The ranges of various familiar functions

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based on joint work with

K. Ford, F. Luca, and P. Pollack

Let us introduce our cast of characters:

- Euler's function: $\varphi(n)$ is the cardinality of $(\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^{\times}$.

- Carmichael's function: $\lambda(n)$ is the exponent of $(\mathbb{Z}/n\mathbb{Z})^{\times}$.

- σ: the sum-of-divisors function.

- $s(n) = \sigma(n) - n$: the sum-of-proper-divisors function.

The oldest of these functions is $s(n) = \sigma(n) - n$, going back to Pythagoras. He was interested in fixed points ($s(n) = n$) and 2-cycles ($s(n) = m$, $s(m) = n$) in the dynamical system given by iterating s.

Very little is known after millennia of study, but we do know that the number of n to x with $s(n) = n$ is at most x^ϵ (Hornfeck & Wirsing, 1957) and that the number of n to x with n in a 2-cycle is at most $x/\exp((\log x)^{1/2})$ for x large (P, 2014).

The study of the comparison of $s(n)$ to n led to the theorems of Schoenberg, Davenport, and Erdős & Wintner.

Erdős was the first to consider the set of values of $s(n)$. Note that if $p \neq q$ are primes, then $s(pq) = p + q + 1$, so that:

All even integers at least 8 are the sum of 2 unequal primes,

$\Longrightarrow$

All odd numbers at least 9 are values of s.

Also, $s(2) = 1$, $s(4) = 3$, and $s(8) = 7$, so presumably the only odd number that's not an s-value is 5. It's known that this slightly stronger form of Goldbach is almost true in that the set of evens not so representable as $p + q$ has density 0.

Thus: *the image of s contains almost all odd numbers.*

But what of even numbers? Erdős (1973): *There is a positive proportion of even numbers missing from the image of* s.

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Unsolved: Does the image of s have an asymptotic density? Does the image of s contain a positive proportion of even numbers?

Late breaking news: Yes to the second question. (Luca & P, 2014)

The set of values of φ was first considered by Pillai (1929): *The number* $V_\varphi(x)$ *of* φ*-values in* $[1, x]$ *is* $O(x/(\log x)^c)$*, where* $c = \frac{1}{e}\log 2 = 0.254\ldots$.

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Erdős's idea: Deal with $\Omega(\varphi(n))$ (the total number of prime factors of $\varphi(n)$, with multiplicity). This paper was seminal for the various ideas introduced. For example, the proof of the infinitude of Carmichael numbers owes much to this paper.

Again: $V_\varphi(x) = x/(\log x)^{1+o(1)}$.
But: A great deal of info may be lurking in that "$o(1)$".

After work of Erdős & Hall, Maier & P, and Ford, we now know that $V_\varphi(x)$ is of magnitude

$$\frac{x}{\log x} \exp\left(A(\log_3 x - \log_4 x)^2 + B \log_3 x + C \log_4 x\right),$$

where $\log_k$ is the k-fold iterated log, and A, B, C are explicit constants.

Unsolved: Is there an asymptotic formula for $V_\varphi(x)$?
Do we have $V_\varphi(2x) \sim 2V_\varphi(x)$?

The same results and unsolved problems pertain as well for the image of σ.

In 1959, Erdős conjectured that the image of σ and the image of φ has an infinite intersection; that is, there are infinitely many pairs m, n with

$$\sigma(m) = \varphi(n).$$

It is amazing how many famous conjectures imply that the answer is yes!

Yes, if there are infinitely many twin primes:

If p, $p + 2$ are both prime, then

$$\varphi(p + 2) = p + 1 = \sigma(p).$$

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Yes, if the Extended Riemann Hypothesis holds.

It would seem a promising strategy to prove that there are at most finitely many solutions to $\sigma(m) = \varphi(n)$; it has some amazing and unexpected corollaries!

However, Ford, Luca, & P (2010): There are indeed infinitely many solutions to $\sigma(m) = \varphi(n)$.

We gave several proofs, but one proof uses a conditional result of Heath-Brown: *If there are infinitely many Siegel zeros, then there are infinitely many twin primes.*

Some further results:

Garaev (2011): *For each fixed number a, the number $V_{\varphi,\sigma}(x)$ of common values of φ and σ in $[1, x]$ exceeds* $\exp((\log\log x)^a)$ *for x sufficiently large.*

Ford & Pollack (2011): *Assuming a strong form of the prime k-tuples conjecture, $V_{\varphi,\sigma}(x) = x/(\log x)^{1+o(1)}$.*

Ford & Pollack (2012): *Most values of φ are not values of σ and vice versa.*

The situation for Carmichael's function λ has only recently become clearer. Recall that $\lambda(p^a) = \varphi(p^a)$ unless $p = 2, a \geq 3$, when $\lambda(2^a) = 2^{a-2}$, and that

$$\lambda([m, n]) = [\lambda(m), \lambda(n)].$$

It is easy to see that the image of φ has density 0, just playing with powers of 2 as did Pillai. But what can be done with λ? It's not even obvious that λ-values that are 2 mod 4 have density 0.

The solution lies in the "anatomy of integers" and in particular of shifted primes. It is known (Erdős & Wagstaff) that most numbers do not have a large divisor of the form $p - 1$ with p prime. But a λ-value has such a large divisor or it is "smooth", so in either case, there are not many of them.

Using these thoughts, Erdős, P, & Schmutz (1991): *There is a positive constant* c *such that* $V_\lambda(x)$*, the number of* λ*-values in* $[1, x]$*, is* $O(x/(\log x)^c)$*.*

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Banks, Friedlander, Luca, Pappalardi, & Shparlinski (2006): $V_\lambda(x) \geq \frac{x}{\log x}\exp\Big((A + o(1))(\log_3 x)^2\Big)$.

So, $V_\lambda(x)$ is somewhere between $x/(\log x)^{1+o(1)}$ and $x/(\log x)^c$, where $c = 1 - \frac{e}{2}\log 2$.

Recently, Luca & P (2013): $V_\lambda(x) \le x/(\log x)^{\eta+o(1)}$, *where* $\eta = 1 - (1 + \log\log 2)/\log 2 = 0.086\ldots$.
Further, $V_\lambda(x) \ge x/(\log x)^{0.36}$ *for all large* x.

Late breaking news: The "correct" exponent is η (Ford, Luca, & P, 2014).

The constant η actually pops up in some other problems:

Erdős (1960): *The number of distinct entries in the* $N \times N$ *multiplication table is* $N^2/(\log N)^{\eta+o(1)}$.

The asymptotic density of integers with a divisor in the interval $[N, 2N]$ *is* $1/(\log N)^{\eta+o(1)}$. This result has its own history beginning with Besicovitch in 1934, some of the other players being Erdős, Hooley, Tenenbaum, and Ford.

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Might there be a positive proportion of integers n with n^2 a value of φ?

Pollack & P (2013): No, the number of $n \le x$ with n^2 a φ-value is $O(x/(\log x)^{0.0063})$. The same goes for σ.

Unsolved: Could possibly almost all even squares be λ-values??

Idea of the proof that a positive proportion of even numbers are values of $s(n) = \sigma(n) - n$ (Luca & P, 2014):

Consider even numbers n with several constraints:

- n is deficient (means that $s(n) < n$);
- $n = pqrk \in [\frac{1}{2}x, x]$ with $p > q > r > k$ and p, q, r primes;
- $k \le x^{1/60}, \quad r \in [x^{1/15}, x^{1/12}], \quad q \in [x^{7/20}, x^{11/30}]$;
- n is "normal".

If n satisfies these conditions, then $s(n) \leq x$ is even.

Let $r(s)$ denote the number of representations of s as $s(n)$ from such numbers n.

We have $\sum_s r(s) \gg x$.

The trick then is to show that $\sum_s r(s)^2 \ll x$.

For this, the sieve is useful. Stay tuned for details on my home page.

What's next with $s(n)$?

Possibly a conjecture of Erdős, Granville, P, & Spiro (1990) is now tractable:
If $\mathcal{A}$ is a set of density 0, then $s^{-1}(\mathcal{A})$ has density 0.

The same conjecture should hold for the function $s_\varphi(n) := n - \varphi(n)$.

(Our proof that the range of s contains a positive proportion of evens, shows this as well for the range of s_φ, a fact not previously known.)

MERCI & THANK YOU