

ANOTHER PROOF OF EULER'S FORMULA FOR $\zeta(2k)$

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ABSTRACT. We give a new proof of Euler's formula related to the sum of the inverses of even powers of positive integers.

The problem of summing the series $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2}$ can be traced back to the 17th century. James Bernoulli claimed that he had computed its value in 1691, but the first proof for the formula

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2} = \frac{\pi^2}{6}$$

was published by Euler in 1734. Later, in 1740, this great mathematician gave a more general result by summing $\zeta(z) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^z}$ (Riemann zeta function) for even positive integers:

$$(1) \quad \zeta(2k) = (-1)^{k+1} \frac{B_{2k} 2^{2k-1} \pi^{2k}}{(2k)!}.$$

Some historical remarks can be found in [2] or [12]. The numbers B_n are rational, the so-called Bernoulli numbers. They are the coefficients in the series expansion

$$(2) \quad B(z) := \frac{z}{e^z - 1} = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{B_n}{n!} z^n, \quad |z| < 2\pi.$$

The formula $\zeta(2) = \frac{\pi^2}{6}$ has been proved by different methods. Most of them are elementary (but not easy). A compilation of fourteen of these proofs can be found in [6].

After Euler's proof of (1), a number of new proofs have appeared. (See [1], [3]-[5], [7]-[11], [13]-[20].)

The aim of this paper is to give a new proof of (1). This proof, we believe, is simpler than those cited above. We use the Taylor series expansion for the tangent function:

$$(3) \quad \tan x = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{B_{2n} (-4)^n (1 - 4^n)}{(2n)!} x^{2n-1}, \quad |x| < \pi/2.$$

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For completeness we derive the series expansion for the tangent function from that for (2) defining the Bernoulli numbers. The equation

$$g(z) := \frac{z}{e^z - 1} + \frac{z}{2} = 1 + \sum_{n=2}^{\infty} \frac{B_n}{n!} z^n$$

implies that $g(z) = g(-z)$, so that $B_n = (-1)^n B_n$ ($n \geq 2$); and thus $B_{2n+1} = 0$ if $n \geq 1$. Therefore, we can rewrite the relation (2) in the form

$$B(x) = \frac{z}{e^z - 1} = 1 - \frac{z}{2} + \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{B_{2n}}{(2n)!} z^{2n}, \quad |z| < 2\pi.$$

From this equation and the relations

$$\begin{aligned} \cot z &= i + \frac{B(i2z)}{z}, \\ \tan z &= \cot z - 2 \cot 2z, \end{aligned}$$

we deduce the series expansion for the tangent in (3).

Let us use the formula in (3) for $\tan xy$ with $|x| \leq \pi/2$ and $|y| < 1$:

$$\begin{aligned} \int_0^{\pi/2} \tan xy \, dx &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{B_{2n}(-4)^n(1-4^n)}{(2n)!} \int_0^{\pi/2} x^{2n-1} dx y^{2n-1} \\ &= \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{B_{2n}(-1)^n(1-4^n)}{(2n)!} \frac{\pi^{2n}}{2n} y^{2n-1} \end{aligned}$$

(where we have used Fubini's theorem for changing the order of integration).

On the other hand, integration by parts in the above integral, together with the infinite product formula for the cosine and the Taylor series expansion for $\ln(1+x)$, gives

$$\begin{aligned} \int_0^{\pi/2} \tan xy \, dx &= \frac{-\ln(\cos(xy))}{y} \Big|_0^{\pi/2} = \frac{-\ln(\cos(\pi y/2))}{y} \\ &= \frac{-\ln\left(\prod_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(1 - \frac{(\pi y/2)^2}{\pi^2(n-1/2)^2}\right)\right)}{y} \\ &= \frac{-\ln\left(\prod_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(1 - \left(\frac{y}{2n-1}\right)^2\right)\right)}{y} \\ &= -\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^{2k+1}}{k} \frac{y^{2k-1}}{(2n-1)^{2k}} \\ &= \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{k} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n-1)^{2k}} y^{2k-1}. \end{aligned}$$

Again, Fubini's theorem allows the order of the sums to be interchanged.

If we identify coefficients in the series expansions, then

$$(4) \quad \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n-1)^{2k}} = (-1)^k \frac{B_{2k}(1-4^k)}{(2k)!} \frac{\pi^{2k}}{2}.$$

Because

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^{2k}} - \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n)^{2k}} = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n-1)^{2k}},$$

we have

$$\zeta(2k) = \left(1 - \frac{1}{4^k}\right) \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(2n-1)^{2k}}.$$

By substitution in (4), we obtain Euler's formula in (1).

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