Proving Undecidability via Reductions

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Lecture 24

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Outline

Proving Undecidability via Reductions
Learning Goals
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Learning Goals

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:
Proving that a problem is undecidable by a reduction from the halting problem

- Define reduction.
- Describe at a high level how we can use reduction to prove that a decision problem is undecidable.
- Prove that a decision problem is undecidable by using a reduction from the halting problem.
We proved that the Halting problem is undecidable. How do we prove that another problem is undecidable?

- We could prove it from scratch, or
- We could prove that it is as difficult as the halting problem. Hence, it must be undecidable.
Proving undecidability via reductions

We will prove undecidability via reductions. Problem A is reducible to problem B.

▶ Given an algorithm for solving $B$, we could use it to solve $A$.
▶ If $B$ is decidable, then $A$ is decidable.
▶ If $A$ is undecidable, then $B$ is undecidable.
Theorem: Problem $X$ is undecidable.

Proof by Contradiction.

Assume that there is an algorithm $B$, which solves problem $X$.

We will construct algorithm $A$, which uses algorithm $B$ to solve the halting problem. (Describe algorithm $A$.)

Since algorithm $B$ solves problem $X$, algorithm $A$ solves the halting problem.

This contradicts with the fact that the halting problem is undecidable. Therefore, algorithm $B$ does not exist. \qed
Example 1 of reduction proofs

The halting-no-input problem:

Given a program $P$ which takes no input, does $P$ halt?

Theorem: The halting-no-input problem is undecidable.
The both-halt problem:

*Given two programs $P_1$ and $P_2$ which take no input, do both programs halt?*

Theorem: The both-halt problem is undecidable.
CQ 1: To prove that the both-halt problem is undecidable, does the following reduction work?

Let $P_1$ run $P$ with input $I$. Let $P_2$ do nothing and terminate immediately.

(A) Yes
(B) No
(C) I don’t know.
CQ 2 Does this reduction work?

**CQ 2:** To prove that the both-halt problem is undecidable, does the following reduction work?

Let $P_1$ run $P$ with input $I$. Let $P_2$ run an infinite loop and never terminate.

(A) Yes  
(B) No  
(C) I don’t know.
Example 3 of reduction proofs

The exists-halting-input problem

Given a program $P$, does there exist an input $I$ such that $P$ halts with input $I$?

Theorem The exists-halting-input problem is undecidable.
Example 4 of reduction proofs

The partial-correctness problem

Given a Hoare triple $P \ C \ Q$, is the triple satisfied under partial correctness?

Theorem: The partial-correctness problem is undecidable.
Revisiting the learning goals

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▶ Define reduction.
▶ Describe at a high level how we can use reduction to prove that a decision problem is undecidable.
▶ Prove that a decision problem is undecidable by using a reduction from the halting problem.