

A Proof about the Harmonic Series

Jayadev Misra

8/13/98

The following problem and its solution was shown to me by Carroll Morgan.

Problem: Show that $\sum_{i=2}^n \frac{1}{i}$ is non-integer, for all $n, n \geq 2$.

Proof: Let p be the largest prime less than or equal to n . Such a p exists because $n \geq 2$.

Lemma 1: $n! = k \times p$ for some k where $k \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$.

Proof: from Bertrand's theorem, $2 \times p > n$. Therefore, $n!$ has exactly one factor p that is a multiple of p .

Lemma 2: For all $i, 2 \leq i \leq n$: $(\frac{n!}{i} \pmod{p}) \equiv (i \neq p)$.

Proof: Using Lemma 1,

For $i = p$, $(\frac{n!}{p} \pmod{p}) \equiv k \pmod{p}$.

For $i \neq p$, $(\frac{n!}{i} \pmod{p}) \equiv \frac{k}{i} \times p \pmod{p} \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$, since k is divisible by i .

The given sum is,

$$\frac{\sum_{i=2}^n \frac{n!}{i}}{n!}$$

The numerator is a sum of terms all of which except one is congruent to $0 \pmod{p}$. Therefore, numerator $\not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. Hence, the numerator is not divisible by $n!$ since the latter contains p as a factor.