Chapter 8: Some Special Functions

Exercise 8.6. *Suppose $f(x)f(y) = f(x + y)$ for all real x and y.*
(a) Assuming that f is differentiable and not zero, prove that

$$f(x) = e^{cx}$$

where c is a constant.
(b) Prove the same thing, assuming only that f is continuous.

(b) implies (a). We prove (b) directly.

Proof. Since $f(x)$ is not zero, there exists $x_0 \in \mathbb{R}$ such that $f(x_0) \neq 0$. So $f(0)f(x_0) = f(x_0)$, or $f(0) = 1$ by cancelling $f(x_0) \neq 0$.

Next, $f(\frac{n}{m}) = f(\frac{1}{m})^n$ for $m \in \mathbb{Z}$, $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$. Since f is continuous at $x = 0$, f is positive in the neighborhood of $x = 0$. That is, there exists $N \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ such that $f(\frac{1}{m}) > 0$ whenever $m \geq N$ or $m \leq N$. So, $f(\frac{n}{m}) = f(\frac{1}{m})^n > 0$. (Since $f(\frac{n}{m}) = f(\frac{kn}{km})$ for any $k \in \mathbb{Z}^+$, we can rescale m to km such that $km \geq N$ or $km \leq N$.) That is, f is positive on $\mathbb{Q}$. Since $\mathbb{Q}$ is dense in $\mathbb{R}$ and f is continuous on $\mathbb{R}$, f is positive on $\mathbb{R}$.

Now let $c = \log f(1)$ (which is well-defined since $f > 0$). We write $f(1)$ in the two ways. Firstly, $f(1) = f(\frac{n}{n}) = f(\frac{1}{n})^n$ where $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$. Secondly, $f(1) = e^c = (e^{\frac{c}{n}})^n$. Since the positive n-th root is unique, $f(\frac{1}{n}) = e^{\frac{c}{n}}$ for $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$. By $f(x)f(-x) = f(0) = 1$ or $f(-x) = \frac{1}{f(x)}$, $f(-\frac{1}{n}) = \frac{1}{e^{\frac{c}{n}}} = e^{-\frac{c}{n}}$ for $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$. Therefore,

$$f\left(\frac{1}{m}\right) = e^{\frac{c}{m}} \text{ where } m \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

By using $f(\frac{n}{m}) = f(\frac{1}{m})^n$ for $m \in \mathbb{Z}$, $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ again, $f(\frac{n}{m}) = e^{c\frac{n}{m}}$ where $m \in \mathbb{Z}, n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$, or

$$f(x) = e^{cx} \text{ where } x \in \mathbb{Q}.$$

Since $g(x) = f(x) - e^{cx}$ vanishes on a dense set of $\mathbb{Q}$ and g is continuous on $\mathbb{R}$, g vanishes on $\mathbb{R}$. Therefore, $f(x) = e^{cx}$ for $x \in \mathbb{R}$. $\square$

Supplement. Cauchy's functional equation.

(1) *(Cauchy's functional equation.) Suppose $f(x) + f(y) = f(x + y)$ for all real x and y. Assuming that f is continuous, prove that $f(x) = cx$ where c is a constant.*

    Easy to prove. Notice that we cannot let $g(x) = \log f(x)$ and apply Cauchy's functional equation on $g(x)$ to prove Exercise 8.6 since $f(x)$ is not necessary positive and thus $g(x) = \log f(x)$ might be meaningless.

However, this wrong approach gives you some useful ideas such as you need to prove that $f(x)$ is positive first, and $f(x)$ should be equal to e^{cx} where $c = g(1) = \log f(1)$.

(2) *Suppose $f(xy) = f(x) + f(y)$ for all positive real x and y. Assuming that f is continuous, prove that $f(x) = c \log x$ where c is a constant.*

(3) *Suppose $f(xy) = f(x)f(y)$ for all positive real x and y. Assuming that f is continuous and positive, prove that $f(x) = x^c$ where c is a constant.*

(4) *Suppose $f(x + y) = f(x) + f(y) + xy$ for all real x and y. Assuming that f is continuous, prove that $f(x) = \frac{1}{2}x^2 + cx$ where c is a constant.*

(5) *(USA 2002.) Suppose $f(x^2 - y^2) = xf(x) - yf(y)$ for all real x and y. Assuming that f is continuous, prove that $f(x) = cx$ where c is a constant.*