

OSCILLATION PROPERTIES OF EVEN-ORDER LINEAR DIFFERENTIAL EQUATIONS

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1. Introduction. The ordinary, self-adjoint differential equation

$$(A) \quad [r(x)y^{(n)}]^{(n)} + p(x)y = 0$$

is considered for $r(x)$ and $p(x)$ continuous and $r(x) > 0$, $p(x) \neq 0$ on $[a, \infty)$. For $n = 1$, this equation has been the subject of many investigations over a number of years. For $n = 2$, J. H. Barrett [1]-[3] and W. Leighton and Z. Nehari [7] have recently considered equations of this type. For arbitrary n , similar equations have been investigated by W. T. Reid [8], by H. Kaufman [6], by H. M. and R. L. Sternberg [6], [9], and by the author [5].

In the present paper, a general boundary problem is considered for a solution $y(x)$ of (A); namely,

$$(B) \quad \begin{aligned} y(a) = y'(a) = \dots = y^{(n-1)}(a) = y_1(a) = \dots = y_1^{(n-i-1)}(a) = 0, \\ y(b) = y'(b) = \dots = y^{(i-1)}(b) = 0 \end{aligned}$$

for $1 \leq i \leq n$, $b > a$, and $y_1(x) \equiv r(x)y^{(n)}(x)$. If $y(x)$ satisfies the first of these conditions, then $y(x)$ is said to be a solution of (A) with a zero of order $2n - i$ at $x = a$, i.e., after the $(n - 1)$ st derivative of $y(x)$, derivatives of $y_1(x)$ are used. For $i = n$, this is similar to boundary problems considered in [1]-[9]. In general, however, the techniques utilized in these latter investigations are dependent on the fact that $i = n$. In §2, a basic property of zeros of solutions of (A) is established. In §§3 and 4, separation and oscillation properties of solutions of (A) are established for $p(x) > 0$ on $[a, \infty)$.

2. A basic property of zeros of solutions of (A). Consider the equations

$$(1) \quad [r(x)y^{(n)}]^{(n)} + p(x)y = 0,$$

$$(2) \quad [r(x)y^{(n)}]^{(n)} - p(x)y = 0,$$

both of which have $r(x)$ and $p(x)$ continuous and positive on $[a, \infty)$. An

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important general property of zeros of solutions of (1) and (2) is then contained in the following theorem.

THEOREM 1. *If i is an even [odd] positive integer and $y(x)$ is a nontrivial solution of (1) [(2)] with a zero of order $\geq 2n - i$ at $x = a$, then $y(x)$ cannot have a zero of order $\geq i$ on (a, ∞) , i.e., there does not exist a nontrivial solution satisfying the conditions (B).*

Proof. Suppose that, for $i \leq n$, $y(x)$ has a zero of order $2n - i$ at $x = a$ and has a zero of order i at $x = b$ on (a, ∞) and that $y(x)$ has m zeros on (a, b) , $m \geq 0$. Let $c \in (a, b]$ be the first zero of $y(x)$ on $(a, b]$. It shall then first be established that $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have a zero on $(a, c]$, regardless of whether i is even or odd.

Note that $y(a) = y'(a) = \dots = y_i(a) = y'_i(a) = \dots = y_1^{(n-i-1)}(a) = 0$ (where, if $i = n$, $y_1^{(-1)}(a)$ is interpreted as $y^{(n-1)}(a)$) and $y(b) = y'(b) = \dots = y^{(i-1)}(b) = 0$. Then successive application of Rolle's Theorem to $y(x)$, $y'(x)$, $\dots$, $y^{(i)}(x)$ gives that $y^{(i)}(x)$ has at least $m + i$ zeros on (a, b) , a zero of order $2(n - i)$ at $x = a$, and does not vanish at $x = b$. Continuation of the process shows that $y_1(x)$ has at least $m + i$ zeros on (a, b) , a zero of order $n - i$ at $x = a$, and does not vanish at $x = b$. Then finally, $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have at least $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) . Suppose that $y_1^{(n-1)}(x) \neq 0$ on $(a, c]$. Then $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ has at least $m + 1$ zeros on (c, b) and hence $y_1^{(n)}(x)$ has at least m zeros on (c, b) . But $y_1^{(n)}(x) = \pm p(x)y(x)$ and thus $y(x)$ would have m zeros on (c, b) , a contradiction. (If $m = 0$, the last three statements are not necessary.) Note that $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ has exactly $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) .

Now let $x = x_0$ be the first zero of $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ on $(a, c]$ and assume, with no loss of generality, that $y(x) > 0$ on (a, c) . Then $y_1^{(n-i)}(a) \geq 0$ regardless of whether i is even or odd. From (1)

$$y_1^{(n-1)}(x_0) - y_1^{(n-1)}(a) = -y_1^{(n-1)}(a) = -\int_a^{x_0} p(x)y \, dx < 0,$$

and $y_1^{(n-1)}(a) > 0$. Similarly, using (2), $y_1^{(n-1)}(a) < 0$. If $i = 1$, the last statement is a contradiction and the special case of the theorem for $i = 1$ and equation (2) is established.

Suppose $i > 1$ and note that $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ must have a zero on (a, x_0) since the $m + 1$ zeros of $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ fall between the extreme zeros of $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ on (a, b) . This comes from the first part of the proof. Also, $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ has exactly $m + 2$ zeros on (a, b) . Similarly, $y_1^{(n-3)}(x)$ must have a zero before the first zero of $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ on (a, x_0) ; and $y_1^{(n-3)}(x)$ has exactly $m + 3$ zeros on (a, b) . This same type of reasoning can then be followed to establish that $y_1^{(n-i)}(x)$ must have a zero on (a, x_0) before the first zero on (a, x_0) of $y_1^{(n-i+1)}(x)$ and

$y^{(n-i)}(x)$ has exactly $m + i$ zeros on (a, b) . If $i = 1$, of course, this entire procedure consists only of the statement that $y^{(n-1)}(x)$ vanishes at x_0 on $(a, c]$.

Then, using (1), $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ must begin at $x = a$ with positive slope and have a zero before its derivative has a zero. This is possible only if $y_1^{(n-2)}(a) < 0$. Then $y_1^{(n-3)}(x)$ must begin at $x = a$ with negative slope and have a zero before its derivative does so, implying that $y_1^{(n-3)}(a) > 0$. Successive applications of this argument yield the fact that $y_1^{(n-i)}(a) < 0$ if i is an even integer. This is a contradiction since $y_1^{(n-i)}(a) > 0$. Hence, the portion of the theorem regarding (1) and even values of i is established. In an analogous way, using (2), $y_1^{(n-i)}(a) < 0$ if i is odd; and a contradiction results.

The theorem is now proved for $i \leq n$. For $i > n$, it suffices to note that the change of variable $x = a - t + b$ leaves (1) and (2) unchanged while transforming $x = a$ into $t = b$ and $x = b$ into $t = a$. Thus, a solution $y(x)$ with a zero of order $2n - i$ at $x = a$ and order i at $x = b$ is transformed into a solution with a zero of order i at $t = a$ and order $2n - i$ at $t = b$. Then the case $i > n$ can be taken care of by the above proof. This completes the proof of the theorem.

Included in Theorem 1 is a generalization of Lemma 8.2 in [7, p. 358], which states that no nontrivial solution of (1) for $n = 2$ has more than one double zero (i.e., a zero of order two). Theorem 1 includes the fact that no nontrivial solution of (1) has more than one n th-order zero. In fact, using the following definition, the following corollary holds.

DEFINITION. The number $\eta_1(a)$ is the smallest number b on (a, ∞) such that the boundary conditions

$$y(a) = y'(a) = \dots = y^{(n-1)}(a) = 0 = y(b) = y'(b) = \dots = y^{(n-1)}(b)$$

are satisfied nontrivially by a solution $y(x)$ of (1) or (2). This is the type of boundary problem considered in [1], [3], [5], [7], [8], [9].

COROLLARY 1. If n is even [odd], then $\eta_1(a)$ does not exist for (1) [(2)].

3. Separation properties of solutions of (1). First of all, Theorem 1 can be utilized to give the following generalization of Lemma 9.1 in [7, p. 361].

THEOREM 2. If $y(x)$ and $z(x)$ are linearly independent solutions of (1) which have zeros of order $\geq 2n - 2$ at $x = a$, then the zeros of $y(x)$ and $z(x)$ separate each other on (a, ∞) .

Proof. If $y(x)$ has consecutive zeros between which $z(x)$ has no zero, a basic result contained in [7, Lemma 1.2, p. 327] gives the existence of a constant k such that $y(x) - kz(x)$ has a double zero in the interval between the zeros of $y(x)$ under consideration. But $y(x) - kz(x)$ is a solution of (1) with a zero of order $2n - 2$ at $x = a$ and cannot have a zero of order two

on (a, ∞) by Theorem 1. Also, $y(x)$ and $z(x)$ cannot have a zero in common for then a constant k could be chosen so that $y(x) - kz(x)$ has a double zero at the common zero, a contradiction. Therefore, the zeros of $y(x)$ and $z(x)$ must separate each other on (a, ∞) .

Let $\{u_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n$) be a set of solutions of (1) which satisfy the boundary conditions

$$(4) \quad \begin{aligned} [u_i(x)]^{(j-1)} &= 0 \quad \text{for } x = a \quad \text{and } i, j = 1, 2, \dots, n, \\ [u_{i,1}(x)]^{(j-1)} &= \delta_{ij} \quad \text{for } x = a \quad \text{and } i, j = 1, 2, \dots, n \\ &\text{and } u_{i,1}(x) = r(x)u_i^{(n)}(x). \end{aligned}$$

Also, let $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$) be a set of solutions of (1) satisfying the conditions

$$(5) \quad \begin{aligned} [U_i(x)]^{(j-1)} &= \delta_{ij} \quad \text{for } x = a \quad \text{and } i, j = 1, 2, \dots, n, \\ [U_{i,1}(x)]^{(j-1)} &= 0 \quad \text{for } x = a \quad \text{and } i, j = 1, 2, \dots, n \\ &\text{and } U_{i,1}(x) = r(x)U_i^{(n)}(x). \end{aligned}$$

THEOREM 3. Consider the sets $\{u_i(x)\}$ and $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$) of solutions of (1) satisfying the conditions of (4) and (5), respectively. Then the zeros of $u_n(x)$ and the zeros of any member of the set $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$), or of $\{u_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n-1$), separate each other on (a, ∞) .

Proof. The proof uses similar techniques to that of Theorem 1. Consider first, the set $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$), and let $U_i(x)$ be one of the members of the set and $y_i(x)$ any linear combination of $U_i(x)$ and $u_n(x)$. If it can be established that $y_i(x)$ cannot have a double zero on (a, ∞) , it will follow as in the proof of Theorem 2 that the zeros of $u_n(x)$ and $U_i(x)$ must separate each other. Thus, suppose that $y_i(x)$ does have a double zero on (a, ∞) at $x = b$ and that $y_i(x)$ has m zeros on (a, b) , $m \geq 0$. Also, let $x = c$ on (a, b) be the first of these zeros to the right of $x = a$. It will first be established that, under these assumptions, $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have a zero on $(a, c]$. Recall $y_{i,1}(x) = r(x)y_i^{(n)}(x)$.

Successive applications of Rolle's Theorem to $y_i(x), y_i'(x), \dots, y_i^{(i-1)}(x)$ show that $y_i^{(i)}(x)$ must have at least $m+1$ zeros on (a, b) . Then, similarly $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have at least $m+1$ zeros on (a, b) . Suppose $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ does not have a zero on $(a, c]$. Then it has $m+1$ zeros on (c, b) and hence $y_{i,1}^{(n)}(x)$ or $y_i(x)$, has m zeros on (c, b) , a contradiction. Note that if $m = 0$ and hence $b = c$, the latter part of the argument is unnecessary. In any case, it follows that $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ has a zero on $(a, c]$. Note that $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ has exactly $m+1$ zeros on (a, b) . Note, also, from the above argument that $y_i^{(i)}(x)$ must have

exactly $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) and that these zeros lie between the first and last zeros of $y_i^{(i-1)}(x)$ on (a, b) .

Now, let $x = x_0$ be the first zero of $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ on $(a, c]$ and assume, with no loss of generality, that $y(x) > 0$ on (a, c) . This implies that $y^{(i-1)}(a) > 0$. Then

$$y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x_0) - y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(a) = -y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(a) = -\int_a^{x_0} p(x)y \, dx < 0,$$

and $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(a) > 0$. Thus $y_{i,1}^{(n-2)}(x)$ must be zero and have positive slope at $x = a$ which implies that $y_{i,1}^{(n-2)}(x) > 0$ in a right neighborhood of $x = a$. Next, $y_{i,1}^{(n-3)}(x)$ must be zero and have zero slope at $x = a$, with positive slope in a right neighborhood of $x = a$, so that $y_{i,1}^{(n-3)}(x) > 0$ in a right neighborhood of $x = a$. This same property must hold for the succeeding functions $y_{i,1}^{(n-4)}(x), \dots, y_{i,1}^{(i)}(x)$. Then $y^{(i-1)}(x)$ must begin at $x = a$ with positive slope and have positive slope in a right neighborhood of $x = a$. Furthermore, by the comment following the first part of the proof, $y^{(i-1)}(x)$ must have a zero before its derivative $y^{(i)}(x)$ has a zero on (a, b) . These properties are possible only if $y^{(i-1)}(a) < 0$, a contradiction. Thus, the zeros of $u_n(x)$ and those of any member of the set $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$), separate each other.

The proof of the latter part of the theorem follows the same lines as that above. Using the same notation, the proof that $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have a zero on $(a, c]$ is obtained as before by successive applications of Rolle's Theorem. Hence, in this case, $y_{i,1}^{(i)}(x)$ has at least $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) ; and, furthermore, $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ has at least $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) . If $y_{i,1}^{(n-1)}(x)$ did not have a zero on $(a, c]$, a contradiction would result as before. Also, $y_{i,1}^{(i)}(x)$ must have exactly $m + 1$ zeros on (a, b) and these lie between the first and last zeros of $y_{i,1}^{(i-1)}(x)$ on (a, b) .

Finally, as before, it follows that upon assuming $y(x) > 0$ on (a, c) , and hence that $y_{i,1}^{(i-1)}(a) > 0$, $y_{i,1}^{(i-1)}(x)$ must have slope zero at $x = a$ and positive slope in a right neighborhood of $x = a$. Furthermore, $y_{i,1}^{(i-1)}(x)$ has a zero before its derivative has a zero. This gives $y_{i,1}^{(i-1)}(a) < 0$, a contradiction. This completes the proof of the theorem.

4. Conditions for oscillation of solutions of (1). The main result of this section is contained in the following theorem.

THEOREM 4. *Suppose that*

$$\int_a^\infty \left({}^x I^n \frac{t^{n-2}}{r} \right) p(x) \, dx = \infty$$

and

$$\int_a^\infty \left({}^x I^n \frac{p}{r(x)} \right) \, dx = \infty$$

(where ${}^*I^n$ denotes the n th iterated integral). Then there exists a set of $2n$ linearly independent, oscillatory solutions (infinitely many zeros on $[a, \infty)$) of (1) with one oscillatory solution whose zeros separate the zeros of each of the other oscillatory solutions ($n > 1$).

Proof. Assume that the theorem is false, and consider the solution $y(x) \equiv u_n(x)$ with a zero of order $2n - 1$ at $x = a$. Let $x = b$ be the last zero of $y(x)$ on $[a, \infty)$, and let m be the number of zeros of $y(x)$ on (a, ∞) , $m \geq 0$. All zeros of $y(x)$ on (a, ∞) must be simple by Theorem 1. Assume, with no loss of generality, that $y(x) > 0$ on (b, ∞) . Then if m is even, $y(x) > 0$ between $x = a$ and the first zero of $y(x)$; if m is odd, $y(x) < 0$ between $x = a$ and the first zero of $y(x)$.

By repeated application of Rolle's Theorem, it follows that in each interval between consecutive zeros of $y(x)$ there exists exactly one simple zero (in order, right to left) of each of the functions $y'(x), y''(x), \dots, y_1(x), y_1'(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$; and none of these functions have zeros coinciding with those of $y(x)$. If one of these functions had more than one zero on such an interval or a zero coinciding with one of $y(x)$, further application of Rolle's Theorem would show that $y_1^{(n)}(x) = -p(x)y(x)$ had a zero on that interval, an impossibility. Furthermore, $y'(x), y''(x), \dots, y_1(x), y_1'(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ are all positive for $x = b$ (unless $b = a$ in which case the functions are all positive in a right neighborhood of $x = b = a$) since they are all positive in a right neighborhood of $x = a$ for m even and all negative in a right neighborhood of $x = a$ for m odd and all vanish m times on (a, b) .

It will now be shown that $y'(x), y''(x), \dots, y_1(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ do not have any zeros at all on (b, ∞) and hence are all positive on (b, ∞) . Assume that $y'(x)$ has a zero at $x = c$ on (b, ∞) . Then, by repeated use of Rolle's Theorem, $y''(x), y'''(x), \dots, y_1(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ all have zeros on (b, c) and are thus all negative on (c, ∞) , as is $y'(x)$, since another zero of any of these functions on (c, ∞) would lead to another zero of $y(x)$ on (b, ∞) . But $y(x)$ cannot remain positive on (c, ∞) if $y'(x)$ and $y''(x)$ are negative on that interval and hence a contradiction results. By the same reasoning, it follows that $y''(x), y'''(x), \dots, y^{(n-1)}(x)$ cannot have zeros on (b, ∞) .

Next, suppose that $y_1(x)$ has a zero at $x = c$ on (b, ∞) . Then $y_1'(x), y_1''(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ must all have zeros on (b, c) and remain negative on (c, ∞) and $y_1(x)$ is negative on (c, ∞) . Now

$$\begin{aligned} y^{(n-1)}(x) &= y^{(n-1)}(c) + \int_c^x y^{(n)}(t) dt \\ &= y^{(n-1)}(c) + \int_c^x \frac{y_1(t)}{r(t)} dt. \end{aligned}$$

Since $y(x)$ is an increasing function on (c, ∞) and $y_1^{(n-1)}(c) < 0$, it follows that

$$\begin{aligned}
 y_1^{(n-1)}(x) &= y_1^{(n-1)}(c) - \int_c^x p(t)y(t) dt \\
 &< - \int_c^x p(t)y(t) dt < - y(c) \int_c^x p(t) dt.
 \end{aligned}$$

Further integrations and the conditions on $y_1(x), y_1'(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ at $x = c$ thus yield

$$y_1(x) < -y(c) {}^xI^n p,$$

where ${}^xI^n p$ is the n th iterated integral of $p(x)$.

Then

$$\begin{aligned}
 y^{(n-1)}(x) &= y^{(n-1)}(c) + \int_c^x \frac{y_1(t)}{r(t)} dt \\
 &< y^{(n-1)}(c) - y(c) \int_c^x \frac{{}^tI^n p}{r(t)} dt
 \end{aligned}$$

and, using the hypothesis, $y^{(n-1)}(x) \rightarrow -\infty$ as $x \rightarrow \infty$. Then $y^{(n-1)}(x)$ must have a zero on (c, ∞) , a contradiction. By the same argument as used for $y'(x), y''(x), \dots, y^{(n-1)}(x)$, it now follows that $y_1'(x), y_1''(x), \dots, y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ cannot have zeros on (b, ∞) .

Now $y_1^{(n)}(x) = -p(x)y(x)$ so that $y_1^{(n)}(x)$ is negative on (b, ∞) and hence $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ is a decreasing function on (b, ∞) and can have at most one zero on (b, ∞) . Assume that $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ has no zeros on (b, ∞) . Note that $y_1(x) \geq x^{n-2}$ on (x_1, ∞) for some $x_1 \geq b$ since $y_1, y_1', \dots, y_1^{(n-1)}$ are all positive functions on (b, ∞) . Furthermore,

$$y^{(n-1)}(x) = y^{(n-1)}(b) + \int_b^x \frac{y_1(t)}{r(t)} dt > \int_{x_1}^x \frac{t^{n-2}}{r(t)} dt.$$

Then, because of the conditions on $y(x), y'(x), \dots, y^{(n-2)}(x)$ at $x = x_1$, $n-1$ integrations give

$$y(x) > {}_{x_1}I^n \frac{t^{n-2}}{r(t)}.$$

From these results,

$$\begin{aligned}
 \int_{x_1}^{\infty} y_1^{(n)}(x) dx &= \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} y_1^{(n-1)}(x) - y_1^{(n-1)}(x_1) \\
 &= - \int_{x_1}^{\infty} p(x)y(x) dx \leq - \int_{x_1}^{\infty} \left({}^xI^n \frac{t^{n-2}}{r(t)} \right) p(x) dx = -\infty,
 \end{aligned}$$

and hence $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ does have a zero for some value $x = c$ on (x_1, ∞) . But then $y_1^{(n-2)}(x)$ is positive on (c, ∞) while $y_1^{(n-1)}(x)$ and $y_1^{(n)}(x)$ are negative on (c, ∞) , an impossibility. Thus, $y(x) \equiv u_n(x)$ cannot have a "last" zero on (a, ∞) and must be oscillatory. From Theorem 3, the zeros of $u_n(x)$ separate those of any member of the sets $\{U_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n$), and

$\{u_i(x)\}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, n-1$); and thus each of these solutions of (1) must oscillate. This completes the proof of the theorem.

COROLLARY 2. *If $\int^\infty x^{2n-2}p(x) dx = \infty$ and $\int^\infty (x^{n-1}/r(x)) dx = \infty$, then there exists a set of $2n$ linearly independent solutions of (1) as in Theorem 4.*

Proof. $\int^\infty ({}^xI^n(t^{n-2}/r(t)))p(x)dx = \infty$ implies $\int^\infty x^{2n-2}p(x) dx = \infty$ and $\int^\infty ({}^xI^n p/r(t)) dx = \infty$ implies that $\int^\infty (x^{n-1}/r(x)) dx = \infty$. The result of the corollary then follows.

For $n = 2$, the following corollary generalizes Theorem 11.4 of [7] which Leighton and Nehari have for the case $r(x) \equiv 1$.

COROLLARY 3. *If $\int^\infty ({}^xI^2r)p(x) dx = \infty$ and $\int^\infty (({}^xI^2p)/r(x)) dx = \infty$, then (1) (for $n = 2$) is oscillatory.*

Proof. By Corollary 9.10 of [7], the solutions of (1) for $n = 2$ are either all oscillatory or all nonoscillatory. Application of Theorem 4 then proves the desired result.

COROLLARY 4. *If $\int^\infty ({}^xI^n(t^{n-2}/r(t)))p(x) dx = \infty$ and $\int^\infty ({}^xI^n p)/r(x) dx = \infty$, then any solution of (1) with a zero of order $2n - 2$ at $x = a$ is oscillatory.*

Proof. Theorem 2 and Theorem 4 combine to give this result.

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