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▶ To cite this version:

Apoloniusz Tyszka. A common approach to the problem of the infinitude of twin primes, primes of the form n!+1, and primes of the form n!-1. 2018. hal-01614087v5

HAL Id: hal-01614087 https://hal.science/hal-01614087v5

Preprint submitted on 24 Mar 2018 (v5), last revised 20 Sep 2023 (v34)

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A common approach to the problem of the infinitude of twin primes, primes of the form n! + 1, and primes of the form n! - 1

Apoloniusz Tyszka March 24, 2018

Abstract

For a positive integer x, let $\Gamma(x)$ denote (x-1)!. Let $\operatorname{fact}^{-1}: \{1, 2, 6, 24, \ldots\} \to \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ denote the inverse function to the factorial function. For positive integers x and y, let $\operatorname{rem}(x,y)$ denote the remainder from dividing x by y. For a positive integer n, by a computation of length n we understand any sequence of terms x_1, \ldots, x_n such that x_1 is defined as the variable x, and for every integer $i \in \{2, \ldots, n\}$, x_i is defined as $\Gamma(x_{i-1})$, or $\operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_{i-1})$, or $\operatorname{rem}(x_{i-1}, x_{i-2})$ (only if $i \ge 3$ and x_{i-1} is defined as $\Gamma(x_{i-2})$). Let f(4) = 3, and let f(n+1) = f(n)! for every integer $n \ge 4$. For an integer $n \ge 4$, let Ψ_n denote the following statement: if a computation of length n returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for at most finitely many positive integers x, then every such x does not exceed f(n). We prove: (1) the statement Ψ_4 equivalently expresses that there are infinitely many primes of the form n! + 1; (2) the statement Ψ_6 implies that for infinitely many primes of the form n! + 1; (4) the statement Ψ_7 implies that there are infinitely many twin primes.

2010 Mathematics Subject Classification: 11A41, 68Q05.

Key words and phrases: computation of length n, prime numbers of the form n! + 1, prime numbers of the form n! - 1, prime numbers p such that p! + 1 is prime, twin prime conjecture.

For a positive integer x, let $\Gamma(x)$ denote (x-1)!. Let $fact^{-1}: \{1, 2, 6, 24, \ldots\} \to \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ denote the inverse function to the factorial function. For positive integers x and y, let rem(x, y) denote the remainder from dividing x by y.

Definition. For a positive integer n, by a computation of length n we understand any sequence of terms x_1, \ldots, x_n such that x_1 is defined as the variable x, and for every integer $i \in \{2, \ldots, n\}$, x_i is defined as $\Gamma(x_{i-1})$, or $\text{fact}^{-1}(x_{i-1})$, or $\text{rem}(x_{i-1}, x_{i-2})$ (only if $i \ge 3$ and x_{i-1} is defined as $\Gamma(x_{i-2})$).

Let f(4) = 3, and let f(n + 1) = f(n)! for every integer $n \ge 4$. For an integer $n \ge 4$, let Ψ_n denote the following statement: if a computation of length n returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for at most finitely many positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for at most finitely many positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for a most finitely many positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for a most finitely many positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n for an integer x_1, \ldots, x_n for all $x_1, \ldots, x_$

Lemma 1. For every positive integer n, there are only finitely many computations of length n.

Theorem 1. For every integer $n \ge 4$, the statement Ψ_n is true with an unknown integer bound that depends on n.

Proof. It follows from Lemma 1.

Let \mathcal{P} denote the set of prime numbers.

Lemma 2. ([4, pp. 214–215]) . For every positive integer x, rem($\Gamma(x)$, x) $\in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $x \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$.

Theorem 2. For every integer $n \ge 4$ and for every positive integer x, the following computation \mathcal{H}_n

$$\begin{cases} x_1 &:= x \\ \forall i \in \{2, \dots, n-3\} \ x_i &:= \text{fact}^{-1}(x_{i-1}) \\ x_{n-2} &:= \Gamma(x_{n-3}) \\ x_{n-1} &:= \Gamma(x_{n-2}) \\ x_n &:= \text{rem}(x_{n-1}, x_{n-2}) \end{cases}$$

returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_n if and only if x = f(n).

Proof. We make three observations.

Observation 1. If $x_{n-3} = 3$, then $x_1, \ldots, x_{n-3} \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ and $x = x_1 = f(n)$. If x = f(n), then $x_1, \ldots, x_{n-3} \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ and $x_{n-3} = 3$. Hence, $x_{n-2} = \Gamma(x_{n-3}) = 2$ and $x_{n-1} = \Gamma(x_{n-2}) = 1$. Therefore, $x_n = \text{rem}(x_{n-1}, x_{n-2}) = 1$.

Observation 2. If $x_{n-3} = 2$, then $x = x_1 = \ldots = x_{n-3} = 2$. If x = 2, then $x_1 = \ldots = x_{n-3} = 2$. Hence, $x_{n-2} = \Gamma(x_{n-3}) = 1$ and $x_{n-1} = \Gamma(x_{n-2}) = 1$. Therefore, $x_n = \text{rem}(x_{n-1}, x_{n-2}) = 0 \notin \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$.

Observation 3. If $x_{n-3} = 1$, then $x_{n-2} = \Gamma(x_{n-3}) = 1$. Hence, $x_{n-1} = \Gamma(x_{n-2}) = 1$. Therefore, $x_n = \text{rem}(x_{n-1}, x_{n-2}) = 0 \notin \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$.

Observations 1–3 cover the case when $x_{n-3} \in \{1, 2, 3\}$. If $x_{n-3} \ge 4$, then $x_{n-2} = \Gamma(x_{n-3})$ is greater than 4 and composite. By Lemma 2, $x_n = \text{rem}(x_{n-1}, x_{n-2}) = \text{rem}(\Gamma(x_{n-2}), x_{n-2}) = 0 \notin \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$.

Corollary 1. For every integer $n \ge 4$, the bound f(n) in the statement Ψ_n cannot be decreased.

Lemma 3. (Wilson's theorem, [2, p. 89]). For every positive integer x, x divides $\Gamma(x) + 1$ if and only if $x \in \{1\} \cup \mathcal{P}$.

Corollary 2. If $x \in \mathcal{P}$, then $rem(\Gamma(x), x) = x - 1$.

Lemma 4. For every positive integer x, the following computation \mathcal{A}

$$\begin{cases} x_1 &:= x \\ x_2 &:= \Gamma(x_1) \\ x_3 &:= \text{rem}(x_2, x_1) \\ x_4 &:= \text{fact}^{-1}(x_3) \end{cases}$$

returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_4 if and only if x = 4 or x is a prime number of the form n! + 1.

Proof. For an integer $i \in \{1, ..., 4\}$, let A_i denote the set of positive integers x such that the first i instructions of the computation \mathcal{A} returns positive integers $x_1, ..., x_i$. We show that

$$A_4 = \{4\} \cup (\{n! + 1 : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} \cap \mathcal{P}) \tag{1}$$

2

For every positive integer x, the terms x_1 and x_2 belong to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. By Lemma 2, the term x_3 (which equals $\operatorname{rem}(\Gamma(x), x)$) belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $x \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$. Hence, $A_3 = \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$. If x = 4, then $x_1, \ldots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. Hence, $4 \in A_4$. If $x \in \mathcal{P}$, then Corollary 2 implies that $x_3 = \operatorname{rem}(\Gamma(x), x) = x - 1 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. Therefore, for every $x \in \mathcal{P}$, the term $x_4 = \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3)$ belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $x \in \{n! + 1 : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\}$. This proves equality (1).

It is conjectured that there are infinitely many primes of the form n! + 1, see [1, p. 443] and [5].

Theorem 3. The statement Ψ_4 implies that the set of primes of the form n! + 1 is infinite.

Proof. The number 3! + 1 = 7 is prime. By Lemma 4, for x = 7 the computation \mathcal{A} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_4 . Since x = 7 > 3 = f(4), the statement Ψ_4 guarantees that the computation \mathcal{A} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_4 for infinitely many positive integers x. By Lemma 4, there are infinitely many primes of the form n! + 1.

Lemma 5. *If* $x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1\}$, *then* fact⁻¹($\Gamma(x)$) = x - 1.

Theorem 4. If the set of primes of the form n! + 1 is infinite, then the statement Ψ_4 is true.

Proof. There exist exactly 10 computations of length 4 that differ from \mathcal{H}_4 and \mathcal{A} , see Table 1. For every such computation \mathcal{F}_i , we determine the set S_i of all positive integers x such that the computation \mathcal{F}_i outputs positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_4 on input x. We omit 10 easy proofs which use Lemmas 2 and 5. The sets S_i are infinite, see Table 1. This completes the proof.

| \mathcal{F}_1 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \Gamma(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} = S_1$ |
|--------------------|--|--|--|---|
| \mathcal{F}_2 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := fact^{-1}(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \iff x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} = S_2$ |
| \mathcal{H}_4 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{rem}(x_3, x_2)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \iff$ $x = 3$ |
| \mathcal{F}_3 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := fact^{-1}(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \Gamma(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} = S_3$ |
| \mathcal{F}_4 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \{1\} \cup \{n! + 1 : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} = S_4$ |
| \mathcal{F}_5 | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \operatorname{rem}(x_2, x_1)$ | $x_4 := \Gamma(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow x \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P} = S_5$ |
| \mathcal{A} | $x_2 := \Gamma(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \operatorname{rem}(x_2, x_1)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \{4\} \cup (\{n! + 1 : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} \cap \mathcal{P})$ |
| \mathcal{F}_6 | $x_2 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \Gamma(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \iff$ $x \in \{n! : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} = S_6$ |
| \mathcal{F}_7 | $x_2 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \{n! : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} = S_7$ |
| \mathcal{F}_8 | $x_2 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \Gamma(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{rem}(x_3, x_2)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \{4!\} \cup \{p! : p \in \mathcal{P}\} = S_8$ |
| \mathcal{F}_9 | $x_2 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \Gamma(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \Longleftrightarrow $ $x \in \{(n!)! : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} = S_9$ |
| \mathcal{F}_{10} | $x_2 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_1)$ | $x_3 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_2)$ | $x_4 := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3)$ | $x_1, \dots, x_4 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \iff$ $x \in \{((n!)!)! : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} = S_{10}$ |

Table 1: 12 computations of length 4, $x_1 := x$, $x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$

Hypothesis. The statements Ψ_4, \ldots, Ψ_7 are true.

Lemma 6. For every positive integer x, the following computation \mathcal{B}

$$\begin{cases} x_1 &:= x \\ x_2 &:= \Gamma(x_1) \\ x_3 &:= \operatorname{rem}(x_2, x_1) \\ x_4 &:= \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_3) \\ x_5 &:= \Gamma(x_4) \\ x_6 &:= \operatorname{rem}(x_5, x_4) \end{cases}$$

returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 if and only if $x \in \{4\} \cup \{p! + 1 : p \in \mathcal{P}\} \cap \mathcal{P}$

Proof. For an integer $i \in \{1, ..., 6\}$, let B_i denote the set of positive integers x such that the first i instructions of the computation \mathcal{B} returns positive integers $x_1, ..., x_i$. Since the computations \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{B} have the same first four instructions, the equality $B_i = A_i$ holds for every $i \in \{1, ..., 4\}$. In particular,

$$B_4 = \{4\} \cup (\{n! + 1 : n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}\} \cap \mathcal{P})$$

We show that

$$B_6 = \{4\} \cup (\{p! + 1: p \in \mathcal{P}\} \cap \mathcal{P}) \tag{2}$$

If x = 4, then $x_1, \ldots, x_6 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. Hence, $4 \in B_6$. Let $x \in \mathcal{P}$, and let x = n! + 1, where $n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. Hence, $n \neq 4$. Corollary 2 implies that $x_3 = \text{rem}(\Gamma(x), x) = x - 1 = n!$. Hence, $x_4 = \text{fact}^{-1}(x_3) = n$ and $x_5 = \Gamma(x_4) = \Gamma(n) \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. By Lemma 2, the term x_6 (which equals $\text{rem}(\Gamma(n), n)$) belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $n \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$. This proves equality (2) as $n \neq 4$. \square

Theorem 5. The statement Ψ_6 implies that for infinitely many primes p the number p! + 1 is prime.

Proof. The numbers 11 and 11! + 1 are prime, see [1, p. 441] and [7]. By Lemma 6, for x = 11! + 1 the computation \mathcal{B} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 . Since x = 11! + 1 > 6! = f(6), the statement Ψ_6 guarantees that the computation \mathcal{B} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 for infinitely many positive integers x. By Lemma 6, for infinitely many primes p the number p! + 1 is prime.

Lemma 7. For every positive integer x, the following computation C

$$\begin{cases} x_1 & := x \\ x_2 & := \Gamma(x_1) \\ x_3 & := \Gamma(x_2) \\ x_4 & := fact^{-1}(x_3) \\ x_5 & := \Gamma(x_4) \\ x_6 & := rem(x_5, x_4) \end{cases}$$

returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 if and only if (x-1)! - 1 is prime.

Proof. For an integer $i \in \{1, ..., 6\}$, let C_i denote the set of positive integers x such that the first i instructions of the computation C returns positive integers $x_1, ..., x_i$. If $x \in \{1, 2, 3\}$, then $x_6 = 0$. Therefore, $C_6 \subseteq \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3\}$. By Lemma 5, for every integer $x \ge 4$, $x_4 = (x - 1)! - 1$, $x_5 = \Gamma((x - 1)! - 1)$, and $x_1, ..., x_5 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$. By Lemma 2, for every integer $x \ge 4$,

$$x_6 = \text{rem}(\Gamma((x-1)! - 1), (x-1)! - 1)$$

belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $(x-1)! - 1 \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$. The last condition equivalently expresses that (x-1)! - 1 is prime as $(x-1)! - 1 \ge 5$ for every integer $x \ge 4$. Hence,

$$C_6 = (\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3\}) \cap \{x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3\} : (x - 1)! - 1 \in \mathcal{P}\} = \{x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} : (x - 1)! - 1 \in \mathcal{P}\}$$

It is conjectured that there are infinitely many primes of the form n! - 1, see [1, p. 443] and [6].

Theorem 6. The statement Ψ_6 implies that there are infinitely many primes of the form x! - 1.

Proof. The number (975 - 1)! - 1 is prime, see [1, p. 441] and [6]. By Lemma 7, for x = 975 the computation C returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 . Since x = 975 > 720 = f(6), the statement Ψ_6 guarantees that the computation C returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_6 for infinitely many positive integers x. By Lemma 7, the set $\{x \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} : (x-1)! - 1 \in \mathcal{P}\}$ is infinite. \square

Lemma 8. For every positive integer x, the following computation \mathcal{D}

$$\begin{cases} x_1 & := x \\ x_2 & := \Gamma(x_1) \\ x_3 & := \operatorname{rem}(x_2, x_1) \\ x_4 & := \Gamma(x_3) \\ x_5 & := \operatorname{fact}^{-1}(x_4) \\ x_6 & := \Gamma(x_5) \\ x_7 & := \operatorname{rem}(x_6, x_5) \end{cases}$$

returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_7 if and only if both x and x-2 are prime.

Proof. For an integer $i \in \{1, ..., 7\}$, let D_i denote the set of positive integers x such that the first i instructions of the computation \mathcal{D} returns positive integers $x_1, ..., x_i$. If x = 1, then $x_3 = 0$. Hence, $D_7 \subseteq D_3 \subseteq \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1\}$. If $x \in \{2, 3, 4\}$, then $x_7 = 0$. Therefore,

$$D_7 \subseteq (\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1\}) \cap (\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 2, 3, 4\}) = \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$$

By Lemma 2, for every integer $x \ge 5$, the term x_3 (which equals $\operatorname{rem}(\Gamma(x), x)$) belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $x \in \mathcal{P} \setminus \{2, 3\}$. By Corollary 2, for every $x \in \mathcal{P} \setminus \{2, 3\}$, $x_3 = x - 1 \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3\}$. By Lemma 5, for every $x \in \mathcal{P} \setminus \{2, 3\}$, the terms x_4 and x_5 belong to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ and $x_5 = x_3 - 1 = x - 2$. By Lemma 2, for every $x \in \mathcal{P} \setminus \{2, 3\}$, the term x_7 (which equals $\operatorname{rem}(\Gamma(x_5), x_5)$) belongs to $\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\}$ if and only if $x_5 = x - 2 \in \{4\} \cup \mathcal{P}$. From these facts, we obtain that

$$D_7 = (\mathbb{N} \setminus \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}) \cap (\mathcal{P} \setminus \{2, 3\}) \cap (\{6\} \cup \{p + 2 : p \in \mathcal{P}\}) = \{p \in \mathcal{P} : p - 2 \in \mathcal{P}\}$$

A twin prime is a prime number that is either 2 less or 2 more than another prime number. The twin prime conjecture states that there are infinitely many twin primes, see [3, p. 39].

Theorem 7. The statement Ψ_7 implies that there are infinitely many twin primes.

Proof. Harvey Dubner proved that the numbers $459 \cdot 2^{8529} - 1$ and $459 \cdot 2^{8529} + 1$ are prime, see [8, p. 87]. By Lemma 8, for $x = 459 \cdot 2^{8529} + 1$ the computation \mathcal{D} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_7 . Since x > 720! = f(7), the statement Ψ_7 guarantees that the computation \mathcal{D} returns positive integers x_1, \ldots, x_7 for infinitely many positive int

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