The Halting Problem

Definition. A register machine H decides the Halting Problem if for all $e, a_1, \ldots, a_n \in \mathbb{N}$, starting H with

$$\mathtt{R}_0 = 0 \qquad \mathtt{R}_1 = e \qquad \mathtt{R}_2 = \ulcorner [a_1, \ldots, a_n] \urcorner$$

and all other registers zeroed, the computation of H always halts with $\mathtt{R}_0$ containing 0 or 1; moreover when the computation halts, $\mathtt{R}_0 = 1$ if and only if

> the register machine program with index e eventually halts when started with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0, \mathtt{R}_1 = a_1, \ldots, \mathtt{R}_n = a_n$ and all other registers zeroed.

Definition. A register machine H decides the Halting Problem if for all $e, a_1, \ldots, a_n \in \mathbb{N}$, starting H with

$$\mathrm{R}_0 = 0 \qquad \mathrm{R}_1 = e \qquad \mathrm{R}_2 = \ulcorner [a_1, \ldots, a_n] \urcorner$$

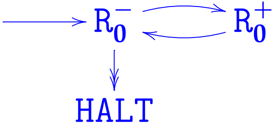
and all other registers zeroed, the computation of H always halts with R_0 containing 0 or 1; moreover when the computation halts, $\mathrm{R}_0 = 1$ if and only if

> the register machine program with index e eventually halts when started with $\mathrm{R}_0 = 0, \mathrm{R}_1 = a_1, \ldots, \mathrm{R}_n = a_n$ and all other registers zeroed.

Theorem. No such register machine H can exist.

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

- Let H' be obtained from H by replacing START$\longrightarrow$ by START$\longrightarrow$ [Z ::= R_1] $\longrightarrow$ [*push* Z *to* R_2] $\longrightarrow$
  (where Z is a register not mentioned in H's program).
- Let C be obtained from H' by replacing each HALT (& each erroneous halt) by 

.
- Let $c \in \mathbb{N}$ be the index of C's program.

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

C started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ eventually halts

if & only if

H' started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

C started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ eventually halts

if & only if

H' started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

if & only if

H started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c, \mathtt{R}_2 = \ulcorner [c] \urcorner$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

C started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ eventually halts

if & only if

H' started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

if & only if

H started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c, \mathtt{R}_2 = \ulcorner [c] \urcorner$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

if & only if

$prog(c)$ started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ does not halt

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

C started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ eventually halts

if & only if

H' started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

if & only if

H started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c, \mathtt{R}_2 = \ulcorner[c]\urcorner$ halts with $\mathtt{R}_0 = 0$

if & only if

$prog(c)$ started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ does not halt

if & only if

C started with $\mathtt{R}_1 = c$ does not halt

Proof of the theorem

Assume we have a RM H that decides the Halting Problem and derive a contradiction, as follows:

C started with $R_1 = c$ eventually halts

if & only if

H' started with $R_1 = c$ halts with $R_0 = 0$

if & only if

H started with $R_1 = c, R_2 = \ulcorner [c] \urcorner$ halts with $R_0 = 0$

if & only if

$prog(c)$ started with $R_1 = c$ does not halt

if & only if

C started with $R_1 = c$ does not halt

—contradiction!

Computable functions

Recall:

Definition. $f \in \mathbb{N}^n \rightharpoonup \mathbb{N}$ is (register machine) computable if there is a register machine M with at least $n+1$ registers R_0, R_1, ..., R_n (and maybe more) such that for all $(x_1, \ldots, x_n) \in \mathbb{N}^n$ and all $y \in \mathbb{N}$,

> the computation of M starting with $R_0 = 0$, $R_1 = x_1$, ..., $R_n = x_n$ and all other registers set to 0, halts with $R_0 = y$

if and only if $f(x_1, \ldots, x_n) = y$.

Note that the same RM M could be used to compute a unary function ($n = 1$), or a binary function ($n = 2$), etc. From now on we will concentrate on the unary case...

Enumerating computable functions

For each $e \in \mathbb{N}$, let $\varphi_e \in \mathbb{N} \rightharpoonup \mathbb{N}$ be the unary partial function computed by the RM with program $prog(e)$. So for all $x, y \in \mathbb{N}$:

$\varphi_e(x) = y$ holds iff the computation of $prog(e)$ started with $R_0 = 0, R_1 = x$ and all other registers zeroed eventually halts with $R_0 = y$.

Thus

$$e \mapsto \varphi_e$$

defines an onto function from $\mathbb{N}$ to the collection of all computable partial functions from $\mathbb{N}$ to $\mathbb{N}$.

Enumerating computable functions

For each $e \in \mathbb{N}$, let $\varphi_e \in \mathbb{N} \rightharpoonup \mathbb{N}$ be the unary partial function computed by the RM with program $prog(e)$. So for all $x, y \in \mathbb{N}$:

$\varphi_e(x) = y$ holds iff the computation of $prog(e)$ started with $R_0 = 0, R_1 = x$ and all other registers zeroed eventually halts with $R_0 = y$.

Thus

$$e \mapsto \varphi_e$$

defines an onto function from $\mathbb{N}$ to the collection of all computable partial functions from $\mathbb{N}$ to $\mathbb{N}$.

so this is countable

So $\mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ (uncountable, by Cantor) contains uncomputable functions

An uncomputable function

Let $f \in \mathbb{N} \rightharpoonup \mathbb{N}$ be the partial function with graph $\{(x, 0) \mid \varphi_x(x)\uparrow\}$.

Thus $f(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \varphi_x(x)\uparrow \\ \mathit{undefined} & \varphi_x(x)\downarrow \end{cases}$

An uncomputable function

Let $f \in \mathbb{N} \rightharpoonup \mathbb{N}$ be the partial function with graph $\{(x, 0) \mid \varphi_x(x)\uparrow\}$.

Thus $f(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \varphi_x(x)\uparrow \\ undefined & \varphi_x(x)\downarrow \end{cases}$

f is not computable, because if it were, then $f = \varphi_e$ for some $e \in \mathbb{N}$ and hence

- if $\varphi_e(e)\uparrow$, then $f(e) = 0$ (by def. of f); so $\varphi_e(e) = 0$ (by def. of e), i.e. $\varphi_e(e)\downarrow$
- if $\varphi_e(e)\downarrow$, then $f(e)\uparrow$ (by def. of e); so $\varphi_e(e)\uparrow$ (by def. of f)

—contradiction! So f cannot be computable. $f(e)\downarrow$

(Un)decidable sets of numbers

Given a subset $S \subseteq \mathbb{N}$, its characteristic function $\chi_S \in \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ is given by: $\chi_S(x) \triangleq \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } x \in S \\ 0 & \text{if } x \notin S. \end{cases}$

(Un)decidable sets of numbers

Definition. $S \subseteq \mathbb{N}$ is called (register machine) decidable if its characteristic function $\chi_S \in \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ is a register machine computable function. Otherwise it is called undecidable.

So S is decidable iff there is a RM M with the property: for all $x \in \mathbb{N}$, M started with $R_0 = 0, R_1 = x$ and all other registers zeroed eventually halts with R_0 containing 1 or 0; and $R_0 = 1$ on halting iff $x \in S$.

(Un)decidable sets of numbers

Definition. $S \subseteq \mathbb{N}$ is called (register machine) decidable if its characteristic function $\chi_S \in \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{N}$ is a register machine computable function. Otherwise it is called undecidable.

So S is decidable iff there is a RM M with the property: for all $x \in \mathbb{N}$, M started with $R_0 = 0, R_1 = x$ and all other registers zeroed eventually halts with R_0 containing 1 or 0; and $R_0 = 1$ on halting iff $x \in S$.

Basic strategy: to prove $S \subseteq \mathbb{N}$ undecidable, try to show that decidability of S would imply decidability of the Halting Problem.

For example...

Claim: $S_0 \triangleq \{e \mid \varphi_e(0)\downarrow\}$ is undecidable.

Claim: $S_0 \triangleq \{e \mid \varphi_e(0)\downarrow\}$ is undecidable.

Proof (sketch): Suppose M_0 is a RM computing χ_{S_0}. From M_0's program (using the same techniques as for constructing a universal RM) we can construct a RM H to carry out:

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{let}\ e = \mathtt{R}_1\ \mathit{and}\ \ulcorner[a_1, \ldots, a_n]\urcorner = \mathtt{R}_2\ \mathit{in} \\
\qquad \mathtt{R}_1 ::= \ulcorner(\mathtt{R}_1 ::= a_1)\,; \cdots ; (\mathtt{R}_n ::= a_n)\,; \mathit{prog}(e)\urcorner\,; \\
\mathtt{R}_2 ::= 0\,; \\
\mathit{run}\ M_0
\end{array}
$$

Then by assumption on M_0, H decides the Halting Problem—contradiction. So no such M_0 exists, i.e. χ_{S_0} is uncomputable, i.e. S_0 is undecidable.

Claim: $S_1 \triangleq \{e \mid \varphi_e \text{ a total function}\}$ is undecidable.

Claim: $S_1 \triangleq \{e \mid \varphi_e \textit{ a total function}\}$ is undecidable.

Proof (sketch): Suppose M_1 is a RM computing χ_{S_1}. From M_1's program we can construct a RM M_0 to carry out:

$$\begin{array}{l} \textit{let } e = \mathtt{R}_1 \textit{ in } \mathtt{R}_1 ::= \ulcorner \mathtt{R}_1 ::= 0\,;\textit{prog}(e) \urcorner; \\ \textit{run } M_1 \end{array}$$

Then by assumption on M_1, M_0 decides membership of S_0 from previous example (i.e. computes χ_{S_0})—contradiction. So no such M_1 exists, i.e. χ_{S_1} is uncomputable, i.e. S_1 is undecidable.