

FREE AND VERY FREE MORPHISMS INTO A FERMAT HYPERSURFACE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Any smooth projective Fano variety in characteristic zero is rationally connected and hence contains a very free rational curve. In positive characteristic a smooth projective Fano variety is rationally chain connected. However, it is not known whether such varieties are separably rationally connected, or equivalently, whether they have a very free rational curve. This is an open question even for nonsingular Fano hypersurfaces. See [Kol96] as well as [Deb01].

In this paper we consider the degree 5 Fermat hypersurface

$$X : X_0^5 + X_1^5 + X_2^5 + X_3^5 + X_4^5 + X_5^5 = 0$$

in \mathbb{P}^5 over an algebraically closed field k of characteristic 2. Note that X is a nonsingular projective Fano variety.

Theorem 1.1. *Any free rational curve $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow X$ has degree ≥ 8 and there exists a free rational curve of degree 8. Any very free rational curve $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow X$ has degree ≥ 9 and there exists a very free rational curve of degree 9.*

This result, although perhaps expected, is interesting for several reasons. First, it is known that X is unirational, see [Deb01, Page 52] (the corresponding rational map $\mathbb{P}^4 \dashrightarrow X$ is inseparable). Second, in [Bea90], it is shown that every nonsingular hyperplane section of X is isomorphic to a Fermat hypersurface of dimension 3 and this property characterizes Fermat hypersurfaces among all hypersurfaces of degree 5 in characteristic 2. We believe that these facts single out the Fermat as a likely candidate for a counter example to the conjecture below; instead our theorem shows that they are evidence for it.

Conjecture 1.2. Nonsingular Fano hypersurfaces have very free rational curves.

A little bit about the method of proof. In Section 2 we translate the geometric question into an algebraic question which is computationally more accessible. In Sections 3, 4, and 5 we exclude low degree solutions by theoretical methods. Finally, in Sections 6 and 7 we explicitly describe some curves which are free and very free in degrees 8 and 9 respectively.

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2. THE OVERALL SETUP

In the rest of this paper k will be an algebraically closed field of characteristic 2 and X will be the Fermat hypersurface of degree 5 over k . Let $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow X$ be a nonconstant morphism. We will repeatedly use that every vector bundle on \mathbb{P}^1 is a direct sum of line bundles, see [Gro57]. Thus we can choose a splitting

$$\varphi^*T_X = \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(a_1) \oplus \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(a_2) \oplus \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(a_3) \oplus \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(a_4).$$

Recall that φ is said to be a *free curve* on X if $a_i \geq 0$ and φ is said to be *very free* if $a_i > 0$. Consider the following commutative diagram

$$(2.0.1) \quad \begin{array}{ccccccc} & & 0 & & 0 & & \\ & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \\ & & \mathcal{O}_X & \xlongequal{\quad} & \mathcal{O}_X & & \\ & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \\ 0 & \longrightarrow & E_X & \longrightarrow & \mathcal{O}_X(1)^{\oplus 6} & \longrightarrow & \mathcal{O}_X(5) \longrightarrow 0 \\ & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \parallel \\ 0 & \longrightarrow & T_X & \longrightarrow & T_{\mathbb{P}^5}|_X & \longrightarrow & N_{X/\mathbb{P}^5} \longrightarrow 0 \\ & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \\ & & 0 & & 0 & & \end{array}$$

with exact rows and columns as indicated. We will call E_X the *extended tangent bundle* of X . The left vertical exact sequence determines a short exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1} \rightarrow \varphi^*E_X \rightarrow \varphi^*T_X \rightarrow 0.$$

The splitting type of φ^*E_X will consistently be denoted $(f_1, f_2, f_3, f_4, f_5)$ in this paper. Since $\text{Hom}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(f), \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(a)) = 0$ if $f > a$ we conclude that

- (1) If $f_i \geq 0$ for all i , then φ is free.
- (2) If $f_i > 0$ for all i , then φ is very free.

For the converse, note that the map $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1} \rightarrow \varphi^*E_X$ has image contained in the direct sum of the summands with $f_i \geq 0$. Hence, if $f_i < 0$ for some i , then φ is not free. Finally, suppose that $f_i \geq 0$ for all i . If there are at least two f_i equal to 0, then we see that φ is free but not very free. We conclude that

- (3) If φ is free, then $f_i \geq 0$ for all i .
- (4) If φ is very free, then either (a) $f_i > 0$ for all i , or (b) exactly one $f_i = 0$ and all others > 0 .

We do not know if (4)(b) occurs.

Translation into algebra. Here we work over the graded k -algebra $R = k[S, T]$. As usual, we let $R(e)$ be the graded free R -module whose underlying module is R with grading given by $R(e)_n = R_{e+n}$. A *graded free R -module* will be any graded R -module isomorphic to a finite direct sum of $R(e)$'s. Such a module M has a *splitting type*, namely the sequence of integers u_1, \dots, u_r such that $M \cong R(u_1) \oplus \dots \oplus R(u_r)$.

We will think of a degree d morphism $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow \mathbb{P}^5$ as a 6-tuple (G_0, \dots, G_5) of homogeneous elements in R of degree d with no common factors. Then φ is a

morphism into X if and only if $G_0^5 + \dots + G_5^5 = 0$. In this situation we define two graded R -modules. The first is called the *pullback of the cotangent bundle*

$$\Omega_X(\varphi) = \text{Ker}(\tilde{\varphi} : R^{\oplus 6}(-d) \longrightarrow R)$$

where the map $\tilde{\varphi}$ is given by $(A_0, \dots, A_5) \mapsto \sum A_i G_i$. The second is called the *pullback of the extended tangent bundle*

$$E_X(\varphi) = \text{Ker}(R^{\oplus 6}(d) \longrightarrow R(5d))$$

where the map is given by $(A_0, \dots, A_5) \mapsto \sum A_i G_i^4$. Since the kernel of a map of graded free R -modules is a graded free R -module, both $\Omega_X(\varphi)$ and $E_X(\varphi)$ are themselves graded free R -modules of rank 5.

Lemma 2.1. *The splitting type of $\varphi^* E_X$ is equal to the splitting type of the R -module $E_X(\varphi)$.*

Proof. Recall that $\mathbb{P}^1 = \text{Proj}(R)$. Thus, a finitely generated graded R -module corresponds to a coherent sheaf on \mathbb{P}^1 , see [Har77, Proposition 5.11]. Under this correspondence, the module $R(e)$ corresponds to $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(e)$. The lemma follows if we show that $\varphi^* E_X$ is the coherent sheaf associated to $E_X(\varphi)$. Diagram (2.0.1) shows that $\varphi^* E_X$ is the kernel of a map $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}(d)^{\oplus 6} \rightarrow \mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}^1}$ given by substituting (G_0, \dots, G_5) into the partial derivatives of the polynomial defining X . Since the equation is $X_0^5 + \dots + X_5^5$, the derivatives are X_i^4 , and substituting we obtain G_i^4 as desired. \square

3. RELATING THE SPLITTING TYPES

Observe that $\Omega_X(\varphi)$ is also a graded free module of rank 5 and so has a splitting type, which we denote using e_1, \dots, e_5 . In this section, we relate the splitting type of $\Omega_X(\varphi)$ to the splitting type of $E_X(\varphi)$.

If $(A_0, \dots, A_5) \in \Omega_X(\varphi)$, then $A_0 G_0 + \dots + A_5 G_5 = 0$ so that

$$A_0^4 G_0^4 + \dots + A_5^4 G_5^4 = 0$$

by the Frobenius endomorphism in characteristic 2. Let

$$\mathcal{T} = \{(A_0^4, \dots, A_5^4) \mid (A_0, \dots, A_5) \in \Omega_X(\varphi)\}$$

in $E_X(\varphi)$. We denote the R -module generated by \mathcal{T} as $R\langle \mathcal{T} \rangle$.

Lemma 3.1. *In the notation above, $E_X(\varphi) = R\langle \mathcal{T} \rangle$.*

Proof. Let (B_0, \dots, B_5) be an element of $E_X(\varphi)$ where B_i is a homogeneous polynomial of degree b . We consider the case $b \equiv 0 \pmod{4}$.

Observe that we can rewrite each monomial term of B_i as $(c^{1/4} S^\ell T^k)^4 S^i T^{4-i}$ or $(c^{1/4} S^\ell T^k)^4$ for some integers ℓ, k , where $c \in k$ and $0 < i < 4$. After collecting terms and applying the Frobenius endomorphism, we obtain

$$B_i = a_{i1}^4 + a_{i2}^4 S^3 T + a_{i3}^4 S^2 T^2 + a_{i4}^4 S T^3$$

where each a_{ij} is an element of R . Then, since $B_0 G_0^4 + \dots + B_5 G_5^4 = 0$, substituting our expression for the B_i 's and applying Frobenius we obtain

$$\left(\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{i1} G_i \right)^4 + \left(\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{i2} G_i \right)^4 S^3 T + \left(\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{i3} G_i \right)^4 S^2 T^2 + \left(\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{i4} G_i \right)^4 S T^3 = 0$$

The sums $\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{ij}G_i$ are each themselves homogeneous polynomials. But since the degree of T in each term above is distinct modulo 4, the equation $\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{ij}G_i = 0$ implies that $(a_{0j}, \dots, a_{5j}) \in \Omega_X(\varphi)$, so that $(a_{0j}^4, \dots, a_{5j}^4) \in \mathcal{T}$ for $1 \leq j \leq 4$.

Hence, every homogeneous element of $E_X(\varphi)$ is contained in the submodule generated by \mathcal{T} . Since the reverse containment is trivial, it follows that $E_X(\varphi) = R\langle \mathcal{T} \rangle$. The cases for $b \equiv 1, 2, 3 \pmod{4}$ follow similarly. \square

Proposition 3.2. *If $x_i = (x_{i0}, \dots, x_{i5})$ for $1 \leq i \leq 5$ form a basis for $\Omega_X(\varphi)$, then $y_i = (x_{i0}^4, \dots, x_{i5}^4)$ for $1 \leq i \leq 5$ form a basis for $E_X(\varphi)$.*

Proof. If $x_i \in \Omega_X(\varphi)$, then $y_i \in \mathcal{T}$ and every element of \mathcal{T} is an R -linear combination of the y_i 's. Since $E_X(\varphi) = R\langle \mathcal{T} \rangle$, every element of $E_X(\varphi)$ is also an R -linear combination of the y_i 's so that the y_i 's generate $E_X(\varphi)$. Moreover, $E_X(\varphi)$ is a free module of rank 5 over a domain, so the generators y_i for $E_X(\varphi)$ must also be linearly independent and hence form a basis. \square

Accounting for twist, a simple computation using the results above gives us the following.

Corollary 3.3. *If f_i denotes the splitting type of $E_X(\varphi)$ and e_i denotes the splitting type of $\Omega_X(\varphi)$, then for a degree d morphism, $f_i = 4e_i + 5d$.*

4. NUMEROLOGY

We now utilize some facts about graded free modules in order to give constraints on potential splitting types. Given a graded free module

$$M = R(u_1) \oplus \dots \oplus R(u_r)$$

one can observe that the Hilbert polynomial H_M is given by

$$H_M(m) = rm + u_1 + \dots + u_r + r.$$

Let φ denote a free morphism into X . Noting that the map $\tilde{\varphi} : R(-d)_m^{\oplus n+1} \rightarrow R_m$ is surjective for $m \gg 0$, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} H_{\Omega(\varphi)}(m) &= \dim_k(\ker(R(-d)_m^{\oplus n+1} \rightarrow R_m)) \\ &= (n+1)(-d+m+1) - (m+1) \\ &= nm - d(n+1) + n. \end{aligned}$$

A similar calculation shows that,

$$H_{E_X(\varphi)}(m) = nm + d(n+1-5) + n$$

We continue to refer to the splitting type components of $\Omega(\varphi)$, respectively $E_X(\varphi)$ as e_i , respectively f_i . In both cases $n = r = 5$, so combining these two equations with the general form for the Hilbert polynomial of a graded free module, we obtain our first constraints:

$$(4.0.1) \quad e_1 + e_2 + e_3 + e_4 + e_5 = -6d$$

$$(4.0.2) \quad f_1 + f_2 + f_3 + f_4 + f_5 = d.$$

Recall from Section 2 that a curve is free, respectively very free if $f_i \geq 0$, respectively $f_i > 0$ for each i . Since $f_i = 4e_i + 5d$, it follows that

$$(4.0.3) \quad e_i \geq -\frac{5d}{4}$$

where strict inequality implies the curve is very free. With these two bounds, we can quickly observe a few facts about curves of different degrees.

Remark 4.1.

- (1) There exist no free curves in degrees 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7.
- (2) Any free curve of degree not divisible by 4 must be very free.
- (3) There are no very free curves in degrees 4 or 8.
- (4) The $\Omega(\varphi)$ splitting type of a degree 4 free curve must be $(-5, -5, -5, -5, -4)$.
- (5) The $\Omega(\varphi)$ splitting type of a degree 5 very free curve must be $(-6, -6, -6, -6, -6)$.

All of these observation follow directly from the two constraints. For example, in degree 6, $e_1 + e_2 + e_3 + e_4 + e_5 = -6d = -36$. However, each $e_i \geq \frac{-30}{4} = -7.5$. So even if each e_i is at best -7 , the e_i cannot sum to -36 .

The rest of the remarks follow in a similar manner. Note that one can glean even more information about these curves from the constraints, but the remarks listed above are sufficient for our purposes.

5. DEGREE 4 AND 5 MORPHISMS INTO X

We will now show that there are no free morphisms of degrees 4 or 5 into X . A morphism $\varphi = (G_0, \dots, G_5)$, where each $G_i = \sum_{j=0}^d a_{ij} S^{d-j} T^j$ is a homogeneous polynomials of degree d , gives us a $6 \times (d+1)$ matrix (a_{ij}) . We will denote this matrix as M_φ .

Lemma 5.1. *If φ is a degree 4 or 5 free morphism into X , then M_φ has maximal rank.*

Proof. This follows from Remark 4.1 (4) and (5) by observing that for a degree d morphism into X , the transpose of M_φ is the matrix of the k -linear map $\tilde{\varphi}_d : (R(-d)^{\oplus 6})_d \rightarrow R_d$. \square

Lemma 5.2.

- (a) *There are no degree 4 free morphisms into X .*
- (b) *There are no degree 5 free morphisms into X .*

Proof. (a) Assume a degree 4 free morphism $\varphi = (G_0, \dots, G_5)$ exists. By the previous lemma, the 6×5 matrix $M_\varphi = (a_{ij})$ has maximal rank. Since permuting the G_i 's does not affect the splitting type of $E_X(\varphi)$, we can assume that the first 5 rows of M_φ are linearly independent over k . Then $\det((a_{ij})_{i \leq 4}) \neq 0$. Now consider the matrix $\overline{M}_\varphi = (a_{ij}^4)$. By the Frobenius endomorphism on k , $\det((a_{ij}^4)_{i \leq 4}) = \det((a_{ij})_{i \leq 4})^4 \neq 0$, proving that \overline{M}_φ has maximal rank as well.

Since $G_0^5 + \dots + G_5^5 = 0$, computing the coefficients of $G_0^5 + \dots + G_5^5$, we obtain for $0 \leq j \leq 4$

$$(5.2.1) \quad \sum_{i=0}^5 a_{ij}^4 a_{i1} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{i=0}^5 a_{ij}^4 a_{i3} = 0.$$

The kernel of the map $k^6 \rightarrow k^5$ given by right multiplication by the matrix \overline{M}_φ has dimension 1 because $\text{rank}(\overline{M}_\varphi) = 5$. By (5.2.1), $(a_{01}, a_{11}, \dots, a_{51})$, $(a_{03}, a_{13}, \dots, a_{53}) \in \ker(k^6 \rightarrow k^5)$, and since these 6-tuples are columns of M_φ , they are linearly independent over k . Then $\dim_k(\ker(k^6 \rightarrow k^5)) \geq 2$, a contradiction.

(b) Assume $\varphi = (G_0, \dots, G_5)$ is a degree 5 free morphism. By the previous lemma, the matrix $M_\varphi = (a_{ij})$ has maximal rank, and is invertible. Thus $\overline{M}_\varphi = (a_{ij}^4)$ is invertible by the same argument above. Since $G_0^5 + \dots + G_5^5 = 0$, computing the coefficients of the polynomial $G_0^5 + \dots + G_5^5$, we get $\sum_{i=0}^5 a_{ij}^4 a_{i2} = 0$ for $0 \leq j \leq 5$. Thus, the product of the row matrix $(a_{02}, a_{12}, \dots, a_{52})$ and the matrix \overline{M}_φ is 0, which is impossible because $(a_{02}, a_{12}, \dots, a_{52}) \neq 0$ and \overline{M}_φ is invertible. \square

6. COMPUTATIONS FOR THE DEGREE 8 FREE CURVE

Let $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow \mathbb{P}^5$ be a morphism given by the 6-tuple

$$\begin{aligned} G_0 &= S^7 T \\ G_1 &= S^4 T^4 + S^3 T^5 \\ G_2 &= S^4 T^4 + S^3 T^5 + T^8 \\ G_3 &= S^7 T + S^6 T^2 + S^5 T^3 + S^4 T^4 + S^3 T^5 \\ G_4 &= S^8 + S^7 T + S^6 T^2 + S^5 T^3 + S^4 T^4 + S^3 T^5 + T^8 \\ G_5 &= S^8 + S^7 T + S^6 T^2 + S^5 T^3 + S^4 T^4 + S^3 T^5 + S^2 T^6 + S T^7. \end{aligned}$$

One can check by computer or by hand that this curve lies on the Fermat hypersurface $X \subset \mathbb{P}^5$.

Due to twisting, the domain of the map $\tilde{\varphi} : R(-8)^{\oplus 6} \rightarrow R$ has its first nontrivial graded piece in dimension 8. The G_i are linearly independent over k , hence the kernel is trivial in dimension 8. The matrix for the map $\tilde{\varphi}_9 : R(-8)_9^{\oplus 6} \rightarrow R_9$ is

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

where each direct summand of the domain has a basis $\{(S, 0), (0, T)\}$, of which we take six copies (for total dimension 12), and the range has basis given by the degree 9 monomials in S and T , ordered by increasing T -degree (for total dimension 10). This matrix has rank 10, which means that the map in degree 9 is surjective. By rank-nullity, two dimensions of the kernel live in degree 9; denote the generators by x_1, x_2 . Surjectivity of $\tilde{\varphi}$ in degree 9 implies surjectivity in all higher degrees. A second application of rank-nullity gives $\dim_k \Omega(\varphi)_{10} = 7$. Four of the generators are inherited from the previous degree, taking the forms

$$x_1 S, x_2 S, x_1 T, x_2 T.$$

We conclude that there are three additional generators in degree 10. Therefore, the splitting type of $\Omega_X(\varphi)$ is $e_1, \dots, e_5 = -10, -10, -10, -9, -9$, which translates to a splitting type for $E_X(\varphi)$ of $f_1, \dots, f_5 = 0, 0, 0, 4, 4$, hence the curve is free.

7. A VERY FREE RATIONAL CURVE OF DEGREE 9

We conclude by giving an example of a degree 9 very free curve lying on X . Let $\varphi : \mathbb{P}^1 \rightarrow \mathbb{P}^5$ be a morphism into the Fermat hypersurface given by the 6-tuple

$$\begin{aligned} G_0 &= S^4T^5 \\ G_1 &= S^9 + S^8T + S^5T^4 \\ G_2 &= S^9 + S^4T^5 + ST^8 \\ G_3 &= S^9 + S^8T + S^4T^5 + S^3T^6 + S^2T^7 + ST^8 \\ G_4 &= S^9 + S^5T^4 + S^3T^6 + S^2T^7 + ST^8 + T^9 \\ G_5 &= S^7T^2 + S^6T^3 + S^5T^4 + S^3T^6 + S^2T^7 + ST^8 + T^9. \end{aligned}$$

Let e_1, \dots, e_5 again denote the splitting type of $\Omega_X(\varphi)$. As in Section 6, we know that $e_i \leq -9$. Since the G_i are linearly independent over k , $\dim_k(\Omega_X(\varphi)_9) = 0$. Next we claim that $\tilde{\varphi}_{10} : R_1^{\oplus 6} \rightarrow R_{10}$ is surjective. In fact, it can be checked that the $\tilde{\varphi}(b_i)$ span R_{10} , where the b_i are distinct basis elements of $R_1^{\oplus 6}$. It follows that $\tilde{\varphi}_n : R(-9)_n^{\oplus 6} \rightarrow R_n$ is surjective for $n \geq 10$. Hence,

$$\begin{aligned} \dim_k(\Omega_X(\varphi)_{10}) &= \dim_k(R_1^{\oplus 6}) - \dim_k(R_{10}) = 1 \\ \dim_k(\Omega_X(\varphi)_{11}) &= \dim_k(R_2^{\oplus 6}) - \dim_k(R_{11}) = 6. \end{aligned}$$

After reordering, this yields $(e_1, \dots, e_5) = (-11, -11, -11, -11, -10)$, which corresponds to the splitting type $(1, 1, 1, 1, 5)$ of $E_X(\varphi)$, showing that φ is very free. This completes the proof of Theorem 1.1.

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