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$$\sigma((\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_r), (\beta_1, \dots, \beta_s)) = (\alpha_1\beta_1, \dots, \alpha_1\beta_s, \alpha_2\beta_1, \dots, \alpha_2\beta_s, \dots, \alpha_r\beta_s)$$

is a projective morphism establishing an isomorphism between $\mathbf{P}_{r-1} \times \mathbf{P}_{s-1}$ and the image $\mathcal{S} = \sigma(\mathbf{P}_{r-1} \times \mathbf{P}_{s-1})$. [4, Ex I.2.14] Once I label the coordinates of \mathbf{P}_{rs-1} as $(z_{11}, \dots, z_{1s}, z_{21}, \dots, z_{2s}, \dots, z_{rs})$, \mathcal{S} can be identified with the algebraic subset of \mathbf{P}_{rs-1} cut out by the polynomials

$$\{z_{ij}z_{pq} - z_{iq}z_{pj} \mid 1 \leq i, p \leq r \text{ and } 1 \leq j, q \leq s\}.$$

\mathcal{S} is an algebraic subvariety of \mathbf{P}_{rs-1} , of dimension $r + s - 2$.

In \mathbf{P}_{rs-1} we can also consider the algebraic subvariety \mathcal{T} cut out by the polynomials $\{\sum_{ij} z_{ij} \lambda_k^{ij} \mid 1 \leq k \leq t\}$. Since \mathcal{T} is cut out by $t \leq r + s - 2$ equations and $\dim \mathcal{S} = r + s - 2$, \mathcal{S} and \mathcal{T} have a nonempty intersection, all of whose components have dimension at least $(r+s-2) - t$, which is ≥ 0 . [4, p. 48] However, any intersection point of \mathcal{S} and \mathcal{T} corresponds to a pair of points $(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_r) \in \mathbf{P}_{r-1}, (\beta_1, \dots, \beta_s) \in \mathbf{P}_{s-1}$ satisfying (*). The corresponding points $a = \sum \alpha_i a_i \in A, b = \sum \beta_j b_j \in B$ are nonzero, yet $\phi(a, b) = 0$. Since this contradicts the bi-injectivity of ϕ , I have shown that

$$\dim C \geq r + s - 1.$$

□

The assumption that K is algebraically closed was only needed to guarantee that $\mathcal{S} \cap \mathcal{T}$, which by dimension theory corresponds locally to a proper ideal, was nonempty. Hilbert's Nullstellensatz shows that any proper ideal in a polynomial ring over an algebraically closed field cuts out at least one point.

2. A BRIEF RESUME OF DIVISORS ON CURVES

In this section, I will establish notation for divisors, and state the Riemann-Roch theorem. Let C be a nonsingular projective algebraic curve defined over an algebraically closed field K . C is contained in some projective space \mathbf{P}_N over K , and a (closed) *point* of C is any closed point (p_0, \dots, p_N) of \mathbf{P}_N at which all the polynomials cutting out C vanish. The *group of divisors on C* is the free abelian group generated by the points of C . Any divisor can be written in the form

$$N = \sum n_p \cdot P$$

where the n_p are integers, almost all zero. The *degree* of N is the integer $\deg N = \sum n_p$. The divisor N is *effective* if all the n_p are ≥ 0 ; this is written as $N \succ 0$. I write $D \succ E$ to mean $D - E \succ 0$.

To any function f on C one can associate a divisor $(f) = \sum \text{ord}_P(f) \cdot P$, where $\text{ord}_P(f)$ is the order of zero or pole of f at P . For any function f , the divisor (f) has degree 0. The divisors D, E are *linearly equivalent*, denoted by $D \sim E$, if for some function f , $D - E = (f)$. To a divisor D on C one can associate a set of functions on C ,

$$L(D) = \{\text{functions } f \text{ on } C \mid (f) + D > 0\} \cup \{0\}.$$

Then $L(D)$ is a K -vector space of dimension $l(D)$; the set $|D| = \{\text{divisors } E \sim D \mid E > 0\}$ of the divisors $(f) + D$ corresponding to functions f in $L(D)$ is the *linear system* associated to D . If $\{f_0, \dots, f_n\}$ is a basis of $L(D)$, then $|D|$ can be identified with \mathbf{P}_n by associating the divisor

$$(a_0 f_0 + \dots + a_n f_n) + D$$

to the triple (a_0, \dots, a_n) ; one writes $\dim |D|$ for the dimension of this projective space. To define $\dim |D|$ intrinsically, notice that $\dim |D| \geq r$ if and only if, for all points P_1, \dots, P_r in C , there is a divisor E in $|D|$ of the form $E = P_1 + \dots + P_r + Q$, with Q effective. Any such divisor E is necessarily effective and linearly equivalent to D , and has support containing each P_i . (In fact, since $\dim |D| \geq r$ there is a linearly independent set $\{f_0, \dots, f_r\}$ of functions in $L(D)$. One can choose E of the form $E = D + (\alpha_0 f_0 + \dots + \alpha_r f_r)$ for some $\alpha_0, \dots, \alpha_r \in K$.)

If $D \sim E$, then $|D| = |E|$, so $\dim |D| = \dim |E|$, and $L(D)$ is isomorphic to $L(E)$. Since for any function f on C $\deg(f) = 0$, also $\deg D = \deg E$. In particular, if $\deg D < 0$ then $|D|$ is empty, and $L(D) = \{0\}$.

Definition. The curve C admits a g_n^r if there exists a divisor D on C of degree n , and with $\dim |D| = r$. We call $|D|$ the g_n^r defined by D .

Notice that if D defines a g_n^r and $E \sim D$, then E defines the same g_n^r . Yet a curve may admit several distinct g_n^r 's if it contains non-linearly equivalent divisors all defining g_n^r 's. To explain the notation, assume that $L(D)$ has basis (f_0, \dots, f_r) . Then the map

$$P \rightarrow (f_0(P), \dots, f_r(P))$$

is a rational map from C into \mathbf{P}_r , defined except at the common zeros of all the f_i (the “fixed points” of $|D|$); via this map, the pullback of every hyperplane in \mathbf{P}_r is a divisor on C of degree n . [4, II: 7.7 and 7.8.1]

The Riemann-Roch Theorem defines for each curve two invariants—a nonnegative integer g , the *genus*, and a divisor \mathcal{K} , the *canonical divisor* (determined only up to linear equivalence). [For a modern proof, cf. 4, Ch. IV.1; an elementary proof is given in 2].

THEOREM (Riemann-Roch). *Let C be a projective nonsingular algebraic curve. The genus of C is a nonnegative integer g . For all divisors D on C ,*

$$\dim |D| \geq \deg D - g.$$

If the strict inequality holds, D is special. For all special divisors D ,

$$\dim |D| = \deg D + 1 - g + \dim |\mathcal{K} - D|.$$

COROLLARY. $\deg \mathcal{K} = 2g - 2$; $\dim |\mathcal{K}| = g - 1$; and all divisors D of degree $> 2g - 2$ are nonspecial.

3. CLIFFORD'S THEOREM — THE ELEMENTARY PROOF

Clifford's Theorem complements Riemann-Roch by providing information about special divisors, which of necessity are of small degree. The theorem also gives a sufficient condition that the curve C is hyperelliptic. (The theorem owes its name to the appearance of its first part in [1].) The proof I give here is elementary; more typical modern proofs [e.g. 4, Ch. IV, section 5 and 3, Ch. 2, section 3] involve considering whether the canonical morphism $C \rightarrow \mathbf{P}_{g-1}$ defined by the canonical divisor \mathcal{K} is an embedding.

Definition. C is a *hyperelliptic* curve if its genus g is at least 2, and if C admits a g_2^1 .

Remarks.

1. C is hyperelliptic if and only if there is a rational map $C \rightarrow \mathbf{P}_1$ of degree 2.
2. This happens if and only if C has an (affine) equation of the form $y^2 = f(x)$.
3. Part (3) of Clifford's Theorem shows that a hyperelliptic curve has a unique g_2^1 . Contrast this to the case of an elliptic curve, where $g = 1$. Here any divisor of degree 2 defines a g_2^1 . Yet choosing distinct points P, Q one sees easily that the divisors $2P$ and $P + Q$ are not linearly equivalent, and so define distinct g_2^1 's.

THEOREM (Clifford). *Let C be a curve of genus g , and let D be an effective special divisor on C . Then*