

Invitation to comparison geometry

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Chapter 1

Metric spaces

Metric is a function that returns a real value $\text{dist}(x, y)$ for any pair x, y in a given nonempty set \mathcal{X} and satisfies the following axioms for any triple x, y, z :

(a) Positiveness:

$$\text{dist}(x, y) \geq 0.$$

(b) $x = y$ if and only if

$$\text{dist}(x, y) = 0.$$

(c) Symmetry:

$$\text{dist}(x, y) = \text{dist}(y, x).$$

(d) Triangle inequality:

$$\text{dist}(x, z) \leq \text{dist}(x, y) + \text{dist}(y, z).$$

A set with a metric is called *metric space* and the elements of the set are called *points*.

Shortcut for distance. Usually we consider only one metric on a set, therefore we can denote the metric space and its underlying set by the same letter, say \mathcal{X} . In this case we also use a shortcut notations $|x - y|$ or $|x - y|_{\mathcal{X}}$ for the *distance* $\text{dist}(x, y)$ from x to y in \mathcal{X} . For example, the triangle inequality can be written as

$$|x - z|_{\mathcal{X}} \leq |x - y|_{\mathcal{X}} + |y - z|_{\mathcal{X}}.$$

Examples. Euclidean space and plane as well as real line will be the most important examples of metric spaces for us. In these examples the introduced notation $|x - y|$ for the distance from x to y has perfect sense as a norm of the vector $x - y$. However, in general metric space

the expression $x - y$ has no sense, but anyway we use expression $|x - y|$ for the distance.

If we say *plane* or *space* we mean *Euclidean* plane or space. However the plane (as well as the space) admits many other metrics, for example the so called Manhattan metric from the following exercise.

1.1. Exercise. Consider the function

$$\text{dist}(p, q) = |x_p - x_q| + |y_p - y_q|,$$

where $p = (x_p, y_p)$ and $q = (x_q, y_q)$ are points in the coordinate plane \mathbb{R}^2 . Show that dist is a metric on \mathbb{R}^2 .

Let us mention another example: the *discrete space* — arbitrary nonempty set \mathcal{X} with the metric defined as $|x - y|_{\mathcal{X}} = 0$ if $x = y$ and $|x - y|_{\mathcal{X}} = 1$ otherwise.

Subspaces. Any subset of a metric space is also a metric space, by restricting the original metric to the subset; the obtained metric space is called a *subspace*. In particular, all subsets of Euclidean space are metric spaces.

Balls. Given a point p in a metric space \mathcal{X} and a real number $R \geq 0$, the set of points x on the distance less then R (or at most R) from p is called open (or correspondingly closed) ball of radius R with center at p . The *open ball* is denoted as $B(p, R)$ or $B(p, R)_{\mathcal{X}}$; the second notation is used if we need to emphasize that the ball lies in the metric space \mathcal{X} . Formally speaking

$$B(p, R) = B(p, R)_{\mathcal{X}} = \{x \in \mathcal{X} : |x - p|_{\mathcal{X}} < R\}.$$

Analogously, the *closed ball* is denoted as $\bar{B}[p, R]$ or $\bar{B}[p, R]_{\mathcal{X}}$ and

$$\bar{B}[p, R] = \bar{B}[p, R]_{\mathcal{X}} = \{x \in \mathcal{X} : |x - p|_{\mathcal{X}} \leq R\}.$$

1.2. Exercise. Let \mathcal{X} be a metric space.

(a) Show that if $\bar{B}[p, 2] \subset \bar{B}[q, 1]$ for some points $p, q \in \mathcal{X}$, then $\bar{B}[p, 2] = \bar{B}[q, 1]$.

(b) Construct a metric space \mathcal{X} with two points p and q such that $B(p, \frac{3}{2}) \subset B(q, 1)$ and the inclusions is strict.

Calculus

In this section we will extend standard notions from calculus to the metric spaces.

1.3. Definition. Let \mathcal{X} be a metric space. A sequence of points x_1, x_2, \dots in \mathcal{X} is called convergent if there is $x_\infty \in \mathcal{X}$ such that $|x_\infty - x_n| \rightarrow 0$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$. That is, for every $\varepsilon > 0$, there is a natural number N such that for all $n \geq N$, we have

$$|x_\infty - x_n| < \varepsilon.$$

In this case we say that the sequence (x_n) converges to x_∞ , or x_∞ is the limit of the sequence (x_n) . Notationally, we write $x_n \rightarrow x_\infty$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$ or $x_\infty = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} x_n$.

1.4. Definition. Let \mathcal{X} and \mathcal{Y} be metric spaces. A map $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ is called continuous if for any convergent sequence $x_n \rightarrow x_\infty$ in \mathcal{X} , we have $f(x_n) \rightarrow f(x_\infty)$ in \mathcal{Y} .

Equivalently, $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ is continuous if for any $x \in \mathcal{X}$ and any $\varepsilon > 0$, there is $\delta > 0$ such that

$$|x - x'|_{\mathcal{X}} < \delta \text{ implies } |f(x) - f(x')|_{\mathcal{Y}} < \varepsilon.$$

1.5. Exercise. Let \mathcal{X} and \mathcal{Y} be metric spaces $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ is distance non-expanding map; that is,

$$|f(x) - f(x')|_{\mathcal{Y}} \leq |x - x'|_{\mathcal{X}}$$

for any $x, x' \in \mathcal{X}$. Show that f is continuous.

1.6. Definition. Let \mathcal{X} and \mathcal{Y} be metric spaces. A continuous bijection $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ is called a homeomorphism if its inverse $f^{-1}: \mathcal{Y} \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ is also continuous.

If there exists a homeomorphism $f: \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$, we say that \mathcal{X} is homeomorphic to \mathcal{Y} , or \mathcal{X} and \mathcal{Y} are homeomorphic.

If a metric space \mathcal{X} is homeomorphic to a known space, for example plane, sphere, disc, circle and so on, we may also say that \mathcal{X} is a topological plane, sphere, disc, circle and so on.

1.7. Definition. A subset A of a metric space \mathcal{X} is called closed if whenever a sequence (x_n) of points from A converges in \mathcal{X} , we have that $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} x_n \in A$.

A set $\Omega \subset \mathcal{X}$ is called open if for any $z \in \Omega$, there is $\varepsilon > 0$ such that $B(z, \varepsilon) \subset \Omega$.

An open set Ω that contains a given point p is called neighborhood of p .

1.8. Exercise. Let Q be a subset of a metric space \mathcal{X} . Show that A is closed if and only if its complement $\Omega = \mathcal{X} \setminus Q$ is open.

Chapter 2

Curves

Paths. Let \mathcal{X} be a metric space. A continuous map $f: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ is called a *path*. If $p = f(0)$ and $q = f(1)$, then we say that f *connects* p to q .

If any two points in \mathcal{X} can be connected by a path then \mathcal{X} is called *path connected*. Similarly, a subset $A \subset \mathcal{X}$ is called *path connected* if any two points $p, q \in A$ can be connected by a path that runs in A ; equivalently, the subspace A is path connected.

Simple curves.

2.1. Definition. A path connected subset γ in a metric space is called a *simple curve* if it is locally homeomorphic to a real interval; that is, any point $p \in \gamma$ has a neighborhood $U \ni p$ such that the intersection $U \cap \gamma$ is homeomorphic to a real interval.

It turns out that any curve γ admits a homeomorphism from a real interval or a circle; that is, there is a continuous bijection $G \rightarrow \gamma$ with continuous inverse; here (and further) G denotes a circle or real interval. We omit a proof of this statement, but it is not hard.

The homeomorphism $G \rightarrow \gamma$ as above is called *parametrization* of γ . The parametrization completely defines the curve. Often will use the same letter for curve and its parametrization, so we can say curve γ has parametrization $\gamma: G \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$. Note however that any curve admits many different parametrization.

2.2. Exercise. Find a continuous injective map $\gamma: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ such that its image is not a simple curve.

Hint: The image of γ should have a shape of digit 9.

If G is a circle, then the curve $\gamma: G \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ is called *closed*. If G is a real interval, then we may say that γ is an *arc*.

Parameterized curves. A *parameterized curve* is defined as a continuous map $\gamma: G \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$. For a parameterized curve we do not assume that γ is injective; in other words the parameterized curve might have self-intersections.

2.3. Advanced exercise. Let $\alpha: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ be a path from p to q . Assume $p \neq q$. Show that there is a simple path connecting from p to q in \mathcal{X} .

Smooth curves

A curve in the Euclidean space or plane, called *space* or *plane curve* correspondingly.

A space curve can be described by its coordinate functions

$$\gamma(t) = (x(t), y(t), z(t)).$$

Plane curves can be considered as a partial case of space curves with $z(t) \equiv 0$.

If each of the coordinate functions $x(t), y(t), z(t)$ of the space curve γ is a smooth (that is, it has derivatives of all orders everywhere in its domain) then the parameterized curve is called *smooth*.

If the *velocity vector*

$$\gamma'(t) = (x'(t), y'(t), z'(t))$$

does not vanish at all points, then the parameterized curve γ is called *regular*.

A simple space curve is called *smooth and regular* if it admits a smooth and regular parametrization correspondingly. Regular smooth curves are among the main objects in differential geometry; the term *smooth curve* often used for *smooth regular curve*.

2.4. Exercise. The function

$$f(t) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } t \leq 0, \\ \frac{t}{e^{1/t}} & \text{if } t > 0. \end{cases}$$

is smooth.¹

Show that $\gamma(t) = (f(t), f(-t))$ gives a smooth parametrization of the curve S formed by the union of two half-axis in the plane.

¹The existence of all derivatives $f^{(n)}(x)$ at $x \neq 0$ is evident and direct calculations show that $f^{(n)}(0) = 0$ for any n .

Show that any smooth parametrization of S has vanishing velocity vector at the origin. Conclude that the curve S is not regular and smooth.

2.5. Exercise. Describe the set of real numbers a such that the plane curve $\gamma_a(t) = (t + a \cdot \sin t, a \cdot \cos t)$, $t \in \mathbb{R}$ is

- (a) regular;
- (b) simple.

Loops and periodic parametrization. A closed simple curve can be described as an image of a parameterized curve $\gamma: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ such that $p = \gamma(0) = \gamma(1)$; such curves are called *loops*; the point p in this case is called *base* of the loop.

However, it is more natural to present it as a *periodic* parameterized curve $\gamma: \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$; that is, there is a constant ℓ such that $\gamma(t + \ell) = \gamma(t)$ for any t . For example the unit circle in the plane can be described by $2 \cdot \pi$ -periodic parametrization $\gamma(t) = (\cos t, \sin t)$.

Any smooth regular closed curve can be described by a smooth regular loop. But in general the closed curve that described by a smooth regular loop might fail to be smooth and regular — it might fail to be smooth at its base; an example shown on the diagram.



Implicitly defined curves

Let $f: \mathbb{R}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a smooth function; that is, all its partial derivatives defined in its domain of definition. Consider the set S of solution of equation $f(x, y) = 0$ in the plane.

Assume S is path connected. According to implicit function theorem (A.2), the set S is a smooth regular simple curve if 0 is a *regular value* of f . In this case it means that the gradient ∇f does not vanish at any point $p \in S$. In other words, if $f(p) = 0$, then $\frac{\partial f}{\partial x}(p) \neq 0$ or $\frac{\partial f}{\partial y}(p) \neq 0$.

Similarly, assume f, h is a pair of smooth functions defined in \mathbb{R}^3 . The system of equations $f(x, y, z) = h(x, y, z) = 0$ defines a regular smooth space curve if the set of solutions is path connected and 0 is a regular value of the map $F: (x, y, z) \mapsto (f(x, y, z), h(x, y, z))$. In this case it means that the gradients ∇f and ∇h are linearly independent at any point $p \in S$. In other words, if $f(p) = 0$, then at the Jacobian matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} & \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} & \frac{\partial f}{\partial z} \\ \frac{\partial h}{\partial x} & \frac{\partial h}{\partial y} & \frac{\partial h}{\partial z} \end{pmatrix}$$

for the map $F: \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ has rank 2 at p .

The described way to define a curve is called *implicit*; if a curve is defined by its parametrization, we say that it is *explicitly defined*. While implicit function theorem guarantees the existence of regular smooth parametrizations, do not expect it to be in a closed form. When it comes to calculations, usually it is easier to work directly with implicit presentation.

2.6. Exercise. Consider the set in the plane described by the equation

$$y^2 = x^3.$$

Is it a simple curve? and if “yes”, is it a smooth regular curve?

2.7. Exercise. Describe the set of real numbers a such that the system of equations

$$\begin{aligned} x^2 + y^2 + z^2 &= 1 \\ x^2 + a \cdot x + y^2 &= 0 \end{aligned}$$

describes a smooth regular curve.

Chapter 3

Length

Recall that a sequence

$$a = t_0 < t_1 < \cdots < t_k = b.$$

is called a *partition* of the interval $[a, b]$.

3.1. Definition. Let $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ be a curve in a metric space. The length of a α is defined as

$$\text{length } \alpha = \sup\{|\alpha(t_0) - \alpha(t_1)| + |\alpha(t_1) - \alpha(t_2)| + \cdots + |\alpha(t_{k-1}) - \alpha(t_k)|\},$$

where the exact upper bound is taken over all partitions

$$a = t_0 < t_1 < \cdots < t_k = b.$$

The length of α is a nonnegative real number or infinity; the curve α is called *rectifiable* if its length is finite.

The length of a closed curve is defined as the length of a corresponding loop. If a curve is defined on a open or closed-open interval then its length is defined as the exact upper bound for lengths of all its closed arcs.

If α is a space curve, then the above definition says that its length is the exact upper bound of the lengths of polygonal lines $p_0 \dots p_k$ inscribed in the curve, where $p_i = \alpha(t_i)$ for a partition $a = t_0 < t_1 < \cdots < t_k = b$. If α is closed then $p_0 = p_k$ and therefore the inscribed polygonal line is also closed.

3.2. Exercise. Let $\alpha: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ be a simple curve. Suppose a parametrized curve $\beta: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ has that same image as α ; that is

$\beta([0, 1]) = \alpha([0, 1])$. Show that

$$\text{length } \beta \geq \text{length } \alpha.$$

3.3. Exercise. Assume $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ is a smooth curve. Show that

(a) $\text{length } \alpha \geq \int_a^b |\alpha'(t)| \cdot dt,$

(b) $\text{length } \alpha \leq \int_a^b |\alpha'(t)| \cdot dt.$

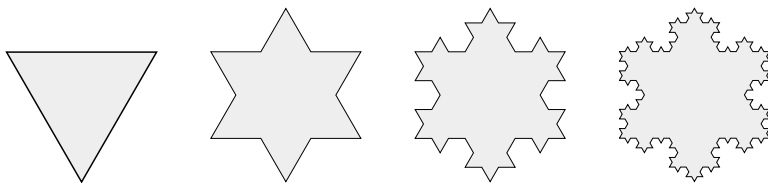
Conclude that

❶
$$\text{length } \alpha = \int_a^b |\alpha'(t)| \cdot dt.$$

Hints: For (a), apply the fundamental theorem of calculus for each segment in a given partition. For (b) consider a partition such that the velocity vector $\alpha'(t)$ is nearly constant on each of its segments.

Nonrectifiable curves. A classical example of a nonrectifiable curve is the so called *Koch snowflake*; it is a fractal curve that can be constructed the following way:

Start with an equilateral triangle, divide each of its side into three segments of equal length and add an equilateral triangle with base at the middle segment. Repeat this construction recursively to the obtained polygons. Few first iterations of the construction are shown



on the diagram. The Koch snowflake is the boundary of the union of all the polygons.

3.4. Exercise.

(a) Show that Koch snowflake is a closed simple curve; that is, it admits a homeomorphism to a circle.

(b) Show that Koch snowflake is not rectifiable.

Arc length parametrization

We say that a parametrized curve γ has an *arc length parametrization*¹ if for any two values of parameters $t_1 < t_2$, the value $t_2 - t_1$ is the length of $\gamma|_{[t_1, t_2]}$; that is, the closed arc of γ from t_1 to t_2 .

Note that a smooth space curve $\gamma(t) = (x(t), y(t), z(t))$ has arc length parametrization if and only if it has unit velocity vector at all times; that is

$$|\gamma'(t)| = \sqrt{x'(t)^2 + y'(t)^2 + z'(t)^2} = 1;$$

by that reason arc length parametrization of smooth curves with also called *unit-speed curves*. Note that smooth unit-speed curves are automatically regular.

Any rectifiable curve can be parameterized by arc length. For a parametrized smooth curve γ , the arc length parameter s can be written as an integral

$$s(t) = \int_{t_0}^t |\gamma'(\tau)| \cdot d\tau.$$

Note that $s(t)$ is a smooth increasing function. Further by fundamental theorem of calculus, $s'(t) = |\gamma'(t)|$. Therefore if γ is regular, then $s'(t) \neq 0$ for any parameter value t . By inverse function theorem (A.1) the inverse function $s^{-1}(t)$ is also smooth. Therefore $\gamma \circ s^{-1}$ — the reparametrization of γ by arclength s — remains smooth and regular.

Most of the time we use s for an arc length parameter of a curve.

3.5. Exercise. Reparametrize the helix

$$\gamma_{a,b}(t) = (a \cdot \cos t, a \cdot \sin t, b \cdot t)$$

by arc length.

We will be interested in the properties of curves that are invariant under a reparametrization. Therefore we can always assume that the given smooth regular curve comes with a arc length parametrization. A good property of arc length parametrizations is that it is almost canonical — these parametrizations differ only by a sign and additive constant. On the other hand, often it is impossible to find an arc length parametrization in a closed form which makes it hard to use it calculations; usually it is more convenient to use the original parametrization.

¹which is also called *natural parametrization*

Convex curves

A simple plane curve is called *convex* if it bounds a convex region.

3.6. Proposition. *Assume a convex closed curve α lies inside the domain bounded by a closed simple plane curve β . Then*

$$\text{length } \alpha \leq \text{length } \beta.$$

Note that it is sufficient to show that for any polygon P inscribed in α there is a polygon Q inscribed in β with $\text{perim } P \leq \text{perim } Q$, where $\text{perim } P$ denotes the perimeter of P .

Therefore it is sufficient to prove the following lemma.

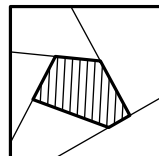
3.7. Lemma. *Let P and Q be polygons. Assume P is convex and $Q \supset P$. Then*

$$\text{perim } P \leq \text{perim } Q.$$

Proof. Note that by the triangle inequality, the inequality

$$\text{perim } P \leq \text{perim } Q$$

holds if P can be obtained from Q by cutting it along a chord; that is, a line segment with ends on the boundary of Q that lies in Q .



Note that there is an increasing sequence of polygons

$$P = P_0 \subset P_1 \subset \dots \subset P_n = Q$$

such that P_{i-1} obtained from P_i by cutting along a chord. Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \text{perim } P = \text{perim } P_0 &\leq \text{perim } P_1 \leq \dots \\ &\dots \leq \text{perim } P_n = \text{perim } Q \end{aligned}$$

and the lemma follows. □

3.8. Corollary. *Any convex closed plane curve is rectifiable.*

Proof. Any closed curve is bounded; that is, it lies in a sufficiently large square. Indeed the curve can be described as an image of a loop $\alpha: [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$, $\alpha(t) = (x(t), y(t))$. The coordinate functions $x(t)$ and $y(t)$ are continuous functions defined on $[0, 1]$. Therefore the absolute values of both of these functions are bounded by some constant C . That is α lies in the square defined by the inequalities $|x| \leq C$ and $|y| \leq C$.

By Proposition 3.6, the length of the curve can not exceed the perimeter of the square $8 \cdot C$, whence the result. \square

Recall that convex hull of a set X is the smallest convex set that contains X ; in other words convex hull is the intersection of all convex sets containing X .

3.9. Exercise. *Let α be a closed simple plane curve. Denote by K the convex hull of α ; let β be the boundary curve of K . Show that*

$$\text{length } \alpha \geq \text{length } \beta.$$

Try to show that the statement holds for arbitrary closed plane curve α , assuming that X has nonempty interior.

Crofton formulas*

Consider a plane curve $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$. Given a unit vector u , denote by α_u the curve that follows orthogonal projections of α to the line in the direction u ; that is

$$\alpha_u(t) = \langle u, \alpha(t) \rangle \cdot u.$$

Note that

$$|\alpha'(t)| = |\langle u, \alpha'(t) \rangle|$$

for any t . Note that for any plane vector the magnitude of its average projection is proportional to its magnitude with coefficient; that is,

$$|w| = k \cdot \overline{|w_u|},$$

where $\overline{|w_u|}$ denotes the average value of $|w_u|$ for all unit vectors u . (The value k is the average value of $|\cos \varphi|$ for $\varphi \in [0, 2\pi]$; it can be found by integration, but soon we will show another way to find it.)

If the curve α is smooth, then according to Exercise 3.3

$$\begin{aligned} \text{length } \alpha &= \int_a^b |\alpha'(t)| \cdot dt = \\ &= \int_a^b k \cdot \overline{|\alpha'_u(t)|} \cdot dt = \\ &= k \cdot \overline{\text{length } \alpha_u}. \end{aligned}$$

This formula and its relatives are called Crofton formulas. To find the coefficient k one can apply it for the unit circle: the left hand

side is $2 \cdot \pi$ — this is the length of unit circle. Note that for any unit vector u , the curve α_u runs back and forth along an interval of length 2. Therefore $\text{length } \alpha_u = 4$ and hence its average value is also 4. It follows that the coefficient k has to satisfy the equation $2 \cdot \pi = k \cdot 4$; whence

$$\text{length } \alpha = \frac{\pi}{2} \cdot \overline{\text{length } \alpha_u}.$$

The Crofton's formula holds for arbitrary rectifiable curves, not necessary smooth; it can be proved using Exercises 3.12.

3.10. Exercise. Assume that closed plane curve α has length at least $\pi \cdot s$, where s is the average of pojections of α to lines. Moreover the equality holds if and only if α is convex.

Use this statement to solve of Exercise 3.9.

3.11. Advanced exercise. Show that the length of space curve is proportional to the average length of its projections to all lines and to planes. Find the coefficients in each case.

3.12. Advanced exercises.

- (a) Show that the formula ❶ holds for any Lipschitz curve $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$.
- (b) Construct a simple curve $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ such that the velocity vector $\alpha'(t)$ is defined and bounded for almost all $t \in [a, b]$, but the formula ❶ does not hold.

Hint: Use theorems of Rademacher and Lusin (A.4 and A.5).

Semicontinuity of length

Recall that the lower limit of a sequence of real numbers (x_n) is denoted by

$$\varliminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} x_n.$$

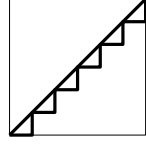
It is defined as the lowest partial limit; that is, the lowest possible limit of a subsequence of (x_n) . The lower limit is defined for any sequence of real numbers and it lies in the extended real line $[-\infty, \infty]$

3.13. Theorem. Length is a lower semi-continuous with respect to pointwise convergence of curves.

More precisely, assume that a sequence of curves $\alpha_n: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ in a metric space \mathcal{X} converges pointwise to a curve $\alpha_\infty: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$; that is, $\alpha_n(t) \rightarrow \alpha_\infty(t)$ for any fixed $t \in [a, b]$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$. Then

$$\text{❷} \quad \varliminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \alpha_n \geq \text{length } \alpha_\infty.$$

Note that the inequality ❷ might be strict. For example the diagonal α_∞ of the unit square can be approximated by a sequence of stairs-like polygonal curves α_n with sides parallel to the sides of the square (α_6 is on the picture). In this case



$$\text{length } \alpha_\infty = \sqrt{2} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{length } \alpha_n = 2$$

for any n .

Proof. Fix a partition $a = t_0 < t_1 < \dots < t_k = b$. Set

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma_n &:= |\alpha_n(t_0) - \alpha_n(t_1)| + \dots + |\alpha_n(t_{k-1}) - \alpha_n(t_k)|. \\ \Sigma_\infty &:= |\alpha_\infty(t_0) - \alpha_\infty(t_1)| + \dots + |\alpha_\infty(t_{k-1}) - \alpha_\infty(t_k)|. \end{aligned}$$

Note that $\Sigma_n \rightarrow \Sigma_\infty$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$ and $\Sigma_n \leq \text{length } \alpha_n$ for each n . Hence

$$\text{❸} \quad \underline{\lim}_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \alpha_n \geq \Sigma_\infty.$$

If α_∞ is rectifiable, we can assume that

$$\text{length } \alpha_\infty < \Sigma_\infty + \varepsilon.$$

for any given $\varepsilon > 0$. By ❹ it follows that

$$\underline{\lim}_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \alpha_n > \text{length } \alpha_\infty - \varepsilon$$

for any $\varepsilon > 0$; whence ❷ follows.

It remains to consider the case when α_∞ is not rectifiable; that is $\text{length } \alpha_\infty = \infty$. In this case we can choose a partition so that $\Sigma_\infty > L$ for any real number L . By ❸ it follows that

$$\underline{\lim}_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \alpha_n > L$$

for any L ; whence

$$\underline{\lim}_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \alpha_n = \infty$$

and ❷ follows. □

Length metric

Let \mathcal{X} be a metric space. Given two points x, y in \mathcal{X} , denote by $d(x, y)$ the exact lower bound for lengths of all paths connecting x to y ; if there is no such path we assume that $d(x, y) = \infty$.

Note that function d satisfies all the axioms of metric except it might take infinite value. Therefore if any two points in \mathcal{X} can be connected by a rectifiable curve, then d defines a new metric on \mathcal{X} ; in this case d is called *induced length metric*.

Evidently $d(x, y) \geq |x - y|$ for any pair of points $x, y \in \mathcal{X}$. If the equality holds for any pair, then the metric is called *length metric* and the space is called *length-metric space*.

Most of the time we consider length-metric spaces. In particular the Euclidean space is a length-metric space. A subspace A of length-metric space \mathcal{X} might be not a length-metric space; the induced length distance between points x and y in the subspace A will be denoted as $|x - y|_A$; that is $|x - y|_A$ is the exact lower bound for the length of paths in A .

3.14. Exercise. Let $A \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ be a closed subset. Show that A is convex if and only if

$$|x - y|_A = |x - y|_{\mathbb{R}^3}.$$

3.15. Exercise. Let us denote by \mathbb{S}^1 the unit circle in the plane; that is,

$$\mathbb{S}^1 = \{ (x, y) \in \mathbb{R}^2 : x^2 + y^2 = 1 \}.$$

Show that

$$|u - v|_{\mathbb{S}^1} = \angle(u, v) := \arccos\langle u, v \rangle$$

for any $u, v \in \mathbb{S}^1$.

Spherical curves

A space curve γ is called *spherical* if it runs in the unit sphere; that is, $|\gamma(t)| = 1$ for any t .

3.16. Exercise. Let us denote by \mathbb{S}^2 the unit sphere in the space; that is,

$$\mathbb{S}^2 = \{ (x, y, z) \in \mathbb{R}^3 : x^2 + y^2 + z^2 = 1 \}.$$

Show that

$$|u - v|_{\mathbb{S}^2} = \angle(u, v) := \arccos\langle u, v \rangle$$

for any $u, v \in \mathbb{S}^2$.

Hint: Use Exercise 3.15 and the following map $f: (r, \theta, \varphi) \mapsto (r, \theta, 0)$ in spherical coordinates. Note that f is distance nonexpanding and it maps \mathbb{R}^3 to a half-plane and \mathbb{S}^2 to one of its meridians.

3.17. Hemisphere lemma. *Any closed curve of length $< 2\pi$ in \mathbb{S}^2 lies in an open hemisphere.*

This lemma is a keystone in the proof of Fenchel's theorem given below. The lemma is not as simple as you might think — try to prove it yourself. I learned the following proof from Stephanie Alexander.

Proof. Let α be a closed curve in \mathbb{S}^2 of length 2ℓ .

Assume $\ell < \pi$.

Let us divide α into two arcs α_1 and α_2 of length ℓ , with endpoints p and q . According to Exercise 3.16, $\angle(p, q) \leq \ell < \pi$. Denote by z be the midpoint between p and q in \mathbb{S}^2 ; that is z is the midpoint of an equator arc from p to q . We claim that α lies in the open north hemisphere with north pole at z . If not, α intersects the equator in a point, say r . Without loss of generality we may assume that r lies on α_1 .

Rotate the arc α_1 by angle π around the line thru z and the center of the sphere. The obtained arc α_1^* together with α_1 forms a closed curve of length 2ℓ that passes thru r and its antipodal point r^* . Therefore

$$\frac{1}{2} \cdot \text{length } \alpha = \ell \geq \angle(r, r^*) = \pi,$$

a contradiction. □

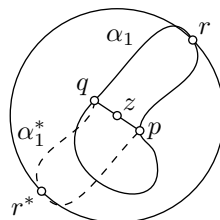
3.18. Exercise. *Describe a simple closed spherical curve that does not pass thru a pair of antipodal points and does not lie in any hemisphere.*

3.19. Exercise. *Suppose that a closed simple spherical curve α divides \mathbb{S}^2 into two regions of equal area. Show that*

$$\text{length } \alpha \geq 2\pi.$$

3.20. Exercise. *Consider the following problem, find a flaw in the given solution. Come up with a correct argument.*

Problem. Suppose that a closed plane curve α has length at most 4. Show that α lies in a unit disc.



The north hemisphere corresponds to the disc and the south hemisphere to the complement of the disc.

Wrong solution. Note that it is sufficient to show that diameter of α is at most 2; that is, the distance between any two pairs of points p and q of α cannot exceed 2.

The length of α can not be smaller than the closed inscribed polygonal line which goes from p to q and back to p . Therefore

$$2 \cdot |p - q| \leq \text{length } \alpha \leq 4.$$

□

3.21. Advanced exercises. Given points $v, w \in \mathbb{S}^2$, denote by w_v the closest point to w on the equator with pole at v ; in other words, if w^\perp is the projection of w to the plane perpendicular to v , then w_v is the unit vector in the direction of w^\perp . The vector w_v is defined if $w \neq \pm v$.

1. Show that for any spherical curve α we have that

$$\text{length } \alpha = \overline{\text{length } \alpha_v},$$

where $\overline{\text{length } \alpha_v}$ denotes the average length for all $v \in \mathbb{S}^2$. (This is a spherical analog of Crofton's formula.)

2. Give another proof of hemisphere lemma using part (1).

Chapter 4

Space curves

Acceleration of unit-speed curve

Recall that any regular smooth curve can be parametrized by its arc length. The obtained parametrized curve, say γ , remains to be smooth and it has unit speed; that is, $|\gamma'(s)| = 1$ for all s .

The following proposition states that the acceleration vector is perpendicular to the velocity vector if the speed remains constant.

4.1. Proposition. *Assume γ is a smooth unit-speed space curve. Then $\gamma'(s) \perp \gamma''(s)$ for any s .*

The scalar product (also known as dot product) of two vectors v and w will be denoted by $\langle v, w \rangle$. Recall that the derivative of a scalar product satisfies the product rule; that is if $v = v(t)$ and $w = w(t)$ are smooth vector-valued functions of a real parameter t , then

$$\langle v, w \rangle' = \langle v', w \rangle + \langle v, w' \rangle.$$

Proof. The identity $|\gamma'| = 1$ can be rewritten as $\langle \gamma', \gamma' \rangle = 1$. Therefore

$$2 \cdot \langle \gamma'', \gamma' \rangle = \langle \gamma', \gamma' \rangle' = 0,$$

whence $\gamma'' \perp \gamma'$. □

Curvature

For a unit speed smooth space curve γ the magnitude of its acceleration $|\gamma''(s)|$ is called its *curvature* at the time s . If γ is simple, then we can say that $|\gamma''(s)|$ is the curvature at the point $p = \gamma(s)$ without

ambiguity. The curvature is usually denoted by $k(s)$ or $k_\gamma(s)$ and in the latter case it might be also denoted by $k(p)$ or $k_\gamma(p)$.

The curvature measures how fast the curve turns; if you drive along a plane curve, curvature tells how much to turn the steering wheel at the given point (note that it does not depend on your speed). In general, the term *curvature* is used for different types of geometric objects, and it always measures how much it deviates from being *straight*; for curves, it measures how fast it deviates from a straight line.

4.2. Exercise. *Show that any regular smooth spherical curve has curvature at least 1 at each time.*

Hint: Differentiate the identity $\langle \gamma(s), \gamma(s) \rangle = 1$ a couple of times.

Tangent indicatrix

Let γ be a regular smooth space curve. Let us consider another curve

$$\textcircled{1} \quad \tau(t) = \frac{\gamma'(t)}{|\gamma'(t)|}$$

that is called *tangent indicatrix* of γ . Note that $|\tau(t)| = 1$ for any t ; that is, τ is a spherical curve.

The line thru $\gamma(s)$ in the direction of $\tau(s)$ is called *tangent line* at s .

We say that smooth regular curve γ_1 at s_1 is *tangent* to a smooth regular curve γ_2 at s_2 if $\gamma_1(s_1) = \gamma_2(s_2)$ and the tangent line of γ_1 at s_1 coincide with the tangent line of γ_2 at s_2 ; if both of the curves are simple we can also say that they are tangent at the point $p = \gamma_1(s_1) = \gamma_2(s_2)$ without ambiguity.

If γ has a unit speed parametrization, then $\tau(t) = \gamma'(t)$. In this case we have the following expression for curvature: $k(t) = |\tau'(t)| = |\gamma''(t)|$.

In general case we have

$$\textcircled{2} \quad k(t) = \frac{|\tau'(t)|}{|\gamma'(t)|}.$$

Indeed, for an arc length parametrization $s(t)$ we have $s'(t) = |\gamma'(t)|$. Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} k(t) &= \left| \frac{d\tau}{ds} \right| = \\ &= \left| \frac{d\tau}{dt} \right| / \left| \frac{ds}{dt} \right| = \\ &= \frac{|\tau'(t)|}{|\gamma'(t)|}. \end{aligned}$$

It follows that indicatrix of a smooth regular curve γ is regular if the curvature of γ does not vanish.

4.3. Exercise. Use the formulas ❶ and ❷ to show that for any smooth regular space curve γ we have the following expressions for its curvature:

(a)

$$k(t) = \frac{|\gamma''(t)^\perp|}{|\gamma'(t)|^2},$$

where $\gamma''(t)^\perp$ denotes the projection of $\gamma''(t)$ to the normal plane of $\gamma'(t)$;

(b)

$$k(t) = \frac{|\gamma''(t) \times \gamma'(t)|}{|\gamma'(t)|^3},$$

where \times denotes the vector product (also known as cross product).

Hint: Prove and use the following identities:

$$\begin{aligned}\gamma''(t) - \gamma''(t)^\perp &= \frac{\gamma'(t)}{|\gamma'(t)|} \cdot \langle \gamma''(t), \frac{\gamma'(t)}{|\gamma'(t)|} \rangle, \\ |\gamma'(t)| &= \sqrt{\langle \gamma'(t), \gamma'(t) \rangle}.\end{aligned}$$

4.4. Exercise. Apply the formulas in the previous exercise to show that if f is a smooth real function, then its graph $y = f(x)$ has curvature

$$k(p) = \frac{|f''(x)|}{(1 + f'(x)^2)^{\frac{3}{2}}}$$

at the point $p = (x, f(x))$.

Total curvature

Let $\gamma: \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ be a regular smooth curve and τ its tangent indicatrix. Recall that without loss of generality we can assume that γ has a unit speed parametrization; in this case $\tau(s) = \gamma'(s)$ and hence

$$k(s) := |\gamma''(s)| = |\tau'(s)|;$$

that is, the curvature of γ at time s is the speed of the tangent indicatrix τ at the same time moment.

The integral

$$\Phi(\gamma) := \int_{\mathbb{I}} k(s) \cdot ds$$

is called *total curvature* of γ .

4.5. Exercise. Find the curvature of the helix

$$\gamma_{a,b}(t) = (a \cdot \cos t, a \cdot \sin t, b \cdot t),$$

its tangent indicatrix and the total curvature of its arc $t \in [0, 2\pi]$.

4.6. Observation. The total curvature of a smooth regular curve is the length of its tangent indicatrix.

Proof. It is sufficient to prove the observation for a unit-speed space curve $\gamma: \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$. Denote by τ its tangent indicatrix. Then

$$\begin{aligned} \Phi(\gamma) &:= \int_{\mathbb{I}} k(s) \cdot ds = \\ &= \int_{\mathbb{I}} |\tau'(s)| \cdot ds = \\ &= \text{length } \tau. \end{aligned}$$

□

4.7. Fenchel's theorem. The total curvature of any closed regular space curve is at least 2π .

Proof. Fix a closed regular space curve γ ; we can assume that it is described by a loop $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$; in this case $\gamma(a) = \gamma(b)$ and $\gamma'(a) = \gamma'(b)$.

Consider its tangent indicatrix $\tau = \gamma'$. Recall that $|\tau(s)| = 1$ for any s ; that is, τ is a closed spherical curve.

Let us show that τ can not lie in a hemisphere. Assume the contrary; without loss of generality we can assume that τ lies in the north hemisphere defined by the inequality $z > 0$ in (x, y, z) -coordinates. It means that $z'(t) > 0$ at any time, where $\gamma(t) = (x(t), y(t), z(t))$. Therefore

$$z(b) - z(a) = \int_a^b z'(s) \cdot ds > 0.$$

In particular, $\gamma(a) \neq \gamma(b)$, a contradiction.

Applying the observation (4.6) and the hemisphere lemma (3.17), we get that

$$\Phi(\gamma) = \text{length } \tau \geq 2\pi.$$

□

4.8. Exercise. Show that a closed space curve γ with curvature at most 1 can not be shorter than the unit circle; that is, $\text{length } \gamma \geq 2\pi$.

4.9. Advanced exercise. Suppose that γ is a smooth regular space curve that does not pass thru the origin. Consider the spherical curve defined as $\sigma(t) = \frac{\gamma(t)}{|\gamma(t)|}$ for any t . Show that

$$\text{length } \sigma < \Phi(\gamma) + \pi.$$

Moreover, if γ is closed, then

$$\text{length } \sigma \leq \Phi(\gamma).$$

Note that the last inequality gives an alternative proof of Fenchel's theorem. Indeed, without loss of generality we can assume that the origin lies on a chord of γ ; in this case the spherical curve σ passes thru a pair of antipodal points in \mathbb{S}^2 ; whence

$$\text{length } \sigma \geq 2 \cdot \pi.$$

Piecewise smooth curves

Assume $\alpha: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ and $\beta: [b, c] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ are two curves such that $\alpha(b) = \beta(b)$. Then one can combine these two curves into one $\gamma: [a, c] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ by the rule

$$\gamma(t) = \begin{cases} \alpha(t) & \text{if } t \leq b, \\ \beta(t) & \text{if } t \geq b. \end{cases}$$

The obtained curve γ is called the *concatenation* of α and β . (The condition $\alpha(b) = \beta(b)$ ensures that the map $t \mapsto \gamma(t)$ is continuous.)

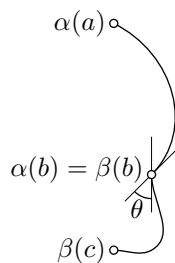
The same definition of concatenation can be applied if α and/or β are defined on semiopen intervals $(a, b]$ and/or $[b, c)$.

The concatenation can be also defined if the end point of the first curve coincides with the starting point of the second curve; if this is the case, then the time intervals of both curves can be shifted so that they fit together.

If in addition $\beta(c) = \alpha(a)$ then we can do cyclic concatenation of these curves; this way we obtain a closed curve.

If $\alpha'(b)$ and $\beta'(b)$ are defined then the angle $\theta = \angle(\alpha'(b), \beta'(b))$ is called *external angle* of γ at time b .

A space curve γ is called *piecewise smooth and regular* if it can be presented as a concatenation of finite number of smooth regular curves; if γ is closed, then the concatenation is assumed to be cyclic.



If γ is a concatenation of smooth regular arcs $\gamma_1, \dots, \gamma_n$, then the total curvature of γ is defined as a sum of the total curvatures of γ_i and the external angles; that is,

$$\Phi(\gamma) = \Phi(\gamma_1) + \dots + \Phi(\gamma_n) + \theta_1 + \dots + \theta_{n-1}$$

where θ_i is the external angle at the joint γ_i and γ_{i+1} ; if γ is closed, then

$$\Phi(\gamma) = \Phi(\gamma_1) + \dots + \Phi(\gamma_n) + \theta_1 + \dots + \theta_n,$$

where θ_n is the external angle at the joint γ_n and γ_1 .

4.10. Generalized Fenchel's theorem. *Let γ be a closed piecewise smooth regular space curve. Then*

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq 2\pi.$$

Proof. Suppose γ is a cyclic concatenation of n smooth regular arcs $\gamma_1, \dots, \gamma_n$. Denote by $\theta_1, \dots, \theta_n$ its external angles. We need to show that

$$\textcircled{3} \quad \Phi(\gamma_1) + \dots + \Phi(\gamma_n) + \theta_1 + \dots + \theta_n \geq 2\pi.$$

Consider the tangent indicatrix τ_1, \dots, τ_n for each arc $\gamma_1, \dots, \gamma_n$; these are smooth spherical arcs.

The same argument as in the proof of Fenchel's theorem, shows that the curves τ_1, \dots, τ_n can not lie in an open hemisphere.

Note that the spherical distance from the end point of τ_i to the starting point of τ_{i+1} is equal to the external angle θ_i (we enumerate modulo n , so $\gamma_{n+1} = \gamma_1$). Therefore if we connect the end point of τ_i to the starting point of τ_{i+1} by a short arc of a great circle in the sphere, then we add $\theta_1 + \dots + \theta_n$ to the total length of τ_1, \dots, τ_n .

Applying the hemispher lemma (3.17) to the obtained closed curve, we get that

$$\text{length } \tau_1 + \dots + \text{length } \tau_n + \theta_1 + \dots + \theta_n \geq 2\pi.$$

Applying the observation (4.6), we get $\textcircled{3}$. □

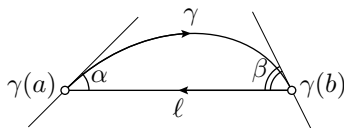
4.11. Chord lemma. *Let ℓ be the chord to a smooth regular arc $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$. Assume γ meets ℓ at angles α and β at its ends; that is*

$$\alpha = \angle(w, \gamma'(a)) \quad \text{and} \quad \beta = \angle(w, \gamma'(b)),$$

where $w = \gamma(b) - \gamma(a)$. Then

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq \alpha + \beta.$$

Proof. Let us parameterize the chord ℓ from $\gamma(b)$ to $\gamma(a)$ and consider the cyclic concatenation $\bar{\gamma}$ of γ and ℓ . The closed curve $\bar{\gamma}$ has two external angles $\pi - \alpha$ and $\pi - \beta$. Since curvature of ℓ vanish, we get that



$$\Phi(\bar{\gamma}) = \Phi(\gamma) + (\pi - \alpha) + (\pi - \beta).$$

According to the generalized Fenechel's theorem (4.10),

$$\Phi(\bar{\gamma}) \geq 2 \cdot \pi;$$

hence the result. \square

4.12. Exercise. Show that the estimate in the chord lemma is optimal.

That is, given two points p, q and two nonzero vectors u, v in \mathbb{R}^3 , show that there is a smooth regular curve γ that starts at p in the direction of u and ends at q in the direction of v such that $\Phi(\gamma)$ is arbitrary close to $\angle(w, u) + \angle(w, v)$, where $w = q - p$.

Polygonal lines

Polygonal lines are partial case of piecewise smooth regular curves; each arc in its concatenation is a line segment. Since the curvature of a line segment vanish, the total curvature of polygonal line is the sum of its external angles.

4.13. Exercise. Let a, b, c, d and x be distinct points in \mathbb{R}^3 . Show that the total curvature of polygonal line $abcd$ can not exceed the total curvature of $abxcd$; that is,

$$\Phi(abcd) \leq \Phi(abxcd).$$

Use this statement to show that any closed polygonal line has curvature at least $2 \cdot \pi$.

Hint: Use that exterior angle of a triangle equals to the sum of the two remote interior angles; for the second part apply the induction on number of vertexes.

4.14. Proposition. Assume a polygonal line $\hat{\gamma} = p_1 \dots p_n$ is inscribed in a smooth regular curve γ . Then

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq \Phi(\hat{\gamma}).$$

Moreover if γ is closed we can assume that the inscribed polygonal line $\hat{\gamma}$ is also closed.

Proof. Since the curvature of line segments vanishes, the total curvature of polygonal line is the sum of external angles $\theta_i = \pi - \angle p_{i-1}p_i p_{i+1}$.

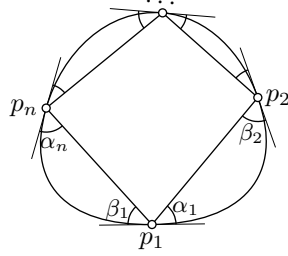
Assume $p_i = \gamma(t_i)$. Set

$$\begin{aligned} w_i &= p_{i+1} - p_i, & v_i &= \gamma'(t_i), \\ \alpha_i &= \angle(w_i, v_i), & \beta_i &= \angle(w_{i-1}, v_i). \end{aligned}$$

In case of closed curve we use indexes modulo n , in particular $p_{n+1} = p_1$.

Note that $\theta_i = \angle(w_{i-1}, w_i)$. Therefore

$$\theta_i \leq \alpha_i + \beta_i.$$



By the chord lemma, the total curvature of the arc of γ from p_i to p_{i+1} is at least $\alpha_i + \beta_{i+1}$.

Therefore if γ is a closed curve, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \Phi(\hat{\gamma}) &= \theta_1 + \cdots + \theta_n \leq \\ &\leq \beta_1 + \alpha_1 + \cdots + \beta_n + \alpha_n = \\ &= (\alpha_1 + \beta_2) + \cdots + (\alpha_n + \beta_1) \leq \\ &\leq \Phi(\gamma). \end{aligned}$$

If γ is an arc, the argument is analogous:

$$\begin{aligned} \Phi(\hat{\gamma}) &= \theta_2 + \cdots + \theta_{n-1} \leq \\ &\leq \beta_2 + \alpha_2 + \cdots + \beta_{n-1} + \alpha_{n-1} \leq \\ &\leq (\alpha_1 + \beta_2) + \cdots + (\alpha_{n-1} + \beta_n) \leq \\ &\leq \Phi(\gamma). \end{aligned}$$

□

4.15. Exercise.

- Draw a smooth regular plane curve γ which has a self-intersection, such that $\Phi(\gamma) < 2\pi$.
- Show that if a smooth regular curve $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ has a self-intersection, then $\Phi(\gamma) > \pi$.

4.16. Proposition. *The equality case in the Fenchel's theorem holds only for convex plane curves; that is, if the total curvature of a smooth regular space curve γ is equal to 2π , then it is a convex plane curve.*

The proof is an application of Proposition 4.14.

Proof. Consider an inscribed quadrilateral $abcd$ in γ . By the definition of total curvature, we have that

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi(abcd) &= (\pi - \angle dab) + (\pi - \angle abc) + (\pi - \angle bcd) + (\pi - \angle cda) = \\ &= 4 \cdot \pi - (\angle dab + \angle abc + \angle bcd + \angle cda)\end{aligned}$$

Note that

$$\textcircled{4} \quad \angle abc \leq \angle abd + \angle dbc \quad \text{and} \quad \angle cda \leq \angle cdb + \angle bda.$$

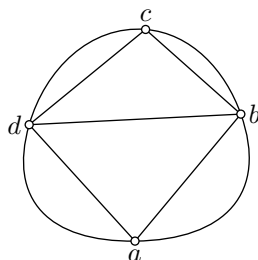
The sum of angles in any triangle is π . Therefore combining these inequalities, we get that

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi(abcd) &\geq 4 \cdot \pi - (\angle dab + \angle abd + \angle bda) - (\angle bcd + \angle cdb + \angle dbc) = \\ &= 2 \cdot \pi.\end{aligned}$$

By 4.14,

$$\Phi(abcd) \leq \Phi(\gamma) \leq 2 \cdot \pi.$$

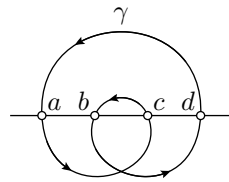
Therefore we have equalities in $\textcircled{4}$. It means that the point d lies in the angle abc and the point b lies in the angle cda . That is, $abcd$ is a convex plane quadrilateral.



It follows that any quadrilateral inscribed in γ is convex plane quadrilateral. Therefore all points of γ lie in one plane and the domain bounded by γ is convex; that is, γ is a convex plane curve. \square

4.17. Exercise. Suppose that a closed curve γ crosses a line at four points a, b, c and d . Assume that these points appear on the line in the order a, b, c, d and they appear on the curve γ in the order a, c, b, d . Show that

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq 4 \cdot \pi.$$



A line crossing a curve at four points as in the exercise is called *alternating quadriseccants*. It turns out that any *nontrivial knot* admits an alternating quadriseccants [1]; it implies the so called Fáry–Milnor theorem — *the total curvature any knot exceeds $4 \cdot \pi$* .

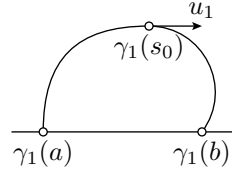
Bow lemma

4.18. Lemma. *Let $\gamma_1: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ and $\gamma_2: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ be two smooth unit-speed curves; denote by $k_1(s)$ and $k_2(s)$ their curvatures at s . Suppose that $k_1(s) \geq k_2(s)$ for any s and the curve γ_1 is a simple arc of a convex curve; that is, it runs in the boundary of a convex plane figure. Then the distance between the ends of γ_1 can not exceed the distance between the ends of γ_2 ; that is,*

$$|\gamma_1(b) - \gamma_1(a)| \leq |\gamma_2(b) - \gamma_2(a)|.$$

Proof. Denote by τ_1 and τ_2 the tangent indicatrices of γ_1 and γ_2 correspondingly.

Let $\gamma_1(s_0)$ be the point on γ_1 that maximize the distance to the line thru $\gamma(a)$ and $\gamma(b)$. Consider two unit vectors



$$u_1 = \tau_1(s_0) = \gamma_1'(s_0) \quad \text{and} \quad u_2 = \tau_2(s_0) = \gamma_2'(s_0).$$

By construction the vector u_1 is parallel to $\gamma(b) - \gamma(a)$ in particular

$$|\gamma_1(b) - \gamma_1(a)| = \langle u_1, \gamma_1(b) - \gamma_1(a) \rangle$$

Since γ_1 is an arc of convex curve, its indicatrix $\tau(s)$ runs in one direction along the unit circle. Suppose $s \leq s_0$, then

$$\begin{aligned} \angle(\gamma_1'(s), u_1) &= \angle(\tau_1(s), \tau_1(s_0)) = \\ &= \text{length}(\tau_1|_{[s, s_0]}) = \\ &= \int_s^{s_0} |\tau_1'(t)| \cdot dt = \\ &= \int_s^{s_0} k_1(t) \cdot dt \geq \\ &\geq \int_s^{s_0} k_2(t) \cdot dt = \\ &= \int_s^{s_0} |\tau_2'(t)| \cdot dt = \\ &= \text{length}(\tau_2|_{[s, s_0]}) \geq \\ &\geq \angle(\tau_2(s), \tau_2(s_0)) = \\ &= \angle(\gamma_2'(s), u_2), \end{aligned}$$

The same argument shows that

$$\angle(\gamma'_1(s), u_1) \geq \angle(\gamma'_2(s), u_2)$$

for $s \geq s_0$; therefore the inequality holds for any s . Since the vectors $\gamma'_1(s), u_1, \gamma'_2(s), u_2$ are unit, it follows that

$$\langle \gamma'_1(s), u_1 \rangle \leq \langle \gamma'_2(s), u_2 \rangle.$$

Integrating the last inequality, we get that

$$\begin{aligned} |\gamma_1(b) - \gamma_1(a)| &= \langle u_1, \gamma_1(b) - \gamma_1(a) \rangle = \\ &= \int_a^b \langle u_1, \gamma'_1(s) \rangle \cdot ds \leq \\ &\leq \int_a^b \langle u_2, \gamma'_2(s) \rangle \cdot ds = \\ &= \langle u_2, \gamma_2(b) - \gamma_2(a) \rangle \leq \\ &\leq |\gamma_2(b) - \gamma_2(a)|. \end{aligned}$$

Hence the result. \square

4.19. Exercise. Let $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ be a smooth regular curve and $0 < \theta \leq \frac{\pi}{2}$. Suppose

$$\Phi(\gamma) \leq 2 \cdot \theta.$$

(a) Show that

$$|\gamma(b) - \gamma(a)| > \cos \theta \cdot \text{length } \gamma.$$

(b) Use part (a) to give another solution of 4.15b.

(c) Show that the inequality in (a) is optimal; that is, given θ there is a smooth regular curve γ such that $\frac{|\gamma(b) - \gamma(a)|}{\text{length } \gamma}$ is arbitrary close to $\cos \theta$.

Hint: Choose a value $s_0 \in [a, b]$ that splits the total curvature into two equal parts, θ in each. Observe that $\angle(\gamma'(s_0), \gamma'(s)) \leq \theta$ for any s . Use this inequality the same way as in the proof of the bow lemma.

4.20. Exercise. Suppose that two points p and q lie on a unit circle and dividing it in two arcs with lengths $\ell_1 < \ell_2$. Show that if a curve γ runs from p to q and has curvature at most 1, then either

$$\text{length } \gamma \leq \ell_1 \quad \text{or} \quad \text{length } \gamma \geq \ell_2.$$

4.21. Exercise. Suppose $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ is a smooth regular loop with curvature at most 1. Show that

$$\text{length } \gamma \geq 2 \cdot \pi.$$

DNA inequality*

Recall that curvature of a spherical curve is at least 1 (Exercise 4.2). In particular the length of spherical curve can not exceed its total curvature. The following theorem shows that the same inequality holds for *closed* curves in a unit ball.

4.22. Theorem. Let γ be a smooth regular closed curve that lies in a unit ball. Then

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq \text{length } \gamma.$$

Proof. Without loss of generality we can assume the curve is described by a loop $\gamma: [0, \ell] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ parameterized by its arc length, so $\ell = \text{length } \gamma$. We can also assume that the origin is the center of the ball. It follows that

$$\langle \gamma'(s), \gamma'(s) \rangle = 1, \quad |\gamma(s)| \leq 1$$

and in particular

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \gamma''(s), \gamma(s) \rangle &\geq -|\gamma''(s)| \cdot |\gamma(s)| \geq \\ &\geq -k(s) \end{aligned}$$

for any s , where $k(s) = |\gamma''(s)|$ is the curvature of γ at s .

Since γ is closed, we have that $\gamma'(0) = \gamma'(\ell)$ and $\gamma(0) = \gamma(\ell)$. Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= \langle \gamma(\ell), \gamma'(\ell) \rangle - \langle \gamma(0), \gamma'(0) \rangle = \\ &= \int_0^\ell \langle \gamma(s), \gamma'(s) \rangle' \cdot ds = \\ &= \int_0^\ell \langle \gamma'(s), \gamma'(s) \rangle \cdot ds + \int_0^\ell \langle \gamma(s), \gamma''(s) \rangle \cdot ds \geq \\ &\geq \ell - \Phi(\gamma), \end{aligned}$$

whence the result. □

This theorem was proved by Don Chakerian [2]; for plane curves it was proved earlier by István Fáry [3]. We present the proof given by Don Chakerian in [4]; few other proofs of this theorem are discussed by Serge Tabachnikov [5]. He also conjectured the following closely related statement:

4.23. Theorem. *Suppose a closed regular smooth curve γ lies in a convex figure with the perimeter $2\cdot\pi$. Then*

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq \text{length } \gamma.$$

It was proved by Jeffrey Lagarias and Thomas Richardson [6]; latter a simpler proof was found by Alexander Nazarov and Fedor Petrov [7]. The proof is elementary, but annoyingly difficult; we do not present it here.

Nonsmooth curves*

4.24. Theorem. *For any regular smooth space curve γ we have that*

$$\Phi(\gamma) = \sup\{\Phi(\beta)\},$$

where the least upper bound is taken for all polygonal lines β inscribed in γ ; if γ is closed we assume that so is β .

Proof. Note that the inequality

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq \Phi(\beta)$$

follows from 4.14; it remains to show

$$\textcircled{5} \quad \Phi(\gamma) \leq \sup\{\Phi(\beta)\}.$$

Let $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ be a smooth curve. Fix a partition $a = t_0 < \dots < t_n = b$ and consider the corresponding inscribed polygonal line $\beta = p_0 \dots p_n$. (If γ is closed, then $p_0 = p_n$ and β is closed as well.)

Let $\chi = \xi_1 \dots \xi_n$ be a spherical polygonal line with the vertexes $\xi_i = \frac{p_i - p_{i-1}}{|p_i - p_{i-1}|}$. We can assume that χ has constant speed on each arc and $\chi(t_i) = \xi_i$ for each i . The spherical polygonal line χ will be called tangent indicatrix for β .

Consider a sequence of finer and finer partitions, denote by β_n and χ_n the corresponding inscribed polygonal lines and their tangent indicatrices. Note that since γ is smooth, the indicatrices χ_n converge

pointwise to τ — the tangent indicatrix of γ . By semi-continuity of the length (3.13), we get that

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi(\gamma) &= \text{length } \tau \leq \\ &\leq \varliminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} \text{length } \chi_n = \\ &= \varliminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} \Phi(\beta_n) \leq \\ &\leq \sup\{\Phi(\beta)\},\end{aligned}$$

where the last supremum is taken over all partitions and their corresponding inscribed polygonal lines β ; whence ❸ follows. \square

The theorem above can be used to define total curvature for arbitrary curves, not necessary (piecewise) smooth and regular. We say that a parameterized curve is trivial if it is constant; that is, it stays at one point.

4.25. Definition. *The total curvature of a nontrivial parameterized space curve γ is the exact upper bound on the total curvatures of inscribed nondegenerate polygonal lines; if γ is closed then we assume that the inscribed polygonal lines are closed as well.*

4.26. Exercise. *Show that the total curvature is lower semi-continuous with respect to pointwise convergence of curves. That is, if a sequence of curves $\gamma_n: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ converges pointwise to a nontrivial curve $\gamma_\infty: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$, then*

$$\varliminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} \Phi(\gamma_n) \geq \Phi(\gamma_\infty).$$

Hint: Modify the proof of semi-continuity of length (Theorem 3.13).

4.27. Exercise. *Show that Fenchel's theorem holds for any nontrivial closed curve γ ; that is,*

$$\Phi(\gamma) \geq 2\pi.$$

4.28. Exercise. *Assume that a curve $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ has finite total curvature. Show that γ is rectifiable.*

Construct a rectifiable curve $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ that has infinite total curvature.

A good survey on curves of finite total curvature is written by John Sullivan [8].

Chapter 5

Torsion

Frenet frame

Let γ be a smooth regular space curve. Without loss of generality, we may assume that γ has arc length parametrization, so the velocity vector $\tau(s) = \gamma'(s)$ is unit.

Assume its curvature does not vanish at some time moment s ; in other words, $\gamma''(s) \neq 0$. Then we can define the so called *normal vector* at s as

$$\nu(s) = \frac{\gamma''(s)}{|\gamma''(s)|}.$$

Note that

$$\tau'(s) = \gamma''(s) = k(s) \cdot \nu(s).$$

According to 4.1, $\nu(s) \perp \tau(s)$. Therefore the vector product

$$\beta(s) = \tau(s) \times \nu(s)$$

is a unit vector which makes the triple $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ an oriented orthonormal basis in \mathbb{R}^3 ; in particular, we have that

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \tau, \tau \rangle &= 1, & \langle \nu, \nu \rangle &= 1, & \langle \beta, \beta \rangle &= 1, \\ \langle \tau, \nu \rangle &= 0, & \langle \nu, \beta \rangle &= 0, & \langle \beta, \tau \rangle &= 0. \end{aligned}$$

The orthonormal basis $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is called *Frenet frame* at s ; the vectors in the frame are called *tangent*, *normal* and *binormal* correspondingly. Note that the frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is defined only if $k(s) \neq 0$.

The plane Π_s thru $\gamma(s)$ spanned by vectors $\tau(s)$ and $\nu(s)$ is called *osculating plane* at s ; equivalently it can be defined as a plane thru

$\gamma(s)$ that is perpendicular to the binormal vector $\beta(s)$. This is a unique plane that has *second order of contact* with γ at s ; that is, $\rho(\ell) = o(\ell^2)$, where $\rho(\ell)$ denotes the distance from $\gamma(s + \ell)$ to Π_s .

Torsion

Let γ be a smooth unit-speed space curve and $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is its Frenet frame. The value

$$\kappa(s) = \langle \nu'(s), \beta(s) \rangle$$

is called *torsion* of γ at s .

Note that the torsion $\kappa(s)$ is defined at each s with nonzero curvature. Indeed, if $k(s) \neq 0$ then Frenet frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is defined at s . Moreover since the function $s \mapsto k(s)$ is continuous, it must be positive in an open interval containing s ; therefore Frenet frame is also defined in this interval. Clearly $\tau(s), \nu(s)$ and $\beta(s)$ depend smoothly on s in their domains of definition. Therefore $\nu'(s)$ is defined and so is the torsion $\kappa(s)$.

The torsion measures how fast the osculating plane rotated when one travels along γ .

5.1. Exercise. Given real numbers a and b , calculate curvature and torsion of the helix

$$\gamma_{a,b}(t) = (a \cdot \cos t, a \cdot \sin t, b \cdot t).$$

Conclude that for any $k > 0$ and κ there is a helix with constant curvature k and torsion κ .

Frenet formulas

Assume the Frenet frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ of curve γ is defined at s . Recall that

$$\textcircled{2} \quad \tau'(s) = k(s) \cdot \nu(s).$$

Let us write the remaining derivatives $\nu'(s)$ and $\beta'(s)$ in the frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$.

First let us show that

$$\textcircled{3} \quad \nu'(s) = -k(s) \cdot \tau(s) + \kappa(s) \cdot \beta(s).$$

Since the frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is orthonormal it is equivalent to the following three identities:

$$\langle \nu', \tau \rangle = -k, \quad \langle \nu', \nu \rangle = 0, \quad \langle \nu', \beta \rangle = \kappa,$$

The last identity follows from the definition of torsion. Differentiating $\langle \nu, \nu \rangle = 1$ in **1**, we get that

$$2 \cdot \langle \nu', \nu \rangle = 0;$$

whence the second identity follows. Differentiating the identity $\langle \tau, \nu \rangle = 0$ in **1**; we get that

$$\langle \tau', \nu \rangle + \langle \tau, \nu' \rangle = 0.$$

Applying **2**, we get that

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \nu', \tau \rangle &= -\langle \tau', \nu \rangle = \\ &= -k \cdot \langle \nu, \nu \rangle = \\ &= -k. \end{aligned}$$

It proves the first equality $\langle \nu', \tau \rangle = -k$ and whence **3** follows.

Taking derivatives of the third identity in **1**, we get that $\beta' \perp \beta$. Further taking derivatives of the other identities with β in **1**, we get that

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \beta', \tau \rangle &= -\langle \beta, \tau' \rangle = -k \cdot \langle \beta, \nu \rangle = 0 \\ \langle \beta', \nu \rangle &= -\langle \beta, \nu' \rangle = \kappa \end{aligned}$$

Since the frame $\tau(s), \nu(s), \beta(s)$ is orthonormal, it follows that

$$\textbf{4} \quad \beta'(s) = -\kappa(s) \cdot \nu(s).$$

The equations **2**, **3** and **4** are called Frenet formulas. All three can be written as one matrix identity:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \tau' \\ \nu' \\ \beta' \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & k & 0 \\ -k & 0 & \kappa \\ 0 & -\kappa & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \tau \\ \nu \\ \beta \end{pmatrix}.$$

5.2. Exercise. Deduce the formula **4** from **2** and **3** by differentiating the identity $\beta = \tau \times \nu$.

5.3. Exercise. Let γ be a regular space curve with nonvanishing curvature. Show that γ lies in a plane if and only if its torsion vanishes.

Hint: Show and use that the binormal vector is constant.

5.4. Exercise. Let γ be a smooth regular space curve and τ, ν, β its Frenet frame. Show that

$$\beta = \frac{\gamma' \times \gamma''}{|\gamma' \times \gamma''|}.$$

Use this formula to show that its torsion is

$$\kappa = \frac{\langle \gamma' \times \gamma'', \gamma''' \rangle}{|\gamma' \times \gamma''|^2}.$$

Curves of constant slope

We say that a smooth regular space curve γ has *constant slope* if its velocity vector makes a constant angle with a fixed direction. The following theorem was proved by Michel Ange Lancet [9] more than two centuries ago.

5.5. Theorem. Let γ be a smooth regular curve; denote by k and κ its curvature and torsion. Suppose $k(s) > 0$ at any s . Then γ has constant slope if and only if the ratio $\frac{\kappa}{k}$ is constant.

Note that the assumption in the theorem implicitly implies that $k \neq 0$; otherwise $\frac{\kappa}{k}$ is undefined.

The proof is an application of Frenet formulas. The following exercise will guide you thru the proof of the theorem.

5.6. Exercise. Suppose that γ is a smooth regular space curve with nonvanishing curvature, τ, ν, β is its Frenet frame and k, κ are its curvature and torsion.

- (a) Assume that $\langle w, \tau \rangle$ is constant for a fixed nonzero vector w . Show that

$$\langle w, \nu \rangle = 0.$$

Use it to show that

$$\langle w, -k \cdot \tau + \kappa \cdot \beta \rangle = 0.$$

Use these two identities to show that $\frac{\kappa}{k}$ is constant; it proves the “only if” part of the theorem.

- (b) Assume that $\frac{\kappa}{k}$ is constant, show that the vector $w = \frac{\kappa}{k} \cdot \tau + \beta$ is constant. Conclude that γ has constant slope; it proves the “if” part of the theorem.

Assume γ is a smooth unit speed curve and s_0 is a fixed real number. Then the curve

$$\alpha(s) = \gamma(s) + (s_0 - s) \cdot \gamma'(s)$$

is called *evolvent* of γ . Note that if $\ell(s)$ denotes the tangent line of γ at s , then $\alpha(s) \in \ell(s)$ and $\alpha'(s) \perp \ell$ for any s .

5.7. Exercise. Show that evolvent of a constant slope curve lies in a plane.

Hint: Show that $\langle w, \alpha \rangle$ is constant if γ makes constant angle with a fixed vector w and α is the evolvent of γ .

Spherical curves

5.8. Theorem. A smooth regular space curve γ lies in a unit sphere if and only if the following identity

$$\left| \frac{k'}{\kappa} \right| = k \cdot \sqrt{k^2 - 1}.$$

holds for its curvature k and torsion κ .

Note that the identity implicitly implies that the torsion κ of the curve is nonzero; otherwise the left hand side would be undefined while right hand side is defined. The proof is another application of Frenet formulas; we present it in a form of guided exercise:

5.9. Exercise. Suppose γ is a smooth unit-speed space curve. Denote by τ, ν, β its Frenet frame and k, κ its curvature and torsion.

Assume that γ is spherical; that is, $|\gamma(s)| = 1$ for any s . Show that

- (a) $\langle \tau, \gamma \rangle = 0$; conclude that $\langle \nu, \gamma \rangle^2 + \langle \beta, \gamma \rangle^2 = 1$.
- (b) $\langle \nu, \gamma \rangle = -\frac{1}{k}$;
- (c) $\langle \beta, \gamma \rangle' = \frac{\kappa}{k}$; conclude that if γ is closed, then $\kappa(s) = 0$ for some s .
- (d) Use (a)–(c) to show that

$$\left| \frac{k'}{\kappa} \right| = k \cdot \sqrt{k^2 - 1}.$$

It proves the “only if” part of the theorem.

Now assume that γ is a space curve that satisfies the identity in (d).

- (e) Show that $p = \gamma + \frac{1}{k} \cdot \nu + \frac{k'}{k^2 \cdot \kappa} \cdot \beta$ is constant; conclude that γ lies in a unit sphere the center at p .

It proves the “if” part of the theorem.

For a unit speed curve γ with nonzero curvature and torsion at s , the sphere Σ_s with the center

$$p(s) = \gamma(s) + \frac{1}{k(s)} \cdot \nu(s) + \frac{k'(s)}{k^2(s) \cdot \kappa(s)} \cdot \beta(s)$$

that pass thru $\gamma(s)$ is called *osculating sphere* of γ at s . This a unique sphere that has *third order of contact* with γ at s ; that is, $\rho(\ell) = o(\ell^3)$, where $\rho(\ell)$ denotes the distance from $\gamma(s + \ell)$ to Σ_s .

Fundamental theorem of curves

5.10. Theorem. *Let $k(s)$ and $\kappa(s)$ be two smooth real valued functions defined on a real interval \mathbb{I} . Suppose $k(s) > 0$ for any s . Then there is a smooth unit-speed curve $\gamma: \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ with curvature $k(s)$ and torsion $\kappa(s)$ for every s . Moreover γ is uniquely defined up to a rigid motion of the space.*

Proof. Fix a parameter value s_0 , a point $\gamma(s_0)$ and an oriented orthonormal frame $\tau(s_0)$, $\nu(s_0)$, $\beta(s_0)$. Consider the following initial value problem:

$$\begin{cases} \gamma' = \tau, \\ \tau' = k \cdot \nu, \\ \nu' = -k \cdot \tau + \kappa \cdot \beta, \\ \beta' = -\kappa \cdot \nu. \end{cases}$$

It has four vector equations, so it can be rewritten as a system of 12 scalar equations. By A.3, it has a solution which is defined in a maximal subinterval \mathbb{J} containing s_0 .

Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \tau, \tau \rangle' &= 2 \cdot \langle \tau, \tau' \rangle = 2 \cdot k \cdot \langle \tau, \nu \rangle = 0, \\ \langle \nu, \nu \rangle' &= 2 \cdot \langle \nu, \nu' \rangle = -2 \cdot k \cdot \langle \nu, \tau \rangle + 2 \cdot \kappa \cdot \langle \nu, \beta \rangle = 0, \\ \langle \beta, \beta \rangle' &= 2 \cdot \langle \beta, \beta' \rangle = -2 \cdot \kappa \cdot \langle \beta, \nu \rangle = 0, \\ \langle \tau, \nu \rangle' &= \langle \tau', \nu \rangle + \langle \tau, \nu' \rangle = k \cdot \langle \nu, \nu \rangle - k \cdot \langle \tau, \tau \rangle + \kappa \cdot \langle \tau, \beta \rangle = 0, \\ \langle \nu, \beta \rangle' &= \langle \nu', \beta \rangle + \langle \nu, \beta' \rangle = 0, \\ \langle \beta, \tau \rangle' &= \langle \beta', \tau \rangle + \langle \beta, \tau' \rangle = -\kappa \cdot \langle \nu, \tau \rangle + k \cdot \langle \beta, \nu \rangle = 0. \end{aligned}$$

That is, the values $\langle \tau, \tau \rangle$, $\langle \nu, \nu \rangle$, $\langle \beta, \beta \rangle$, $\langle \tau, \nu \rangle$, $\langle \tau, \beta \rangle$, $\langle \nu, \beta \rangle$ are constant functions of s . Since we choose $\tau(s_0)$, $\nu(s_0)$, $\beta(s_0)$ to be an oriented

orthonormal frame, we have that the $\tau(s)$, $\nu(s)$, $\beta(s)$ is oriented orthonormal for any s .

In particular $|\gamma'(s)| = 1$ for any s .

Assume $\mathbb{J} \neq \mathbb{I}$. Then an end of \mathbb{J} , say a , lies in the interior of \mathbb{I} . By Theorem A.3, at least one of the values $\gamma(s)$, $\tau(s)$, $\nu(s)$, $\beta(s)$ escapes to infinity as $s \rightarrow a$. But this is impossible since the vectors $\tau(s)$, $\nu(s)$, $\beta(s)$ remain unit and $|\gamma'(s)| = |\tau(s)| = 1$ — a contradiction. Whence $\mathbb{J} = \mathbb{I}$.

Assume there are two curves γ_1 and γ_2 with the given curvature and torsion functions. Applying a motion of the space we can assume that the $\gamma_1(s_0) = \gamma_2(s_0)$ and the Frenet frames of the curves coincide at s_0 . Then $\gamma_1 = \gamma_2$ by uniqueness of solution of the system (A.3). That is, the curve is unique up to a rigid motion of the space. \square

5.11. Exercise. Assume a curve $\gamma: \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ has constant curvature and torsion. Show that γ is a helix, possibly degenerate to a circle; that is, in a suitable coordinate system we have

$$\gamma(t) = (a \cdot \cos t, a \cdot \sin t, b \cdot t)$$

for some constants a and b .

Hint: Use the second statement in Exercise 5.1. Use

5.12. Advanced exercise. Let γ be a smooth regular space curve such that the distance $|\gamma(t) - \gamma(t + \ell)|$ depends only on ℓ . Show that γ is a helix, possibly degenerate to a line or a circle.

Hint: Note that the function

$$\rho(\ell) = |\gamma(t + \ell) - \gamma(t)|^2 = \langle \gamma(t + \ell) - \gamma(t), \gamma(t + \ell) - \gamma(t) \rangle$$

is a smooth and does not depend on t . Express speed, curvature and torsion of γ in terms of derivatives $\rho^{(n)}(0)$ and apply 5.11.

Chapter 6

Plane curves

Signed curvature

Suppose γ is a smooth unit-speed plane curve, so $\tau(s) = \gamma'(s)$ is its unit tangent vector.

Let us rotate $\tau(s)$ by angle $\frac{\pi}{2}$ counterclockwise; denote the obtained vector by $\nu(s)$. The pair $\tau(s), \nu(s)$ is an oriented orthonormal frame in the plane which is analogous to the Frenet frame for space curves; we will keep the name *Frenet frame* for it.

Recall that $\gamma''(s) \perp \gamma'(s)$ (see 4.1). Therefore

$$\textcircled{1} \quad \tau'(s) = k(s) \cdot \nu(s).$$

for some real number $k(s)$; the value $k(s)$ is called *signed curvature* of γ at s . Note that up to sign it equals to the curvature of γ at s as it defined on page 20; the sign tells which direction γ turns — if it turns left, then it is positive. If we want to emphasise that we work with *nonsigned* curvature of the curve, we call it *absolute curvature* — it is absolute value of signed curvature.

Note that if we reverse the parametrization of γ or change the orientation of the plane, then the signed curvature changes its sign.

Since $\tau(s), \nu(s)$ is an orthonormal frame, we have that

$$\langle \tau, \tau \rangle = 1, \quad \langle \nu, \nu \rangle = 1, \quad \langle \tau, \nu \rangle = 0,$$

Differentiating these identities we get that

$$\langle \tau', \tau \rangle = 0, \quad \langle \nu', \nu \rangle = 0, \quad \langle \tau', \nu \rangle + \langle \tau, \nu' \rangle = 0,$$

By $\textcircled{1}$, $\langle \tau', \nu \rangle = k$ and therefore $\langle \tau, \nu' \rangle = -k$. Whence we get

$$\textcircled{2} \quad \nu'(s) = -k(s) \cdot \tau(s).$$

The equations ❶ and ❷ are Frenet formulas for plane curves. They could be also written in a matrix form:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \tau' \\ \nu' \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & k \\ -k & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \tau \\ \nu \end{pmatrix}.$$

6.1. Theorem. *Let $k(s)$ be a smooth real valued function defined on a real interval \mathbb{I} . Then there is a smooth unit-speed curve $\gamma: \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ with signed curvature $k(s)$ at every s . Moreover γ is uniquely defined up to a rigid motion of the plane.*

This is the fundamental theorem of plane curves; it is direct analog of 5.10 and it can be proved along the same lines. We give a slightly simpler proof.

Proof. Fix $s_0 \in \mathbb{I}$. Consider the function

$$\theta(s) = \int_{s_0}^s k(t) \cdot dt.$$

Note that by the fundamental theorem of calculus, we have $\theta'(s) = k(s)$ for any s .

Set

$$\tau(s) = (\cos[\theta(s)], \sin[\theta(s)])$$

and let $\nu(s)$ be its counterclockwise rotation by angle $\frac{\pi}{2}$; so

$$\nu(s) = (-\sin[\theta(s)], \cos[\theta(s)]).$$

Consider the curve

$$\gamma(s) = \int_{s_0}^s \tau(s) \cdot ds.$$

Since $|\gamma'| = |\tau| = 1$, the curve γ is unit-speed and τ, ν is its Frenet frame.

Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \gamma''(s) &= \tau'(s) = \\ &= (\cos[\theta(s)]', \sin[\theta(s)]') = \\ &= \theta'(s) \cdot (-\sin[\theta(s)], \cos[\theta(s)]) = \\ &= k(s) \cdot \nu(s). \end{aligned}$$

That is $k(s)$ is the signed curvature of γ at s .

We proved the existence; it remains to prove uniqueness. Assume γ_1 and γ_2 are two curves that satisfy the assumptions of the theorem.

Applying a rigid motion, we can assume that $\gamma_1(s_0) = \gamma_2(s_0) = 0$ and the Frenet frame of both curves at s_0 is formed by the coordinate frame $(1, 0), (0, 1)$. Let us denote by τ_1, ν_1 and τ_2, ν_2 the Frenet frames of γ_1 and γ_2 correspondingly. The triples γ_i, τ_i, ν_i satisfy the same system of ordinary differential equations

$$\begin{cases} \gamma'_i = \tau_i, \\ \tau'_i = k \cdot \nu_i, \\ \nu'_i = -k \cdot \tau_i. \end{cases}$$

Moreover, they have the same the initial values at s_0 . Therefore $\gamma_1 = \gamma_2$. \square

Note that from the proof of theorem we obtain the following corollary:

6.2. Corollary. *Suppose $\gamma: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ is a smooth unit-speed curve. Then there is a smooth function $\theta: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ such that*

$$\gamma'(s) = (\cos[\theta(s)], \sin[\theta(s)]) \quad \text{and} \quad \theta'(s) = k(s)$$

for any s , where $k(s)$ denotes the signed curvature of γ .

Total signed curvature

Let γ be a smooth unit-speed plane curve. The integral of its signed curvature is called *total signed curvature* and it denoted by $\Psi(\gamma)$; so if θ and γ is as in 6.2, then

$$\textcircled{3} \quad \Psi(\gamma) = \int_a^b k(s) \cdot ds = \theta(b) - \theta(a).$$

Since $|\int k(s) \cdot ds| \leq \int |k(s)| \cdot ds$, we have that

$$\textcircled{4} \quad |\Psi(\gamma)| \leq \Phi(\gamma)$$

for any smooth regular plane curve γ .

6.3. Proposition. *The total signed curvature of any closed simple smooth plane curve γ is $\pm 2 \cdot \pi$; it is $+2 \cdot \pi$ if the region bounded by γ lies on the left from it and $-2 \cdot \pi$ otherwise.*

This proposition is a differential-geometric analog of the theorem about sum of the internal angles of a polygon (A.7) which we use in

the proof. A more conceptual proof was given by Heinz Hopf [10], [11, p. 42].

Proof. Without loss of generality we may assume that γ is oriented in such a way that the region bounded by γ lies on the left from it. We can also assume that it parametrized by arc length.

Consider a closed polygonal line $p_1 \dots p_n$ inscribed in γ . We can assume that the arcs between the vertexes are sufficiently small; in this case the polygonal line is simple and each arc γ_i from p_i to p_{i+1} have small total absolute curvature, say $\Phi(\gamma_i) < \pi$ for each i .

As usual we use indexes modulo n , in particular $p_{n+1} = p_1$. Assume $p_i = \gamma(t_i)$. Set

$$w_i = p_{i+1} - p_i, \quad v_i = \gamma'(t_i),$$

$$\alpha_i = \angle(v_i, w_i), \quad \beta_i = \angle(w_{i-1}, v_i),$$

where $\alpha_i, \beta_i \in (-\pi, \pi]$ are oriented angles — α_i is positive if w_i points to the left from v_i .

By ❸, the value

$$\text{❶} \quad \Psi(\gamma_i) - \alpha_i - \beta_{i+1}$$

is a multiple of $2 \cdot \pi$. Since $\Phi(\gamma_i) < \pi$, by chord lemma (4.11), we also have that $|\alpha_i| + |\beta_i| < \pi$. By ❹, we have that $|\Psi(\gamma_i)| \leq \Phi(\gamma_i)$; therefore the value in ❶ vanishes, or equivalently

$$\Psi(\gamma_i) = \alpha_i + \beta_{i+1}$$

for each i .

Note that $\delta_i = \pi - \alpha_i - \beta_i$ is the internal angle of $p_1 \dots p_n$ at p_i ; $\delta_i \in (0, 2 \cdot \pi)$ for each i . Recall that the sum of internal angles of an n -gon is $(n - 2) \cdot \pi$ (see A.7); that is,

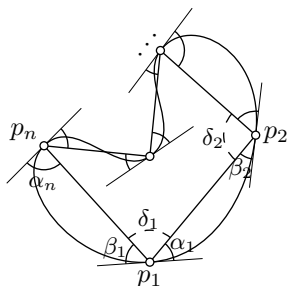
$$\delta_1 + \dots + \delta_n = (n - 2) \cdot \pi.$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \Psi(\gamma) &= \Psi(\gamma_1) + \dots + \Psi(\gamma_n) = \\ &= (\alpha_1 + \beta_2) + \dots + (\alpha_n + \beta_1) = \\ &= (\beta_1 + \alpha_1) + \dots + (\beta_n + \alpha_n) = \\ &= (\pi - \delta_1) + \dots + (\pi - \delta_n) = \\ &= n \cdot \pi - (n - 2) \cdot \pi = \\ &= 2 \cdot \pi. \end{aligned}$$

□

6.4. Exercise. Draw a smooth regular closed plane curve with zero total signed curvature.



Osculating circline

As a direct corollary of Theorem 6.1, we get the following:

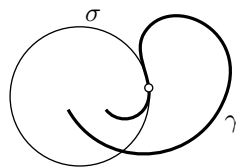
6.5. Proposition. *Given a point p , a unit vector τ and a real number k , there is a unique smooth unit-speed curve $\sigma: \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ that starts at p in the direction of τ and has constant signed curvature k .*

Moreover, if $k = 0$, then $\sigma(s) = p + s \cdot \tau$ which runs along the line; if $k \neq 0$, then σ runs around the circle of radius $\frac{1}{|k|}$ and center $p + \frac{1}{k} \cdot \nu$, where τ, ν is an oriented orthonormal frame.

Further we will use the term *circline* for a circle or a line.

6.6. Definition. *Let γ be a smooth unit-speed plane curve; denote by $k(s)$ the signed curvature of γ at s .*

The unit-speed curve σ of constant signed curvature $k(s)$ that starts at $\gamma(s)$ in the direction $\gamma'(s)$ is called the osculating circline of γ at s .



The center and radius of the osculating circle at a given point are called *center of curvature* and *radius of curvature* of the curve at that point.

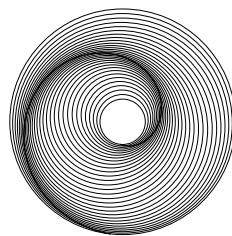
The osculating circle σ_s can be also defined as the (nesesary unique) circle that has *second order of contact* with γ at s ; that is, $\rho(\ell) = o(\ell^2)$, where $\rho(\ell)$ denotes the distance from $\gamma(s + \ell)$ to σ_s .

Spiral lemma

The following lemma was proved by Peter Tait [12] and later rediscovered by Adolf Kneser [13].

6.7. Lemma. *Assume that γ is a smooth regular plane curve with strictly decreasing positive signed curvature. Then the osculating circles of γ are nested; that is, if σ_s denoted the osculating circle of γ at s , then σ_{s_0} lies in the open disc bounded by σ_{s_1} for any $s_0 < s_1$.*

It turns out that osculating circles of the curve γ give a peculiar foliation of an annulus by circles; it has the following property: if a smooth function is constant on each osculating circle it must be constant in the annulus [see 14, Lecture 10]. Also note that the curve γ is tangent to a circle of the foliation at each of its points. However, it does not run along a circle.



Proof. Let $\tau(s), \nu(s)$ be the Frenet frame, $z(s)$ the curvature center and $r(s)$ the radius of curvature of γ at s . By 6.5,

$$z(s) = \gamma(s) + r(s) \cdot \nu(s).$$

Since $k > 0$, we have that $r(s) \cdot k(s) = 1$. Therefore applying Frenet formula 2, we get that

$$\begin{aligned} z'(s) &= \gamma'(s) + r'(s) \cdot \nu(s) + r(s) \cdot \nu'(s) = \\ &= \tau(s) + r'(s) \cdot \nu(s) - r(s) \cdot k(s) \cdot \tau(s) = \\ &= r'(s) \cdot \nu(s). \end{aligned}$$

Since $k(s)$ is decreasing, $r(s)$ is increasing; therefore $r' \geq 0$. It follows that $|z'(s)| = r'(s)$ and $z'(s)$ points in the direction of $\nu(s)$.

Since $\nu'(s) = -k(s) \cdot \tau(s)$, the direction of $z'(s)$ can not have constant direction on a nontrivial interval; that is, the curve $s \mapsto z(s)$ contains no line segments. It follows that

$$\begin{aligned} |z(s_1) - z(s_0)| &< \text{length}(z|_{[s_0, s_1]}) = \\ &= \int_{s_0}^{s_1} |z'(s)| \cdot ds = \\ &= \int_{s_0}^{s_1} r'(s) \cdot ds = \\ &= r(s_1) - r(s_0). \end{aligned}$$

In other words, the distance between the centers of σ_{s_1} and σ_{s_0} is strictly less than the difference between their radii. Therefore the osculating circle at s_0 lies inside the osculating circle at s_1 without touching it. \square

The curve $s \mapsto z(s)$ is called *evolute* of γ ; it traces the centers of curvature of the curve. Note that in the proof we showed that $(\frac{1}{k})' \cdot \nu$ is the velocity of evolute of the curve.

6.8. Exercise. Show that the stretched astroid

$$\alpha(t) = \left(\frac{a^2-b^2}{a} \cdot \cos^3 t, \frac{b^2-a^2}{b} \cdot \sin^3 t\right)$$

is an evolute of the ellipse $\gamma(t) = (a \cdot \cos t, b \cdot \sin t)$.

The following theorem states formally that *if you drive on the plane and turn the steering wheel to the right all the time, then you will not be able to come back to the same place.*

6.9. Theorem. Assume γ is a smooth regular plane curve with positive and strictly monotonic signed curvature. Then γ is simple.

Proof of 6.9. Note that $\gamma(s)$ lies on the osculating circle σ_s of γ at s . If $s_1 \neq s_0$, then by lemma σ_{s_0} does not intersect σ_{s_1} . Therefore $\gamma(s_1) \neq \gamma(s_0)$, hence the result. \square

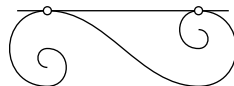
The same statement holds without assuming positivity of curvature; the proof requires only minor modifications.

6.10. Exercise. Show that a 3-dimensional analog of the theorem does not hold. That is, there are self-intersecting smooth regular space curves with strictly monotonic curvature.

6.11. Exercise. Assume that γ is a smooth regular plane curve with positive strictly monotonic signed curvature.

- (a) Show that no line can be tangent to γ at two distinct points.
- (b) Show that no circle can be tangent to γ at three distinct points.

Note that part (a) does not hold if we allow the curvature to be negative; an example is shown on the diagram.



Supporting circlines

Suppose γ is a smooth regular plane curve. Recall that a circline σ is tangent to γ at t_0 if $\gamma(t_0) = \sigma(t_1)$ for some t_1 and they share the tangent at these time parameters; that is, the tangent lines of γ and t_0 coincides with the tangent line σ at t_1 .

We can (and often will) assume that tangent circline is *cooriented* with the curve; that is, the tangent vectors $\gamma'(t_0)$ and $\sigma'(t_1)$ point in the same direction. If not we can reverse the parametrization of σ . If both curves are given with arc length parametrization, then coorientation means that $\gamma'(t_0) = \sigma'(t_1)$.

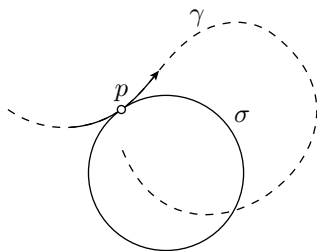
If γ is simple we can say that σ is tangent to γ at the point $p = \gamma(t_0)$ without ambiguity.

A circline σ supports γ at t_0 if $\gamma(t_0) \in \sigma$ and γ lies on one side of σ . (We assume that t_0 is not an end point of the interval of parameters.) If $p = \sigma(t_0)$ for a single value t_0 , then we can also say σ supports γ at p without ambiguity.

Note that if σ supports γ at t_0 , then σ is tangent to γ at t_0 . Indeed, if it is not the case, then $\gamma'(t_0)$ would point inside or outside of σ ; therefore γ would cross σ from one side to another. Therefore we can assume that σ is cooriented with γ at t_0 . In this case we say that σ

supports γ from the left (right) if γ lies on the right (correspondingly left) side from σ .

Note that a circle supports itself on the right and left at the same time at any point.



We say that a circle σ *locally supports* a curve γ at s if it supports its arc $\gamma|_{(s-\varepsilon, s+\varepsilon)}$ for some $\varepsilon > 0$. The same definitions for local support on the left and right are applied.

The circle σ on the diagram locally supports curve γ on the right at p , but does not support it globally — since γ crosses σ at a latter time.

We say that a smooth regular plane curve γ has a *vertex* at s if the signed curvature function has extremal at s ; that is, if $k'_\gamma(s) = 0$. If γ is simple we could say that the point $p = \gamma(s)$ is a vertex of γ without ambiguity.

6.12. Exercise. Assume that osculating circline σ_s of a smooth regular plane curve γ supports γ at s . Show that γ has a vertex at s .

Hint: Apply the spiral lemma (6.7).

Supporting test

The following proposition resembles the second derivative test.

6.13. Proposition. Assume σ is a circline that locally supports γ at t_0 from the right (correspondingly left). Suppose σ is cooriented to γ at t_0 . Then

$$k_\gamma(t_0) \geq k_\sigma \quad (\text{correspondingly} \quad k_\gamma(t_0) \leq k_\sigma).$$

where k_σ is the signed curvature of σ and $k_\gamma(t_0)$ is the signed curvature of γ at t_0 .

A partial converse also holds. Namely, suppose a unit-speed circline σ with signed curvature k_σ starts at $\gamma(t_0)$ in the direction $\gamma'(t_0)$. Then σ locally supports γ at t_0 from the right (correspondingly left) if

$$k_\gamma(t_0) > k_\sigma \quad (\text{correspondingly} \quad k_\gamma(t_0) < k_\sigma).$$

Proof. We prove only the case $k_\sigma > 0$. The 2 remaining cases $k_\sigma = 0$ and $k_\sigma < 0$ can be done essentially the same way.

Since $k_\sigma \neq 0$, the curve σ is a circle. According to Proposition 6.5, σ has radius $r_\sigma = \frac{1}{k_\sigma}$ and it is centered at

$$z = \gamma(t_0) + r \cdot \nu(t_0).$$

Consider the function

$$f(t) = |z - \gamma(t)|^2 - \frac{1}{k_\sigma^2}.$$

Note that $f(t) \leq 0$ (correspondingly $f(t) \geq 0$) if and only if $\gamma(t)$ lies on the closed left (correspondingly right) side from σ . It follows that

◇ if σ locally supports γ at t_0 from the right, then

$$f'(t_0) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad f''(t_0) \leq 0;$$

◇ if σ locally supports γ at t_0 from the left, then

$$f'(t_0) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad f''(t_0) \geq 0;$$

◇ if

$$f'(t_0) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad f''(t_0) < 0,$$

then σ locally supports γ at t_0 from the right;

◇ if

$$f'(t_0) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad f''(t_0) > 0,$$

then σ locally supports γ at t_0 from the left;

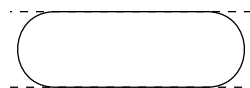
Direct calculations show that

$$\begin{aligned} f(t_0) &= 0; \\ f'(t_0) &= \langle z - \gamma(t), z - \gamma(t) \rangle' |_{t=t_0} = \\ &= -2 \cdot \langle \gamma'(t_0), z - \gamma(t_0) \rangle = \\ &= -2 \cdot r \cdot \langle \gamma'(t_0), \nu(t_0) \rangle = \\ &= 0; \\ f''(t_0) &= \langle z - \gamma(t), z - \gamma(t) \rangle'' |_{t=t_0} = \\ &= 2 \cdot (\langle \gamma'(t_0), \gamma'(t_0) \rangle - \langle \gamma''(t_0), z - \gamma(t_0) \rangle) = \\ &= 2 \cdot (\langle \tau(t_0), \tau(t_0) \rangle - r \cdot k_\gamma(t_0) \cdot \langle \nu(t_0), \nu(t_0) \rangle) = \\ &= 2 \cdot \left(1 - \frac{k_\gamma(t_0)}{k_\sigma} \right). \end{aligned}$$

Hence the result. □

6.14. Exercise. Assume a closed smooth regular plane curve γ runs between parallel lines on distance 2 from each other. Show that there is a point on γ with absolute curvature at least 1.

Hint: Consider the smallest figure F as on the diagram that contains the curve. More precisely, F is formed by a rectangle with pair of bases on the lines and two half discs attached to the sides of length 2.

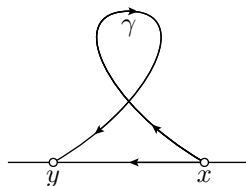


6.15. Exercise. Assume a closed smooth regular plane curve γ runs inside of a triangle \triangle with inradius 1; that is, the inscribed circle of \triangle has radius 1. Show that there is a point on γ with absolute curvature at least 1.

Lens lemma

6.16. Lemma. Let γ be a smooth regular simple curve that runs from x to y . Assume that γ runs on the right side (correspondingly left side) of the oriented line xy and only its end points x and y lie on the line. Then γ has a point with positive (correspondingly negative) signed curvature.

Note that the lemma fails for curves with self-intersections; the curve γ on the diagram always turns right, so it has negative curvature everywhere, but it lies on the right side of the line xy .

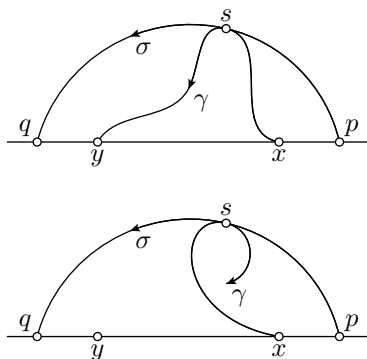


Proof. Choose points p and q on ℓ so that the points p, x, y, q appear in the same order on ℓ .

Consider the smallest disc segment with chord $[pq]$ that contains γ . Note that its arc σ supports γ at a point $s = \gamma(t_0)$.

Note that the $\gamma'(t_0)$ is tangent to σ at s . Let us parameterise σ from p to q . Then γ and σ are cooriented as s . If not, then the arc of γ from s to y would be trapped in the curvilinear triangle xsp bounded by arcs of σ , γ and the line segment $[px]$. But this is impossible since y does not belong to this triangle.

It follows that σ supports γ at t_0 from the right. By Proposition 6.13,



$$k_\gamma(t_0) \geq k_\sigma,$$

Evidently $k_\sigma > 0$, hence the result. \square

Remark. Instead of taking minimal disc segment, one can take a point s on γ that maximize the distance to the line xy . The same argument shows that curvature at s is nonnegative, which is slightly weaker than the required positive curvature.

6.17. Exercise. Assume γ is a closed regular simple plane curve with positive signed curvature. Show that γ bounds a convex set.

Hint: Show that any tangent line to γ is supporting.

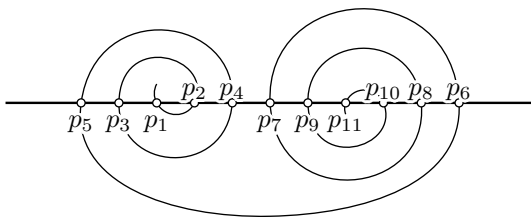
6.18. Exercise. Assume γ is a closed smooth regular plane curve with positive signed curvature. Show that γ is simple if and only if its total absolute curvature is 2π .

6.19. Advanced exercise. Suppose γ is a simple smooth regular curve in the plane with positive curvature. Assume γ crosses a line ℓ at the points p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n and these points appear on γ in that same order.

- (a) Show that p_2 can not lie between p_1 and p_3 on ℓ .
- (b) Show that if p_3 lies between p_1 and p_2 on ℓ then the points appear on ℓ in the following order:

$$p_1, p_3, \dots, p_4, p_2.$$

- (c) Try to describe all possible orders when p_1 lies between p_2 and p_3 (see the diagram).



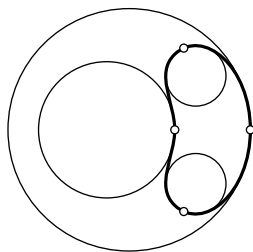
Moon in a puddle

6.20. Theorem. Assume γ is a simple closed smooth regular plane curve. Then at least two of its osculating circles support γ from the left and at least two from the right.

The diagram shows for supporting osculating circles, two from inside and two outside the curve for the given curve.

The above theorem is a slight generalization of the following theorem proved by Vladimir Ionin and German Pestov in [15]:

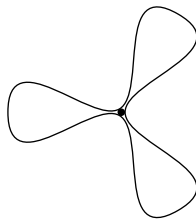
6.21. Theorem. *Assume γ is a simple closed smooth regular plane curve of absolute curvature bounded by 1. Then it surrounds a unit disc.*



This theorem is a direct corollary of 6.20; indeed, since absolute curvature is bounded by 1, every osculating circle has radius at least 1 and by 6.20 two of these circles are surrounded by γ .

This theorem gives a simple but nontrivial example of the so called *local to global theorems* — based on some local data (in this case the curvature of a curve) we conclude a global property (in this case existence of a large disc surrounded by the curve). For convex curves, this result was known earlier [16, §24].

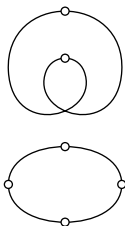
A straightforward approach to the latter theorem would be to start with some disc in the region bounded by the curve and blow it up to maximize its radius. However, as one may see from the diagram it does not always lead to a solution a closed plane curve of absolute curvature bounded by 1 may surround a disc of radius smaller than 1 that can not be enlarged continuously.



Recall that a vertex of a smooth regular curve is defined as a critical point of its signed curvature; in particular, any local minimum (or maximum) of the signed curvature is a vertex.

According to 6.12, if an osculating circle supports the curve at the same point p , then p is a vertex. Therefore 6.20 implies existence of 4 vertexes of γ . That is, we proved the following theorem:

6.22. Four-vertex theorem. *Any smooth regular simple plane curve has at least four vertexes.*

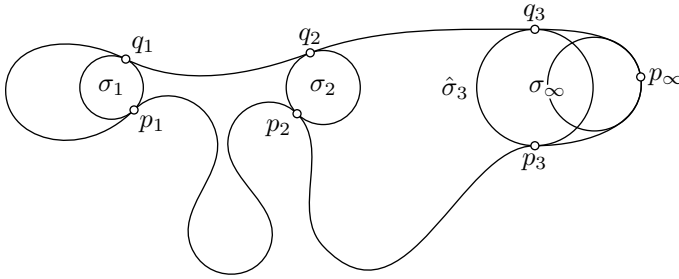


Evidently any closed curve has at least two vertexes — where the minimum and the maximum of the curvature are attained. On the diagram the vertexes are marked; the first curve has one self-intersection and exactly two vertexes; the second curve has exactly four vertexes and no self-intersections.

The four-vertex theorem was first proved by Syamadas Mukhopadhyaya [17] for convex curves. By now it has a large number of different proofs and generalizations. One of my favorite proofs was given by Robert Osserman [18]; the proof of Vladimir Ionin and German Pestov given below is even better.

Proof of 6.20. Denote by F the closed region surrounded by γ ; as usual we parametrize γ so that F lies on the left from it.

First let us show that one osculating circle is supporting γ from the left; that is, it lies completely in F — this is the main part of the proof.

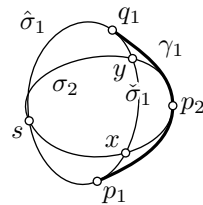


Assume contrary; that is, the osculating circle at each point $p \in \gamma$ does not lie in F . For each point $p \in \gamma$ consider corresponding circle σ that lies completely in F , tangent to γ at p and has minimal signed curvature. Note that σ has to touch γ at another point; otherwise we could decrease its curvature slightly while keeping the circle in F .

Fix a point p_1 and let σ_1 be the corresponding circle. Denote by γ_1 an arc of γ from p_1 to a first common point q_1 on σ_1 . Denote by $\hat{\sigma}_1$ and $\tilde{\sigma}_1$ two arcs of σ_1 from p_1 to q_1 such that the cyclic concatenation of $\hat{\sigma}_1$ and γ_1 surrounds $\tilde{\sigma}_1$.

Let p_2 be the midpoint of γ_1 and σ_2 be the corresponding circle.

Note that σ_2 can not intersect $\hat{\sigma}_1$. Otherwise, if σ_2 intersects $\hat{\sigma}_1$ at some point s , then σ_2 has two more common points with $\tilde{\sigma}_1$ — x and y , one for each arc of σ_2 from p_2 to s . That is σ_1 and σ_2 have three common points. Therefore $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$ as two circles with three common points. On the other hand, by construction $p_2 \in \sigma_2$ and $p_2 \notin \sigma_1$ — a contradiction. (Two ovals on the diagram pretend to be circles.)



Note that by construction we have that

⑥ $\text{length } \gamma_2 < \frac{1}{2} \cdot \text{length } \gamma_1.$

Let us repeat this construction recessively. We get an infinite sequence of arcs $\gamma_1 \supset \gamma_2 \supset \dots$. By ⑥, we also get that

$$\text{length } \gamma_n \rightarrow 0 \quad \text{as } n \rightarrow \infty.$$

Therefore the intersection

$$\bigcap_n \gamma_n$$

contains a single point; denote it by p_∞ .

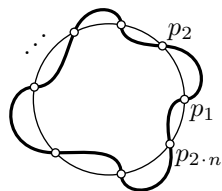
Let σ_∞ be the corresponding circle at p_∞ ; it has to touch γ at another point q_∞ . The same argument as above shows that $q_\infty \in \gamma_n$ for any n . It follows that $q_\infty = p_\infty$ — a contradiction.

Now suppose that there is only one point $p \in \gamma$ such that corresponding circle is osculating.

Chose a point $p_1 \neq p$ on γ , take its corresponding circle σ_1 and note that there are two choices for arc γ_1 one of which does not contain p . Therefore repeating the same construction we also arrive to a contradiction.

It remains to show that existence of a pair of osculating circlines that support γ form the right. This is done the same way, one only has to change the definition of corresponding circline — given $p \in \gamma$, it has to be the circline of maximal signed curvature that supports γ from the right at p . We leave it as an exercise:

6.23. Exercise. *List all the necessary changes in the proof above of existence of circlines that support γ form the right.* \square



6.24. Advanced exercise. *Suppose γ is a closed simple smooth regular plane curve and σ is a circle. Assume γ crosses σ at the points $p_1, \dots, p_{2 \cdot n}$ and these points appear in the same cycle order on γ and on σ . Show that osculating circles at n distinct points of γ lie inside γ and that osculating circles at other n distinct points of γ lie outside of γ . In particular the curve γ*

has at least $2 \cdot n$ vertexes.

Construct an example of a closed simple smooth regular plane curve γ with only 4 vertexes that crosses a given circle at arbitrary many points.

Hint: Repeat the proof of theorem for each cyclic concatenation of an arc of γ from p_i to p_{i+1} with large arc of the circle.

Recall that the *inverse* of a point x with respect to the unit circle centered at the origin is the point $\hat{x} = \frac{x}{|x|^2}$.

6.25. Advanced exercise. Suppose γ is a smooth regular point on the plane that does not pass thru the origin. Let $\hat{\gamma}$ be the inversion of γ in the unit circle centered at the origin. Show that osculating circline of $\hat{\gamma}$ at s is the inversion of osculating circline of γ at s . Conclude that every vertex of $\hat{\gamma}$ is the inversion of a vertex of γ .

Hint: Use the definition of osculating circle via order of contact and that inversion maps circles to circlines.

Note that the exercise provides an alternative way to finish the proof of 6.20 — once we proved the existence of two osculating circles that support γ from the left, we can apply to γ inversion with the center surrounded by γ . In this case the curve γ is mapped to a curve $\hat{\gamma}$, the domain inside γ is mapped to the domain outside $\hat{\gamma}$ and the other way around. It follows that if an osculating circle supports the obtained curve $\hat{\gamma}$ on the right then its inversion supports γ from the left and the other way around. That is from the existence of two supporting circles on the left we also get the existence of two supporting circles on the right.

Appendix A

Review

Here we state and discuss results from different branches of mathematics which were used further in the book. The reader is not expected to know proofs of these statements, but it is better to check that his intuition agrees with each.

Multivariable calculus

A map $\mathbf{f}: \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^k$ can be thought as array of functions

$$f_1, \dots, f_k: \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}.$$

The map \mathbf{f} is called *smooth* if each function f_i is smooth; that is, all partial derivatives of f_i are defined in the domain of definition of \mathbf{f} .

Inverse function theorem gives a sufficient condition for a smooth function to be invertible in a neighborhood of a given point p in its domain. The condition is formulated in terms of partial derivative of f_i at p .

Implicit function theorem is a close relative to inverse function theorem; in fact it can be obtained as its corollary. It is used for instance when we need to pass from parametric to implicit description of curves and surface.

Both theorems reduce the existence of a map satisfying certain equation to a question in linear algebra. We use these two theorems only for $n \leq 3$.

These two theorems are discussed in any course of multivariable calculus, the classical book of Walter Rudin [19] is one of my favorites.

A.1. Inverse function theorem. Let $\mathbf{f} = (f_1, \dots, f_n): \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$

be a smooth map. Assume that the Jacobian matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \frac{\partial f_n}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f_n}{\partial x_n} \end{pmatrix}$$

is invertible at some point p in the domain of definition of \mathbf{f} . Then there is a smooth function $\mathbf{h}: \mathbb{R}^m \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ defined in a neighborhood Ω_q of $q = \mathbf{f}(p)$ that is local inverse of \mathbf{f} at p ; that is, there are neighborhoods $\Omega_p \ni p$ such that \mathbf{f} defines a bijection $\Omega_p \rightarrow \Omega_q$ and $\mathbf{f}(x) = y$ if and only if $x = \mathbf{h}(y)$ for any $x \in \Omega_p$ and any $y \in \Omega_q$.

A.2. Implicit function theorem. Let $\mathbf{f} = (f_1, \dots, f_n): \mathbb{R}^{n+m} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ be a smooth map, $m, n \geq 1$. Let us consider \mathbb{R}^{n+m} as a product space $\mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{R}^m$ with coordinates $x_1, \dots, x_n, y_1, \dots, y_m$. Consider the following matrix

$$M = \begin{pmatrix} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \frac{\partial f_n}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial f_n}{\partial x_n} \end{pmatrix}$$

formed by first n columns of the Jacobian matrix. Assume M is invertible at some point p in the domain of definition of \mathbf{f} and $\mathbf{f}(p) = 0$. Then there is a neighborhood $\Omega_p \ni p$ and smooth function $\mathbf{h}: \mathbb{R}^m \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ defined in a neighborhood $\Omega_0 \ni 0$ that for any $(x_1, \dots, x_n, y_1, \dots, y_m) \in \Omega_p$ the equality

$$\mathbf{f}(x_1, \dots, x_n, y_1, \dots, y_m) = 0$$

holds if and only if

$$(x_1, \dots, x_n) = \mathbf{h}(y_1, \dots, y_m).$$

If the assumption in the theorem holds for any point p such that $\mathbf{f}(p) = 0$, then we say that 0 is a regular value of \mathbf{f} . Sard's theorem states that most of the values of smooth map are regular; in particular generic smooth function satisfies the assumption of the theorem.

Initial value problem

The following theorem guarantees existence and uniqueness of a solution of an initial value problem for a system of ordinary differential

equations

$$\begin{cases} x'_1(t) &= f_1(x_1, \dots, x_n, t), \\ &\dots \\ x'_n(t) &= f_n(x_1, \dots, x_n, t), \end{cases}$$

where each $x_i = x_i(t)$ is a real valued function defined on a real interval \mathbb{I} and each f_i is a smooth function defined on $\mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{I}$.

The array functions (f_1, \dots, f_n) can be considered as one vector-valued function $\mathbf{f}: \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ and the array (x_1, \dots, x_n) can be considered as a vector $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$. Therefore the system can be rewritten as one vector equation

$$\mathbf{x}'(t) = \mathbf{f}(\mathbf{x}, t).$$

A.3. Theorem. *Suppose \mathbb{I} is a real interval and $\mathbf{f}: \mathbb{R}^n \times \mathbb{I} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^n$ is a smooth function. Then for any initial data $\mathbf{x}(t_0) = \mathbf{u}$ the differential equation*

$$\mathbf{x}'(t) = \mathbf{f}(\mathbf{x}, t)$$

has a unique solution $\mathbf{x}(t)$ defined at a maximal subinterval \mathbb{J} of \mathbb{I} that contains t_0 . Moreover

- (a) if $\mathbb{J} \neq \mathbb{I}$, that is, if an end a of \mathbb{J} lies in the interior of \mathbb{I} , then $\mathbf{x}(t)$ diverges for $t \rightarrow a$;*
- (b) the function $(\mathbf{u}, t_0, t) \mapsto \mathbf{x}(t)$ is smooth.*

Real analysis

Recall that a function f is called Lipschitz if there is a constant L such that

$$|f(x) - f(y)| \leq L|x - y|$$

for values x and y in the domain of definition of f . This definition works for maps between metric spaces, but we will use it for real-to-real functions only.

A.4. Rademacher's theorem. *Let $f: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a Lipschitz function. then derivative $f'(x)$ is defined for almost all $x \in [a, b]$. Moreover the derivative f' is a bounded measurable function defined almost everywhere in $[a, b]$ and it satisfies the fundamental theorem of calculus; that is, the following identity*

$$f(b) - f(a) = \int_a^b f'(x) \cdot dx,$$

holds if the integral understood in the sense of Lebesgue.

It is often helps to work with measurable functions; it makes possible to extend many statements about continuous function to measurable functions.

A.5. Luzin's theorem. *Let $\varphi: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a measurable function. Then for any $\varepsilon > 0$, there is a continuous function $\psi_\varepsilon: [a, b] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ that coincides with φ outside of a set of measure at most ε . Moreover, φ is bounded above and/or below by some constants then we can assume that so is ψ_ε .*

Topology

The first part of the following theorem is proved by Camille Jordan, the second part is due to Arthur Schoenflies.

A.6. Theorem. *The complement of any closed simple γ plane curve has exactly two connected components.*

Moreover there is a homeomorphism $h: \mathbb{R}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$ that maps the unit circle to γ . In particular one of the components is a topological disc.

This theorem is known for simple formulation and quite hard proof. By now many proofs of this theorem are known. For the first statement, a very short proof based on somewhat developed technique is given by Patrick Doyle [20], among elementary proofs, one of my favorites is the proof given by Aleksei Filippov [21].

An amusing proof of general statement for smooth regular curves can be found in [22]; we use this theorem mostly in this (much simpler) case.

Elementary geometry

A.7. Theorem. *The sum of sum of all the internal angles of a simple n -gon is $(n - 2) \cdot \pi$.*

Proof. The proof is by induction on n . For $n = 3$ it says that sum of internal angles of a triangle is π , which is assumed to be known.

First let us show that for any $n \geq 4$, any n -gon has a diagonal that lies inside of it. Assume this is holds true for all polygons with at most $n - 1$ vertex.

Fix an n -gon P , $n \geq 4$. Applying rotation if necessary, we can assume that all its vertexes have different x -coordinates. Let v be a vertex of P that minimize the x -coordinate; denote by u and w

its adjacent vertexes. Let us choose the diagonal uw if it lies in P . Otherwise the triangle $\triangle uvw$ contains another vertex of P . Choose a vertex s in the interior of $\triangle uvw$ that maximize the distance to line uw . Note that the diagonal vs lies in P ; if it is not the case then vs crosses another side pq of P , one of the vertexes p or q has larger distance to the line and it lies in the interior of $\triangle uvw$ — a contradiction.

Note that the diagonal divides P into two polygons, say Q and R , with smaller number of sides in each, say k and m correspondingly. Note that

$$\textbf{1} \qquad k + m = n + 2;$$

indeed each side of P appears once as a side of P or Q plus the diagonal appears twice — once as a side in Q and once as a side of R . Note that the sum of angles of P is the sum of angles of Q and R , which by the induction hypothesis are $(k - 2) \cdot \pi$ and $(m - 2) \cdot \pi$ correspondingly. It remains to note that **1** implies

$$(k - 2) \cdot \pi + (m - 2) \cdot \pi = (n - 2) \cdot \pi. \qquad \square$$

Appendix B

Homework assignments

HWA-01. Exercises: 1.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 3.14.

HWA-02. Exercises: 3.4(b), 3.5, 3.9, 3.15, 3.20.

HWA-03. Exercises: 3.16, 3.18, 3.19, 4.3a, 4.5.

HWA-04. Exercises: 4.2, 4.4, 4.15, 4.17 + 1.12.17 in the Toponogov's book.

HWA-05. Exercises: 4.8, 4.12, 4.13, 5.6, 6.4.

HWA-06. Exercises: 4.20, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.14.

MIDTERM. 5 problems, 20 points each:

- ◇ 2 theorems from the following list; in the brackets I give the corresponding statement in the Toponogov's book, if it exists.
3.7, 3.13, 3.17 (Prob. 1.10.4),
4.1, 4.7 (Thm. 1.10.1), 4.10, 4.11 (Lem. 1.11.2), 4.14, 4.16, 4.18 (Prob. 1.10.6), 5.10 (Thm. 1.9.1),
6.3 (Prob. 1.7.7), 6.7, 6.13 (Prob. 1.7.1), 6.16, 6.20.
- ◇ 2 problems from HWA's;
- ◇ 1 new problem.

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