On Stack Overflow the [question](https://stackoverflow.com/q/56832560/8416610) was asked how to numerically integrate a function over a infinite range in Rcpp, e.g. by using [RcppNumerical](https://github.com/yixuan/RcppNumerical). As an example, the integral

\[  
\int\_{-\infty}^{\infty} \mathrm{d}x \exp\left(-\frac{(x-\mu)^4}{2}\right)  
\]

was given. Using RcppNumerical is straight forward. One defines a class that extends Numer::Func for the function and an interface function that calls Numer::integrate on it:

// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppEigen)]]

// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppNumerical)]]

#include

class exp4: public Numer::Func {

private:

double mean;

public:

exp4(double mean\_) : mean(mean\_) {}

double operator()(const double& x) const {

return exp(-pow(x-mean, 4) / 2);

}

};

// [[Rcpp::export]]

Rcpp::NumericVector integrate\_exp4(const double &mean, const double &lower, const double &upper) {

exp4 function(mean);

double err\_est;

int err\_code;

const double result = Numer::integrate(function, lower, upper, err\_est, err\_code);

return Rcpp::NumericVector::create(Rcpp::Named("result") = result,

Rcpp::Named("error") = err\_est);

}

This works fine for finite ranges:

integrate\_exp4(4, 0, 4)

## result error

## 1.077900e+00 9.252237e-08

However, it produces NA for infinite ones:

integrate\_exp4(4, -Inf, Inf)

## result error

## NaN NaN

This is disappointing, since base R’s integrate() handles this without problems:

exp4 <- function(x, mean) exp(-(x - mean)^4 / 2)

integrate(exp4, 0, 4, mean = 4)

## 1.0779 with absolute error < 1.3e-07

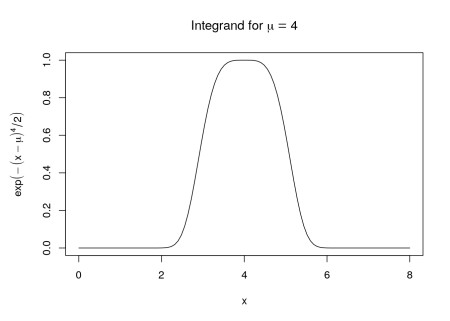
integrate(exp4, -Inf, Inf, mean = 4)

## 2.155801 with absolute error < 7.9e-06

In this particular case the problem can be easily solved in two different ways. First, the integral can be expressed in terms of the [Gamma function](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamma_function#Integration_problems):

\[  
\int\_{-\infty}^{\infty} \mathrm{d}x \exp\left(-\frac{(x-\mu)^4}{2}\right) =  
2^{-\frac{3}{4}} \Gamma\left(\frac{1}{4}\right) \approx 2.155801  
\]

Second, the integrand is almost zero almost everywhere:



It is therefore sufficient to integrate over a small region around mean to get a reasonable approximation for the integral over the infinite range:

integrate\_exp4(4, 1, 7)

## result error

## 2.155801e+00 9.926448e-13

However, the trick to approximate the integral over an infinite range with an integral over a (possibly large) finite range does not work for functions that approach zero more slowly. The help page for integrate() has a nice example for this effect:

## a slowly-convergent integral

integrand <- function(x) {1/((x+1)\*sqrt(x))}

integrate(integrand, lower = 0, upper = Inf)

## 3.141593 with absolute error < 2.7e-05

## don't do this if you really want the integral from 0 to Inf

integrate(integrand, lower = 0, upper = 10)

## 2.529038 with absolute error < 3e-04

integrate(integrand, lower = 0, upper = 100000)

## 3.135268 with absolute error < 4.2e-07

integrate(integrand, lower = 0, upper = 1000000, stop.on.error = FALSE)

## failed with message 'the integral is probably divergent'

How does integrate() handle the infinite range and can we replicate this in Rcpp? The help page states:

If one or both limits are infinite, the infinite range is mapped onto a finite interval.

This is in fact done by a different function from R’s C-API: Rdqagi() instead of Rdqags(). In principle one could call Rdqagi() via Rcpp, but this is not straightforward. Fortunately, there are at least two other solutions.

The [GNU Scientific Library](https://www.gnu.org/software/gsl/) provides a function to [integrate over the infinte interval \((-\infty, \infty)\)](https://www.gnu.org/software/gsl/doc/html/integration.html#c.gsl_integration_qagi), which can be used via the RcppGSL package:

// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppGSL)]]

#include

#include

double exp4 (double x, void \* params) {

double mean = \*(double \*) params;

return exp(-pow(x-mean, 4) / 2);

}

// [[Rcpp::export]]

Rcpp::NumericVector normalize\_exp4\_gsl(double &mean) {

gsl\_integration\_workspace \*w = gsl\_integration\_workspace\_alloc (1000);

double result, error;

gsl\_function F;

F.function = &exp4;

F.params = &mean;

gsl\_integration\_qagi(&F, 0, 1e-7, 1000, w, &result, &error);

gsl\_integration\_workspace\_free (w);

return Rcpp::NumericVector::create(Rcpp::Named("result") = result,

Rcpp::Named("error") = error);

}

normalize\_exp4\_gsl(4)

## result error

## 2.155801e+00 3.718126e-08

Alternatively, one can apply the transformation used by GSL (and probably R) also in conjunction with RcppNumerical. To do so, one has to substitute \(x = (1-t)/t\) resulting in

\[  
\int\_{-\infty}^{\infty} \mathrm{d}x f(x) = \int\_0^1 \mathrm{d}t \frac{f((1-t)/t) + f(-(1-t)/t)}{t^2}  
\]

Now one could write the code for the transformed function directly, but it is of course nicer to have a general solution, i.e. use a class template that can transform *any function* in the desired fashion

// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppEigen)]]

// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppNumerical)]]

#include

class exp4: public Numer::Func {

private:

double mean;

public:

exp4(double mean\_) : mean(mean\_) {}

double operator()(const double& x) const {

return exp(-pow(x-mean, 4) / 2);

}

};

// [[Rcpp::plugins(cpp11)]]

template class trans\_func: public T {

public:

using T::T;

double operator()(const double& t) const {

double x = (1-t)/t;

return (T::operator()(x) + T::operator()(-x))/pow(t, 2);

}

};

// [[Rcpp::export]]

Rcpp::NumericVector normalize\_exp4(const double &mean) {

trans\_func f(mean);

double err\_est;

int err\_code;

const double result = Numer::integrate(f, 0, 1, err\_est, err\_code);

return Rcpp::NumericVector::create(Rcpp::Named("result") = result,

Rcpp::Named("error") = err\_est);

}

normalize\_exp4(4)

## result error

## 2.155801e+00 1.439771e-06

Note that the exp4 class is identical to the one from the initial example. This means one can use the same class to calculate integrals over a finite range and after transformation over an infinite range.