

# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

**ON A CHARACTERISTIC PROPERTY OF FINITE SETS**

G. KUREPA

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1. **Introduction.** There are several equivalent definitions of finite sets [2], [5]. The purpose of this note is to give an equivalent property of finite sets in terms of ramifications of sets.

DEFINITION 1. A partially ordered set  $S \equiv (S; \leq)$  is said to be *ramified* or to satisfy the *ramification condition* ([3], pp. 69, 127; cf. 4) provided that for every  $x \in S$  the set  $(-\infty, x)$  of all  $y \in S$  satisfying  $y < x$  is totally ordered (that is, contains no distinct noncomparable points). If the points of a ramified set  $(S; \leq)$  are the same as these of a set  $M$ , one says that  $(S; \leq)$  is a *ramification of  $M$* .

DEFINITION 2. A *chain (anti-chain)* of a partially ordered set  $(S; \leq)$  is any subset of  $S$  containing no distinct incomparable (comparable) points. Every set containing a single point is considered both as chain and as anti-chain.

DEFINITION 3. For a partially ordered set  $(S; \leq) = S$ , we denote by

$$(1) \quad O(S) \quad \text{or} \quad OS$$

the system of all *maximal* chains contained in  $S$ ; analogously,

$$(2) \quad \bar{O}(S) \quad \text{or} \quad \bar{O}S$$

denotes the system of all maximal anti-chains of  $S$ .

THEOREM. *In order that a nonvoid set  $S$  be finite, it is necessary and sufficient that for every ramification  $T(S)$  of  $S$  the relations*

$$(3) \quad M \in OT(S), \quad A \in \bar{O}T(S)$$

*imply*

$$(4) \quad M \cap A \neq \Lambda \quad (\Lambda \equiv \text{vacuous set}).$$

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2. **The condition is necessary.** Otherwise, there would be a finite set  $S$ , a ramification  $T(S)$ , a set  $M \in OT(S)$ , and a set  $A \in \overline{OT}(S)$ , such that

$$(5) \quad M \cap A = \Lambda.$$

Now,  $A$  is a maximal anti-chain of  $T(S)$ ; consequently, for every  $x \in T(S)$  there is a point  $a(x) \in A$  such that the set  $\{x, a(x)\}$  is a chain of  $T(S)$ . (Otherwise, the set  $A \cup \{x\}$  would be an anti-chain greater than the maximal anti-chain  $A$ .)

In particular, for any  $x \in M \in OT(S)$ , the points  $x, a(x)$  are comparable. We say that

$$(6) \quad x < a(x).$$

Since  $M$  is a maximal chain of the ramified set  $T(S)$ ,  $M$  is an initial portion of  $T(S)$ ; that is,  $M$ , which contains the point  $x$  contains also every point of  $T(S)$  preceding  $x$ . In particular, if (6) did not hold then  $M$  would contain also  $a(x) \leq x$ ; consequently,  $a(x) \in M \cap A$ , contrary to the assumption (5).

Thus if (5) held then for every  $x \in M$  one would have (6); but  $M$ , as a non-void subset of the finite set  $T(S)$ , would have a terminal point, say  $l$ ;  $l$  would be a final point of  $T(S)$ , too, contrary to the relation (6) for  $x = l$ . Thus the relation (5) is not possible.

3. **The condition is sufficient.** If for every ramification  $T(S)$  the relations (3) imply (4), then the set  $S$  is finite. Otherwise, the set  $S$  would be infinite; consequently, there would be a one-to-one correspondence  $\phi$  of the set  $N$  of all natural numbers into  $S$ . Now, let us define the ordering  $(S; \leq)$  by transplantation of a certain order of the set  $N$ . We shall order  $N$  according to the scheme<sup>1</sup>,

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 1 & \longrightarrow & 3 & \longrightarrow & 5 & \longrightarrow & 7 & \longrightarrow & \dots \\ & \searrow & & \searrow & & \searrow & & \searrow & \\ 2 & & 4 & & 6 & & 8 & & \dots \end{array}$$

That is, the set  $2N - 1$  of all  $2n - 1$  ( $n \in N$ ) is ordered as in the natural order; for every  $n \in N$ , the set of numbers preceding  $2n$  consists of the numbers  $2\nu - 1$  ( $\nu = 1, 2, \dots, n$ ); all other couples of natural integers are incomparable, by definition. In the ramified set  $N_0$  so obtained one sees that  $2N \in \overline{ON}_0$ , that  $2N - 1 \in ON_0$ , and that the sets  $2N, 2N - 1$  are disjoint. Now, the set  $S$  being infinite by hypothesis, there is a one-to-one mapping  $\phi$  of  $N = N_0$  into  $S$ .

<sup>1</sup>For the definition of schemes or diagrams of partly ordered sets see Birkhoff [1, p.6].

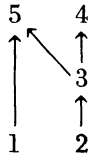
That enables us to define the order in  $S$  by transporting the order of  $N_0$  into  $S$  so that, on the one hand, the mapping  $\phi$  is a similitude between  $N_0$  and  $\phi N_0 \subseteq S$ , and so that, on the other hand, no point of  $\phi N_0$  is comparable to any point of  $S \setminus \phi N_0$ , and so that  $S \setminus \phi N_0$  contains no comparable couple of distinct points.

It is obvious that the set  $(S; \leq)$  is ramified, that the set  $\phi(2N - 1)$  is a maximal chain of  $(S; \leq)$ , and that the set  $A = \phi(2N) \cup (S \setminus \phi N)$  is a maximal anti-chain of  $(S; \leq)$ .

According to (4), the set  $A \cap \phi(2N - 1)$  would be nonvacuous, contrary to the fact that the sets  $A, \phi(2N - 1)$  are disjoint.

Thus, the proof of the theorem is completed.

**4. Observation.** We observe that the condition of ramification in the statement of the theorem is essential. Namely, if we consider the partially ordered set  $S_1 = \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$  with the diagram



it is obvious that  $\{2, 3, 5\}$  is a maximal chain of  $S$ , that  $\{1, 4\}$  is a maximal anti-chain of  $S$ , and that the set  $\{2, 3, 5\}$  does not intersect the set  $\{1, 4\}$ .

**5. Questions.** In connection with the statement of the theorem it is interesting to consider the following two questions:

QUESTION 1. Is there a partially ordered nonvacuous set  $S$  such that there is no maximal anti-chain  $A \in \overline{OS}$  satisfying  $A \cap M \neq \Lambda$  for every maximal chain  $M \in OS$ ?

QUESTION 2. Is there a partially ordered nonvacuous set  $S$  such that there is no maximal chain  $M \in OS$  satisfying  $M \cap A \neq \Lambda$  for every maximal anti-chain  $A \in \overline{OS}$ ?

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Lars V. Ahlfors, <i>Remarks on the Neumann-Poincaré integral equation</i> . . . . .	271
Leonard P. Burton, <i>Oscillation theorems for the solutions of linear, nonhomogeneous, second-order differential systems</i> . . . . .	281
Paul Civin, <i>Multiplicative closure and the Walsh functions</i> . . . . .	291
James Michael Gardner Fell and Alfred Tarski, <i>On algebras whose factor algebras are Boolean</i> . . . . .	297
Paul Joseph Kelly and Lowell J. Paige, <i>Symmetric perpendicularity in Hilbert geometries</i> . . . . .	319
G. Kurepa, <i>On a characteristic property of finite sets</i> . . . . .	323
Joseph Lehner, <i>A diophantine property of the Fuchsian groups</i> . . . . .	327
Donald Alan Norton, <i>Groups of orthogonal row-latin squares</i> . . . . .	335
R. S. Phillips, <i>On the generation of semigroups of linear operators</i> . . . . .	343
G. Piranian, <i>Uniformly accessible Jordan curves through large sets of relative harmonic measure zero</i> . . . . .	371
C. T. Rajagopal, <i>Note on some Tauberian theorems of O. Szűsz</i> . . . . .	377
Halsey Lawrence Royden, Jr., <i>A modification of the Neumann-Poincaré method for multiply connected regions</i> . . . . .	385
George H. Seifert, <i>A third order irregular boundary value problem and the associated series</i> . . . . .	395
Herbert E. Vaughan, <i>Well-ordered subsets and maximal members of ordered sets</i> . . . . .	407
Hans F. Weinberger, <i>An optimum problem in the Weinstein method for eigenvalues</i> . . . . .	413
Shigeki Yano, <i>Note on Fourier analysis. XXXI. Cesàro summability of Fourier series</i> . . . . .	419