



Gravitational Lenses (Astronomy and Astrophysics Library)

Peter Schneider, Jürgen Ehlers, Emilio E. Falco

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The theory, observations, and applications of gravitational lensing constitute one of the most rapidly growing branches of extragalactic astrophysics. The deflection of light from very distant sources by intervening masses provides a unique possibility for the investigation of both background sources and lens mass distributions. Gravitational lensing manifests itself most distinctly through multiply imaged QSOs and the formation of highly elongated images of distant galaxies ('arcs') and spectacular ring-like images of extragalactic radio sources. But the effects of gravitational light deflection are not limited to these prominent image configurations; more subtle, since not directly observable, consequences of lensing are the, possibly strong, magnification of sources, which may permit observation of intrinsically fainter, or more distant, sources than would be visible without these natural telescopes. Such light deflection can also affect the source counts of QSOs and of other compact extragalactic sources, and can lead to flux variability of sources owing to propagation effects. Trying to summarize the theory and observational status of gravitational lensing in a monograph turned out to be a bigger problem than any of the authors anticipated when we started this project at the end of 1987, encouraged by Martin Harwit, who originally approached us. The development in the field has been very rapid during the last four years, both through the theory and through observation, and many sections have been rewritten several times, as the previous versions became out of date.

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