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Application of the parareal algorithm to simulations of ELMs in ITER plasma

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Abstract

This paper explores the application of the parareal algorithm to simulations of ELMs in ITER plasma. The primary focus of this research is identifying the parameters that lead to optimum performance. Since the plasma dynamics vary extremely fast during an ELM cycle, a straightforward application of the algorithm is not possible and a modification to the standard parareal correction is implemented. The size of the time chunks also have an impact on the performance and needs to be optimized. A computational gain of 7.8 is obtained with 48 processors to illustrate that the parareal algorithm can be successfully applied to ELM plasma.

Keywords: time parallelization, parareal algorithm, edge plasma, scrape off layer (SOL), SOLPS, magnetically confined plasmas, Edge Localized Modes or ELMs, ITER, tokamak

PACS: 02.70.-c, 52.40.Hf, 52.55.Fa, 52.65.-y, 02.90.+p, 07.05.Tp

1. Introduction

The ever increasing demand for improving complexities in simulations requires maximizing the efficient use of computational resources. Traditional parallelization techniques (such as space parallelization) although reduce the wallclock time, often reach saturation on modern supercomputing machines.

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Parallelizing the time domain ushers in a new possibility of optimizing resource utilization. Parallel in time algorithms are not a replacement for but are complimentary to other schemes of parallelization. This therefore allows utilization of the gain achieved from existing parallelization and adding a large improvement in computational gain.

Various parallel in time algorithms exist such as PITA [1], parareal [2], RIDC [3, 4], PFASST [5]. This work explores the application of the Parareal algorithm to a complex, non-linear simulation in fusion plasma. Of all the algorithms that achieve temporal parallelization, the Parareal algorithm has been the one to have been used the most in non-linear plasma physics simulations over the years [6, 7, 8]. The algorithm was introduced in [2] and its convergence and stability have been analyzed in great detail in [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17].

This work seeks to explore temporal parallelization of simulations of Edge Localized Modes (ELMs) that play a crucial role in the successful operation of any fusion device [18, 19, 20, 21, 22]. ELMs are simulated using the multi-fluid codes SOLPS 5.0 [23, 24] and SOLPS-ITER [25, 26]. ELMs have been observed in experiments on present machines[27, 28]. These modes exhibit irregular or quasi-regular periodicity and lead to deposition of huge power fluxes on plasma facing walls . While ELMs are an area of strong active research in the fusion community and there is significant information collected from experimental databases, a complete understanding of ELMs is still elusive to scientists.

One major hindrance in studying the behavior of ELMs using computer simulations is their demand for extremely large wall clock times. This is why adding a new dimension to the parallelization is of significance in ELM research. A successful application of the Parareal algorithm makes these simulations much more feasible, allowing the inclusion of more complex physics while still maintaining a reasonable computation time. However, due to the strong non-linear phenomena involved, the application of temporal parallelization to simulations of ELMs is unsurprisingly far from straightforward and this work attempts to identify the computational parameters and regimes that allow the best performance.

The present research is a follow-up of the work detailed in [8]. [8] demonstrated that the parareal algorithm is applicable to edge plasma simulations but relatively 'steady' states were used as test beds. This work extends that application to more strongly coupled non-linear phenomena called ELMs. Due to the complex non-linear behavior of ELMs, the application poses new

challenges. A modification to the application of the parareal correction allows convergence and generates computational gain.

This paper is organized as follows: ELMs are described in sec.2 and sec.3 details how they are implemented in the code to be observed in the simulations. Sec.4 describes the Parareal Algorithm and the results are described in sec.5.

2. ELMs

Edge Localized Modes(ELMs) [29, 30] are periodic bursts of instabilities at the plasma edge in a tokamak. A tokamak is a fusion device of toroidal geometry with complex magnetic field lines to confine the burning plasma of a few hundred million Kelvin within the vessel. As has been mentioned in [8], simulations of the plasma edge is particularly challenging due to the interactions with the materials of the walls of the vessel accompanied by both radial (perpendicular to the magnetic field lines) and parallel (parallel to the field lines) transports.

It is desirable to operate a tokamak in the H-mode (High Confinement Mode) [18, 31, 32, 33] since that greatly enhances the energy confinement time of the plasma. The energy confinement time τ is the characteristic time scale in which the energy escapes the plasma. In fact, H-mode confinement time is typically twice that of L-mode (Low Confinement mode). The sharp transition from L-mode to H-mode occurs when the input heating power is above a certain threshold. A sharp increase in the profile gradients (such as of pressure, density or temperature) occurs over a very narrow region (typically a few cm) at the plasma edge. This results in the formation of the 'edge transport barrier' or 'H-mode pedestal' which generates the improved confinement. The suppression of turbulent transport at the plasma edge is believed to be the reason behind the improved confinement - although a complete understanding of the mechanisms at play is still an area of active research.

While the improved confinement makes the H-mode an attractive operating regime, the presence of instabilities makes it more challenging. Two MHD instabilities become prominent. The increasing pressure gradient leads to ballooning instabilities and the gradient in the edge current generates the peeling instability. These two instabilities are believed to be responsible for ELMs [18, 19].

ELMs are characterized by sudden bursts of energy and a transient rise of heat loads on the divertor targets of the device. Depending on their amplitudes and frequencies, ELMs are classified into types I (large amplitudes - hence often termed as 'giant' ELMs) and II and III (smaller, hence often known as 'grassy' ELMs). Current predictions estimate [21, 34, 35] the heat flux due to ELMs on the divertor plates at ITER (the world's biggest experimental tokamak) will be 20 times larger than what can be tolerated for a reasonable lifetime of the target materials. This makes research into ELM control and mitigation of primary importance for making fusion a viable source of energy.

Despite the devastating impact of tremendous heat loads on plasma facing components and leading to temporary degradation in confinement, ELMs have strong positive consequences. They help to control plasma densities and remove impurities from the plasma core. As a result, controlled ELMs in H-mode is the desired operational mode for ITER.

3. ELMs in the SOLPS code

The SOLPS 5.0 and SOLPS-ITER codes are described in detail in [23, 24, 25, 26]. SOLPS stands for Scrape Off Layer Plasma Simulator which, as the name suggests, simulates the Scrape Off Layer (SOL). The SOL is the region between the wall of the device and the Last Closed Flux Surface (LCFS), characterized by open field lines. Both codes solve the same set of equations and SOLPS-ITER is considered to be an upgraded version of SOLPS5.0. Both codes use the B2.5 package that solve the Braginskii fluid equations for multiple species or all charge states of every individual element present in the plasma [20]. The regimes studied are sufficiently collisional to justify the use of fluid equations. In the present case, the fluid model is used for both the charged species as well as the neutrals in the plasma as in [20]. Ideally, it is desirable to use a kinetic model to simulate the neutral species in the plasma, but using the fluid model makes the computations tractable.

It is interesting to note that ELMs are believed to be intrinsically MHD phenomena while SOLPS is not an MHD code. It must be clarified that a code like SOLPS is used to study the impact of ELMs (and provide insight into the effects of individual species which is impossible to perform in an MHD code) rather than the mechanisms for their generation (which is typically studied using MHD codes [36]).

ELMs characteristically enhance the radial transport in a plasma. This is typically simulated by increasing the diffusive or convective coefficient for a brief period (say 1 ms) at regular intervals. The impact of that increase successfully lasts much longer than 1 ms and simulates the behaviour of an ELM-plasma. These simulations have been successfully bench marked against experiments in the JET and TCV tokamaks [21, 22].

[8] studied relatively simpler cases in the tokamaks MAST and DIII-D. The present work simulates a significantly larger device - ITER - with a much higher number of species mix (98) in the plasma. The physics involved in these simulations are very similar to the cases described in [20]. The species include all ions and neutrals of Deuterium, Tritium, Helium, Beryllium, Neon and Tungsten and the complex interactions between the various charge states are included in the simulations. As in [20], prompt redeposition of Tungsten, which is otherwise released into the plasma as a result of sputtering at the divertor targets, is included in the calculations. The density gradient driven diffusivity has been increased by 10 times for 1 ms in every 20 ms to simulate the ELM triggered plasma. This is illustrated in Fig.1 where the diffusivity along the outer midplane is plotted for two different times.

A computational grid of size 96×36 as shown in Fig.2 was used as the fine model for the SOLPS computations of ELMs in the ITER plasma. The typical size of the timesteps for the fine computations was $1E-5$ sec. A typical ELM cycle is shown in Fig.3 where the electron density at the separatrix on the midplane (henceforth will be referred to as *nsep*) and the maximum total power flux (henceforth referred to as *pwxap*) on the outer target are plotted against time. It is seen that both these quantities are greatly increased during the ELM and then reduce from the peak values during the ELM-crash phase.

4. Parareal algorithm

The parareal algorithm was first introduced in [2]. It is described in detail in [8]. The algorithm uses a predictor-corrector approach with an accurate fine (F) integrator and another coarse integrator (G). Identifying the optimum coarse predictor is generally the biggest challenge in all complex applications. The parareal correction is given by eq.1.

$$\lambda_{i+1}^k = F(\lambda_i^{k-1}) + G(\lambda_i^k) - G(\lambda_i^{k-1}) \quad (1)$$

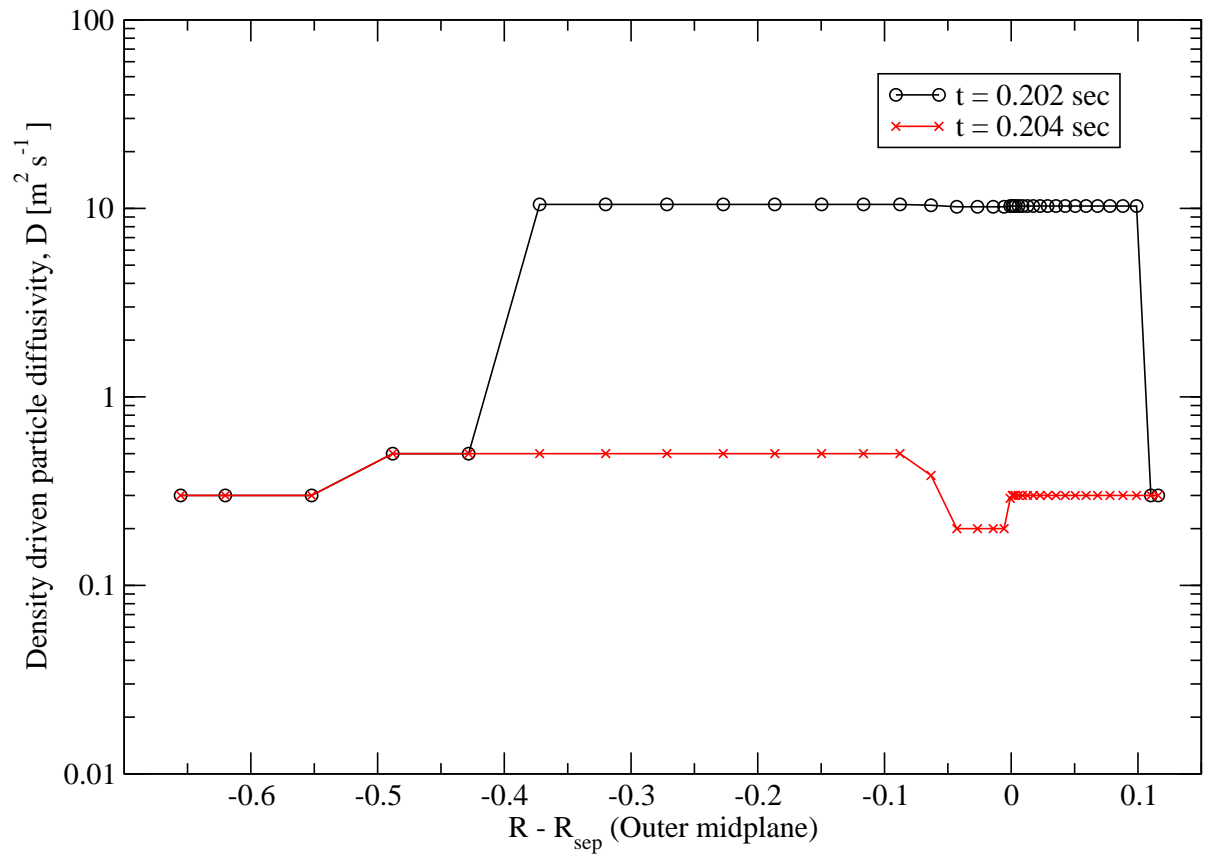


Figure 1: The particle density gradient driven radial diffusivity is increased by 10 times to simulate ELMs.

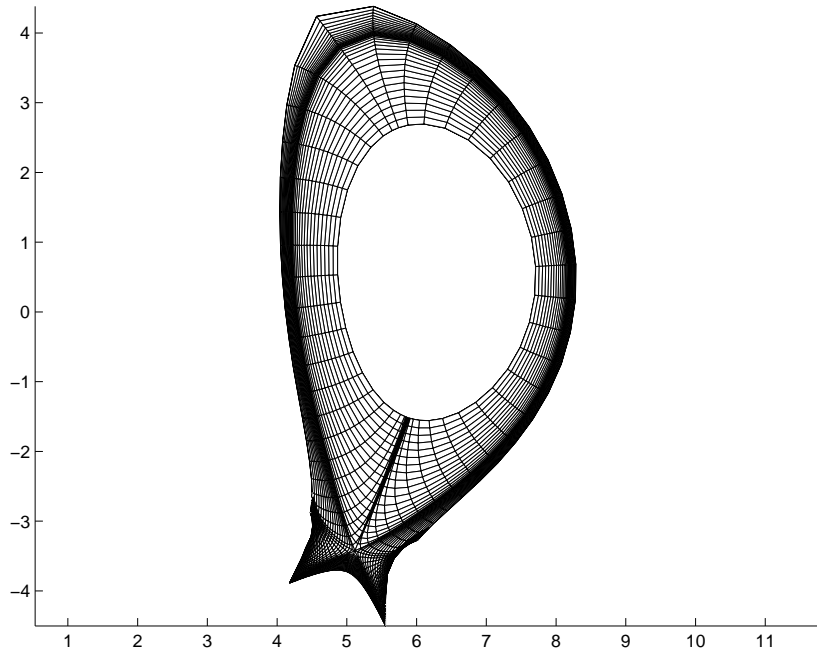
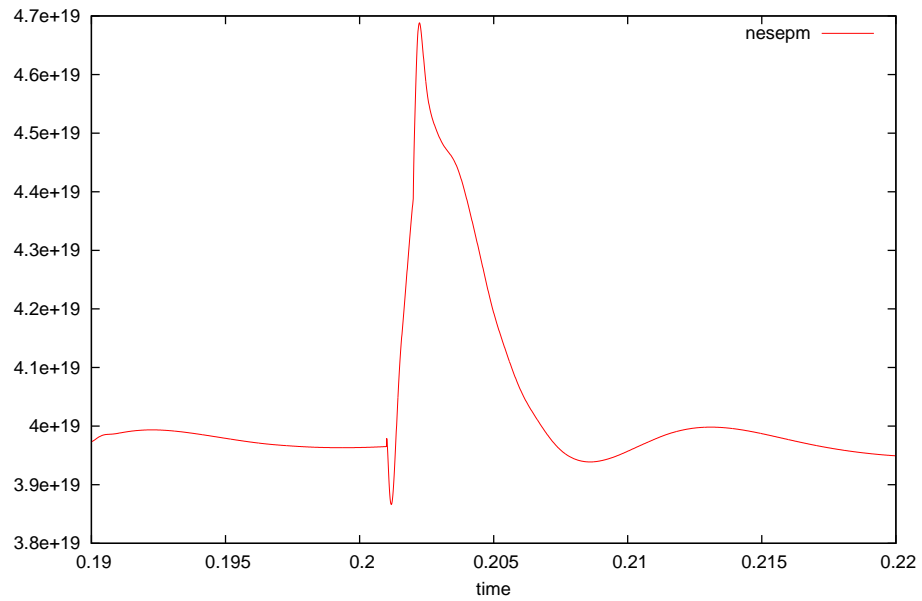
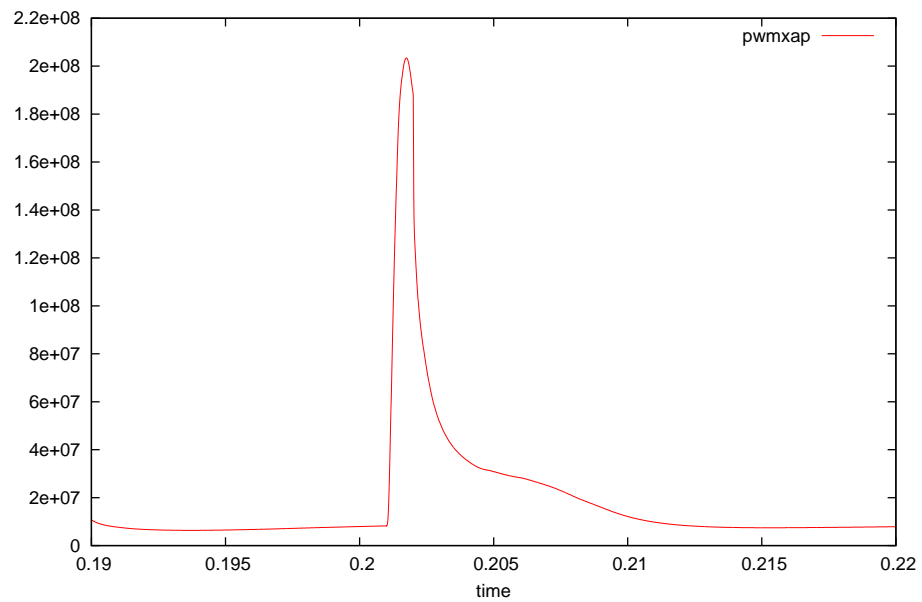


Figure 2: A grid of size 96×36 was used for the fine or serial computation of the ELM plasma in the ITER device.



(a) The electron density (n_{sepm}) at the separatrix on the outer midplane computed shows a sudden rise followed by a reduction during the ELM cycle.



(b) The maximum total power flux on the ⁸ outer target for the same case as Fig.3a.

Figure 3: A typical ELM cycle using the SOLPS5.0 code package with the Fine solver is demonstrated.

λ_{i+1}^k is the initial state for the $(i+1)^{th}$ time slice at the k^{th} iteration. At the k^{th} iteration λ_i^k is evolved to λ_{i+1}^k using $F(\lambda_i^k)$ and $G(\lambda_i^k)$.

Just as in [8], this paper also utilizes the event-based approach given in detail in [37, 38, 39].

The coarse and fine calculations are repeated across a number of parareal iterations k until convergence is achieved. Parareal convergence across a time chunk or processor is said to have been achieved when the 'defect' between two successive fine calculations (k and $k-1$) across that processor is below a tolerance value. The sum of this defect in solutions across a time chunk between t_i and t_{i-1} is defined by

$$\zeta_i^k = \int_{t_{i-1}}^{t_i} \frac{|\lambda^k(t) - \lambda^{k-1}(t)|}{|\lambda^{k-1}(t)|} dt. \quad (2)$$

The solution is then converged for time slice i if,

$$\zeta_i^k < \text{tol}, \quad \forall i \leq I. \quad (3)$$

5. Results

The cases explored in this work used both the SOLPS5.0 and SOLPS-ITER codes. In some cases, results from SOLPS-ITER were more stable than those from SOLPS5.0. The value of tol in eq.3 was 0.005. The choice of this value is explained in [8].

Following the work in [8], a reduced grid model of size 48×36 with bigger timesteps was used as a coarse predictor for the Parareal implementation. While this approach was relatively straightforward for the cases explored in [8], the treatment turned out to be much more challenging for a plasma with ELMs. The parareal solutions had spurious rises and falls in the plasma quantities such as temperature and density throughout the ELM cycles. One such 'catastrophic' case is illustrated in Fig.4 where there is a rise in $n_{sep,m}$, the electron density at the separatrix on the midplane (it must be noted that other quantities like temperature and ion densities also behave similarly) when there is expected to be a decrease as is seen in Fig.3a. This was a simulation using 16 processors, with $ntim_F = 100$ and $dt_G = 10 * dt_F$. $ntim$ is the number of time-steps solved per processor and dt represents the size of each time step. The subscripts F and G represent the fine and coarse cases, respectively. It may be noted that $ntim_F * dt_F = ntim_G * dt_G$ is the size of each 'time chunk' solved on every processor.

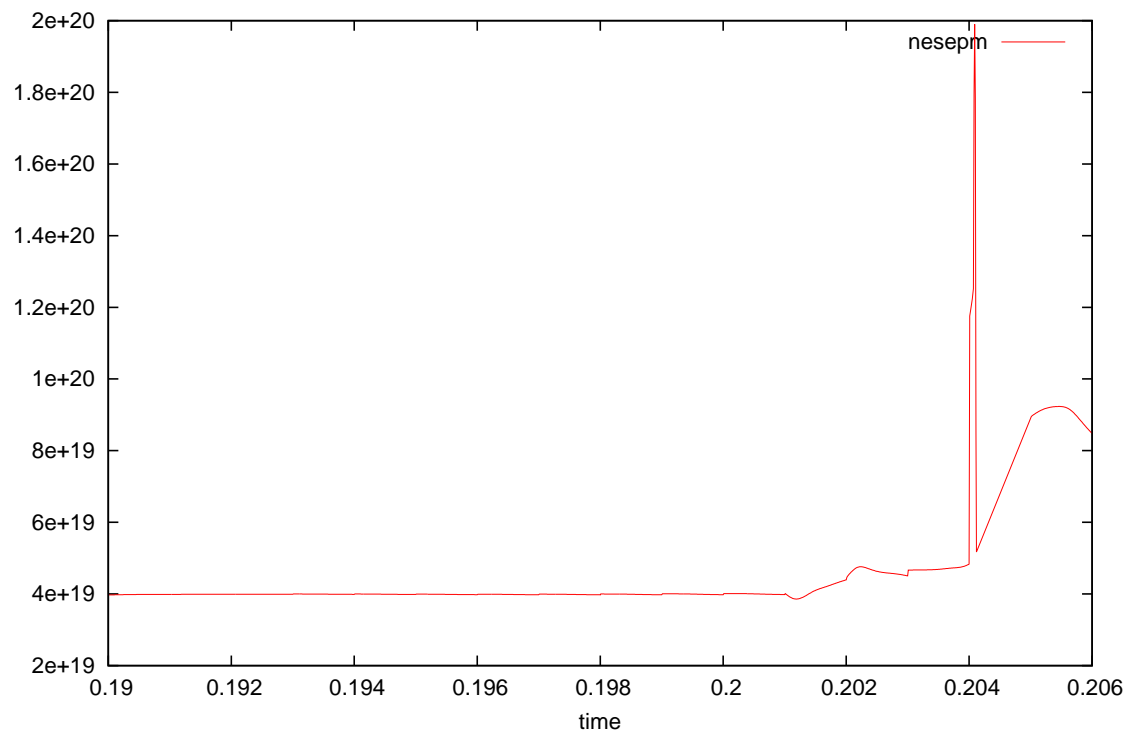


Figure 4: A spurious rise in the electron density at the outer midplane obtained from the parareal computation using a grid of 48×36 and $dt_G = 10 * dt_F$ as the coarse solver.

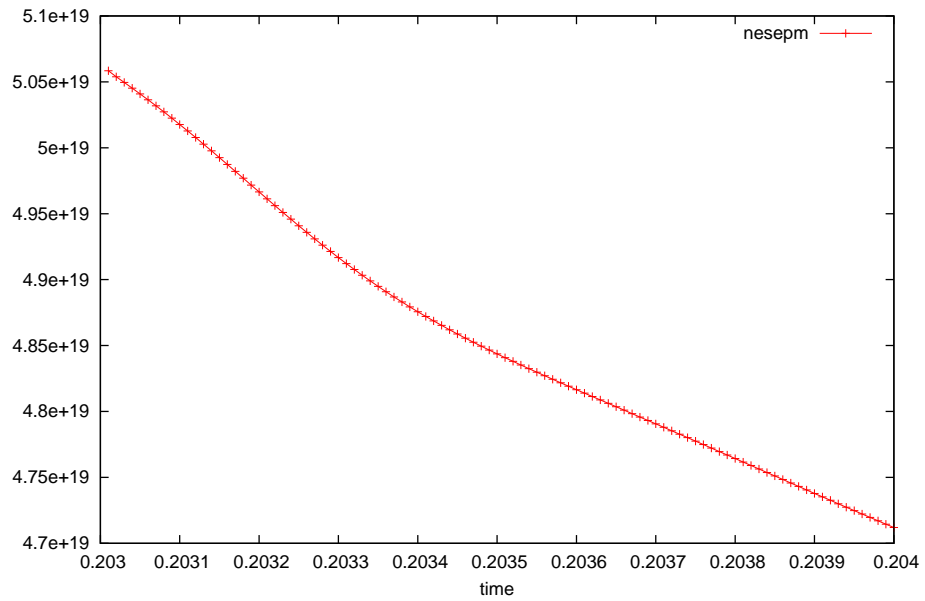
A closer look at the parareal computation shows that in this case, the unwanted ELM rise starts at the 14th time chunk, which subsequently affects successive time chunks solved by other processors. Plotting *nesepm* against time for both $k=1$ and $k=2$ in Fig.5 showed that the rise occurs at the parareal iteration $k=2$, which somewhat implies that the parareal correction as given by eq.1 might be the cause for this behaviour.

A possible explanation might be obtained if we take into account that the radial profiles and the subsequent plasma dynamics vary extremely rapidly during an ELM cycle. This is illustrated for the electron density and temperature along the midplane in Figs.6 & 7. With the fact that eq.1 is an algebraic correction at all grid points, it is not very surprising that after applying eq.1, the plasma profiles change to an ELM rise phase while it is expected to be in an ELM crash phase or vice versa.

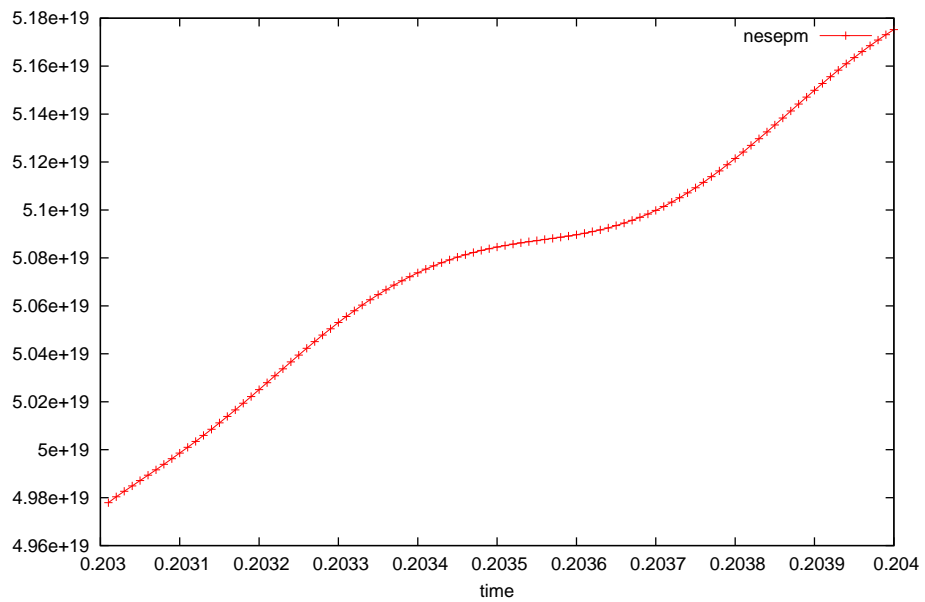
This issue due to the rapidly varying profiles during an ELM is a cause for concern since the success of the parareal algorithm depends on eq.1. However, implementing a restriction to the parareal correction appeared to solve the problem. At the k^{th} parareal iteration, the value of each primary variable was not allowed to vary more than that of the fine value computed at the $(k-1)^{\text{th}}$ iteration by $X\%$. To ensure that the study was restricted to the correction to the grid points and to rule out any impact of choosing a dt_G greater than dt_F , $dt_G = dt_F = 1E - 5s$ was chosen with a grid of 48×36 for the coarse predictor. A series of simulations were performed with different values of $X = 1, 5, 20, 40$. While the undesirable behaviour in the solutions was eradicated with a decreasing value of X , the number of iterations required for parareal convergence was minimum at $X = 1$.

With this promise, the next numerical parameter that was explored was the size of the time chunk solved per processor. This involved varying $ntim_F$ and subsequently varying $ntim_G$, keeping dt_F and dt_G constant. The size of the time chunk has been a factor influencing parareal performances in a large number of previous applications [6, 8] and was found to be a strong one in the present case. Once again with restricting the time step sizes such that $dt_G = dt_F = 1E - 5s$, a series of simulations were performed with 8 processors or time chunks varying the values of *ntim*. The results are listed in Table1. It was observed that $ntim = 200$ allowed the best parareal performance. This dependence on *ntim* has been observed many times but a full mathematical understanding of the parareal algorithm with respect to it is still unclear.

It is believed that SOLPS-like simulations with $dt = 1E - 5s$ marginally resolve ELM physics with very rapidly varying plasma dynamics. A step



(a) nesepm is expected to decrease during the time 0.203 and 0.204 sec. This behaviour is evident in the parareal computation at $k=1$.



(b) At the parareal iteration $k=2$, ¹²nesepm starts to increase affecting subsequent time chunks solved using the parareal algorithm eventually leading to the (wrong) solution shown in Fig.4.

Figure 5: The parareal solutions are very sensitive to initial values in case of ELMs.

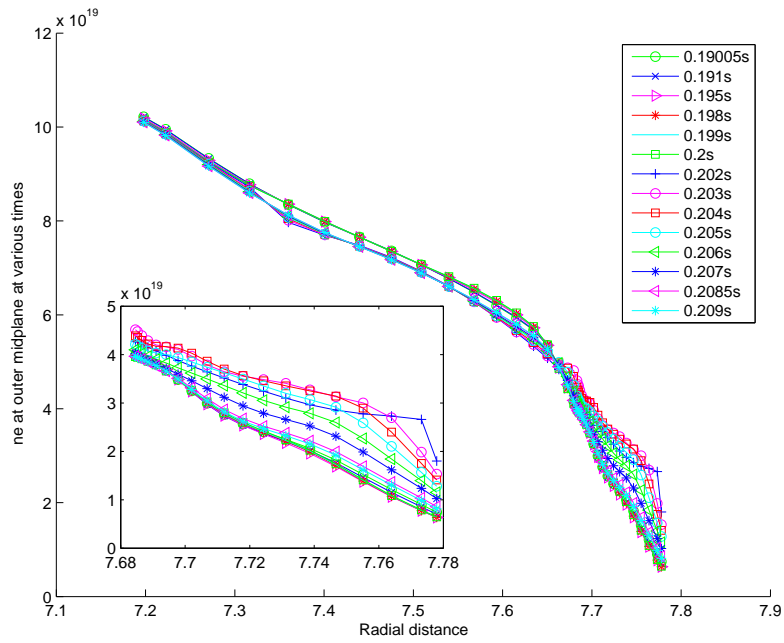


Figure 6: A spurious rise in the electron density at the outer midplane obtained from the parareal computation using a grid of 48×36 and $dt_G = 10 * dt_F$ as the coarse solver.

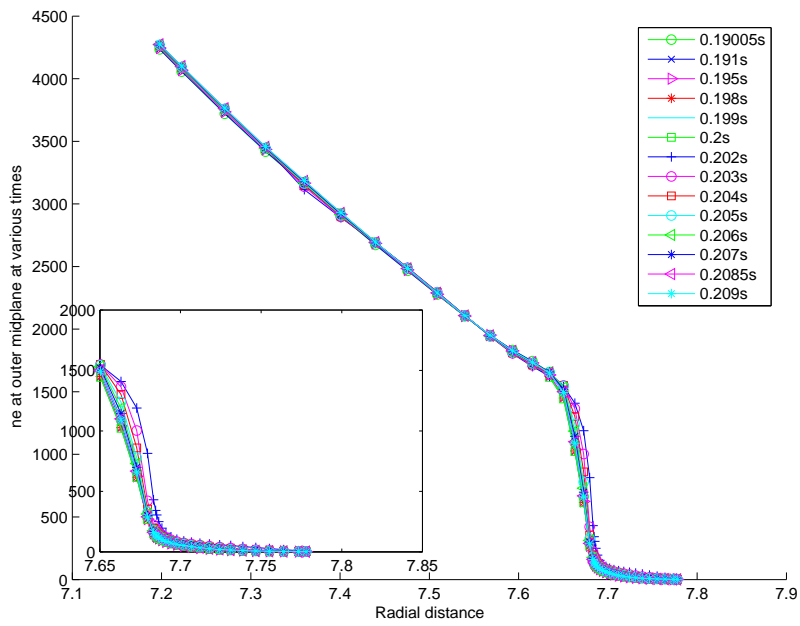


Figure 7: A spurious rise in the electron density at the outer midplane obtained from the parareal computation using a grid of 48×36 and $dt_G = 10 * dt_F$ as the coarse solver.

Table 1: The number of iterations were minimum at $ntim_F = ntim_G = 200$ with parareal correction restricted to $X = 1$.

ntim	Parareal iteration k
20	4
200	2
300	3
400	No convergence

size of $1E - 6s$ is desired. But a serial computation of a single ELM cycle would then take about 16.25 days! However, once the optimum parameters ($ntim_F = 200$ & $X = 1$) were identified, a set of parareal simulations were performed with $dt_F = 1E - 6s$ & $dt_G = 1E - 5s$. With the serial and parareal wallclock times defined as T_{ser} and T_{PR} respectively, the computational gain is defined as $gain = \frac{T_{ser}}{T_{PR}}$. A computational gain of 7.8 was achieved with 48 processors, which is expected to rise with increasing processor counts. The parareal solutions obtained for this case are shown in Fig.8 which illustrates that ELM simulations with smaller than marginal timesteps (dt) can be performed using the parareal algorithm.

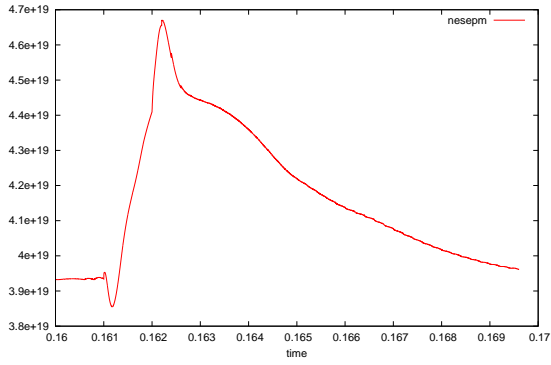
6. Conclusion

The parareal algorithm is shown to work for a complex case of ELM simulations in ITER plasma with 98 species. The rapidly changing radial profiles during an ELM cycle pose unique challenges for this application. A modification to the application of the parareal algorithm alleviates the problem. The parareal performance is also found to be sensitive to the size of the time chunk solved per processor. An optimum value for it is identified, and a simulation with 48 processors yielded a computational gain of 7.8.

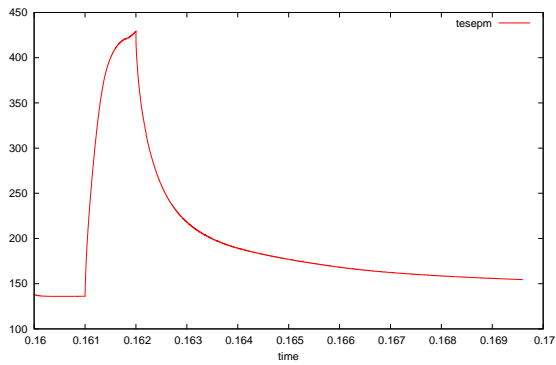
This application illustrates that ELM simulations can become more tractable using the parareal algorithm. As a result more complex physics can be incorporated into the model, such as kinetic neutrals, and long simulations of multiple ELM cycles may be performed within much shorter wall clock time.

7. Acknowledgements

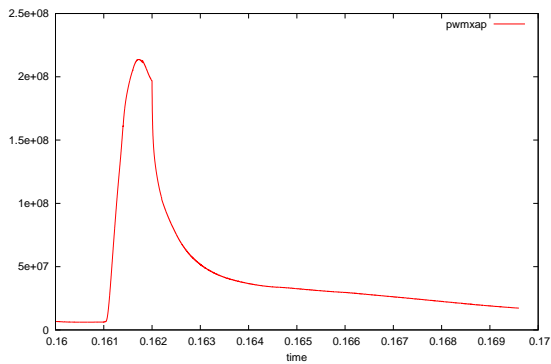
This work has been funded within the framework of the EUROfusion Consortium and has received funding from the Euratom research and train-



(a) The electron density (n_{ESEPM}) at the separatrix on the outer midplane computed for an ELM cycle using the parareal algorithm.



(b) The electron temperature on the outer midplane at the separatrix for the same case as Fig.8a.



(c) The maximum total power flux on the outer target for the same case as Fig.8a.

Figure 8: The parareal algorithm correctly simulates an ELM cycle using a reduced grid of size 48×36 and $dt_G = 1E - 5s$ for a coarse model. The fine integrator used 96×36 and $dt_G = 1E - 6s$.

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