

Polynomial rings

Given a set X , we have the polynomial ring

$$\mathbb{Z}[X]$$

with variables in X . A typical element of $\mathbb{Z}[X]$ is of the form

$$f = \sum a_{i_1, \dots, i_n} x_1^{i_1} \cdots x_n^{i_n}$$

where $x_1, \dots, x_n \in X$, $i_1, \dots, i_n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$, and all but finitely many a_{i_1, \dots, i_n} 's are zero.

Polynomial rings can be defined in terms of their universal property. Let \mathbf{Comm} be the category of commutative rings and ring homomorphisms. Then, we have the forgetful functor

$$u: \mathbf{Comm} \rightarrow \mathbf{Set}$$

which maps a (commutative) ring A to its underlying set. In the other direction, we have

$$F: \mathbf{Set} \rightarrow \mathbf{Comm}$$

which maps a set X to the polynomial ring

$$\mathbb{Z}[X].$$

They form an adjunction $F \dashv u$, which amounts to existence of a natural bijection

$$\text{Mor}_{\mathbf{Comm}}(\mathbb{Z}[X], A) \xrightarrow{\sim} \text{Mor}_{\mathbf{Set}}(X, u(A)).$$

For a given set map $t: X \rightarrow u(A)$, the associated ring homomorphism

$$t_*: \mathbb{Z}[X] \rightarrow A$$

is the evaluation map, which acts on polynomials as

$$t_*: \sum a_{i_1, \dots, i_n} x_1^{i_1} \cdots x_n^{i_n} \longmapsto \sum a_{i_1, \dots, i_n} t(x_1)^{i_1} \cdots t(x_n)^{i_n}.$$

Question

If X is a set and k is an arbitrary commutative ring, one can define polynomial rings $k[X]$ with variables in X and coefficients in k . In this context, you might want to regard $k[X]$ as a ring equipped with a homomorphism $k \rightarrow k[X]$. What is their universal property?