halcheck

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`halcheck` — Overview

Motivation

Design

Summary

Motivation

Why **halcheck**?

1. Simpler API
2. Support for test-case generation strategies
3. Better space complexity

All PBT frameworks are direct ports or descendants of QuickCheck. These frameworks all consist of:

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A set of basic combinators:

```haskell
choose    :: (Int, Int) → Gen Int
suchThat  :: (a → Bool) → Gen a → Gen a
frequency :: [(Int, Gen a)] → Gen a
…
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```

- Users must be comfortable reasoning about higher-order functions.
- Users must ensure generators are only invoked in the correct context.

Example: *Write a generator combinator that produces `std::vector`s up to (but not including) a given length.*

```
// RapidCheck
Gen<std::vector<int>> example(int N) {
  return gen::container<std::vector<int>>(
    *gen::inRange(0, N),
    gen::arbitrary<int>);
}
```

```
-- QuickCheck
example n = vectorOf (choose (0, n - 1)) arbitrary
```

Example: *Write a generator combinator that produces* `std::vector`*s up to (but not including) a given length.*

```
// RapidCheck
Gen<std::vector<int>> example(int N) {
  return gen::container<std::vector<int>>(
    *gen::inRange(0, N), // WRONG (no compiler error)
    gen::arbitrary<int>);
}
```

```
-- QuickCheck           ▿ WRONG (compiler error)
example n = vectorOf (choose (0, n - 1)) arbitrary
```

Problem: `example(N)` always produces `std::vector`s of the same length.

Example: *Write a generator combinator that produces `std::vector`s up to (but not including) a given length.*

```
// RapidCheck
Gen<std::vector<int>> example(int N) {
  return gen::exec([=] {
    return gen::container<std::vector<int>>(
      *gen::inRange(0, N),
      gen::arbitrary<int>);
  });
}
```

```
-- QuickCheck
example n = do
  i ← choose (0, n - 1)
  vectorOf i arbitrary
```

Solution: Delay computation of `*gen::inRange(0, N)` using `gen::exec`.

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- **Problem:** Need to ensure generators are only invoked in the correct context.
  - Haskell's type system ensures this always happens.
  - C++'s type system can provide no such guarantee!
- **Solution:** Get rid of the generator type!
  - All code is written in the generator context.
  - Bonus: fewer higher-order functions.

```cpp
// halcheck
std::vector<int> example(int N) {
  // container(int, () → int) → std::vector<int>
  return gen::container<std::vector<int>>(
    gen::range(0, N),
    gen::arbitrary<int>);
}
```

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There are various desirable strategies for generating data:

- Random (almost everything)
- Enumerative (SmallCheck/LeanCheck)

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Most PBT frameworks (and all C++ PBT frameworks) use a fixed strategy.

halcheck provides combinators for specifying strategies:

```
//   random(int) → strategy
// ▿ Executes random test cases forever or until a bug is found.
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(Intended for advanced users.)

Why **halcheck**?

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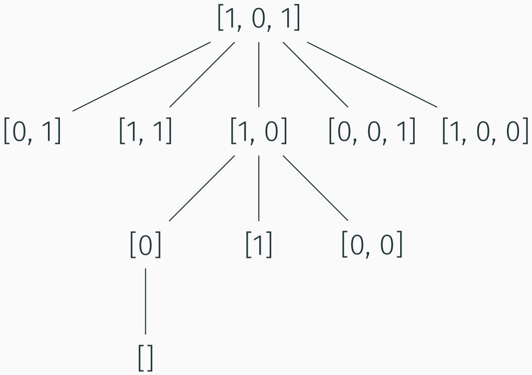
How does shrinking work?

Internally, every generator is a function returning a “shrink tree” of values.

```
data Gen a = Gen (Random → Tree a)
```

Shrink trees can be very large so they must be computed lazily.

Shrink tree for a list:



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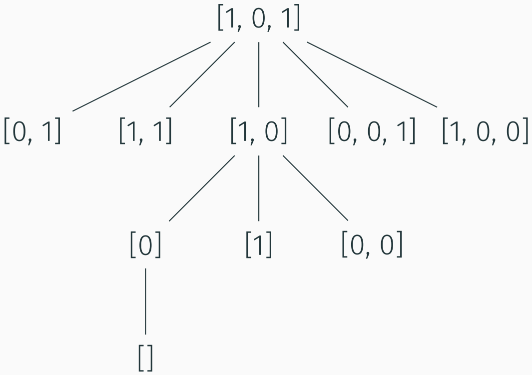

This implementation strategy does not work for C++!

Example:

```
auto xs = *gen::arbitrary<std::vector<int>>();
auto x  = *gen::elementOf(xs);
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Conclusion: all combinators (with shrinking behaviour) must make copies of their arguments!

halcheck — Motivation — Space Complexity

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Conclusion: all combinators (with shrinking behaviour) must make copies of their arguments!

Problem: by default, copies in C++ are deep ($\mathcal{O}(n)$ instead of $\mathcal{O}(1)$).

Generators cannot return references:

```
// Generates a random reference
// to an element of xs.
rc::Gen<int &> referenceOf(??? xs);

// Example: assign a
// random element to 0.
*referenceOf(xs) = 0;
```

What type should `referenceOf` have?

Generators cannot return references:

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// Generates a random reference
// to an element of xs.
rc::Gen<int &> referenceOf(??? xs);

// Example: assign a
// random element to 0.
*referenceOf(xs) = 0;
```

What type should `referenceOf` have?

exec arguments must capture by value:

```
auto bound  = *gen::arbitrary<int>();
auto ranges = *gen::container<...>(
  gen::exec([&] {
    // bound does not exist
    // during shrinking!
    auto min = *gen::inRange(0, bound);
    auto max = *gen::inRange(min, bound);
    return std::make_pair(min, max);
  }));
```

`halcheck` is inspired by work on internal shrinking.

- Motto: shrink inputs, not outputs!
- Data is regenerated, never copied.

Note: `halcheck` does not use internal shrinking.

- Users have full control over shrinking.

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Design

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Goals:

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- First-order functions (as much as possible)

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- C++ 11 support
- Thread safety

halcheck — Design

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`halcheck` — Design

Goals:

- Support user-defined generation strategies
- First-order functions (as much as possible)

To support these goals, every generator needs to be built from a set of overridable core functions:

- `gen::next`
- `gen::discard`
- `gen::shrink`
- `gen::group`

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Intuition: `gen::next(x, y)` performs a biased coin flip with $p = \frac{y}{x+y}$.

- This is our only source of randomness.
- Is this enough to define all generators?

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 1: *generate a number in the range* $[a, b)$.

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Example 1: *generate a number in the range* $[a, b)$.

- Use binary search, replace comparison with biased coin flip.

```
int range(int a, int b) {
  if (a + 1 >= b)
    return a;

  int c = std::midpoint(a, b);
  if (gen::next(c - a, b - c))
    return range(mid, b);
  else
    return range(a, mid);
}
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 2: *generate a* ***enum dim***.

```
enum class dim {
  x = 0, y = 3, z = 8
};
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 2: *generate a* ***enum dim***.

- Consult `gen::range` to determine which value to return.

```
enum class dim {
  x = 0, y = 3, z = 8
};
dim arbitrary(gen::tag<dim>) {
  switch (gen::range(0, 3)) {
  case 0: return dim::x;
  case 1: return dim::y;
  case 2: return dim::z;
} }
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 2: *generate a* ***enum dim***.

- Consult `gen::range` to determine which value to return.

— OR —

- Define `gen::element` (implemented via `gen::range`).

```
enum class dim {
  x = 0, y = 3, z = 8
};
dim arbitrary(gen::tag<dim>) {
  return gen::element({x, y, z});
}
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 3: *generate a* ***struct vec***.

```
struct vec {
  int x;
  int y;
};
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 3: *generate a* ***struct vec***.

- Trivial.

```
struct vec {
  int x;
  int y;
};
```

```
vec arbitrary(gen::tag<vec>) {
  vec output;
  output.x = gen::arbitrary<int>();
  output.y = gen::arbitrary<int>();
  return output;
}
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 4: *generate a `std::string`.*

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 4: *generate a* ***std::string***.

- Generate random size *n*, then generate *n* elements.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  auto size = gen::arbitrary<size_t>();
  while (size-- > 0)
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 4: *generate a* ***`std::string`***.

- Generate random size *n*, then generate *n* elements.
- `gen::arbitrary<size_t>` is uniformly distributed — high chance of generating billions of GBs.

```cpp
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  auto size = gen::arbitrary<size_t>();
  while (size-- > 0)
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

```
gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool
```

Example 4: *generate a `std::string`.*

- Add elements as long as `gen::next` returns `true`.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  while (gen::next())
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

`gen::next(int x = 1, int y = 1) → bool`

Example 4: *generate a `std::string`.*

- Add elements as long as `gen::next` returns `true`.
- Distribution biased towards shorter lists.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  while (gen::next())
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

Problem: how do we define `gen_string` with a sensible distribution?

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Standard Solution: define a incrementally increasing size parameter and choose lengths uniformly up to the current size.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  auto size = gen::range(0, gen::size());
  while (size-- > 0)
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

Problem: how do we define `gen_string` with a sensible distribution?

Standard Solution: define a incrementally increasing size parameter and choose lengths uniformly up to the current size.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  auto size = gen::range(0, gen::size());
  while (size-- > 0)
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

- `gen::size` cannot be defined in terms of `gen::next`.
- Do we really need an extra combinator?

```
gen::next(gen::weight x = 1, gen::weight y = 1) → bool
```

I lied!

```
gen::next(gen::weight x = 1, gen::weight y = 1) → bool
```

I lied!

- Actual definition of `gen::next` takes `gen::weight` parameters.
- A `gen::weight` is an expression over an unknown size s.
    - $s - 5$, $2s$, etc.

```
std::string gen_string() {
  std::string xs;
  auto size = gen::weight::current; // current is s
  while (gen::next(1, size--))
    xs.push_back(gen::arbitrary<char>());
  return xs;
}
```

- Proof of correctness left as an exercise to the reader ☺

Summary: `gen::next` alone allows us to write generators for

- weighted distributions,
- **`enum`**s and **`union`**s (i.e., sum types),
- **`struct`**s (i.e., product types), and
- recursive data structures via sized generation.

```
gen::discard()
```

Intuition: `gen::discard()` terminates the current test case (no failure).

- Used to implement precondition checking (==>, `RC_PRE`).
- Also useful for implementing rejection sampling (`gen::suchThat`).

```
gen::shrink(int size = 1) → std::optional<int>
```

Intuition: `gen::shrink(n)` returns an integer if shrinking should occur at the call site, or `std::nullopt` otherwise.

`gen::shrink(int size = 1) → std::optional<int>`

Example:

```
std::string gen_string_shrink() {
  auto xs = gen_string();
  for (size_t i = 0; i < xs.size();) {
    if (auto c = gen::shrink(2))
      if (*c == 0) xs.erase(i);
      else         xs[i] = '\0';
    else
      i++;
  }
  return xs;
}
```

Behaviour:

`gen::shrink(int size = 1) → std::optional<int>`

Example:

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  return xs;
}
```

Behaviour:

1. `gen::shrink(n)` returns `std::nullopt` until a test case failure occurs.

`gen::shrink(int size = 1) → std::optional<int>`

Example:

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std::string gen_string_shrink() {
  auto xs = gen_string();
  for (size_t i = 0; i < xs.size();) {
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      if (*c == 0) xs.erase(i);
      else         xs[i] = '\0';
    else
      i++;
  }
  return xs;
}
```

Behaviour:

1. `gen::shrink(n)` returns `std::nullopt` until a test case failure occurs.
2. On subsequent test cases, `gen::shrink(n)` returns an integer $< n$ indicating which value to shrink to.

`gen::group()`

Example:

```
int x = 0;
if (gen::next() && // a
    !gen::shrink())
  x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // b
x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // c
```

- Suppose a test case failure occurs with `a == b == true` and `c == false`.
- Then `!gen::shrink()` subsequently evaluates to `false` and `b` is not evaluated.
- We expect that `c` should still evaluate to `false`.

`gen::group()`

Example:

```
int x = 0;
if (gen::next() && // a
    !gen::shrink())
  x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // b
x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // c
```

Problem: **halcheck** is just a library. It cannot inspect the internal structure of a program!

- Internally, **halcheck** only saves and replays the results of `gen::next`.
- Sequence 1:

  `{a: true, b: true, c: false}`
- Sequence 2:

  `{a: true, c: true, [unused]: false}`

`gen::group()`

Example:

```
int x = 0;
{
  auto _ = gen::group();
  if (gen::next() && // a
      !gen::shrink())
    x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // b
}
x += gen::next() ? 1 : 0; // c
```

Intuition: `gen::group` informs **halcheck** that all subsequent calls to `gen::next` (and `gen::shrink`) should be treated as a single "step".

- Sequence 1:
  `{{a: true, b: true}, c: false}`
- Sequence 2:
  `{{a: true, [unused]: true}, c: false}`

- All generators are implemented using the core functions.

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- How are the core functions themselves implemented? It depends!
- Core functions can be overridden.

Example: Overriding `gen::next`

```
CHECK_THROWS(gen::next()); // Throws by default
{
  //    ▿ gen::next calls the lambda as long as this is in scope
  auto _ = gen::next.handle([](int x, int y) {
    CHECK_THROWS(gen::next()); // Calling gen::next within the handler
                               // invokes the previous behaviour.
    return x == 0 && y > 0;
  });
  CHECK_EQ(gen::next(0, 1), true);
}
CHECK_THROWS(gen::next()); // Original behaviour restored
```

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- `gen::next`, `gen::discard`, etc. are *effects*.
- Effects are *invoked* via the call operator (`eff()`).
- A *handler* can be *installed* using `auto _ = eff.handle(my_handler)` is *uninstalled* when the return value (`_`) goes out of scope.
- Effects are lexically scoped: any effects invoked within an effect handler behave as if they were invoked *just before the effect handler was installed*.
  - This property is what makes strategies composable.

Summary

- Every generator in `halcheck` is built from four first-order core functions, enabling a ”direct-style” API.
- User-defined generation strategies are supported: every core function can be overriden.
- Shrinking is performed by changing generator inputs (`gen::shrink`) instead of generator outputs, resulting in less memory usage.