Dummit & Foote Ch. 4.3: Groups Acting on Themselves by Conjugation — The Class Equation

Scott Donaldson

Feb. 2024

Let G be a group.

1. (2/22/24)

Suppose G has a left action on a set A, denoted by $g \cdot a$ for all $g \in G$ and $a \in A$. Denote the corresponding right action on A by $a \cdot g$. Prove that the (equivalence) relations $\sim$ and $\sim'$ defined by

$$a \sim b \text{ if and only if } a = g \cdot b \text{ for some } g \in G$$

and

$$a \sim' b \text{ if and only if } a = b \cdot g \text{ for some } g \in G$$

are the same relation (i.e., $a \sim b$ if and only $a \sim' b$).

Proof. To show that $a \sim b$ implies $a \sim' b$, we must show that, given a $g \in G$ with $a = g \cdot b$, there exists an $h \in G$ such that $a = b \cdot h$. By definition, the corresponding right action of a left action is specified to be $g \cdot x = x \cdot g^{-1}$ for all $g \in G$, $x \in A$. Letting $h = g^{-1}$, we have found an element where $a = g \cdot b = b \cdot h$, and so $a \sim' b$.

The proof for $a \sim' b$ implies $a \sim b$ is identical, letting $h = g^{-1}$ but with h acting on the left. □

2. (2/22/24)

Find all conjugacy classes and their sizes in the following groups:

(a) D_8:

$$\{1\}_1 \qquad \{r^2\}_1 \qquad \{r, r^3\}_2 \qquad \{s, sr^2\}_2 \qquad \{sr, sr^3\}_2$$

(b) Q_8:

$$\{1\}_1 \qquad \{-1\}_1 \qquad \{\pm i\}_2 \qquad \{\pm j\}_2 \qquad \{\pm k\}_2$$

(c) A_4:

$$\{1\}_1 \quad \{(1\,2\,3),(1\,3\,4),(1\,4\,2),(2\,4\,3)\}_4 \quad \{(1\,3\,2),(1\,2\,4),(1\,4\,3),(2\,3\,4)\}_4$$
$$\{(1\,2)(3\,4),(1\,3)(2\,4),(1\,4)(2\,3)\}_3$$

3. (2/22/24)

Find all the conjugacy classes and their sizes in the following groups:

(a) $Z_2 \times S_3$:

$$\{(0,1)\}_1 \quad \{(1,1)\}_1 \quad \{(0,(1\,2)),(0,(1\,3)),(0,(2\,3))\}_3$$
$$\{(1,(1\,2)),(1,(1\,3)),(1,(2\,3))\}_3 \quad \{(0,(1\,2\,3)),(0,(1\,3\,2))\}_2$$
$$\{(1,(1\,2\,3)),(1,(1\,3\,2))\}_2$$

(b) $S_3 \times S_3$:

$$\{(1,1)\}_1 \quad \{(1,\text{2-cycle})\}_3 \quad \{(\text{2-cycle},1)\}_3 \quad \{(1,\text{3-cycle})\}_2 \quad \{(\text{3-cycle},1)\}_2$$
$$\{(\text{2-cycle},\text{2-cycle})\}_9 \quad \{(\text{2-cycle},\text{3-cycle})\}_6 \quad \{(\text{3-cycle},\text{2-cycle})\}_6$$
$$\{(\text{3-cycle},\text{3-cycle})\}_4$$

(c) $Z_3 \times A_4$ (using representatives from the conjugacy classes of A_4 above):

$$\{(0,1)\}_1 \quad \{(1,1)\}_1 \quad \{(2,1)\}_1$$
$$\{(0,\overline{(1\,2\,3)})\}_4 \quad \{(1,\overline{(1\,2\,3)})\}_4 \quad \{(2,\overline{(1\,2\,3)})\}_4$$
$$\{(0,\overline{(1\,3\,2)})\}_4 \quad \{(1,\overline{(1\,3\,2)})\}_4 \quad \{(2,\overline{(1\,3\,2)})\}_4$$
$$\{(0,\overline{(1\,2)(3\,4)})\}_3 \quad \{(1,\overline{(1\,2)(3\,4)})\}_3 \quad \{(2,\overline{(1\,2)(3\,4)})\}_3$$

4. (2/22/24)

Prove that if $S \subseteq G$ and $g \in G$ then $gN_g(S)g^{-1} = N_G(gSg^{-1})$ and $gC_g(S)g^{-1} = C_G(gSg^{-1})$.

Proof. Let $x \in N_G(S)$. So $xsx^{-1} \in S$ for all $s \in S$. Then

$$\begin{aligned}
gxsx^{-1}g^{-1} &\in gSg^{-1}\\
gxg^{-1}gsg^{-1}gx^{-1}g^{-1} &\in gSg^{-1}\\
(gxg^{-1})gsg^{-1}(gx^{-1}g^{-1}) &\in gSg^{-1}\\
(gxg^{-1})gsg^{-1}(gxg^{-1})^{-1} &\in gSg^{-1},
\end{aligned}$$

which implies that $gxg^{-1} \in N_G(gSg^{-1})$, and so $gN_G(S)g^{-1} \subseteq N_G(gSg^{-1})$.

Conversely, let $x \in N_G(gSg^{-1})$. So $xgsg^{-1}x^{-1} \in gSg^{-1}$ for all $s \in S$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} xgsg^{-1}x^{-1} &\in gSg^{-1} \\ g^{-1}xgsg^{-1}x^{-1} &\in Sg^{-1} \\ g^{-1}xgsg^{-1}x^{-1}g &\in S \\ (g^{-1}xg)s(g^{-1}xg)^{-1} &\in S \\ g^{-1}xg &\in N_G(S) \\ x &\in gN_G(S)g^{-1}, \end{aligned}$$

which shows that $N_G(gSg^{-1}) \subseteq gN_G(S)g^{-1}$. This proves that $N_G(gSg^{-1}) = gN_G(S)g^{-1}$.

Next, let $x \in C_G(S)$. So $xs = sx$ for all $s \in S$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} xs &= sx \\ gsxg^{-1} &= gsxg^{-1} \\ gsg^{-1}gxg^{-1} &= gsg^{-1}gxg^{-1} \\ (gsg^{-1})(gxg^{-1}) &= (gsg^{-1})(gxg^{-1}), \end{aligned}$$

and so $gxg^{-1} \in C_G(gSg^{-1})$, which implies that $gC_G(S)g^{-1} \subseteq C_G(gSg^{-1})$. Finally, let $x \in C_G(gSg^{-1})$. So $x(gsg^{-1}) = (gsg^{-1})x$ for all $x \in S$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} xgsg^{-1} &= gsg^{-1}x \\ g^{-1}xgsg^{-1} &= sg^{-1}x \\ g^{-1}xgs &= sg^{-1}xg \\ (g^{-1}xg)s &= s(g^{-1}xg), \end{aligned}$$

which implies that $g^{-1}xg \in C_G(S)$, so $x \in gC_G(S)g^{-1}$. It follows that $C_G(gSg^{-1}) \subseteq gC_G(S)g^{-1}$, and therefore $gC_g(S)g^{-1} = C_G(gSg^{-1})$. $\square$

11. (2/28/24)

In each of (a) - (d) determine whether σ_1 and σ_2 are conjugate. If they are, give an explicit permutation τ such that $\tau\sigma_1\tau^{-1} = \sigma_2$.

(a) $\sigma_1 = (1\,2)(3\,4\,5)$ and $\sigma_2 = (1\,2\,3)(4\,5)$. Both have cycle type $1, 1, 3$ and so they are conjugate. Let $\tau = (1\,4\,2\,5\,3)$. Then $\tau\sigma_1\tau^{-1} = \sigma_2$.

(b) $\sigma_1 = (1\,5)(3\,7\,2)(10\,6\,8\,11)$ and $\sigma_2 = (3\,7\,5\,10)(4\,9)(13\,11\,2)$. In S_13, both have cycle type $1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 4$ and so they are conjugate. Let $\tau = (1\,4)(2\,11\,10\,3)(5\,9\,6\,7\,13\,8)$. Then $\tau\sigma_1\tau^{-1} = \sigma_2$.

(c) $\sigma_1 = (1\,5)(3\,7\,2)(10\,6\,8\,11)$ and $\sigma_2 = \sigma_1^3 = (1\,5)(10\,11\,8\,6)$. They do not have the same cycle type (σ_1 contains a 3-cycle that σ_2 does not), and so they are not conjugate.

(d) $\sigma_1 = (1\,3)(2\,4\,6)$ and $\sigma_2 = (3\,5)(2\,4)(5\,6) = (2\,4)(3\,5\,6)$. Let $\tau = (1\,2\,3\,4\,5)$. Then $\tau\sigma_1\tau^{-1} = \sigma_2$.

13. (2/28/24)

Find all finite groups which have exactly two conjugacy classes.

Proof. Let G be a non-trivial finite group. Since the conjugacy class of 1 is $\{1\}$, if G has exactly two conjugacy classes, then every other element in G must have the same conjugacy class, namely $G - \{1\}$.

From Proposition 6, for any $g \in G$, the number of conjugates of g (i.e. the cardinality of the conjugacy class of g) is the index of the centralizer of g, $|G : C_G(g)|$. Therefore the size of the conjugacy class of g must divide the order of G.

Let $|G| = n$. Then the size of the conjugacy class of g is $|G - \{1\}| = n - 1$. This is only possible when $|G| = 2$, and so G must be the unique group of order two. $\square$