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**ON THE MAXIMAL MONOTONICITY OF SUBDIFFERENTIAL  
MAPPINGS**

RALPH TYRRELL ROCKAFELLAR

## ON THE MAXIMAL MONOTONICITY OF SUBDIFFERENTIAL MAPPINGS

R. T. ROCKAFELLAR

**The subdifferential of a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on a Banach space is a maximal monotone operator, as well as a maximal cyclically monotone operator. This result was announced by the author in a previous paper, but the argument given there was incomplete; the result is proved here by a different method, which is simpler in the case of reflexive Banach spaces. At the same time, a new fact is established about the relationship between the subdifferential of a convex function and the subdifferential of its conjugate in the nonreflexive case.**

Let  $E$  be a real Banach space with dual  $E^*$ . A *proper convex function* on  $E$  is a function  $f$  from  $E$  to  $(-\infty, +\infty]$ , not identically  $+\infty$ , such that

$$f((1 - \lambda)x + \lambda y) \leq (1 - \lambda)f(x) + \lambda f(y)$$

whenever  $x \in E$ ,  $y \in E$  and  $0 < \lambda < 1$ . The *subdifferential* of such a function  $f$  is the (generally multivalued) mapping  $\partial f: E \rightarrow E^*$  defined by

$$\partial f(x) = \{x^* \in E^* \mid f(y) \geq f(x) + \langle y - x, x^* \rangle, \forall y \in E\},$$

where  $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$  denotes the canonical pairing between  $E$  and  $E^*$ .

A multivalued mapping  $T: E \rightarrow E^*$  is said to be a *monotone operator* if

$$\langle x_0 - x_1, x_0^* - x_1^* \rangle \geq 0 \quad \text{whenever} \quad x_0^* \in T(x_0), x_1^* \in T(x_1).$$

It is said to be a *cyclically monotone operator* if

$$\begin{aligned} \langle x_0 - x_1, x_0^* \rangle + \cdots + \langle x_{n-1} - x_n, x_{n-1}^* \rangle + \langle x_n - x_0, x_n^* \rangle \geq 0 \\ \text{whenever} \quad x_i^* \in T(x_i), i = 0, \dots, n. \end{aligned}$$

It is called a *maximal monotone operator* (resp. *maximal cyclically monotone operator*) if, in addition, its graph

$$G(T) = \{(x, x^*) \mid x^* \in T(x)\} \subset E \times E^*$$

is not properly contained in the graph of any other monotone (resp. cyclically monotone) operator  $T': E \rightarrow E^*$ .

This note is concerned with proving the following theorems.

**THEOREM A.** *If  $f$  is a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$ , then  $\partial f$  is a maximal monotone operator from  $E$  to  $E^*$ .*

**THEOREM B.** *Let  $T: E \rightarrow E^*$  be a multivalued mapping. In order that there exist a lower semicontinuous proper convex function  $f$  on  $E$  such that  $T = \partial f$ , it is necessary and sufficient that  $T$  be a maximal cyclically monotone operator. Moreover, in this case  $T$  determines  $f$  uniquely up to an additive constant.*

These theorems have previously been stated by us in [4] as Theorem 4 and Theorem 3, respectively. However, a gap occurs in the proofs in [4], as has kindly been brought to our attention recently by H. Brézis. (It is not clear whether formula (4.7) in the proof of Theorem 3 of [4] will hold for  $\varepsilon$  sufficiently small, because  $x_i^*$  depends on  $\varepsilon$  and could conceivably increase unboundedly in norm as  $\varepsilon$  decreases to 0. The same oversight appears in the penultimate sentence of the proof of Theorem 4 of [4]). In view of this oversight, the proofs in [4] are incomplete; further arguments must be given before the maximality in Theorem A, the maximality in the necessary condition in Theorem B, and the uniqueness in Theorem B can be regarded as established. Such arguments will be given here.

**2. Preliminary result.** Let  $f$  be a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$ . (For proper convex functions, lower semicontinuity in the strong topology of  $E$  is the same as lower semicontinuity in the weak topology.) The conjugate of  $f$  is the function  $f^*$  on  $E^*$  defined by

$$(2.1) \quad f^*(x^*) = \sup \{ \langle x, x^* \rangle - f(x) \mid x \in E \} .$$

It is known that  $f^*$  is a weak\* lower semicontinuous (and hence strongly lower semicontinuous) proper convex function on  $E^*$ , and that

$$(2.2) \quad f(x) + f^*(x^*) - \langle x, x^* \rangle \geq 0, \quad \forall x \in E, \quad \forall x^* \in E^* ,$$

with equality if and only if  $x^* \in \partial f(x)$

(see Moreau [3, § 6]). The subdifferential  $\partial f^*$ , which is a multivalued mapping from  $E^*$  to the bidual  $E^{**}$ , can be compared with the subdifferential  $\partial f$  from  $E$  to  $E^*$ , when  $E$  is regarded in the canonical way as a weak\*\* dense subspace of  $E^{**}$  (the weak\*\* topology being the weak topology induced on  $E^{**}$  by  $E^*$ ). Facts about the relationship between  $\partial f^*$  and  $\partial f$  will be used below in proving Theorems A and B.

In terms of the conjugate  $f^{**}$  of  $f^*$ , which is the weak\*\* lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E^{**}$  defined by

$$(2.3) \quad f^{**}(x^{**}) = \sup \{ \langle x^{**}, x^* \rangle - f^*(x^*) \mid x^* \in E^* \},$$

we have, as in (2.2),

$$(2.4) \quad f^{**}(x^{**}) + f^*(x^*) - \langle x^{**}, x^* \rangle \geq 0, \quad \forall x^{**} \in E^{**}, \forall x^* \in E^*,$$

with equality if and only if  $x^{**} \in \partial f^*(x^*)$ .

Moreover, the restriction of  $f^{**}$  to  $E$  is  $f$  (see [3, § 6]). Thus, if  $E$  is reflexive, we can identify  $f^{**}$  with  $f$ , and it follows from (2.2) and (2.4) that  $\partial f^*$  is just the “inverse” of  $\partial f$ , in other words one has  $x \in \partial f^*(x^*)$  if and only if  $x^* \in \partial f(x)$ . If  $E$  is not reflexive, the relationship between  $\partial f^*$  and  $\partial f$  is more complicated, but  $\partial f^*$  and  $\partial f$  still completely determine each other, according to the following result.

**PROPOSITION 1.** *Let  $f$  be a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$ , and let  $x^* \in E^*$  and  $x^{**} \in E^{**}$ . Then  $x^{**} \in \partial f^*(x^*)$  if and only if there exists a net  $\{x_i^* \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E^*$  converging to  $x^*$  in the strong topology and a bounded net  $\{x_i \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E$  (with the same partially ordered index set  $I$ ) converging to  $x^{**}$  in the weak\*\* topology, such that  $x_i^* \in \partial f(x_i)$  for every  $i \in I$ .*

*Proof.* The sufficiency of the condition is easy to prove. Given nets as described, we have

$$f(x_i) + f^*(x_i^*) = \langle x_i, x_i^* \rangle, \quad \forall i \in I$$

by (2.2), where  $f(x_i) = f^{**}(x_i)$ . Then by the lower semicontinuity of  $f^*$  and  $f^{**}$  we have

$$f^{**}(x^{**}) + f^*(x^*) \leq \liminf \{ f^{**}(x_i) + f^*(x_i^*) \} \\ = \lim \langle x_i, x_i^* \rangle = \langle x^{**}, x^* \rangle.$$

(The last equality makes use of the boundedness of the norms  $\|x_i\|$ ,  $i \in I$ .) Thus  $x^{**} \in \partial f^*(x^*)$  by (2.4).

To prove the necessity of the condition, we demonstrate first that, given any  $x^{**} \in E^{**}$ , there exists a bounded net  $\{y_i \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E$  such that  $y_i$  converges to  $x^{**}$  in the weak\*\* topology and

$$(2.5) \quad \lim f(y_i) = f^{**}(x^{**}).$$

Consider  $f + h_\alpha$ , where  $\alpha$  is a positive real number and  $h_\alpha$  is the lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$  defined by

$$(2.6) \quad h_\alpha(x) = 0 \quad \text{if} \quad \|x\| \leq \alpha, \quad h_\alpha(x) = +\infty \quad \text{if} \quad \|x\| > \alpha.$$

Assuming that  $\alpha$  is sufficiently large, there exist points  $x$  at which  $f$  and  $h_\alpha$  are both finite and  $h_\alpha$  is continuous (i.e., points  $x$  such that  $f(x) < +\infty$  and  $\|x\| < \alpha$ ). Then, by the formulas for conjugates of

sums of convex functions (see Moreau [3, pp. 38, 56, 57] or Rockafellar [5, Th. 3]), we have  $(f + h_\alpha)^* = f^* \square h_\alpha^*$  (infimal convolution), and consequently

$$(2.7) \quad (f + h_\alpha)^{**} = (f^* \square h_\alpha^*)^* = f^{**} + h_\alpha^{**}.$$

Moreover  $h_\alpha^*(x^*) = \alpha \|x^*\|$  for every  $x^* \in E^*$ , so that

$$\begin{aligned} h_\alpha^{**}(x^{**}) &= \sup \{ \langle x^{**}, x^* \rangle - \alpha \|x^*\| \mid x^* \in E^* \} \\ &= \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } \|x^{**}\| \leq \alpha, \\ +\infty & \text{if } \|x^{**}\| > \alpha. \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

Hence by (2.7), given any  $x^{**} \in E^{**}$ , we have

$$(2.8) \quad f^{**}(x^{**}) = (f + h_\alpha)^{**}(x^{**})$$

for sufficiently large  $\alpha > 0$ . On the other hand, it is known that, for any lower semicontinuous proper convex function  $g$  on  $E$ ,  $g^{**}$  is the greatest weak<sup>\*\*</sup> lower semicontinuous function on  $E^{**}$  majorized by  $g$  on  $E$  (see [3, § 6]), so that

$$(2.9) \quad g^{**}(x^{**}) = \liminf_{y \rightarrow x^{**}} g(y),$$

where the "lim inf" is taken over all nets in  $E$  converging to  $x^{**}$  in the weak<sup>\*\*</sup> topology. Taking  $g = f + h_\alpha$ , we see from (2.8) and (2.9) that

$$f^{**}(x^{**}) = \liminf_{y \rightarrow x^{**}} [f(y) + h_\alpha(y)],$$

implying that (2.5) holds as desired for some net  $\{y_i \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E$  such that  $y_i$  converges to  $x^{**}$  in the weak<sup>\*\*</sup> topology and  $\|y_i\| \leq \alpha$  for every  $i \in I$ .

Now, given any  $x^* \in E^*$  and  $x^{**} \in \partial f^*(x^*)$ , let  $\{y_i \mid i \in I\}$  be a bounded net in  $E$  such that  $y_i$  converges to  $x^{**}$  in the weak<sup>\*\*</sup> topology and (2.5) holds. Define  $\varepsilon_i \geq 0$  by

$$\varepsilon_i^2 = f(y_i) + f^*(x^*) - \langle y_i, x^* \rangle.$$

Note that  $\lim \varepsilon_i = 0$  by (2.5) and (2.4). According to a lemma of Brøndsted and Rockafellar [1, p. 608], there exist for each  $i \in I$  an  $x_i \in E$  and an  $x_i^* \in E^*$  such that

$$x_i^* \in \partial f(x_i), \quad \|x_i - y_i\| \leq \varepsilon_i, \quad \|x_i^* - x^*\| \leq \varepsilon_i.$$

The latter two conditions imply that the net  $\{x_i^* \mid i \in I\}$  converges to  $x^*$  in the strong topology of  $E^*$ , while the net  $\{x_i \mid i \in I\}$  is bounded and converges to  $x^{**}$  in the weak<sup>\*\*</sup> topology of  $E^{**}$ . This completes the proof of Proposition 1.

**3. Proofs of Theorems A and B.** In the sequel,  $f$  denotes a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$ , and  $j$  denotes the continuous convex function  $E$  defined by  $j(x) = (1/2)\|x\|^2$ . We shall make use of the fact that, for each  $x \in E$ ,  $\partial f(x)$  is by definition a certain (possibly empty, possibly unbounded) weak\* closed convex subset of  $E^*$ , whereas  $\partial j(x)$  is (by the finiteness and continuity of  $j$ , see [3, p. 60]) a certain nonempty weak\* compact convex subset of  $E^*$ . Furthermore

$$(3.1) \quad \partial(f + j) = \partial f(x) + \partial j(x), \forall x \in E$$

(see [3, p. 62] or [5, Th. 3]). The conjugate of  $j$  is given by  $j^*(x^*) = (1/2)\|x^*\|^2$ , and since

$$(f + j)^*(x^*) = (f^* \square j^*)(x^*) = \min_{y^* \in E^*} \{f^*(y^*) + j^*(x^* - y^*)\}$$

([3, § 9] or [5, Th. 3]) the conjugate function  $(f + j)^*$  is finite and continuous throughout  $E^*$ .

*Proof of Theorem A.* Theorem A has already been established by Minty [2] in the case of convex functions which, like  $j$ , are everywhere finite and continuous. Applying Minty's result to the function  $(f + j)^*$ , we may conclude that  $\partial(f + j)^*$  is a maximal monotone operator from  $E^*$  to  $E^{**}$ . We shall show this implies that  $\partial f$  is a maximal monotone operator from  $E$  to  $E^*$ .

Let  $T$  be a monotone operator from  $E$  to  $E^*$  such that the graph of  $T$  includes the graph of  $\partial f$ , i.e.,

$$(3.2) \quad T(x) \supset \partial f(x), \forall x \in E.$$

We must show that equality necessarily holds in (3.2).

The mapping  $T + \partial j$  defined by

$$\begin{aligned} (T + \partial j)(x) &= T(x) + \partial j(x) \\ &= \{x_1^* + x_2^* \mid x_1^* \in T(x), x_2^* \in \partial j(x)\} \end{aligned}$$

is a monotone operator from  $E$  to  $E^*$ , since  $T$  and  $\partial j$  are, and by (3.1) and (3.2) we have

$$(3.3) \quad (T + \partial j)(x) \supset \partial(f + j)(x), \forall x \in E.$$

Let  $S$  be the multivalued mapping from  $E^*$  to  $E^{**}$  defined as follows:  $x^{**} \in S(x^*)$  if and only if there exists a net  $\{x_i^* \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E^*$  converging to  $x^*$  in the strong topology, and a bounded net  $\{x_i \mid i \in I\}$  in  $E$  (with the same partially ordered index set  $I$ ) converging to  $x^{**}$  in the weak\*\* topology, such that

$$x_i^* \in (T + \partial j)(x_i), \forall i \in I.$$

It is readily verified that  $S$  is a monotone operator. (The boundedness of the nets  $\{x_i \mid i \in I\}$  enters in here.) Moreover

$$(3.4) \quad S(x^*) \supset \partial(f + j)^*(x^*), \forall x^* \in E^*,$$

by (3.3) and Proposition 1. Since  $\partial(f + j)^*$  is a maximal monotone operator, equality must actually hold in (3.4). This shows that one has  $x \in \partial(f + j)^*(x^*)$  whenever  $x \in E$  and  $x \in S(x^*)$ , hence in particular whenever  $x^* \in (T + \partial j)(x)$ . On the other hand, one always has  $x^* \in \partial(f + j)(x)$  if  $x \in \partial(f + j)^*(x^*)$  and  $x \in E$ . (This follows from applying (2.2) and (2.4) to  $f + j$  in place of  $f$ .) Thus one has  $x^* \in \partial(f + j)(x)$  if  $x^* \in (T + \partial j)(x)$ , implying by (3.3) and (3.1) that

$$(3.5) \quad T(x) + \partial j(x) = \partial f(x) + \partial j(x), \forall x \in E.$$

We shall show now from (3.5) that actually

$$T(x) = \partial f(x), \forall x \in E,$$

so that  $\partial f$  must be a maximal monotone operator as claimed. Suppose that  $x \in E$  is such that the inclusion in (3.2) is proper. This will lead to a contradiction. Since  $\partial f(x)$  is a weak\* closed convex subset of  $E^*$ , there must exist some point of  $T(x)$  which can be separated strictly from  $\partial f(x)$  by a weak\* closed hyperplane. Thus, for a certain  $y \in E$ , we have

$$\sup \{ \langle y, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in T(x) \} > \sup \{ \langle y, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in \partial f(x) \}.$$

But then

$$\begin{aligned} & \sup \{ \langle y, z^* \rangle \mid z^* \in T(x) + \partial j(x) \} \\ &= \sup \{ \langle y, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in T(x) \} + \sup \{ \langle y, y^* \rangle \mid y^* \in \partial j(x) \} \\ &> \sup \{ \langle y, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in \partial f(x) \} + \sup \{ \langle y, y^* \rangle \mid y^* \in \partial j(x) \} \\ &= \sup \{ \langle y, z^* \rangle \mid z^* \in \partial f(x) + \partial j(x) \}, \end{aligned}$$

inasmuch as  $\partial j(x)$  is a nonempty bounded set, and this inequality is incompatible with (3.5).

*Proof of Theorem B.* Let  $g$  be a lower semicontinuous proper convex function on  $E$  such that

$$(3.6) \quad \partial g(x) \supset \partial f(x), \forall x \in E.$$

As noted at the beginning of the proof Theorem 3 of [4], to prove Theorem B it suffices, in view of Theorem 1 of [4] and its Corollary 2, to demonstrate that  $g = f + \text{const}$ .

We consider first the case where  $f$  and  $g$  are everywhere finite and continuous. Then, for each  $x \in E$ ,  $\partial f(x)$  is a nonempty weak\*

compact set, and

$$(3.7) \quad f'(x; u) = \max \{ \langle u, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in \partial f(x) \}, \forall u \in E,$$

where

$$f'(x; u) = \lim_{\lambda \downarrow 0} [f(x + \lambda u) - f(x)]/\lambda$$

[3, p. 65]. Similarly,  $\partial g(x)$  is a nonempty weak\* compact set, and

$$(3.8) \quad g'(x; u) = \max \{ \langle u, x^* \rangle \mid x^* \in \partial g(x) \}, \forall u \in E.$$

It follows from (3.6), (3.7) and (3.8) that

$$(3.9) \quad f'(x; u) \leq g'(x; u), \forall x \in E, \forall u \in E.$$

On the other hand, for any  $x \in E$  and  $y \in E$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} f(y) - f(x) &= \int_0^1 f'((1 - \lambda)x + \lambda y; y - x) d\lambda, \\ g(y) - g(x) &= \int_0^1 g'((1 - \lambda)x + \lambda y; y - x) d\lambda \end{aligned}$$

(see [6, § 24]), so that by (3.9) we have

$$f(y) - f(x) \leq g(y) - g(x), \forall x \in E, \forall y \in E.$$

Of course, the latter can hold only if  $g = f + \text{const}$ .

In the general case, we observe from (3.6) that

$$\partial g(x) + \partial j(x) \supset \partial f(x) + \partial j(x), \forall x \in E,$$

and consequently

$$\partial(g + j)(x) \supset \partial(f + j)(x), \forall x \in E,$$

by (3.1)(and its counterpart for  $g$ ). This implies by Proposition 1 that

$$(3.10) \quad \partial(g + j)^*(x^*) \supset \partial(f + j)^*(x^*), \forall x^* \in E^*.$$

The functions  $(f + j)^*$  and  $(g + j)^*$  are finite and continuous on  $E^*$ , so we may conclude from (3.10) and the case already considered that

$$(g + j)^* = (f + j)^* + \alpha$$

for a certain real constant  $\alpha$ . Taking conjugates, we then have

$$(3.11) \quad (g + j)^{**} = (f + j)^{**} - \alpha.$$

Since  $(g + j)^{**}$  and  $(f + j)^{**}$  agree on  $E$  with  $g + j$  and  $f + j$ , respectively, (3.11) implies that

$$g + j = f + j - \alpha,$$



and hence that  $g = f + \text{const.}$

REMARK. The preceding proofs become much simpler if  $E$  is reflexive, since then  $\partial f^*$  and  $\partial(f + j)^*$  are just the "inverses" of  $\partial f$  and  $\partial(f + j)$ , respectively, and Proposition 1 is superfluous. In this case,  $S$  may be replaced by the inverse of  $T + \partial j$  in the proof of Theorem A.

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