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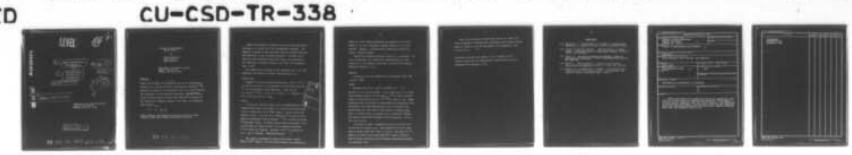

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Gilles Brassard,
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Department of Computer Science
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14853

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Gilles Brassard
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Abstract

Diffie and Hellman [2] propose the use of the exponential function in a finite field for cryptographic purposes. The proposal is based on the conjecture that the inverse function, the logarithm, is not feasibly computable. We show that a proof of this conjecture would have important consequences for theoretical computer science, even under the assumption that P ≠ NP.

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Diffie and Hellman [2] propose the use of the exponential function in a finite field for cryptographic purposes. The proposal is based on the conjecture that the inverse function, the logarithm, is not feasibly computable. We show that a proof of this conjecture would have important consequences for theoretical computer science, even under the assumption that $P \neq NP$.

Our observation is based on the following idea. ($|i|$ here represents the length of binary representation of i).

Proposition:

Suppose f has the following properties: $|f(i)| = |i|$, f is one-one and onto, f is computable in polynomial time and $f^{-1}$ is not polynomial time computable. Then the set $S = \{\langle n,m\rangle \mid f^{-1}(n) > m\}$ is in $NP \cap CoNP - P$. Moreover, if $f^{-1}$ is NP-hard then NP = CoNP.



Proof:

S is in NP, since on input $\langle n,m\rangle$ a nondeterministic algorithm can guess i of length $|n|$, verify $f(i)=n$ and accept if $i>m$. Similarly S is in CoNP (guess i, verify $f(i)=n$ and accept if $i\leq m$). S is not in P, otherwise $f^{-1}(n)$ can be computed in polynomial time as follows. $f^{-1}(n)$ is one of at most $2^{|n|}$ possible values. By binary search where each query $\langle n,k\rangle$ of S divides the range in half, we can uniquely determine $f^{-1}(n)$ within $|n|$ queries. Moreover, if $f^{-1}$ is NP-hard so is S. But $S \in NP \cap CoNP$. Therefore NP=CoNP. □

The function proposed by Diffie and Hellman, namely $\exp_{r,p}(n) \equiv r^n \pmod p$, does not quite satisfy the proposition,

since it is not length preserving and moreover if p is not prime or r is not a primitive element modulo p, it is not one-one. However, a slightly more complicated proof will obtain a similar result.

Define the logarithm function log(p,r,n) as follows. If p is a prime and r is a primitive element modulo p, then log(p,r,n) is the unique m such that $0<m<p$ and $r^m \equiv n \pmod p$. Otherwise log(p,r,n) is 0.

Theorem:

If log(p,r,n) is not computable in polynomial time, then $P \subsetneq NP \cap CoNP$.

Proof:

Consider the set $S = \{(p,r,n,t) \mid \log(p,r,n) > t\}$.

We show S is in NP as follows. p is a prime and r is a primitive element modulo p if and only if $r^{p-1} \equiv 1 \pmod p$ and for each q a prime factor of p-1, $r^{(p-1)/q} \not\equiv 1 \pmod p$ [3]. These conditions can be checked in nondeterministic polynomial time by guessing the prime decomposition of p-1 together with certificates [4] that each of the factors is indeed prime. Once it is known that p is prime and r a primitive element, the unique m such that $r^m \equiv n \pmod p$ can be guessed. If $m>t$, (p,r,n,t) is in S.

S is also in CoNP. A quadruple (p,r,n,t) is not in S if and only if $\log(p,r,n) \leq t$. The condition is true if and only if either there are i and j, $0<i<j<p$, such that $r^i \equiv r^j \pmod p$ or there is an m such that $r^m \equiv n \pmod p$ and $m \leq t$. Both of these conditions can be checked nondeterministically in polynomial time.

Now if we are given an oracle for the set S, log(p,r,n) can be computed in deterministic polynomial using binary search. Hence if log(p,r,n) is not polynomial time computable, then S is not in P. □

Additional material will appear in [1], together with a similar result for the cryptographic method based on prime decomposition suggested in [5].

## References

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[5] Rivest, R., A. Shamir and L. Adleman. "On Digital Signatures and Public-Key Cryptosystems", MIT Laboratory for Computer Science, Cambridge, Mass., (1977).

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Diffie and Hellman [2] propose the use of the exponential function in a finite field for cryptographic purposes. The proposal is based on the conjecture that the inverse function, the logarithm, is not feasibly computable. We show that a proof of this conjecture would have important consequences for theoretical computer science, even under the assumption that P ≠ NP.

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