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COMPOSITE POSITIVE INTEGERS WHOSE SUM OF PRIME FACTORS IS PRIME

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Abstract. In this note, we show that the counting function of the number of composite positive integers $n \le x$ such that $\beta(n) = \sum_{p|n} p$ is a prime is of order of magnitude at least $x/(\log x)^3$ and at most $x/\log x$.

1. Introduction

In this paper, for a positive integer n we set $\beta(n) = \sum_{p|n} p$. This function has been studied by a few authors before. It's first appearance was in papers of Pomerance and his co-authors, including Erdós (see [7], [8], [9]), where the positive integers n with $\beta(n) = \beta(n+1)$ were investigated. An example of such n is 714, a number which at that time appeared in the context of a baseball game and since then such numbers have been called Ruth-Aaron numbers. De Koninck and Luca studied positive integers n with $\beta(n) \mid n$ (see [3], [4]).

Let

$$\mathcal{B} := \{n \text{ composite} : \beta(n) \text{ is prime}\}.$$

For a subset $\mathcal{A}$ of positive integers and a real number $x \ge 1$, we write

$$\mathcal{A}(x) = \mathcal{A} \cap [1, x].$$

We have the following theorem.

Theorem 1. *The estimates*

$$\frac{x}{(\log x)^3} \ll \#\mathcal{B}(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x}$$

hold.

We believe the upper bound is closer to the truth and this would follow if we assume that $\beta(n)$ is "randomly distributed". In the last section, we provide a conditional proof of a lower bound of the same order of magnitude as the upper bound assuming a uniform version of the Bateman-Horn conjecture. In the same section, we conjecture that in fact $\#\mathcal{B}(x) = e^{\gamma}(1 + o(1))x/\log x$ holds as $x \to \infty$ and give some heuristics in support of our conjecture.

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Throughout the paper, the Landau symbols O and o as well as the Vinogradov symbols $\ll$ and $\gg$ are used. The constants implied by them are absolute.

2. The upper bound

Here, we prove the upper bound from Theorem 1. We carve off a finite number of slices of $\mathcal{B}(x)$ denoted $\mathcal{B}_i(x)$ for $i = 1, 2, 3, 4$ each of cardinality $O(x/\log x)$. Then we will study the condition $\beta(n)$ is prime on the left-over subset of $n \le x$ denoted by $\mathcal{B}_5(x)$.

2.1. **Eliminating smooth numbers from $\mathcal{B}(x)$.** We let $P(n)$ be the largest prime factor of n. We put $y := \exp(\log x/\log\log x)$ and let

$$\mathcal{B}_1(x) := \{n \le x : P(n) \le y\}. \tag{1}$$

In classical notation, and in our range of y versus x, we have

$$\#\mathcal{B}_1(x) = \Psi(x, y) = \big(1 + o(1)\big)x\rho(u) = xu^{-(1+o(1))u}, \quad \text{where} \quad u := \frac{\log x}{\log y},$$

(see Theorem 9.15 and Corollary 9.18 in [5]), where ρ is the Dickman function. Since for us $u = \log\log x$, we have $u^{-(1+o(1))u} = (\log x)^{-(1+o(1))\log\log\log x}$ as $x \to \infty$. Hence,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_1(x) = \frac{x}{(\log x)^{(1+o(1))\log\log\log x}} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}. \tag{2}$$

2.2. **Eliminating numbers divisible by the square of a large prime.** We put $z := (\log x)^{10}$ and let

$$\mathcal{B}_2(x) := \{n \le x : p^2 \mid n \text{ for some prime } p > z\}. \tag{3}$$

Given a prime p, the number of $n \le x$ divisible by p^2 is $\lfloor n/p^2 \rfloor \le x/p^2$. Thus,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_2(x) \le \sum_{p>z} \frac{x}{p^2} < x \sum_{m>z} \frac{1}{m^2} \ll x \int_z^\infty \frac{dt}{t^2} \ll \frac{x}{z}.$$

In particular,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_2(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x}. \tag{4}$$

2.3. **Applying the sieve.** Assume $n \in \mathcal{B}(x) \setminus (\mathcal{B}_1(x) \cup \mathcal{B}_2(x))$. Then $n = Pm$, where $P = P(n) > y$. Thus, $2 \le m < x/y$. For large x, we have $P > y > z$, so $P \nmid m$. Fix m. Then

$$\beta(n) = P + \beta(m) = P_1,$$

where P_1 is also a prime. By the sieve (apply Theorem 12.6 in [5] with $w(p) = 2$ if $p \nmid \beta(m)$ and $w(p) = 1$ otherwise), the number of primes $P \le x/m$ with the

property that $P+\beta(m)$ is a prime is

$$\begin{aligned}
&\ll \frac{x}{m}\prod_{3\le p\le x/m}\left(1-\frac{w(p)}{p}\right)\\
&\ll \frac{x}{m}\prod_{3\le p\le x/m}\left(1-\frac{2}{p}\right)\prod_{\substack{3\le p\le x/m\\ p\mid\beta(m)}}\left(\left(1-\frac{1}{p}\right)\left(1-\frac{2}{p}\right)^{-1}\right)\\
&\ll \frac{x}{m(\log(x/m))^2}\left(\frac{\sigma(\beta(m))}{\beta(m)}\right),
\end{aligned}$$

where we used the fact that

$$\prod_{\substack{3\le p\le x/m\\ p\mid\beta(m)}}\left(\left(1-\frac{1}{p}\right)\left(1-\frac{2}{p}\right)^{-1}\right)\ll\prod_{p\mid\beta(m)}\left(1+\frac{1}{p}\right)\ll\frac{\sigma(\beta(m))}{\beta(m)}.$$

Now we sum up over m. Note that since $n=Pm\le x$ and $P>P(m)$, it follows that the m's under scrutiny satisfy $mP(m)\le x$. Thus,

$$\#\left(\mathcal{B}(x)\setminus\left(\mathcal{B}_1(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_2(x)\right)\right)\ll\sum_{\substack{m\le x/y\\ mP(m)\le x}}\frac{x}{m(\log(x/m))^2}\left(\frac{\sigma(\beta(m))}{\beta(m)}\right).$$

If most of the sum over the above range of m is concentrated on m's that are not too small (say $\log(x/m)\asymp\log x$), and if in addition the factor $\sigma(\beta(m))/\beta(m)$ is $O(1)$ on the average over such m, then the sum of the reciprocals of these m will introduce at most another logarithm. Hence, we have to deal with $\log(x/m)$ and with $\sigma(\beta(m))/\beta(m)$. We first deal only with $\sigma(\beta(m))/\beta(m)$ when m is not too small as a warm-up example, and deal with the general case later.

2.4. **Eliminating smooth m's.** Let $w:=\exp(\log x/(\log\log x)^3)$. Let

$$\mathcal{B}_3(x):=\{n\in\mathcal{B}(x)\setminus\left(\mathcal{B}_1(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_2(x)\right)\ \text{and}\ P(m)\le w\}. \tag{5}$$

Then

$$\#\mathcal{B}_3(x)\le\sum_{\substack{m\le x/y\\ P(m)\le w}}\frac{x}{m(\log(x/m))^2}\left(\frac{\sigma(\beta(m))}{\beta(m)}\right).$$

Since $x/m\ge y$, we have $\log(x/m)\ge\log y=\log x/\log\log x$. Further, since $\beta(m)\le m\le x$, it follows, by the fact that the inequality $\sigma(n)/n\ll\log\log n$ holds for all positive integers $n\ge 3$ (see Proposition 8.5 in [5]), that $\sigma(\beta(m))/\beta(m)\ll\log\log x$. Hence,

$$\begin{aligned}
\#\mathcal{B}_3(x)&\ll\frac{x(\log\log x)^3}{(\log x)^2}\sum_{\substack{m\le x/y\\ P(m)\le w}}\frac{1}{m}\ll\frac{x(\log\log x)^3}{(\log x)^2}\prod_{p\le w}\left(1-\frac{1}{p}\right)^{-1}\\
&\ll\frac{x(\log\log x)^3\log w}{(\log x)^2}=\frac{x}{\log x}.
\end{aligned}$$

Hence,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_3(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x}\,. \tag{6}$$

The next trick we use is to note that if d is a divisor of s, so is s/d, therefore

$$\frac{\sigma(s)}{s} = \sum_{d|s} \frac{1}{d} \le \sum_{\substack{d|s\\ d\le\sqrt{s}}} \left(\frac{1}{d} + \frac{1}{s/d}\right) \le 2 \sum_{\substack{d|s\\ d\le\sqrt{s}}} \frac{1}{d}\,.$$

We apply this with $s = \beta(m)$ and change the order of summation getting that

$$\#\left(\mathcal{B}(x)\setminus\left(\mathcal{B}_1(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_2(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_3(x)\right)\right) \ll x \sum_{d\le\sqrt{x/y}} \frac{1}{d} \sum_{\substack{m\in\mathcal{M}\\ \beta(m)\ge d^2\\ \beta(m)\equiv 0 \pmod d}} \frac{1}{m(\log(x/m))^2}\,,$$

where

$$\mathcal{M} := \{m \le \min\{x/y, x/P(m)\} : P(m) > w,\ p^2 \nmid m \text{ for } p > z\}\,.$$

2.5. **The case $m \le x^{9/10}$.** We write $\mathcal{M}_1 := \mathcal{M} \cap [1, x^{9/10}]$ and

$$\mathcal{B}_4(x) := \{n \in \mathcal{B}(x)\setminus\left(\mathcal{B}_1(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_2(x)\cup\mathcal{B}_3(x)\right) : m \in \mathcal{M}_1\}\,. \tag{7}$$

When $m \in \mathcal{M}_1$, we have $x/m \ge x^{1/10}$, so $\log(x/m) \ge \log(x^{1/10}) \gg \log x$. Thus,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_4(x) \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{d\le\sqrt{x/y}} \frac{1}{d} \sum_{\substack{m\in\mathcal{M}_1\\ \beta(m)\ge d^2\\ \beta(m)\equiv 0 \pmod d}} \frac{1}{m} := \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{d\le\sqrt{x/y}} \frac{S_d}{d}\,. \tag{8}$$

We write $m =: Q\ell$, where $Q := P(m)$. Since $Q > w$ and $w > z$ for large x, it follows that for large x, $P(\ell) < Q$. Now $\beta(m) = Q + \beta(\ell) \ge Q$. Further, since $\omega(m) \ll \log m/\log\log m \le \log x/\log\log x$ holds for all our m (see Proposition 7.10 in [5]), and $Q > z$, it follows that

$$\beta(m) \ll Q(\log x/\log\log x), \quad \text{therefore} \quad \beta(m) < Q\log x = Qz^{1/10} < Q^{1.1}$$

holds for all large x. Since $d^2 \le \beta(m)$, it follows that $Q > d^{2/1.1} > d^{1.8}$. So, we fix d and ℓ. Then $\beta(m) = Q + \beta(\ell) \equiv 0 \pmod d$ puts Q into the arithmetic progression $-\beta(\ell)$ modulo d which depends on ℓ.
Also, $Q \in [\max\{P(\ell), d^{1.8}\}, x]$. By the sieve (see Theorem 12.7 in [5]), the counting function of primes $Q \le t$ in this arithmetic progression is

$$\pi(t, d, -\beta(\ell)) \ll \frac{t}{\phi(d)\log(t/d))} \ll \frac{t}{\phi(d)\log t} \tag{9}$$

for $t \in [\max\{P(\ell), d^{1.8}\}, x]$.
Fixing ℓ and summing up over all m with the fixed ℓ and the prime $P(m) = Q$ in

the above progression modulo d, we get, by the Abel summation formula,

$$\begin{aligned} S_{d,\ell} &\ll \frac{1}{\ell} \sum_{\substack{\max\{P(\ell), d^{1/8}\} \le Q \le x \\ Q \equiv -\beta(\ell) \pmod d}} \frac{1}{Q} \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\ell} \left(\frac{\pi(x,d,-\beta(\ell))}{x} + \int_{P(\ell)}^{x} \frac{\pi(t,d,-\beta(\ell))}{t^2} dt \right) \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\phi(d)\ell} \left(\frac{1}{\log x} + \int_{P(\ell)}^{x} \frac{dt}{t \log t} \right) \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\phi(d)\ell} \left(\frac{1}{\log x} + (\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)) \right). \end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

Inserting (10) into the right-hand side of (8) and summing up the first terms over $\ell \le m \le x^{0.9}$ and over $d \le x$, we get a contribution of at most

$$\frac{x}{(\log x)^3} \sum_{\ell \le x^{0.9}} \frac{1}{\ell} \sum_{d \ge 1} \frac{1}{d\phi(d)} \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2}$$

integers $n \in \mathcal{B}_4(x)$, where we used the fact that the last series is convergent because $\phi(d) \gg d/\log\log d$ (see Proposition 8.4 in [5]), therefore we have $d\phi(d) \gg d^2/\log\log d \gg d^{3/2}$. Summing up also the second terms in (10) over ℓ then over $d \le x$, we get

$$\begin{aligned} \#\mathcal{B}_4(x) &\ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{3 \le \ell \le x^{0.9}} \left(\frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell} \right) \sum_{d \ge 1} \frac{1}{d\phi(d)} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \\ &\ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{3 \le \ell \le x^{0.9}} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell}. \end{aligned}$$

In the above, we discarded the cases $\ell = 1, 2$ since then $m = PQ,\ 2PQ$ with P and Q large primes, because for these ones $\beta(m) = P + Q,\ P + Q + 2$ is large and even so it cannot be a prime. We also absorbed the second term $x/(\log x)^2$ into the first term (say for $\ell = 3$). To continue, we may assume that $P(\ell) > y$. Indeed, the part of the above sum for with $P(\ell) \le y$ gives a contribution of

$$\frac{x \log\log x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{P(\ell) \le y} \frac{1}{\ell} \ll \frac{x(\log\log x)\log y}{(\log x)^2} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}$$

to $\#\mathcal{B}_4(x)$, which is acceptable for us. For the rest of $\#\mathcal{B}_4(x)$, we put $P(\ell) \in [x^{1/(j+1)}, x^{1/j}]$ for some integer $j \in [1, \log\log x]$. For such ℓ, we have

$$\log\log P(\ell) = \log\log x + O\big(\log(j+1)\big),$$

so

$$\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell) = O\big(\log(j+1)\big).$$

For such an ℓ, we write $\ell =: R\ell_1$, where $R := P(\ell)$. We then get

$$\begin{aligned}
\#\mathcal{B}_4(x) &\ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{3 \le \ell \le x^{0.9}} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell} + \frac{x}{\log x} \\
&\ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{1 \le j \le \log\log x} \sum_{\substack{3 \le \ell \le x^{0.9} \\ x^{1/(j+1)} < P(\ell) \le x^{1/j}}} \frac{\log(j+1)}{\ell} \\
&\ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{1 \le j \le \log\log x} \log(j+1) \sum_{x^{1/j+1} < R \le x^{1/j}} \frac{1}{R} \sum_{P(\ell_1) \le x^{1/j}} \frac{1}{\ell_1} \\
&\ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \\
&\quad \times \sum_{1 \le j \le \log\log x} \log(j+1) \left(\log\log x^{1/j} - \log\log x^{1/j+1} + O\left(\frac{j}{\log x}\right)\right) \\
&\quad \times \left(\log x^{1/j} + O(1)\right) \\
&\ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{1 \le j \le \log\log x} \log(j+1) \left(\log\left(1 + \frac{1}{j}\right) + O\left(\frac{j}{\log x}\right)\right) \\
&\quad \times \left(\frac{\log x}{j} + O(1)\right) \\
&\ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x(\log x)}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{j \ge 1} \frac{\log(j+1)}{j^2} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}\,, \qquad (11)
\end{aligned}$$

which is what we wanted. In the above, we used the fact that the series

$$\sum_{j \ge 1} \frac{\log(j+1)}{j^2}$$

is convergent. We also used the fact that

$$\sum_{a \le R \le b} \frac{1}{R} = \log\log b - \log\log a + O(1/\log a) \qquad (12)$$

with $a = x^{1/(j+1)}$ and $b = x^{1/j}$. With these choices, we have that

$$\log\log b - \log\log a = \log(1 + 1/j) = O(1/j)$$

and this last quantity dominates $O(1/\log a) = O(j/\log x)$ since $j \le \log\log x$.

2.6. **The case m large.** Here, we put

$$\mathcal{B}_5(x) := \mathcal{B}(x) \setminus \left(\cup_{i=1}^4 \mathcal{B}_i(x)\right)\,. \qquad (13)$$

We put $\mathcal{M}_2 = \mathcal{M} \setminus \mathcal{M}_1$ and then, by the argument leading to (8), we have

$$\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) \ll x \sum_{d \le \sqrt{x/y}} \frac{1}{d} \sum_{\substack{m \in \mathcal{M}_2 \\ \beta(m) \ge d^2 \\ \beta(m) \equiv 0 \pmod d}} \frac{1}{m(\log(x/m))^2} := x \sum_{d \le \sqrt{x/y}} \frac{T_d}{d}\,. \qquad (14)$$

Every m participating in T_d satisfies $m > x^{9/10}$. We split the sum over m according to $x/m \in [x^{1/k+1}, x^{1/k})$. For such m, we have that the inequality $\log(x/m) \geq (\log x)/(k+1)$ holds. Further, $m \in (x^{1-1/k}, x^{1-1/(k+1)}]$, and since $m > x^{9/10}$, it follows that $k \geq 10$. Further,

$$w < P(m) < P < x/m \leq x^{1/k}\,,$$

therefore $k \leq (\log\log x)^3$. Hence,

$$\begin{aligned} T_d &\leq \frac{1}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10\leq k\leq (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \sum_{\substack{x^{1-1/k}\leq m\leq x^{1-1/(k+1)}\\ P(m)<x^{1/k}\\ \beta(m)\geq d^2\\ \beta(m)\equiv 0 \pmod d}} \frac{1}{m} \\ &:= \frac{1}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10\leq k\leq (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 T_{d,k}\,. \end{aligned}$$

For each inner sum, we apply the argument used when bounding $\#\mathcal{B}_4(x)$. Namely, $\beta(m) = Q + \beta(\ell) \equiv 0 \pmod d$, which puts, for a fixed ℓ, the prime $Q = P(m)$ into the arithmetic progression $-\beta(\ell)$ modulo d. Further, $Q \geq \max\{P(\ell), d^{1.8}\}$ so the bound (9) applies. Fixing ℓ and summing up over all Q, we get, by the argument used at (10), that

$$\begin{aligned} T_{d,k,\ell} &\ll \frac{1}{\ell} \sum_{\substack{\max\{P(\ell),d^{1/8}\}\leq Q\leq x\\ Q\equiv -\beta(\ell) \pmod d}} \frac{1}{Q} \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\ell}\left(\frac{\pi(x,d,-\beta(\ell))}{x} + \int_{P(\ell)}^{x} \frac{\pi(t,d,-\beta(\ell))}{t^2}dt\right) \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\phi(d)\ell}\left(\frac{1}{\log x} + \int_{P(\ell)}^{x} \frac{dt}{t\log t}\right) \\ &\ll \frac{1}{\phi(d)\ell}\left(\frac{1}{\log x} + (\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell))\right) \\ &\ll \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\phi(d)\ell}\,. \end{aligned} \tag{15}$$

For the last estimate above, we used the fact that $P(\ell) \leq x^{1/k} \leq x^{1/10}$, so $\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell) \geq \log\log x - \log\log x^{1/10} \gg 1$ dominates $1/\log x$. Hence, we can write

$$T_d \ll \frac{1}{\phi(d)(\log x)^2} \sum_{10\leq k<(\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \sum_{\ell\in\mathcal{L}_k} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell}\,,$$

where $\mathcal{L}_k$ is the set of positive integers m such that $m = Q\ell$ for some prime $Q > P(\ell)$, and m satisfies the conditions that $m \in (x^{1-1/k}, x^{1-1/(k+1)}]$,

$\beta(m) \equiv 0 \pmod{d^2}$. Therefore,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10 \le k \le (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \left(\sum_{\ell \in \mathcal{L}_k} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell} \right) \left(\sum_{d \ge 1} \frac{1}{d\phi(d)} \right).$$

The last sum is $O(1)$. We may assume that $P(\ell) \ge w_1 := \exp(\log x/(\log\log x)^{10})$, since for $P(\ell) \le w_1$, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
&\frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10 \le k \le (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \left(\sum_{P(\ell) \le w_1} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell} \right) \\
&\ll \frac{x(\log\log x)^6}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10 \le k \le (\log\log x)^3} \sum_{P(\ell) \le w_1} \frac{\log\log x}{\ell} \\
&\ll \frac{x(\log\log x)^{10}}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{P(\ell) \le w_1} \frac{1}{\ell} \\
&\ll \frac{x(\log\log x)^{10} \log w_1}{(\log x)^2} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}.
\end{aligned}$$

So, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) &\ll \frac{x}{\log x} \\
&\quad + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10 \le k \le (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \left(\sum_{\substack{\ell \in \mathcal{L}_k \\ P(\ell) \ge w_1}} \frac{\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell)}{\ell} \right),
\end{aligned}$$

and we may concentrate on the case $P(\ell) \ge w_1$. Note that since $Q \le x^{1/k}$, it follows that $\ell = m/Q \ge x^{1-2/k}$. We now let $j \ge 0$ and assume that $P(\ell) \in [x^{1/(k+j+1)}, x^{1/(k+j)}]$. Since $P(\ell) \ge w_1$, it follows that the inequality $j < j + k \le (\log\log x)^{10}$ holds. Write $\ell =: R\ell_1$, where $R := P(\ell)$. Then $\ell_1 = \ell/R \ge x^{1-2/k-1/(k+j)} \ge x^{1-3/k} \ge x^{1/3}$ is not too small. We easily verify this by noting that

$$\frac{2}{k} + \frac{1}{k+j} = \frac{3k+j}{k(k+j)} \le \frac{3(k+j)}{k(k+j)} = \frac{3}{k} \le \frac{1}{3},$$

since $k \ge 10$ and $j \ge 0$. Since $P(\ell_1) \le P(\ell)$, it follows that such numbers ℓ_1 are quite smooth, namely their $u = \log \ell_1/\log P(\ell_1)$ is at least

$$u = \frac{\log \ell_1}{\log P(\ell_1)} \ge \frac{\log(x^{1/3})}{\log x^{1/(k+j)}} = \frac{k+j}{3}.$$

For such numbers ℓ, we also have $\log\log x - \log\log P(\ell) = O(\log(k+j))$. We thus get that

$$\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{10\le k<(\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \sum_{j\ge 0} \log(k+j) \sum_{x^{1/(k+j+1)}\le R\le x^{1/(k+j)}} \frac{1}{R} \sum_{\substack{\ell_1\in[x^{1/3},x]\\ u\ge (k+j)/3}} \frac{1}{\ell_1}\,.$$

The last inner sum is

$$\ll \rho((k+j)/3)\log x\,,$$

by applying the Abel summation formula for the sum of the reciprocals of the $x^{1/(k+j)}$-smooth numbers in $[x^{1/3}, x]$ as described in Section 2.1. The sum prior to it is, by estimate (12) with $a := x^{1/(k+j+1)}$ and $b := x^{1/(k+j)}$,

$$\log\log(x^{1/(k+j)} - \log\log x^{1/(k+j+1)} + O\left(\frac{1}{\log x^{1/(k+j)}}\right)$$
$$= \log\left(1+\frac{1}{k+j}\right) + O\left(\frac{k+j}{\log x}\right) \ll \frac{1}{k+j} + O\left(\frac{k+j}{\log x}\right) \ll \frac{1}{k+j}\,,$$

where we used the fact that $k+j = O((\log\log x)^{10})$. Thus,

$$\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{\log x} \sum_{10\le k\le (\log\log x)^3} (k+1)^2 \sum_{0\le j\le (\log\log x)^{10}} \frac{\rho((k+j)/3)\log(k+j)}{k+j}\,.$$

Since $\rho(u) = u^{-(1+o(1))u}$ as $u\to\infty$, it follows that $\rho((k+j)/3) \ll (k+j)^{-4}$. Hence, the inner sum above is bounded by

$$\sum_{0\le j\le (\log\log x)^{10}} \frac{\rho((k+j)/3)\log(k+j)}{k+j} \ll \sum_{j\ge 0} \frac{\log(k+j)}{(k+j)^5} \le \sum_{K\ge k} \frac{\log K}{K^5}$$
$$\ll \int_k^\infty \frac{\log t\,dt}{t^5} \ll \frac{\log k}{k^4}\,,$$

and so

(16)
$$\#\mathcal{B}_5(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x} + \frac{x}{\log x} \sum_{10\le k\le (\log\log x)^3} \frac{(k+1)^2\log k}{k^4} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}\sum_{k\ge 9}\frac{\log k}{k^2} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}\,.$$

Thus, by inequalities (2), (4), (6), (11) and (16), we get that

$$\#\mathcal{B}(x) \le \sum_{i=1}^{5} \#\mathcal{B}_i(x) \ll \frac{x}{\log x}\,,$$

which is what we wanted to prove.

3. The lower bound

3.1. **A conditional lower bound.** Before we give the proof of the actual unconditional lower bound, let us give a conditional proof of a lower bound of the same order of magnitude as the upper bound. Before we can do that, let us recall the Bateman-Horn conjecture. We say that a system of non-constant polynomials $f_1(X), \ldots, f_k(X) \in \mathbb{Z}[X]$ each having positive leading coefficient is *acceptable* if the following conditions hold:

(i) $f_i(X)$ is irreducible for all $i = 1, \ldots, k$.

(ii) there exists no prime number p such that $p \mid f_1(n)f_2(n)\cdots f_k(n)$ for all $n \geq 0$.

Given a system of acceptable polynomials, the Bateman-Horn conjecture (see Chapter 2.10 in [5]) is an heuristic statement addressing the frequency of the positive integers n such that

$$f_1(n),\ f_2(n),\ \ldots,\ f_k(n)$$

are all prime numbers. The actual statement is as follows.

Conjecture 1 (Bateman, Horn [1])**.** *Let $f_1(X), \ldots, f_k(X)$ be an acceptable system of polynomials. For each prime number p let*

$$\omega(p) = \#\{0 \leq n \leq p-1\ :\ f_1(n)f_2(n)\ldots f_k(n) \equiv 0 \pmod p\}\,,$$

and set

$$\pi_{f_1,\ldots,f_k}(x) := \#\{n \leq x\ :\ f_1(n),\ \ldots,\ f_k(n)\ \text{are all primes}\}\,.$$

Then

$$\pi_{f_1,\ldots,f_k}(x) = (1+o(1))C(f_1,\ldots,f_k)\,\frac{1}{d_1\ldots d_k}\,\frac{x}{(\log x)^k} \quad \text{as} \quad x \to \infty\,, \tag{17}$$

where $d_i := \deg(f_i)$, and where the constant $C(f_1, \ldots, f_k)$ is given by

$$C(f_1,\ldots,f_k) = \prod_{p \geq 2} \frac{1-\omega(p)/p}{(1-1/p)^k}\,. \tag{18}$$

Proposition 1. *Assume that Bateman-Horn conjecture estimate* (17) *holds for the acceptable system of polynomials $X,\ X+h$ for all even positive integers h in the range $h < x^\delta$ with some small $\delta > 0$. Then*

$$\#\mathcal{B}(x) \gg \frac{x}{\log x}\,.$$

Proof. For all even positive integers h, let $\pi_2(x,h)$ be the number of primes p such that $p+h \leq x$ is also prime. The Bateman-Horn conjecture for the acceptable system of polynomials $X,\ X+h$ implies that

$$\pi_2(x,h) \asymp c_h \frac{x}{(\log x)^2}, \quad \text{where} \quad c_h = 2\left(\prod_{p \neq 2} \frac{p(p-2)}{(p-1)^2}\right)\left(\prod_{\substack{p \mid h \\ p>2}} \frac{p-1}{p-2}\right) \tag{19}$$

as $x \to \infty$. We assume further that $\pi_2(h) \gg c_h x/(\log x)^2$ holds uniformly for all even $h \le x^\delta$ for some small $\delta > 0$. We may assume that $\delta < 1/3$. Consider numbers $m \le x^{\delta/2}$ which are odd and for which $\omega(m)$ is even. Then $\beta(m)$ is even and $\beta(m) \le m \le x^{\delta/2} < (x/m)^\delta$. Thus, by the above assumption, with $h = \beta(m)$, we have

$$\pi_2(x/m, h) \gg c_h \frac{x}{m(\log(x/m))^2} \gg \frac{x}{m(\log x)^2}\,.$$

We may assume that $p > x^{1-\delta}$, since if not, then for a given m there are at most $\pi(x^{1-\delta}) < x^{1-\delta} < x/(m(\log x)^3)$ primes p failing the above inequality, so we can eliminate those situations from the above count and still keep $\gg x/(m(\log x)^2)$ primes p. We now sum up over $m \le x^{\delta/2}$ getting a count of

$$\gg \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \sum_{\substack{m \le x^{\delta/2} \\ m \equiv 1 \pmod 2 \\ \omega(m) \equiv 0 \pmod 2}} \frac{1}{m}$$

pairs (m, p) with $m \le x^{\delta/2}$, $p \le x/m$ and $p + \beta(m)$ is prime. Let us now put $n = pm \le x$. Further, $p > x^{1-\delta} > m$, so $p = P(n)$ is uniquely determined out of n. Thus, this construction produces distinct integers $n \in \mathcal{B}(x)$. It is enough to show that the sum over m's is a positive proportion of $\log x$. Well, assume further $m \le x^{\delta/2}/3$ and that m is coprime to 6 and then

$$\sum_{\substack{m \le x^{\delta/2}/3 \\ \gcd(m,6)=1}} \frac{1}{m} \ge \sum_{\ell \le \lfloor x^\delta/18 \rfloor - 1} \frac{1}{6\ell + 1} \gg \sum_{\ell \le \lfloor x^\delta/18 \rfloor - 1} \frac{1}{\ell} \gg \log\left(\frac{x^{\delta/2}}{18} - 1\right) \gg \log x\,.$$

Write the sum in the left as $S_0 + S_1$, where S_i denotes the contribution to the sum of m with $\omega(m) \equiv i \pmod 2$ for $i = 0, 1$. If $S_0 \ge S_1$, then $S_0 \ge (S_0 + S_1)/2 \gg \log x$, and we are through. Otherwise, $S_1 \gg \log x$ and

$$\sum_{\substack{m \le x^{\delta/2} \\ m \equiv 1 \pmod 2 \\ \omega(m) \equiv 0 \pmod 2}} \frac{1}{m} \ge \sum_{\substack{m \le x^{\delta/2}/3 \\ \gcd(m,6)=1 \\ \omega(m) \equiv 1 \pmod 2}} \frac{1}{3m} \ge \frac{S_1}{3} \gg \log x\,,$$

so we are done again. This finishes the proof of Proposition 1. □

3.2. **The unconditional lower bound.** Here, we give a proof of the lower bound from Theorem 1. We use an average version of the Bateman-Horn conjecture due to Chudakov [2]. To state it, let again h be an even positive integer and let

$$T_h(x) := \sum_{n+h \le x} \frac{1}{\log n \log(n+h)}\,.$$

Note that $T_h(x) \asymp x/(\log x)^2$ uniformly for $h = o(x)$ as $x \to \infty$. Then Chudakov proved that

$$\sum_{2|h} |\pi_2(x, h) - c_h T_h(x)|^2 \ll_A \frac{x^3}{(\log x)^A}$$

for any constant $A > 0$. Here, c_h is given by (19). Note that the sum on the left is finite since when $h > x$ from the definition of $T_h(x)$ and if

$$T_h(x) \asymp \frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \gg \pi_2(x,h)$$

both $\pi_2(x,h)$ and $T_h(x)$ are zero. To apply Chudakov's theorem, we take $A := 10$ and let

$$\mathcal{H} := \{h < x/20; h \equiv 0 \pmod 2,\ \pi_2(x,h) < (c_h/2)T_h(x)\}\,.$$

Then

$$\sum_{h\in\mathcal{H}} (c_h T_h(x))^2 \ll \frac{x^3}{(\log x)^{10}}\,.$$

Since $T_h(x) \gg x/(\log x)^2$ for $h \le x/20$ and $c_h \gg 1$, it follows that the left–hand side of the above sum is

$$\gg \#\mathcal{H}\left(\frac{x}{(\log x)^2}\right)^2 \gg \#\mathcal{H}\frac{x^2}{(\log x)^4}.$$

Thus,

$$\#\mathcal{H}\frac{x^2}{(\log x)^4} \ll \frac{x^3}{(\log x)^{10}}\,,$$

implying that $\#\mathcal{H} \ll x/(\log x)^6$. Thus, the set of even integers $h \le x/20$ such that $\pi_2(x,h) \gg c_h T_h(x)$ is of cardinality $x/20 - O(x/(\log x)^6)$. In particular, this set contains most numbers of the form $h = Q + 3$, where $Q \in (x/40, x/20]$ is a prime. Consider pairs of numbers of the form (Q,p), where Q is prime, $h = Q + 3 \in (x/40, x/20]\backslash\mathcal{H}$ and p is a prime counted by $\pi_2(x,h)$. The number of such pairs is

$$\begin{aligned}
&\ge \sum_{\substack{x/40\le Q+3\le x/20\\ Q+3\notin\mathcal{H}}} \pi_2(x, Q+3)\\
&\gg \sum_{\substack{x/40\le Q+3\le x/20\\ Q+3\notin\mathcal{H}}} c_{(Q+3)}T_{Q+3}(x)\\
&\gg \sum_{\substack{x/40\le Q+3\le x/20\\ Q+3\notin\mathcal{H}}} \frac{x}{(\log x)^2}\\
&\gg \frac{x}{(\log x)^2}\left(\pi\left(\frac{x}{20}\right) - \pi\left(\frac{x}{40}\right) - O\left(\frac{x}{(\log x)^6}\right)\right) \gg \frac{x^2}{(\log x)^3}\,.
\end{aligned}$$

For each one of these pairs, $n = 3pQ \le x^2$ satisfies that

$$\beta(n) = p + Q + 3 = p + h \quad \text{is prime}\,.$$

Thus, $n \in \mathcal{B}(x^2)$. Further, since P and Q are large, it follows that each n can appear at most twice in the above count (once from $\pi_2(x, Q+3)$ and once from $\pi_2(x, p+3)$). Thus, the number of such distinct $n \le x^2$ is $\gg x^2/(\log x)^3 \gg x^2/(\log(x^2))^3$. Replacing x by $\sqrt{x}$ in the above argument we get the desired lower bound. This finishes the proof of the lower bound in Theorem 1.

3.3. **A further conjecture on the count of $\mathcal{B}(x)$.** In this section, we offer the following conjecture.

Conjecture 2. *We have*

$$\#\mathcal{B}(x) = e^{\gamma}(1+o(1))\frac{x}{\log x} \qquad as \qquad x \to \infty\,.$$

In the previous sections, we already proved that $\#\mathcal{B}(x) \ll x/\log x$ unconditionally, and $\#\mathcal{B}(x) \gg x/\log x$ conditionally under the Bateman-Horn conjecture for all pairs of polynomials X, $X+h$ for even positive integers $h \le x^{\delta}$ for some $\delta > 0$. So, it is natural to conjecture that

$$\#\mathcal{B}(x) = (1+o(1))cx/\log x \quad \text{holds as} \quad x \to \infty \tag{20}$$

with some constant $c > 0$ and it remains to offer some guess for c. Well, assume that (20) holds. We shall estimate the sum

$$\sum_{n\in\mathcal{B}(x)} \frac{1}{n} \tag{21}$$

in two ways, as follows. In the first way, by estimate (20) and the Abel summation formula, expression (21) should be asymptotically $c(1+o(1))\log\log x$ as $x \to \infty$. Secondly, let us assume that $\beta(n)$ is "randomly distributed" and as such the probability of it to be prime is $1/\log\beta(n)$. Then the sum (21) should be

$$\sum_{2\le n\le x} \frac{1}{n\log\beta(n)}\,. \tag{22}$$

We have not seen the above sum evaluated in the literature, but we have seen the one for which $\beta(n)$ is replaced by $P(n)$. So, let compare them. We have $P(n) \le \beta(n) \le P(n)\omega(n)$. Let $s(n) := \log\beta(n) - \log P(n)$. If p_k denotes the kth prime, then $p_k > k$, so $P(n) \ge p_{\omega(n)} > \omega(n)$ holds for all $n \ge 2$. Thus, $s(n) \le \log\omega(n) \le \log P(n)$. Hence,

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{\beta(n)} &= \frac{1}{\log P(n)+s(n)} = \frac{1}{\log P(n)}\left(\frac{1}{1+s(n)/\log P(n)}\right)\\ &= \frac{1}{\log P(n)} + O\left(\frac{s(n)}{(\log P(n))^2}\right) = \frac{1}{\log P(n)} + O\left(\frac{\log\omega(n)}{(\log P(n))^2}\right)\,.\end{aligned}$$

In the above, we used the fact that

$$\frac{1}{1+z} = 1 + O(z) \quad \text{for} \quad |z| < 1\,,$$

with $z := s(n)/\log P(n)$. Thus,

$$\sum_{2\le n\le x} \frac{1}{n\log\beta(n)} = \sum_{2\le n\le x} \frac{1}{n\log P(n)} + O\left(\sum_{n\le x} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2}\right)\,.$$

The first sum above was evaluated in [6]:

$$\sum_{2\le n\le x} \frac{1}{n\log P(n)} = e^{\gamma}\log\log x + O(1)\,.$$

It remains to bound the sum inside the O term. For this, we break it into two parts, namely the part for which $\omega(n)$ is large and the part for which $\omega(n)$ is small. Let

$$\mathcal{A} := \{n : \omega(n) \geq 10 \log\log x\}\,.$$

Recall that $\mathcal{A}(t) = \mathcal{A} \cap [1,t]$. Put $\tau(n)$ for the number of divisors of n. Since $\tau(n) \geq 2^{\omega(n)} \geq 2^{10\log\log x} > (\log x)^6$, we have that

$$\#\mathcal{A}(t)(\log x)^6 \leq \sum_{n\in\mathcal{A}(t)} \tau(n) \ll t\log t \ll t\log x\,.$$

The last inequality above is classical (see Theorem 4.9 n [5]). Thus,

$$\#\mathcal{A}(t) \ll \frac{t}{(\log x)^5} \quad \text{holds for all} \quad t \leq x\,.$$

By the Abel summation formula, we have that

$$\sum_{\substack{n\leq x\\ n\in\mathcal{A}}} \frac{1}{n} \leq \frac{\#\mathcal{A}(t)}{t}\Big|_{t=2}^{t=x} + \int_2^x \frac{\#\mathcal{A}(t)dt}{t^2} \ll \frac{1}{(\log x)^5}\left(1 + \int_2^x \frac{dt}{t}\right) \ll \frac{1}{(\log x)^4}\,.$$

Since $\omega(n) \leq \log n/\log\log n$, an estimate mentioned already during the proof of the upper bound for $\#\mathcal{B}_4(x)$, we have that $\log\omega(n) \leq \log\log x$ holds for all $n \leq x$ once x is sufficiently large. Thus,

$$\sum_{\substack{n\leq x\\ n\in\mathcal{A}}} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2} \ll (\log\log x)\left(\sum_{\substack{n\leq x\\ n\in\mathcal{A}}} \frac{1}{n}\right) \ll \frac{\log\log x}{(\log x)^4} = o(1)$$

as $x \to \infty$. Assume now that $n \leq x$ is not in $\mathcal{A}$. We then have that $\omega(n) \leq 10\log\log x$, so $\log\omega(n) \ll \log\log\log x$. Thus,

$$\sum_{\substack{2\leq n\leq x\\ n\notin\mathcal{A}}} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2} \ll (\log\log\log x) \sum_{2\leq n\leq x} \frac{1}{n(\log P(n))^2}\,.$$

The last sum on the right is $O(1)$. This follows easily by the Abel summation formula and the fact that

$$\sum_{2\leq n\leq x} \frac{1}{(\log P(n))^2} = (c_1 + o(1))\frac{x}{(\log x)^2} \qquad \text{as} \qquad x \to \infty\,,$$

which is a result of Wheeler from [10]. Further, $c_1 = \int_0^\infty \rho(t)(t+1)dt$, where $\rho(t)$ is the Dickman function mentioned in the upper bound for $\#\mathcal{B}_1(x)$ (for this, make $u := 1,\ \alpha := -2$ on the last display on page 516 in [10]). It thus follows that

$$\sum_{2\leq n\leq x} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2} = \sum_{\substack{n\leq x\\ n\in\mathcal{A}}} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n)^2} + \sum_{\substack{2\leq n\leq x\\ n\notin\mathcal{A}}} \frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2} \ll \log\log\log x\,,$$

so

$$\sum_{2\le n\le x}\frac{1}{n\log\beta(n)}=\sum_{n\le x}\frac{1}{\log P(n)}+O\left(\sum_{n\le x}\frac{\log\omega(n)}{n(\log P(n))^2}\right)$$
$$=e^{\gamma}\log\log x+O(\log\log\log x)\,.$$

Since the sums (21) and (22) should asymptotically be the same under the assumption that $\beta(n)$ is "randomly distributed", we conclude that if asymptotic (20) holds, then we must indeed have $c=e^{\gamma}$.

We tested this computationally. We computed $r(x):=\#\mathcal{B}'(x)/\pi(x)$, where $\mathcal{B}'(x)=\{n\le x:\omega(n)\ge 2$ and $\beta(n)$ is prime$\}$ for $x:=10^k$, and $k=3,4,5,6,7,8,9$ getting the values from the table below.

k	$x=10^k$	$\#\mathcal{B}'(x)$	$\pi(x)$	$r(x)$
3	10^3	130	168	0.77381
4	10^4	1196	1229	0.973149
5	10^5	11698	9592	1.21956
6	10^6	107315	78498	1.3671
7	10^7	961924	664579	1.44742
8	10^8	8641491	5761455	1.49988
9	10^9	78304633	50847534	1.53999
10	10^{10}	714962670	455052511	1.57117

This sequence $\{r(10^k)\}_{k\ge 3}$ in the right–most column above seems to increase with k and it is anyone's guess whether by continuing the calculations one would get a limit of $e^{\gamma}=1.78107\ldots$

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