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Interactive comment on "The Palaeoclimate and Terrestrial Exoplanet Radiative Transfer Model Intercomparison Project (PALAEOTRIP): experimental design and protocols" *by* Colin Goldblatt and Lucas Kavenagh

Anonymous Referee #2

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Review of gmd-2017-24 "The Palaeoclimate and Terrestrial Exoplanet Radiative Transfer Model Intercomparison Project (PALAEOTRIP): experimental design and protocols"

The manuscript introduces a new intercomparison project for radiation codes, PALAEOTRIP, aimed at evaluating the accuracy of and differences between radiation codes applied to study paleo- and terrestrial exoplanet climates. As the field of modelling climates of planets significantly different from the present-day Earth matures, it will be increasingly important to evaluate the accuracy of the radiation schemes used, as radiative transfer is one of the most important components of climate models. I

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commend the authors for taking the initiative to begin such an intercomparison.

I found the manuscript to be well written, and the different experiments to be explained in sufficient detail. My main concerns are with the large number of different runs proposed (> 200), that important parts of the parameter space are not included, and that the experiments including clouds will lead to differences between codes that may not be errors and have no distinction from conditions found on present day Earth. I discuss my concerns in more detail below, and recommend publication once my major concerns have been addressed.

To facilitate broad participation, the authors could consider adopting an experiment design similar to that proposed for CMIP6, with a core set of experiments that all participating groups are expected to do, and with remaining experiments organised in terms of increasing optionality: http://www.mpimet.mpg.de/en/communication/news/single-news/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=606

Main comments:

1) Experiment 2: In this experiment, well-mixed greenhouse gas (WMGHG) amounts are varied. Only one gas is varied at a time, with the rest kept at standard conditions, amounting to a total of 113 different runs. I have several suggestions on how this experiment could be improved:

1.1) I think the number of experiments here is unnecessarily large, which may put off some potential participants. I think the number of gas concentrations per log unit can be reduced to one or two without losing a significant amount of information.

1.2) The maximum N2O amount seems quite large to me, I am curious about how the authors arrived at this number (1e-2 volume mixing ratio). Also, some radiation schemes may not include N2O, so it might be worth having some experiments without N2O to facilitate broader participation.

1.3) As only one gas is varied at any given time, a significant part of the parameter

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space is not being considered, including the authors' example of a typical late Archean atmospheric composition in the introduction where both CO2 and CH4 amounts are elevated compared to present day Earth. I think it would be beneficial to add some runs with compositions that have previously been used in climate models of the Archean Earth.

1.4) Should these experiments include oxygen and ozone? The Archean atmosphere is thought to have had very little oxygen and ozone, including some experiments without these absorbers may be useful.

In summary, I would encourage the authors to significantly reduce the number of WMGHG amounts in this experiment and also to include other, very common compositions such as atmospheres where both CO2 and CH4 amounts are elevated compared to present day Earth.

2) Experiment 3: The water vapour mixing ratio could be reduced even further in this experiment, perhaps by a factor of 0.01 or 0.001. Five mixing ratios per log unit may also be unnecessarily many, this could potentially be reduced to two or three. Also, planets receiving large near-IR fluxes may have very large stratospheric water vapour mixing ratios (up to $\sim$1e-3), the authors could consider adding an experiment with a modified water vapour profile where the stratospheric water vapour amount is elevated compared to present day Earth.

3) Experiment 5: Why have the authors decided to turn off oxygen absorption while still having ozone absorption turned on? This test also moves the upper boundary to a higher or lower pressure. In particular, the largest surface pressure will move the upper boundary to 1 mbar, which is a rather large pressure. I would recommend defining a few separate P-T profiles with varying surface pressures (but constant upper boundary pressures) to use for this test instead of simply multiplying the values in the GAM profile with a constant factor.

4) Experiments 6-8: WMGHG amounts are not varied for the experiments using an

M-star spectrum. CO_2, and particularly CH_4, are significant near-IR absorbers. It would be very interesting to see how well the different radiation schemes deal with the overlapping absorption in the near-IR between H_2O, CO_2 and CH_4 for cases with large amounts of CO_2 and CH_4. Any errors in this region can become significantly larger with an M-star spectrum compared to that obtained with a Sun-like star spectrum due to the large near-IR flux.

5) The temperature-pressure profile is kept the same in all experiments (except in experiment 5 where it is scaled to achieve a smaller/larger surface pressure). For the stellar (short-wave) component of the radiation I would not expect errors in most radiation codes to depend strongly on temperature (except if temperatures become high enough to warrant the use of high temperature line lists). Errors in the thermal (long-wave) radiation, however, can depend on the temperature due to the shift in the peak of the Planck function with temperature, which will emphasise different wavelengths. It may be worth adding another experiment where the temperature is varied within a reasonable range to see how well codes deal with somewhat lower and higher temperatures than those found on present day Earth.

6) Experiments 9-12 involve adding a low or high altitude cloud to the setup of experiment 1 and vary the water path or cloud particle size. Currently these experiments feel somewhat out-of-place:

6.1) The motivation for including these experiments is not clear from the current manuscript. The other experiments are designed to test how well radiation codes perform for conditions potentially significantly different from present day Earth. In these experiments conditions are similar to those found on present day Earth, and most approximations used have been tested for these conditions by present day Earth climate modellers (see e.g. Oreopoulos et al. 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1029/2011JD016821, Barker et al. 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1175/JAS-D-15-0033.1). I think a stronger motivation for these experiments is required.

6.2) Experiments 11-12 include ice clouds with a prescribed effective size D_eff with optical properties from Baum et al. (2014). For several participating groups this may involve implementing new ice cloud scattering properties in their radiation codes, solely for the purpose of participating in this intercomparison. I think it may be too much to ask groups to do this, and results would not directly reflect those obtained in the respective climate models.

6.3) It is not clear how the benchmark results will be defined and obtained in these tests. Different and entirely reasonable choices with regards to e.g. the size distribution of cloud particles may result in differences between radiation codes that cannot be considered to be errors as in the other experiments. This should be discussed in more detail.

6.4) The number of different runs may also here be unnecessarily large, 54 in total. I would suggest reducing it to about three runs per experiment (e.g. with a low, medium and high value) to ease participation.

I my opinion these points will need to be addressed in order to justify including Experiments 9-12 in this intercomparison.

Minor comments:

7) The abstract and introduction paints a rather negative view of the current state of radiation codes used to study paleo- and terrestrial exoplanet climates. While it is true that the accuracy of several radiation codes remains unevaluated, at least in the literature, there have been some work to address this. Examples are Wolf & Toon (2013) (dx.doi.org/10.1089/ast.2012.0936), who evaluated the accuracy of their new radiation scheme by comparing it to the LBLRTM, and Yang et al. (2016) (dx.doi.org/10.3847/0004-637X/826/2/222), who evaluated differences between several radiation schemes when applied to the inner edge of the habitable zone. These works should be mentioned and referenced.

8) Introduction, first paragraph, first sentence ("A typical model of ..."): One or more references are needed. Also, giving gas amounts in units of pressure is ambiguous (a gas' contribution to the surface pressure and the gas' partial pressure at the surface are generally different). Please consider using ppmv for all gas amount units, or clarify which pressure is used.

9) Introduction, second paragraph: The statement that deriving the surface temperature for a given atmospheric composition and incident flux is conceptually a simple physics problem is somewhat oversimplifying the problem. Uncertainties in e.g. ground albedos, cloud physics and ocean heat transport (with a potentially unknown land/ocean distribution) can potentially impact surface temperatures significantly. In my opinion this discussion should be modified to argue for why performing accurate radiative transfer is both important and difficult, while at the same time acknowledging that other uncertainties remain.

10) Introduction, second paragraph: In my experience line-by-line calculations can, with a reasonable number of layers (~ 40), take as little as a few minutes for a single column. Still several orders of magnitude too slow for use in a GCM, but not as bad as indicated.

11) Introduction, third paragraph: A statement is made that atmospheric composition is equivalent to column abundances. This is strictly speaking not correct as gas mixing ratios are 3D fields, while column densities are vertically integrated fields.

12) Section 2.1, second paragraph: To argue for why H2-dominated atmospheres are not included, it is stated that the altered mean molar weight would lead to different pressure-broadened line shapes. While it is indeed true that H2 pressure-broadened widths are different from air-broadened widths, this is not only due to H2 molecules being lighter than air molecules; calculating pressure-broadened line widths is a rather complicated quantum-mechanical problem. Please reformulate.

13) Section 2.2.1: I assume the mixing ratios provided online with the GAM profile are

volume mixing ratios, but I could not find this specified anywhere. Also, it would be nice if the GAM profile could be specified on both levels and layers to avoid potential slight inconsistencies between codes.

14) Section 2.2.3: Will the supplied stellar spectra be normalised such that, integrated over wavelength, they give the TOA flux to be used in the experiments? Otherwise the TOA flux will need to be specified.

15) Section 2.2.5: The effective temperature of the surface is missing.

16) Section 2.3: Currently, the list of experiments is provided twice, one on the form of an overview and one as a list with details on each experiment. I understand why, but to me this seems a bit awkward. I would consider making a large table with details on the different experiments to provide a better overview, and refer to this in the main text when discussing them.

17) Section 2.4, second paragraph: Consider moving the definition of layers and levels to section 2.2.4 as they are used there.

18) Please consider adding more references to recent radiation intercomparisons, e.g.: Oreopoulos et al. (2012): http://dx.doi.org/10.1029/2011JD016821 Pincus et al. (2015): http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/2015GL064291

19) From statements in section 2.2.2, and 2.4, I deduce that benchmark results from line-by-line codes are meant to be submitted along with results from other radiation codes. Please make this more clear.

Typos:

- Page 3, line 31: "a a" –> "a"

- Page 4, line 4: "and and" –> "and an"

- Page 6, line 22: Runcode for experiment 8 should be PT8_x.

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- Page 7, lines 8-9: "an ten line" –> "a ten line"

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