[CSE301 / Lecture 4]
Side-effects and monads

Noam Zeilberger

Ecole Polytechnique

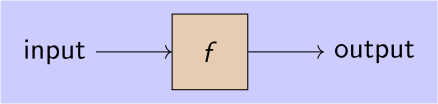
24 September 2025

What are side-effects?

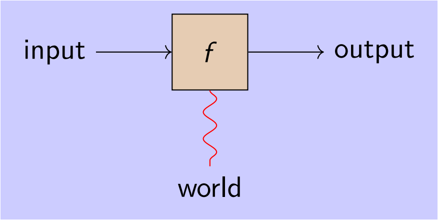
Everything that a function does besides computing a functional relation from inputs to outputs.

In other words, the difference between “functions in math” and “functions in Python”.

What are side-effects?



versus



“pure” function = no side-effects

```
def sqr(x):
    y = x ** 2
    return y
```

```
>>> sqr(3)
9
>>> sqr(4)
16
```

Printing debugging information

```
def sqr_debug(x):
    y = x ** 2
    print("Squaring {} gives {}!!".format(x, y))
    return y
```

```
>>> sqr_debug(3)
Squaring 3 gives 9!!
9
>>> sqr_debug(4)
Squaring 4 gives 16!!
16
```

Getting input from the user, and raising exceptions

```
def exp_by_input(x):
    k = int(input("Enter exponent: "))
    y = x ** k
    return y
```

```
>>> exp_by_input(3)
Enter exponent: 2
9
>>> exp_by_input(3)
Enter exponent: two
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
  File "<string>", line 7, in exp_by_input
ValueError: invalid literal for int() with base 10: 'two'
```

Querying a random number generator

```
def exp_by_random(x):
    k = random.randrange(0,10)
    y = x ** k
    return y
```

```
>>> exp_by_random(3)
2187
>>> exp_by_random(3)
243
```

Reading and writing global variables

```
k = 0
def exp_by_counter(x):
    global k
    y = x ** k
    k = k + 1
    return y
```

```
>>> exp_by_counter(3)
1
>>> exp_by_counter(3)
3
>>> exp_by_counter(3)
9
```

Non-standard control flow (e.g., nondeterminism via generators)

```
def exp_by_nondet(x):
    for k in range(0,10):
        y = x ** k
        yield y
```

```
>>> exp_by_nondet(3)
<generator object exp_by_nondet at 0x7ff77d38c830>
>>> list(exp_by_nondet(3))
[1, 3, 9, 27, 81, 243, 729, 2187, 6561, 19683]
```

Side-effects in Haskell

Despite claims, Haskell is not really a pure language...

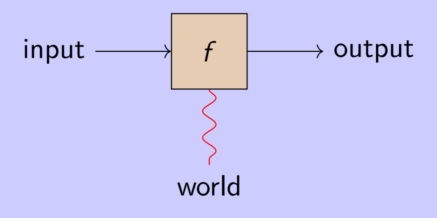
1. Functions may not terminate
2. Functions may raise exceptions
3. Run-time performance can vary wildly due to laziness

Nevertheless, these effects (at least 1 & 2) are relatively "benign".

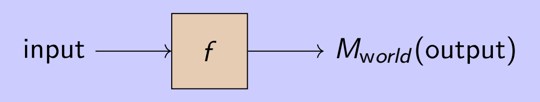
In Haskell, most "serious" effects (like getting input from the user, or reading and writing global variables) are confined to *monads.*

The idea, very roughly

Replace



by



where M_{world} captures all possible interactions with the world.

We'll make this more precise, but first let's talk a bit about the principles of *referential transparency* and *compositionality*...

The principle of referential transparency

Informal principle that we can replace an expression by the value it computes without changing the behavior of a program, e.g.:

```
>>> sqr(3)
9
>>> 9 == 9
True
>>> sqr(3) == 9
True
>>> sqr(3) == sqr(3)
True
```

The principle of referential transparency

The presence of side-effects can break referential transparency!

```
>>> exp_by_counter(3)
9
>>> exp_by_counter(3) == 9
False
>>> exp_by_counter(3) == exp_by_counter(3)
False
```

Compositional semantics

More generally, a *semantics* for a programming language is a way of assigning meanings to program expressions. A desired property of a semantics is that it is *compositional*, in the sense that the meaning of an expression is built from the meanings of its subexpressions.

The presence of side-effects presents a challenge to defining compositional semantics for programming languages![1]

[1] And this is also true for natural languages! See, for example, Chung-chieh Shan's PhD thesis, *Lingustic side effects* (2005).

Toy example:[2] arithmetic expressions

Consider a little language of arithmetic expressions, with constants, subtraction, and division:

$$e ::= c \mid e1 - e2 \mid e1 \;/\; e2$$

Each expression e denotes a number $[\![e]\!] \in \mathbb{R}$, defined inductively:

$$\begin{aligned}
[\![c]\!] &= c \\
[\![e1 - e2]\!] &= [\![e1]\!] - [\![e2]\!] \\
[\![e1 \;/\; e2]\!] &= [\![e1]\!] \;/\; [\![e2]\!]
\end{aligned}$$

Division by zero is undefined, so $[\![e]\!]$ is sometimes undefined.

---

[2] Inspired in part by Philip Wadler, "Monads for functional programming", Proceedings of the Båstad Spring School, May 1995.

Toy example: arithmetic expressions

Translated to Haskell:

$$\textbf{data}\ \mathit{Expr} = \mathit{Con\ Double} \mid \mathit{Sub\ Expr\ Expr} \mid \mathit{Div\ Expr\ Expr}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&\mathit{eval} :: \mathit{Expr} \rightarrow \mathit{Double}\\
&\mathit{eval}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) = c\\
&\mathit{eval}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ e1\ e2) = \mathit{eval}\ e1 - \mathit{eval}\ e2\\
&\mathit{eval}\ (\mathit{Div}\ e1\ e2) = \mathit{eval}\ e1\ /\ \mathit{eval}\ e2
\end{aligned}$$

Toy example: arithmetic expressions

Example expressions:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathit{e1} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 4))\ (\mathit{Con}\ 3) \\
\mathit{e2} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)) \\
\mathit{e3} &= \mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2))
\end{aligned}
$$

And their semantics:

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\mathit{eval}\ \mathit{e1} = -2.5 \\
&\mathit{eval}\ \mathit{e2} = 0 \\
&\mathit{eval}\ \mathit{e3}\quad \text{undefined}
\end{aligned}
$$

Variation #1: error-handling

Modify the semantics to handle division-by-zero.

In a language with exceptions, we could simply raise an exception.
Haskell has them, but let's pretend it doesn't and stay "pure"...

Idea: e no longer denotes a number, but a "number or error".

That is, $[\![e]\!] \in \mathbb{R} \uplus \{\mathit{error}\}$

In Haskell, we can return a Maybe type...

Variation #1: error-handling

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval1} :: \mathit{Expr} \rightarrow \mathit{Maybe\ Double} \\
\mathit{eval1}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) \qquad = \mathit{Just}\ c \\
\mathit{eval1}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \textbf{case}\ (\mathit{eval1}\ e1, \mathit{eval1}\ e2)\ \textbf{of} \\
\qquad (\mathit{Just}\ x1, \mathit{Just}\ x2) \rightarrow \mathit{Just}\ (x1 - x2) \\
\qquad \_ \rightarrow \mathit{Nothing} \\
\mathit{eval1}\ (\mathit{Div}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \textbf{case}\ (\mathit{eval1}\ e1, \mathit{eval1}\ e2)\ \textbf{of} \\
\qquad (\mathit{Just}\ x1, \mathit{Just}\ x2) \\
\qquad\quad \mid x2 \mathrel{/=} 0 \rightarrow \mathit{Just}\ (x1\ /\ x2) \\
\qquad\quad \mid \mathit{otherwise} \rightarrow \mathit{Nothing} \\
\qquad \_ \qquad\qquad\qquad\quad \rightarrow \mathit{Nothing}
\end{array}
$$

Variation #1: error-handling

The example expressions:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathit{e1} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 4))\ (\mathit{Con}\ 3)\\
\mathit{e2} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2))\\
\mathit{e3} &= \mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2))
\end{aligned}
$$

In the new semantics:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathit{eval1}\ \mathit{e1} &= \mathit{Just}\ (-2.5)\\
\mathit{eval1}\ \mathit{e2} &= \mathit{Just}\ 0.0\\
\mathit{eval1}\ \mathit{e3} &= \mathit{Nothing}
\end{aligned}
$$

Variation #2: global state

Modify the semantics of expressions so that every third constant is interpreted as 0. (Yeah this is a bit weird, but so is most of life.)

The meaning of a subexpression now depends on its position. E.g., $[\![3 - 2]\!] = [\![1]\!]$, but $[\![6 \,/\, (3 - 2)]\!] = [\![6 \,/\, (3 - 0)]\!] \neq [\![6 \,/\, 1]\!]$.

Can we define a compositional semantics?...

Variation #2: global state

...Yes, in **state-passing style!**

Idea: every subexpression e denotes a function $[\![e]\!] \in \mathbb{N} \to \mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{N}$ taking a count of the previously seen constants, and returning a number together with an updated count.

For the top-level expression, initialize count to 0.

Variation #2: global state

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\mathit{eval2} :: \mathit{Expr} \to \mathit{Int} \to (\mathit{Double}, \mathit{Int}) \\
&\mathit{eval2}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c)\ n = \\
&\quad (\textbf{if}\ \mathit{mod}\ n\ 3 == 2\ \textbf{then}\ 0\ \textbf{else}\ c, n+1) \\
&\mathit{eval2}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2})\ n = \\
&\quad \textbf{let}\ (\mathit{x1}, o) = \mathit{eval2}\ \mathit{e1}\ n\ \textbf{in} \\
&\quad \textbf{let}\ (\mathit{x2}, p) = \mathit{eval2}\ \mathit{e2}\ o\ \textbf{in} \\
&\quad (\mathit{x1} - \mathit{x2}, p) \\
&\mathit{eval2}\ (\mathit{Div}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2})\ n = \\
&\quad \textbf{let}\ (\mathit{x1}, o) = \mathit{eval2}\ \mathit{e1}\ n\ \textbf{in} \\
&\quad \textbf{let}\ (\mathit{x2}, p) = \mathit{eval2}\ \mathit{e2}\ o\ \textbf{in} \\
&\quad (\mathit{x1}\ /\ \mathit{x2}, p)
\end{aligned}
$$

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\mathit{eval2Top} :: \mathit{Expr} \to \mathit{Double} \\
&\mathit{eval2Top}\ e = \mathit{fst}\ (\mathit{eval2}\ e\ 0)
\end{aligned}
$$

Variation #2: global state

The example expressions:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathit{e1} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 4))\ (\mathit{Con}\ 3) \\ \mathit{e2} &= \mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)) \\ \mathit{e3} &= \mathit{Div}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 1)\ (\mathit{Sub}\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)\ (\mathit{Con}\ 2)) \end{aligned}$$

In the new semantics:

$$\begin{aligned} &\mathit{eval2Top}\ \mathit{e1} = 0.5 \\ &\mathit{eval2Top}\ \mathit{e2}\quad \text{undefined} \\ &\mathit{eval2Top}\ \mathit{e3} = 0.5 \end{aligned}$$

Variation #3: combining error-handling and state

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval3} :: \mathit{Expr} \to \mathit{Int} \to \mathit{Maybe}\ (\mathit{Double}, \mathit{Int}) \\
\mathit{eval3}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c)\ n = \\
\quad \mathit{Just}\ (\textbf{if}\ \mathit{mod}\ n\ 3 == 2\ \textbf{then}\ 0\ \textbf{else}\ c, n + 1) \\
\mathit{eval3}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2})\ n = \\
\quad \textbf{case}\ \mathit{eval3}\ \mathit{e1}\ n\ \textbf{of} \\
\quad\quad \mathit{Nothing} \to \mathit{Nothing} \\
\quad\quad \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x1}, o) \to \textbf{case}\ \mathit{eval3}\ \mathit{e2}\ o\ \textbf{of} \\
\quad\quad\quad \mathit{Nothing} \to \mathit{Nothing} \\
\quad\quad\quad \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x2}, p) \to \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x1} - \mathit{x2}, p) \\
\mathit{eval3}\ (\mathit{Div}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2})\ n = \\
\quad \textbf{case}\ \mathit{eval3}\ \mathit{e1}\ n\ \textbf{of} \\
\quad\quad \mathit{Nothing} \to \mathit{Nothing} \\
\quad\quad \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x1}, o) \to \textbf{case}\ \mathit{eval3}\ \mathit{e2}\ o\ \textbf{of} \\
\quad\quad\quad \mathit{Nothing} \to \mathit{Nothing} \\
\quad\quad\quad \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x2}, p) \\
\quad\quad\quad\quad \mid \mathit{x2} \mathrel{/=} 0 \to \mathit{Just}\ (\mathit{x1} \mathbin{/} \mathit{x2}, p) \\
\quad\quad\quad\quad \mid \mathit{otherwise} \to \mathit{Nothing}
\end{array}
$$

Variation #3: combining error-handling and state

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\mathit{eval3Top} :: \mathit{Expr} \to \mathit{Maybe\ Double}\\
&\mathit{eval3Top}\ e = \mathbf{case}\ \mathit{eval3}\ e\ 0\ \mathbf{of}\\
&\quad \mathit{Nothing} \to \mathit{Nothing}\\
&\quad \mathit{Just}\ (x, \_) \to \mathit{Just}\ x
\end{aligned}
$$

In this last semantics:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\mathit{eval3Top}\ \mathit{e1} &= \mathit{Just}\ 0.5\\
\mathit{eval3Top}\ \mathit{e2} &= \mathit{Nothing}\\
\mathit{eval3Top}\ \mathit{e3} &= \mathit{Just}\ 0.5
\end{aligned}
$$

Compare with the OCaml version...

```
type expr = Con of float
          | Sub of expr * expr | Div of expr * expr
let cnt = ref 0
let rec eval3 (e : expr) : float =
  match e with
  | Con c -> let n = !cnt in
             (cnt := n+1; if n mod 3 == 2 then 0.0 else c)
  | Sub (e1,e2) -> let x1 = eval3 e1 in
                   let x2 = eval3 e2 in
                   x1 -. x2
  | Div (e1,e2) -> let x1 = eval3 e1 in
                   let x2 = eval3 e2 in
                   if x2 <> 0.0 then x1 /. x2
                   else raise Division_by_zero
let rec eval3Top e = (cnt := 0; eval3 e)
```

Haskell version #3, rewritten using a monad and do notation

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval3'} :: \mathit{Expr} \rightarrow \mathit{StateT\ Int\ Maybe\ Double} \\
\mathit{eval3'}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) = \mathbf{do} \\
\quad n \leftarrow \mathit{get} \\
\quad \mathit{put}\ (n + 1) \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathbf{if}\ \mathit{mod}\ n\ 3 == 2\ \mathbf{then}\ 0\ \mathbf{else}\ c) \\
\mathit{eval3'}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2}) = \mathbf{do} \\
\quad \mathit{x1} \leftarrow \mathit{eval3'}\ \mathit{e1} \\
\quad \mathit{x2} \leftarrow \mathit{eval3'}\ \mathit{e2} \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathit{x1} - \mathit{x2}) \\
\mathit{eval3'}\ (\mathit{Div}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2}) = \mathbf{do} \\
\quad \mathit{x1} \leftarrow \mathit{eval3'}\ \mathit{e1} \\
\quad \mathit{x2} \leftarrow \mathit{eval3'}\ \mathit{e2} \\
\quad \mathbf{if}\ \mathit{x2}\ /= 0\ \mathbf{then}\ \mathit{return}\ (\mathit{x1}\ /\ \mathit{x2})\ \mathbf{else}\ \mathit{lift\ Nothing} \\
\mathit{eval3'Top}\ e = \mathit{runStateT}\ (\mathit{eval3'}\ e)\ 0 \ggg\!= \mathit{return} \circ \mathit{fst}
\end{array}
$$

What is a monad?

A concept originating in category theory.

Proposed by Eugenio Moggi as a unifying mathematical model of different notions of computation.

Adapted by Phil Wadler as a way of integrating side-effects with pure functional programming, in particular in Haskell.

What is a category?

A *category* is a gadget consisting of the following:

- a set of objects;
- for every pair of objects, a set of arrows between them;
- for every object a, a distinguished *identity* arrow $id_a : a \to a$;
- for every pair of arrows $f : a \to b$ and $g : b \to c$, a *composite* arrow $g \circ f : a \to c$;
- such that composition and identity are associative and unital in the appropriate sense.

Intuition: the arrows of a category can be seen as describing a collection of “allowable transformations” between objects.

What is a category?

Examples:

- Set : sets as objects, arrows are *total functions* $f : X \to Y$
- Rel : sets as objects, arrows are *arbitrary relations* $r \subseteq X \times Y$
- Grp : groups as objects, arrows *homomorphisms* $\phi : G \to H$
- Vec : vector spaces as objects, arrows *linear maps* $\phi : V \to W$

A category of pure Haskell functions

Informally, we can think of Haskell functions as forming the arrows of a category, whose objects are types.

$$Int \xrightarrow{(+1)} Int \qquad Int \xrightarrow{(>0)} Bool \qquad etc.$$

Composition of arrows is defined by function composition.

$$\begin{tikzcd} Int \arrow[r, "(+1)"] \arrow[rr, bend right, "(>0)\circ(+1)"'] & Int \arrow[r, "(>0)"] & Bool \end{tikzcd}$$

The identity function $\backslash x \to x$ serves as the identity arrow $a \to a$.

Beyond the category of pure functions

But... we don't always want to program inside this category!

Monads give us a way of building new categories to program in.

A monad is a special kind of *functor.*

What is a functor?

A *functor* is a way of mapping one category into another:

- It should map objects to objects and arrows to arrows.
- It should preserve identity and composition.

Examples:

- $|-| : \mathrm{Grp} \to \mathrm{Set}$ sending a group G to its underlying carrier $|G|$, and a homomorphism $\phi : G \to H$ to the underlying function between carriers $|\phi| : |G| \to |H|$
- $P : \mathrm{Set} \to \mathrm{Set}$ sending a set X to its powerset $P(X)$, and a function $f : X \to Y$ to the function $P(f) : P(X) \to P(Y)$ defined by $P(f) = \lambda S.\{f(x) \mid x \in S\}$.

Functors in Haskell

The Functor type class:

$$\begin{array}{l} \textbf{class}\ \mathit{Functor}\ f\ \textbf{where} \\ \quad \mathit{fmap} :: (a \to b) \to f\ a \to f\ b \end{array}$$

Note here f is a type constructor $f :: * \to *$.

Any instance should satisfy the *functor laws*:

$$\mathit{fmap}\ \mathit{id} = \mathit{id} \qquad \mathit{fmap}\ (f \circ g) = \mathit{fmap}\ f \circ \mathit{fmap}\ g$$

Example #1: the List functor

The list type constructor is a functor:

instance *Functor* [ ] **where**
-- fmap :: (a -> b) -> [a] -> [b]
$fmap = map$

(Exercise: prove the functor laws $map\ id\ xs = xs$ and $map\ (f \circ g)\ xs = map\ f\ (map\ g\ xs)$ by structural induction!)

Example #2: the Maybe functor

The *Maybe* type constructor is a functor:

> **instance** *Functor Maybe* **where**
> -- fmap :: (a -> b) -> Maybe a -> Maybe b
> *fmap f Nothing* = *Nothing*
> *fmap f* (*Just x*) = *Just* (*f x*)

Rough definition of a monad, in category theory

A *monad* is a functor m from a category to itself, equipped with an arrow $a \to m\,a$ for every object a, together with a way of transforming arrows $a \to m\,b$ into arrows $m\,a \to m\,b$, subject to certain equations.

For example, the powerset functor $P : \mathrm{Set} \to \mathrm{Set}$ is a monad: the functions $X \to P(X)$ are defined by taking singletons, and any function $X \to P(Y)$ extends to a function $P(X) \to P(Y)$ by taking unions.

Kleisli category

One motivation for the definition of monad is that it allows to build a new category with the same objects, but where an arrow $a \to b$ in the new category corresponds to an arrow $a \to m\,b$ in the old category. To compose an arrow $f : a \to m\,b$ with an arrow $g : b \to m\,c$, we first transform the latter to $g^* : m\,b \to m\,c$ and then use ordinary composition to get $g^* \circ f : a \to m\,c$.

For, the Kleisli category of the powerset monad P on Set recovers the category of sets and relations $\mathrm{Rel} \cong \mathrm{Set}_P$.

Monads in Haskell (before 2014)

The Monad type class:

$$\begin{array}{l}\textbf{class}\ \mathit{Monad}\ m\ \textbf{where}\\ \quad \mathit{return} :: a \rightarrow m\ a\\ \quad (\gg\!=) :: m\ a \rightarrow (a \rightarrow m\ b) \rightarrow m\ b\end{array}$$

Subject to the *monad laws*:

$$\begin{array}{l}\mathit{return}\ x \gg\!= f = f\ x\\ mx \gg\!= \mathit{return} = mx\\ (mx \gg\!= f) \gg\!= g = mx \gg\!= (\backslash x \rightarrow (f\ x \gg\!= g))\end{array}$$

(Note that $\mathit{flip}\ (\gg\!=) :: (a \rightarrow m\ b) \rightarrow (m\ a \rightarrow m\ b)$.)

The List and Maybe monads

instance *Monad* [] **where**
-- return :: a -> [a]
return $x = [x]$
-- (»=) :: [a] -> (a -> [b]) -> [b]
xs $\gg\!=$ f = *concatMap* f *xs*

instance *Monad Maybe* **where**
-- return :: a -> Maybe a
return x = *Just* x
-- (»=) :: Maybe a -> (a -> Maybe b) -> Maybe b
Nothing $\gg\!=$ f = *Nothing*
Just x $\gg\!=$ f = $f\ x$

Monads as notions of computation

Via the Kleisli category constructions...

- List monad: category of nondeterministic functions $a \to [b]$.
- Maybe monad: category of partial functions $a \to \mathit{Maybe}\ b$.

Evaluator #1, re-expressed using the Maybe monad

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval1}' :: \mathit{Expr} \to \mathit{Maybe\ Double} \\
\mathit{eval1}'\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) = \mathit{return}\ c \\
\mathit{eval1}'\ (\mathit{Sub}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \mathit{eval1}'\ e1 \ggg\!= \backslash x1 \to \\
\quad \mathit{eval1}'\ e2 \ggg\!= \backslash x2 \to \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (x1 - x2) \\
\mathit{eval1}'\ (\mathit{Div}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \mathit{eval1}'\ e1 \ggg\!= \backslash x1 \to \\
\quad \mathit{eval1}'\ e2 \ggg\!= \backslash x2 \to \\
\quad \mathbf{if}\ x2 \mathrel{/=} 0\ \mathbf{then}\ \mathit{return}\ (x1\ /\ x2)\ \mathbf{else}\ \mathit{Nothing}
\end{array}
$$

The State monad

The type constructor *State s* is defined essentially as follows:

$$\textbf{newtype}\ \mathit{State}\ s\ a = \mathit{State}\ \{\mathit{runState} :: s \to (a, s)\}$$

It is a monad:

$$\begin{array}{l}
\textbf{instance}\ \mathit{Monad}\ (\mathit{State}\ s)\ \textbf{where} \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ x = \mathit{State}\ (\backslash s \to (x, s)) \\
\quad \mathit{xt} \gg\!\!= f = \mathit{State}\ (\backslash s0 \to \\
\quad\quad \textbf{let}\ (x, s1) = \mathit{runState}\ \mathit{xt}\ s0\ \textbf{in} \\
\quad\quad \mathit{runState}\ (f\ x)\ s1)
\end{array}$$

The State monad

Also, it supports "get" and "set" operations:

$$
\begin{aligned}
&get :: State\ s\ s \\
&get = State\ (\backslash s \rightarrow (s, s)) \\
&put :: s \rightarrow State\ s\ () \\
&put\ s' = State\ (\backslash s \rightarrow ((), s'))
\end{aligned}
$$

Evaluator #2, redefined using the State monad

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval2'} :: \mathit{Expr} \rightarrow \mathit{State\ Int\ Double} \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) = \\
\quad \mathit{get} \ggg\!= \backslash n \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{put}\ (n + 1) \ggg\!= \backslash\_ \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathbf{if}\ \mathit{mod}\ n\ 3 == 2\ \mathbf{then}\ 0\ \mathbf{else}\ c) \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \mathit{eval2'}\ e1 \ggg\!= \backslash x1 \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{eval2'}\ e2 \ggg\!= \backslash x2 \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (x1 - x2) \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Div}\ e1\ e2) = \\
\quad \mathit{eval2'}\ e1 \ggg\!= \backslash x1 \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{eval2'}\ e2 \ggg\!= \backslash x2 \rightarrow \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (x1\ /\ x2) \\
\mathit{eval2Top'}\ e = \mathit{fst}\ (\mathit{runState}\ (\mathit{eval2'}\ e)\ 0)
\end{array}
$$

Do notation

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\textbf{do}\ \mathit{x1} \leftarrow \mathit{e1} \\
\quad \mathit{x2} \leftarrow \mathit{e2} \\
\quad \ldots \\
\quad \mathit{xn} \leftarrow \mathit{en} \\
\quad f\ \mathit{x1}\ \mathit{x2}\ \ldots\ \mathit{xn}
\end{array}
$$

is syntactic sugar for

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{e1} \gg\!= \backslash \mathit{x1} \rightarrow \\
\mathit{e2} \gg\!= \backslash \mathit{x2} \rightarrow \\
\ldots \\
\mathit{en} \gg\!= \backslash \mathit{xn} \rightarrow \\
f\ \mathit{x1}\ \mathit{x2}\ \ldots\ \mathit{xn}
\end{array}
$$

Evaluator #2, equivalently expressed with do notation

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathit{eval2'} :: \mathit{Expr} \rightarrow \mathit{State\ Int\ Double} \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Con}\ c) = \mathbf{do} \\
\quad n \leftarrow \mathit{get} \\
\quad \mathit{put}\ (n + 1) \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathbf{if}\ \mathit{mod}\ n\ 3 == 2\ \mathbf{then}\ 0\ \mathbf{else}\ c) \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Sub}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2}) = \mathbf{do} \\
\quad \mathit{x1} \leftarrow \mathit{eval2'}\ \mathit{e1} \\
\quad \mathit{x2} \leftarrow \mathit{eval2'}\ \mathit{e2} \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathit{x1} - \mathit{x2}) \\
\mathit{eval2'}\ (\mathit{Div}\ \mathit{e1}\ \mathit{e2}) = \\
\quad \mathit{x1} \leftarrow \mathit{eval2'}\ \mathit{e1} \\
\quad \mathit{x2} \leftarrow \mathit{eval2'}\ \mathit{e2} \\
\quad \mathit{return}\ (\mathit{x1}\ /\ \mathit{x2})
\end{array}
$$

The IO monad

A built-in monad used to perform real system I/O.

Supports operations like

$$getLine :: IO\ String$$
$$putStrLn :: String \to IO\ ()$$

etc.

The use of a monad ensures proper sequentialization, as we can never “escape” the IO monad![3]

[3] Technically, this is not true. There is a back door in the form of a function $unsafePerformIO :: IO\ a \to a$, contained in *System.IO.Unsafe*. As the name suggests, this function should be used with care...

Monads in Haskell (post 2014)

A bit more heavy since the "Functor-Applicative-Monad" hierarchy:

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\textbf{class } \mathit{Functor}\ f \textbf{ where} \\
\quad \mathit{fmap} :: (a \to b) \to f\ a \to f\ b \\
\textbf{class } \mathit{Functor}\ f \Rightarrow \mathit{Applicative}\ f \textbf{ where} \\
\quad \mathit{pure} :: a \to f\ a \\
\quad (\langle * \rangle) :: f\ (a \to b) \to f\ a \to f\ b \\
\textbf{class } \mathit{Applicative}\ m \Rightarrow \mathit{Monad}\ m \textbf{ where} \\
\quad \mathit{return} :: a \to m\ a \\
\quad (\ggg\!=) :: m\ a \to (a \to m\ b) \to m\ b \\
\quad \mathit{return} = \mathit{pure}
\end{array}
$$

So to define an instance of Monad, you first need instances of Functor and Applicative.

Monads in Haskell (post 2014)

But instances of Functor and Applicative can always be retrofitted from a Monad instance:

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\textbf{instance}\ \mathit{Functor}\ M\ \textbf{where} \\
\quad \mathit{fmap}\ f\ \mathit{xm} = \mathit{xm} \ggg\!\!= \mathit{return} \circ f \\
\textbf{instance}\ \mathit{Applicative}\ M\ \textbf{where} \\
\quad \mathit{pure} = \mathit{return} \\
\quad \mathit{fm}\ \langle * \rangle\ \mathit{xm} = \mathit{fm} \ggg\!\!= \backslash f \to \mathit{xm} \ggg\!\!= \mathit{return} \circ f
\end{array}
$$

Combining monads

To define Evaluator #3, we implicitly used a *monad transformer*:

$$\textbf{newtype}\ StateT\ s\ m\ a = \\ \quad StateT\ \{ runStateT :: s \to m\ (a, s) \}$$

Given a monad m representing some notion of computation (e.g., partiality or nondeterminism), $StateT\ s\ m$ defines a new monad with s state wrapped around an m-computation.

But it is not always clear how to combine monads.

More generally, the question of how to organize and reason about programs with side-effects remains an important open problem!