + \frac{i}{g} \partial_\mu \right] V^\dagger(x)$$

Gauge field

- Built in the gauge link
 - SU(3) matrices
 - Gauge invariance guaranteed by connecting them.

$$U_{\mu}(x) = \exp[igaA_{\mu}(x)] = 1 + igaA_{\mu}(x) + \dots$$



$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Tr} \left[U_{\mu}(x) U_{\nu}(x + \hat{\mu}) U_{\mu}^{\dagger}(x + \hat{\nu}) U_{\nu}^{\dagger}(x) \right] \\ & \approx \text{Tr} \left[e^{igaA_{\mu}} e^{iga(A_{\nu} + a\partial_{\mu}A_{\nu})} e^{-iga(A_{\mu} + a\partial_{\nu}A_{\mu})} e^{-igaA_{\nu}} \right] \\ & \approx \text{Tr} \left[e^{iga^2(\partial_{\mu}A_{\nu} - \partial_{\nu}A_{\mu}) - g^2a^2[A_{\mu}, A_{\nu}]} \right] = \text{Tr} \left[e^{iga^2F_{\mu\nu}} \right] \\ & = \text{Tr} [1] - \frac{1}{2} g^2 a^4 \text{Tr} [F_{\mu\nu}^2] + \dots \end{aligned}$$

Gauge action

Should go back to the continuum, by taking $a \rightarrow 0$

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \frac{6}{g^2} \sum_x \sum_{\mu < \nu} \left[1 - \frac{1}{3} \text{Re Tr} \left[U_\mu(x) U_\nu(x + \hat{\mu}) U_\mu^\dagger(x + \hat{\nu}) U_\nu^\dagger(x) \right] \right] \\ &\rightarrow a^4 \sum_x \sum_{\mu < \nu} \text{Re Tr} \left[F_{\mu\nu}^2 \right] \\ &= \int d^4x \frac{1}{4} (F_{\mu\nu}^a)^2 \end{aligned}$$

- Coupling constant $\beta = 6/g^2$
 - Corresponds to $1/kT$ in the statistical model.



Partition function

- Integrate over SU(3) variables U, rather than A

$$\begin{aligned}
 Z &= \int [dU_\mu]_f [d\psi][d\bar{\psi}] \exp[-S_g - \int d^4x \bar{\psi}_f (D[U] + m_f) \psi_f] \\
 &= \int [dU_\mu]_f \det(D[U] + m_f) \exp[-S_g]
 \end{aligned}$$

- Fermion fields are anti-commuting, giving the determinant when integrated out

Apply the Monte Carlo method !?




Fermion determinant

- Too hard to evaluate
 - Determinant of a large matrix. Needs to obtain all the eigenvalues $\sim N^3$

$$\det(D[U] + m) = \prod_k (m + i\lambda_k[U])$$

- Rewrite in favor of bosons

$$\begin{aligned}
 Z &= \int [dU] \det(D[U] + m)^2 e^{-S_g} \\
 &= \int [dU][d\phi] e^{-S_g - \phi^\dagger (D[U] + m)^{-2} \phi} = \int [dU][d\phi] e^{-S_g - |(D[U] + m)^{-1} \phi|^2}
 \end{aligned}$$

non-local action


- Reduces to the problem of matrix inversion. Hard, but more tractable.



Matrix inversion

- Most time-consuming part in the LQCD calculations

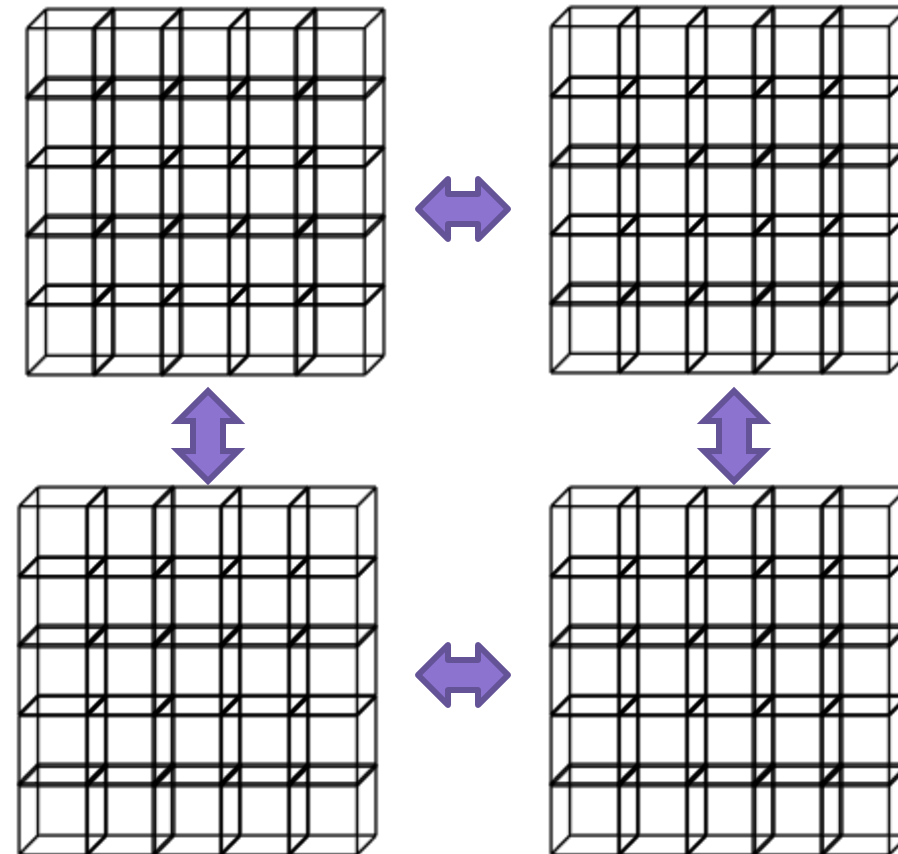
$$(D[U] + m)x = b$$

- $D[U]$: a 4D diffusion-like operator (typically nearest-neighbor)
- In some cases, use 5D implementation for theoretical virtue
- 4D lattices:
 - Typical size: $64^3 \times 128 \times 3(\text{color}) \times 4(\text{spinor}) = 400 \text{ M}$
 - 1 vector = 7 GB
- Iterative solver:
 - Conjugate Gradient (CG): typically 1,000-10,000 iterations per solve



Big computing

- Parallel computing
 - Conceptually straightforward. Each node is responsible for a small sub-lattice.
 - Not “easy” in practice.
- Code development
 - CPS, Chroma, MILC, ...
 - QMP, QDP, QUDA, ...
 - openQCD
 - Bridge++, Iroiro++
 - Grid/Hadrons



Supercomputer

- Fugaku computer (RIKEN Kobe)

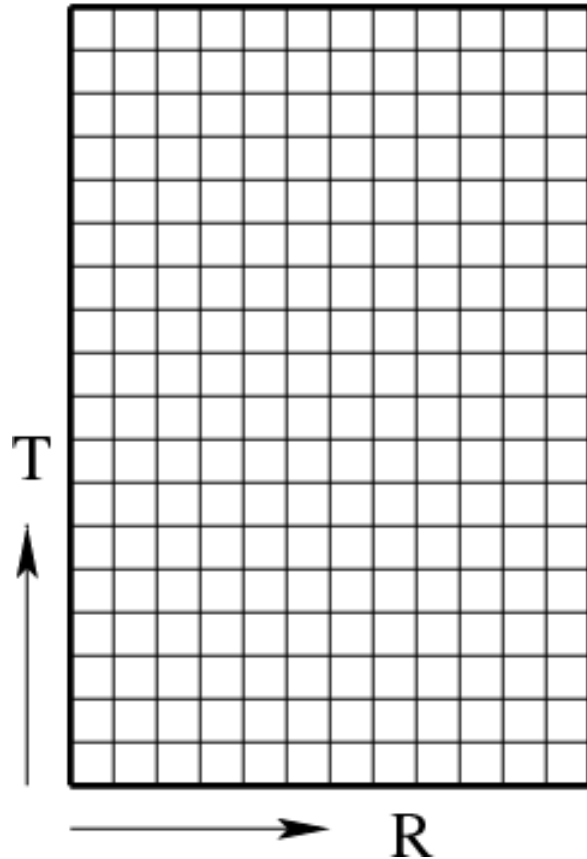


- General purpose (life, environment, material, etc). Running QCD, too
- Next generation machine (Fugaku-NEXT) under development.

Basic applications



QCD potential

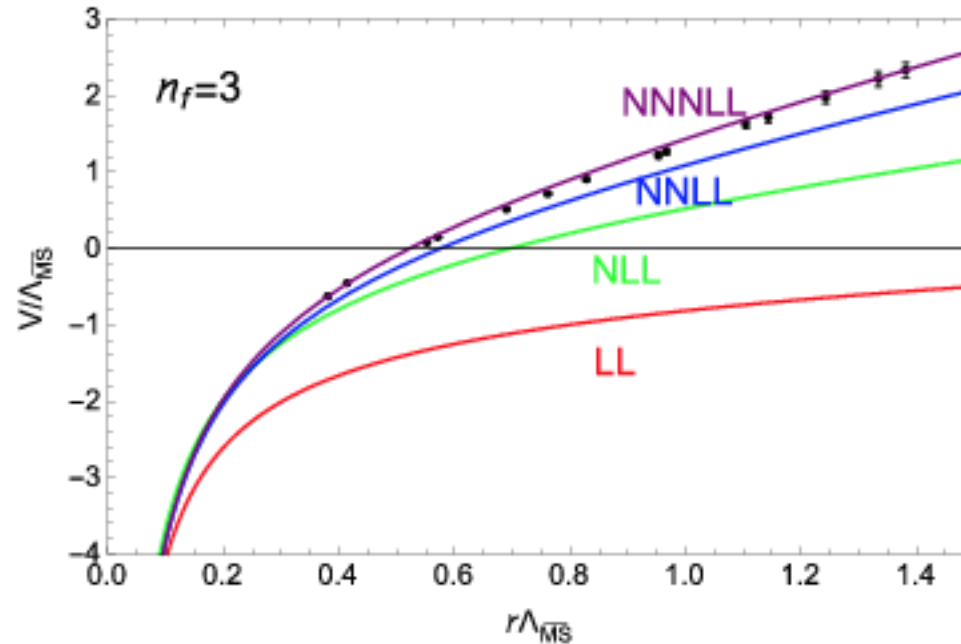


Energy of static QQbar system
gives the potential $V(R)$

$$\sim \exp[-V(R)T]$$

Example ($N_f=3$):

Linearly rising potential at long distances = confinement



$\sim \sigma r$

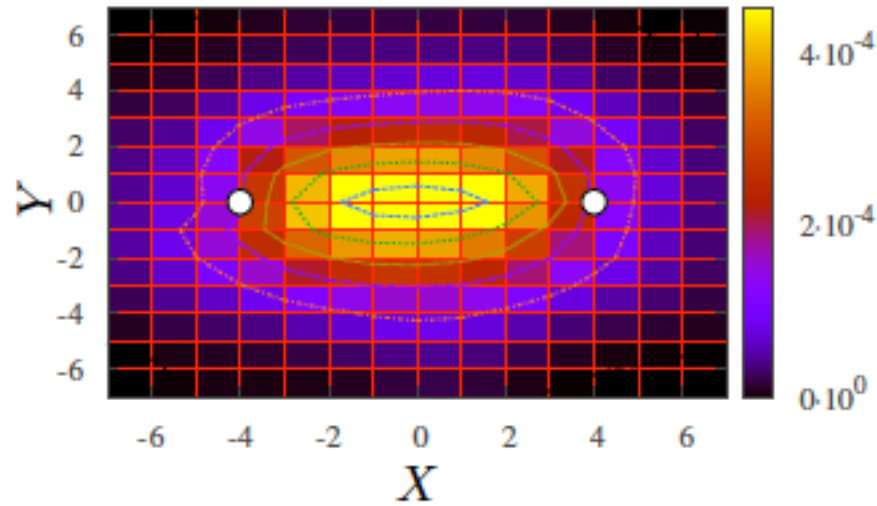
Perturbative at short distances:

$$\sim C_F \frac{\alpha_s}{r}$$

plot from Takaura et al. (2019)



Quark confinement



Flux-tube structure is generated between two color sources.

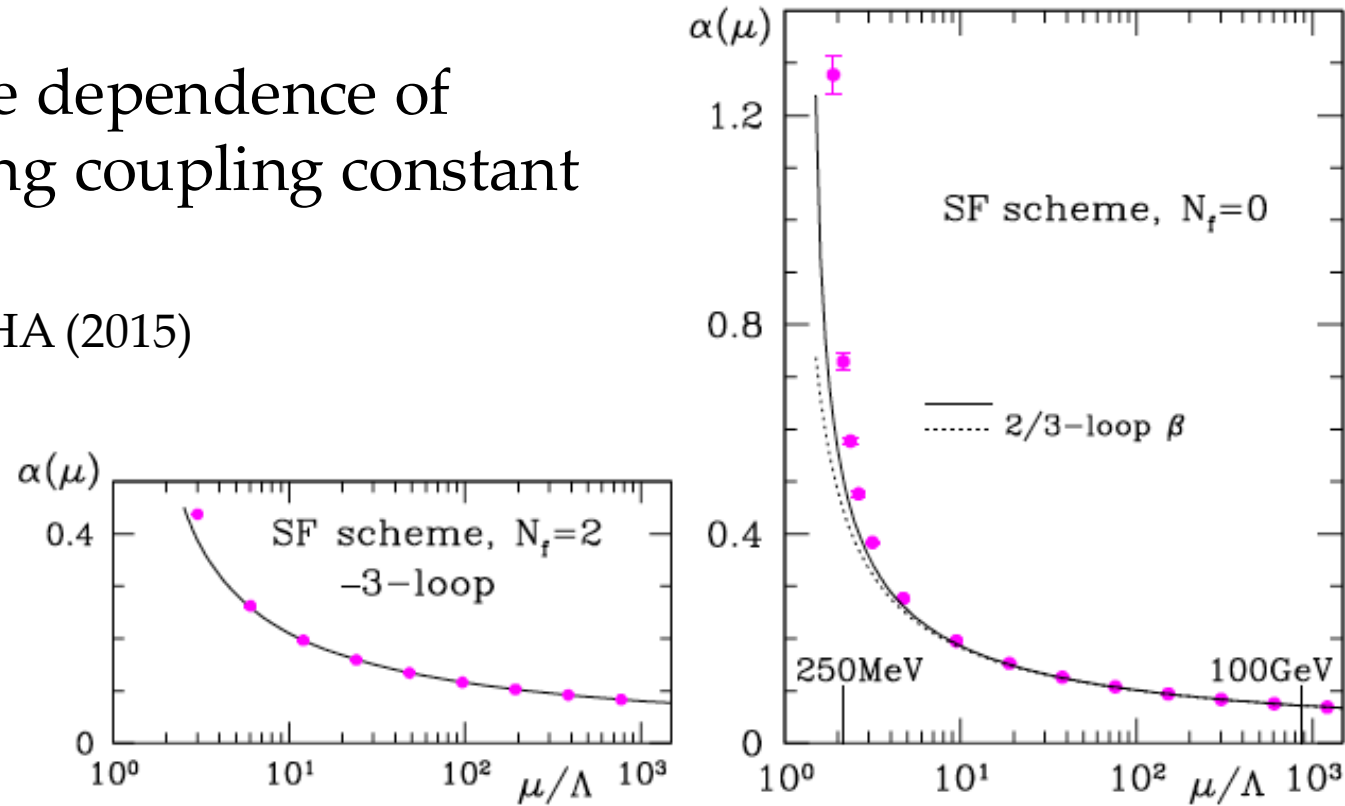
- Constant energy density of the flux-tube implies the linear potential.

Restoration of chiral symmetry inside the flux-tube, Iritani (2015)

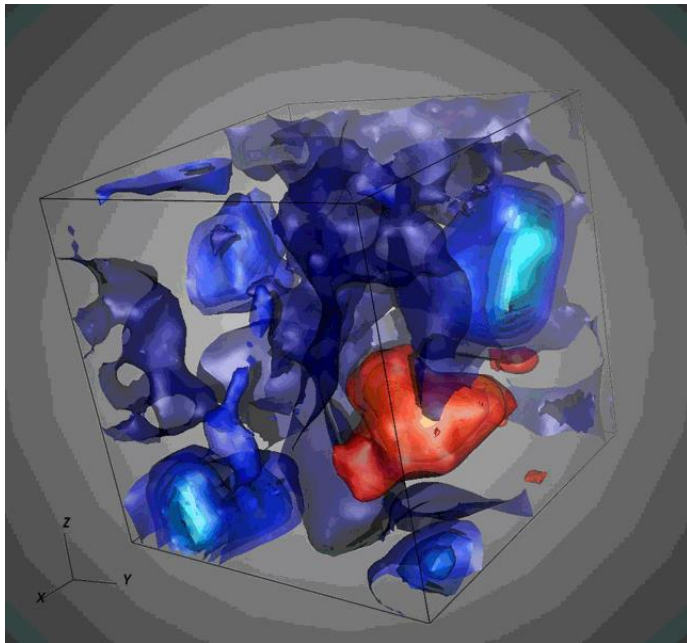
Asymptotic freedom

Scale dependence of
strong coupling constant

ALPHA (2015)



QCD vacuum?



Accumulation of near-zero eigenmodes of quarks leads to

- Chiral condensate

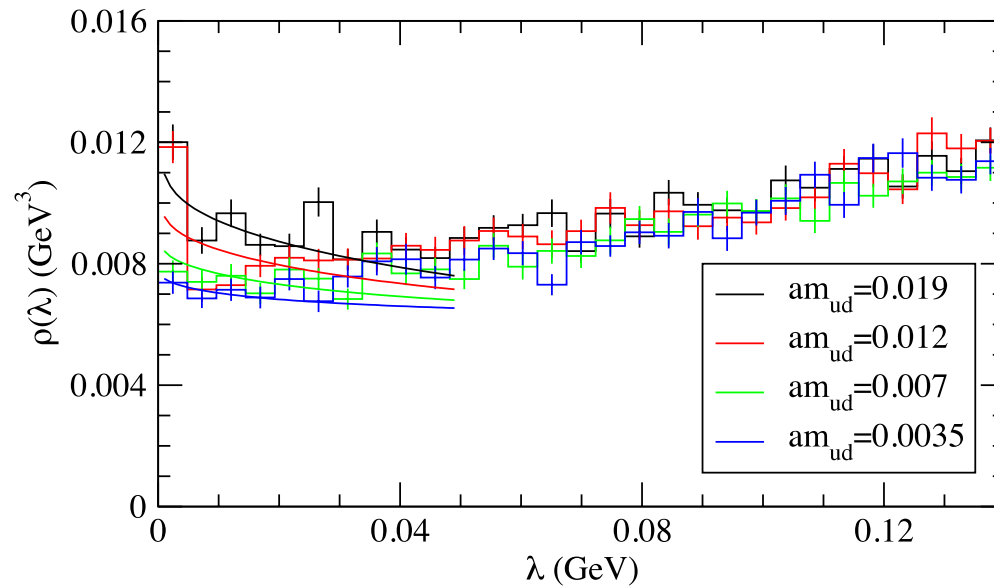
$$\langle \bar{q}q \rangle \neq 0$$

- Order parameter of the spontaneous chiral symmetry breaking.

Dirac spectrum

Eigenvalue distribution of \mathcal{D}

$$-\langle \bar{q}q \rangle = \int_0^\infty d\lambda \rho(\lambda) \frac{2m}{\lambda^2 + m^2} = \pi\rho(0)$$



$$\Sigma = (270.0 \pm 4.9 \text{ MeV})^3$$



INPUT to LQCD

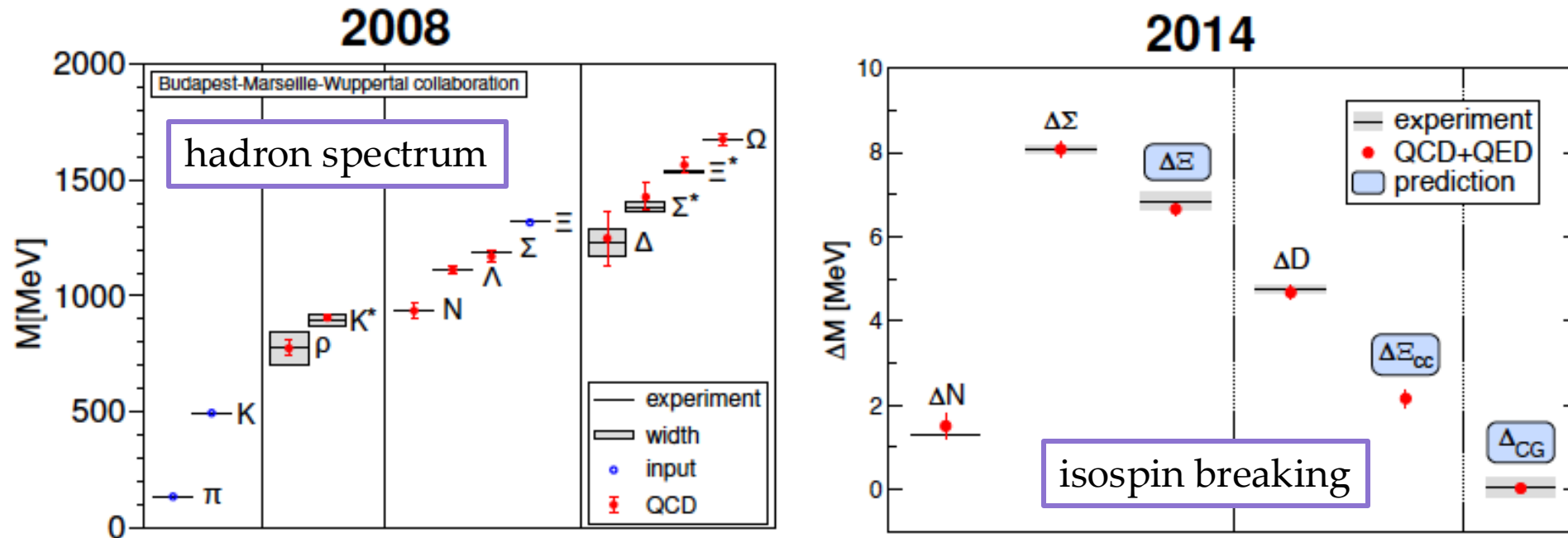
Parameters in QCD

- Strong coupling constant $\alpha_s(\mu)$
 - Fix the correspondence between the scale and coupling.
 - β is the relevant parameter to control the lattice spacing a .
- Light quark masses m_u, m_d, m_s
 - up and down are often assumed to be degenerate.
 - Tuned to reproduce π and K meson masses.
- Heavy quark masses m_c, m_b
 - Usually not in the sea, but changing.
 - Tuned to reproduce J/ψ and Υ masses.

All other quantities are OUTPUT.



Hadron spectrum

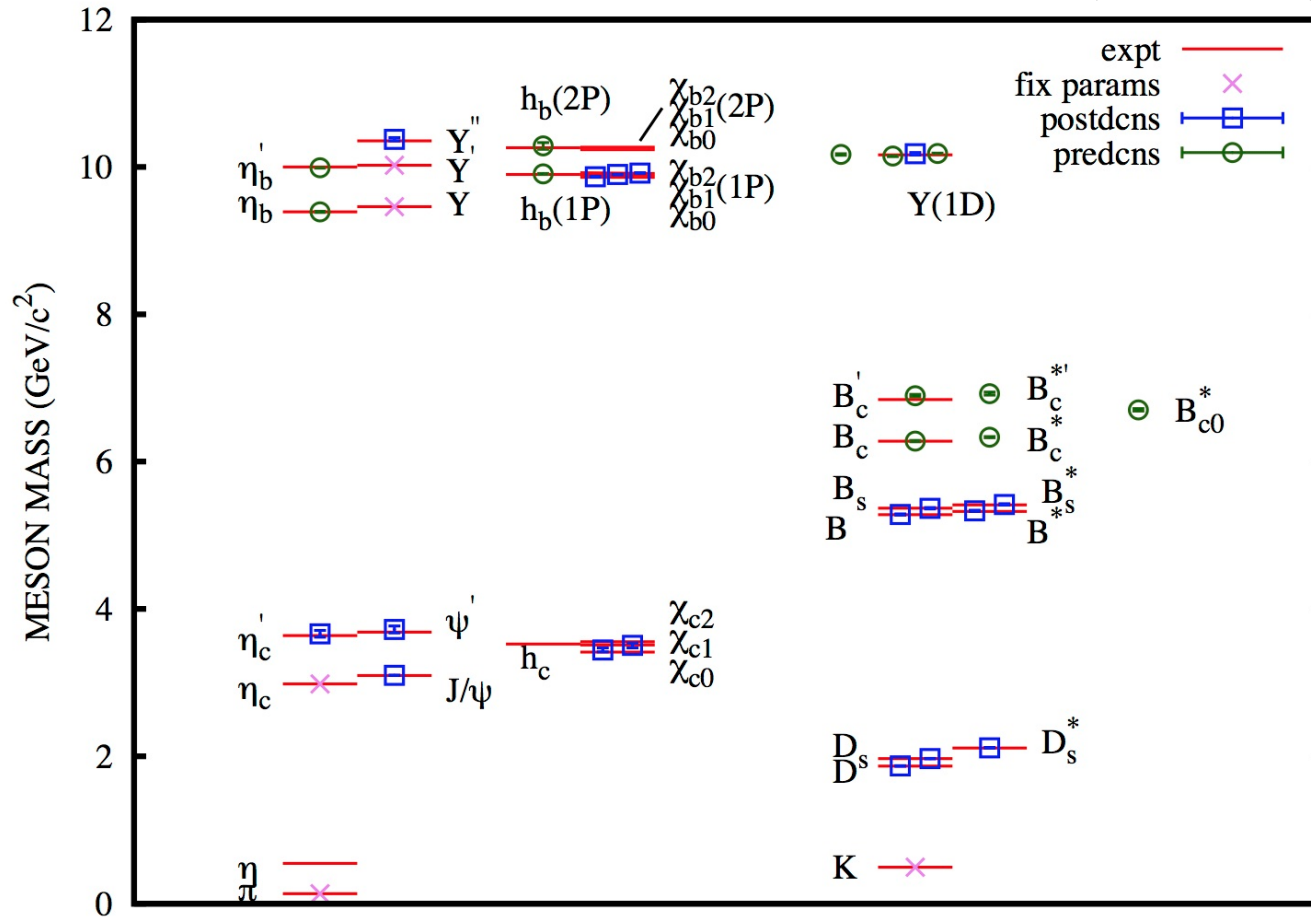


Budapest-Marseille-Wuppertal collaboration, Science (2008, 2015)



Hadron masses

HPQCD (2012-2015)



Crucial question:

Can we expect to get correct solutions from them??

= What are the potential errors?

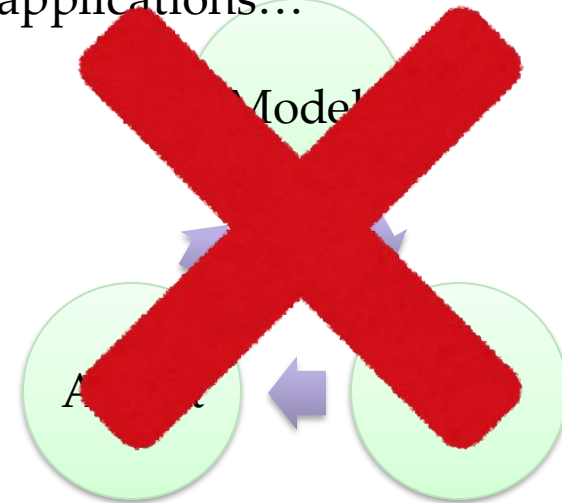


We believe it's right, because ...

Firm theoretical framework = Quantum Field Theory

- Well-defined theory
 - Action (Lagrangian) and partition function
- Exact relations from symmetries
 - Ward-Takahashi identities
- Renormalization theory
 - Model itself is highly restricted.
 - “continuum limit” is unique.

In many other computational applications...



Understanding the errors



Understanding the errors

- Of course, there are practical limitations, which yield (sometimes significant) errors
 - Discretization effect, finite volume effect, statistical error...
- One may **theoretically** understand how the error behaves:
 - One should first confirm that the error is consistent with the expectation.
 - Then, eliminate it, e.g. by an extrapolation.

This is an ideal situation, though...

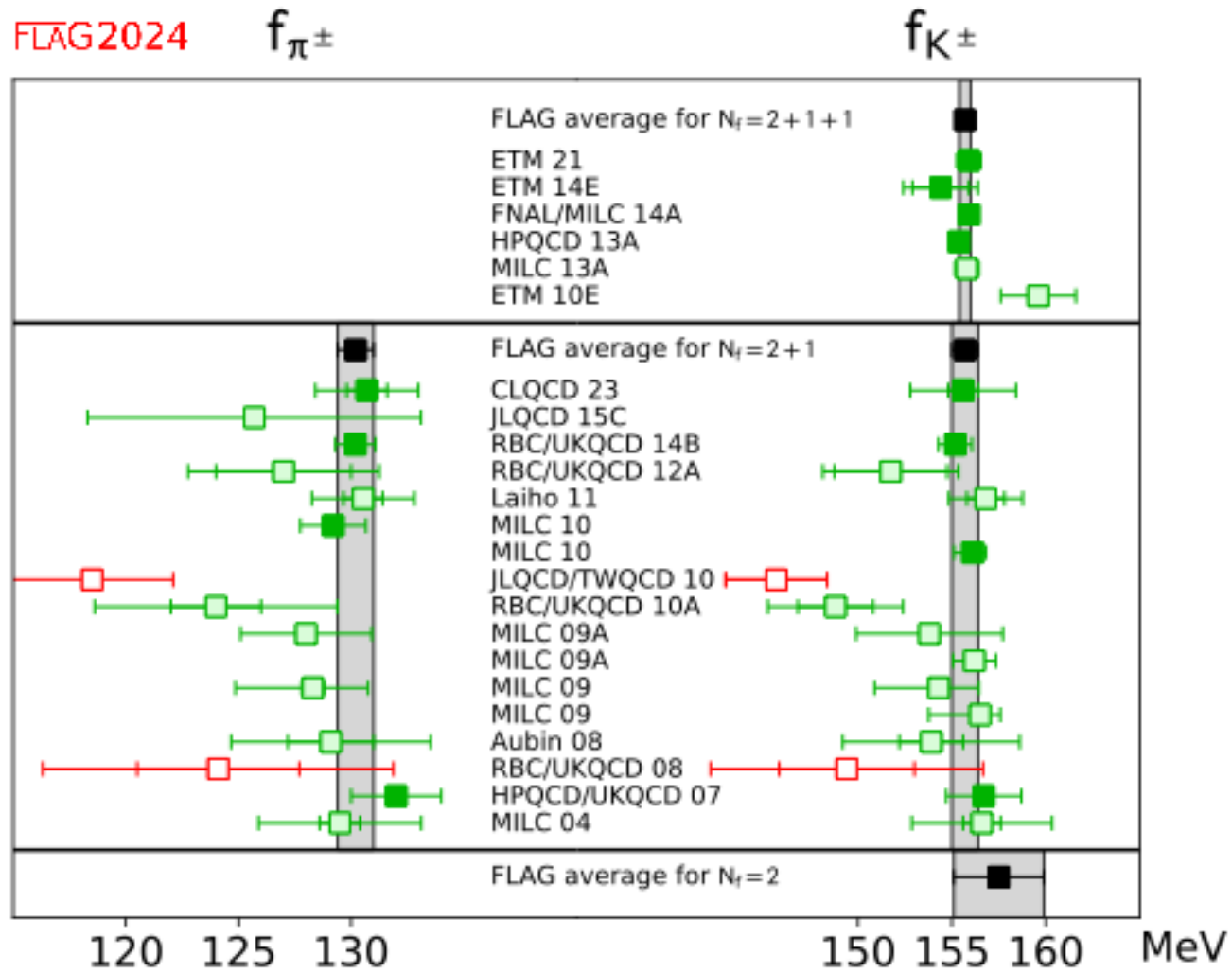


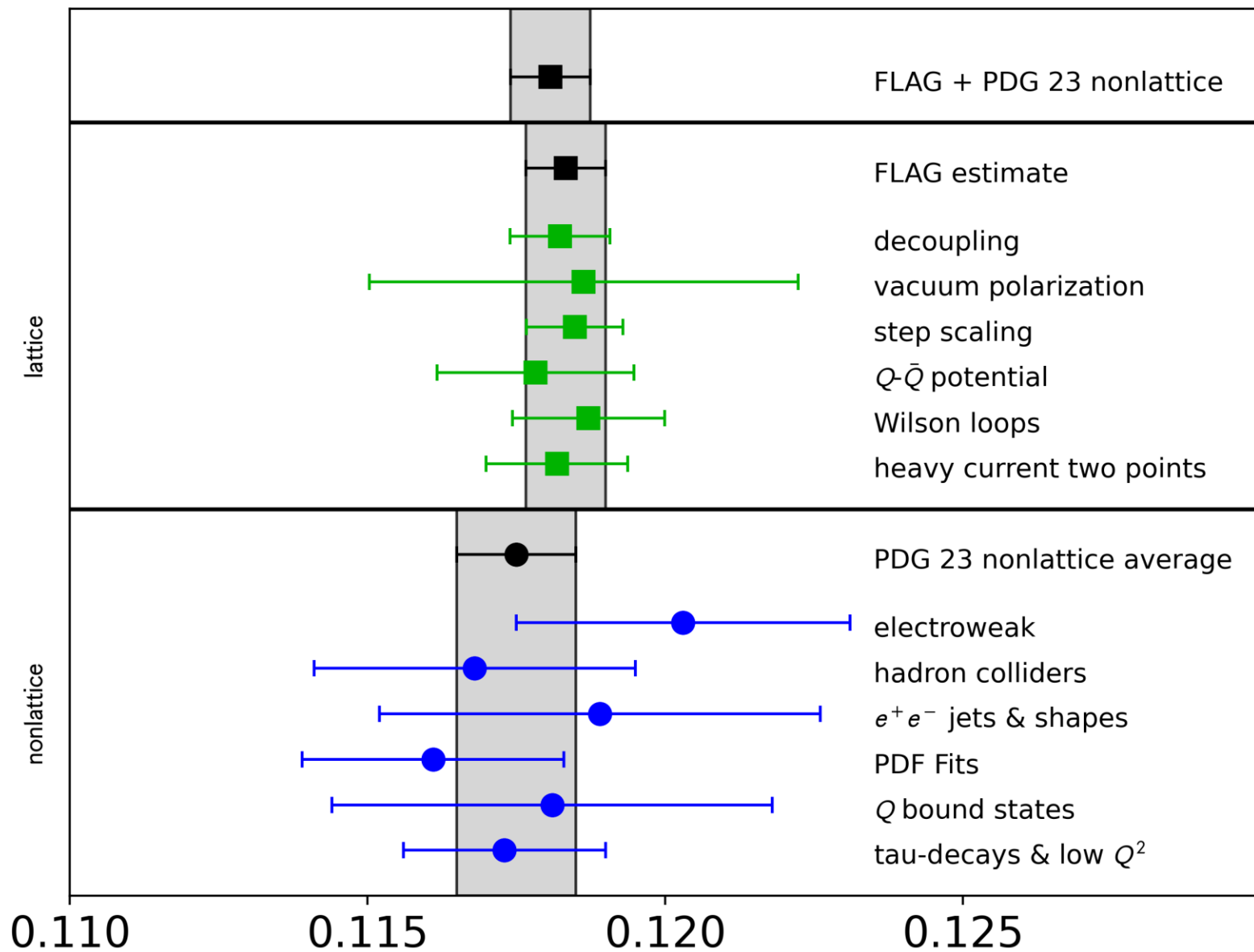
Systematic errors ~ Who cares?

Flavour Lattice Averaging Group (FLAG)

- Provides lattice average of various quantities
- Regularly updating: 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2021, 2024
- Assesses the ability of controlling the systematic errors

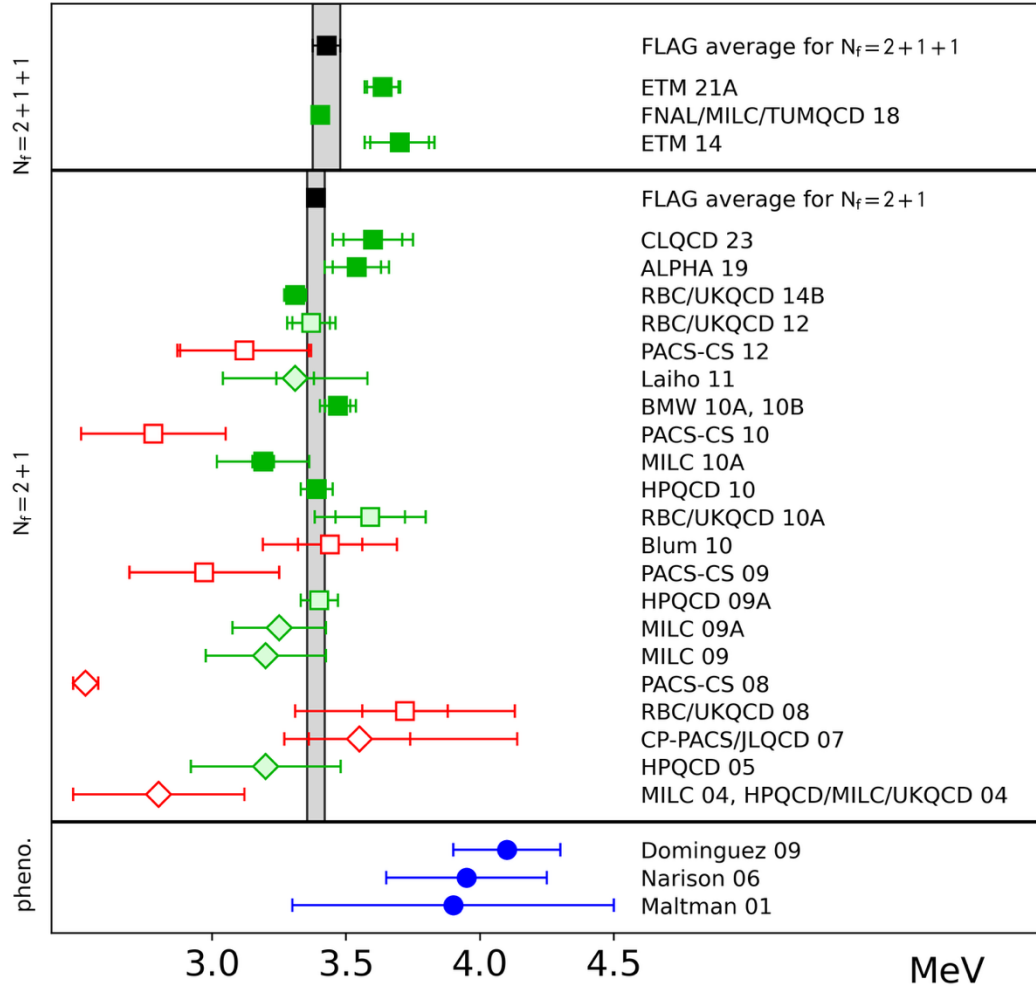






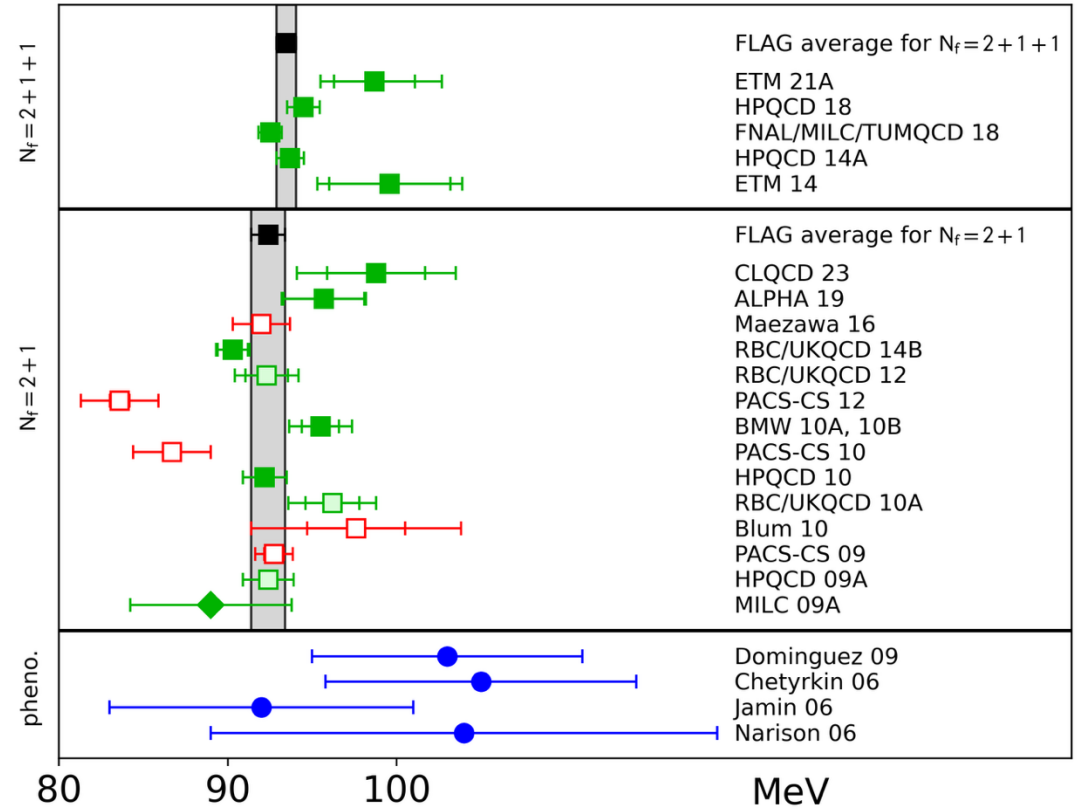
FLAG2024

m_{ud}



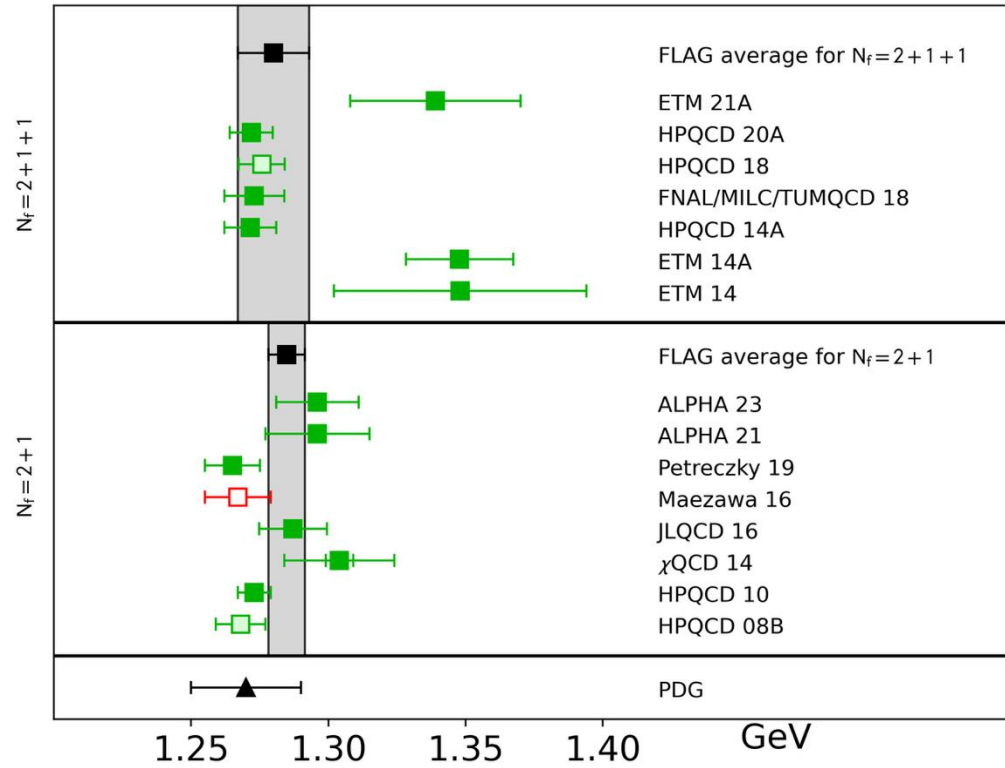
FLAG2024

m_s



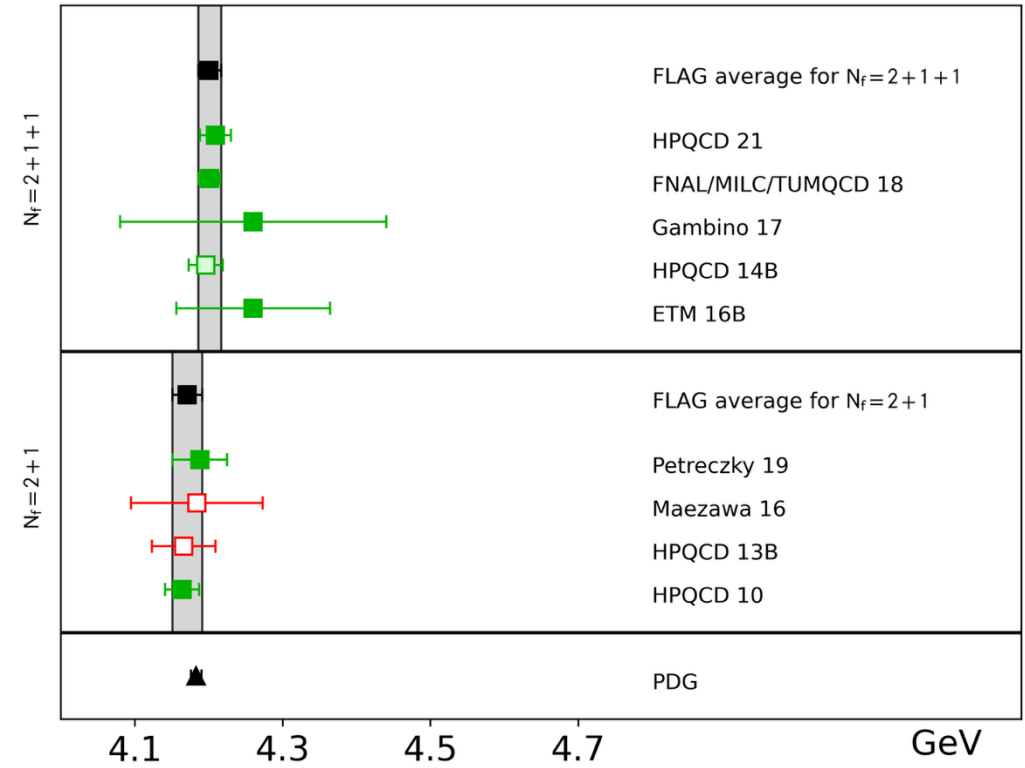
FLAG2024

$\bar{m}_c(\bar{m}_c)$



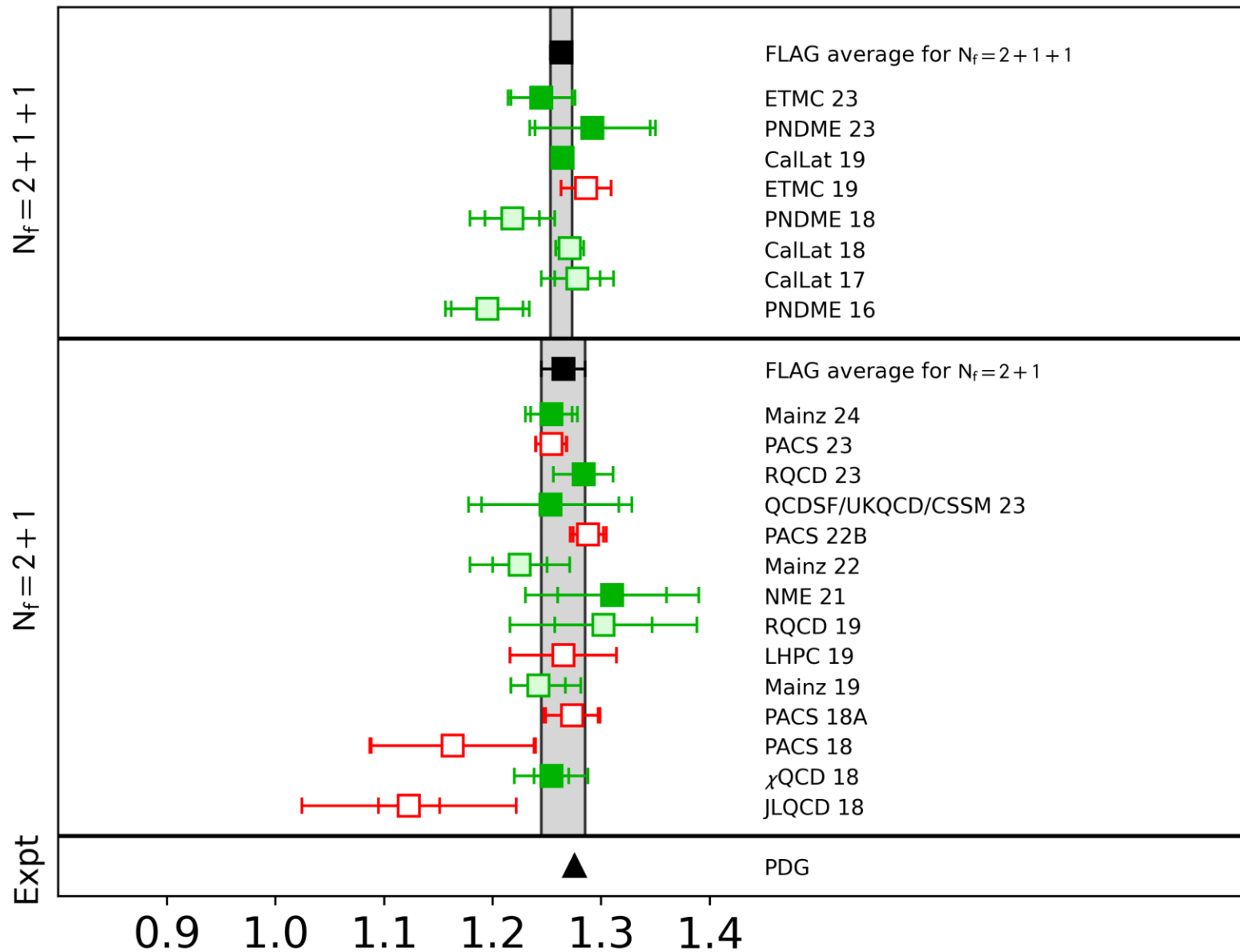
FLAG2024

$\bar{m}_b(\bar{m}_b)$

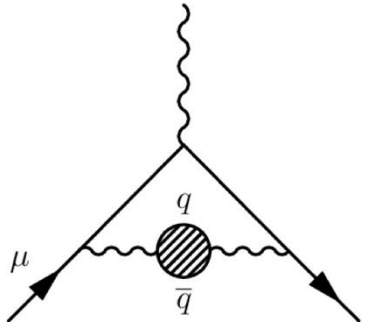


FLAG2024

$$g_A^{u-d}$$

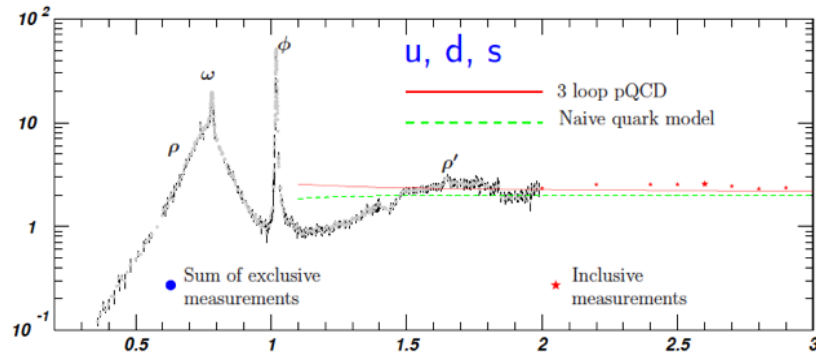


Muon g-2

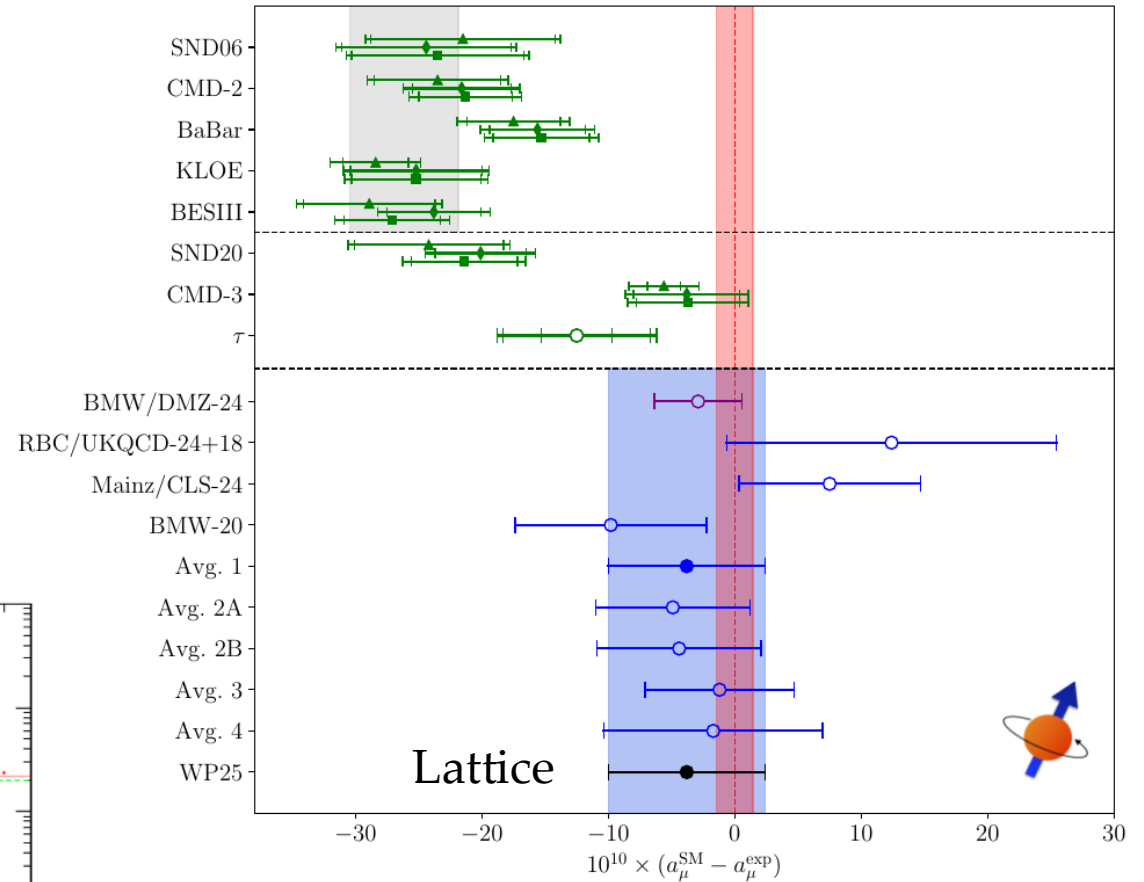


$$\text{had.} = \int \frac{ds}{\pi(s-q^2)} \text{Im had.}$$

$$2 \text{Im had.} = \sum_{\text{had.}} \int d\Phi \left| \text{had.} \right|^2$$



White Paper: 2505.21476



Reasons to believe?

- Foundation is solid
 - QFT well-defined, Renormalizable theory
- Systematic errors
 - May be understood again using QFT.
 - Every efforts to control them going on.
- Statistical errors
 - Sometimes crucial, killing, fatal...

