DISTRIBUTED FORCES: CENTROIDS AND CENTERS OF GRAVITY

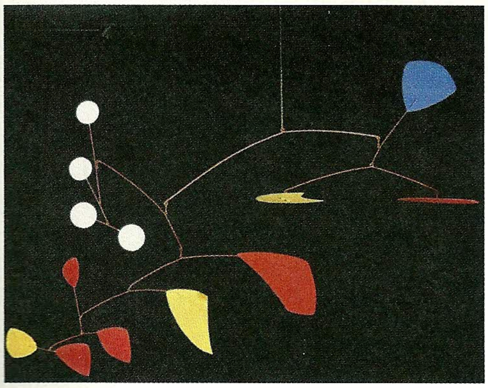


Photo 5.1 The precise balancing of the components of a mobile requires an understanding of centers of gravity and centroids, the main topics of this chapter.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

We have assumed so far that the attraction exerted by the earth on a rigid body could be represented by a single force **W**. This force, called the force of gravity or the weight of the body, was to be applied at the *center of gravity* of the body (Sec. 3.2). Actually, the earth exerts a force on each of the particles forming the body. The action of the earth on a rigid body should thus be represented by a large number of small forces distributed over the entire body. You will learn in this chapter, however, that all of these small forces can be replaced by a single equivalent force **W**. You will also learn how to determine the center of gravity, that is, the point of application of the resultant **W**, for bodies of various shapes.

In the first part of the chapter, two-dimensional bodies, such as flat plates and wires contained in a given plane, are considered. Two concepts closely associated with the determination of the center of gravity of a plate or a wire are introduced: the concept of the *centroid* of an area or a line and the concept of the *first moment* of an area or a line with respect to a given axis.

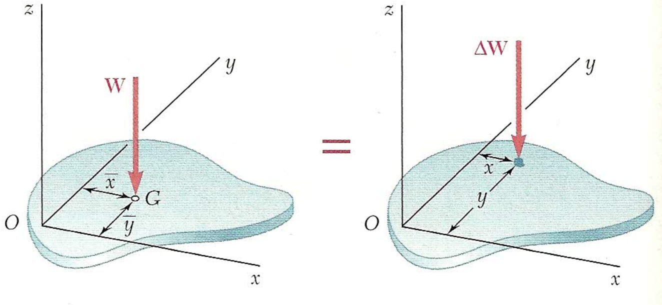
You will also learn that the computation of the area of a surface of revolution or of the volume of a body of revolution is directly related to the determination of the centroid of the line or area used to generate that surface or body of revolution (Theorems of Pappus-Guldinus). And, as is shown in Secs. 5.8 and 5.9, the determination of the centroid of an area simplifies the analysis of beams subjected to distributed loads and the computation of the forces exerted on submerged rectangular surfaces, such as hydraulic gates and portions of dams.

In the last part of the chapter, you will learn how to determine the center of gravity of a three-dimensional body as well as the centroid of a volume and the first moments of that volume with respect to the coordinate planes.

AREAS AND LINES

5.2. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF A TWO-DIMENSIONAL BODY

Let us first consider a flat horizontal plate (Fig. 5.1). We can divide the plate into n small elements. The coordinates of the first element



$$\Sigma M_y: \quad \bar{x}\,W = \Sigma x\,\Delta W$$

$$\Sigma M_x: \quad \bar{y}\,W = \Sigma y\,\Delta W$$

Fig. 5.1 Center of gravity of a plate.

are denoted by x_1 and y_1, those of the second element by x_2 and y_2, etc. The forces exerted by the earth on the elements of a plate will be denoted, respectively, by $\Delta\mathbf{W}_1$, $\Delta\mathbf{W}_2$, . . . , $\Delta\mathbf{W}_n$. These forces or weights are directed toward the center of the earth; however, for all practical purposes they can be assumed to be parallel. Their resultant is therefore a single force in the same direction. The magnitude W of this force is obtained by adding the magnitudes of the elemental weights:

$$\Sigma F_z: \qquad W = \Delta W_1 + \Delta W_2 + \cdots + \Delta W_n$$

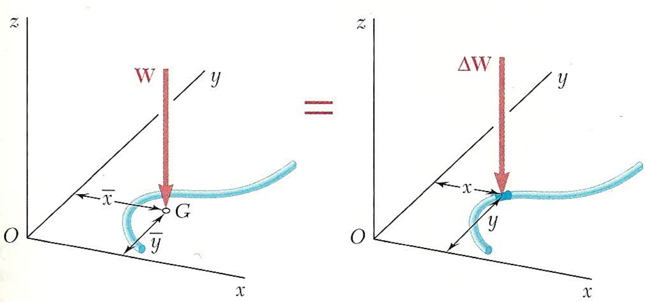
To obtain the coordinates $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ of the point G where the resultant $\mathbf{W}$ should be applied, we write that the moments of $\mathbf{W}$ about the y and x axes are equal to the sum of the corresponding moments of the elemental weights,

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma M_y: &\quad \bar{x}W = x_1\,\Delta W_1 + x_2\,\Delta W_2 + \cdots + x_n\,\Delta W_n \\ \Sigma M_x: &\quad \bar{y}W = y_1\,\Delta W_1 + y_2\,\Delta W_2 + \cdots + y_n\,\Delta W_n \end{aligned} \tag{5.1}$$

If we now increase the number of elements into which the plate is divided and simultaneously decrease the size of each element, we obtain in the limit the following expressions:

$$W = \int dW \qquad \bar{x}W = \int x\,dW \qquad \bar{y}W = \int y\,dW \tag{5.2}$$

These equations define the weight $\mathbf{W}$ and the coordinates $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ of the center of gravity G of a flat plate. The same equations can be derived for a wire lying in the xy plane (Fig. 5.2). We note that the center of gravity G of a wire is usually not located on the wire.



$$\Sigma M_y: \quad \bar{x}W = \Sigma x\,\Delta W$$
$$\Sigma M_x: \quad \bar{y}W = \Sigma y\,\Delta W$$

Fig. 5.2 Center of gravity of a wire.

5.3. CENTROIDS OF AREAS AND LINES

In the case of a flat homogeneous plate of uniform thickness, the magnitude ΔW of the weight of an element of the plate can be expressed as

$$\Delta W = \gamma t \, \Delta A$$

where γ = specific weight (weight per unit volume) of the material
t = thickness of the plate
ΔA = area of the element

Similarly, we can express the magnitude W of the weight of the entire plate as

$$W = \gamma t A$$

where A is the total area of the plate.

If U.S. customary units are used, the specific weight γ should be expressed in lb/ft^3, the thickness t in feet, and the areas ΔA and A in square feet. We observe that ΔW and W will then be expressed in pounds. If SI units are used, γ should be expressed in N/m^3, t in meters, and the areas ΔA and A in square meters; the weights ΔW and W will then be expressed in newtons.†

Substituting for ΔW and W in the moment equations (5.1) and dividing throughout by γt, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma M_y: \quad & \bar{x}A = x_1 \, \Delta A_1 + x_2 \, \Delta A_2 + \cdots + x_n \, \Delta A_n \\ \Sigma M_x: \quad & \bar{y}A = y_1 \, \Delta A_1 + y_2 \, \Delta A_2 + \cdots + y_n \, \Delta A_n \end{aligned}$$

If we increase the number of elements into which the area A is divided and simultaneously decrease the size of each element, we obtain in the limit

$$\bar{x}A = \int x \, dA \qquad \bar{y}A = \int y \, dA \tag{5.3}$$

These equations define the coordinates $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ of the center of gravity of a homogeneous plate. The point whose coordinates are $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ is also known as the *centroid C of the area A of the plate* (Fig. 5.3). If the plate is not homogeneous, these equations cannot be used to determine the center of gravity of the plate; they still define, however, the centroid of the area.

In the case of a homogeneous wire of uniform cross section, the magnitude ΔW of the weight of an element of wire can be expressed as

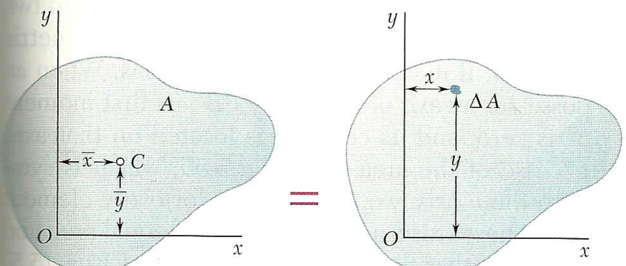
$$\Delta W = \gamma a \, \Delta L$$

where γ = specific weight of the material
a = cross-sectional area of the wire
ΔL = length of the element

†It should be noted that in the SI system of units a given material is generally characterized by its density ρ (mass per unit volume) rather than by its specific weight γ. The specific weight of the material can then be obtained from the relation

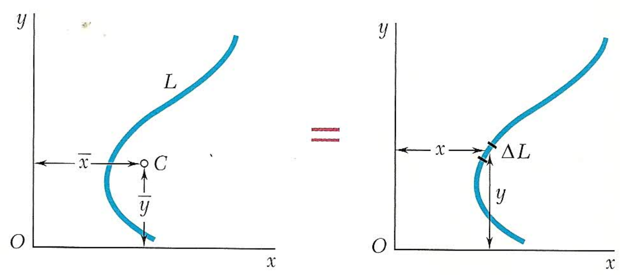
$$\gamma = \rho g$$

where $g = 9.81 \text{ m/s}^2$. Since ρ is expressed in kg/m^3, we observe that γ will be expressed in $(\text{kg/m}^3)(\text{m/s}^2)$, that is, in N/m^3.



$$\Sigma M_y: \quad \bar{x}A = \Sigma x\,\Delta A$$
$$\Sigma M_x: \quad \bar{y}A = \Sigma y\,\Delta A$$

Fig. 5.3 Centroid of an area.



$$\Sigma M_y: \quad \bar{x}L = \Sigma x\,\Delta L$$
$$\Sigma M_x: \quad \bar{y}L = \Sigma y\,\Delta L$$

Fig. 5.4 Centroid of a line.

The center of gravity of the wire then coincides with the *centroid C of the line L* defining the shape of the wire (Fig. 5.4). The coordinates $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ of the centroid of the line L are obtained from the equations

$$\bar{x}L = \int x\,dL \qquad \bar{y}L = \int y\,dL \tag{5.4}$$

5.4. FIRST MOMENTS OF AREAS AND LINES

The integral $\int x\,dA$ in Eqs. (5.3) of the preceding section is known as the *first moment of the area A with respect to the y axis* and is denoted by Q_y. Similarly, the integral $\int y\,dA$ defines the *first moment of A with respect to the x axis* and is denoted by Q_x. We write

$$Q_y = \int x\,dA \qquad Q_x = \int y\,dA \tag{5.5}$$

Comparing Eqs. (5.3) with Eqs. (5.5), we note that the first moments of the area A can be expressed as the products of the area and the coordinates of its centroid:

$$Q_y = \bar{x}A \qquad Q_x = \bar{y}A \tag{5.6}$$

It follows from Eqs. (5.6) that the coordinates of the centroid of an area can be obtained by dividing the first moments of that area by the area itself. The first moments of the area are also useful in mechanics of materials for determining the shearing stresses in beams under transverse loadings. Finally, we observe from Eqs. (5.6) that if the centroid of an area is located on a coordinate axis, the first moment of the area with respect to that axis is zero. Conversely, if the first moment of an area with respect to a coordinate axis is zero, then the centroid of the area is located on that axis.

Relations similar to Eqs. (5.5) and (5.6) can be used to define the first moments of a line with respect to the coordinate axes and to express these moments as the products of the length L of the line and the coordinates $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ of its centroid.

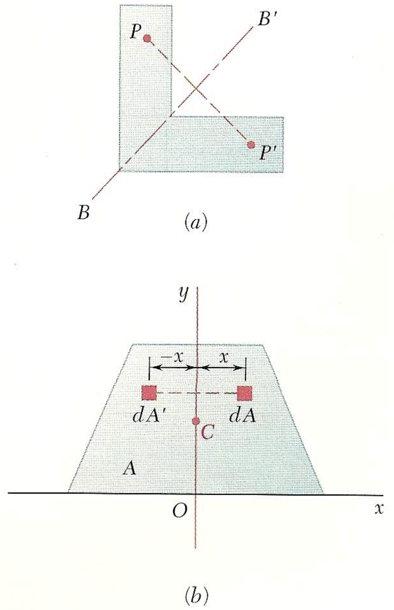


Fig. 5.5

An area A is said to be *symmetric with respect to an axis BB'* if for every point P of the area there exists a point P' of the same area such that the line PP' is perpendicular to BB' and is divided into two equal parts by that axis (Fig. 5.5*a*). A line L is said to be symmetric with respect to an axis BB' if it satisfies similar conditions. When an area A or a line L possesses an axis of symmetry BB', its first moment with respect to BB' is zero, and its centroid is located on that axis. For example, in the case of the area A of Fig. 5.5*b*, which is symmetric with respect to the y axis, we observe that for every element of area dA of abscissa x there exists an element dA' of equal area and with abscissa $-x$. It follows that the integral in the first of Eqs. (5.5) is zero and, thus, that $Q_y = 0$. It also follows from the first of the relations (5.3) that $\bar{x} = 0$. Thus, if an area A or a line L possesses an axis of symmetry, its centroid C is located on that axis.

We further note that if an area or line possesses two axes of symmetry, its centroid C must be located at the intersection of the two axes (Fig. 5.6). This property enables us to determine immediately the centroid of areas such as circles, ellipses, squares, rectangles, equilateral triangles, or other symmetric figures as well as the centroid of lines in the shape of the circumference of a circle, the perimeter of a square, etc.

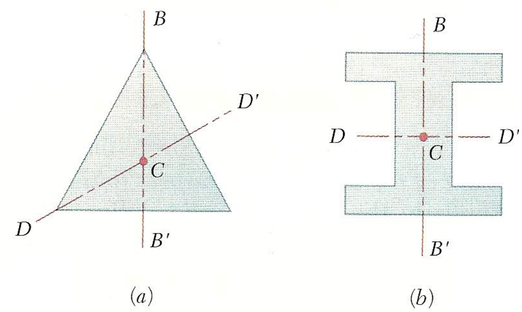


Fig. 5.6

An area A is said to be *symmetric with respect to a center O* if for every element of area dA of coordinates x and y there exists an element dA' of equal area with coordinates $-x$ and $-y$ (Fig. 5.7). It then follows that the integrals in Eqs. (5.5) are both zero and that $Q_x = Q_y = 0$. It also follows from Eqs. (5.3) that $\bar{x} = \bar{y} = 0$, that is, that the centroid of the area coincides with its center of symmetry O. Similarly, if a line possesses a center of symmetry O, the centroid of the line will coincide with the center O.

It should be noted that a figure possessing a center of symmetry does not necessarily possess an axis of symmetry (Fig. 5.7), while a figure possessing two axes of symmetry does not necessarily possess a center of symmetry (Fig. 5.6*a*). However, if a figure possesses two axes of symmetry at a right angle to each other, the point of intersection of these axes is a center of symmetry (Fig. 5.6*b*).

Determining the centroids of unsymmetrical areas and lines and of areas and lines possessing only one axis of symmetry will be discussed in Secs. 5.6 and 5.7. Centroids of common shapes of areas and lines are shown in Fig. 5.8A and B.

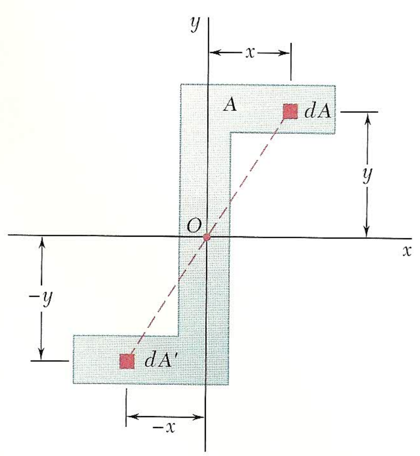


Fig. 5.7