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How can the sum of λ th powers ($0 < \lambda < 2$) of the Euclidean distances from the variable unit vector p to N fixed unit vectors p_1, \dots, p_N be maximized or minimized? By means of an integral transform used in distance geometry, the problem can be reduced in certain cases to minimizing or maximizing sums of integer powers of the inner products (p, p_i) . In particular, a complete solution is obtained for the vertices of an m -dimensional octahedron.

1. Introduction. Let $|p - q|$ denote the Euclidean distance from p to q . Various authors [1-3, 7, 12, 14, 16, 17] have studied the problem of placing N points p_1, \dots, p_N on the unit sphere U of m -dimensional Euclidean space E^m so that

$$(1) \quad S(N, m) = \sum_{i < j} |p_i - p_j|^\lambda \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is maximal. This suggests a second problem: If p_1, \dots, p_N are preassigned points of U , for what $p \in U$ is

$$(2) \quad T(p) = \sum_{i=1}^N |p - p_i|^\lambda \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

maximal? One can add to this, when is $T(p)$ minimal? For example, if $N = 3$ and p_1, p_2, p_3 are the vertices of an equilateral triangle, then $T(p)$ is maximal if and only if $p = -p_i$ for some i and minimal if and only if $p = p_i$ for some i . This is very easy to show for $0 < \lambda \leq 1$, but is rather more difficult for $1 < \lambda < 2$.

In §2 we develop a method for attacking this second problem. Our main tools are (i) an integral transform introduced by Schoenberg (see [15, pp. 526-527] or [4, pp. 134-136]) to prove certain metric embedding theorems, and (ii) the concept of uniform power maxima introduced in §2. The results §§3-6 are applications of the theorem of §2 to various special cases. In §3 we determine the maxima and minima for $T(p)$ when the p_i are the vertices of a regular m -dimensional octahedron. In §4 we determine the maxima of $T(p)$ when the p_i are the vertices of an m -dimensional cube. In §5 we investigate the case where the p_i are the vertices of an m -dimensional simplex. We show that if a certain "elementary" inequality is valid, then $T(p)$ is minimal if and only if $p = p_i$ for some i . In §6 we determine the minima of $T(p)$ when the p_i are the vertices of a regular N -gon and U is the unit circle $x^2 + y^2 = 1$.

The general conclusion we draw from these results is that if the points p_i are "reasonably" uniformly distributed on U then $T(p)$ is large or small depending upon whether $\min_i |p_i - p|$ is large or small. It is interesting to contrast this with Theorem 2 of Björck [3, pp. 256-257]. Also, it can be shown that if p is constrained to be in the convex hull H of p_1, \dots, p_N and $1 \leq \lambda$, then $T(p)$ will be *maximal* at some p_i .

In §7 we show that a modification of our method can be applied to the problem of minimizing $T(p)$ when λ is negative. This is related to the problem of stability configurations of electrons on a sphere; see [5-6, 8-10, 14, 18].

2. Uniform power maxima. For vectors g and h in E^m , we let (g, h) denote their inner product.

DEFINITION. Let p_1, \dots, p_N be a set of points on the unit sphere U . We say $q_0 \in U$ is a uniform power maximum (minimum) for p_1, \dots, p_N if for every positive integer k , the sum

$$(2.1) \quad \sum_{i=1}^N (p_i, q)^k$$

achieves its absolute maximum (minimum) on U when $q = q_0$.

For example, let U be the unit circle $x^2 + y^2 = 1$. If $p_1 = (1, 0)$ and $p_2 = -p_1$, then the points p_1 and p_2 are themselves the uniform power maxima, while the points $(0, 1)$ and $(0, -1)$ are the uniform power minima. In general, uniform power maxima or minima may fail to exist.

If q_0 is a uniform power maximum, then we easily see that $q_0 = p_i$ for some i ; let $k \rightarrow \infty$ through odd values in (2.1). Similarly, by letting $k \rightarrow \infty$ through even values, we see that $\max_i |(p_i, q_0)|$ must be minimal if q_0 is a uniform power minimum. For example, if N is even and p_1, \dots, p_N are the vertices of a regular N -gon inscribed in the unit circle U given by $x^2 + y^2 = 1$, then the only possibilities for uniform power minima are points on U which bisect the arc between adjacent p_i . The only possibilities for uniform power maxima are the p_i themselves.

The following result shows how the concepts of uniform power maxima and minima can be used.

THEOREM. Let p_1, \dots, p_N have at least one uniform power maximum (minimum). Let $p \in U$. Then

$$(2.2) \quad T(p) = \sum_{i=1}^N |p_i - p|^2 \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is minimal (maximal) if and only if p is a uniform power maximum (minimum).

Proof. Let $p \in U$. Let q_0 be a uniform power maximum. Then

$$(2.3) \quad \sum_{i=1}^N (p_i, p)^k \leq \sum_{i=1}^N (p_i, q_0)^k$$

for all integers $k \geq 0$. If g and h are arbitrary unit vectors, then

$$(2.4) \quad 2(g, h) = 2 - |g - h|^2.$$

Hence

$$(2.5) \quad \sum_{i=1}^N (2 - |p_i - p|^2)^k \leq \sum_{i=1}^N (2 - |p_i - q_0|^2)^k.$$

Set

$$E(p, t) = \sum_{i=1}^N \exp(-|p_i - p|^2 t^2).$$

Multiply both sides of (2.5) by $t^{2k}/k!$ and sum over all k . This shows that

$$(2.6) \quad \begin{aligned} \exp(2t^2)E(p, t) &= \sum_{i=1}^N \exp(2t^2 - |p_i - p|^2 t^2) \\ &\leq \sum_{i=1}^N \exp(2t^2 - |p_i - q_0|^2 t^2) \\ &= \exp(2t^2)E(q_0, t). \end{aligned}$$

Note that here and throughout equality holds if and only if p is a uniform power maximum. Since $0 < \lambda < 2$, we can set

$$(2.7) \quad I_\lambda(s) = \int_0^\infty (1 - e^{-s^2 t^2}) t^{-1-\lambda} dt.$$

By making the change of variable $t \rightarrow t/s$ we see that

$$(2.8) \quad I_\lambda(s) = c(\lambda) s^\lambda$$

where $c(\lambda)$ is a positive constant depending only on λ ; in fact,

$$c(\lambda) = \int_0^\infty (1 - e^{-t^2}) t^{-1-\lambda} dt.$$

Now replace s by $|p_i - q_0|$ in (2.7). From (2.6) and (2.8) we find that

$$\begin{aligned} c(\lambda) T(q_0) &= c(\lambda) \sum_{i=1}^N |p_i - q_0|^\lambda \\ &= \sum_{i=1}^N I_\lambda(|p_i - q_0|) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 (2.9) \quad &= \int_0^\infty [N - E(q_0, t)] t^{-1-\lambda} dt \\
 &\leq \int_0^\infty [N - E(p, t)] t^{-1-\lambda} dt \\
 &= c(\lambda) T(p),
 \end{aligned}$$

with equality if and only if p is a uniform power maximum. The proof for uniform power minima is obtained simply by reversing all inequalities.

3. **The octahedron.** Let α_i denote that vector of E^m whose i th component is 1 and whose other components are 0. Let $\alpha_{N+i} = -\alpha_i$ for $1 \leq i \leq N$. Then we call $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_{2N}$ the vertices of the standard N -dimensional octahedron.

COROLLARY 1. *Let $p \in U$. If $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_{2N}$ are the vertices of the standard N -dimensional octahedron, and*

$$(3.1) \quad p = \sum_{i=1}^{2N} |\alpha_i - p|^\lambda \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is minimal, then $p = \alpha_i$ for some i . If $T(p)$ is maximal, then

$$(3.2) \quad p = \left(\sum_{i=1}^N \pm \alpha_i \right) / \sqrt{N} \equiv p^*$$

for some choice of plus and minus signs.

Before we prove this we need a simple inequality related to power means (for the basic properties of power means see, for example, [11, p. 26]).

LEMMA. *Let $s > 1$ and define*

$$f(u) = \sum_{i=1}^N u_i^s$$

for all N -tuples $u = (u_1, \dots, u_N)$ satisfying

$$\sum_{i=1}^N u_i = 1$$

and

$$u_i \geq 0 \quad 1 \leq i \leq N.$$

Then $f(u)$ is minimal if and only if $u = (\sum_{i=1}^N \alpha_i)/N$ and maximal if and only if $u = \alpha_i$ for some i with $1 \leq i \leq N$.

Proof of Lemma. The s th power mean of u_1, \dots, u_N is non-decreasing as a function of s , so by letting $s \rightarrow 1$ and $s \rightarrow \infty$ we obtain

$$\frac{1}{N} \leq \left[\frac{1}{N} f(u) \right]^{1/s} \leq 1.$$

The u_i must all be equal for equality to hold on the left, while for equality to hold on the right one of the u_i must equal 1.

Proof of Corollary 1. For $p \in U$ write $p = (x_1, \dots, x_N)$. Thus $\sum x_i^2 = 1$. For every positive integer k we have

$$(3.3) \quad \sum_k(p) \equiv \sum_{i=1}^{2N} (\alpha_i, p)^k = [1 + (-1)^k] \sum_{i=1}^N x_i^k.$$

Clearly $\sum_k(p)$ is zero unless $k = 2m$ for some positive integer m . Apply the above lemma with $u_i = x_i^2$ and $s = m$. It shows that the α_i are the uniform power maxima and the 2^N values of p given by (3.2) are the uniform power minima. Thus Corollary 1 follows from the theorem.

4. The cube. Let the β_i , for $1 \leq i \leq 2^N$, be the vectors in E^N whose components are either $N^{-1/2}$ or $-N^{-1/2}$. We call $\beta_1, \dots, \beta_{2^N}$ the vertices of the standard N -dimensional cube; this cube is inscribed in the unit sphere U .

COROLLARY 2. Let $p \in U$. If β_1, \dots, β_M are the vertices of the standard N -dimensional cube, where $M = 2^N$, and

$$(4.1) \quad T(p) = \sum_{i=1}^M |\beta_i - p|^\lambda \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is maximal, then (in the notation of Corollary 1) we have $p = \alpha_i$ for some i .

Proof. For $p \in U$ write $p = (x_1, \dots, x_N)$; thus $\sum x_i^2 = 1$. For every positive integer k we have

$$(4.2) \quad \begin{aligned} \sum_k(p) &\equiv \sum_{i=1}^M (\beta_i, p)^k = N^{-k/2} \sum^* (\pm x_1 \pm \dots \pm x_N)^k \\ &\equiv N^{-k/2} \sum_{i=1}^M v_i^k \end{aligned}$$

where the asterisk indicates that the sum is extended over all M possible choices of plus and minus signs. Clearly $\sum_k(p)$ is zero unless $k = 2m$ for some positive integer m . Now

$$(4.3) \quad \sum_{i=1}^M v_i^2 = \sum^* (\pm x_1 \pm \dots \pm x_N)^2 = M \sum_{i=1}^N x_i^2 = M$$

since all the mixed terms cancel. Now apply the lemma of §3 with $u_i = (v_i/\sqrt{M})^2$, with $s = m$, and with N replaced by M . It follows that

$$M^{1-m} = M \left(\frac{1}{M} \right)^m \leq \sum_{i=1}^M u_i^m$$

so

$$(4.4) \quad M \leq \sum_{i=1}^M v_i^{2m}$$

for every positive integer m . Thus every α_i is a uniform power minimum. For any $q = (x_1, \dots, x_N) \in U$ which is not an α_i , it is easy to verify that

$$(4.5) \quad v^* \equiv \sum_{i=1}^N |x_i| > 1.$$

But since $v^* = v_i$ for some i , this shows that q is not a uniform power minimum. The result now follows from the theorem.

We have no proof that the β_i are the uniform power maxima here. If they were, then $T(p)$ would be minimal if and only if $p = \beta_i$ for some i .

5. The simplex. Let the γ_i , where $0 \leq i \leq N$, denote the vertices of a regular simplex inscribed in U . We now propose

Conjecture A. If m and N are integers with $m \geq 0$ and $N \geq 1$, then for $x \geq 0$ we have

$$(5.1) \quad \begin{aligned} L_m(x) &\equiv \left(x + \frac{1}{N}\right)^{2m} + \left(1 + \frac{x}{N}\right)^{2m} + (N-1) \left(\frac{x-1}{N}\right)^{2m} \\ &\equiv \left(1 + \frac{1}{N^{2m-1}}\right) \left(x^2 + \frac{2}{N}x + 1\right)^m \equiv R_m(x). \end{aligned}$$

If we set $P_m(x) = R_m(x) - L_m(x)$, then $P_0(x) \equiv P_1(x) \equiv 0$ and for $m = 2$ and $m = 3$ the coefficients of $P_m(x)$ are nonnegative. It seems likely, in fact, that the coefficients of $P_m(x)$ are always nonnegative.

COROLLARY 3. *Conjecture A implies that the uniform power maxima for the vertices of the regular simplex are simply the vertices themselves, i.e., the γ_i where $0 \leq i \leq N$.*

Proof. For $N = 1$ this is trivial. Assume true for all positive integers less than N . We shall examine

$$(5.2) \quad \sum_k(p) \equiv \sum_{i=0}^N (\gamma_i, p)^k$$

where $p \in U$. Without loss of generality we may assume that $p = a_1\gamma_1 + \dots + a_N\gamma_N$ where $a_i \geq 0$ for $0 \leq i \leq N$. For any vector q , write $q = q_a + q_b$ where q_a is parallel to γ_0 and q_b is normal to γ_0 . In particular, $(\gamma_i)_a \equiv \gamma_{ia} = -\gamma_0/N$. Thus

$$(5.3) \quad \begin{aligned} \sum_k(p) &= (\gamma_0, \gamma_a)^k + \sum_{i=1}^N [(\gamma_{ia}, \gamma_a) + (\gamma_{ib}, \gamma_b)]^k \\ &= (\gamma_0, \gamma_a)^k + \sum_{i=1}^N \left[-\frac{1}{N}(\gamma_0, \gamma_a) + (\gamma_{ib}, \gamma_b) \right]^k \\ &= (\gamma_0, \gamma_a)^k + \sum_{s=0}^k \binom{k}{s} \left[-\frac{1}{N}(\gamma_0, \gamma_a) \right]^{k-s} \sum_{i=1}^N (\gamma_{ib}, \gamma_b)^s \\ &= (\gamma_0, \gamma_a)^k + \sum_{s=0}^k c(k, s) \sum_{i=1}^N (\gamma_{ib}, \gamma_b)^s \end{aligned}$$

where the coefficients $c(k, s)$ are all positive. By the induction hypothesis the last sum on the right can only become larger if p is rotated about an axis through γ_0 so that $\gamma_b = \gamma_{jb}$ for some j . Thus

$$(5.4) \quad \sum_k(p) \leq \sum_{i=0}^N (\gamma_i, p')^k \equiv J$$

where p' is a linear combination of γ_0 and γ_j , i.e. $p' = -x\gamma_0 + y\gamma_j$ where $x, y \geq 0$. Now

$$(5.5) \quad 1 = (p', p') = x^2 + \frac{2}{N}xy + y^2$$

and

$$(5.6) \quad J = \left(y + \frac{x}{N}\right)^k + (-1)^k \left(\frac{y}{N} + x\right)^k + (N-1) \left(\frac{x-y}{N}\right)^k.$$

It suffices to show that J is maximal when $x = 0$ and $y = 1$ (in which case $J = 1 + (-1)^k N^{1-k}$).

First we consider the case where k is odd, and write $k = 2m + 1$. The vector T , where

$$(5.7) \quad T = \left(-\left(\frac{x}{N} + y\right), \left(x + \frac{y}{N}\right)\right),$$

is a counterclockwise tangent to the ellipse described by (5.5) in the first quadrant of the xy plane. We have

$$\begin{aligned}
 & (\text{grad } J, T) \\
 (5.8) \quad & = k(1 - N^{-2}) \left[x \left(\frac{x}{N} + y \right)^{2m} + y \left(x + \frac{y}{N} \right)^{2m} - (x + y) \left(\frac{x}{N} - \frac{y}{N} \right)^{2m} \right] \\
 & > 0
 \end{aligned}$$

for $0 < x < 1$, so J achieves its maximal value at the endpoint $(0, 1)$. Next, let k be even and write $k = 2m$. Replace x by x/y in (5.1), and multiply both sides of (5.1) by y^{2m} . It follows that $J \leq 1 + N^{1-2m}$ whenever (5.5) holds. Since a uniform power maximum must be one of the γ_i , this completes the proof.

COROLLARY 4. *Let $p \in U$. Let $\gamma_0, \dots, \gamma_N$ be the vertices of the N -dimensional simplex, and assume the sum*

$$(5.9) \quad T(p) = \sum_{i=0}^N |\gamma_i - p|^2 \qquad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is minimal. If Conjecture A is true, then $p = \gamma_i$ for some i .

Proof. This follows from Corollary 3 and the theorem.

It seems reasonable to conjecture here that $T(p)$ is maximal if and only if $p = -\gamma_i$ for some i . But (see the comment towards the end of §6) the $-\gamma_i$ are not always uniform power minima.

We digress here to mention that an inductive procedure similar to that used in the proof of Corollary 3 shows that for *any* $p \in E^N$ we have

$$(5.10) \quad \sum_2(p) \equiv \sum_{i=0}^N (\gamma_i, p)^2 = \frac{N+1}{N}(p, p),$$

where again the γ_i are the vertices of a regular simplex inscribed in U . The famous Selberg inequality [13, pp. 7-8] asserts that

$$(5.11) \quad \sum_{i=0}^N (\gamma_i, p)^2 \left[\sum_{j=0}^N |\langle \gamma_i, \gamma_j \rangle| \right]^{-1} \leq (p, p)$$

for *any* nonzero vectors γ_i with $0 \leq i \leq N$. For the vertices of a regular simplex

$$(5.12) \quad \sum_{j=0}^N |\langle \gamma_i, \gamma_j \rangle| = 1 + N \left(\frac{1}{N} \right) = 2$$

so in this case the Selberg inequality yields

$$(5.13) \quad \sum_2(p) \leq 2(p, p)$$

which is somewhat weaker than (5.10). Also, the equality (5.10) has as a consequence that

$$(5.14) \quad \sum_{i=0}^N |\gamma_i - p|^4 = 4(N+1)^2/N$$

for $p \in U$.

6. **The regular N -gon.** Let the ρ_i , where $0 \leq i \leq N - 1$, denote the vertices of a regular N -gon inscribed in the unit circle U given by $x^2 + y^2 = 1$. We begin by establishing two lemmas; the first is well known, but we include it for the sake of completeness.

LEMMA 6.1. *For k a positive integer,*

$$(6.1) \quad \cos^k x = \sum_{s=0}^k a_{sk} \cos sx$$

where $a_{sk} \geq 0$ and $a_{sk} = 0$ if $s \not\equiv k \pmod{2}$.

Proof. Since $\cos^2 x = 1/2 + 1/2 \cos 2x$, this is true for $k = 1$ and $k = 2$. Assume true for integers less than k . For $k > 2$ we have

$$\begin{aligned} \cos^k x &= (\cos^{k-2} x)(\cos^2 x) \\ &= (\cos^{k-2} x) \left(\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \cos 2x \right) \end{aligned}$$

and the result follows from the identity

$$\cos A \cos B = \frac{1}{2} \cos (A + B) + \frac{1}{2} \cos (A - B)$$

and the induction hypothesis.

LEMMA 6.2. *If k is a nonnegative integer, then for any real ϕ we have*

$$(6.2) \quad \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \cos^k \left(\frac{2\pi j}{N} - \phi \right) \leq \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \cos^k \left(\frac{2\pi j}{N} \right)$$

with equality if and only if either $\phi = 2\pi m/N$ for some integer m , or $k < N$.

Proof. Let $d(N, s)$ be 1 if N divides s , and 0 otherwise. Then the left hand side of (6.2) is

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \sum_{s=0}^k a_{sk} \cos \left(\frac{2\pi js}{N} - s\phi \right) \\ (6.3) \quad &= \sum_{s=0}^k a_{sk} \cos s\phi \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \cos \frac{2\pi js}{N} + \sum_{s=0}^k a_{sk} \sin s\phi \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \sin \frac{2\pi js}{N} \\ &= N \sum_{s=0}^k d(N, s) a_{sk} \cos s\phi \leq N \sum_{s=0}^k d(N, s) a_{sk} \\ &= \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \cos^k \frac{2\pi j}{N}. \end{aligned}$$

Equality holds only under the conditions stated, so the result is proved.

COROLLARY 5. Let $p = e^{i\phi} \in U$. If $\rho_j = e^{2\pi i j/N}$ for $0 \leq j \leq N-1$ and

$$(6.4) \quad T(p) = \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} |\rho_j - p|^\lambda \quad 0 < \lambda < 2$$

is minimal, then $p = \rho_j$ for some j .

Proof. The sum

$$(6.5) \quad \sum_k (p) = \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} (\rho_j, p)^k = \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} \cos^k \left(\frac{2\pi j}{N} - \phi \right)$$

is maximal for all k if and only if $\phi \equiv 2\pi j/N \pmod{2\pi}$ for some j with $0 \leq j \leq N-1$. In other words, if and only if $p = \rho_j$ for some j . The result now follows from the theorem.

Although the author has a proof that $T(p)$ is maximal if and only if $p = e^{\pi i(2j+1)/N}$ for some integer j , it is not always true that these points are uniform power minima. The case $N = 3$ and $k = 6$ provides a counterexample.

Rather more can be proved here by means of certain differential inequalities associated with Sturm-Liouville problems. Namely, $T(p)$ is minimal if and only if p is a vertex, and maximal if and only if p lies half way between two vertices. Moreover, if λ is allowed to increase from 0 to $2N$, then every time λ passes through an even integer the points at which $T(p)$ was maximal will become the points at which it is minimal, and vice-versa. The present paper omits this proof.

7. Negative λ . For $\lambda < 0$ define the integral transform

$$A_\lambda(s) = \int_0^\infty e^{-st} t^{-1-\lambda} dt = s^\lambda \Gamma(-\lambda).$$

If q_0 is a uniform power minima, the proof of the theorem can be trivially modified, with $A_\lambda(s)$ in place of $I_\lambda(s)$, to show that $T(p)$ is minimal when $p = q_0$. So for λ negative, $T(p)$ is minimal for the octahedron when $p = p^*$ and minimal for the cube when $p = \alpha_i$.

Note added in proof. L. J. Yang has proved Conjecture A. Thus Corollary 4 is unconditionally valid. His method, essentially, is to analyze the cases (i) $0 < x < 1/4N$, (ii) $1/4N \leq x < 2/N$; and (iii) $2/N \leq x < 1$ separately. The details are somewhat lengthy, but require only elementary calculus.

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Vol. 57, No. 2

February, 1975

Norman Larrabee Alling, <i>On Cauchy's theorem for real algebraic curves with boundary</i>	315
Daniel D. Anderson, <i>A remark on the lattice of ideals of a Prüfer domain</i>	323
Dennis Neal Barr and Peter D. Miletta, <i>A necessary and sufficient condition for uniqueness of solutions to two point boundary value problems</i>	325
Ladislav Beran, <i>On solvability of generalized orthomodular lattices</i>	331
L. Carlitz, <i>A three-term relation for some sums related to Dedekind sums</i>	339
Arthur Herbert Copeland, Jr. and Albert Oscar Shar, <i>Images and pre-images of localization maps</i>	349
G. G. Dandapat, John L. Hunsucker and Carl Pomerance, <i>Some new results on odd perfect numbers</i>	359
M. Edelstein and L. Keener, <i>Characterizations of infinite-dimensional and nonreflexive spaces</i>	365
Francis James Flanigan, <i>On Levi factors of derivation algebras and the radical embedding problem</i>	371
Harvey Friedman, <i>Provable equality in primitive recursive arithmetic with and without induction</i>	379
Joseph Braucher Fugate and Lee K. Mohler, <i>The fixed point property for tree-like continua with finitely many arc components</i>	393
John Norman Ginsburg and Victor Harold Saks, <i>Some applications of ultrafilters in topology</i>	403
Arjun K. Gupta, <i>Generalisation of a "square" functional equation</i>	419
Thomas Lee Hayden and Frank Jones Massey, <i>Nonlinear holomorphic semigroups</i>	423
V. Kannan and Thekkedath Thrivikraman, <i>Lattices of Hausdorff compactifications of a locally compact space</i>	441
J. E. Kerlin and Wilfred Dennis Pepe, <i>Norm decreasing homomorphisms between group algebras</i>	445
Young K. Kwon, <i>Behavior of Φ-bounded harmonic functions at the Wiener boundary</i>	453
Richard Arthur Levaro, <i>Projective quasi-coherent sheaves of modules</i>	457
Chung Lin, <i>Rearranging Fourier transforms on groups</i>	463
David Lowell Lovelady, <i>An asymptotic analysis of an odd order linear differential equation</i>	475
Jerry Malzan, <i>On groups with a single involution</i>	481
J. F. McClendon, <i>Metric families</i>	491
Carl Pomerance, <i>On multiply perfect numbers with a special property</i>	511
Mohan S. Putcha and Adil Mohamed Yaqub, <i>Polynomial constraints for finiteness of semisimple rings</i>	519
Calvin R. Putnam, <i>Hyponormal contractions and strong power convergence</i>	531
Douglas Conner Ravenel, <i>Multiplicative operations in BP^*BP</i>	539
Judith Roitman, <i>Attaining the spread at cardinals which are not strong limits</i>	545
Kazuyuki Saitô, <i>Groups of $*$-automorphisms and invariant maps of von Neumann algebras</i>	553
Brian Kirkwood Schmidt, <i>Homotopy invariance of contravariant functors acting on smooth manifolds</i>	559
Kenneth Barry Stolarsky, <i>The sum of the distances to N points on a sphere</i>	563
Mark Lawrence Teply, <i>Semiprime rings with the singular splitting property</i>	575
J. Pelham Thomas, <i>Maximal connected Hausdorff spaces</i>	581
Charles Thomas Tucker, II, <i>Concerning σ-homomorphisms of Riesz spaces</i>	585
Rangachari Venkataraman, <i>Compactness in abelian topological groups</i>	591
William Charles Waterhouse, <i>Basically bounded functors and flat sheaves</i>	597
David Westreich, <i>Bifurcation of operator equations with unbounded linearized part</i>	611
William Robin Zame, <i>Extendibility, boundedness and sequential convergence in spaces of holomorphic functions</i>	619