

**Problem 11753**

(American Mathematical Monthly, Vol.121, January 2014)

Proposed by Prapanpong Pongsriam (Thailand).

Let  $f$  be a continuous map from  $[0, 1]$  to  $\mathbb{R}$  that is differentiable on  $(0, 1)$ , with  $f(0) = 0$  and  $f(1) = 1$ . Show that for each positive integer  $n$  there exist distinct numbers  $c_1, \dots, c_n$  in  $(0, 1)$  such that

$$\prod_{k=1}^n f'(c_k) = 1.$$

Solution proposed by Roberto Tauraso, Dipartimento di Matematica, Università di Roma "Tor Vergata", via della Ricerca Scientifica, 00133 Roma, Italy.

Assume that  $f$  is not identically equal to the identity map (otherwise the required property holds trivially), then  $|f(x) - x|$  attains a positive maximum value in some point  $t \in (0, 1)$ .

Let us consider the set  $D = f'((0, 1))$ . By the Mean Value Theorem,

$$b := \frac{f(t)}{t} = \frac{f(t) - f(0)}{t - 0} \in D \quad \text{and} \quad a := 1 - \frac{f(t) - t}{1 - t} = \frac{1 - t - (f(t) - t)}{1 - t} = \frac{f(1) - f(t)}{1 - t} \in D.$$

Note that  $b > 1$  and  $a < 1$  if  $f(t) > t$ , and  $b < 1$  and  $a > 1$  if  $f(t) < t$ . Hence by Darboux's Theorem, there exists  $r > 0$  such that  $(1 - r, 1 + r) \subset D$ . Moreover, for any  $y \in (1, 1 + r)$ , we have that  $1/y \in (1/(1 + r), 1) \subset (1 - r, 1)$ .

Finally select  $m := \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$  different numbers  $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_m \in (1, 1 + r)$  and let  $y_{m+k} := 1/y_k$  for  $k = 1, \dots, m$ . Take also  $y_n = 1$  if  $n$  is odd. Then  $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n$  are  $n$  different values in  $D$  and therefore there exist  $n$  different numbers  $c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n \in (0, 1)$ , such that  $f'(c_k) = y_k$  for  $k = 1, \dots, n$  and

$$\prod_{k=1}^n f'(c_k) = \prod_{k=1}^m \left( y_k \cdot \frac{1}{y_k} \right) = 1.$$

□