1 Group Actions

1.1 Group Actions and Permutation Representations

Definition. Let G be a group acting on a set A

1. The *kernel* of the action is the set of elements of G that act trivially on every element of A: $\{g \in G \mid g \cdot a = a \text{ for all } a \in A\}$.
2. For each $a \in A$ the *stabilizer* of a in G is the set of elements of G that fix the element a: $\{g \in G \mid g \cdot a = a\}$ and is denoted by G_a.
3. An action is *faithful* if its kernel is the identity.

Note. The kernel pf an action is precisely the same as the kernel of the associated permutation representation as defined in the note in section 1.7 and is rephrased below.

Proposition 1. For any group G and any nonempty set A there is a bijection between the actions of G on A and the homomorphisms of G into S_A.

Definition. If G is a group a *permutation representation* of G into the symmetric group S_A for some nonempty set A. We shall say a given action of G on A *affords* or *induces* the associated representation of G.

Proposition 2. Let G be a group acting on the nonempty set A. the relation on A defined by

$$a \sim b \text{ if and only if } a = g \cdot b \text{ for some } g \in G$$

is an equivalence relation. For each $a \in A$, the number of elements in the equivalence class containing a is $|G : G_a|$, the index of the stabilizer of a.

Definition. Let G be a group acting on the set A.

1. The equivalence class $\{g \cdot \mid g \in G\}$ is called the *orbit* of G containing a.
2. The action of G on A is called *transitive* if there is only one orbit, i.e., given any two elements $a, b \in A$ there is some $g \in G$ such that $a = g \cdot b$.

Note.

1. Every element of S_n has a unique cycle decomposition
2. Subgroups of symmetric groups are called *permutation groups*.
3. The orbits of a permutation group will refer to its orbits on $\{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$
4. The orbits of an element $\sigma \in S_n$ will refer to the orbits of the group $\langle\sigma\rangle$.

1.2 Group Acting on Themselves by Left Multiplication - Cayley's Theorem

Note. In this section G is any group and we first consider G acting on itself (i.e., $A = G$) by left multiplication:

$$g \cdot a = ga \quad \text{for all } g \in G, a \in G$$

When G is a finite group of order n it is convenient to label the elements of G with the integers $1, 2, \ldots, n$ in order to describe the permutation representation afforded by this action. In this way the elements of G are listed as $g_1, g_2, \ldots, g_n$ and for each $g \in G$ the permutation σ_g may be described as a permutation of the indices $1, 2, \ldots, n$ as follows:

$$\sigma_g(i) = j \quad \text{if and only if} \quad gg_i = g_j.$$

Theorem 3. Let G be a group, let H be a subgroup and let G act by left multiplication on the set A of left cosets of H in G. Let π_H be the associated permutation representation afforded by this action. Then

1. G acts transitively on A
2. the stabilizer of G of the point $1H \in A$ us the subgroup H
3. the kernel of the action (i.e., the kernel of π_H) is $\cap_{x \in G} xHx^{-1}$, and $\ker \pi_H$ is the largest normal subgroup of g contained in H.

Corollary 4. (Cayley's Theorem) Every group is isomorphic to a subgroup of symmetric group. If G is a group of order n, then G is isomorphic to a subgroup of S_n.

Corollary 5. If G is a finite group of order n and p is the smallest prime dividing $|G|$, then any subgroup of index p is normal (Note that a group of order n need not have a subgroup of order p).

1.3 Groups Acting on Themselves by Conjugation - The Class Equation