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Probing the Nature of Inflation

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The idea that the early universe included an era of accelerated expansion (Inflation) was proposed to explain very qualitative features of the first cosmological observations. Since then, our observations have improved dramatically and have led to high precision agreement with the predictions of the first models of inflation, slow-roll inflation. At the same time, there has been significant growth in the number of mechanisms for inflation, many of which are qualitatively distinct from slow-roll. Nevertheless, most of these ideas are also consistent with current data. In this talk, I will review inflation and its current observational status. I will then discuss the important theoretical targets for the future and the prospects for achieving them.

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