

Yet another note about termination.

I had never thought that I would have to write this note, but apparently I have to. In a paper I had written:

"For each repetitive process we must have a monotonicity argument on which to base our proof of termination."

To my utter amazement, the Editor of the journal to which it was submitted, expressed in his letter seven lines of severe doubt about the above statement, ending with: "Perhaps it is true, but it is a rather sweeping claim." I could only conclude that the need for a monotonicity argument for termination proofs is not the common knowledge I supposed it to be, and that the need, even when stated, is not intuitively obvious to everybody.

Because perhaps my Editor's hesitation was caused by the nondeterminacy that also played a role in that paper, let us consider the general --and in general nondeterministic-- repetitive construct DO:

do B1 \rightarrow S1 \parallel ... \parallel Bn \rightarrow Sn od .

On my recent trip through the USSR, Tony Hoare, who is presently more operationally inclined than I, described it as

if B1 \rightarrow S1 \parallel ... \parallel Bn \rightarrow Sn fi* or {IF}*

where with {...}* he meant "as many successive executions as possible", where the execution of IF is regarded when all the guards are false (non BB). A termination proof for a given state x means that after a finite number of steps --i.e. applications of IF-- the state non BB is reached. The actual number of steps may not be determined by x , e.g. do $y \geq 2 \rightarrow y := y - 2 \parallel y \geq 1 \rightarrow y := y - 1$ od with initially $y \geq 2$; guaranteed termination for the initial state x , however, means that the maximum number of steps needed is finite. Denoting this maximum number by $mn(x)$, termination is guaranteed in all points x where $mn(x)$ is finite. Denoting the transformation of the state as effectuated by IF symbolically by $x := F(x)$ --where F may be a partial function: $F(x)$ need not be defined for states x , in which BB does not hold-- it is clear that with the above meaning of mn we must have $(mn(x) > 0) \Rightarrow (mn(F(x)) \leq mn(x) - 1)$.

Note. If $F(x)$ is a single valued function, the program is deterministic and the maximum number of steps needed is also the actual number of steps needed;

