



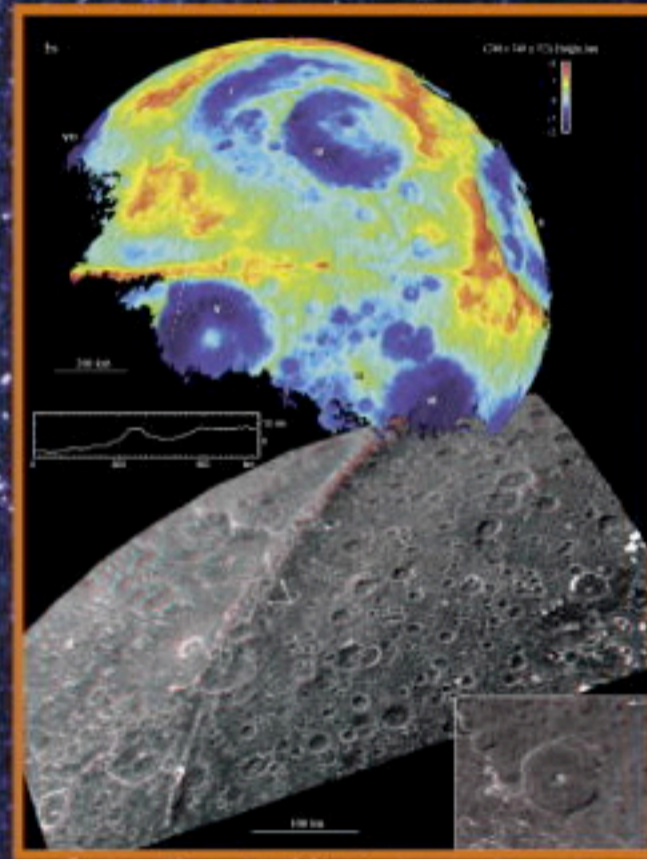
ISSN 0019-1035
This Number Completes Volume 193
Volume 193, Number 2, February 2008

ICARUS

International Journal of Solar System Studies

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Note

The problems with acoustics on a small planet

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Received 25 May 2007; revised 28 September 2007

Available online 1 November 2007

Abstract

In recent years increased attention has been paid to the potential uses of acoustics for extraterrestrial exploration. This paper concerns two aspects which should be taken into account when transposing terrestrial experience with acoustics to smaller worlds. These are, specifically, the effect on the acoustics of the variation of gravity with depth, and the curvature of the world's surface. A case resembling Europa is used quantitatively to illustrate these effects, indicating significant errors if these factors are neglected.

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Keywords: Europa; Geophysics; Impact processes; Interiors

1. Introduction

In recent years increased attention has been paid to the potential uses of acoustics for extraterrestrial exploration. Acoustic systems offer several appealing features: the instrumentation is light-weight, low-power, and rugged (Muir, 2007; Leighton, 2007).

Traditionally, extraterrestrial acoustical investigations have been dominated by the modelling of low-frequency acoustic-related waves in, for example, planets (Lee, 1993) and stars (Elsworth et al., 1990; Rammacher and Ulmschneider, 1992; Bouchy et al., 2005); and in dust plasmas such as occur in planetary rings, comets and noctilucent clouds (Verheest, 1993; Pieper and Goree, 1996; Rosenberg and Kalman, 1997; Merlini, 1997; Shukla, 2000; Gupta et al., 2001).

Direct acoustical observations are understandably rarer (Delory et al., 1998; Zarnecki et al., 2005). With an appropriate propagation model (Petculescu and Lueptow, 2007), the received acoustic signal can be interpreted (inverted) to estimate the properties of the source and the propagation path. For probes which transmit and receive artificially-generated acoustic pulses, the source is well known and the interpretation reveals details of the propagation medium. This might range from inferring atmospheric sound speed from time-of-flight measurements over a few cm (Lebreton et al., 2005) to, speculatively, propagation around entire planets (Leighton et al., 2006, 2007), a technique which has proved to be very successful on Earth (McDonald et al., 1994; Mikhalevsky and Gavrilov, 2001; Wage et al., 2003). If the source of sound is natural, the power requirements and complexity of the hardware in principle become simpler. However the inversion discussed above now contains an extra cause of uncertainty (i.e., the characteristics of the source).

Some probes have carried microphones (Ksanfomality et al., 1983a, 1983b; Lebreton et al., 2005), and there have been spectacular successes from such

missions in collecting data from a wide range of sensors (Zarnecki et al., 2005; Tokano et al., 2006; Stofan et al., 2007). However there are as yet no published results of in-depth interpretation and inversion of the natural acoustical signals generated by the extraterrestrial environment in order to characterise that environment (Fulchignoni et al., 2005a, 2005b, 2006; The Planetary Society, 2007, www.planetary.org/explore/topics/saturn/titan_sounds.html). Nevertheless our understanding of acoustics is sufficient not only to predict the natural acoustic surroundings (including the soundscape which would be audible to human hearing), but also is capable of generating methods by which acoustic data might be quantitatively inverted to characterise the environment (Leighton, 2004; Leighton and White, 2004; Leighton et al., 2005, 2006).

Several notable acoustical investigations feature Europa, a main objective being exploration of ways to characterise the ocean which could be present beneath the surface ice. Kovach and Chyba (2001) and Lee et al. (2003) produced pioneering studies which modelled acoustic propagation in the ice and the sub-ice ocean of Europa. They opened the way for assessing Europa's ice and ocean using acoustical signals of opportunity, generated by natural processes in the ice, ocean or mantle (Crawford and Stevenson, 1988; Schenk and McKinnon, 1989; Hoppa et al., 2000; Greenberg, 2002; Lee et al., 2005; Nimmo and Schenk, 2006; Panning et al., 2006; Leighton et al., 2006). An example application is where 'the spacing of arrivals in time can be used to robustly estimate source range' (Makris et al., 2001; Makris, 2001).

In order to define the required propagation model for acoustic inversion, it is efficient to transpose our well-established terrestrial models to these extraterrestrial environments (Lee et al., 2003). This paper highlights two factors which have not previously been considered in ocean acoustic propagation on Europa, but which become important when such transpositions are made to smaller worlds from Earth (with its relatively large radius, of which the oceans make up a tiny percentage) for long-range propagation. These are, specifically, the effect on the acoustics of the variation of gravity with depth, and the curvature of the world's surface. Whilst it is recognised that there remain uncertainties as to the nature of the ocean on Europa, a simple model (which resembles the generally-

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accepted conditions on Europa) is used to estimate the magnitude of the effects on propagation. It is shown that these effects are general and not confined to specific ray paths, and furthermore that they are significant (compared to the precisions quoted in the earlier papers for propagation ranges used in those earlier papers). Future modelling over such ranges should therefore include this physics.

2. Theory

Consider a small spherical world of outer radius $R_{\text{outer}} = 1561$ km, where a layer of ice (of thickness $h_{\text{ice}} = 20$ km and bounded by R_{outer} and $R_{\text{ice}} = 1541$ km) overlies an ocean, and where the seabed occurs at radius $R_{\text{bed}} = 1441$ km (all radii being measured from the planet's centre). This is not inconsistent with existing models of Europa (Pappalardo et al., 1998), commensurate with the illustrative purposes of this paper. Assume for this calculation that the sound speed ($c/\text{m s}^{-1}$) in this ocean follows the empirical relationship which characterises Earth's oceans in terms of temperature ($T/^\circ\text{C}$) and the hydrostatic pressure (P_{h}/Pa):

$$c = 1449.2 + 4.6T - 0.055T^2 + 0.0003T^3 + (1.39 - 0.012T)(S - 35) + 1.74 \times 10^{-6} P_{\text{h}}. \quad (1)$$

The simple model of this paper assumes that the salinity (S , in parts per thousand, ppt) is taken to resemble that of Earth's oceans (Khurana et al., 1998; Kivelson et al., 2000), and the ocean temperature is taken to be uniform at $T = 0^\circ\text{C}$ unless otherwise stated (Melosh et al., 2004). Let ρ_{w} and ρ_{ice} be the densities of the water and ice respectively (neglecting any variation of these with depth) and let ρ_{E} be the spatially-averaged density of the seabed, mantle and core. Whilst Europa's environment will be more complex than these simple assumptions encapsulate, the model is sufficient to illustrate the effects of this paper. It is not accurate to say that the hydrostatic pressure is $P_{\text{h}} = g(\rho_{\text{w}}z + \rho_{\text{ice}}h_{\text{ice}})$ at some depth z below the base of the ice, where g is the acceleration due to gravity. To do so would be to assume a constant acceleration due to gravity, and to ignore the curvature of Europa's spherical geometry: vertical lines are not parallel on a small planet. Consider the separate components that make up the hydrostatic pressure. We assume an almost zero atmospheric pressure, and ocean depth z as measured positively downwards from the ice/water interface. The assumption of constant densities for the water and ice is maintained throughout this paper.

Whilst on Earth it is usual to ignore the difference in the acceleration due to gravity from the sea surface to the seabed, the effect is much larger on Europa because it is a smaller planetary body, and because the sea depths are believed to be so much greater. The net effect on the gravity will depend on the densities of the material which exist between the point of interest and the centre of the planet. At a location in the water, a distance r_{w} from Europa's centre, the acceleration due to gravity ($g(r_{\text{w}})$) is

$$g(r_{\text{w}}) \approx \frac{G}{r_{\text{w}}^2} \left(\frac{4\pi R_{\text{bed}}^3 \rho_{\text{E}}}{3} + \int_{R_{\text{bed}}}^{r_{\text{w}}} \rho_{\text{w}} 4\pi r^2 dr \right) = \frac{4\pi G}{3r_{\text{w}}^2} (r_{\text{w}}^3 \rho_{\text{w}} + R_{\text{bed}}^3 (\rho_{\text{E}} - \rho_{\text{w}})), \quad (2)$$

where $G = 6.67300 \times 10^{-11} \text{ m}^3 \text{ kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$ is the gravitational constant. Similarly, at a location in the ice, a distance r_{ice} from Europa's centre, the acceleration due to gravity ($g(r_{\text{ice}})$) is

$$g(r_{\text{ice}}) \approx \frac{4\pi G}{3r_{\text{ice}}^2} ((R_{\text{ice}}^3 - R_{\text{bed}}^3) \rho_{\text{w}} + R_{\text{bed}}^3 \rho_{\text{E}} + (r_{\text{ice}}^3 - R_{\text{ice}}^3) \rho_{\text{ice}}). \quad (3)$$

Assume the parameter values cited in the caption to Fig. 1. From (3), the value of the gravity at the surface of Europa is a little over 1.3 m s^{-2} , which is consistent with the values in the literature (Pappalardo et al., 1998), and from (2) is around 10% less than the value at the bottom of the ocean (the gravitational acceleration on the Arctic icepack differs by less than 0.03% from that found at

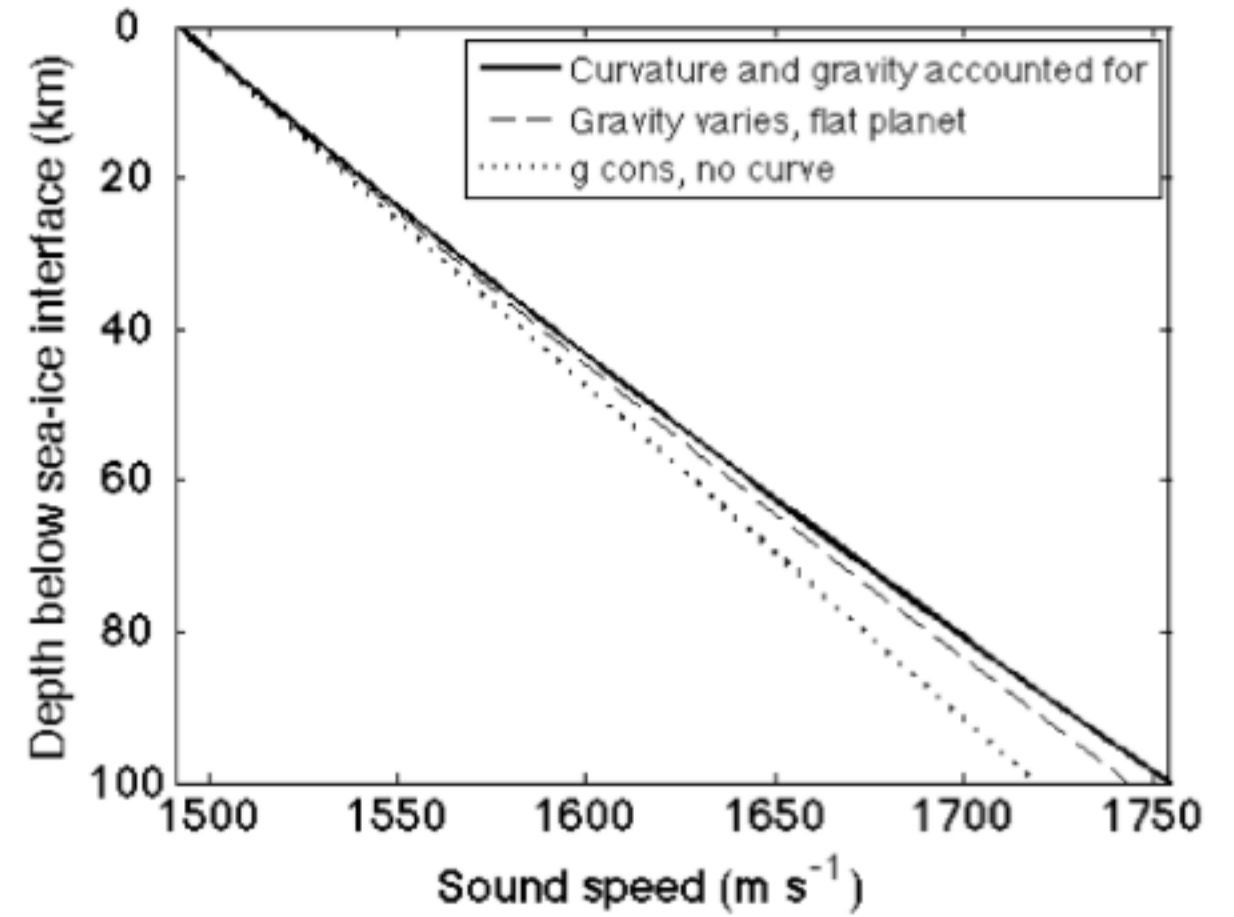


Fig. 1. Calculation of oceanic sound speed as a function of depth beneath the base of the ice sheet, assuming constant densities ($\rho_{\text{w}} = 1000 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$, $\rho_{\text{ice}} = 920 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$, with $\rho_{\text{E}} = 3550 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ and $S = 35$ ppt, and $T = 0^\circ\text{C}$). Solid curve (—) plots c_1 , the sound speed calculated including planet curvature and variable gravitational acceleration (i.e., substitution of Eq. (4) into Eq. (1)). For this curve the sound speed gradient is $dc_1/dr_{\text{w}} \approx 2.65 \times 10^{-3} \text{ s}^{-1}$. Dashed curve (---) ignores planet curvature but has variable gravitational acceleration. Dotted curve ($\cdot\cdot\cdot$) plots c_2 , the sound speed calculated ignoring planet curvature and for a gravitational acceleration which is constant at a value of 1.31 m s^{-2} (the value at Europa's surface). For this dotted curve, the sound speed gradient is $dc_2/dr_{\text{w}} \approx 2.3 \times 10^{-3} \text{ s}^{-1}$. Changing the assumed temperature tends to translate all the curves: if the temperature is increased to $T = 4^\circ\text{C}$, the sound speeds are all increased by roughly 20 m s^{-1} . As a result, the size of errors in Fig. 2 is relatively insensitive to the exact temperature, although in principle the absolute results are sufficiently sensitive to allow inversion of the acoustic data to estimate ocean properties (Leighton et al., 2007).

the 1.3 km average depth of the Arctic Ocean seabed).¹ The hydrostatic pressure within Europa's water column approximately equals the sum of the weights of water and ice upon a spherical surface at radius r_{w} , divided by the area of this surface $4\pi r_{\text{w}}^2$:

$$P_{\text{h}}(r_{\text{w}}) = \frac{W_{\text{ice}} + \rho_{\text{w}} \int_{r_{\text{w}}}^{R_{\text{ice}}} 4\pi \tilde{r}_{\text{w}}^2 g(\tilde{r}_{\text{w}}) d\tilde{r}_{\text{w}}}{4\pi r_{\text{w}}^2} = \frac{W_{\text{ice}}}{4\pi r_{\text{w}}^2} + \frac{\rho_{\text{w}} \frac{4\pi G}{3} R_{\text{bed}}^3 (\rho_{\text{E}} - \rho_{\text{w}}) (R_{\text{ice}} - r_{\text{w}})}{r_{\text{w}}^2} + \frac{\rho_{\text{w}}^2 \frac{4\pi G (R_{\text{ice}}^4 - r_{\text{w}}^4)}{12}}{r_{\text{w}}^2}, \quad (4)$$

which is accurate to within 10% at Europa's seabed, although for small planets integration of $\nabla P_{\text{h}} = \rho g$ should be used as follows:

$$P_{\text{h}}(r_{\text{w}}) = \int_{r_{\text{w}}}^{R_{\text{ice}}} \rho_{\text{w}} g(\tilde{r}_{\text{w}}) d\tilde{r}_{\text{w}} + \int_{R_{\text{ice}}}^{R_{\text{outer}}} \rho_{\text{ice}} g(\tilde{r}_{\text{ice}}) d\tilde{r}_{\text{ice}} = \frac{4\pi G \rho_{\text{ice}}}{3} ((R_{\text{ice}}^{-1} - R_{\text{outer}}^{-1}) ((R_{\text{ice}}^3 - R_{\text{bed}}^3) \rho_{\text{w}} + R_{\text{bed}}^3 \rho_{\text{E}} - R_{\text{ice}}^3 \rho_{\text{ice}}) + \rho_{\text{ice}} (R_{\text{outer}}^2 - R_{\text{ice}}^2)/2) + \frac{4\pi G \rho_{\text{w}}}{3} (\rho_{\text{w}} (R_{\text{ice}}^2 - r_{\text{w}}^2)/2 + R_{\text{bed}}^3 (\rho_{\text{E}} - \rho_{\text{w}}) (r_{\text{w}}^{-1} - R_{\text{ice}}^{-1})) \quad (5)$$

which now remains bounded as $r_{\text{w}} \rightarrow R_{\text{bed}} \rightarrow 0$, where $g(r_{\text{w}})$ and $g(r_{\text{ice}})$ are given by Eqs. (2) and (3) respectively, and where the weight of the ice sheet

¹ In this paper, the number of significant figures quoted with numerical values does not reflect confidence in the accuracy of those values. Rather, it represents the precision required to distinguish estimates obtained from the following analysis, from those which are given for comparison following 'back-of-the-envelope' calculations.

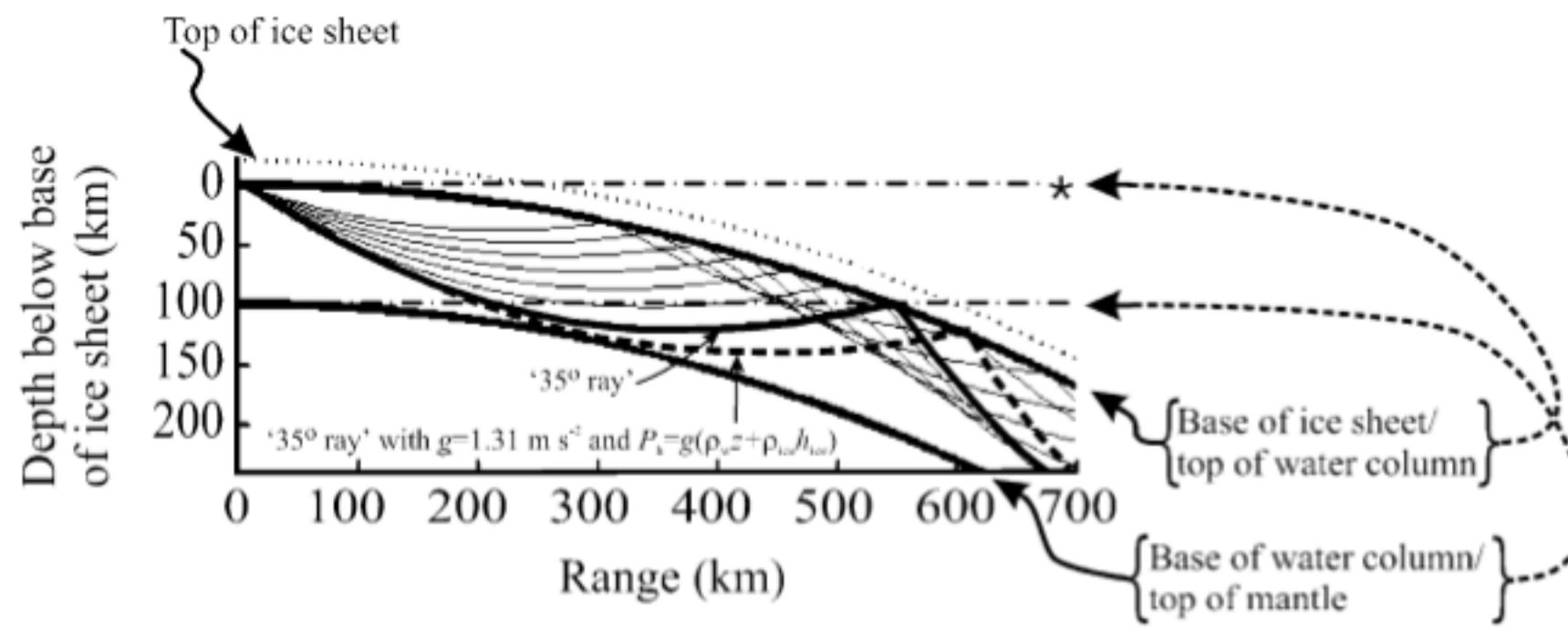


Fig. 2. Predicted ray paths within the curved ocean (the location of the ocean boundaries if curvature is ignored are also shown), calculated when Eq. (4) is used in Eq. (1) for the conditions indicated in the caption to Fig. 1. The deepest of the selection of rays calculated in this way had a launch angle of 35° below the horizontal, and is plotted with a thick solid line, and labelled ‘ 35° ray.’ If the trajectory of the ray with a 35° launch angle were instead recalculated with the variation in gravity neglected, and the hydrostatic pressure calculated using rectilinear (as opposed to conic) sections, its trajectory would change to the one shown with the thick dashed line. The rays propagate within the upwardly-refracting water column, reflecting specularly off the sea/ice interface.

in (4) is $W_{ice} = \rho_{ice} \int_{R_{ice}}^{R_{outer}} 4\pi \tilde{r}_{ice}^2 g(\tilde{r}_{ice}) d\tilde{r}_{ice}$. Substitution of (5) into (1) allows the variation with depth of the sound speed in the ocean to be calculated. The full calculations using (4) in (1) are compared in Fig. 1 with the more approximate forms obtained for the sound speed profile. Fig. 1 implies that the sound speed will increase with depth (and therefore acoustic propagation in the ocean will be upwardly refracting; Leighton et al., 2006). This increase is approximately linear with depth [to within 3%, as confirmed by differentiation of (1) (with (5) used for P_h) with respect to z]. Such a linear approximation would be physically equivalent to ignoring the variation of gravity with depth, and the effect of the curvature of the planet. The influence of these two effects will now be estimated.

3. Results

The variation in gravitational acceleration and the curvature of Europa were incorporated into the computational model for ray propagation in the ocean (with properties assumed as in caption of Fig. 1). Neither potential deviations from sphericity nor horizontal gradients have been incorporated, though such effects have been shown to have a profound effect on Earth (Munk et al., 1988). The interface between water and ice was modelled as perfectly reflecting.

Fig. 2 shows the paths of a series of rays, calculated with the incorporation both of variable g and where the hydrostatic pressure is calculated using conic, rather than rectilinear, sections. The top and bottom of the ice sheet, and the top of the mantle, are shown. Also shown are the locations that these physical boundaries would take if the curvature of the planet were ignored, indicating the large errors that would occur in calculations of propagations over several hundred km (distances which are relevant for, say, the remote detection of meteor impacts or other large events). The changes to the sound speed profile shown in Fig. 1 will affect all through-water ray paths/travel times over a sufficient distance, but for clarity a single ray is chosen to demonstrate this in Fig. 2. The deepest of the series of plotted rays is labelled (the ‘ 35° ray’). The figure also shows its path were it to be calculated with the assumption that g is constant at 1.31 m s^{-2} (the value for gravity at the surface), and were hydrostatic pressure to be calculated using rectilinear sections (i.e., $P_h = g(\rho_w z + \rho_{ice} h_{ice})$). The discrepancy is considerable, with, for example, a $>50 \text{ km}$ overestimate in the range at which the ray that was launched at 35° below the horizontal first reflects off the ice.² Such errors increase with range, and are important if, for example, acoustic propagation right around the planet is modelled (for example, to diagnose the oceanic conditions) (Leighton et al., 2007). Note that if the original ray chosen for this study had been slightly deeper, then the neglect of these effects would have caused reflections from the seabed: when the character

of the propagation is changed qualitatively in this way, the effect can be more significant than the percentage changes implied above. The circumpropagation simulations of oceans in Europa undertaken by Leighton et al. (2007) show the importance of the correct modelling of the qualitative ray paths when quantitatively predicting acoustic travel times: a small change in the assumed ocean temperature or depth can lead to a much greater proportional change in travel time if it alters the number of reflections at the water/ice interface required for a specific return.

4. Conclusions

On a small planet, assumptions which are common in ocean acoustic models for Earth may no longer hold. The assumption that the acceleration due to gravity is independent of depth, and the assumption that the hydrostatic pressure can be calculated using rectilinear sections, were shown on a planet resembling Europa to lead to significant errors. Whilst these effects may be negligible on other planets (where the ocean makes up a smaller proportion of the radius), their effects should be quantitatively assessed using the methods of this paper so that any neglect of such effects can be justified or shown to be questionable. This procedure is also applicable to the modelling of non-acoustic phenomena such as heat convection, mass flux, and glacial/tectonic interaction (Lee et al., 2003; Showman and Han, 2005). Such justification for neglecting relevant physics should not be based on misleading comparisons between the systematic sound speed discrepancies described in this paper, and the current uncertainties in the values of other parameters (e.g., ocean temperature and salinity variations) whose physics is correctly incorporated into the models but whose values are estimated with uncertainty which may be reduced as further data becomes available. This is because acoustic inversions based on a model which contains significant systematic errors in the physics can produce misleading answers. The formulations outlined in this paper provide a simple basis for generating a more accurate model.

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² If one were neglecting ice pack curvature and calculating the distance to intersect the base of the ice sheet at * in Fig. 2, the error would be $2(c_{1,i}/(dc_1/dr_w) - c_{2,i}/(dc_2/dr_w)) \sin \theta \approx 2(1750/(2.65 \times 10^{-3}) - 1720/(2.3 \times 10^{-3})) \sin 35 \approx 100 \text{ km}$, where $c_{1,i}$ and $c_{2,i}$ are the sound speeds where each of the respective rays attains horizontal trajectory (Leighton, 1998).

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