

Problem 3

In a space research project two schemes of launching a space probe out of the Solar system are discussed. The first scheme (i) is to launch the probe with a velocity large enough to escape from the Solar system directly. According to the second one (ii), the probe is to approach one of the outer planets, and with its help change its direction of motion and reach the velocity necessary to escape from the Solar system. Assume that the probe moves under the gravitational field of only the Sun or the planet, depending on whichever field is stronger at that point.

- a) Determine the minimum velocity and its direction relative to the Earth's motion that should be given to the probe on launching according to scheme (i).
- b) Suppose that the probe has been launched in the direction determined in a) but with another velocity. Determine the velocity of the probe when it crosses the orbit of Mars, i. e., its parallel and perpendicular components with respect to this orbit. Mars is not near the point of crossing, when crossing occurs.
- c) Let the probe enter the gravitational field of Mars. Find the minimum launching velocity from the Earth necessary for the probe to escape from the Solar system.

Hint: From the result a) you know the optimal magnitude and the direction of the velocity of the probe that is necessary to escape from the Solar system after leaving the gravitational field of Mars. (You do not have to worry about the precise position of Mars during the encounter.) Find the relation between this velocity and the velocity components before the probe enters the gravitational field of Mars; i. e., the components you determined in b). What about the conservation of energy of the probe?

- d) Estimate the maximum possible fractional saving of energy in scheme (ii) with respect to scheme (i). Notes: Assume that all the planets revolve round the Sun in circles, in the same direction and in the same plane. Neglect the air resistance, the rotation of the Earth around its axis as well as the energy used in escaping from the Earth's gravitational field.

Data: Velocity of the Earth round the Sun is 30 km/s, and the ratio of the distances of the Earth and Mars from the Sun is 2/3.