

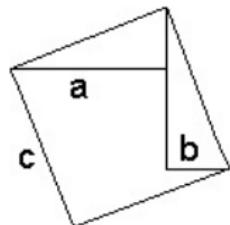
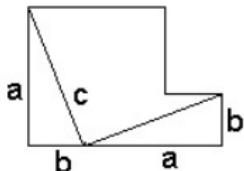
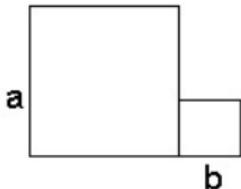
Beyond Fermat's Last Theorem

David Zureick-Brown
Amherst College

Slides available at <http://dmzb.github.io/>

Wesleyan University Colloquium
February 10, 2026

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$



Basic Problem (Solving Diophantine Equations)

Let f_1, \dots, f_m be polynomials with integer coefficients, e.g.,

$$x^2 + y^2 + 1$$

$$x^3 - y^2 - 2$$

$$2y^2 + 17x^4 - 1$$

Basic problem: solve polynomial equations

Describe the set

$$V(f_1, \dots, f_m) = \{(a_1, \dots, a_n) \in \mathbb{Z}^n : \forall i, f_i(a_1, \dots, a_n) = 0\},$$

i.e., the set of integer solutions to those polynomials

Fact

Solving Diophantine equations is difficult.

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Hilbert's Tenth Problem

Theorem (Davis–Putnam–Robinson 1961, Matijasevič 1970)

There does not exist an algorithm solving the following problem:

input: integer polynomials f_1, \dots, f_m in variables x_1, \dots, x_n ;

output: YES / NO according to whether the set of solutions

$$\{(a_1, \dots, a_n) \in \mathbb{Z}^n : \forall i, f_i(a_1, \dots, a_n) = 0\}$$

is non-empty.

This is *known* to be true for many other cases (e.g., $\mathbb{C}, \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{F}_q, \mathbb{Q}_p, \mathbb{C}(t)$).

This is *still unknown* in many other cases (e.g., \mathbb{Q}).

Fermat's Last Theorem - A Marvelous Proof

Theorem (Wiles; Taylor)

For primes $p \geq 3$ the only integer solutions to the equation

$$x^p + y^p = z^p$$

are integer multiples of the triples

$$(0, 0, 0), \quad (\pm 1, \mp 1, 0), \quad \pm(1, 0, 1), \quad \pm(0, 1, 1).$$

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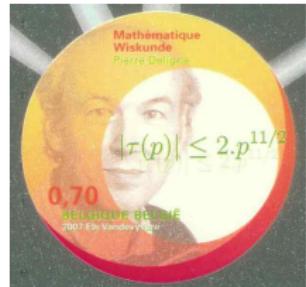
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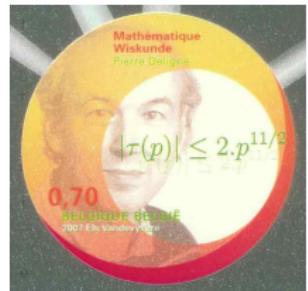
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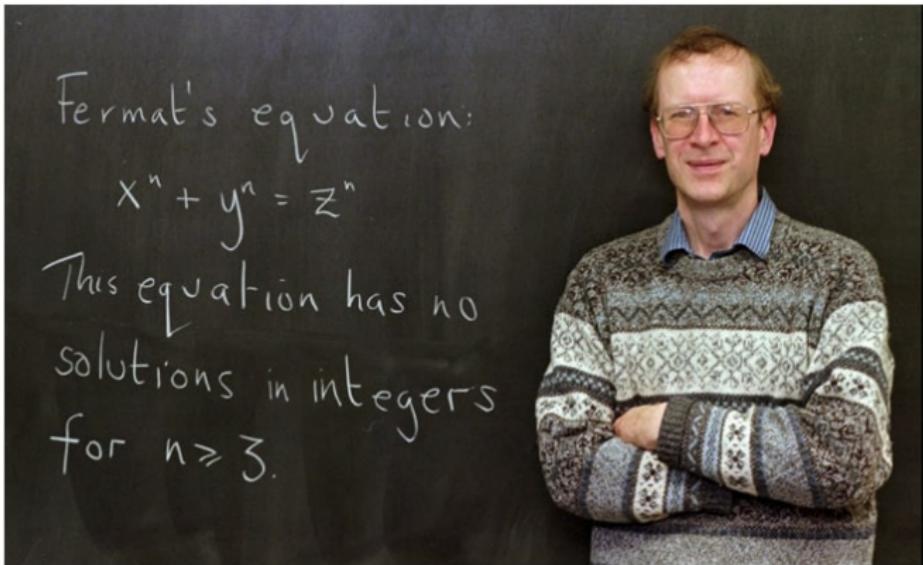
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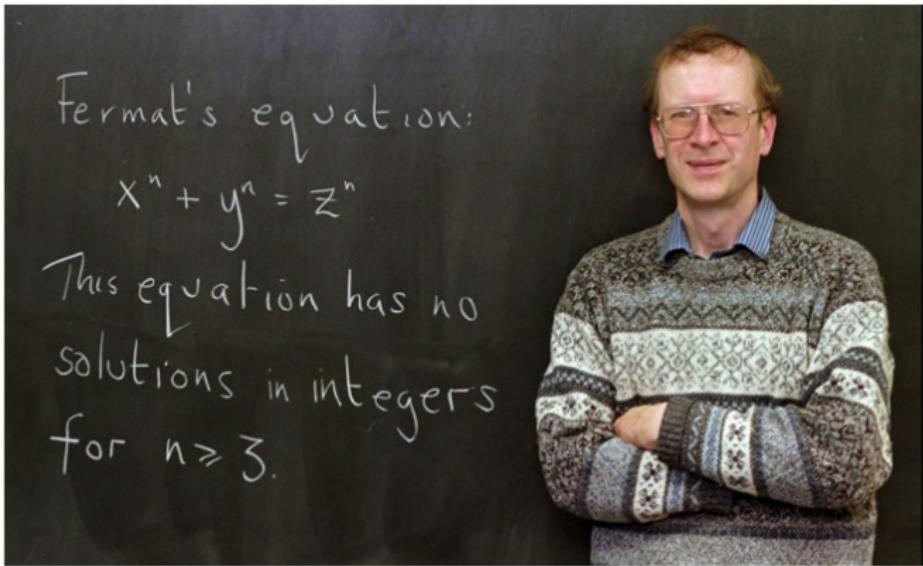
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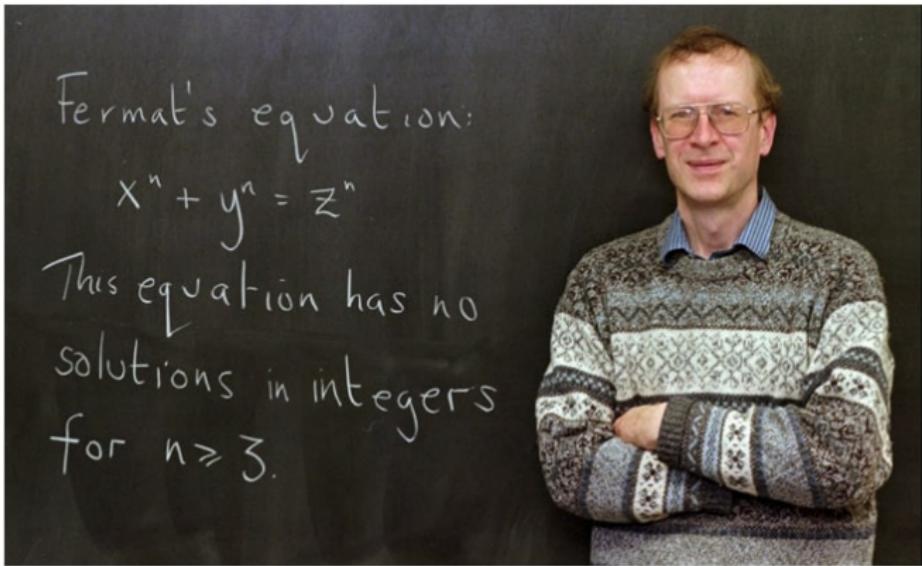
Fermat's Last Theorem - aftermath



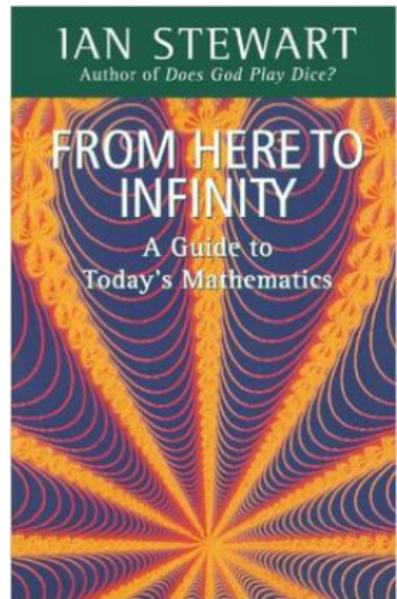
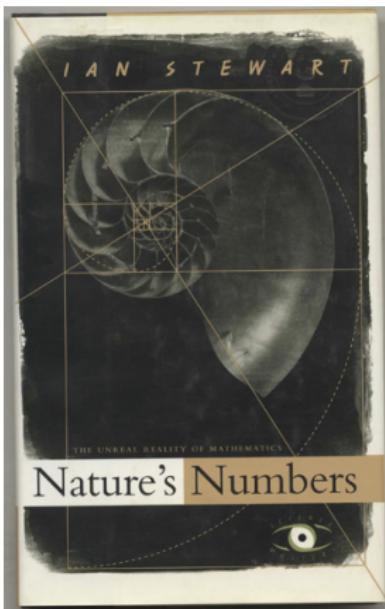
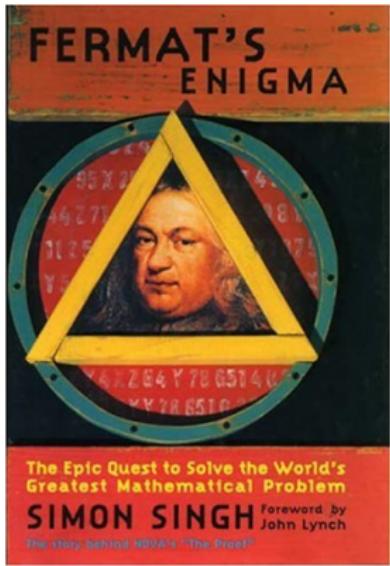
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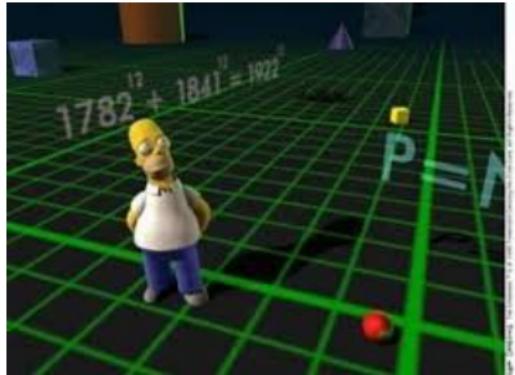
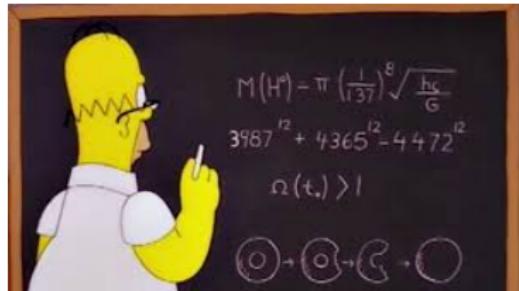
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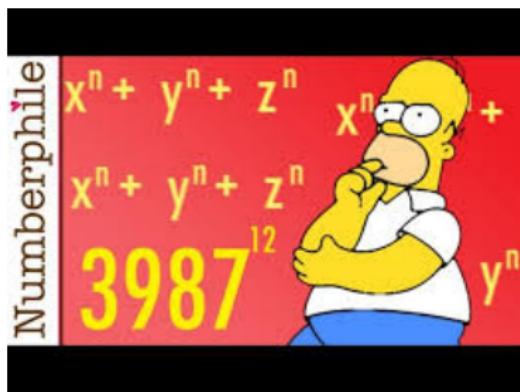
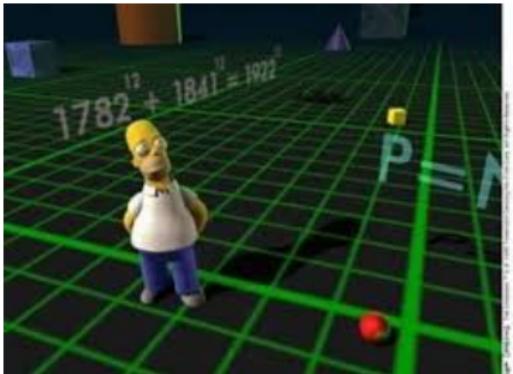
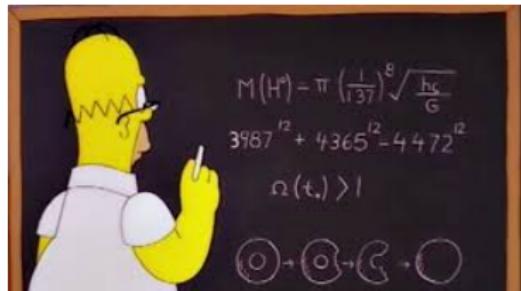
Books



Fermat trolling



Fermat trolling



See <https://youtu.be/ReOQ300AcSU?si=--fAdsdPttt4HR3N>

Basic Problem: $f_1, \dots, f_m \in \mathbb{Z}[x_1, \dots, x_n]$

Qualitative:

- ▶ Does there **exist** a solution?
- ▶ Do there exist **infinitely many** solutions?
- ▶ Does the set of solutions have some **extra structure** (e.g., geometric structure, group structure).

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- ▶ How **large** is the **smallest** solution?
- ▶ How can we explicitly **find** all solutions? (With proof?)

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Implicit question

- ▶ Why do equations **have** (or fail to have) solutions?
- ▶ Why do some have **many** and some have **none**?
- ▶ What **underlying mathematical structures** control this?

Example: Pythagorean triples

$$3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$$

$$5^2 + 12^2 = 13^2$$

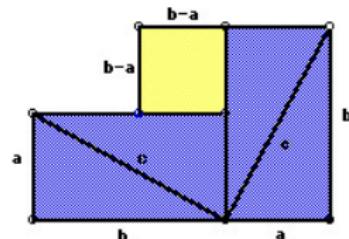
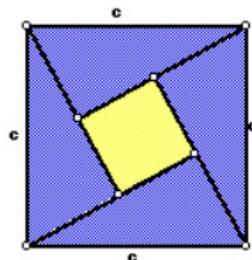
$$7^2 + 24^2 = 25^2$$

Lemma

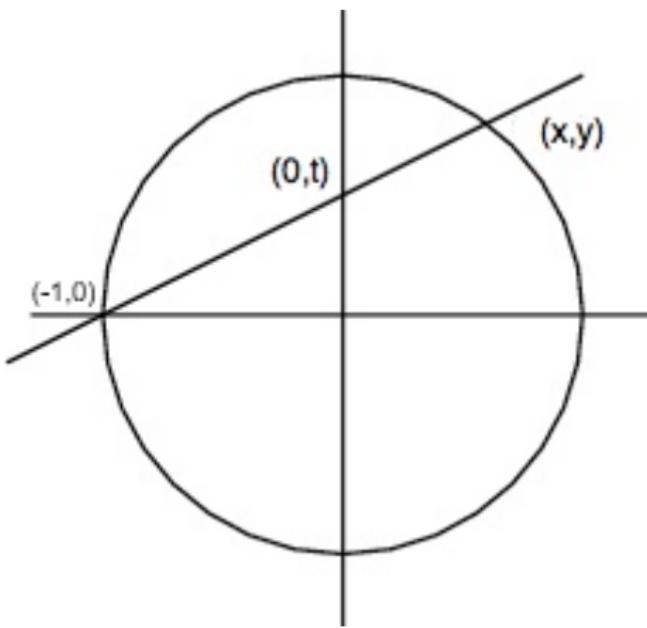
The equation

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2$$

has infinitely many non-zero coprime solutions.



Pythagorean triples



$$\text{Slope} = t = \frac{y}{x+1}$$

$$x = \frac{1-t^2}{1+t^2}$$

$$y = \frac{2t}{1+t^2}$$

Pythagorean triples

Lemma

The solutions to

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

(with $c \neq 0$) are all multiples of the triples

$$a = 1 - t^2$$

$$b = 2t$$

$$c = 1 + t^2$$

The Mordell Conjecture

Example

The equation $y^2 + x^2 = 1$ has infinitely many solutions.

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Theorem (Faltings)

For $n \geq 5$, the equation

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Theorem (Faltings)

For $n \geq 5$, the equation

$$y^2 = f(x)$$

has only finitely many solutions if $f(x)$ is squarefree, with degree > 4 .

Fermat Curves

Question

Why is Fermat's last theorem believable?

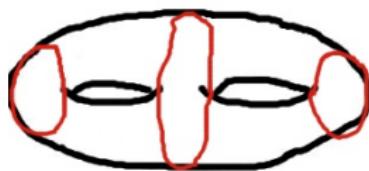
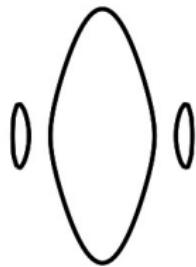
- ① $x^n + y^n - z^n = 0$ looks like a surface (3 variables)
- ② $x^n + y^n - 1 = 0$ looks like a curve (2 variables)

Mordell Conjecture

Example

$$y^2 = -(x^2 - 1)(x^2 - 2)(x^2 - 3)$$

This is a cross section of a two holed torus.



The **genus** is the number of holes.

Conjecture (Mordell, 1922)

A curve of genus $g \geq 2$ has only finitely many rational solutions.

Fermat Curves

Question

Why is Fermat's last theorem believable?

- ① $x^n + y^n - z^n = 0$ looks like a surface (3 variables)
- ② $x^n + y^n - 1 = 0$ looks like a curve (2 variables)
- ③ and has genus

$$(n - 1)(n - 2)/2$$

which is ≥ 2 iff $n \geq 4$.

Fermat Curves

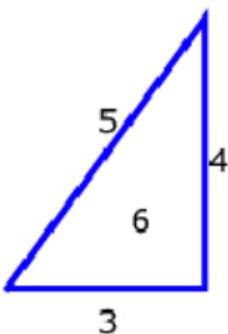
Question

What if $n = 3$?

- ① $x^3 + y^3 - 1 = 0$ is a curve of genus $(3 - 1)(3 - 2)/2 = 1$.
- ② We were lucky; $Ax^3 + By^3 = Cz^3$ can have infinitely many solutions.

Congruent number problem

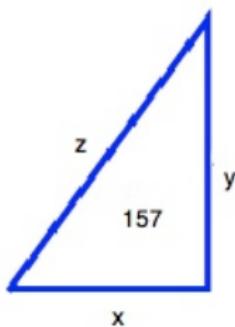
$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2, xy = 2 \cdot 6$$



$$3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2, \quad 3 \cdot 4 = 2 \cdot 6$$

Congruent number problem

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2, xy = 2 \cdot 157$$



Assume the Birch–Swinnerton-Dyer conjectures

If you assume \$1,000,000 worth of conjectures, then the equations

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The denominator of z has **44 digits**!

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“Next” soluton has **176 digits**!

Back of the envelope calculation (as of 2011)

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2, xy = 2 \cdot 157$$

- Num, den(x, y, z) $\leq 10 \sim 10^6$ many, **1 min** on Emory's computers.

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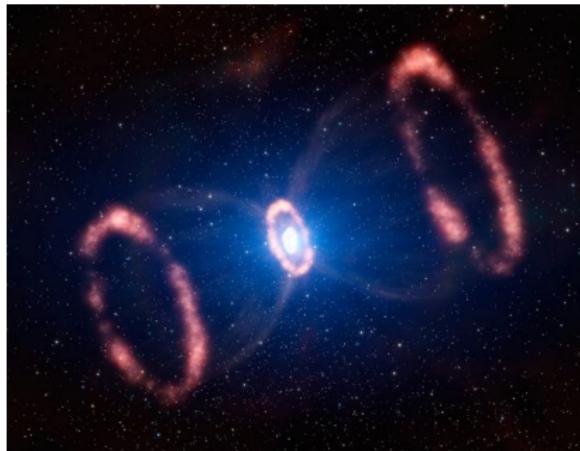
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- 10^9 many computers in the world – so **10^{243} years**
- Expected time until 'heat death' of universe – **10^{100} years**.



Fermat Surfaces

Conjecture

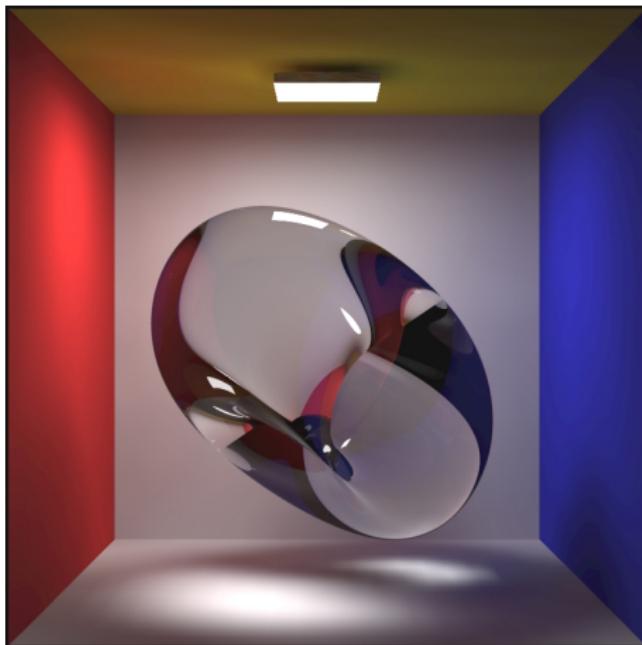
The only solutions to the equation

$$x^n + y^n = z^n + w^n, n \geq 5$$

satisfy $xyzw = 0$ or lie on the lines ‘lines’ $x = z$, $y = w$ (and permutations).

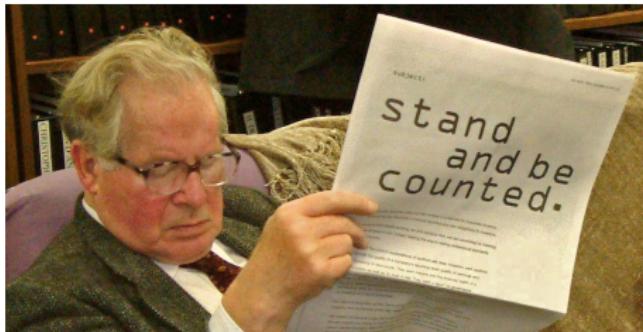
The Swinnerton-Dyer K3 surface

$$x^4 + 2y^4 = 1 + 4z^4$$



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Two ‘obvious’ solutions – $(\pm 1 : 0 : 0)$.

The Swinnerton-Dyer K3 surface

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- Two ‘obvious’ solutions – $(\pm 1 : 0 : 0)$.
- The next smallest solutions are $(\pm \frac{1484801}{1169407}, \pm \frac{1203120}{1169407}, \pm \frac{1157520}{1169407})$.

Problem

Find another solution. (Probably impossible.)

Back of envelope calculation

- ➊ **10^{16} years** to find via brute force.
- ➋ Age of the universe – **$13.75 \pm .11$ billion years** (roughly 10^{10}).

Sums of cubes

$$1 = 1^3 + 0^3 + 0^3$$

$$2 = 1^3 + 1^3 + 0^3$$

$$3 = 1^3 + 1^3 + 1^3$$

$$3 = 4^3 + 4^3 + (-5)^3$$

$$4 \neq x^3 + y^3 + z^3$$

$$5 \neq x^3 + y^3 + z^3$$

$$6 = 1^3 + 1^3 + 2^3$$

Conjecture (Heath-Brown)

The equation

$$x^3 + y^3 + z^3 = n$$

has an integer solution if and only if n is not 4 or 5 mod 9.

Solved by Booker–Sutherland

$$32 \neq x^3 + y^3 + z^3$$

$$33 =$$

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<https://www.quantamagazine.org/why-the-sum-of-three-cubes-is-a-hard-math-problem-20191105/>

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$$114 = x^3 + y^3 + z^3?$$



<https://www.quantamagazine.org/why-the-sum-of-three-cubes-is-a-hard-math-problem-20191105/>

“Generalized” Fermat equations

Theorem (Poonen, Schaefer, Stoll)

The coprime integer solutions to $x^2 + y^3 = z^7$ are the 16 triples

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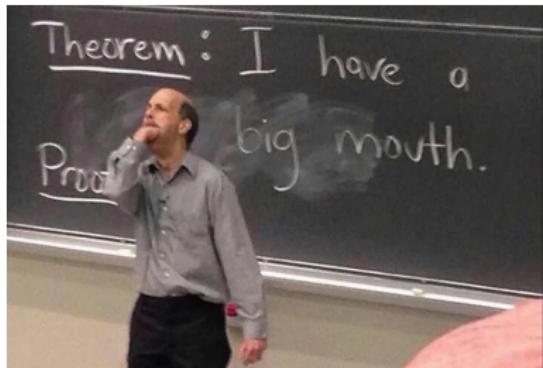
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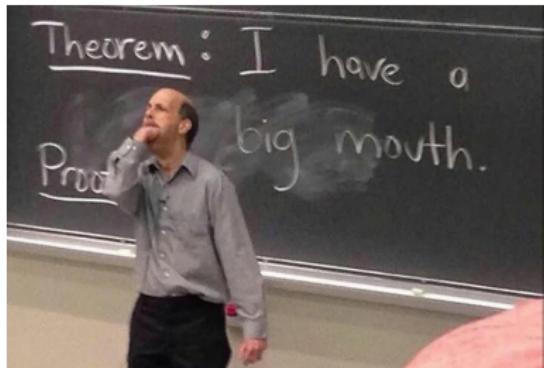


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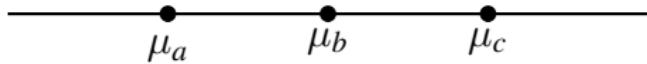
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Theorem (Darmon and Granville)

Fix $a, b, c \geq 2$. Then the equation $x^a + y^b = z^c$ has only finitely many coprime integer solutions iff $\chi = \frac{1}{a} + \frac{1}{b} + \frac{1}{c} - 1 \leq 0$.



Known Solutions to $x^a + y^b = z^c$ with $\frac{1}{a} + \frac{1}{b} + \frac{1}{c} < 1$

$$1^p + 2^3 = 3^2, \quad 2^5 + 7^2 = 3^4$$

$$7^3 + 13^2 = 2^9, \quad 2^7 + 17^3 = 71^2$$

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Problem (Beal's conjecture)

These are all solutions with $\frac{1}{a} + \frac{1}{b} + \frac{1}{c} - 1 < 0$.

Generalized Fermat Equations – Known Solutions

Conjecture (Beal, Granville, Tijdeman–Zagier)

This is a complete list of coprime non-zero solutions such that

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Examples of Generalized Fermat Equations

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$$\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{6} - 1 = 0$$

Examples of Generalized Fermat Equations

Theorem (Darmon, Merel)

Any pairwise coprime solution to the equation

$$x^n + y^n = z^2, n > 4$$

satisfies $xyz = 0$.

$$\frac{1}{n} + \frac{1}{n} + \frac{1}{2} - 1 = \frac{2}{n} - \frac{1}{2} < \frac{2}{4} - \frac{1}{2} = 0$$

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Ideas behind the proof of FLT permeate the study of diophantine problems.

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The only Fibonacci numbers that are perfect powers are

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1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, ...

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Theorem (Silliman–Vogt; 2013 REU)

0 and 1 are the only perfect powers in the Lucas sequence

$$L_1 = 0, L_2 = 1, \quad L_n = 3L_{n-1} - 2L_{n-2}.$$

$$0, \textcolor{red}{1}, 3, 7, 15, 31, 63, 127, 255, 511, 1023, 2047, 4095, 8191, \dots, 2^n - 1, \dots$$

Examples of Generalized Fermat Equations

Theorem (Klein, Zagier, Beukers, Edwards, others)

The equation

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$$(T/2)^2 + H^3 + (f/12^3)^5$$

- ① $f = st(t^{10} - 11t^5s^5 - s^{10})$,
- ② $H = \text{Hessian of } f$,
- ③ $T = \text{a degree 3 covariant of the dodecahedron}$.

(a, b, c) such that $\chi < 0$ and the solutions to $x^a + y^b = z^c$ have been determined.

$\{n, n, n\}$	Wiles, Taylor–Wiles, building on work of many others
$\{2, n, n\}$	Darmon–Merel, others for small n
$\{3, n, n\}$	Darmon–Merel, others for small n
$\{5, 2n, 2n\}$	Bennett
$(2, 4, n)$	Ellenberg, Bruin, Ghioca $n \geq 4$
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$\{2, 2\ell, 3\}$	Chen, Dahmen, Siksek; primes $7 < \ell < 1000$ with $\ell \neq 31$
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$(2, 3, 10)$	ZB

Faltings' theorem / Mordell's conjecture

Theorem (Faltings, Vojta, Bombieri)

Let X be a smooth curve with genus at least 2. Then $\#X(\mathbb{Q}) < \infty$.

Example

For $g \geq 2$, $y^2 = x^{2g+1} + 1$ has only finitely many solutions with $x, y \in \mathbb{Q}$.

Conjecture (Lang, Vojta)

Let X be a variety of general type. Then $X(\mathbb{Q})$ is not (Zariski) dense.

Uniformity

Problem

- ① Given X , compute $X(\mathbb{Q})$ exactly.
- ② Compute bounds on $\#X(\mathbb{Q})$.

Conjecture (Uniformity)

There exists a constant $N(g)$ such that every smooth curve of genus g over \mathbb{Q} has at most $N(g)$ rational points.

Theorem (Caporaso, Harris, Mazur)

Lang's conjecture \Rightarrow uniformity.

Uniformity numerics

g	2	3	4	5	10	45	g
$B_g(\mathbb{Q})$	642	112	126	132	192	781	$16(g + 1)$

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Remark

Elkies studied K3 surfaces of the form

$$y^2 = S(t, u, v)$$

with lots of rational lines, such that S restricted to such a line is a square.

Main Theorem (uniformity for curves of small rank)

Theorem (Katz–Rabinoff–ZB)

Let X be *any* curve of genus g and let $r = \text{rank}_{\mathbb{Z}} \text{Jac}_X(\mathbb{Q})$. Suppose $r < g - 2$. Then

$$\#X(\mathbb{Q}) \leq 84g^2 - 98g + 28$$

Tools

p-adic integration on annuli

comparison of different analytic continuations of *p*-adic integration

Non-Archimedean (Berkovich) structure of a curve [BPR]

Combinatorial restraints coming from the Tropical canonical bundle

Coleman's bound

Theorem (Coleman, 1985)

Let X be a curve of genus g and let $r = \text{rank}_{\mathbb{Z}} \text{Jac}_X(\mathbb{Q})$. Suppose $p > 2g$ is a prime of **good reduction**. Suppose $r < g$. Then

$$\#X(\mathbb{Q}) \leq \#X(\mathbb{F}_p) + 2g - 2.$$

Remark

- ① A modified statement holds for $p \leq 2g$ or for $K \neq \mathbb{Q}$.
- ② **This does not prove uniformity** (since the first good p might be large).

Tools

p -adic integration and Riemann–Roch

Example (from McCallum–Poonen’s survey paper)

Example

$$X: y^2 = x^6 + 8x^5 + 22x^4 + 22x^3 + 5x^2 + 6x + 1$$

- ① Points P_t reducing mod 3 to $\tilde{Q} = (0, 1)$ are given by

$$x = 3 \cdot t, \text{ where } t \in \mathbb{Z}_3$$

$$y = \sqrt{x^6 + 8x^5 + 22x^4 + 22x^3 + 5x^2 + 6x + 1} = 1 + x^2 + \dots$$

② $\int_{(0,1)}^{P_t} \frac{xdx}{y} = \int_0^t (x - x^3 + \dots) dx$

p-adic integration

(Chabauty, Coleman) There exists $V \subset H^0(X_{\mathbb{Q}_p}, \Omega_X^1)$ with $\dim_{\mathbb{Q}_p} V \geq g - r$ such that,

$$\int_P^Q \omega = 0 \quad \forall P, Q \in X(\mathbb{Q}), \omega \in V$$

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Chabauty's method

(p -adic integration) There exists $V \subset H^0(X_{\mathbb{Q}_p}, \Omega_X^1)$ with $\dim_{\mathbb{Q}_p} V \geq g - r$ such that

$$\int_P^Q \omega = 0 \quad \forall P, Q \in X(\mathbb{Q}), \omega \in V.$$

(Coleman, via Newton Polygons) Number of zeroes in a residue disc D_P is $\leq 1 + n_P$, where $n_P = \#(\text{div } \omega \cap D_P)$

(Riemann–Roch) $\sum n_P = 2g - 2$.

(Coleman's bound) $\sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_p)} (1 + n_P) = \#X(\mathbb{F}_p) + 2g - 2$.

Stoll's hyperelliptic uniformity theorem

Theorem (Stoll, 2013)

Let X be a *hyperelliptic* curve of genus g and let $r = \text{rank}_{\mathbb{Z}} \text{Jac}_X(\mathbb{Q})$.
Suppose $r < g - 2$.

Then

$$\#X(\mathbb{Q}) \leq 8(r + 4)(g - 1) + \max\{1, 4r\} \cdot g$$

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Comments

Corollary ((Partially) effective Manin-Mumford)

There is an effective constant $N(g)$ such that if $g(X) = g$, then

$$\#(X \cap \text{Jac}_{X,\text{tors}})(\mathbb{Q}) \leq N(g)$$

Corollary

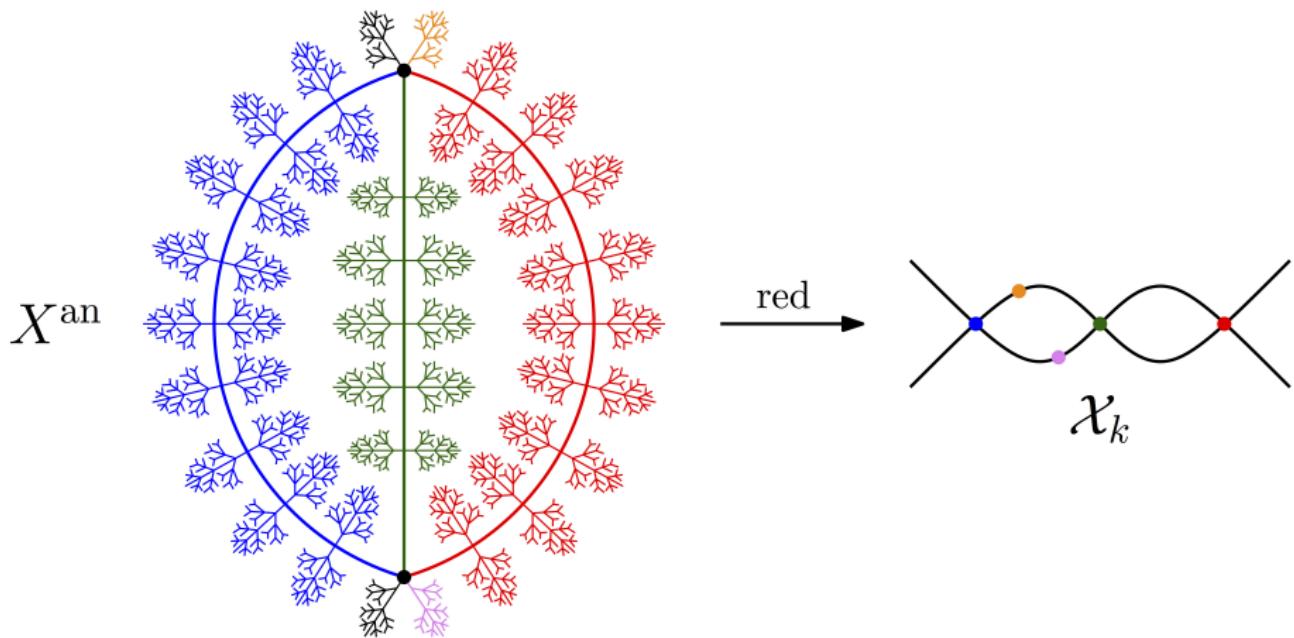
*There is an effective constant $N'(g)$ such that if $g(X) = g > 3$ and X/\mathbb{Q} has **totally degenerate, trivalent** reduction mod 2, then*

$$\#(X \cap \text{Jac}_{X,\text{tors}})(\mathbb{C}) \leq N'(g)$$

The second corollary is a big improvement

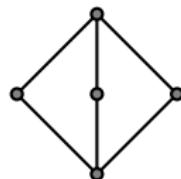
- ① It requires working over a **non-discretely valued** field.
- ② The bound **only depends on the reduction type**.
- ③ Integration over **wide opens** (c.f. Coleman) instead of discs and annuli.

Berkovich picture



Baker–Payne–Rabinoff and the slope formula

(Dual graph Γ of $X_{\mathbb{F}_p}$)



(Contraction Theorem) $\tau: X^{\text{an}} \rightarrow \Gamma$.

(Combinatorial harmonic analysis/potential theory)

f a meromorphic function on X^{an}

$F := (-\log |f|) \big|_\Gamma$ associated tropical, piecewise linear function

$\text{div } F$ combinatorial record of the slopes of F

(Slope formula) $\tau_* \text{div } f = \text{div } F$

Berkovich picture

