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Revisiting Metastable Cosmic String Breaking

Listening to Grand Unification

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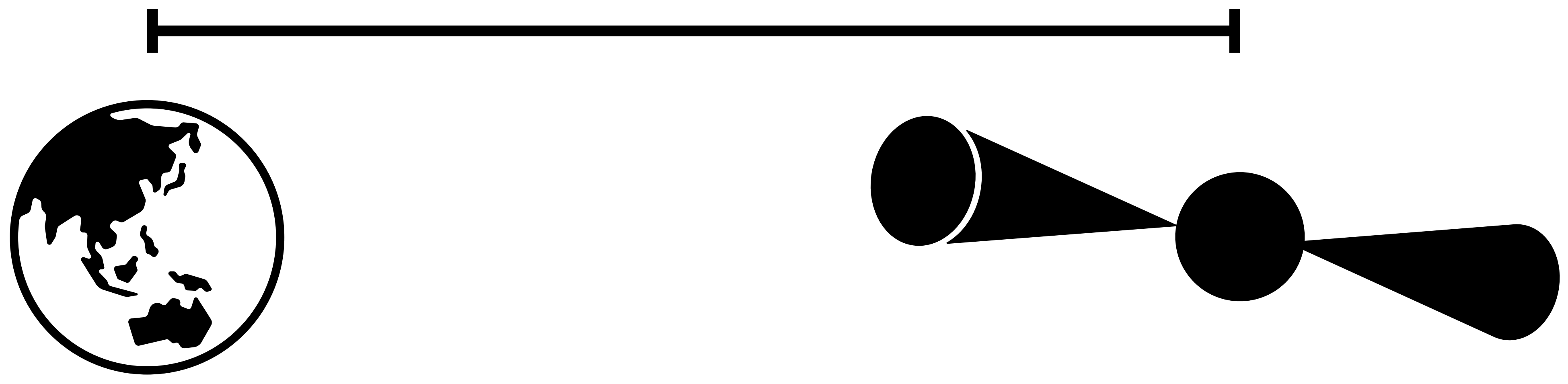
Stochastic Gravitational Wave Background

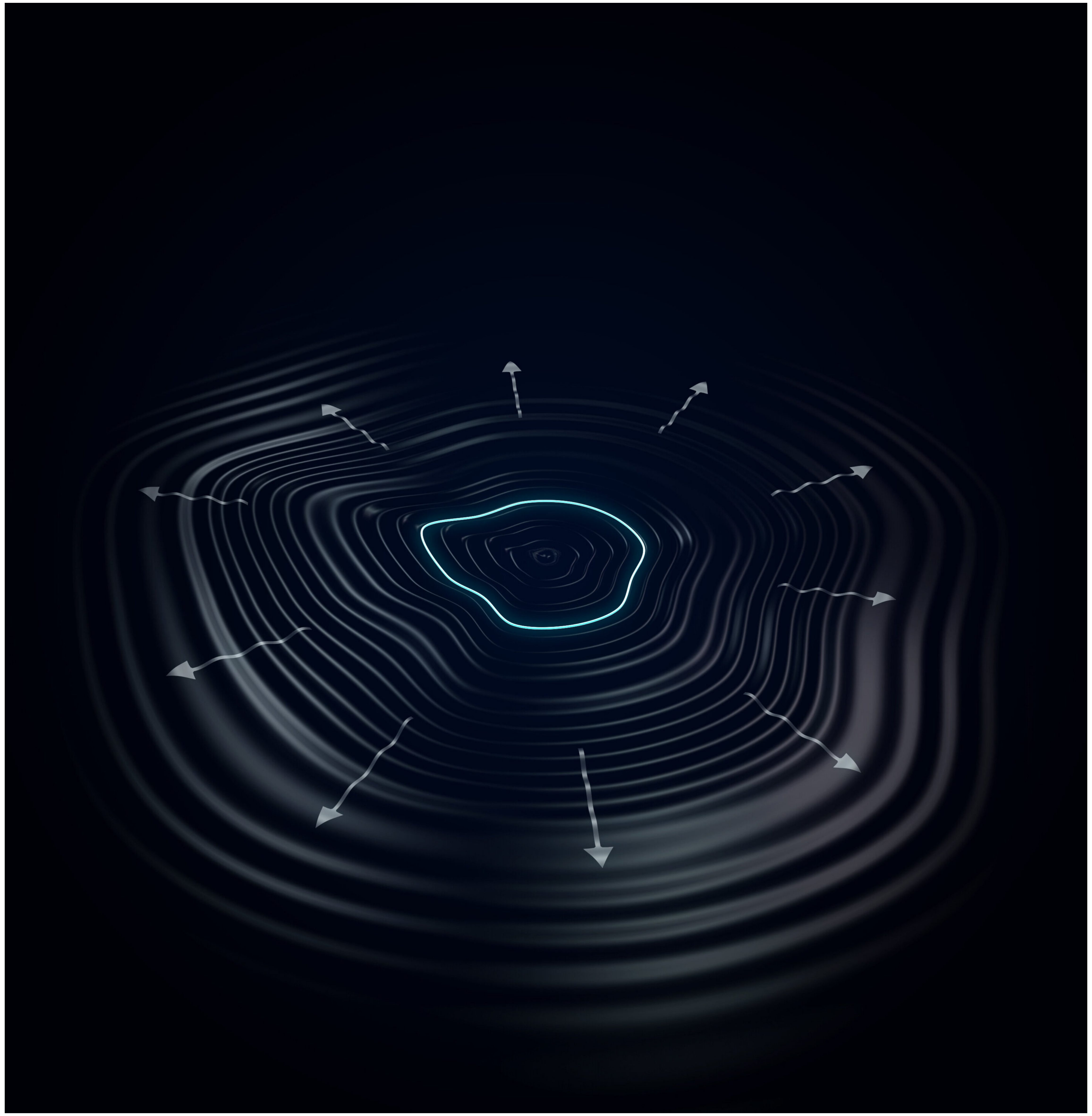
- Evidenced by PTA observations (NANOGrav, InPTA, EPTA, PPTA, CPTA)
  - Observed at nHz range
- Many possible origins
  - Black holes?
  - Phase transition?
  - ….



Cosmic Strings

Probing BSM with GW

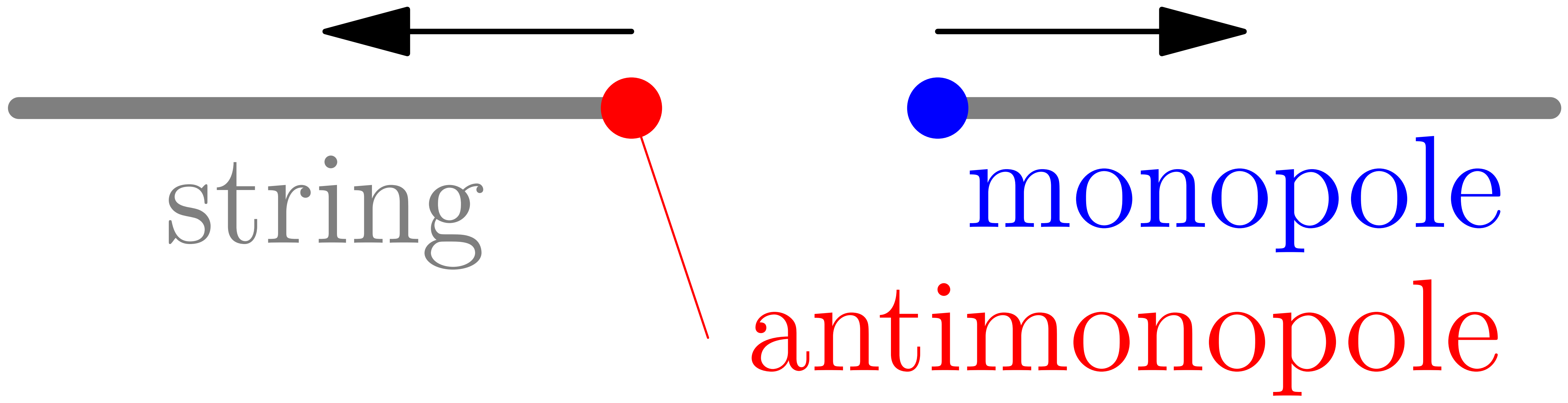
- Linear solitons in QFT
- Created in the Universe by
  e.g. spontaneous U(1) breaking
- Predicted by many BSM physics
  - e.g. GUT



Credit: Daniel Dominguez from CERN's Education, Communications & Outreach (ECO) Department.

Metastable Cosmic Strings

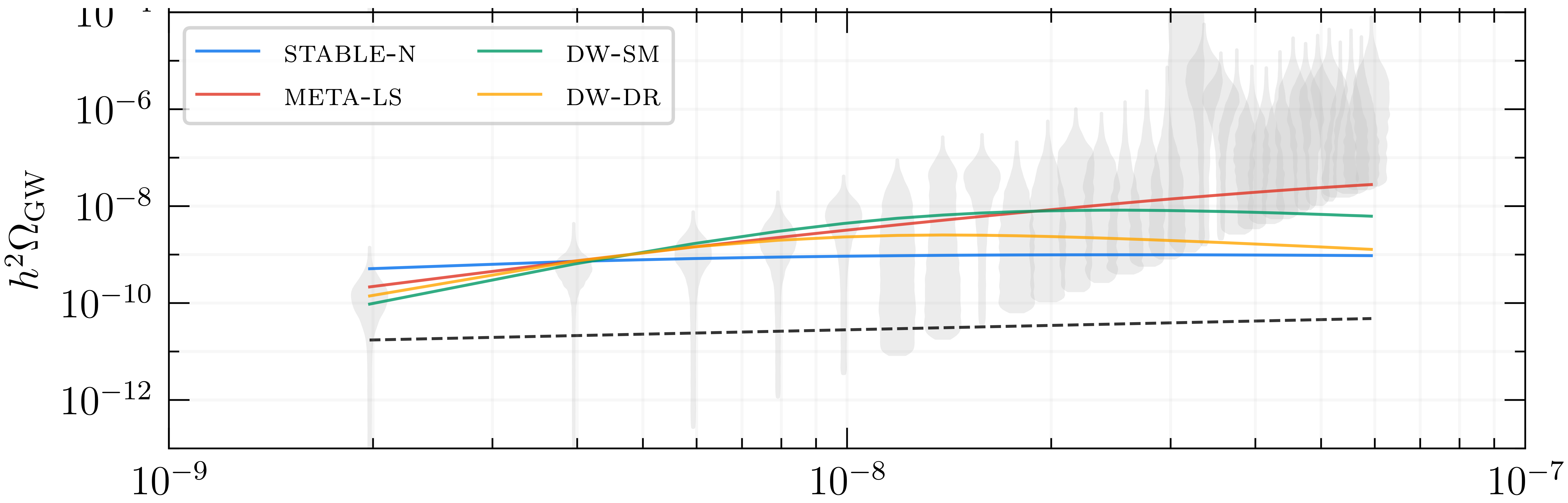
- Cosmic strings are metastable for e.g. $G \to \mathrm{U}(1) \to 1$ with $\pi_1(G) = 0$
- Spontaneously cut by monopole-antimonopole pair creation



Metastable Cosmic Strings

NANOGrav requires metastability

- NANOGrav requires the strings to be metastable
  - $\sqrt{\kappa} \sim 8$ for decay rate $\sim \exp[-\pi\kappa]$
  - Precise estimate is crucial

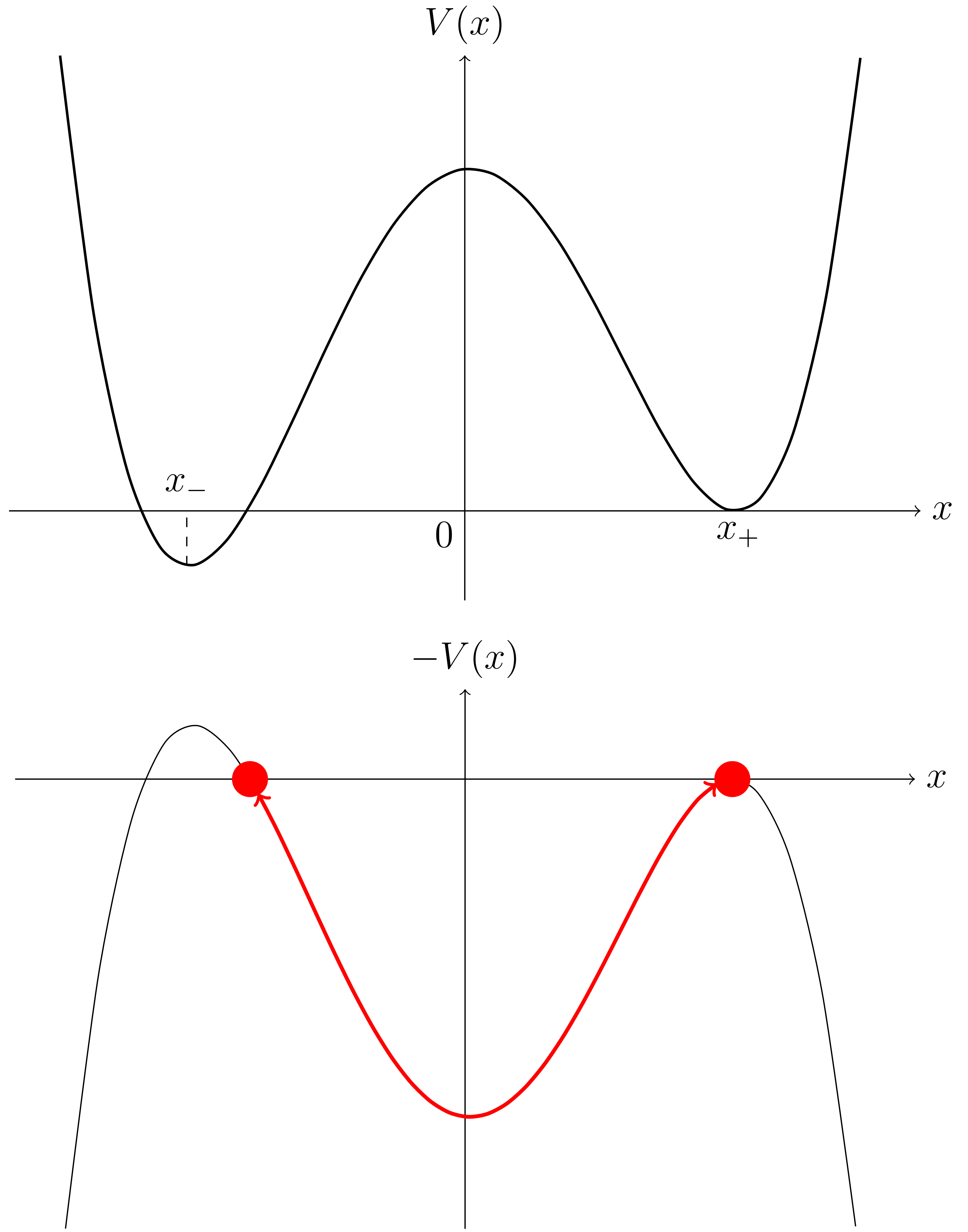


[Afzal et al., 2023]

String breaking rate

Decaying states and bounce

- Procedure:
  - Go to imaginary time
    - $\approx$ invert the potential
  - Find the bounce solution
    - Action: S_B
  - Decay rate: $\Gamma \sim \exp[-S_B]$

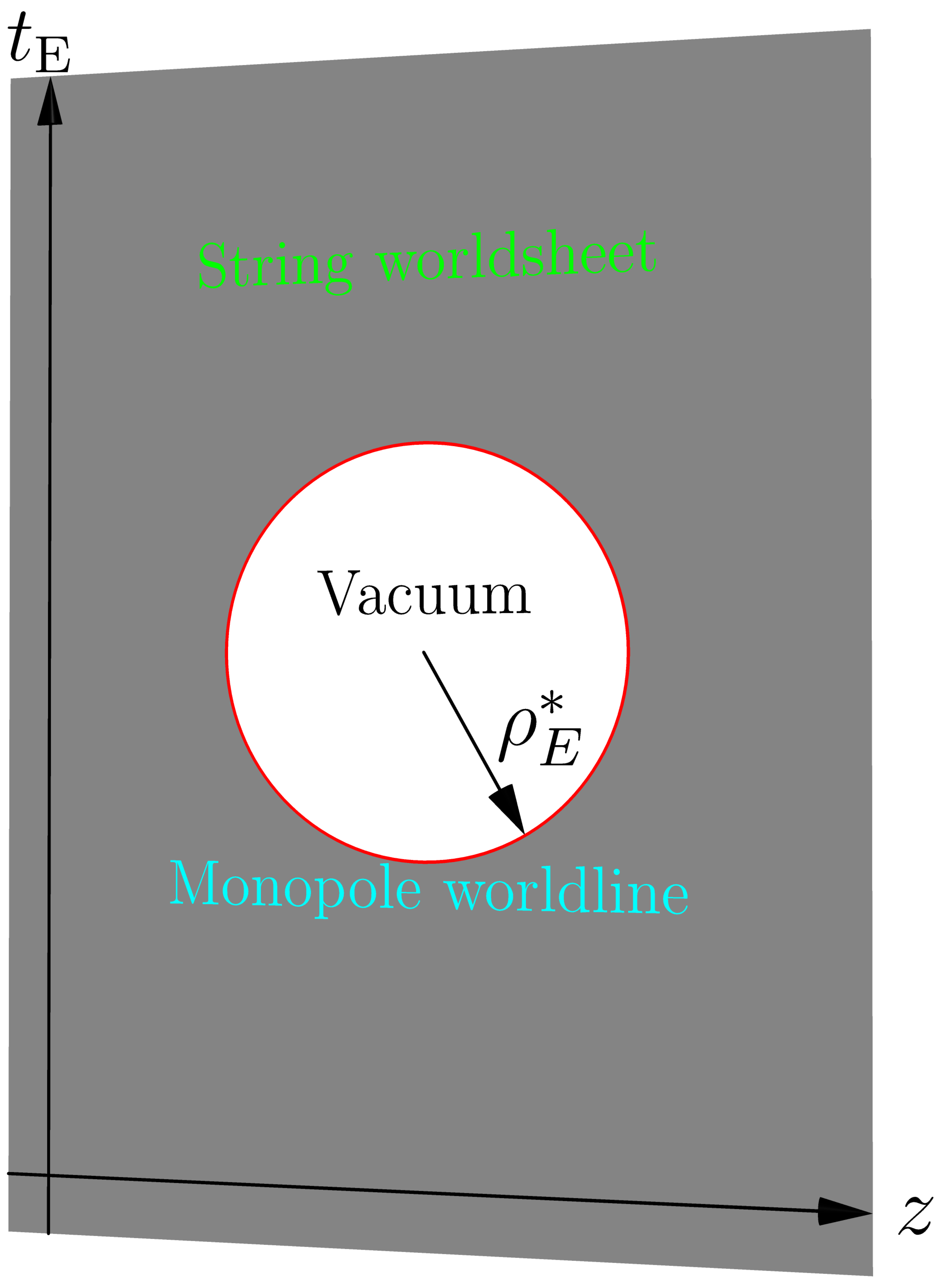


String breaking rate

Preskill-Vilenkin approximation [Preskill & Vilenkin, 1992]

- Neglect monopole size and string width
- Bounce solution for string breaking →
  - $S_E = 2\pi\rho_E^* M_M - \pi\rho_E^{*2} T_{\rm str}$
  - $\to \rho_E^* = M_M / T_{\rm str}$, $S_B = \pi M_M^2 / T_{\rm str} = \pi\kappa$
    - M_M: monopole mass, $T_{\rm str}$: string tension
  - String width $T_{\rm str}^{-1/2} \ll \rho_E^*$ required

  $\to \sqrt{\kappa} \gg 1 \cdots$ **Is this OK for PTA ($\sqrt{\kappa} \sim 8$)?**



Re-evaluation of bounce action

Setup

SU(2) gauge theory w/ adjoint Higgs & fundamental Higgs

- $\mathscr{L} = -\frac{1}{4g^2}F^2 - \;\; Dh\;\;^2 - \left(D\overrightarrow{\phi}\right)^2 - V_{\mathrm{Higgs}}(h,\phi)$
  - ϕ: SU(2) adjoint, h: SU(2) fundamental
- $V_{\mathrm{Higgs}}(h,\phi) = \lambda\left(\;\; h\;\;^2 - v^2\right)^2 + \tilde{\lambda}\left(\overrightarrow{\phi}^2 - V^2\right)^2 + \gamma\left|\left(\phi^a\frac{\tau^a}{2} - \frac{V}{2}\right)h\right|^2$
  - Assumptions: $\lambda,\ \tilde{\lambda},\ \gamma > 0, V > v$

Setup

Symmetry breaking pattern

- $V_{\text{Higgs}}(h, \phi) = \lambda \left(h^2 - v^2 \right)^2 + \tilde{\lambda} \left(\vec{\phi}^2 - V^2 \right)^2 + \gamma \left| \left(\phi^a \frac{\tau^a}{2} - \frac{V}{2} \right) h \right|^2$

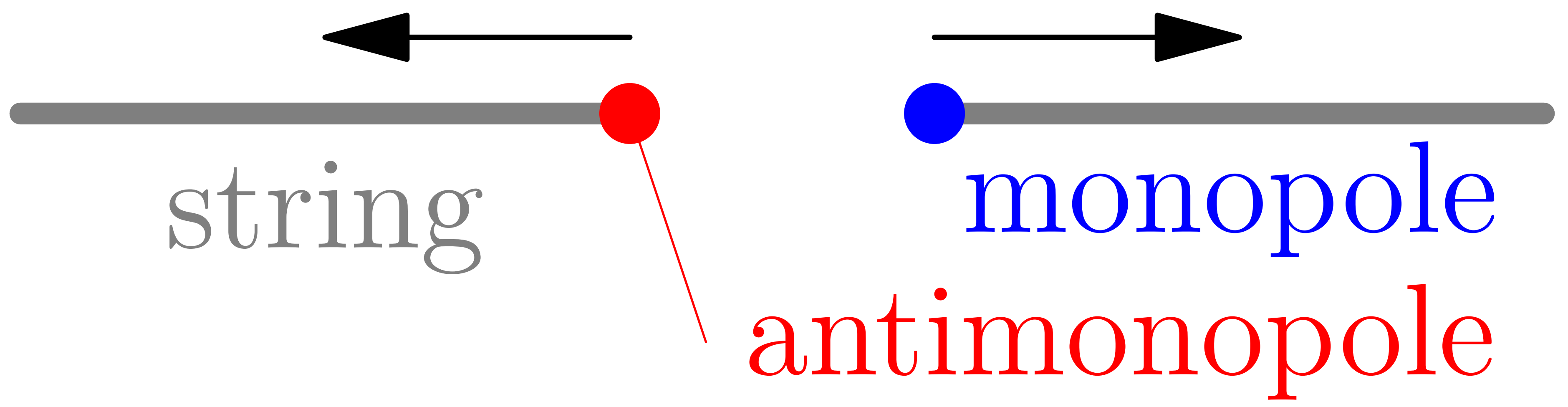
$$\phi^a = V\delta_3^a$$

$$\gamma V^2 \; h_2^{\;2}$$

- SU(2) → U(1) by $\phi = V\delta_3^a$
  - U(1) generator: $\tau^3/2$
- U(1) → 1 by $h_i = v\delta_i^1$

Setup

Cosmic Strings and Monopoles

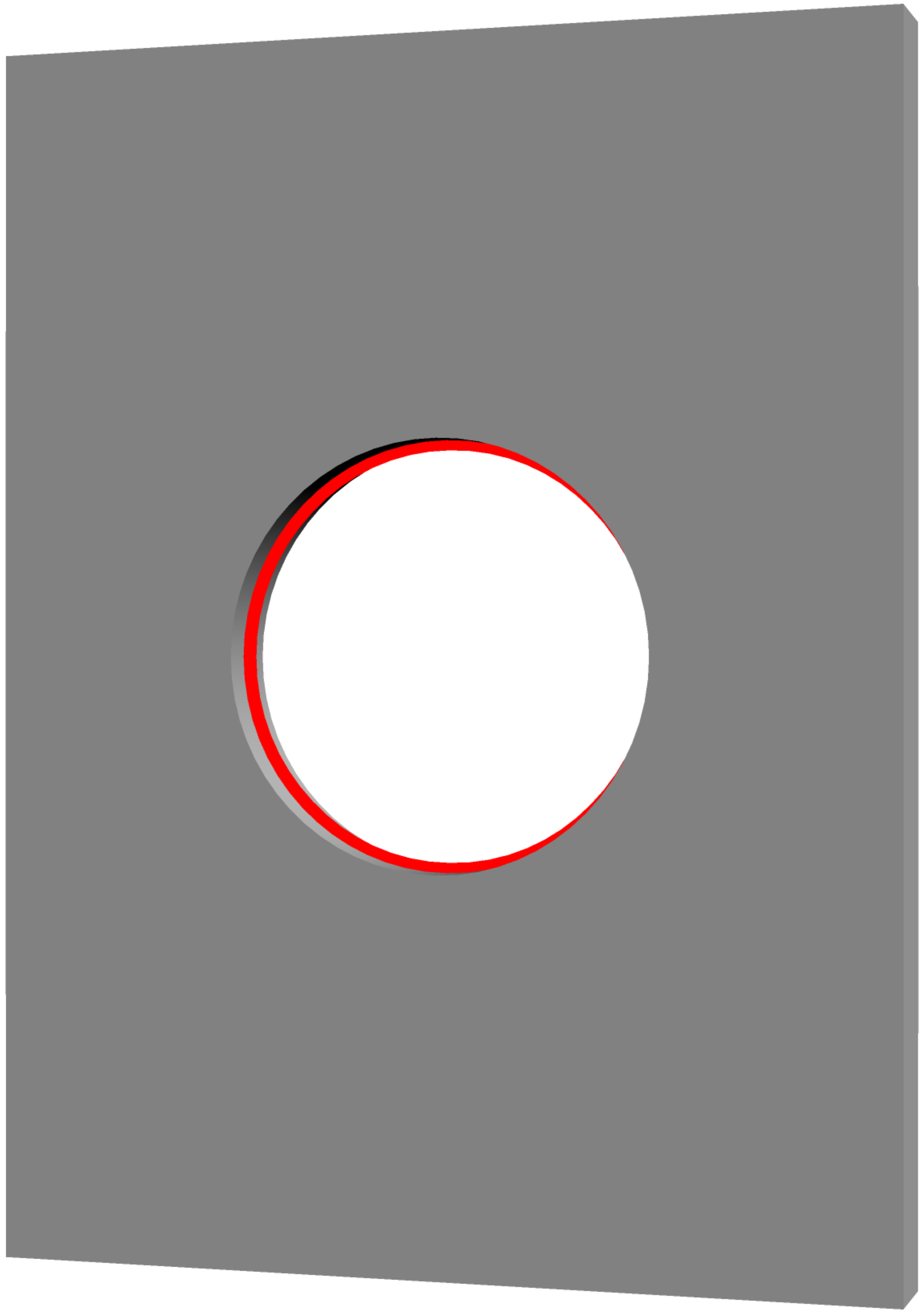


- 1st SSB: SU(2) → U(1) by $\phi = V\delta_3^a$
  - $\pi_2(\mathrm{SU}(2)/\mathrm{U}(1)) = \mathbb{Z}$ → monopoles formed by ϕ
- 2nd SSB: U(1) → 1 by $h_1 = ve^{i\times 0}$
  - $\pi_1(\mathrm{U}(1)) = \mathbb{Z}$ → cosmic strings formed by h_1 (at least for $V \gg v$)
  - But also $\pi_1(\mathrm{SU}(2)) = 0$ → only metastable
    - Strings can break via monopole-antimonopole pair production

Strategy

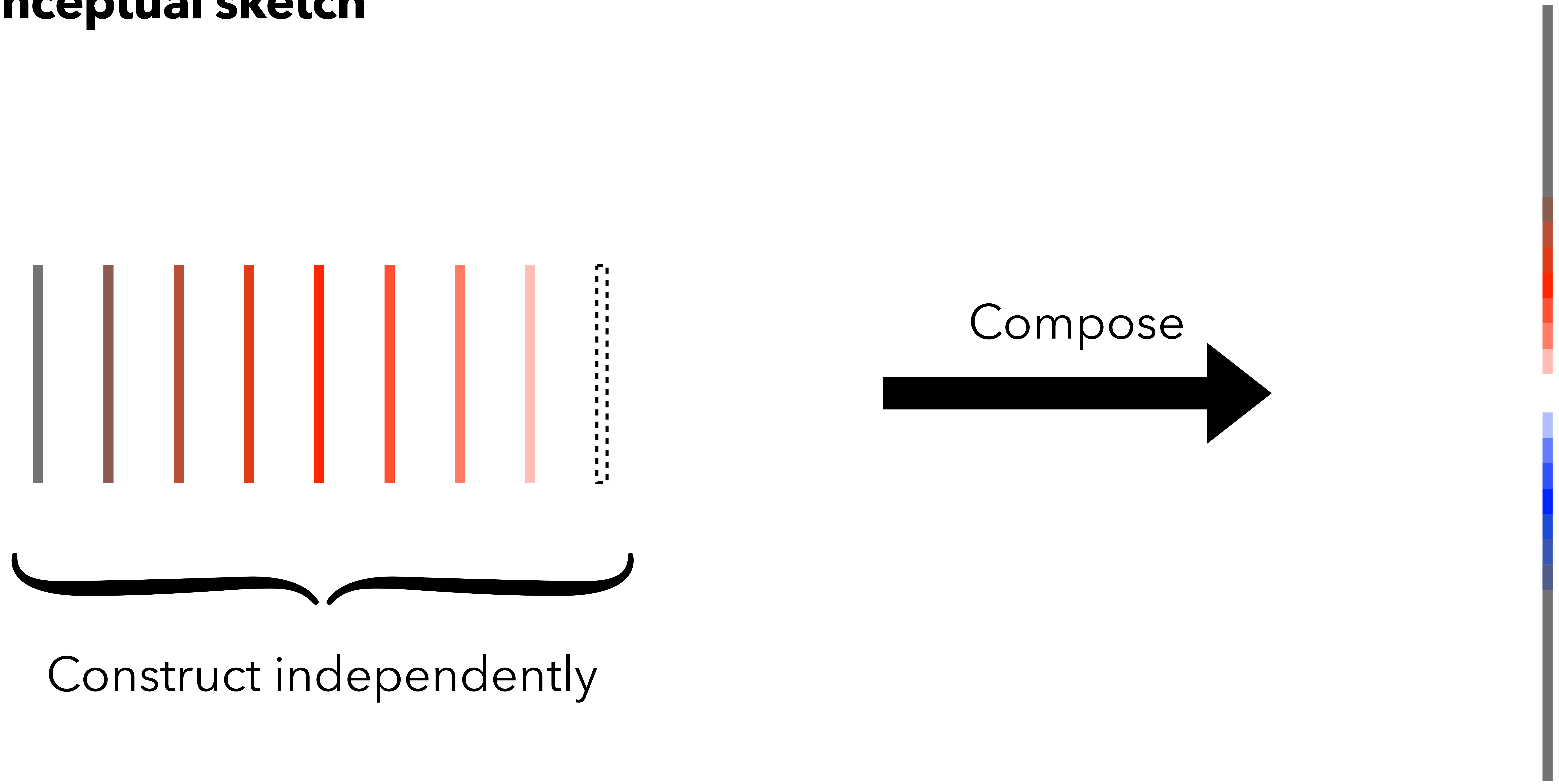
How to evaluate the bounce action?

- Solve 4D Euclidean field equation?
  - Hard because:
    - Bounce: saddle point
      → nontrivial algorithm needed
    - Less symmetric than vacuum decay
- → Alternative strategy



Strategy

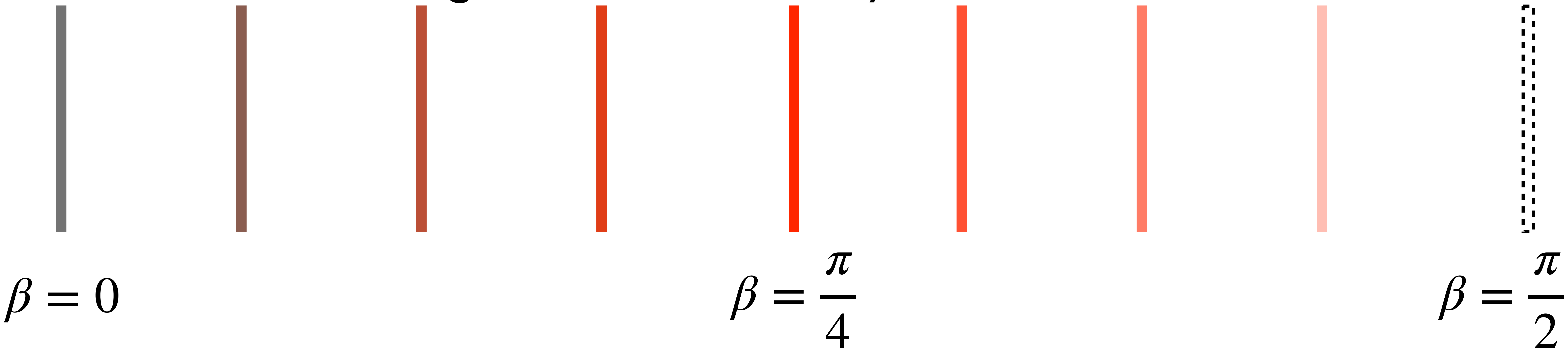
Conceptual sketch



Strategy

Step 1: Build "excited strings" with an Ansatz

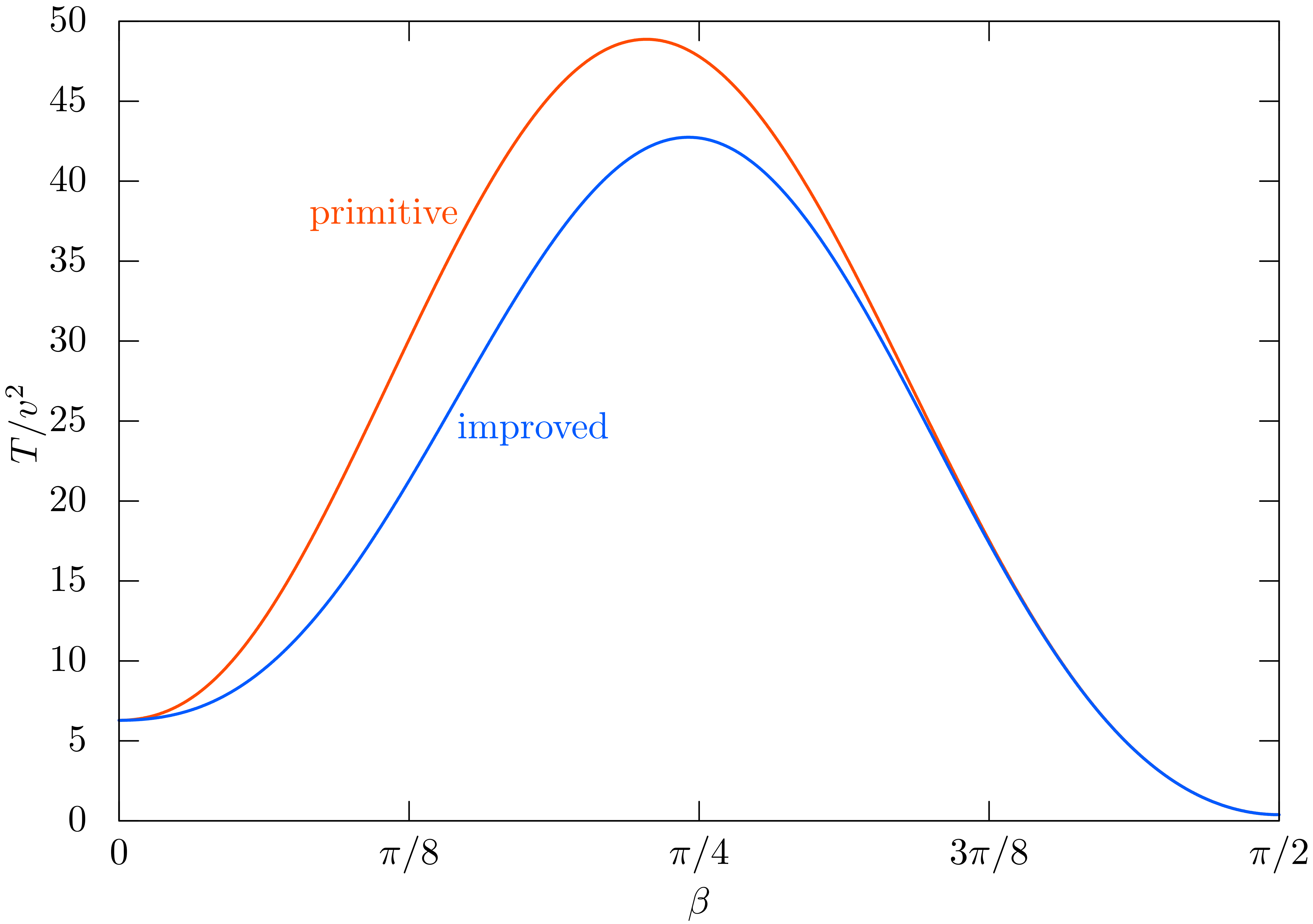
- Make β-dependent static string configuration
  - β: unwinding parameter (ordinary string at $\beta = 0$, vacuum at $\beta = \pi/2$)
  - Field configuration $\leftarrow$ β-dependent Ansatz with a few profile functions
    - Minimize the string tension for each β



Strategy

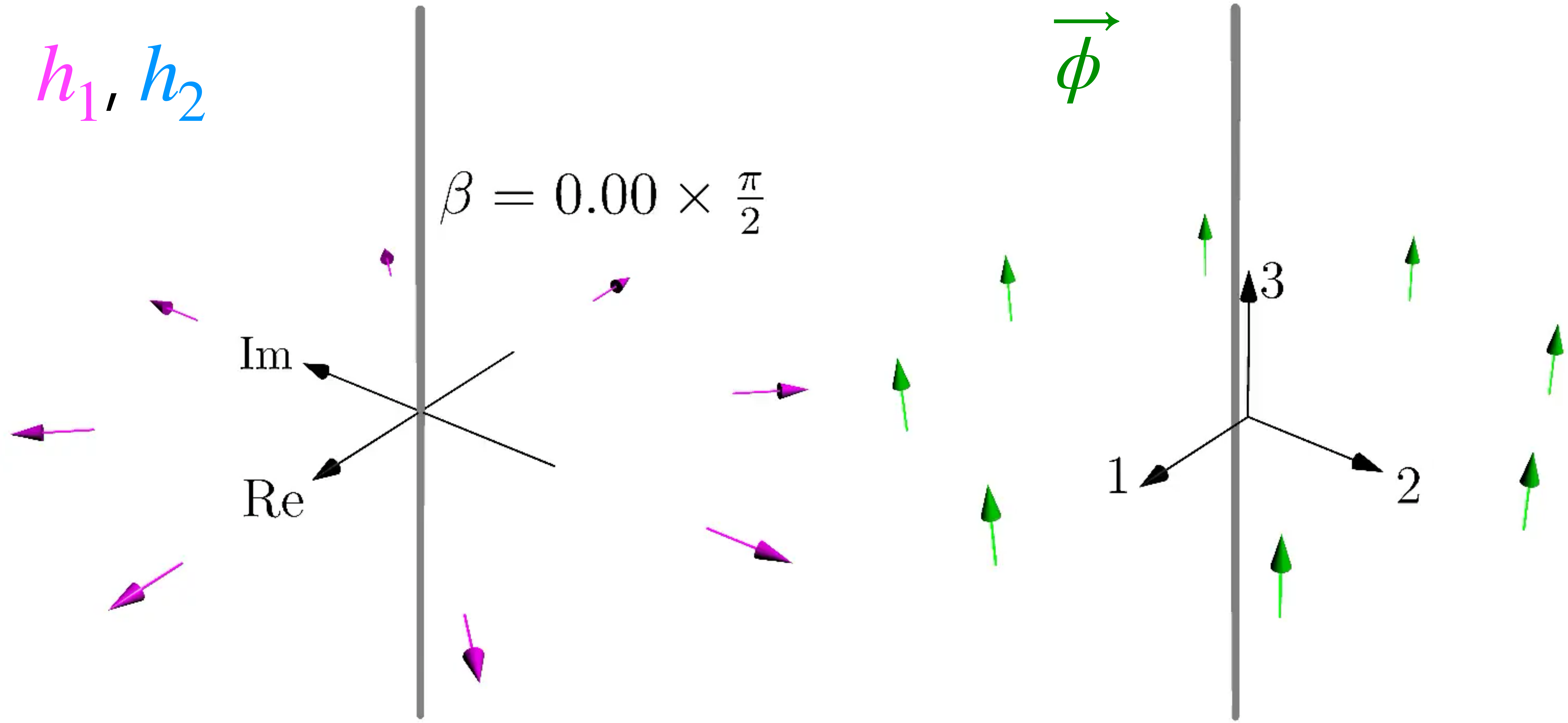
β-dependent tension

- $T(\beta = \pi/2) < T(\beta = 0)$, as required
- naturally, improved < primitive
- $\beta \sim \pi/4$: monopole → potential wall



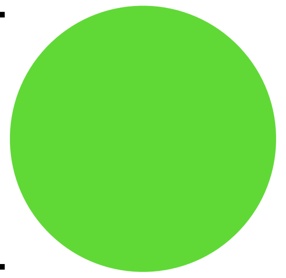
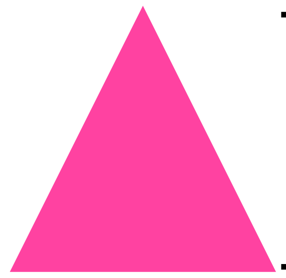
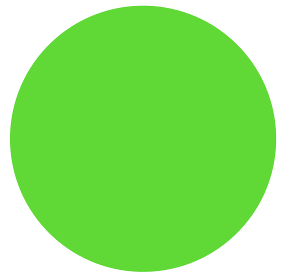
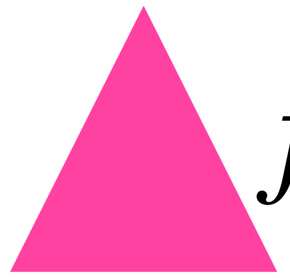
Strategy

Asymptotics of the Ansatz



Strategy

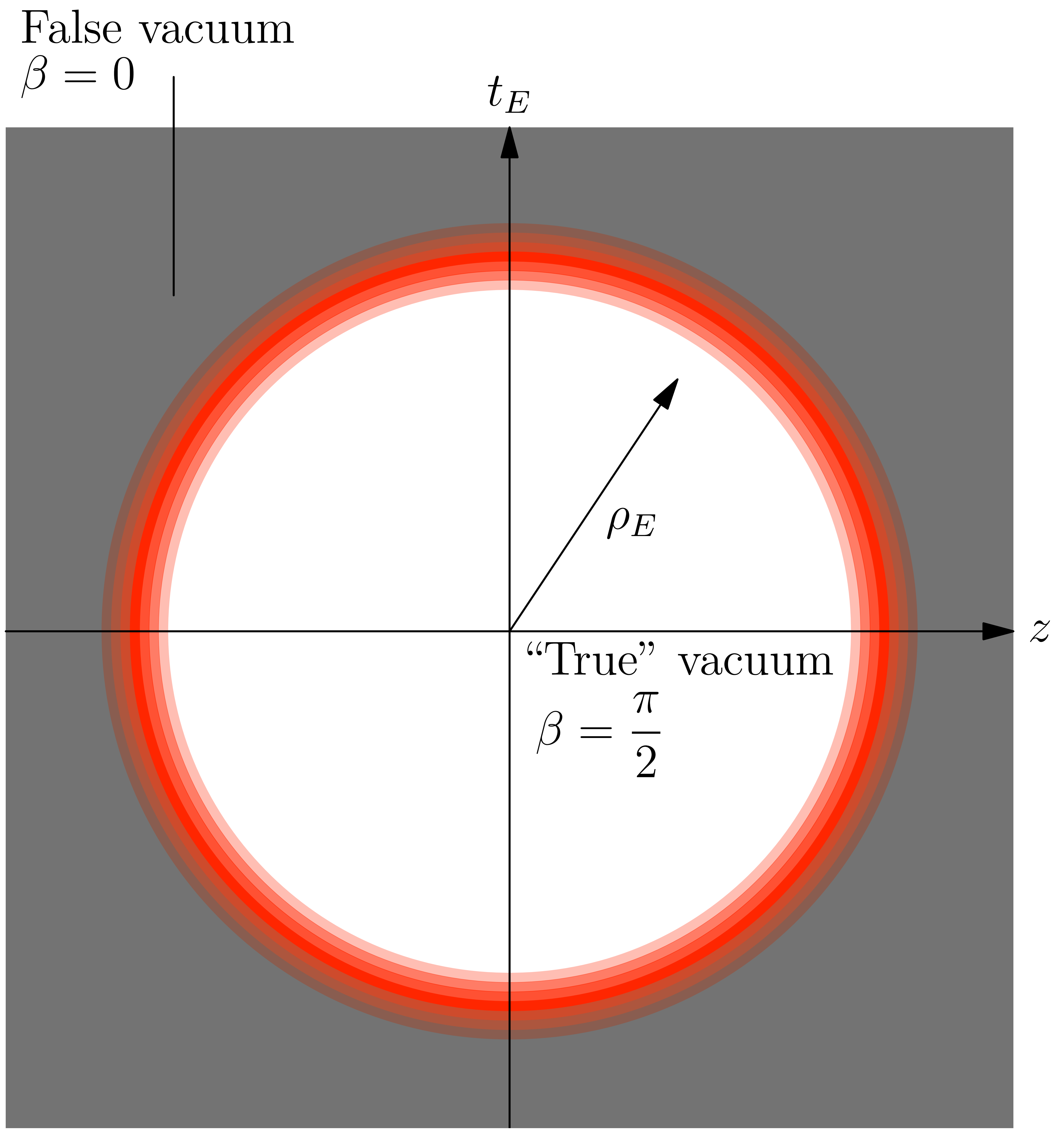
Two Ansätze [Shifman & Yung, 2002]

- Primitive Ansatz: $A_\theta = \Big[$  $+$  $\Big] f_\beta(\rho)$
  - $f_\beta(\rho)$: one of the profile functions
- Improved Ansatz: $A_\theta =$  $f_\beta^\gamma(\rho) +$  $f_\beta^W(\rho)$
  - Contains the primitive Ansatz
- No numerical computations so far

Strategy

Step 2: Promote β to a field on the string

- Construct effective 2D theory about $\beta(t_E, z)$
- The bubble is circular
  - Reduces to 1D theory:
    $$S_E = 2\pi \int_0^\infty \rho_E \, \mathrm{d}\rho_E \left[\frac{1}{2} \mathscr{K}_{\mathrm{eff}}(\beta) \beta'^2 + T(\beta) \right]$$
  - EoM solvable → bounce action



Strategy
Summary

1. Impose an Ansatz with an unwinding parameter β
    - $\beta = 0$: string, $\beta = \dfrac{\pi}{2}$: vacuum
    - Minimize the string tension → static profiles for each β
2. Promote β to a collective coordinate $\beta(t, z)$
    - Euclidean bubble: SO(2) symmetric → $\beta(\rho)$
    - Solve the Euclidean EoM for $\beta(\rho)$ and compute the bounce action

- → Upper bound on the optimal bounce action

Strategy

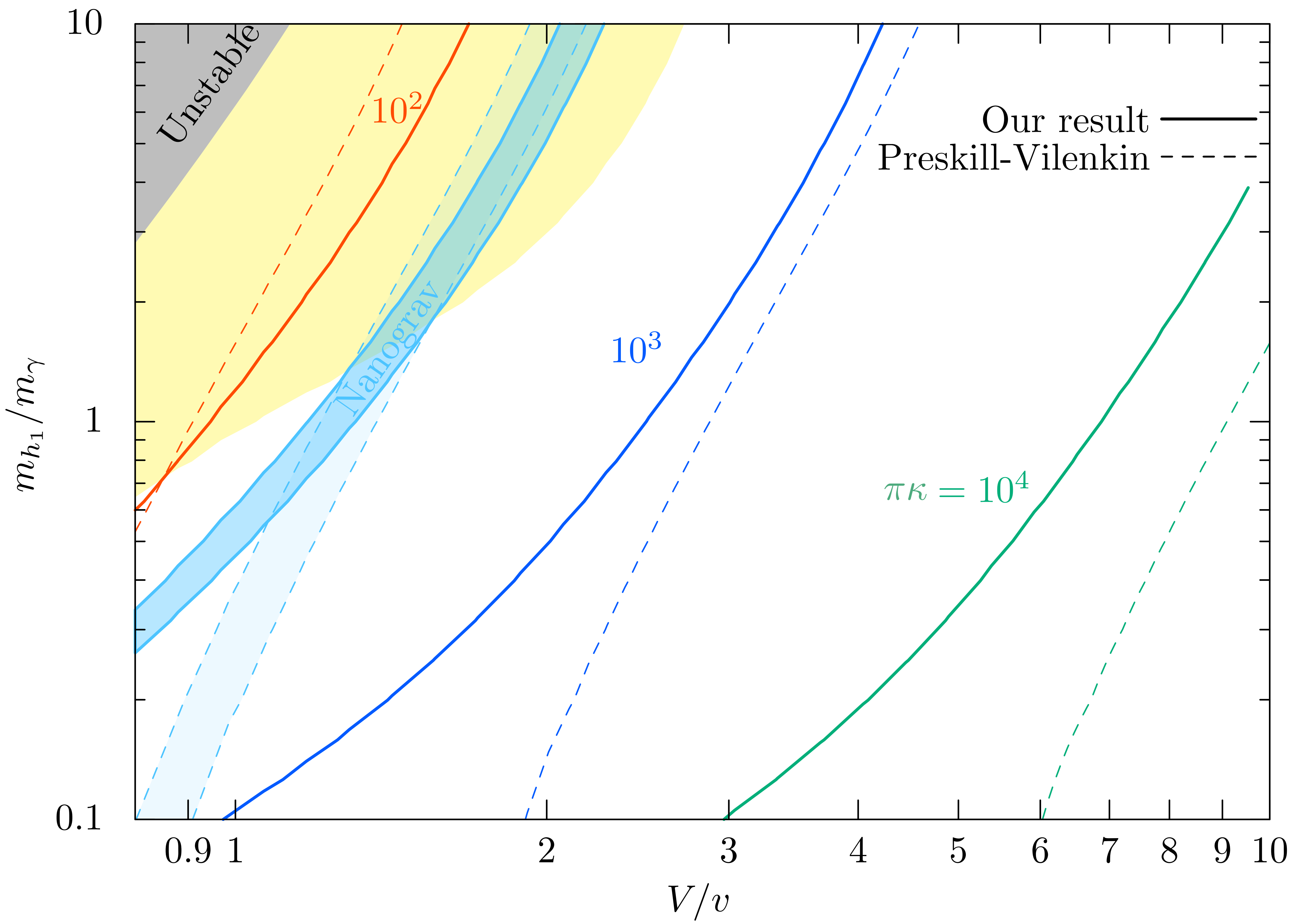
"β-thin-wall approximation" for comparison with Preskill-Vilenkin

- Thin-wall approximation to the 1D effective theory of $\beta(\rho_E)$
  - Valid only for $V \gg v$
- Preskill-Vilienkin approximation: similar but different
  - β-thin-wall: Ansatz → effective 1D theory → thin-wall
  - Preskill-Vilenkin: assume thin-wall in the 4D theory

Results

Interpretation of NANOGrav results

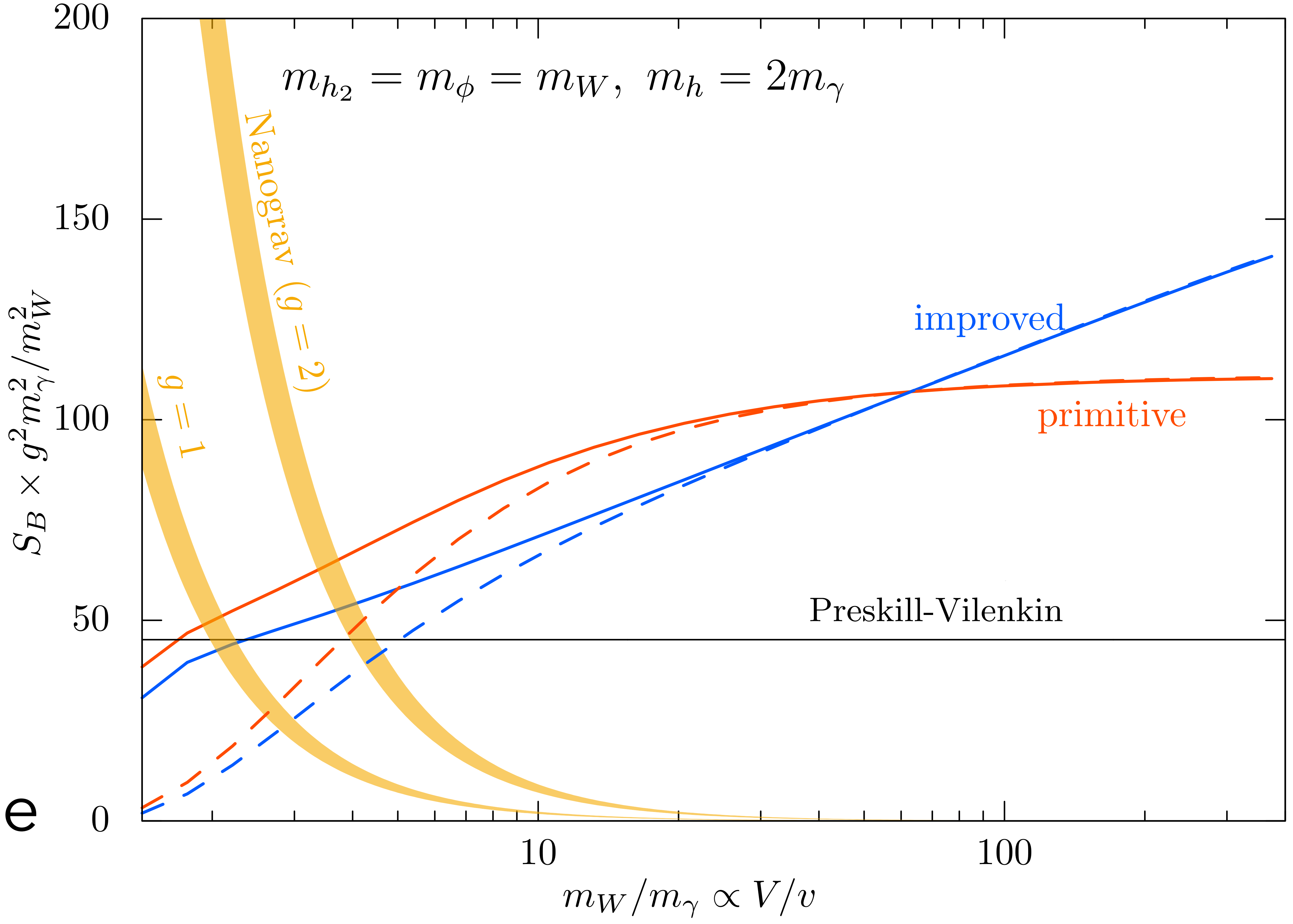
- Yellow: our S_B < Preskill-Vilenkin
  - Overlaps with NANOGrav region
  - Modifies the interpretation



Results

vs. Preskill-Vilenkin

- solid: bounce, dashed: β-thin-wall
- For large hierarchy:
  - Primitive: Preskill-Vilenkin $\times\, \mathcal{O}(1)$
- For small hierarchy:
  - Deviation from β-thin-wall
    - Preskill-Vlienkin: also questionable



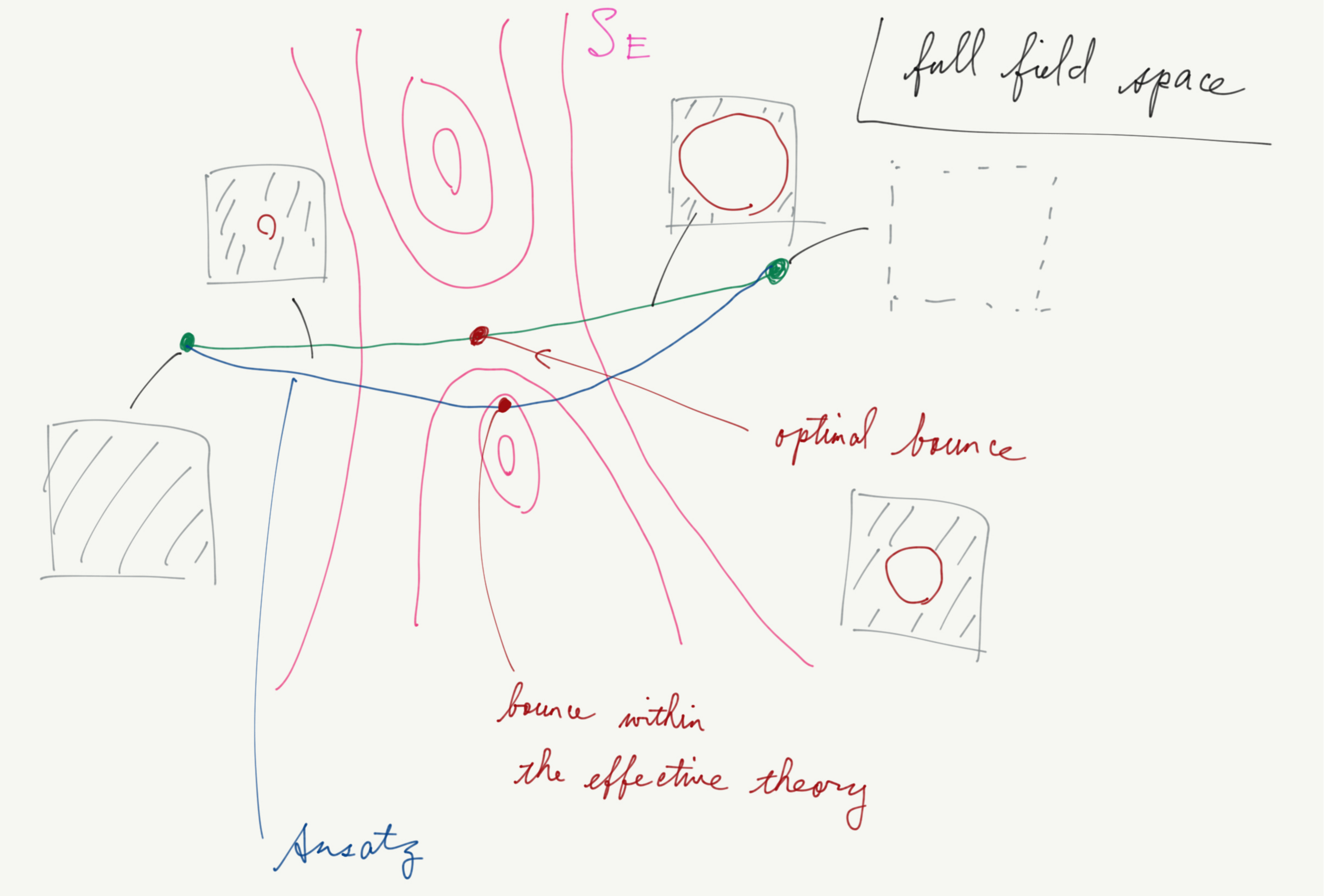
Conclusions & Outlook

- A robust upper bound on the bounce action for string breaking was calculated
  - free of the conventional assumption
  - reproduces the conventional estimate for $V \gg v$ up to an $\mathcal{O}(1)$ factor
- The Preskill-Vilenkin approximation may be unsuited to interpret the PTA data
- Next steps:
  - Optimal bounce action for the improved Ansatz? (WIP)
  - More realistic setups?

Thank you!

Backup

Upper Bound on the Bounce Action

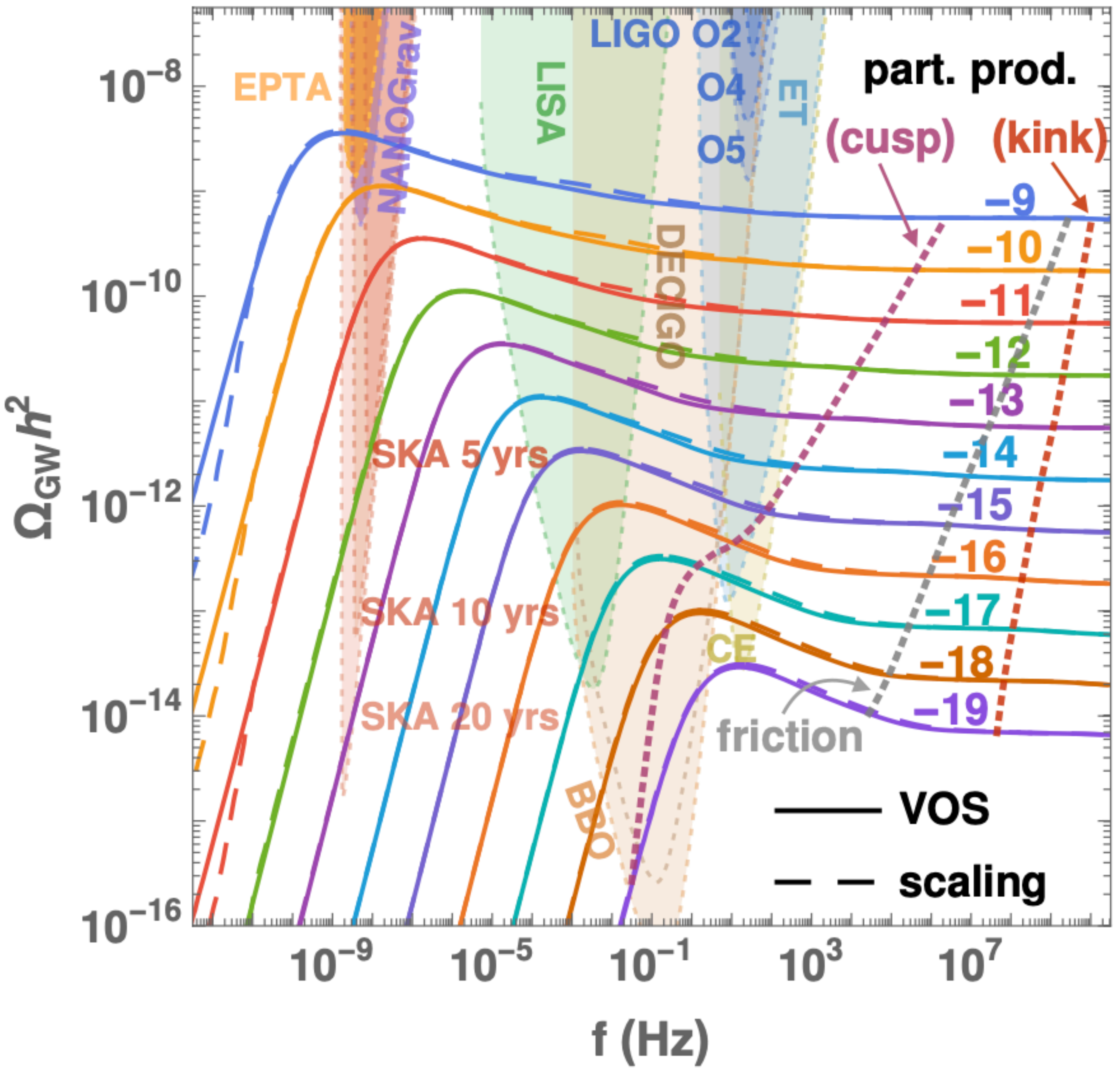


On metastability

Stable strings vs. PTA

- Nanograv's spectrum: blue tilted
- GW spectrum from stable cosmic strings →
  - The amplitude and the low-frequency cutoff correlate
  - → Mismatch with Nanograv

late emission ← early emission

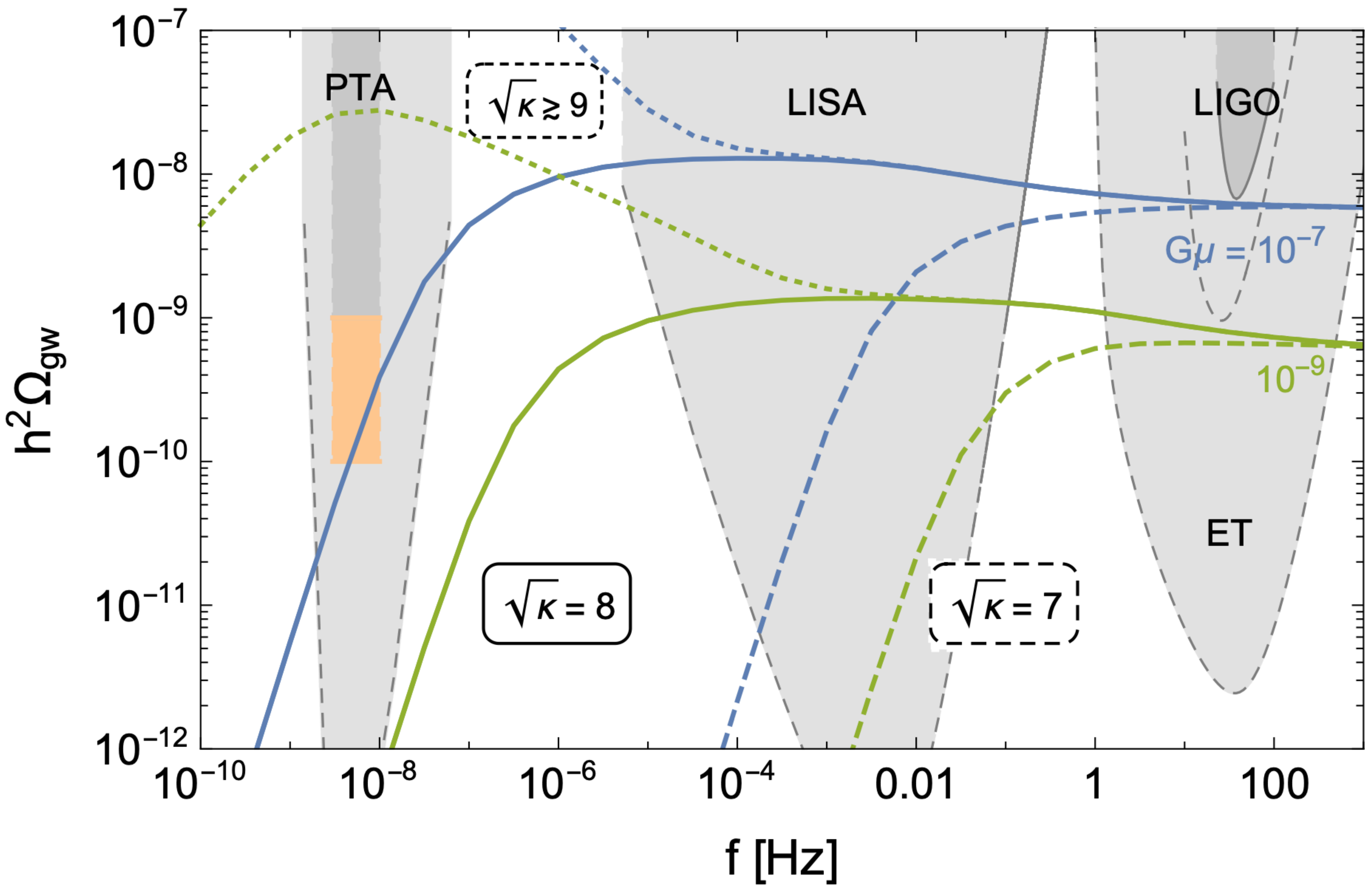


[Gouttenoire et al., 2019]

On metastability

Metastable strings vs. PTA

- Finite lifetime moves the cutoff to the right
  - → better fit with the PTA data

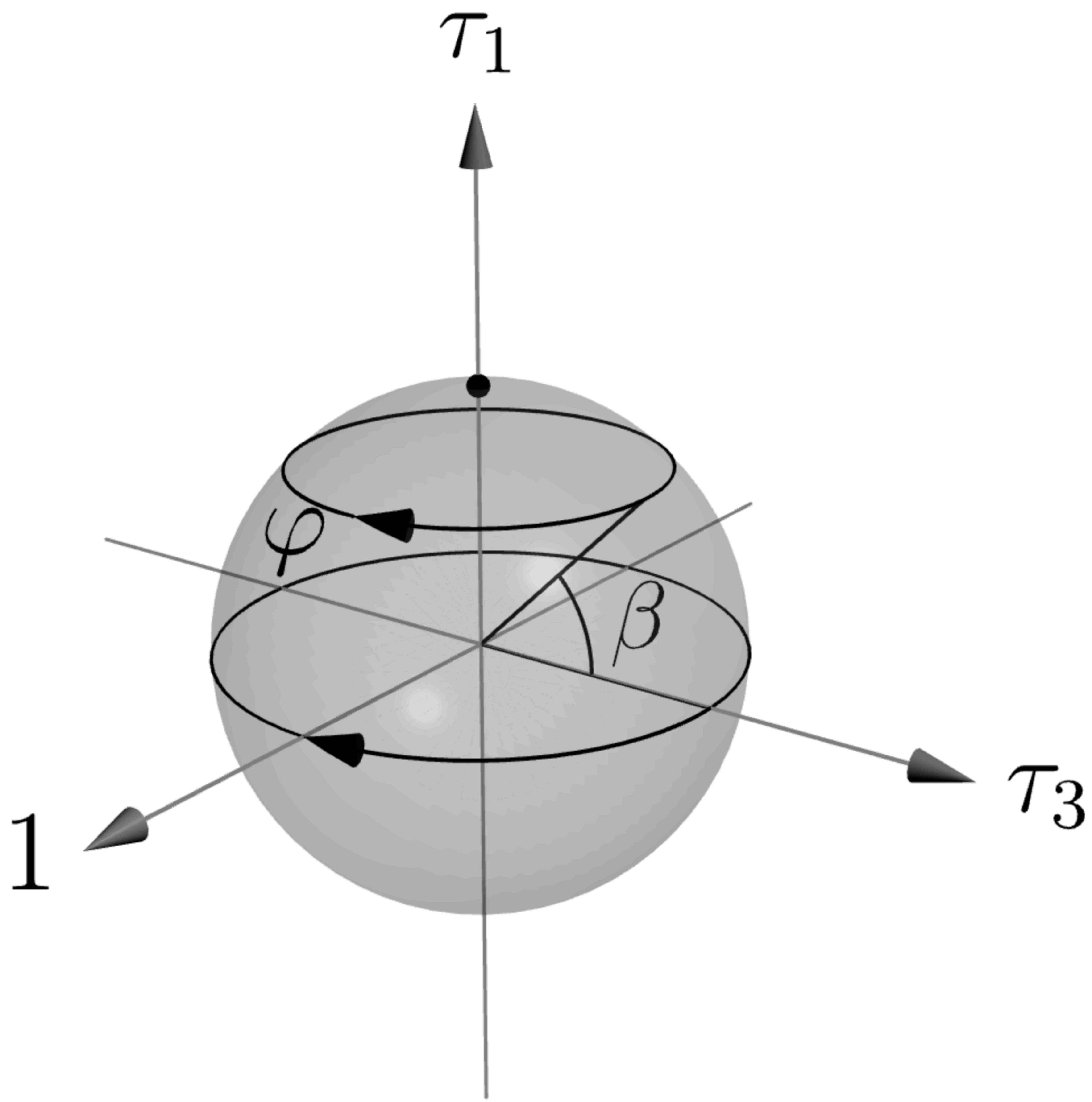


[Buchmüller et al., 2023]

Unwinding the string

Why $\pi_2(\mathrm{SU}(2))$ is trivial

- $U = e^{-i\tau_3\varphi} \cos\beta + i\tau_1 \sin\beta \in \mathrm{SU}(2)$
  - $h = U(v\ 0)^{\top},\ \phi = U(\tau_3/2)U^{\dagger}$
  - controls the U(1) winding
  - $U = i\tau_1 = \mathrm{const.}$ for $\beta = \pi/2$
    - completely unwound

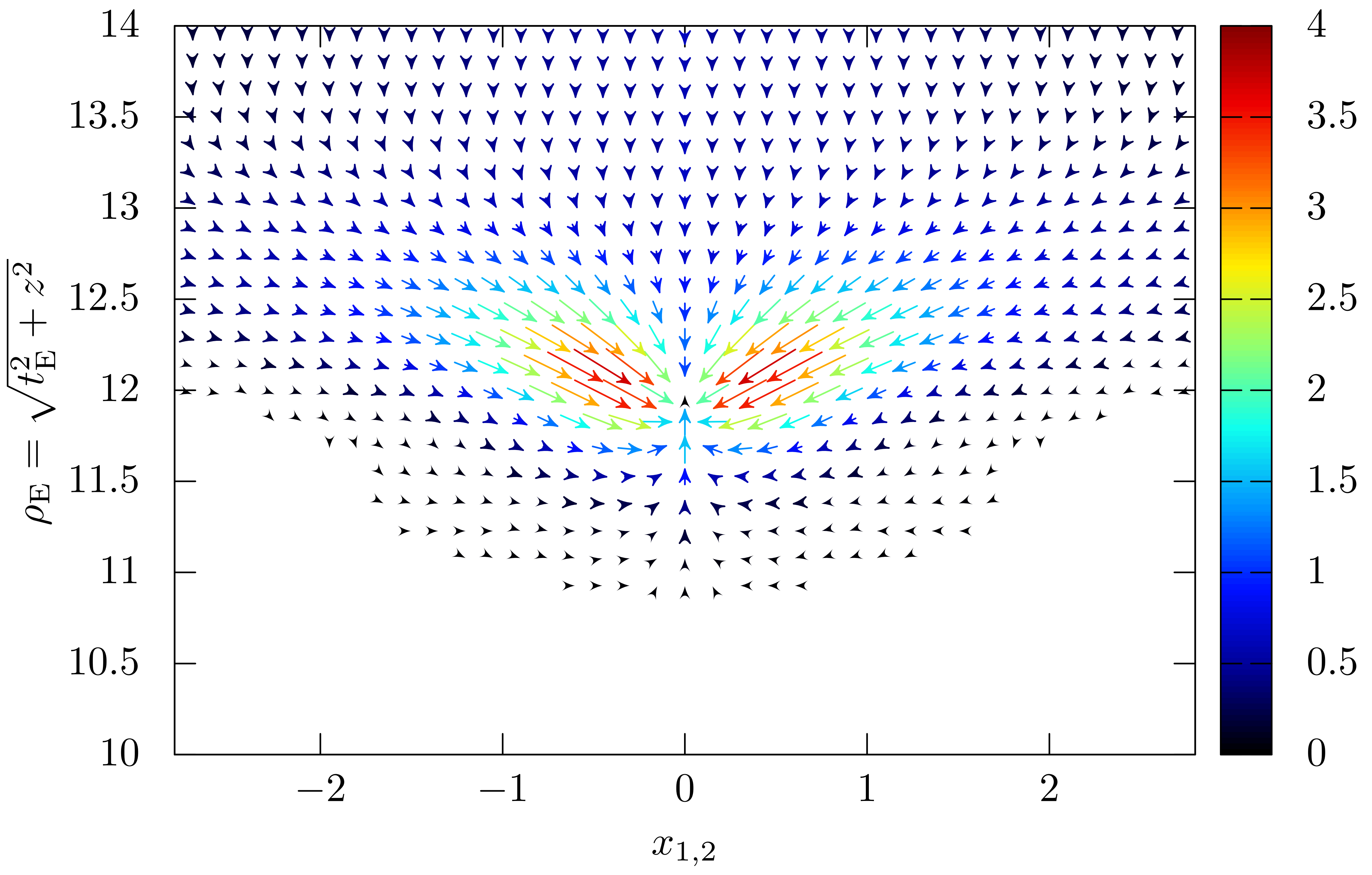


Magnetic fields

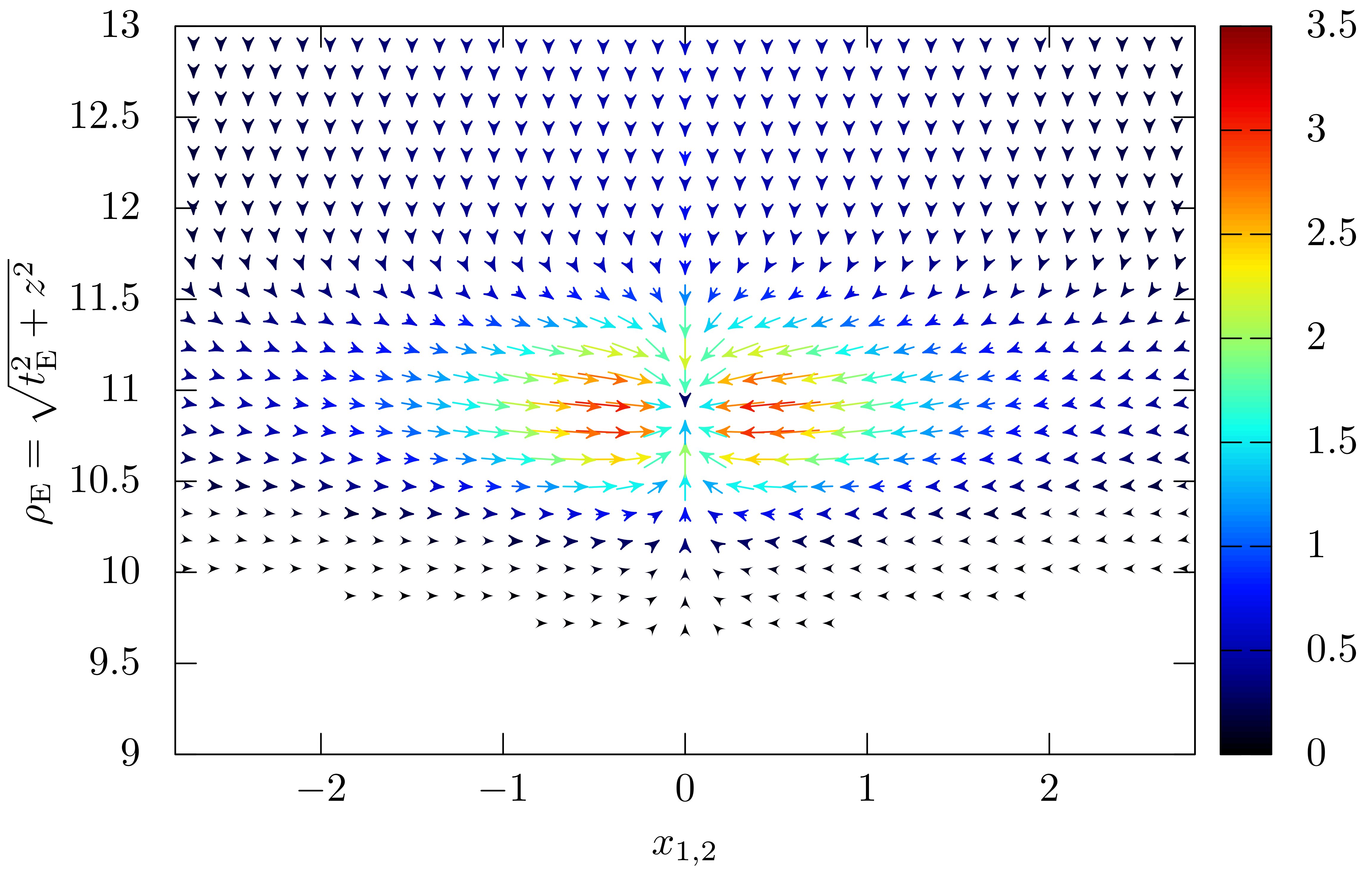
Cross section of the breaking string

$$B_i = \frac{1}{2}\epsilon^{ijk}\frac{\phi^a}{V}F^a_{jk}$$

Primitive

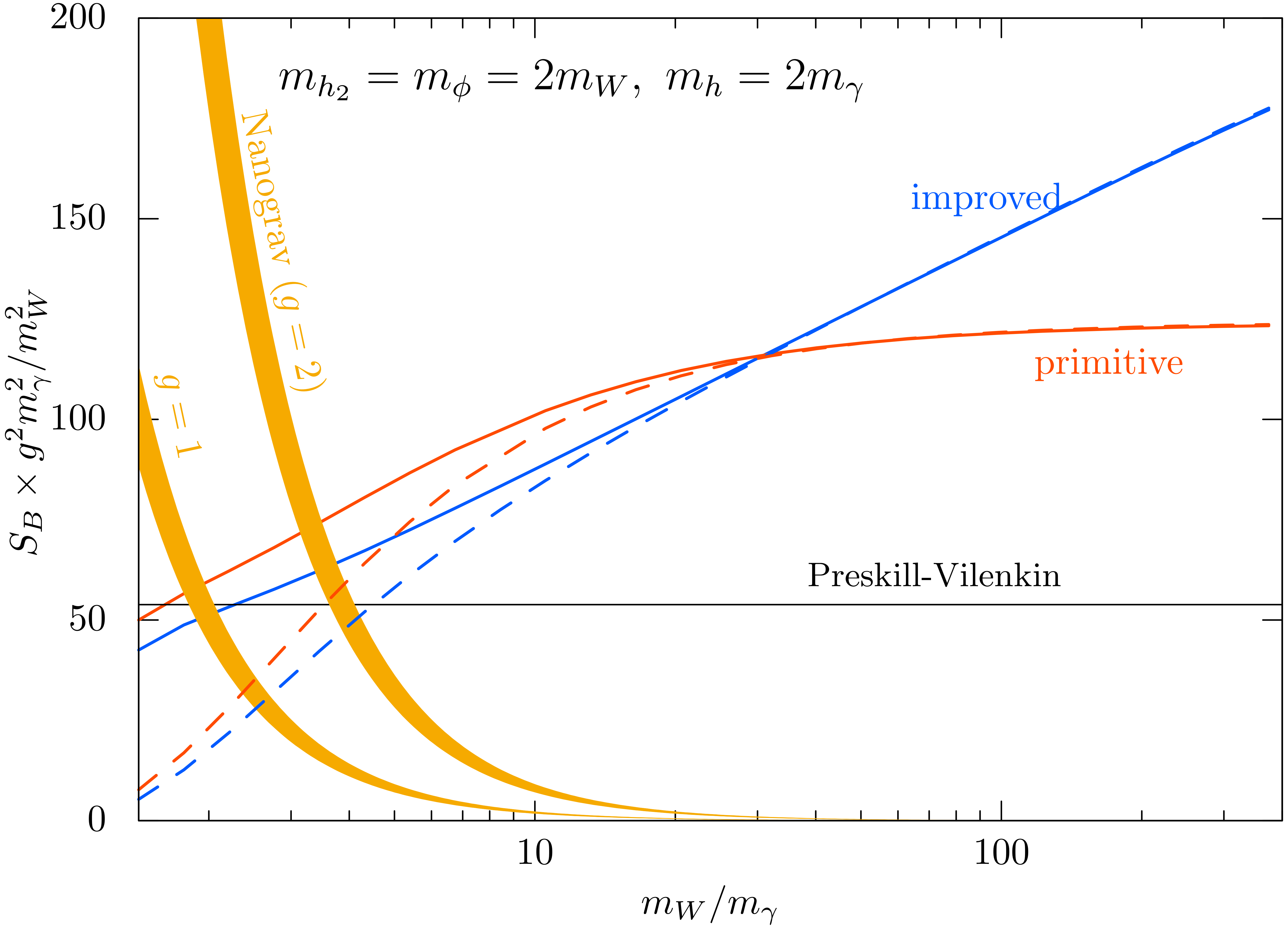


Improved



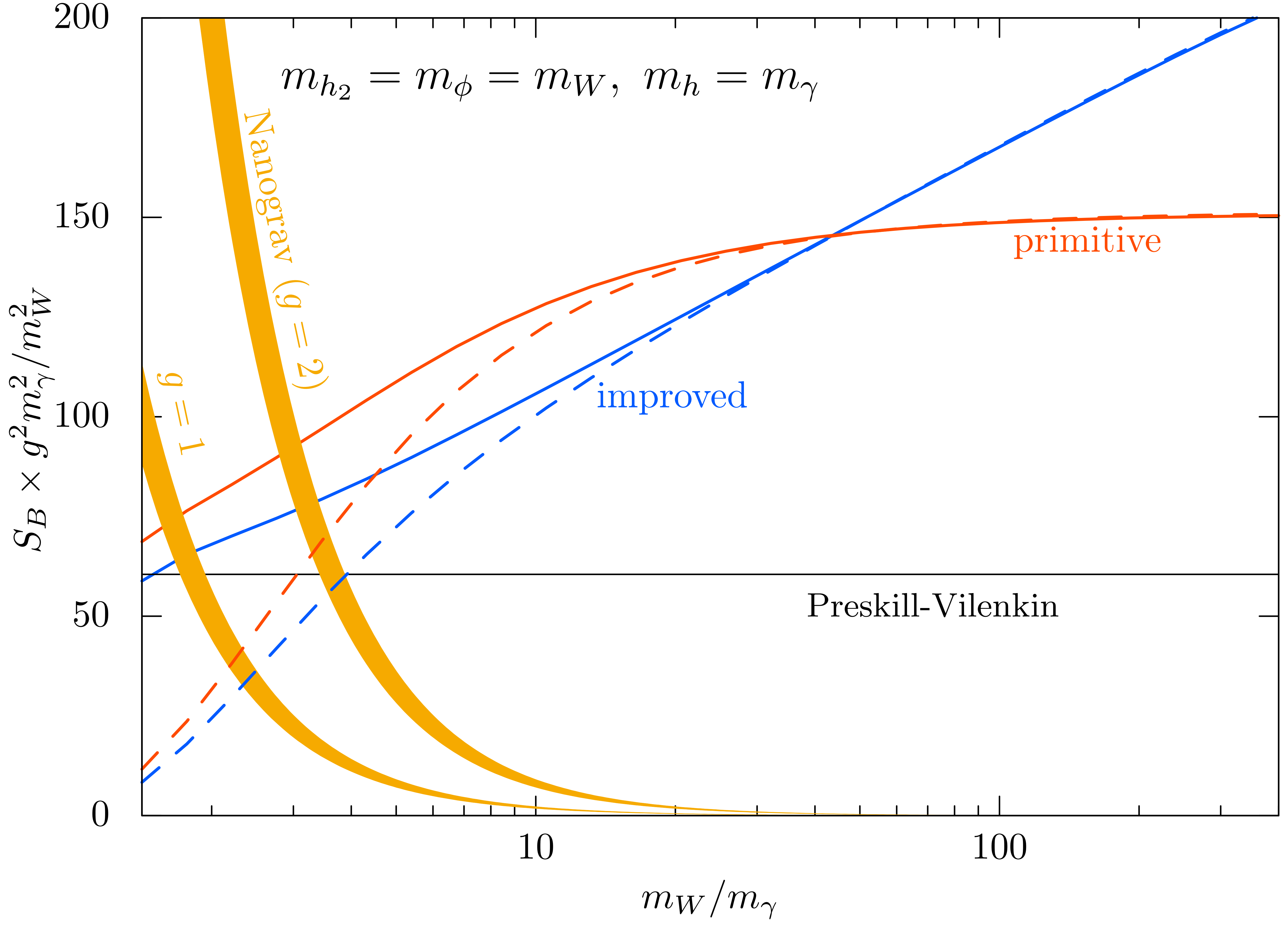
Other parameters

Light W



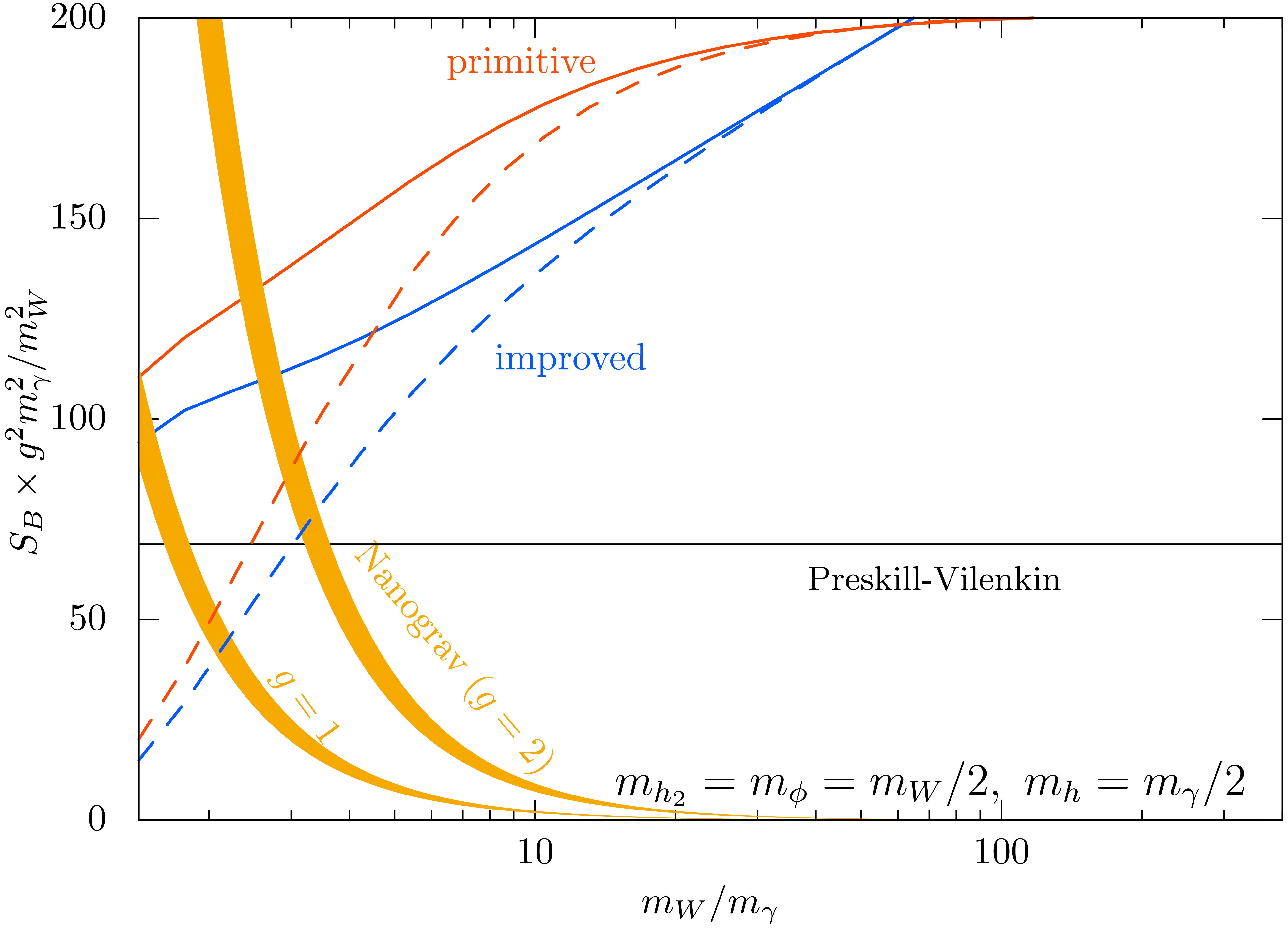
Other parameters

SUSY-like



Other parameters

Heavy W

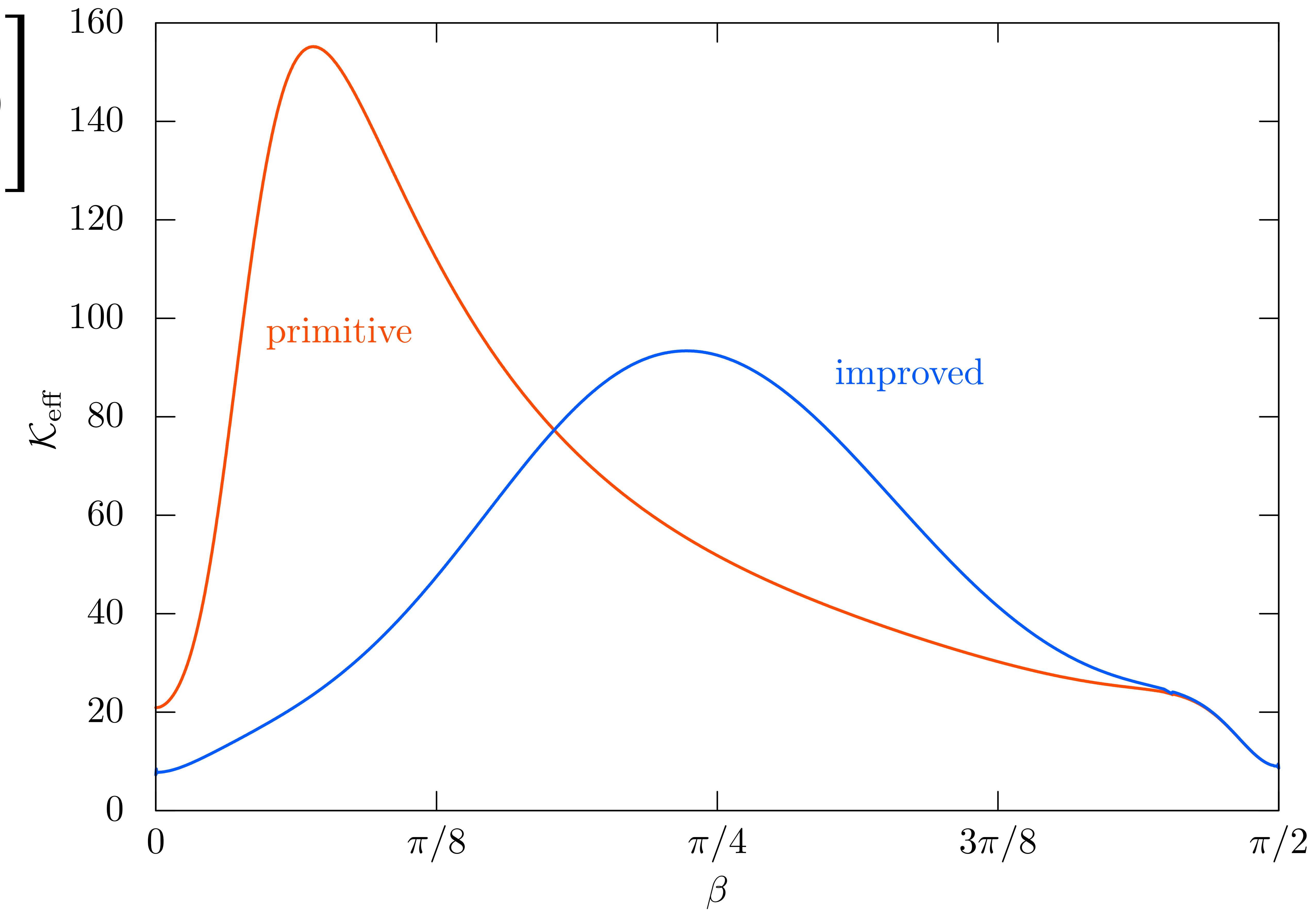


β-thin-wall approximation

- $$S_B = 2\pi \int_0^\infty \rho_E \mathrm{d}\rho_E \left[\frac{1}{2}\mathscr{K}_{\mathrm{eff}}(\beta)\beta'^2 + T(\beta) - T(0)\right]$$
$$\approx -\pi\rho_E^{*2}\left[T(0) - T\left(\frac{\pi}{2}\right)\right] + 2\pi\rho_E^* \int_{\mathrm{wall}} \mathrm{d}\rho_E \left[\frac{1}{2}\mathscr{K}_{\mathrm{eff}}(\beta)\beta'^2 + T(\beta) - T(0)\right]$$
$$= -\pi\rho_E^{*2}\left[T(0) - T\left(\frac{\pi}{2}\right)\right] + 2\pi\rho_E^* m_{\mathrm{eff}}$$
  - $$m_{\mathrm{eff}} := \int_0^{\frac{\pi}{2}} \mathrm{d}\beta \sqrt{2\mathscr{K}_{\mathrm{eff}}(\beta)(T(\beta) - T(0))}$$
- Maximum: $S_B = \pi \dfrac{m_{\mathrm{eff}}^2}{T(0) - T(\pi/2)}$

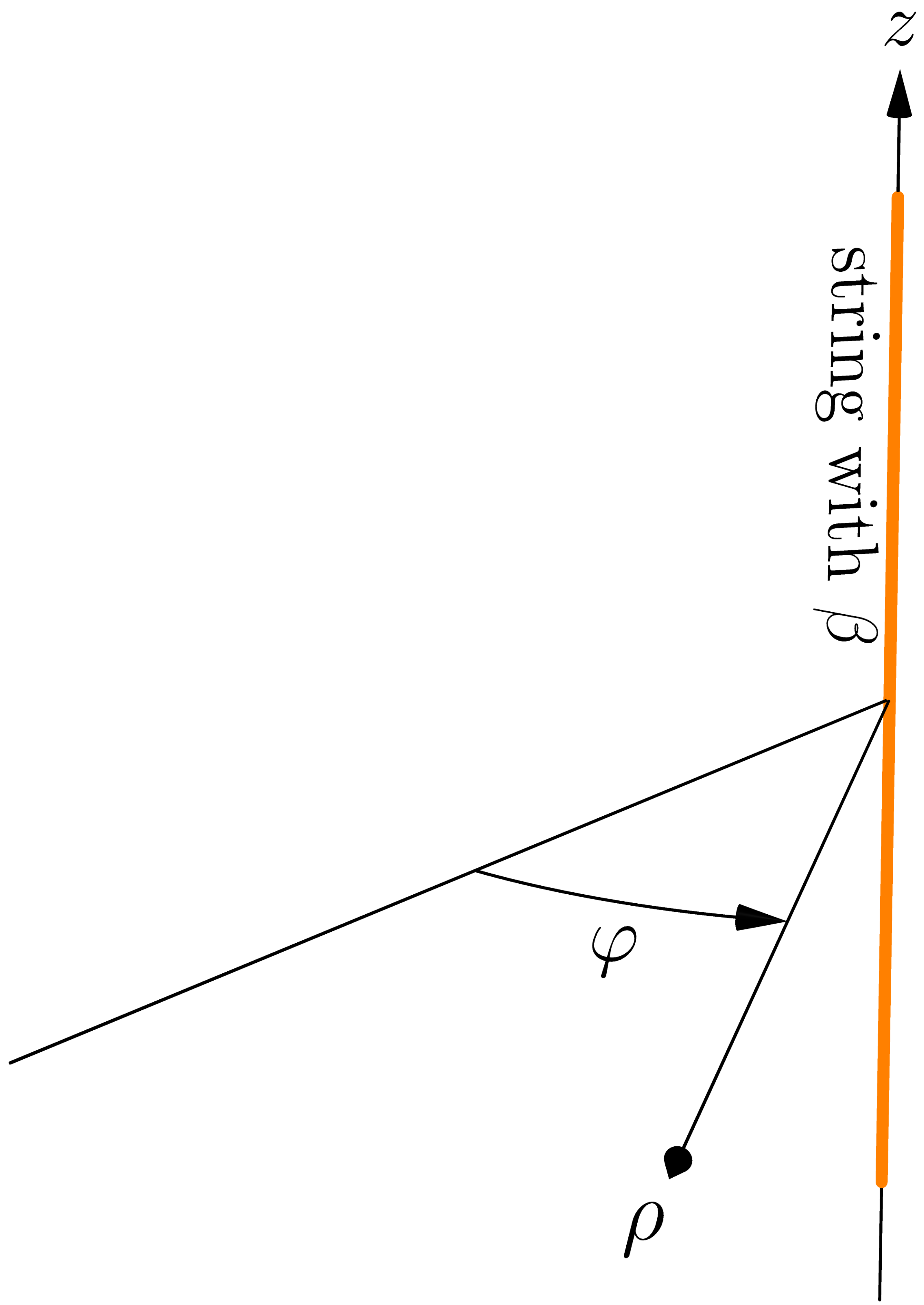
Kinetic term

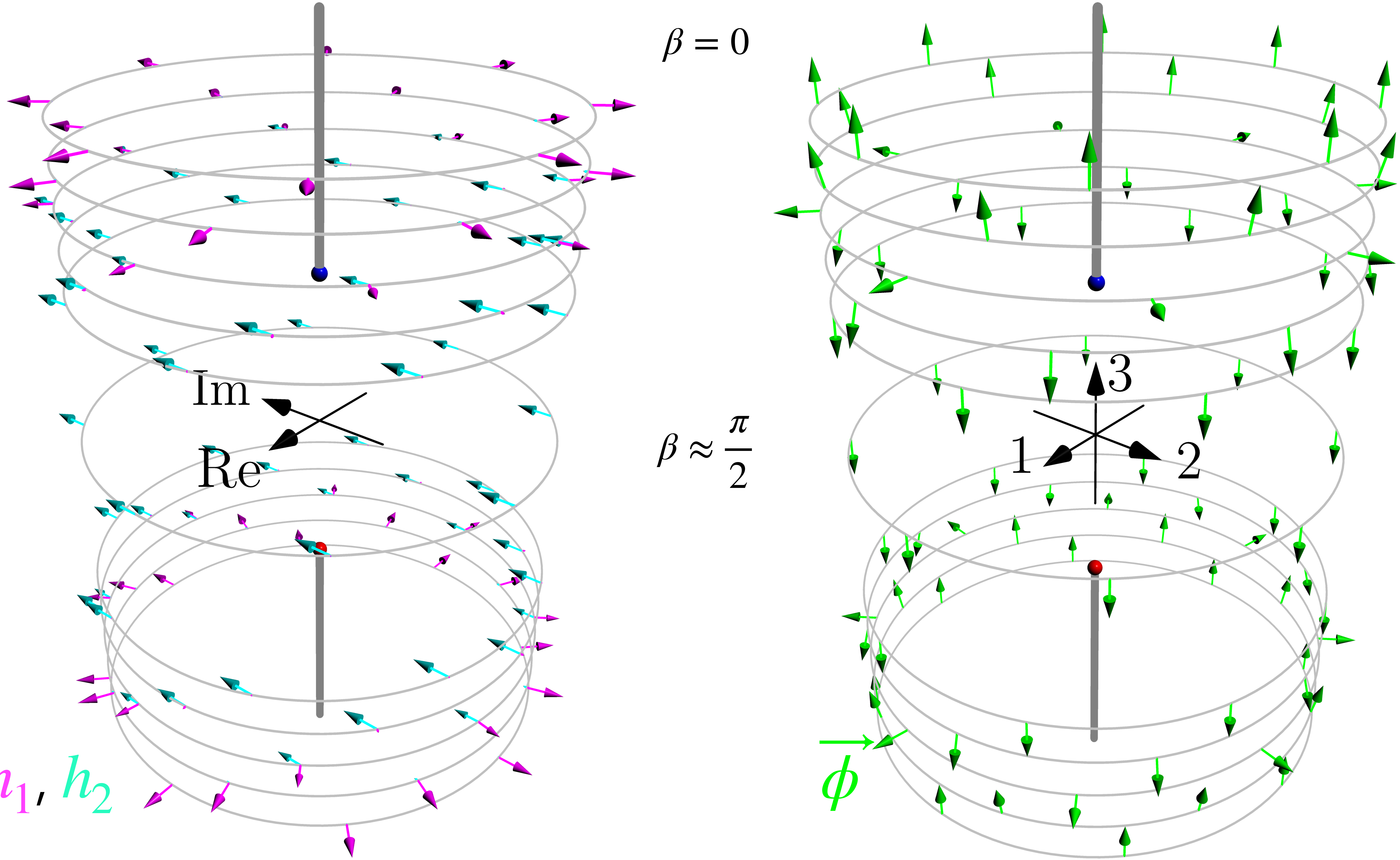
- $S_E = 2\pi \int_0^\infty \rho_E \mathrm{d}\rho_E \left[\frac{1}{2} \mathscr{K}_{\text{eff}}(\beta)\beta'^2 + T(\beta) \right]$



Primitive Ansatz [Shifman & Yung, 2002]

- $h(x) = U \begin{pmatrix} \xi_\beta(\rho) \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$
- $A_\theta(x) = iU\partial_\varphi U^{-1}[1 - f_\beta(\rho)]$, other components: 0
- $\phi(x) = VU\frac{\tau_3}{2}U^{-1} + \varphi_\beta(\rho)\left[\frac{\tau_1}{2}\sin\beta - \frac{\tau_2}{2}\cos\beta\right]$
- $U = e^{-i\tau_3\varphi}\cos\beta + i\tau_1\sin\beta$
- $\xi_\beta(0) = 0$, $\xi_\beta(\infty) = v$, $f_\beta(0) = 1$, $f_\beta(\infty) = 0$, $\varphi_\beta(0) = V\sin 2\beta$, $\varphi_\beta(\infty) = 0$





$\beta = 0$
Im
Re
$\beta \approx \frac{\pi}{2}$
3
1
2
h_1, h_2
$\vec{\phi}$

Setup

Couplings vs. Masses

- Scale hierarchy: $\sqrt{\kappa_{PV}} = M_M/\sqrt{T_{\text{str}}} \sim V/v \propto m_W/m_\gamma$
  - Gauge field : $m_W = gV$, $m_\gamma = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} gv$
  - (Scalars : $m_\phi = \sqrt{8\tilde{\lambda}}V$, $m_{h_1} = 2\sqrt{\lambda}v$, $m_{h_2} = \sqrt{\gamma}V$)
- Euclidean action in terms of the masses: $S_E = \frac{1}{g^2}[g \text{ independent}]$

Couplings vs. Masses (detailed)

- Gauge field : $m_W = gV$, $m_\gamma = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} g v$
  - Scale hierarchy: $V/v \propto m_W/m_\gamma$
- Scalar triplet : $m_\phi = \sqrt{8\tilde{\lambda}} V$
- Scalar doublet: $m_{h_1} = 2\sqrt{\lambda} v$, $m_{h_2} = \sqrt{\gamma} V$
- Euclidean action:

$$g^2 \mathscr{H} = \frac{1}{4} F^2 + \left| D\hat{h} \right|^2 + \frac{1}{2} \left(D\hat{\phi} \right)^2 + \frac{m_\phi^2}{8 m_W^2} \left(\hat{\phi}^2 - m_W^2 \right)^2 + \frac{m_{h_1}^2}{4 m_\gamma^2} \left(\quad \hat{h} \quad ^2 - 2 m_\gamma^2 \right)^2 + \frac{m_{h_2}^2}{m_W^2} \left| \left(\hat{\phi} - \frac{m_W}{2} \right) \hat{h} \right|^2$$