Math 3030 Abstract Algebra
Review of basic group theory

1 Groups

Definition 1.1. *A **group** $(G, *)$ is a nonempty set G, together with a binary operation*

$$G \times G \to G,$$
$$(a, b) \mapsto a * b,$$

*called the "**group operation**" or "**multiplication**", such that*

- *$*$ is **associative**, i.e.*
$$(a * b) * c = a * (b * c)$$
for any $a, b, c \in G$;
- *there exists an element $e \in G$, called an **identity**, such that*
$$a * e = e * a = a$$
for any $a \in G$;
- *each element $a \in G$ has an **inverse** $a^{-1} \in G$, i.e.*
$$a * a^{-1} = a^{-1} * a = e.$$

Remark 1.2. *We often write $a \cdot b$, or simply ab, to denote the product $a * b$ of a and b.*

It is straightforward to show that both the identity and the inverse of any given element are unique.

Also, the **cancellation laws** hold, i.e. for any $a, b, c \in G$, $ab = ac$ implies that $b = c$ and likewise $ba = ca$ implies that $b = c$. This can be used to show that $(ab)^{-1} = b^{-1}a^{-1}$ for any $a, b \in G$ (or more generally, $(a_1a_2 \cdots a_k)^{-1} = a_k^{-1}a_{k-1}^{-1} \cdots a_1^{-1}$ for any $a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_k \in G$).

Definition 1.3. *The **order** of G, denoted as $|G|$, is the number of elements in G. We call G **finite** (resp. **infinite**) if $|G| < \infty$ (resp. $|G| = \infty$).*

Definition 1.4. *If the group operation is commutative, i.e. $ab = ba$ for any $a, b \in G$, we say that G is **abelian**; otherwise, G is said to be **nonabelian**.*

Remark 1.5. *When G is abelian, we usually use $+$ to denote the group operation, 0 to denote the identity, and $-a$ to denote the inverse of an element $a \in G$.*

Here are some examples of groups:

1. Given any field F equipped with addition $+$ and multiplication $\cdot$, both $(F, +)$ and $(F^\times := F\setminus\{0\}, \cdot)$ are abelian groups. Examples include $\mathbb{Q}, \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{C}$ with the usual addition and multiplication.

2. Given a commutative ring R, the set of units $R^\times$ is an abelian group under the ring multiplication.

3. The set of integers $\mathbb{Z}$ is an abelian group under addition, but the set of nonzero integers $\mathbb{Z} \setminus \{0\}$ is *not* a group under multiplication.

4. For any positive integer n, the set $\mathbb{Z}_n = \{0, 1, \ldots, n-1\}$ is a finite abelian group under addition modulo n.

5. A vector space V is an abelian group under its addition $+$. (This is part of the definition of a vector space.)

6. The set of all $m \times n$ matrices is an abelian group under matrix addition. More generally, given any group G and a nonempty set X, the set of maps from X to G form a group using the group operation in G, which is abelian if G is so.

7. The set of all nonsingular $n \times n$ matrices with coefficients in a field F is a group under multiplication, denoted by $GL_n(F)$ and called the **general linear group over** F. For $n \geq 2$, this group is nonabelian.

8. Let X be a nonempty set. Let S_X be the set of bijections (permutations) $\sigma : X \to X$. Then S_X is a group under the composition of maps, called the **symmetric group on** X.

   For any positive integer n, the group S_{I_n}, where $I_n = \{1, \ldots, n\}$, is denoted as S_n and called the n**-th symmetric group**. For $n \geq 3$, S_n is a finite nonabelian group.

9. If G_1, G_2 are groups, then the Cartesian product $G_1 \times G_2$ is naturally a group whose multiplication is defined componentwise; this is called the **direct product** of G_1 and G_2. Similarly, one can define the direct product of *any* number of groups.

2 Subgroups

Definition 2.1. *Let $(G, *)$ be a group. Let $H \subseteq G$ be a subset. If H is closed under $*$ (i.e. $a * b \in H$ for any $a, b \in H$) and H is a group under the induced group operation $*$, then we call H a* ***subgroup*** *of G, denoted as $H \leq G$.*

To check that a subset is a subgroup, we have the following very useful criterion:

Proposition 2.2. *A nonempty subset H of a group G is a subgroup if and only if $a * b^{-1} \in H$ for any $a, b \in H$.*

Proposition 2.3. *A finite subset H of a group G is a subgroup if and only if H is nonempty and closed under the group operation.*

Here are some examples of subgroups:

1. We have $\mathbb{Z} < \mathbb{Q} < \mathbb{R} < \mathbb{C}$ under addition, and $\mathbb{Q}^\times < \mathbb{R}^\times < \mathbb{C}^\times$ under multiplication.

2. For any group G, we have $\{e\} \leq G$ (called the **trivial subgroup**) and $G \leq G$. A subgroup $H \lneqq G$ is called **proper** and a subgroup $\{e\} \lneqq H \leq G$ is called **nontrivial**.

3. Vector subspaces are additive subgroups.

4. The subset
$$SL_n(F) = \{M \in GL_n(F) : \det M = 1\}$$
is a subgroup of $GL_n(F)$, called the **special linear group**. We also have the subgroups
$$O_n(F) = \{M \in GL_n(F) : M^T M = I_n = MM^T\},$$
$$SO_n(F) = \{M \in O_n(F) : \det M = 1\}$$
of $GL_n(F)$, called the **orthogonal group** and **special orthogonal group** respectively; here M^T denotes the transpose of M and I_n denotes the $n \times n$ identity matrix.

For $F = \mathbb{C}$, we have the subgroups
$$U(n) = \{M \in GL_n : M^* M = I_n = MM^*\},$$
$$SU(n) = \{M \in U_n : \det M = 1\}$$
of $GL_n(\mathbb{C})$, called the **unitary group** and **special unitary group** respectively; here M^* denotes the conjugate transpose of M. When $n = 1$, this is nothing but the **circle group**
$$U(1) = \{z \in \mathbb{C} : |z| = 1\},$$
which is a multiplicative subgroup of $\mathbb{C}^\times$.

Remark 2.4. *These are examples of **matrix groups**, which are in turn examples of **Lie groups**. When F is a finite field, they form an important class of finite simple groups.*

3 Homomorphisms and isomorphisms

Definition 3.1. *A map $\phi : G \to G'$ from a group G to another group G' is called a **homomorphism** if*
$$\phi(ab) = \phi(a)\phi(b)$$
*for any $a, b \in G$. If ϕ is in addition bijective, then it is called an **isomorphism**. We say that G is **isomorphic** to G', denoted by $G \cong G'$, if there exists an isomorphism ϕ from G onto G'. An isomorphism from G onto itself is called an **automorphism**; the set of all automorphisms of a group G is a group itself, denoted by Aut(G).*

Remark 3.2. *If ϕ is an isomorphism, then ϕ^{-1} is automatically an isomorphism.*

Isomorphic groups share the same algebraic properties; they only differ by relabeling of their elements. A fundamental question in group theory is to *classify* all groups up to isomorphism.

Examples of homomorphisms:

1. A linear map (resp. isomorphism) between two vector spaces V and W is a homomorphism (resp. isomorphism) between the abelian groups $(V, +)$ and $(W, +)$.
2. For any field F, the determinant $\det : GL_n(F) \to F^\times$ is a homomorphism.
3. The exponential function $\exp : (\mathbb{R}, +) \to (\mathbb{R}_{>0}, \cdot)$ (or $\exp : (\mathbb{C}, +) \to (\mathbb{C}^\times, \cdot)$) is an isomorphism, whose inverse is the logarithm $\log$.
4. For any nonzero integer n, $n\mathbb{Z} \leq \mathbb{Z}$ and the map $\phi : n\mathbb{Z} \to \mathbb{Z}$ defined by $\phi(nk) = k$ is an isomorphism. So $\mathbb{Z}$ and its proper subgroup $n\mathbb{Z}$ (when $|n| \geq 2$) are abstractly isomorphic.
5. For any positive integer n, the map $\phi : \mathbb{Z} \to \mathbb{Z}_n$ defined by mapping k to its reminder when divided by n is a surjective homomorphism.
6. The map
$$SO_2(\mathbb{R}) \to U(1), \quad \begin{pmatrix} \cos\theta & -\sin\theta \\ \sin\theta & \cos\theta \end{pmatrix} \mapsto e^{\mathbf{i}\theta}$$
is an isomorphism.
7. The finite groups $\mathbb{Z}_4$ and $\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2$ are *not* isomorphic though they have the same order.

4 Cyclic groups; generating sets

4.1 Cyclic (sub)groups

Definition 4.1. *Let G be a group and $a \in G$ be any element. Then the subset*
$$\langle a \rangle := \{a^n : n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$$
*is a subgroup of G, called the **cyclic subgroup** generated by a. The **order** of a, denoted by $|a|$, is defined as the order of $\langle a \rangle$.*

Proposition 4.2. *If $|a| < \infty$, then $|a|$ is the smallest positive integer k such that $a^k = e$.*

Definition 4.3. *A group G is called **cyclic** if there exists $a \in G$ such that $G = \langle a \rangle$. In this case, we say that a **generates** G, or a is a **generator** of G.*

Proposition 4.4. *Every cyclic group is abelian.*

Remark 4.5. *The converse of the above proposition is false.*

Theorem 4.6. *(Classification of cyclic groups) Any infinite cyclic group is isomorphic to* $(\mathbb{Z}, +)$*. Any cyclic group of finite order* n *is isomorphic to* $(\mathbb{Z}_n, +)$*.*

For example, for any positive integer m, the set of m-th roots of unity $U_m := \{z \in \mathbb{C} : z^m = 1\}$ is a cyclic subgroup of $U(1)$. By the above theorem, U_m is isomorphic to $\mathbb{Z}_m$. (This is a better way to visualize the adjective "cyclic".) In fact, U_m is generated by the primitive m-th root of unity $\exp \frac{2\pi \mathbf{i}}{m}$. (How about the cyclic subgroup generated by $\exp 2\pi \mathbf{i} t$ where $t \in \mathbb{R}$?)

Proposition 4.7. *A subgroup of a cyclic group is also cyclic.*

Corollary 4.8. *Any subgroup of* $\mathbb{Z}$ *is of the form* $n\mathbb{Z}$ *for some* $n \in \mathbb{Z}$*.*

Theorem 4.9. *(Classification of subgroups of a finite cyclic group) Let* $G = \langle a \rangle$ *be a cyclic group of finite order* n*. Let* $a^s \in G$*. Then* $|a^s| = n/d$ *where* $d = \gcd(s, n)$*. Moreover,* $\langle a^s \rangle = \langle a^t \rangle$ *if and only if* $\gcd(s, n) = \gcd(t, n)$*.*

Corollary 4.10. *All generators of a cyclic group* $G = \langle a \rangle$ *are of the form* a^r *where* r *is relatively prime to* n*.*

For example, $\mathbb{Z}_{18}$ is generated by 1, 5, 7, 11, 13 or 17.

4.2 Generating sets

Proposition 4.11. *The intersection of any collection of subgroups is also a subgroup.*

Definition 4.12. *Let* G *be a group, and* $A \subseteq G$ *any subset. The smallest subgroup* $\langle A \rangle$ *of* G *containing* A *is called the* ***subgroup generated by*** A*. By the above proposition, we must have*

$$\langle A \rangle = \bigcap_{\{H \leq G :\ A \subseteq H\}} H.$$

If $G = \langle A \rangle$*, then we say that the subset* A ***generates*** G*. If* G *is generated by a finite set* A*, then we say that* G *is* ***finitely generated****.*

Remark 4.13. *In practice, the subgroup generated by a subset* $A \subseteq G$ *is given by the set of all* finite *products of powers of elements in* A*, i.e.*

$$\langle A \rangle = \{a_1^{k_1} \cdots a_n^{k_n} : a_i \in A, k_i \in \mathbb{Z}\}.$$

For example, the **Klein 4-group** $V \cong \mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2$ is the smallest non-cyclic group but it is abelian and generated by two elements: $(1, 0)$ and $(0, 1)$. As another example, the infinite nonabelian group $SL_2(\mathbb{Z})$ is also generated by two elements: $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$ and $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$.

Remark 4.14. *Not all abelian groups are finitely generated, e.g.* $\mathbb{Q}$*,* $\mathbb{R}$*.*

5 Symmetric groups and dihedral groups

5.1 Symmetric groups

Recall that, given an integer $n \geq 2$, the n-th symmetric group S_n is the set of bijective maps from the set $I_n = \{1, \ldots, n\}$ onto itself equipped with the composition of maps. Elements of S_n are called **permutations** (of I_n).

For example, an element in S_{10} is of the form

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\ 3 & 10 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 1 & 4 & 2 & 5 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Definition 5.1. *Let $i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_r$ ($r \leq n$) be distinct elements of I_n. Denote by $(i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_r)$ the permutation*

$$i_1 \mapsto i_2,\ i_2 \mapsto i_3,\ \ldots,\ i_{r-1} \mapsto i_r,\ i_r \mapsto i_1$$

*and $j \mapsto j$ for any $j \in I_n \setminus \{i_1,\ i_2, \ldots, i_r\}$. We call $(i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_r)$ an r-**cycle**, and r is the **length** of the cycle. A 2-cycle is also called a **transposition**.*

For example, in S_5, we have

$$(1, 3, 5, 4) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\ 3 & 2 & 5 & 1 & 4 \end{pmatrix} = (5, 4, 1, 3).$$

Proposition 5.2. *Every permutation $\sigma \in S_n$ is a product of disjoint cycles (unique up to reordering of terms in the product). In particular, S_n is generated by cycles.*

For example, in S_8, we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\ 3 & 8 & 6 & 7 & 4 & 1 & 5 & 2 \end{pmatrix} = (1, 3, 6)(2, 8)(4, 7, 5).$$

Remark 5.3. *Composition of disjoint cycles is commutative.*

Proposition 5.4. *For an r-cycle μ, we have $|\mu| = r$. Hence, if we write a permutation σ as a product of disjoint cycles $\sigma = \mu_1\mu_2 \cdots \mu_k$, then*

$$|\sigma| = \mathit{lcm}(r_1, r_2, \ldots, r_k),$$

where $r_i = |\mu_i| =$ length of μ_i.

Since $(i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_r) = (i_1, i_r)(i_1, i_{r-1}) \cdots (i_1, i_3)(i_1, i_2)$, we have

Proposition 5.5. *Every permutation is a product of transpositions. In particular, S_n is generated by transpositions.*

Corollary 5.6. *S_n is generated by $(1, 2)$ and $(1, 2, \ldots, n)$.*

Note that the decomposition in Proposition 5.5 is not unique, e.g.

$$(1,2,3) = (1,3)(1,2) = (1,3)(2,3)(1,2)(1,3).$$

However, the *parity* is well-defined:

Proposition 5.7. *No permutation can be expressed both as a product of an even number of transpositions and also as a product of an odd number of transpositions.*

Hence the following definition makes sense.

Definition 5.8. *A permutation $\sigma \in S_n$ is called* **even** *(resp.* **odd***) if it can be expressed as a product of an even (resp. odd) number of transpositions.*

Proposition 5.9. *Let A_n be the subset of all even permutations in S_n. Then A_n is a subgroup, called the* ***n-th alternating group***. *Moreover, the order of A_n is $|S_n|/2 = n!/2$.*

5.2 Dihedral groups

Given an integer $n \geq 3$, we let $\Delta = \Delta_n \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2$ be a regular n-gon centered at the origin. An **isometry** is a distance-preserving map between metric spaces. If we equip $\mathbb{R}^2$ with the Euclidean metric, then a **symmetry** of Δ is an isometry (also called rigid motion) $\phi : \mathbb{R}^2 \to \mathbb{R}^2$ such that $\phi(\Delta) = \Delta$.

Definition 5.10. *The* ***n-th dihedral group*** *D_n is the set of symmetries of Δ equipped with composition of maps.*

We make the following observations:

1. Enumerating the vertices of Δ as $1, 2, \ldots, n$ (say, in the counter-clockwise direction), we can view each element of D_n as a permutation of $I_n = \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$. Also note that two distinct symmetries will give rise to two distinct permutations of I_n. So we may regard D_n as a subgroup of S_n.

2. There is a complete classification of isometries of $\mathbb{R}^2$: **translations**, **rotations**, **reflections** and **glide reflections**. But a symmetry of Δ must fix the origin $0 \in \mathbb{R}^2$ and both translations and glide reflections have no fixed points, so D_n consists of *only* rotations and reflections.

3. Let $a \in D_n$ be the rotation by the angle $2\pi/n$ in the counter-clockwise direction. Then the set of rotations in D_n is given by $\langle a \rangle = \{\mathrm{id}, a, a^2, \ldots, a^{n-1}\}$. On the other hand, there are n reflections in D_n. So we conclude that

$$|D_n| = 2n.$$

   Furthermore, the composition of two reflections is a rotation (which can be seen by flipping a Hong Kong 2-dollar coin). Hence if we let $b \in D_n$ be any reflection, then the set of reflections in D_n is given by $\{b, ab, a^2b, \ldots, a^{n-1}b\}$. In particular,

$$D_n = \langle a, b \rangle.$$

4. There are three relations among a and b:

$$a^n = 1,\ b^2 = 1,\ ab = ba^{-1}.$$

(Again you can confirm this by playing with a Hong Kong 2-dollar coin.) In fact, they are all the relations, so that we have a **presentation**

$$D_n = \langle a, b : a^n, b^2, abab \rangle.$$

Remark 5.11. *Some authors use D_{2n} to denote the n-th dihedral group. An excellent reference for dihedral groups and other interesting groups of symmetries is Chapter 5 in Michael Artin's* Algebra*.*

Remark 5.12. *The dihedral groups form a class of finite subgroups of $SO_3(\mathbb{R})$. The others are given by: finite cyclic groups and the groups of symmetries of the* Platonic solids *(there are 5 of such solids, corresponding to 3 different groups).*

6 Cosets and the Theorem of Lagrange

Given a subgroup $H \leq G$, we can define two equivalence relations:

$$a \sim_L b \Leftrightarrow a^{-1}b \in H,$$
$$a \sim_R b \Leftrightarrow ab^{-1} \in H.$$

These induce two partitions of G, whose equivalence classes are called cosets of H:

Definition 6.1. *Let $H \leq G$, and $a \in G$. The sets $aH := \{ah : h \in H\}$ and $Ha := \{ha : h \in H\}$ are called the **left** and **right coset** of H containing a respectively.*

Here are some examples:

1. Let n be a positive integer. Consider the subgroup $n\mathbb{Z} \leq \mathbb{Z}$. Then the cosets are given by

$$\{k + n\mathbb{Z} : k \in \mathbb{Z}\} = \{k + n\mathbb{Z} : k \in \{0, 1, \ldots, n-1\}\},$$

which are in a bijective correspondence with elements of the finite group $\mathbb{Z}_n$.

Remark 6.2. *When G is abelian, any left coset is equal (as a subset) to the corresponding right coset, and we usually use $a + H$ to denote a coset.*

2. For $\mathbb{Z} < \mathbb{R}$, the cosets are given by

$$\{t + \mathbb{Z} : t \in \mathbb{R}\} = \{t + \mathbb{Z} : t \in [0, 1)\},$$

which are in a bijective correspondence with elements of the circle group $U(1)$ (by mapping $t + \mathbb{Z}$ to $\exp 2\pi \mathbf{i} t$).

3. Given a vector subspace $W \subseteq V$, the cosets of the additive subgroup $(W, +) \leq (V, +)$ are given by the *affine translates* of the subspace W:

$$\{v + W : v \in V\}.$$

If we choose another subspace $Q \subseteq V$ which is complementary to W, i.e. such that $Q \cap W = \{0\}$ and $\dim(Q) = \dim(V) - \dim(W)$, then each coset is represented by a unique element in Q:

$$\{v + W : v \in V\} = \{v + W : v \in Q\}.$$

4. Consider $S_3 = \{\text{id}, \rho, \rho^2, \mu, \rho\mu, \rho^2\mu\}$, where $\rho = (1, 2, 3)$ and $\mu = (1, 2)$. Let H be the cyclic subgroup generated by μ. Then the left cosets are

$$H = \{\text{id}, \mu\},\ \rho H = \{\rho, \rho\mu\},\ \rho^2 H = \{\rho^2, \rho^2\mu\},$$

while the right cosets are

$$H = \{\text{id}, \mu\},\ H\rho = \{\rho, \rho^2\mu\},\ H\rho^2 = \{\rho^2, \rho\mu\}.$$

Note that $\rho H \neq H\rho$ and $\rho^2 H \neq H\rho^2$.

Since any two cosets are of the same cardinality as H, we have the important:

Theorem 6.3. *(Theorem of Lagrange) Suppose that G is a finite group. Then $|H|$ divides $|G|$ for any subgroup $H \leq G$.*

Corollary 6.4. *Suppose that G is a finite group. Then $a^{|G|} = e$ for any $a \in G$.*

Corollary 6.5. *Every group of prime order is cyclic.*

Definition 6.6. *Let $H \leq G$. The number of distinct left (or right) cosets of H in G, denoted by $[G : H]$, is called the* ***index*** *of H in G.*

Remark 6.7. *The index $[G : H]$ may be infinite. But if G is finite, then (the proof of) the Theorem of Lagrange implies that*

$$|G| = [G : H]|H|.$$

7 (Optional) The language of categories

Definition 7.1. *A* ***category*** *$\mathcal{C}$ consists of*

- *a class Obj$(\mathcal{C})$ of* ***objects*** *of the category; and*
- *for every two objects A, B of $\mathcal{C}$, a set Hom$_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ of* ***morphisms****,*

satisfying the following properties:

- *For every object A of $\mathcal{C}$, there exists (at least) one morphism $\mathbf{1}_A \in Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, A)$, the **identity** on A.*
- *For every triple of objects A, B, C of $\mathcal{C}$, there is a map*

$$Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B) \times Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(B, C) \to Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, C)$$

  *sending a pair of morphisms (f, g) to their **compositon** $g \circ f$.*
- *The composition is associative, i.e. if $f \in Hom_C(A, B)$, $g \in Hom_C(B, C)$ and $h \in Hom_C(C, D)$, then we have*

$$(h \circ g) \circ f = h \circ (g \circ f).$$

- *The identity morphisms are identities with respect to composition, i.e. for all $f \in Hom_C(A, B)$, we have*

$$f \circ \mathbf{1}_A = f, \quad \mathbf{1}_B \circ f = f.$$

Examples:

1. The category `Set` is defined by
   - Obj(`Set`) = the class of all sets;
   - for A, B in Obj(`Set`), $\text{Hom}_{\texttt{Set}}(A, B)$ = the set of all maps $f : A \to B$.
2. Let S be a set and $\sim$ be a relation on S which is *reflexive* and *transitive*. Then we can encode this data into a category with:
   - objects = elements of S;
   - for objects a, b (i.e. $a, b \in S$), we let $\text{Hom}(a, b)$ be the singleton consisting of $(a, b) \in S \times S$ if $a \sim b$, and let $\text{Hom}(a, b) = \emptyset$ otherwise.
3. The category `Grp` is defined by
   - Obj(`Grp`) = the class of all groups;
   - for G_1, G_2 in Obj(`Grp`), $\text{Hom}_{\texttt{Grp}}(G_1, G_2)$ = the set of all group homomorphisms $\varphi : G_1 \to G_2$.

Similarly, one has the category $\texttt{Vect}_F$ of vector spaces over a field F, the category `Ab` of abelian groups, etc.

Definition 7.2. *Let $\mathcal{C}$ be a category. A morphism $f \in Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ is called an **isomorphism** if there exists $g \in Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(B, A)$ such that*

$$g \circ f = \mathbf{1}_A, \quad f \circ g = \mathbf{1}_B.$$

Proposition 7.3. *The inverse of an isomorphism is unique.*

Definition 7.4. *An **automorphism** of an object A of a category $\mathcal{C}$ is an isomorphism from A to itself. The set of automorphisms of A is denoted $Aut_{\mathcal{C}}(A)$; it is a subset of the set $End_{\mathcal{C}}(A)$ of endomorphisms of A.*

Note that $\mathrm{Aut}_{\mathcal{C}}(A)$ is a group with identity $\mathbf{1}_A$.

Definition 7.5. *Let $\mathcal{C}$ be a category. A morphism $f \in Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ is called a* ***monomorphism*** *if, for any object Z of $\mathcal{C}$ and any morphisms $g_1, g_2 \in Hom(Z, A)$, we have*

$$f \circ g_1 = f \circ g_2 \Longrightarrow g_1 = g_2.$$

A morphism $f \in Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, B)$ is called a ***epimorphism*** *if, for any object Z of $\mathcal{C}$ and any morphisms $g_1, g_2 \in Hom(B, Z)$, we have*

$$g_1 \circ f = g_2 \circ f \Longrightarrow g_1 = g_2.$$

Note that in the category `Set`, monomorphisms (resp. epimorphisms) are precisely the injective (resp. surjective) maps. But this may not be true in other categories.

Definition 7.6. *Let $\mathcal{C}$ be a category. We say that an object I of $\mathcal{C}$ is* ***initial*** *in $\mathcal{C}$ if $Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(I, A)$ is a singleton for every object A of $\mathcal{C}$. We say that an object F of $\mathcal{C}$ is* ***final*** *in $\mathcal{C}$ if $Hom_{\mathcal{C}}(A, F)$ is a singleton for every object A of $\mathcal{C}$.*

One may use *terminal* to mean either possibility. In general, initial or final objects may not exist; and if they do, they may not be unique. For example, in `Set`, the empty set $\emptyset$ is initial, while any singleton is a final object. Nevertheless, if initial/final objects exist, they are *unique up to a unique isomorphism*.

Initial/final objects are useful for introducing *universal properties*. Examples:

1. Let $\sim$ be an equivalence relation on a set A. Consider a category whose objects are pairs (φ, Z) consisting of a set Z and a map $\varphi : A \to Z$ such that $\varphi(a) = \varphi(b)$ whenever $a \sim b$, and the morphisms between two objects (φ_1, Z_1) and (φ_2, Z_2) are commutative diagrams

$$\begin{array}{ccc} Z_1 & \xrightarrow{\ \sigma\ } & Z_2 \\ {}^{\varphi_1}\nwarrow & & \nearrow{}^{\varphi_2} \\ & A & \end{array} \tag{7.1}$$

   Then $(\pi, A/\sim)$, where $A/\sim$ is the quotient of A by $\sim$ and $\pi : A \to A/\sim$ is the canonical projection, is an *initial* object of this category.

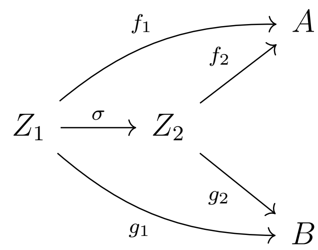
2. Let A, B be sets. Consider the category $\mathtt{Set}_{A,B}$ defined by

   - $\mathrm{Obj}(\mathtt{Set}_{A,B}) =$ diagrams

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & & A \\ & \nearrow^{f} & \\ Z & & \\ & \searrow_{g} & \\ & & B \end{array} \tag{7.2}$$

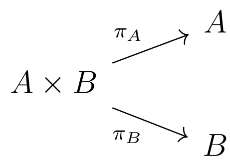
     in `Set`; and

- morphisms are commutative diagrams



(7.3)

Then the product



(7.4)

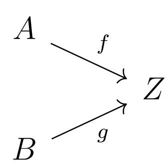
where $\pi_A : A \times B \to A$ and $\pi_B : A \times B \to B$ are the natural projections, is a *final* object in $\mathtt{Set}_{A,B}$.

If we replace `Set` by the category `Grp` of groups, then the product of two groups $G_1 \times G_2$ is similarly a final object in the category $\mathtt{Grp}_{G_1,G_2}$. More generally, we can replace `Set` by any category $\mathcal{C}$ and defines a *categorical product* in $\mathcal{C}$.

For instance, if we consider the category obtained from $\leq$ on $\mathbb{Z}$ as above, then a categorical product of two integers $a, b \in \mathbb{Z}$ is given by $\min(a, b)$ (check this!). This gives an unexpected connection between 'the Cartesian product of two sets' and 'the minimum of two integers'.

3. Let A, B be objects of a category $\mathcal{C}$. Consider the category $\mathcal{C}^{A,B}$ defined by

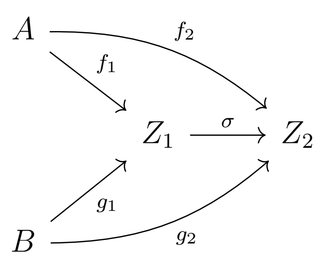
   - Obj$(\mathcal{C}^{A,B})$ = diagrams



(7.5)

     in $\mathcal{C}$; and

   - morphisms are commutative diagrams



(7.6)

Then an *initial* object in $\mathcal{C}^{A,B}$ is called a **coproduct** of A and B. For example, the **disjoint union** $A \sqcup B$ of two sets $A, B \in$ Obj(`Set`) is a coproduct in `Set`.