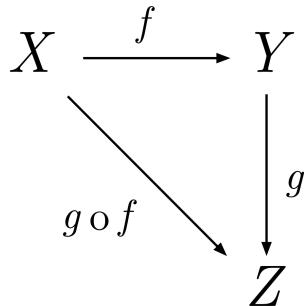


# Category Theory for Programmers



Bartosz Milewski

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Bartosz Milewski

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# Preface

For some time now I've been floating the idea of writing a book about category theory that would be targeted at programmers. Mind you, not computer scientists but programmers — engineers rather than scientists. I know this sounds crazy and I am properly scared. I can't deny that there is a huge gap between science and engineering because I have worked on both sides of the divide. But I've always felt a very strong compulsion to explain things. I have tremendous admiration for Richard Feynman who was the master of simple explanations. I know I'm no Feynman, but I will try my best. I'm starting by publishing this preface — which is supposed to motivate the reader to learn category theory — in hopes of starting a discussion and soliciting feedback.<sup>1</sup>

I WILL ATTEMPT, in the space of a few paragraphs, to convince you that this book is written for you, and whatever objections you might have to learning one of the most abstract branches of mathematics in your “copious spare time” are totally unfounded.

---

<sup>1</sup>You may also watch me [teaching this material](#) to a live audience.

My optimism is based on several observations. First, category theory is a treasure trove of extremely useful programming ideas. Haskell programmers have been tapping this resource for a long time, and the ideas are slowly percolating into other languages, but this process is too slow. We need to speed it up.

Second, there are many different kinds of math, and they appeal to different audiences. You might be allergic to calculus or algebra, but it doesn't mean you won't enjoy category theory. I would go as far as to argue that category theory is the kind of math that is particularly well suited for the minds of programmers. That's because category theory — rather than dealing with particulars — deals with structure. It deals with the kind of structure that makes programs composable.

Composition is at the very root of category theory — it's part of the definition of the category itself. And I will argue strongly that composition is the essence of programming. We've been composing things forever, long before some great engineer came up with the idea of a subroutine. Some time ago the principles of structural programming revolutionized programming because they made blocks of code composable. Then came object oriented programming, which is all about composing objects. Functional programming is not only about composing functions and algebraic data structures — it makes concurrency composable — something that's virtually impossible with other programming paradigms.

Third, I have a secret weapon, a butcher's knife, with which I will butcher math to make it more palatable to programmers. When you're a professional mathematician, you have to be very careful to get all your assumptions straight, qualify every statement properly, and construct all your proofs rigorously. This makes mathematical papers and books extremely hard to read for an outsider. I'm a physicist by train-

ing, and in physics we made amazing advances using informal reasoning. Mathematicians laughed at the Dirac delta function, which was made up on the spot by the great physicist P. A. M. Dirac to solve some differential equations. They stopped laughing when they discovered a completely new branch of calculus called distribution theory that formalized Dirac's insights.

Of course when using hand-waving arguments you run the risk of saying something blatantly wrong, so I will try to make sure that there is solid mathematical theory behind informal arguments in this book. I do have a worn-out copy of Saunders Mac Lane's *Category Theory for the Working Mathematician* on my nightstand.

Since this is category theory *for programmers* I will illustrate all major concepts using computer code. You are probably aware that functional languages are closer to math than the more popular imperative languages. They also offer more abstracting power. So a natural temptation would be to say: You must learn Haskell before the bounty of category theory becomes available to you. But that would imply that category theory has no application outside of functional programming and that's simply not true. So I will provide a lot of C++ examples. Granted, you'll have to overcome some ugly syntax, the patterns might not stand out from the background of verbosity, and you might be forced to do some copy and paste in lieu of higher abstraction, but that's just the lot of a C++ programmer.

But you're not off the hook as far as Haskell is concerned. You don't have to become a Haskell programmer, but you need it as a language for sketching and documenting ideas to be implemented in C++. That's exactly how I got started with Haskell. I found its terse syntax and powerful type system a great help in understanding and implementing C++ templates, data structures, and algorithms. But since I can't expect the



readers to already know Haskell, I will introduce it slowly and explain everything as I go.

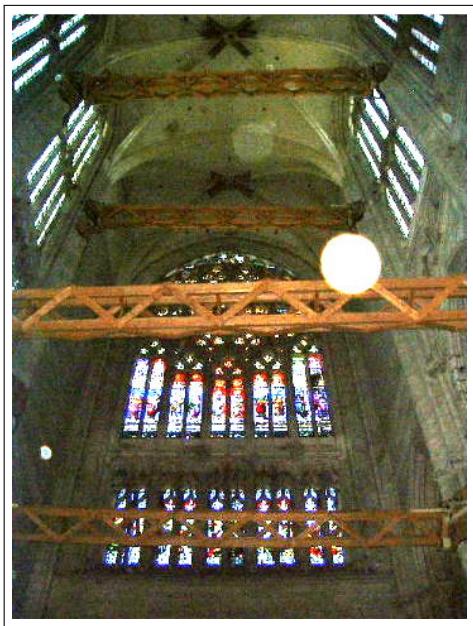
If you're an experienced programmer, you might be asking yourself: I've been coding for so long without worrying about category theory or functional methods, so what's changed? Surely you can't help but notice that there's been a steady stream of new functional features invading imperative languages. Even Java, the bastion of object-oriented programming, let the lambdas in C++ has recently been evolving at a frantic pace — a new standard every few years — trying to catch up with the changing world. All this activity is in preparation for a disruptive change or, as we physicist call it, a phase transition. If you keep heating water, it will eventually start boiling. We are now in the position of a frog that must decide if it should continue swimming in increasingly hot water, or start looking for some alternatives.

One of the forces that are driving the big change is the multicore revolution. The prevailing programming paradigm, object oriented pro-

gramming, doesn't buy you anything in the realm of concurrency and parallelism, and instead encourages dangerous and buggy design. Data hiding, the basic premise of object orientation, when combined with sharing and mutation, becomes a recipe for data races. The idea of combining a mutex with the data it protects is nice but, unfortunately, locks don't compose, and lock hiding makes deadlocks more likely and harder to debug.

But even in the absence of concurrency, the growing complexity of software systems is testing the limits of scalability of the imperative paradigm. To put it simply, side effects are getting out of hand. Granted, functions that have side effects are often convenient and easy to write. Their effects can in principle be encoded in their names and in the comments. A function called SetPassword or WriteFile is obviously mutating some state and generating side effects, and we are used to dealing with that. It's only when we start composing functions that have side effects on top of other functions that have side effects, and so on, that things start getting hairy. It's not that side effects are inherently bad — it's the fact that they are hidden from view that makes them impossible to manage at larger scales. Side effects don't scale, and imperative programming is all about side effects.

Changes in hardware and the growing complexity of software are forcing us to rethink the foundations of programming. Just like the builders of Europe's great gothic cathedrals we've been honing our craft to the limits of material and structure. There is an unfinished gothic cathedral in Beauvais, France, that stands witness to this deeply human struggle with limitations. It was intended to beat all previous records of height and lightness, but it suffered a series of collapses. Ad hoc measures like iron rods and wooden supports keep it from disintegrating, but obviously a lot of things went wrong. From a modern per-



Ad hoc measures preventing the Beauvais cathedral from collapsing.

spective, it's a miracle that so many gothic structures had been successfully completed without the help of modern material science, computer modelling, finite element analysis, and general math and physics. I hope future generations will be as admiring of the programming skills we've been displaying in building complex operating systems, web servers, and the internet infrastructure. And, frankly, they should, because we've done all this based on very flimsy theoretical foundations. We have to fix those foundations if we want to move forward.

**Part I**

**Part One**

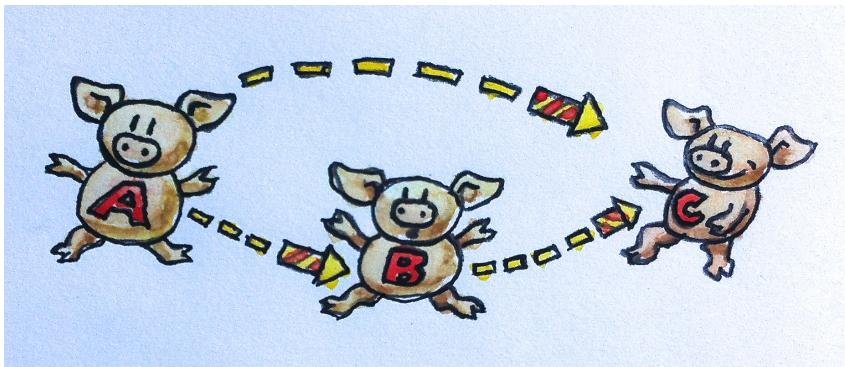
# 1

## Category: The Essence of Composition

A CATEGORY is an embarrassingly simple concept. A category consists of *objects* and *arrows* that go between them. That's why categories are so easy to represent pictorially. An object can be drawn as a circle or a point, and an arrow... is an arrow. (Just for variety, I will occasionally draw objects as piggies and arrows as fireworks.) But the essence of a category is *composition*. Or, if you prefer, the essence of composition is a category. Arrows compose, so if you have an arrow from object A to object B, and another arrow from object B to object C, then there must be an arrow — their composition — that goes from A to C.

### 1.1 Arrows as Functions

Is this already too much abstract nonsense? Do not despair. Let's talk concretes. Think of arrows, which are also called *morphisms*, as functions. You have a function  $f$  that takes an argument of type A and



In a category, if there is an arrow going from A to B and an arrow going from B to C then there must also be a direct arrow from A to C that is their composition. This diagram is not a full category because it's missing identity morphisms (see later).

returns a B. You have another function g that takes a B and returns a C. You can compose them by passing the result of f to g. You have just defined a new function that takes an A and returns a C.

In math, such composition is denoted by a small circle between functions:  $g \circ f$ . Notice the right to left order of composition. For some people this is confusing. You may be familiar with the pipe notation in Unix, as in:

```
ls of | grep Chrome
```

or the chevron  $>>$  in F#, which both go from left to right. But in mathematics and in Haskell functions compose right to left. It helps if you read  $g \circ f$  as “g after f.”

Let's make this even more explicit by writing some C code. We have one function f that takes an argument of type A and returns a value of type B:

```
B f(A a);
```

and another:

```
C g(B b);
```

Their composition is:

```
C g_after_f(A a)
{
    return g(f(a));
}
```

Here, again, you see right-to-left composition:  $g(f(a))$ ; this time in C.

I wish I could tell you that there is a template in the C++ Standard Library that takes two functions and returns their composition, but there isn't one. So let's try some Haskell for a change. Here's the declaration of a function from A to B:

```
f :: A -> B
```

Similarly:

```
g :: B -> C
```

Their composition is:

```
g . f
```

Once you see how simple things are in Haskell, the inability to express straightforward functional concepts in C++ is a little embarrassing. In fact, Haskell will let you use Unicode characters so you can write composition as:

$g \circ f$

You can even use Unicode double colons and arrows:

$f :: A \rightarrow B$

So here's the first Haskell lesson: Double colon means "has the type of..." A function type is created by inserting an arrow between two types. You compose two functions by inserting a period between them (or a Unicode circle).

## 1.2 Properties of Composition

There are two extremely important properties that the composition in any category must satisfy.

1. Composition is associative. If you have three morphisms,  $f$ ,  $g$ , and  $h$ , that can be composed (that is, their objects match end-to-end), you don't need parentheses to compose them. In math notation this is expressed as:

$$h \circ (g \circ f) = (h \circ g) \circ f = h \circ g \circ f$$

In (pseudo) Haskell:

$f :: A \rightarrow B$

$g :: B \rightarrow C$

$h :: C \rightarrow D$

$$h . (g . f) == (h . g) . f == h . g . f$$

(I said “pseudo,” because equality is not defined for functions.)

Associativity is pretty obvious when dealing with functions, but it may be not as obvious in other categories.

2. For every object A there is an arrow which is a unit of composition. This arrow loops from the object to itself. Being a unit of composition means that, when composed with any arrow that either starts at A or ends at A, respectively, it gives back the same arrow. The unit arrow for object A is called  $\text{id}_A$  (*identity* on A). In math notation, if  $f$  goes from A to B then

$$f \circ \text{id}_A = f$$

and

$$\text{id}_B \circ f = f$$

When dealing with functions, the identity arrow is implemented as the identity function that just returns back its argument. The implementation is the same for every type, which means this function is universally polymorphic. In C++ we could define it as a template:

```
template<class T> T id(T x) { return x; }
```

Of course, in C++ nothing is that simple, because you have to take into account not only what you’re passing but also how (that is, by value, by reference, by const reference, by move, and so on).

In Haskell, the identity function is part of the standard library (called Prelude). Here’s its declaration and definition:

```
id :: a -> a
id x = x
```

As you can see, polymorphic functions in Haskell are a piece of cake. In the declaration, you just replace the type with a type variable. Here's the trick: names of concrete types always start with a capital letter, names of type variables start with a lowercase letter. So here `a` stands for all types.

Haskell function definitions consist of the name of the function followed by formal parameters — here just one, `x`. The body of the function follows the equal sign. This terseness is often shocking to newcomers but you will quickly see that it makes perfect sense. Function definition and function call are the bread and butter of functional programming so their syntax is reduced to the bare minimum. Not only are there no parentheses around the argument list but there are no commas between arguments (you'll see that later, when we define functions of multiple arguments).

The body of a function is always an expression — there are no statements in functions. The result of a function is this expression — here, just `x`.

This concludes our second Haskell lesson.

The identity conditions can be written (again, in pseudo-Haskell) as:

```
f . id == f  
id . f == f
```

You might be asking yourself the question: Why would anyone bother with the identity function — a function that does nothing? Then again, why do we bother with the number zero? Zero is a symbol for nothing. Ancient Romans had a number system without a zero and they were able to build excellent roads and aqueducts, some of which survive to this day.

Neutral values like zero or `id` are extremely useful when working with symbolic variables. That's why Romans were not very good at algebra, whereas the Arabs and the Persians, who were familiar with the concept of zero, were. So the identity function becomes very handy as an argument to, or a return from, a higher-order function. Higher order functions are what make symbolic manipulation of functions possible. They are the algebra of functions.

To summarize: A category consists of objects and arrows (morphisms). Arrows can be composed, and the composition is associative. Every object has an identity arrow that serves as a unit under composition.

## 1.3 Composition is the Essence of Programming

Functional programmers have a peculiar way of approaching problems. They start by asking very Zen-like questions. For instance, when designing an interactive program, they would ask: What is interaction? When implementing Conway's Game of Life, they would probably ponder about the meaning of life. In this spirit, I'm going to ask: What is programming? At the most basic level, programming is about telling the computer what to do. "Take the contents of memory address `x` and add it to the contents of the register `EAX`." But even when we program in assembly, the instructions we give the computer are an expression of something more meaningful. We are solving a non-trivial problem (if it were trivial, we wouldn't need the help of the computer). And how do we solve problems? We decompose bigger problems into smaller problems. If the smaller problems are still too big, we decompose them further, and so on. Finally, we write code that solves all the small problems. And then comes the essence of programming: we compose those

pieces of code to create solutions to larger problems. Decomposition wouldn't make sense if we weren't able to put the pieces back together.

This process of hierarchical decomposition and recombination is not imposed on us by computers. It reflects the limitations of the human mind. Our brains can only deal with a small number of concepts at a time. One of the most cited papers in psychology, [The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two](#), postulated that we can only keep  $7 \pm 2$  “chunks” of information in our minds. The details of our understanding of the human short-term memory might be changing, but we know for sure that it's limited. The bottom line is that we are unable to deal with the soup of objects or the spaghetti of code. We need structure not because well-structured programs are pleasant to look at, but because otherwise our brains can't process them efficiently. We often describe some piece of code as elegant or beautiful, but what we really mean is that it's easy to process by our limited human minds. Elegant code creates chunks that are just the right size and come in just the right number for our mental digestive system to assimilate them.

So what are the right chunks for the composition of programs? Their surface area has to increase slower than their volume. (I like this analogy because of the intuition that the surface area of a geometric object grows with the square of its size — slower than the volume, which grows with the cube of its size.) The surface area is the information we need in order to compose chunks. The volume is the information we need in order to implement them. The idea is that, once a chunk is implemented, we can forget about the details of its implementation and concentrate on how it interacts with other chunks. In object-oriented programming, the surface is the class declaration of the object, or its abstract interface. In functional programming, it's the declaration of a function. (I'm simplifying things a bit, but that's the gist of it.)

Category theory is extreme in the sense that it actively discourages us from looking inside the objects. An object in category theory is an abstract nebulous entity. All you can ever know about it is how it relates to other objects — how it connects with them using arrows. This is how internet search engines rank web sites by analyzing incoming and outgoing links (except when they cheat). In object-oriented programming, an idealized object is only visible through its abstract interface (pure surface, no volume), with methods playing the role of arrows. The moment you have to dig into the implementation of the object in order to understand how to compose it with other objects, you've lost the advantages of your programming paradigm.

## 1.4 Challenges

1. Implement, as best as you can, the identity function in your favorite language (or the second favorite, if your favorite language happens to be Haskell).
2. Implement the composition function in your favorite language. It takes two functions as arguments and returns a function that is their composition.
3. Write a program that tries to test that your composition function respects identity.
4. Is the world-wide web a category in any sense? Are links morphisms?
5. Is Facebook a category, with people as objects and friendships as morphisms?
6. When is a directed graph a category?

# 2

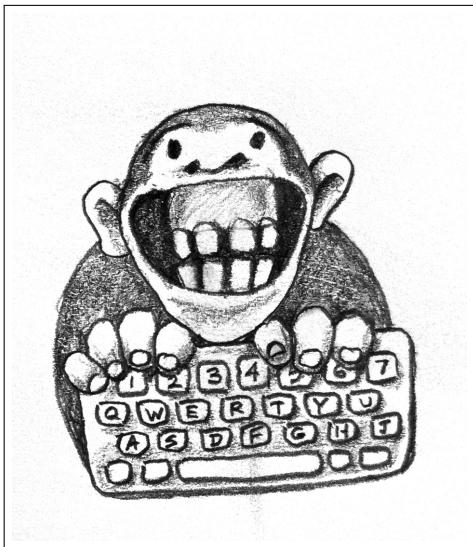
## Types and Functions

THE CATEGORY OF TYPES AND FUNCTIONS plays an important role in programming, so let's talk about what types are and why we need them.

### 2.1 Who Needs Types?

There seems to be some controversy about the advantages of static vs. dynamic and strong vs. weak typing. Let me illustrate these choices with a thought experiment. Imagine millions of monkeys at computer keyboards happily hitting random keys, producing programs, compiling, and running them.

With machine language, any combination of bytes produced by monkeys would be accepted and run. But with higher level languages, we do appreciate the fact that a compiler is able to detect lexical and grammatical errors. Lots of monkeys will go without bananas, but the remaining programs will have a better chance of being useful. Type



checking provides yet another barrier against nonsensical programs. Moreover, whereas in a dynamically typed language, type mismatches would be discovered at runtime, in strongly typed statically checked languages type mismatches are discovered at compile time, eliminating lots of incorrect programs before they have a chance to run.

So the question is, do we want to make monkeys happy, or do we want to produce correct programs?

The usual goal in the typing monkeys thought experiment is the production of the complete works of Shakespeare. Having a spell checker and a grammar checker in the loop would drastically increase the odds. The analog of a type checker would go even further by making sure that, once Romeo is declared a human being, he doesn't sprout leaves or trap photons in his powerful gravitational field.

## 2.2 Types Are About Composability

Category theory is about composing arrows. But not any two arrows can be composed. The target object of one arrow must be the same as the source object of the next arrow. In programming we pass the results on one function to another. The program will not work if the target function is not able to correctly interpret the data produced by the source function. The two ends must fit for the composition to work. The stronger the type system of the language, the better this match can be described and mechanically verified.

The only serious argument I hear against strong static type checking is that it might eliminate some programs that are semantically correct. In practice, this happens extremely rarely and, in any case, every language provides some kind of a backdoor to bypass the type system when that's really necessary. Even Haskell has `unsafeCoerce`. But such devices should be used judiciously. Franz Kafka's character, Gregor Samsa, breaks the type system when he metamorphoses into a giant bug, and we all know how it ends.

Another argument I hear a lot is that dealing with types imposes too much burden on the programmer. I could sympathize with this sentiment after having to write a few declarations of iterators in C++ myself, except that there is a technology called *type inference* that lets the compiler deduce most of the types from the context in which they are used. In C++, you can now declare a variable `auto` and let the compiler figure out its type.

In Haskell, except on rare occasions, type annotations are purely optional. Programmers tend to use them anyway, because they can tell a lot about the semantics of code, and they make compilation errors easier to understand. It's a common practice in Haskell to start a project by

designing the types. Later, type annotations drive the implementation and become compiler-enforced comments.

Strong static typing is often used as an excuse for not testing the code. You may sometimes hear Haskell programmers saying, “If it compiles, it must be correct.” Of course, there is no guarantee that a type-correct program is correct in the sense of producing the right output. The result of this cavalier attitude is that in several studies Haskell didn’t come as strongly ahead of the pack in code quality as one would expect. It seems that, in the commercial setting, the pressure to fix bugs is applied only up to a certain quality level, which has everything to do with the economics of software development and the tolerance of the end user, and very little to do with the programming language or methodology. A better criterion would be to measure how many projects fall behind schedule or are delivered with drastically reduced functionality.

As for the argument that unit testing can replace strong typing, consider the common refactoring practice in strongly typed languages: changing the type of an argument of a particular function. In a strongly typed language, it’s enough to modify the declaration of that function and then fix all the build breaks. In a weakly typed language, the fact that a function now expects different data cannot be propagated to call sites. Unit testing may catch some of the mismatches, but testing is almost always a probabilistic rather than a deterministic process. Testing is a poor substitute for proof.

## 2.3 What Are Types?

The simplest intuition for types is that they are sets of values. The type `Bool` (remember, concrete types start with a capital letter in Haskell) is

a two-element set of `True` and `False`. Type `Char` is a set of all Unicode characters like `a` or `ä`.

Sets can be finite or infinite. The type of `String`, which is a synonym for a list of `Char`, is an example of an infinite set.

When we declare `x` to be an `Integer`:

```
x :: Integer
```

we are saying that it's an element of the set of integers. `Integer` in Haskell is an infinite set, and it can be used to do arbitrary precision arithmetic. There is also a finite-set `Int` that corresponds to machine type, just like the C++ `int`.

There are some subtleties that make this identification of types and sets tricky. There are problems with polymorphic functions that involve circular definitions, and with the fact that you can't have a set of all sets; but as I promised, I won't be a stickler for math. The great thing is that there is a category of sets, which is called `Set`, and we'll just work with it. In `Set`, objects are sets and morphisms (arrows) are functions.

`Set` is a very special category, because we can actually peek inside its objects and get a lot of intuitions from doing that. For instance, we know that an empty set has no elements. We know that there are special one-element sets. We know that functions map elements of one set to elements of another set. They can map two elements to one, but not one element to two. We know that an identity function maps each element of a set to itself, and so on. The plan is to gradually forget all this information and instead express all those notions in purely categorical terms, that is in terms of objects and arrows.

In the ideal world we would just say that Haskell types are sets and Haskell functions are mathematical functions between sets. There is just one little problem: A mathematical function does not execute any

code — it just knows the answer. A Haskell function has to calculate the answer. It's not a problem if the answer can be obtained in a finite number of steps — however big that number might be. But there are some calculations that involve recursion, and those might never terminate. We can't just ban non-terminating functions from Haskell because distinguishing between terminating and non-terminating functions is undecidable — the famous halting problem. That's why computer scientists came up with a brilliant idea, or a major hack, depending on your point of view, to extend every type by one more special value called the *bottom* and denoted by `_ | _`, or Unicode  $\perp$ . This “value” corresponds to a non-terminating computation. So a function declared as:

```
f :: Bool -> Bool
```

may return `True`, `False`, or `_ | _`; the latter meaning that it would never terminate.

Interestingly, once you accept the bottom as part of the type system, it is convenient to treat every runtime error as a bottom, and even allow functions to return the bottom explicitly. The latter is usually done using the expression `undefined`, as in:

```
f :: Bool -> Bool
f x = undefined
```

This definition type checks because `undefined` evaluates to bottom, which is a member of any type, including `Bool`. You can even write:

```
f :: Bool -> Bool
f = undefined
```

(without the  $x$ ) because the bottom is also a member of the type  $\text{Bool} \rightarrow \text{Bool}$ .

Functions that may return bottom are called partial, as opposed to total functions, which return valid results for every possible argument.

Because of the bottom, you'll see the category of Haskell types and functions referred to as **Hask** rather than **Set**. From the theoretical point of view, this is the source of never-ending complications, so at this point I will use my butcher's knife and terminate this line of reasoning. From the pragmatic point of view, it's okay to ignore non-terminating functions and bottoms, and treat **Hask** as *bona fide Set*.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.4 Why Do We Need a Mathematical Model?

As a programmer you are intimately familiar with the syntax and grammar of your programming language. These aspects of the language are usually described using formal notation at the very beginning of the language spec. But the meaning, or semantics, of the language is much harder to describe; it takes many more pages, is rarely formal enough, and almost never complete. Hence the never ending discussions among language lawyers, and a whole cottage industry of books dedicated to the exegesis of the finer points of language standards.

There are formal tools for describing the semantics of a language but, because of their complexity, they are mostly used with simplified academic languages, not real-life programming behemoths. One such tool called *operational semantics* describes the mechanics of program execution. It defines a formalized idealized interpreter. The semantics of

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<sup>1</sup>Nils Anders Danielsson, John Hughes, Patrik Jansson, Jeremy Gibbons, [Fast and Loose Reasoning is Morally Correct](#). This paper provides justification for ignoring bottoms in most contexts.

industrial languages, such as C++, is usually described using informal operational reasoning, often in terms of an “abstract machine.”

The problem is that it’s very hard to prove things about programs using operational semantics. To show a property of a program you essentially have to “run it” through the idealized interpreter.

It doesn’t matter that programmers never perform formal proofs of correctness. We always “think” that we write correct programs. Nobody sits at the keyboard saying, “Oh, I’ll just throw a few lines of code and see what happens.” We think that the code we write will perform certain actions that will produce desired results. We are usually quite surprised when it doesn’t. That means we do reason about programs we write, and we usually do it by running an interpreter in our heads. It’s just really hard to keep track of all the variables. Computers are good at running programs — humans are not! If we were, we wouldn’t need computers.

But there is an alternative. It’s called *denotational semantics* and it’s based on math. In denotational semantics every programming construct is given its mathematical interpretation. With that, if you want to prove a property of a program, you just prove a mathematical theorem. You might think that theorem proving is hard, but the fact is that we humans have been building up mathematical methods for thousands of years, so there is a wealth of accumulated knowledge to tap into. Also, as compared to the kind of theorems that professional mathematicians prove, the problems that we encounter in programming are usually quite simple, if not trivial.

Consider the definition of a factorial function in Haskell, which is a language quite amenable to denotational semantics:

```
fact n = product [1..n]
```

The expression `[1..n]` is a list of integers from 1 to n. The function product multiplies all elements of a list. That's just like a definition of factorial taken from a math text. Compare this with C:

```
int fact(int n) {  
    int i;  
    int result = 1;  
    for (i = 2; i <= n; ++i)  
        result *= i;  
    return result;  
}
```

Need I say more?

Okay, I'll be the first to admit that this was a cheap shot! A factorial function has an obvious mathematical denotation. An astute reader might ask: What's the mathematical model for reading a character from the keyboard or sending a packet across the network? For the longest time that would have been an awkward question leading to a rather convoluted explanation. It seemed like denotational semantics wasn't the best fit for a considerable number of important tasks that were essential for writing useful programs, and which could be easily tackled by operational semantics. The breakthrough came from category theory. Eugenio Moggi discovered that computational effect can be mapped to monads. This turned out to be an important observation that not only gave denotational semantics a new lease on life and made pure functional programs more usable, but also shed new light on traditional programming. I'll talk about monads later, when we develop more categorical tools.

One of the important advantages of having a mathematical model for programming is that it's possible to perform formal proofs of cor-

rectness of software. This might not seem so important when you’re writing consumer software, but there are areas of programming where the price of failure may be exorbitant, or where human life is at stake. But even when writing web applications for the health system, you may appreciate the thought that functions and algorithms from the Haskell standard library come with proofs of correctness.

## 2.5 Pure and Dirty Functions

The things we call functions in C++ or any other imperative language, are not the same things mathematicians call functions. A mathematical function is just a mapping of values to values.

We can implement a mathematical function in a programming language: Such a function, given an input value will calculate the output value. A function to produce a square of a number will probably multiply the input value by itself. It will do it every time it’s called, and it’s guaranteed to produce the same output every time it’s called with the same input. The square of a number doesn’t change with the phases of the Moon.

Also, calculating the square of a number should not have a side effect of dispensing a tasty treat for your dog. A “function” that does that cannot be easily modelled as a mathematical function.

In programming languages, functions that always produce the same result given the same input and have no side effects are called *pure functions*. In a pure functional language like Haskell all functions are pure. Because of that, it’s easier to give these languages denotational semantics and model them using category theory. As for other languages, it’s always possible to restrict yourself to a pure subset, or reason about side effects separately. Later we’ll see how monads let us model all kinds of

effects using only pure functions. So we really don't lose anything by restricting ourselves to mathematical functions.

## 2.6 Examples of Types

Once you realize that types are sets, you can think of some rather exotic types. For instance, what's the type corresponding to an empty set? No, it's not C++ `void`, although this type *is* called `Void` in Haskell. It's a type that's not inhabited by any values. You can define a function that takes `Void`, but you can never call it. To call it, you would have to provide a value of the type `Void`, and there just aren't any. As for what this function can return, there are no restrictions whatsoever. It can return any type (although it never will, because it can't be called). In other words it's a function that's polymorphic in the return type. Haskellers have a name for it:

```
absurd :: Void -> a
```

(Remember, `a` is a type variable that can stand for any type.) The name is not coincidental. There is deeper interpretation of types and functions in terms of logic called the Curry-Howard isomorphism. The type `Void` represents falsity, and the type of the function `absurd` corresponds to the statement that from falsity follows anything, as in the Latin adage "ex falso sequitur quodlibet."

Next is the type that corresponds to a singleton set. It's a type that has only one possible value. This value just "is." You might not immediately recognise it as such, but that is the C++ `void`. Think of functions from and to this type. A function from `void` can always be called. If it's a pure function, it will always return the same result. Here's an example of such a function:

```
int f44() { return 44; }
```

You might think of this function as taking “nothing”, but as we’ve just seen, a function that takes “nothing” can never be called because there is no value representing “nothing.” So what does this function take? Conceptually, it takes a dummy value of which there is only one instance ever, so we don’t have to mention it explicitly. In Haskell, however, there is a symbol for this value: an empty pair of parentheses, `()`. So, by a funny coincidence (or is it a coincidence?), the call to a function of void looks the same in C++ and in Haskell. Also, because of the Haskell’s love of terseness, the same symbol `()` is used for the type, the constructor, and the only value corresponding to a singleton set. So here’s this function in Haskell:

```
f44 :: () -> Integer  
f44 () = 44
```

The first line declares that `f44` takes the type `()`, pronounced “unit,” into the type `Integer`. The second line defines `f44` by pattern matching the only constructor for unit, namely `()`, and producing the number 44. You call this function by providing the unit value `()`:

```
f44 ()
```

Notice that every function of unit is equivalent to picking a single element from the target type (here, picking the `Integer` 44). In fact you could think of `f44` as a different representation for the number 44. This is an example of how we can replace explicit mention of elements of a set by talking about functions (arrows) instead. Functions from unit to any type `A` are in one-to-one correspondence with the elements of that set `A`.

What about functions with the `void` return type, or, in Haskell, with the unit return type? In C++ such functions are used for side effects, but we know that these are not real functions in the mathematical sense of the word. A pure function that returns unit does nothing: it discards its argument.

Mathematically, a function from a set  $A$  to a singleton set maps every element of  $A$  to the single element of that singleton set. For every  $A$  there is exactly one such function. Here's this function for `Integer`:

```
fInt :: Integer -> ()  
fInt x = ()
```

You give it any integer, and it gives you back a unit. In the spirit of terseness, Haskell lets you use the wildcard pattern, the underscore, for an argument that is discarded. This way you don't have to invent a name for it. So the above can be rewritten as:

```
fInt :: Integer -> ()  
fInt _ = ()
```

Notice that the implementation of this function not only doesn't depend on the value passed to it, but it doesn't even depend on the type of the argument.

Functions that can be implemented with the same formula for any type are called parametrically polymorphic. You can implement a whole family of such functions with one equation using a type parameter instead of a concrete type. What should we call a polymorphic function from any type to unit type? Of course we'll call it `unit`:

```
unit :: a -> ()  
unit _ = ()
```

In C++ you would write this function as:

```
template<class T>
void unit(T) {}
```

Next in the typology of types is a two-element set. In C++ it's called `bool` and in Haskell, predictably, `Bool`. The difference is that in C++ `bool` is a built-in type, whereas in Haskell it can be defined as follows:

```
data Bool = True | False
```

(The way to read this definition is that `Bool` is either `True` or `False`.) In principle, one should also be able to define a Boolean type in C++ as an enumeration:

```
enum bool {
    true,
    false
};
```

but C++ `enum` is secretly an integer. The C++11 “`enum class`” could have been used instead, but then you would have to qualify its values with the class name, as in `bool::true` and `bool::false`, not to mention having to include the appropriate header in every file that uses it.

Pure functions from `Bool` just pick two values from the target type, one corresponding to `True` and another to `False`.

Functions to `Bool` are called *predicates*. For instance, the Haskell library `Data.Char` is full of predicates like `isAlpha` or `isDigit`. In C++ there is a similar library that defines, among others, `isalpha` and `isdigit`, but these return an `int` rather than a Boolean. The actual predicates are defined in `std::ctype` and have the form `ctype::is(alpha, c)`, `ctype::is(digit, c)`, etc.

## 2.7 Challenges

1. Define a higher-order function (or a function object) `memoize` in your favorite language. This function takes a pure function `f` as an argument and returns a function that behaves almost exactly like `f`, except that it only calls the original function once for every argument, stores the result internally, and subsequently returns this stored result every time it's called with the same argument. You can tell the memoized function from the original by watching its performance. For instance, try to memoize a function that takes a long time to evaluate. You'll have to wait for the result the first time you call it, but on subsequent calls, with the same argument, you should get the result immediately.
2. Try to memoize a function from your standard library that you normally use to produce random numbers. Does it work?
3. Most random number generators can be initialized with a seed. Implement a function that takes a seed, calls the random number generator with that seed, and returns the result. Memoize that function. Does it work?
4. Which of these C++ functions are pure? Try to memoize them and observe what happens when you call them multiple times: memoized and not.
  - (a) The factorial function from the example in the text.
  - (b) `std::getchar()`
  - (c) `bool f() {  
 std::cout << "Hello!" << std::endl;  
 return true;  
}`
  - (d) `int f(int x)`

```
{  
    static int y = 0;  
    y += x;  
    return y;  
}
```

5. How many different functions are there from Bool to Bool? Can you implement them all?
6. Draw a picture of a category whose only objects are the types Void, () (unit), and Bool; with arrows corresponding to all possible functions between these types. Label the arrows with the names of the functions.

# 3

## Categories Great and Small

YOU CAN GET REAL APPRECIATION for categories by studying a variety of examples. Categories come in all shapes and sizes and often pop up in unexpected places. We'll start with something really simple.

### 3.1 No Objects

The most trivial category is one with zero objects and, consequently, zero morphisms. It's a very sad category by itself, but it may be important in the context of other categories, for instance, in the category of all categories (yes, there is one). If you think that an empty set makes sense, then why not an empty category?

## 3.2 Simple Graphs

You can build categories just by connecting objects with arrows. You can imagine starting with any directed graph and making it into a category by simply adding more arrows. First, add an identity arrow at each node. Then, for any two arrows such that the end of one coincides with the beginning of the other (in other words, any two *composable* arrows), add a new arrow to serve as their composition. Every time you add a new arrow, you have to also consider its composition with any other arrow (except for the identity arrows) and itself. You usually end up with infinitely many arrows, but that's okay.

Another way of looking at this process is that you're creating a category, which has an object for every node in the graph, and all possible *chains* of composable graph edges as morphisms. (You may even consider identity morphisms as special cases of chains of length zero.)

Such a category is called a *free category* generated by a given graph. It's an example of a free construction, a process of completing a given structure by extending it with a minimum number of items to satisfy its laws (here, the laws of a category). We'll see more examples of it in the future.

## 3.3 Orders

And now for something completely different! A category where a morphism is a relation between objects: the relation of being less than or equal. Let's check if it indeed is a category. Do we have identity morphisms? Every object is less than or equal to itself: check! Do we have composition? If  $a \leq b$  and  $b \leq c$  then  $a \leq c$ : check! Is composition associative? Check! A set with a relation like this is called a *preorder*,

so a preorder is indeed a category.

You can also have a stronger relation, that satisfies an additional condition that, if  $a \leq b$  and  $b \leq a$  then  $a$  must be the same as  $b$ . That's called a *partial order*.

Finally, you can impose the condition that any two objects are in a relation with each other, one way or another; and that gives you a *linear order* or *total order*.

Let's characterize these ordered sets as categories. A preorder is a category where there is at most one morphism going from any object  $a$  to any object  $b$ . Another name for such a category is “thin.” A preorder is a thin category.

A set of morphisms from object  $a$  to object  $b$  in a category  $C$  is called a *hom-set* and is written as  $C(a, b)$  (or, sometimes,  $\text{Hom}_C(a, b)$ ). So every hom-set in a preorder is either empty or a singleton. That includes the hom-set  $C(a, a)$ , the set of morphisms from  $a$  to  $a$ , which must be a singleton, containing only the identity, in any preorder. You may, however, have cycles in a preorder. Cycles are forbidden in a partial order.

It's very important to be able to recognize preorders, partial orders, and total orders because of sorting. Sorting algorithms, such as quicksort, bubble sort, merge sort, etc., can only work correctly on total orders. Partial orders can be sorted using topological sort.

### 3.4 Monoid as Set

Monoid is an embarrassingly simple but amazingly powerful concept. It's the concept behind basic arithmetics: Both addition and multiplication form a monoid. Monoids are ubiquitous in programming. They show up as strings, lists, foldable data structures, futures in concurrent

programming, events in functional reactive programming, and so on.

Traditionally, a monoid is defined as a set with a binary operation. All that's required from this operation is that it's associative, and that there is one special element that behaves like a unit with respect to it.

For instance, natural numbers with zero form a monoid under addition. Associativity means that:

$$(a + b) + c = a + (b + c)$$

(In other words, we can skip parentheses when adding numbers.)

The neutral element is zero, because:

$$0 + a = a$$

and

$$a + 0 = a$$

The second equation is redundant, because addition is commutative ( $a + b = b + a$ ), but commutativity is not part of the definition of a monoid. For instance, string concatenation is not commutative and yet it forms a monoid. The neutral element for string concatenation, by the way, is an empty string, which can be attached to either side of a string without changing it.

In Haskell we can define a type class for monoids — a type for which there is a neutral element called `mempty` and a binary operation called `mappend`:

```
class Monoid m where
    mempty  :: m
    mappend :: m -> m -> m
```

The type signature for a two-argument function,  $m \rightarrow m \rightarrow m$ , might look strange at first, but it will make perfect sense after we talk about currying. You may interpret a signature with multiple arrows in two basic ways: as a function of multiple arguments, with the rightmost type being the return type; or as a function of one argument (the leftmost one), returning a function. The latter interpretation may be emphasized by adding parentheses (which are redundant, because the arrow is right-associative), as in:  $m \rightarrow (m \rightarrow m)$ . We'll come back to this interpretation in a moment.

Notice that, in Haskell, there is no way to express the monoidal properties of `mempty` and `mappend` (i.e., the fact that `mempty` is neutral and that `mappend` is associative). It's the responsibility of the programmer to make sure they are satisfied.

Haskell classes are not as intrusive as C++ classes. When you're defining a new type, you don't have to specify its class up front. You are free to procrastinate and declare a given type to be an instance of some class much later. As an example, let's declare `String` to be a monoid by providing the implementation of `mempty` and `mappend` (this is, in fact, done for you in the standard Prelude):

```
instance Monoid String where
    mempty = ""
    mappend = (++)
```

Here, we have reused the list concatenation operator `(++)`, because a `String` is just a list of characters.

A word about Haskell syntax: Any infix operator can be turned into a two-argument function by surrounding it with parentheses. Given two strings, you can concatenate them by inserting `++` between them:

```
"Hello " ++ "world!"
```

or by passing them as two arguments to the parenthesized `(++)`:

```
(++) "Hello" "world!"
```

Notice that arguments to a function are not separated by commas or surrounded by parentheses. (This is probably the hardest thing to get used to when learning Haskell.)

It's worth emphasizing that Haskell lets you express equality of functions, as in:

```
mappend = (++)
```

Conceptually, this is different than expressing the equality of values produced by functions, as in:

```
mappend s1 s2 = (++) s1 s2
```

The former translates into equality of morphisms in the category `Hask` (or `Set`, if we ignore bottoms, which is the name for never-ending calculations). Such equations are not only more succinct, but can often be generalized to other categories. The latter is called *extensional* equality, and states the fact that for any two input strings, the outputs of `mappend` and `(++)` are the same. Since the values of arguments are sometimes called *points* (as in: the value of `f` at point `x`), this is called point-wise equality. Function equality without specifying the arguments is described as *point-free*. (Incidentally, point-free equations often involve composition of functions, which is symbolized by a point, so this might be a little confusing to the beginner.)

The closest one can get to declaring a monoid in C++ would be to use the (proposed) syntax for concepts.

```

template<class T>
T mempty = delete;

template<class T>
T mappend(T, T) = delete;

template<class M>
concept bool Monoid = requires (M m) {
    { mempty<M> } -> M;
    { mappend(m, m); } -> M;
};

```

The first definition uses a value template (also proposed). A polymorphic value is a family of values — a different value for every type.

The keyword `delete` means that there is no default value defined: It will have to be specified on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, there is no default for `mappend`.

The concept `Monoid` is a predicate (hence the `bool` type) that tests whether there exist appropriate definitions of `mempty` and `mappend` for a given type `M`.

An instantiation of the `Monoid` concept can be accomplished by providing appropriate specializations and overloads:

```

template<>
std::string mempty<std::string> = {""};

std::string mappend(std::string s1, std::string s2) {
    return s1 + s2;
}

```

## 3.5 Monoid as Category

That was the “familiar” definition of the monoid in terms of elements of a set. But as you know, in category theory we try to get away from sets and their elements, and instead talk about objects and morphisms. So let’s change our perspective a bit and think of the application of the binary operator as “moving” or “shifting” things around the set.

For instance, there is the operation of adding 5 to every natural number. It maps 0 to 5, 1 to 6, 2 to 7, and so on. That’s a function defined on the set of natural numbers. That’s good: we have a function and a set. In general, for any number  $n$  there is a function of adding  $n$  — the “adder” of  $n$ .

How do adders compose? The composition of the function that adds 5 with the function that adds 7 is a function that adds 12. So the composition of adders can be made equivalent to the rules of addition. That’s good too: we can replace addition with function composition.

But wait, there’s more: There is also the adder for the neutral element, zero. Adding zero doesn’t move things around, so it’s the identity function in the set of natural numbers.

Instead of giving you the traditional rules of addition, I could as well give you the rules of composing adders, without any loss of information. Notice that the composition of adders is associative, because the composition of functions is associative; and we have the zero adder corresponding to the identity function.

An astute reader might have noticed that the mapping from integers to adders follows from the second interpretation of the type signature of `mappend` as  $m \rightarrow (m \rightarrow m)$ . It tells us that `mappend` maps an element of a monoid set to a function acting on that set.

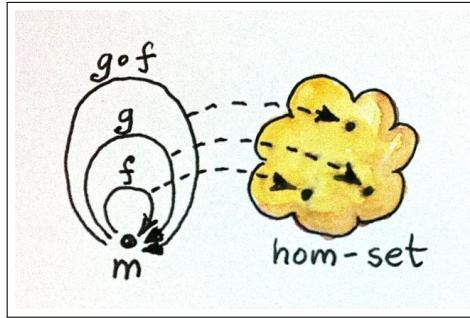
Now I want you to forget that you are dealing with the set of natural



numbers and just think of it as a single object, a blob with a bunch of morphisms — the adders. A monoid is a single object category. In fact the name monoid comes from Greek *mono*, which means single. Every monoid can be described as a single object category with a set of morphisms that follow appropriate rules of composition.

String concatenation is an interesting case, because we have a choice of defining right appenders and left appenders (or *prependers*, if you will). The composition tables of the two models are a mirror reverse of each other. You can easily convince yourself that appending “bar” after “foo” corresponds to prepending “foo” after prepending “bar”.

You might ask the question whether every categorical monoid — a one-object category — defines a unique set-with-binary-operator monoid.



Monoid hom-set seen as morphisms and as points in a set.

It turns out that we can always extract a set from a single-object category. This set is the set of morphisms — the adders in our example. In other words, we have the hom-set  $M(m, m)$  of the single object  $m$  in the category  $M$ . We can easily define a binary operator in this set: The monoidal product of two set-elements is the element corresponding to the composition of the corresponding morphisms. If you give me two elements of  $M(m, m)$  corresponding to  $f$  and  $g$ , their product will correspond to the composition  $g \circ f$ . The composition always exists, because the source and the target for these morphisms are the same object. And it's associative by the rules of category. The identity morphism is the neutral element of this product. So we can always recover a set monoid from a category monoid. For all intents and purposes they are one and the same.

There is just one little nit for mathematicians to pick: morphisms don't have to form a set. In the world of categories there are things larger than sets. A category in which morphisms between any two objects form a set is called locally small. As promised, I will be mostly ignoring such subtleties, but I thought I should mention them for the

record.

A lot of interesting phenomena in category theory have their root in the fact that elements of a hom-set can be seen both as morphisms, which follow the rules of composition, and as points in a set. Here, composition of morphisms in  $M$  translates into monoidal product in the set  $M(m, m)$ .

## 3.6 Challenges

1. Generate a free category from:
  - (a) A graph with one node and no edges
  - (b) A graph with one node and one (directed) edge (hint: this edge can be composed with itself)
  - (c) A graph with two nodes and a single arrow between them
  - (d) A graph with a single node and 26 arrows marked with the letters of the alphabet: a, b, c ... z.
2. What kind of order is this?
  - (a) A set of sets with the inclusion relation: A is included in B if every element of A is also an element of B.
  - (b) C++ types with the following subtyping relation: T1 is a subtype of T2 if a pointer to T1 can be passed to a function that expects a pointer to T2 without triggering a compilation error.
3. Considering that Bool is a set of two values True and False, show that it forms two (set-theoretical) monoids with respect to, respectively, operator `&&` (AND) and `||` (OR).

4. Represent the Bool monoid with the AND operator as a category:  
List the morphisms and their rules of composition.
5. Represent addition modulo 3 as a monoid category.

# 4

## Kleisli Categories

You've seen how to model types and pure functions as a category. I also mentioned that there is a way to model side effects, or non-pure functions, in category theory. Let's have a look at one such example: functions that log or trace their execution. Something that, in an imperative language, would likely be implemented by mutating some global state, as in:

```
string logger;

bool negate(bool b) {
    logger += "Not so! ";
    return !b;
}
```

You know that this is not a pure function, because its memoized version would fail to produce a log. This function has *side effects*.

In modern programming, we try to stay away from global mutable state as much as possible — if only because of the complications of concurrency. And you would never put code like this in a library.

Fortunately for us, it's possible to make this function pure. You just have to pass the log explicitly, in and out. Let's do that by adding a string argument, and pairing regular output with a string that contains the updated log:

```
pair<bool, string> negate(bool b, string logger) {  
    return make_pair(!b, logger + "Not so! ");  
}
```

This function is pure, it has no side effects, it returns the same pair every time it's called with the same arguments, and it can be memoized if necessary. However, considering the cumulative nature of the log, you'd have to memoize all possible histories that can lead to a given call. There would be a separate memo entry for:

```
negate(true, "It was the best of times. ");
```

and

```
negate(true, "It was the worst of times. ");
```

and so on.

It's also not a very good interface for a library function. The callers are free to ignore the string in the return type, so that's not a huge burden; but they are forced to pass a string as input, which might be inconvenient.

Is there a way to do the same thing less intrusively? Is there a way to separate concerns? In this simple example, the main purpose of the

function `negate` is to turn one Boolean into another. The logging is secondary. Granted, the message that is logged is specific to the function, but the task of aggregating the messages into one continuous log is a separate concern. We still want the function to produce a string, but we'd like to unburden it from producing a log. So here's the compromise solution:

```
pair<bool, string> negate(bool b) {
    return make_pair(!b, "Not so! ");
}
```

The idea is that the log will be aggregated *between* function calls.

To see how this can be done, let's switch to a slightly more realistic example. We have one function from string to string that turns lower case characters to upper case:

```
string toUpper(string s) {
    string result;
    int (*toupperp)(int) = &toupper; // toupper is overloaded
    transform(begin(s), end(s), back_inserter(result), toupperp);
    return result;
}
```

and another that splits a string into a vector of strings, breaking it on whitespace boundaries:

```
vector<string> toWords(string s) {
    return words(s);
}
```

The actual work is done in the auxiliary function `words`:

```

vector<string> words(string s) {
    vector<string> result{""};
    for (auto i = begin(s); i != end(s); ++i)
    {
        if (isspace(*i))
            result.push_back("");
        else
            result.back() += *i;
    }
    return result;
}

```

We want to modify the functions `toUpper` and `toWords` so that they piggyback a message string on top of their regular return values.

We will “embellish” the return values of these functions. Let’s do it in a generic way by defining a template `Writer` that encapsulates a pair whose first component is a value of arbitrary type `A` and the second component is a string:

```

template<class A>
using Writer = pair<A, string>;

```

Here are the embellished functions:

```

Writer<string> toUpper(string s) {

```



```

    string result;
    int (*toupperp)(int) = &toupper;
    transform(begin(s), end(s), back_inserter(result), toupperp);
    return make_pair(result, "toUpper ");
}

Writer<vector<string>> toWords(string s) {
    return make_pair(words(s), "toWords ");
}

```

We want to compose these two functions into another embellished function that uppercases a string and splits it into words, all the while producing a log of those actions. Here's how we may do it:

```

Writer<vector<string>> process(string s) {
    auto p1 = toUpper(s);
    auto p2 = toWords(p1.first);
    return make_pair(p2.first, p1.second + p2.second);
}

```

We have accomplished our goal: The aggregation of the log is no longer the concern of the individual functions. They produce their own messages, which are then, externally, concatenated into a larger log.

Now imagine a whole program written in this style. It's a nightmare of repetitive, error-prone code. But we are programmers. We know how to deal with repetitive code: we abstract it! This is, however, not your run of the mill abstraction — we have to abstract *function composition* itself. But composition is the essence of category theory, so before we write more code, let's analyze the problem from the categorical point of view.

## 4.1 The Writer Category

The idea of embellishing the return types of a bunch of functions in order to piggyback some additional functionality turns out to be very fruitful. We'll see many more examples of it. The starting point is our regular category of types and functions. We'll leave the types as objects, but redefine our morphisms to be the embellished functions.

For instance, suppose that we want to embellish the function `isEven` that goes from `int` to `bool`. We turn it into a morphism that is represented by an embellished function. The important point is that this morphism is still considered an arrow between the objects `int` and `bool`, even though the embellished function returns a pair:

```
pair<bool, string> isEven(int n) {
    return make_pair(n % 2 == 0, "isEven ");
}
```

By the laws of a category, we should be able to compose this morphism with another morphism that goes from the object `bool` to whatever. In particular, we should be able to compose it with our earlier `negate`:

```
pair<bool, string> negate(bool b) {
    return make_pair(!b, "Not so! ");
}
```

Obviously, we cannot compose these two morphisms the same way we compose regular functions, because of the input/output mismatch. Their composition should look more like this:

```
pair<bool, string> isOdd(int n) {
    pair<bool, string> p1 = isEven(n);
```

```

pair<bool, string> p2 = negate(p1.first);
return make_pair(p2.first, p1.second + p2.second);
}

```

So here's the recipe for the composition of two morphisms in this new category we are constructing:

1. Execute the embellished function corresponding to the first morphism
2. Extract the first component of the result pair and pass it to the embellished function corresponding to the second morphism
3. Concatenate the second component (the string) of the first result and the second component (the string) of the second result
4. Return a new pair combining the first component of the final result with the concatenated string.

If we want to abstract this composition as a higher order function in C++, we have to use a template parameterized by three types corresponding to three objects in our category. It should take two embellished functions that are composable according to our rules, and return a third embellished function:

```

template<class A, class B, class C>
function<Writer<C>(A)> compose(function<Writer<B>(A)> m1,
                                         function<Writer<C>(B)> m2)
{
    return [m1, m2](A x) {
        auto p1 = m1(x);
        auto p2 = m2(p1.first);
        return make_pair(p2.first, p1.second + p2.second);
    }
}

```

```
    };
}
```

Now we can go back to our earlier example and implement the composition of `toUpper` and `toWords` using this new template:

```
Writer<vector<string>> process(string s) {
    return compose<string, string, vector<string>>(toUpper,
        ↳ toWords)(s);
}
```

There is still a lot of noise with the passing of types to the `compose` template. This can be avoided as long as you have a C++14-compliant compiler that supports generalized lambda functions with return type deduction (credit for this code goes to Eric Niebler):

```
auto const compose = [](auto m1, auto m2) {
    return [m1, m2](auto x) {
        auto p1 = m1(x);
        auto p2 = m2(p1.first);
        return make_pair(p2.first, p1.second + p2.second);
    };
};
```

In this new definition, the implementation of `process` simplifies to:

```
Writer<vector<string>> process(string s) {
    return compose(toUpper, toWords)(s);
}
```

But we are not finished yet. We have defined composition in our new category, but what are the identity morphisms? These are not our regular identity functions! They have to be morphisms from type A back to type A, which means they are embellished functions of the form:

```
Writer<A> identity(A);
```

They have to behave like units with respect to composition. If you look at our definition of composition, you'll see that an identity morphism should pass its argument without change, and only contribute an empty string to the log:

```
template<class A> Writer<A> identity(A x) {  
    return make_pair(x, "");  
}
```

You can easily convince yourself that the category we have just defined is indeed a legitimate category. In particular, our composition is trivially associative. If you follow what's happening with the first component of each pair, it's just a regular function composition, which is associative. The second components are being concatenated, and concatenation is also associative.

An astute reader may notice that it would be easy to generalize this construction to any monoid, not just the string monoid. We would use `mappend` inside `compose` and `mempty` inside `identity` (in place of `+` and `""`). There really is no reason to limit ourselves to logging just strings. A good library writer should be able to identify the bare minimum of constraints that make the library work — here the logging library's only requirement is that the log have monoidal properties.

## 4.2 Writer in Haskell

The same thing in Haskell is a little more terse, and we also get a lot more help from the compiler. Let's start by defining the `Writer` type:

```
type Writer a = (a, String)
```

Here I'm just defining a type alias, an equivalent of a `typedef` (or `using`) in C++. The type `Writer` is parameterized by a type variable `a` and is equivalent to a pair of `a` and `String`. The syntax for pairs is minimal: just two items in parentheses, separated by a comma.

Our morphisms are functions from an arbitrary type to some `Writer` type:

```
a -> Writer b
```

We'll declare the composition as a funny infix operator, sometimes called the "fish":

```
(>=>) :: (a -> Writer b) -> (b -> Writer c) -> (a -> Writer c)
```

It's a function of two arguments, each being a function on its own, and returning a function. The first argument is of the type `(a->Writer b)`, the second is `(b->Writer c)`, and the result is `(a->Writer c)`.

Here's the definition of this infix operator — the two arguments `m1` and `m2` appearing on either side of the fishy symbol:

```
m1 >=> m2 = \x ->
  let (y, s1) = m1 x
      (z, s2) = m2 y
  in (z, s1 ++ s2)
```

The result is a lambda function of one argument  $x$ . The lambda is written as a backslash — think of it as the Greek letter  $\lambda$  with an amputated leg.

The `let` expression lets you declare auxiliary variables. Here the result of the call to `m1` is pattern matched to a pair of variables  $(y, s1)$ ; and the result of the call to `m2`, with the argument  $y$  from the first pattern, is matched to  $(z, s2)$ .

It is common in Haskell to pattern match pairs, rather than use accessors, as we did in C++. Other than that there is a pretty straightforward correspondence between the two implementations.

The overall value of the `let` expression is specified in its `in` clause: here it's a pair whose first component is  $z$  and the second component is the concatenation of two strings,  $s1++s2$ .

I will also define the identity morphism for our category, but for reasons that will become clear much later, I will call it `return`.

```
return :: a -> Writer a
return x = (x, "")
```

For completeness, let's have the Haskell versions of the embellished functions `upCase` and `toWords`:

```
upCase :: String -> Writer String
upCase s = (map toUpper s, "upCase ")

toWords :: String -> Writer [String]
toWords s = (words s, "toWords ")
```

The function `map` corresponds to the C++ `transform`. It applies the character function `toUpper` to the string  $s$ . The auxiliary function `words` is defined in the standard Prelude library.

Finally, the composition of the two functions is accomplished with the help of the fish operator:

```
process :: String -> Writer [String]
process = upCase >=> toWords
```

## 4.3 Kleisli Categories

You might have guessed that I haven't invented this category on the spot. It's an example of the so called Kleisli category — a category based on a monad. We are not ready to discuss monads yet, but I wanted to give you a taste of what they can do. For our limited purposes, a Kleisli category has, as objects, the types of the underlying programming language. Morphisms from type A to type B are functions that go from A to a type derived from B using the particular embellishment. Each Kleisli category defines its own way of composing such morphisms, as well as the identity morphisms with respect to that composition. (Later we'll see that the imprecise term "embellishment" corresponds to the notion of an endofunctor in a category.)

The particular monad that I used as the basis of the category in this post is called the *writer monad* and it's used for logging or tracing the execution of functions. It's also an example of a more general mechanism for embedding effects in pure computations. You've seen previously that we could model programming-language types and functions in the category of sets (disregarding bottoms, as usual). Here we have extended this model to a slightly different category, a category where morphisms are represented by embellished functions, and their composition does more than just pass the output of one function to the input of another. We have one more degree of freedom to play with: the composition itself. It turns out that this is exactly the degree of freedom which makes it possible to give simple denotational semantics to programs that in imperative languages are traditionally implemented

using side effects.

## 4.4 Challenge

A function that is not defined for all possible values of its argument is called a partial function. It's not really a function in the mathematical sense, so it doesn't fit the standard categorical mold. It can, however, be represented by a function that returns an embellished type `optional`:

```
template<class A> class optional {
    bool _isValid;
    A _value;
public:
    optional() : _isValid(false) {}
    optional(A v) : _isValid(true), _value(v) {}
    bool isValid() const { return _isValid; }
    A value() const { return _value; }
};
```

As an example, here's the implementation of the embellished function `safe_root`:

```
optional<double> safe_root(double x) {
    if (x >= 0) return optional<double>{sqrt(x)};
    else return optional<double>{};
}
```

Here's the challenge:

1. Construct the Kleisli category for partial functions (define composition and identity).

2. Implement the embellished function `safe_reciprocal` that returns a valid reciprocal of its argument, if it's different from zero.
3. Compose `safe_root` and `safe_reciprocal` to implement `safe_root_reciprocal` that calculates  $\sqrt{1/x}$  whenever possible.

# 5

## Products and Coproducts

THE ANCIENT GREEK playwright Euripides once said: “Every man is like the company he is wont to keep.” We are defined by our relationships. Nowhere is this more true than in category theory. If we want to single out a particular object in a category, we can only do this by describing its pattern of relationships with other objects (and itself). These relationships are defined by morphisms.

There is a common construction in category theory called the *universal construction* for defining objects in terms of their relationships. One way of doing this is to pick a pattern, a particular shape constructed from objects and morphisms, and look for all its occurrences in the category. If it’s a common enough pattern, and the category is large, chances are you’ll have lots and lots of hits. The trick is to establish some kind of ranking among those hits, and pick what could be considered the best fit.

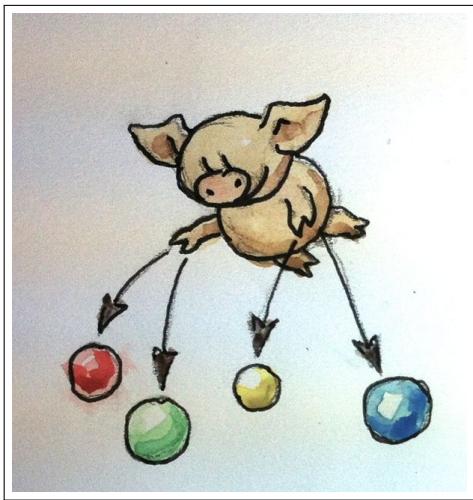
This process is reminiscent of the way we do web searches. A query

is like a pattern. A very general query will give you large *recall*: lots of hits. Some may be relevant, others not. To eliminate irrelevant hits, you refine your query. That increases its *precision*. Finally, the search engine will rank the hits and, hopefully, the one result that you're interested in will be at the top of the list.

## 5.1 Initial Object

The simplest shape is a single object. Obviously, there are as many instances of this shape as there are objects in a given category. That's a lot to choose from. We need to establish some kind of ranking and try to find the object that tops this hierarchy. The only means at our disposal are morphisms. If you think of morphisms as arrows, then it's possible that there is an overall net flow of arrows from one end of the category to another. This is true in ordered categories, for instance in partial orders. We could generalize that notion of object precedence by saying that object  $a$  is “more initial” than object  $b$  if there is an arrow (a morphism) going from  $a$  to  $b$ . We would then define *the* initial object as one that has arrows going to all other objects. Obviously there is no guarantee that such an object exists, and that's okay. A bigger problem is that there may be too many such objects: The recall is good, but precision is lacking. The solution is to take a hint from ordered categories – they allow at most one arrow between any two objects: there is only one way of being less-than or equal-to another object. Which leads us to this definition of the initial object:

The **initial object** is the object that has one and only one morphism going to any object in the category.



However, even that doesn't guarantee the uniqueness of the initial object (if one exists). But it guarantees the next best thing: uniqueness *up to isomorphism*. Isomorphisms are very important in category theory, so I'll talk about them shortly. For now, let's just agree that uniqueness up to isomorphism justifies the use of "the" in the definition of the initial object.

Here are some examples: The initial object in a partially ordered set (often called a *poset*) is its least element. Some posets don't have an initial object – like the set of all integers, positive and negative, with less-than-or-equal relation for morphisms.

In the category of sets and functions, the initial object is the empty set. Remember, an empty set corresponds to the Haskell type `Void` (there is no corresponding type in C++) and the unique polymorphic function from `Void` to any other type is called `absurd`:

```
absurd :: Void -> a
```

It's this family of morphisms that makes `Void` the initial object in the category of types.

## 5.2 Terminal Object

Let's continue with the single-object pattern, but let's change the way we rank the objects. We'll say that object  $a$  is "more terminal" than object  $b$  if there is a morphism going from  $b$  to  $a$  (notice the reversal of direction). We'll be looking for an object that's more terminal than any other object in the category. Again, we will insist on uniqueness:

The **terminal object** is the object with one and only one morphism coming to it from any object in the category.



And again, the terminal object is unique, up to isomorphism, which I will show shortly. But first let's look at some examples. In a poset,

the terminal object, if it exists, is the biggest object. In the category of sets, the terminal object is a singleton. We've already talked about singletons — they correspond to the `void` type in C++ and the unit type `()` in Haskell. It's a type that has only one value — implicit in C++ and explicit in Haskell, denoted by `()`. We've also established that there is one and only one pure function from any type to the unit type:

```
unit :: a -> ()  
unit _ = ()
```

so all the conditions for the terminal object are satisfied.

Notice that in this example the uniqueness condition is crucial, because there are other sets (actually, all of them, except for the empty set) that have incoming morphisms from every set. For instance, there is a Boolean-valued function (a predicate) defined for every type:

```
yes :: a -> Bool  
yes _ = True
```

But `Bool` is not a terminal object. There is at least one more `Bool`-valued function from every type:

```
no :: a -> Bool  
no _ = False
```

Insisting on uniqueness gives us just the right precision to narrow down the definition of the terminal object to just one type.

## 5.3 Duality

You can't help but to notice the symmetry between the way we defined the initial object and the terminal object. The only difference between

the two was the direction of morphisms. It turns out that for any category  $C$  we can define the *opposite category*  $C^{\text{op}}$  just by reversing all the arrows. The opposite category automatically satisfies all the requirements of a category, as long as we simultaneously redefine composition. If original morphisms  $f : a \rightarrow b$  and  $g : b \rightarrow c$  composed to  $h : a \rightarrow c$  with  $h = g \circ f$ , then the reversed morphisms  $f^{\text{op}} : b \rightarrow a$  and  $g^{\text{op}} : c \rightarrow b$  will compose to  $h^{\text{op}} : c \rightarrow a$  with  $h^{\text{op}} = f^{\text{op}} \circ g^{\text{op}}$ . And reversing the identity arrows is a (pun alert!) no-op.

Duality is a very important property of categories because it doubles the productivity of every mathematician working in category theory. For every construction you come up with, there is its opposite; and for every theorem you prove, you get one for free. The constructions in the opposite category are often prefixed with “co”, so you have products and coproducts, monads and comonads, cones and cocones, limits and colimits, and so on. There are no cocomonads though, because reversing the arrows twice gets us back to the original state.

It follows then that a terminal object is the initial object in the opposite category.

## 5.4 Isomorphisms

As programmers, we are well aware that defining equality is a non-trivial task. What does it mean for two objects to be equal? Do they have to occupy the same location in memory (pointer equality)? Or is it enough that the values of all their components are equal? Are two complex numbers equal if one is expressed as the real and imaginary part, and the other as modulus and angle? You’d think that mathematicians would have figured out the meaning of equality, but they haven’t. They have the same problem of multiple competing defini-

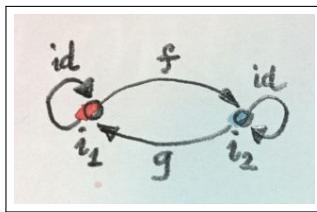
tions for equality. There is the propositional equality, intensional equality, extensional equality, and equality as a path in homotopy type theory. And then there are the weaker notions of isomorphism, and even weaker of equivalence.

The intuition is that isomorphic objects look the same — they have the same shape. It means that every part of one object corresponds to some part of another object in a one-to-one mapping. As far as our instruments can tell, the two objects are a perfect copy of each other. Mathematically it means that there is a mapping from object  $a$  to object  $b$ , and there is a mapping from object  $b$  back to object  $a$ , and they are the inverse of each other. In category theory we replace mappings with morphisms. An isomorphism is an invertible morphism; or a pair of morphisms, one being the inverse of the other.

We understand the inverse in terms of composition and identity: Morphism  $g$  is the inverse of morphism  $f$  if their composition is the identity morphism. These are actually two equations because there are two ways of composing two morphisms:

$$\begin{aligned} f \circ g &= \text{id} \\ g \circ f &= \text{id} \end{aligned}$$

When I said that the initial (terminal) object was unique up to isomorphism, I meant that any two initial (terminal) objects are isomorphic. That's actually easy to see. Let's suppose that we have two initial objects  $i_1$  and  $i_2$ . Since  $i_1$  is initial, there is a unique morphism  $f$  from  $i_1$  to  $i_2$ . By the same token, since  $i_2$  is initial, there is a unique morphism  $g$  from  $i_2$  to  $i_1$ . What's the composition of these two morphisms?



All morphisms in this diagram are unique.

The composition  $g \circ f$  must be a morphism from  $i_1$  to  $i_1$ . But  $i_1$  is initial so there can only be one morphism going from  $i_1$  to  $i_1$ . Since we are in a category, we know that there is an identity morphism from  $i_1$  to  $i_1$ , and since there is room for only one, that must be it. Therefore  $g \circ f$  is equal to identity. Similarly,  $f \circ g$  must be equal to identity, because there can be only one morphism from  $i_2$  back to  $i_2$ . This proves that  $f$  and  $g$  must be the inverse of each other. Therefore any two initial objects are isomorphic.

Notice that in this proof we used the uniqueness of the morphism from the initial object to itself. Without that we couldn't prove the "up to isomorphism" part. But why do we need the uniqueness of  $f$  and  $g$ ? Because not only is the initial object unique up to isomorphism, it is unique up to *unique* isomorphism. In principle, there could be more than one isomorphism between two objects, but that's not the case here. This "uniqueness up to unique isomorphism" is the important property of all universal constructions.

## 5.5 Products

The next universal construction is that of a product. We know what a cartesian product of two sets is: it's a set of pairs. But what's the pattern

that connects the product set with its constituent sets? If we can figure that out, we'll be able to generalize it to other categories.

All we can say is that there are two functions, the projections, from the product to each of the constituents. In Haskell, these two functions are called `fst` and `snd` and they pick, respectively, the first and the second component of a pair:

```
fst :: (a, b) -> a  
fst (x, y) = x
```

```
snd :: (a, b) -> b  
snd (x, y) = y
```

Here, the functions are defined by pattern matching their arguments: the pattern that matches any pair is `(x, y)`, and it extracts its components into variables `x` and `y`.

These definitions can be simplified even further with the use of wildcards:

```
fst (x, _) = x  
snd (_, y) = y
```

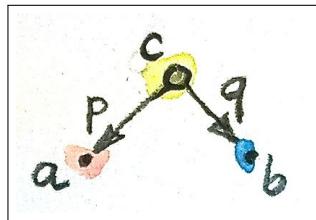
In C++, we would use template functions, for instance:

```
template<class A, class B> A  
fst(pair<A, B> const & p) {  
    return p.first;  
}
```

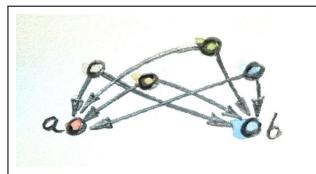
Equipped with this seemingly very limited knowledge, let's try to define a pattern of objects and morphisms in the category of sets that

will lead us to the construction of a product of two sets,  $a$  and  $b$ . This pattern consists of an object  $c$  and two morphisms  $p$  and  $q$  connecting it to  $a$  and  $b$ , respectively:

```
p :: c -> a  
q :: c -> b
```



All  $c$ s that fit this pattern will be considered candidates for the product. There may be lots of them.



For instance, let's pick, as our constituents, two Haskell types, `Int` and `Bool`, and get a sampling of candidates for their product.

Here's one: `Int`. Can `Int` be considered a candidate for the product of `Int` and `Bool`? Yes, it can — and here are its projections:

```
p :: Int -> Int  
p x = x
```

```
q :: Int -> Bool  
q _ = True
```

That's pretty lame, but it matches the criteria.

Here's another one:  $(\text{Int}, \text{Int}, \text{Bool})$ . It's a tuple of three elements, or a triple. Here are two morphisms that make it a legitimate candidate (we are using pattern matching on triples):

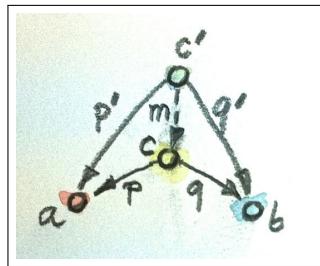
```
p :: (\text{Int}, \text{Int}, \text{Bool}) -> \text{Int}  
p (x, _, _) = x
```

```
q :: (\text{Int}, \text{Int}, \text{Bool}) -> \text{Bool}  
q (_, _, b) = b
```

You may have noticed that while our first candidate was too small — it only covered the `Int` dimension of the product; the second was too big — it spuriously duplicated the `Int` dimension.

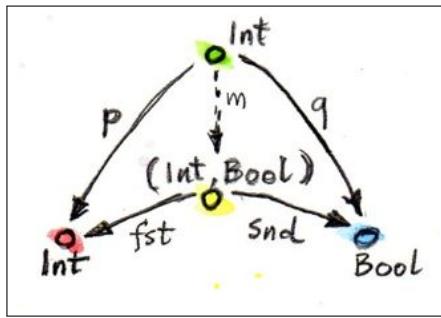
But we haven't explored yet the other part of the universal construction: the ranking. We want to be able to compare two instances of our pattern. We want to compare one candidate object  $c$  and its two projections  $p$  and  $q$  with another candidate object  $c'$  and its two projections  $p'$  and  $q'$ . We would like to say that  $c$  is “better” than  $c'$  if there is a morphism  $m$  from  $c'$  to  $c$  — but that's too weak. We also want its projections to be “better,” or “more universal,” than the projections of  $c'$ . What it means is that the projections  $p'$  and  $q'$  can be reconstructed from  $p$  and  $q$  using  $m$ :

```
p' = p . m  
q' = q . m
```



Another way of looking at these equation is that  $m$  factorizes  $p'$  and  $q'$ . Just pretend that these equations are in natural numbers, and the dot is multiplication:  $m$  is a common factor shared by  $p'$  and  $q'$ .

Just to build some intuitions, let me show you that the pair  $(\text{Int}, \text{Bool})$  with the two canonical projections,  $\text{fst}$  and  $\text{snd}$  is indeed *better* than the two candidates I presented before.



The mapping  $m$  for the first candidate is:

```
 $m :: \text{Int} \rightarrow (\text{Int}, \text{Bool})$ 
 $m x = (x, \text{True})$ 
```

Indeed, the two projections,  $p$  and  $q$  can be reconstructed as:

$$\begin{aligned} p \ x &= \text{fst } (m \ x) = x \\ q \ x &= \text{snd } (m \ x) = \text{True} \end{aligned}$$

The  $m$  for the second example is similarly uniquely determined:

$$m \ (x, \ _, \ b) = (x, \ b)$$

We were able to show that  $(\text{Int}, \ \text{Bool})$  is better than either of the two candidates. Let's see why the opposite is not true. Could we find some  $m'$  that would help us reconstruct  $\text{fst}$  and  $\text{snd}$  from  $p$  and  $q$ ?

$$\begin{aligned} \text{fst} &= p \ . \ m' \\ \text{snd} &= q \ . \ m' \end{aligned}$$

In our first example,  $q$  always returned `True` and we know that there are pairs whose second component is `False`. We can't reconstruct  $\text{snd}$  from  $q$ .

The second example is different: we retain enough information after running either  $p$  or  $q$ , but there is more than one way to factorize  $\text{fst}$  and  $\text{snd}$ . Because both  $p$  and  $q$  ignore the second component of the triple, our  $m'$  can put anything in it. We can have:

$$m' \ (x, \ b) = (x, \ x, \ b)$$

or

$$m' \ (x, \ b) = (x, \ 42, \ b)$$

and so on.

Putting it all together, given any type  $c$  with two projections  $p$  and  $q$ , there is a unique  $m$  from  $c$  to the cartesian product  $(a, \ b)$  that factorizes them. In fact, it just combines  $p$  and  $q$  into a pair.

```
m :: c -> (a, b)
m x = (p x, q x)
```

That makes the cartesian product  $(a, b)$  our best match, which means that this universal construction works in the category of sets. It picks the product of any two sets.

Now let's forget about sets and define a product of two objects in any category using the same universal construction. Such product doesn't always exist, but when it does, it is unique up to a unique isomorphism.

A **product** of two objects  $a$  and  $b$  is the object  $c$  equipped with two projections such that for any other object  $c'$  equipped with two projections there is a unique morphism  $m$  from  $c'$  to  $c$  that factorizes those projections.

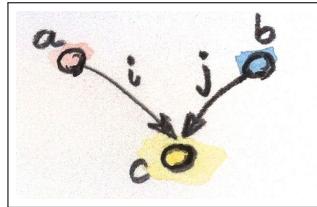
A (higher order) function that produces the factorizing function  $m$  from two candidates is sometimes called the *factorizer*. In our case, it would be the function:

```
factorizer :: (c -> a) -> (c -> b) -> (c -> (a, b))
factorizer p q = \x -> (p x, q x)
```

## 5.6 Coproduct

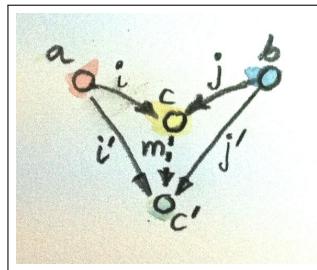
Like every construction in category theory, the product has a dual, which is called the coproduct. When we reverse the arrows in the product pattern, we end up with an object  $c$  equipped with two *injections*,  $i$  and  $j$ : morphisms from  $a$  and  $b$  to  $c$ .

$i :: a \rightarrow c$   
 $j :: b \rightarrow c$



The ranking is also inverted: object  $c$  is “better” than object  $c'$  that is equipped with the injections  $i'$  and  $j'$  if there is a morphism  $m$  from  $c$  to  $c'$  that factorizes the injections:

$$i' = m \circ i$$
$$j' = m \circ j$$



The “best” such object, one with a unique morphism connecting it to any other pattern, is called a coproduct and, if it exists, is unique up to unique isomorphism.

A coproduct of two objects  $a$  and  $b$  is the object  $c$  equipped with two injections such that for any other object  $c'$  equipped with two injections there is a unique morphism  $m$  from  $c$  to  $c'$  that factorizes those injections.

In the category of sets, the coproduct is the *disjoint union* of two sets. An element of the disjoint union of  $a$  and  $b$  is either an element of  $a$  or an element of  $b$ . If the two sets overlap, the disjoint union contains two copies of the common part. You can think of an element of a disjoint union as being tagged with an identifier that specifies its origin.

For a programmer, it's easier to understand a coproduct in terms of types: it's a tagged union of two types. C++ supports unions, but they are not tagged. It means that in your program you have to somehow keep track which member of the union is valid. To create a tagged union, you have to define a tag — an enumeration — and combine it with the union. For instance, a tagged union of an `int` and a `char const *` could be implemented as:

```
struct Contact {  
    enum { isPhone, isEmail } tag;  
    union { int phoneNum; char const * emailAddr; };  
};
```

The two injections can either be implemented as constructors or as functions. For instance, here's the first injection as a function `PhoneNum`:

```
Contact PhoneNum(int n) {  
    Contact c;  
    c.tag = isPhone;  
    c.phoneNum = n;
```

```
    return c;  
}
```

It injects an integer into Contact.

A tagged union is also called a *variant*, and there is a very general implementation of a variant in the boost library, boost::variant.

In Haskell, you can combine any data types into a tagged union by separating data constructors with a vertical bar. The Contact example translates into the declaration:

```
data Contact = PhoneNum Int | EmailAddr String
```

Here, PhoneNum and EmailAddr serve both as constructors (injections), and as tags for pattern matching (more about this later). For instance, this is how you would construct a contact using a phone number:

```
helpdesk :: Contact;  
helpdesk = PhoneNum 2222222
```

Unlike the canonical implementation of the product that is built into Haskell as the primitive pair, the canonical implementation of the coproduct is a data type called Either, which is defined in the standard Prelude as:

```
Either a b = Left a | Right b
```

It is parameterized by two types, a and b and has two constructors: Left that takes a value of type a, and Right that takes a value of type b.

Just as we've defined the factorizer for a product, we can define one for the coproduct. Given a candidate type c and two candidate injections i and j, the factorizer for Either produces the factoring function:

```
factorizer :: (a -> c) -> (b -> c) -> Either a b -> c
factorizer i j (Left a) = i a
factorizer i j (Right b) = j b
```

## 5.7 Asymmetry

We've seen two set of dual definitions: The definition of a terminal object can be obtained from the definition of the initial object by reversing the direction of arrows; in a similar way, the definition of the coproduct can be obtained from that of the product. Yet in the category of sets the initial object is very different from the final object, and coproduct is very different from product. We'll see later that product behaves like multiplication, with the terminal object playing the role of one; whereas coproduct behaves more like the sum, with the initial object playing the role of zero. In particular, for finite sets, the size of the product is the product of the sizes of individual sets, and the size of the coproduct is the sum of the sizes.

This shows that the category of sets is not symmetric with respect to the inversion of arrows.

Notice that while the empty set has a unique morphism to any set (the absurd function), it has no morphisms coming back. The singleton set has a unique morphism coming to it from any set, but it *also* has outgoing morphisms to every set (except for the empty one). As we've seen before, these outgoing morphisms from the terminal object play a very important role of picking elements of other sets (the empty set has no elements, so there's nothing to pick).

It's the relationship of the singleton set to the product that sets it apart from the coproduct. Consider using the singleton set, represented by the unit type `()`, as yet another – vastly inferior – candidate for the

product pattern. Equip it with two projections  $p$  and  $q$ : functions from the singleton to each of the constituent sets. Each selects a concrete element from either set. Because the product is universal, there is also a (unique) morphism  $m$  from our candidate, the singleton, to the product. This morphism selects an element from the product set – it selects a concrete pair. It also factorizes the two projections:

$$\begin{aligned} p &= \text{fst} . m \\ q &= \text{snd} . m \end{aligned}$$

When acting on the singleton value  $()$ , the only element of the singleton set, these two equations become:

$$\begin{aligned} p () &= \text{fst} (m ()) \\ q () &= \text{snd} (m ()) \end{aligned}$$

Since  $m ()$  is the element of the product picked by  $m$ , these equations tell us that the element picked by  $p$  from the first set,  $p ()$ , is the first component of the pair picked by  $m$ . Similarly,  $q ()$  is equal to the second component. This is in total agreement with our understanding that elements of the product are pairs of elements from the constituent sets.

There is no such simple interpretation of the coproduct. We could try the singleton set as a candidate for a coproduct, in an attempt to extract the elements from it, but there we would have two injections going into it rather than two projections coming out of it. They'd tell us nothing about their sources (in fact, we've seen that they ignore the input parameter). Neither would the unique morphism from the coproduct to our singleton. The category of sets just looks very different when seen from the direction of the initial object than it does when seen from the terminal end.

This is not an intrinsic property of sets, it's a property of functions, which we use as morphisms in  $\text{Set}$ . Functions are, in general, asymmetric. Let me explain.

A function must be defined for every element of its domain set (in programming, we call it a *total* function), but it doesn't have to cover the whole codomain. We've seen some extreme cases of it: functions from a singleton set — functions that select just a single element in the codomain. (Actually, functions from an empty set are the real extremes.) When the size of the domain is much smaller than the size of the codomain, we often think of such functions as embedding the domain in the codomain. For instance, we can think of a function from a singleton set as embedding its single element in the codomain. I call them *embedding* functions, but mathematicians prefer to give a name to the opposite: functions that tightly fill their codomains are called *surjective* or *onto*.

The other source of asymmetry is that functions are allowed to map many elements of the domain set into one element of the codomain. They can collapse them. The extreme case are functions that map whole sets into a singleton. You've seen the polymorphic `unit` function that does just that. The collapsing can only be compounded by composition. A composition of two collapsing functions is even more collapsing than the individual functions. Mathematicians have a name for non-collapsing functions: they call them *injective* or *one-to-one*.

Of course there are some functions that are neither embedding nor collapsing. They are called *bijections* and they are truly symmetric, because they are invertible. In the category of sets, an isomorphism is the same as a bijection.

## 5.8 Challenges

1. Show that the terminal object is unique up to unique isomorphism.
2. What is a product of two objects in a poset? Hint: Use the universal construction.
3. What is a coproduct of two objects in a poset?
4. Implement the equivalent of Haskell Either as a generic type in your favorite language (other than Haskell).
5. Show that Either is a “better” coproduct than int equipped with two injections:

```
int i(int n) { return n; }
int j(bool b) { return b? 0: 1; }
```

Hint: Define a function

```
int m(Either const & e);
```

that factorizes i and j.

6. Continuing the previous problem: How would you argue that int with the two injections i and j cannot be “better” than Either?
7. Still continuing: What about these injections?

```
int i(int n) {
    if (n < 0) return n;
    return n + 2;
}

int j(bool b) { return b? 0: 1; }
```

8. Come up with an inferior candidate for a coproduct of `int` and `bool` that cannot be better than `Either` because it allows multiple acceptable morphisms from it to `Either`.

## 5.9 Bibliography

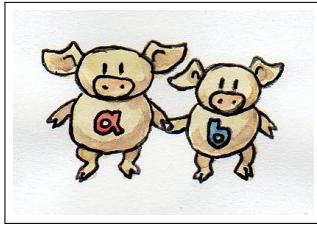
1. The Catsters, [Products and Coproducts](#) video.

# 6

## Simple Algebraic Data Types

WE'VE SEEN TWO BASIC ways of combining types: using a product and a coproduct. It turns out that a lot of data structures in everyday programming can be built using just these two mechanisms. This fact has important practical consequences. Many properties of data structures are composable. For instance, if you know how to compare values of basic types for equality, and you know how to generalize these comparisons to product and coproduct types, you can automate the derivation of equality operators for composite types. In Haskell you can automatically derive equality, comparison, conversion to and from string, and more, for a large subset of composite types.

Let's have a closer look at product and sum types as they appear in programming.



## 6.1 Product Types

The canonical implementation of a product of two types in a programming language is a pair. In Haskell, a pair is a primitive type constructor; in C++ it's a relatively complex template defined in the Standard Library.

Pairs are not strictly commutative: a pair `(Int, Bool)` cannot be substituted for a pair `(Bool, Int)`, even though they carry the same information. They are, however, commutative up to isomorphism — the isomorphism being given by the `swap` function (which is its own inverse):

```
swap :: (a, b) -> (b, a)
swap (x, y) = (y, x)
```

You can think of the two pairs as simply using a different format for storing the same data. It's just like big endian vs. little endian.

You can combine an arbitrary number of types into a product by nesting pairs inside pairs, but there is an easier way: nested pairs are equivalent to tuples. It's the consequence of the fact that different ways of nesting pairs are isomorphic. If you want to combine three types in a product, `a`, `b`, and `c`, in this order, you can do it in two ways:

```
((a, b), c)
```

or

$(a, (b, c))$

These types are different — you can't pass one to a function that expects the other — but their elements are in one-to-one correspondence. There is a function that maps one to another:

```
alpha :: ((a, b), c) -> (a, (b, c))
alpha ((x, y), z) = (x, (y, z))
```

and this function is invertible:

```
alpha_inv :: (a, (b, c)) -> ((a, b), c)
alpha_inv (x, (y, z)) = ((x, y), z)
```

so it's an isomorphism. These are just different ways of repackaging the same data.

You can interpret the creation of a product type as a binary operation on types. From that perspective, the above isomorphism looks very much like the associativity law we've seen in monoids:

$(a * b) * c = a * (b * c)$

Except that, in the monoid case, the two ways of composing products were equal, whereas here they are only equal "up to isomorphism."

If we can live with isomorphisms, and don't insist on strict equality, we can go even further and show that the unit type,  $()$ , is the unit of the product the same way  $1$  is the unit of multiplication. Indeed, the pairing of a value of some type  $a$  with a unit doesn't add any information. The type:

```
(a, ())
```

is isomorphic to `a`. Here's the isomorphism:

```
rho :: (a, ()) -> a
```

```
rho (x, ()) = x
```

```
rho_inv :: a -> (a, ())
```

```
rho_inv x = (x, ())
```

These observations can be formalized by saying that `Set` (the category of sets) is a *monoidal category*. It's a category that's also a monoid, in the sense that you can multiply objects (here, take their cartesian product). I'll talk more about monoidal categories, and give the full definition in the future.

There is a more general way of defining product types in Haskell – especially, as we'll see soon, when they are combined with sum types. It uses named constructors with multiple arguments. A pair, for instance, can be defined alternatively as:

```
data Pair a b = P a b
```

Here, `Pair a b` is the name of the type parameterized by two other types, `a` and `b`; and `P` is the name of the data constructor. You define a pair type by passing two types to the `Pair` type constructor. You construct a pair value by passing two values of appropriate types to the constructor `P`. For instance, let's define a value `stmt` as a pair of `String` and `Bool`:

```
stmt :: Pair String Bool
stmt = P "This statements is" False
```

The first line is the type declaration. It uses the type constructor `Pair`, with `String` and `Bool` replacing `a` and the `b` in the generic definition of `Pair`. The second line defines the actual value by passing a concrete string and a concrete Boolean to the data constructor `P`. Type constructors are used to construct types; data constructors, to construct values.

Since the name spaces for type and data constructors are separate in Haskell, you will often see the same name used for both, as in:

```
data Pair a b = Pair a b
```

And if you squint hard enough, you may even view the built-in pair type as a variation on this kind of declaration, where the name `Pair` is replaced with the binary operator `(,)`. In fact you can use `(,)` just like any other named constructor and create pairs using prefix notation:

```
stmt = (,) "This statement is" False
```

Similarly, you can use `(,,)` to create triples, and so on.

Instead of using generic pairs or tuples, you can also define specific named product types, as in:

```
data Stmt = Stmt String Bool
```

which is just a product of `String` and `Bool`, but it's given its own name and constructor. The advantage of this style of declaration is that you may define many types that have the same content but different meaning and functionality, and which cannot be substituted for each other.

Programming with tuples and multi-argument constructors can get messy and error prone – keeping track of which component represents what. It's often preferable to give names to components. A product type with named fields is called a record in Haskell, and a `struct` in C.

## 6.2 Records

Let's have a look at a simple example. We want to describe chemical elements by combining two strings, name and symbol; and an integer, the atomic number; into one data structure. We can use a tuple (String, String, Int) and remember which component represents what. We would extract components by pattern matching, as in this function that checks if the symbol of the element is the prefix of its name (as in He being the prefix of Helium):

```
startsWithSymbol :: (String, String, Int) -> Bool
startsWithSymbol (name, symbol, _) = isPrefixOf symbol name
```

This code is error prone, and is hard to read and maintain. It's much better to define a record:

```
data Element = Element { name :: String
                        , symbol :: String
                        , atomicNumber :: Int }
```

The two representations are isomorphic, as witnessed by these two conversion functions, which are the inverse of each other:

```
tupleToElem :: (String, String, Int) -> Element
tupleToElem (n, s, a) = Element { name = n
                                 , symbol = s
                                 , atomicNumber = a }
```

```
elemToTuple :: Element -> (String, String, Int)
elemToTuple e = (name e, symbol e, atomicNumber e)
```

Notice that the names of record fields also serve as functions to access these fields. For instance, `atomicNumber e` retrieves the `atomicNumber` field from `e`. We use `atomicNumber` as a function of the type:

```
atomicNumber :: Element -> Int
```

With the record syntax for `Element`, our function `startsWithSymbol` becomes more readable:

```
startsWithSymbol :: Element -> Bool  
startsWithSymbol e = isPrefixOf (symbol e) (name e)
```

We could even use the Haskell trick of turning the function `isPrefixOf` into an infix operator by surrounding it with backquotes, and make it read almost like a sentence:

```
startsWithSymbol e = symbol e `isPrefixOf` name e
```

The parentheses could be omitted in this case, because an infix operator has lower precedence than a function call.

## 6.3 Sum Types

Just as the product in the category of sets gives rise to product types, the coproduct gives rise to sum types. The canonical implementation of a sum type in Haskell is:

```
data Either a b = Left a | Right b
```

And like pairs, `Eithers` are commutative (up to isomorphism), can be nested, and the nesting order is irrelevant (up to isomorphism). So we can, for instance, define a sum equivalent of a triple:

```
data OneOfThree a b c = Sinistral a | Medial b | Dextral c
```

and so on.

It turns out that `Set` is also a (symmetric) monoidal category with respect to coproduct. The role of the binary operation is played by the disjoint sum, and the role of the unit element is played by the initial object. In terms of types, we have `Either` as the monoidal operator and `Void`, the uninhabited type, as its neutral element. You can think of `Either` as plus, and `Void` as zero. Indeed, adding `Void` to a sum type doesn't change its content. For instance:

```
Either a Void
```

is isomorphic to `a`. That's because there is no way to construct a `Right` version of this type — there isn't a value of type `Void`. The only inhabitants of `Either a Void` are constructed using the `Left` constructors and they simply encapsulate a value of type `a`. So, symbolically,  $a + 0 = a$ .

Sum types are pretty common in Haskell, but their C++ equivalents, unions or variants, are much less common. There are several reasons for that.

First of all, the simplest sum types are just enumerations and are implemented using `enum` in C++. The equivalent of the Haskell sum type:

```
data Color = Red | Green | Blue
```

is the C++:

```
enum { Red, Green, Blue };
```

An even simpler sum type:

```
data Bool = True | False
```

is the primitive `bool` in C++.

Simple sum types that encode the presence or absence of a value are variously implemented in C++ using special tricks and “impossible” values, like empty strings, negative numbers, null pointers, etc. This kind of optionality, if deliberate, is expressed in Haskell using the `Maybe` type:

```
data Maybe a = Nothing | Just a
```

The `Maybe` type is a sum of two types. You can see this if you separate the two constructors into individual types. The first one would look like this:

```
data NothingType = Nothing
```

It’s an enumeration with one value called `Nothing`. In other words, it’s a singleton, which is equivalent to the unit type `()`. The second part:

```
data JustType a = Just a
```

is just an encapsulation of the type `a`. We could have encoded `Maybe` as:

```
data Maybe a = Either () a
```

More complex sum types are often faked in C++ using pointers. A pointer can be either null, or point to a value of specific type. For instance, a Haskell list type, which can be defined as a (recursive) sum type:

```
List a = Nil | Cons a (List a)
```

can be translated to C++ using the null pointer trick to implement the empty list:

```
template<class A>
class List {
    Node<A> * _head;
public:
    List() : _head(nullptr) {} // Nil
    List(A a, List<A> l)      // Cons
        : _head(new Node<A>(a, l))
    {}
};
```

Notice that the two Haskell constructors `Nil` and `Cons` are translated into two overloaded `List` constructors with analogous arguments (none, for `Nil`; and a value and a list for `Cons`). The `List` class doesn't need a tag to distinguish between the two components of the sum type. Instead it uses the special `nullptr` value for `_head` to encode `Nil`.

The main difference, though, between Haskell and C++ types is that Haskell data structures are immutable. If you create an object using one particular constructor, the object will forever remember which constructor was used and what arguments were passed to it. So a `Maybe` object that was created as `Just "energy"` will never turn into `Nothing`. Similarly, an empty list will forever be empty, and a list of three elements will always have the same three elements.

It's this immutability that makes construction reversible. Given an object, you can always disassemble it down to parts that were used in its construction. This deconstruction is done with pattern matching

and it reuses constructors as patterns. Constructor arguments, if any, are replaced with variables (or other patterns).

The `List` data type has two constructors, so the deconstruction of an arbitrary `List` uses two patterns corresponding to those constructors. One matches the empty `Nil` list, and the other a `Cons`-constructed list. For instance, here's the definition of a simple function on `List`s:

```
maybeTail :: List a -> Maybe (List a)
maybeTail Nil = Nothing
maybeTail (Cons _ t) = Just t
```

The first part of the definition of `maybeTail` uses the `Nil` constructor as pattern and returns `Nothing`. The second part uses the `Cons` constructor as pattern. It replaces the first constructor argument with a wildcard, because we are not interested in it. The second argument to `Cons` is bound to the variable `t` (I will call these things variables even though, strictly speaking, they never vary: once bound to an expression, a variable never changes). The return value is `Just t`. Now, depending on how your `List` was created, it will match one of the clauses. If it was created using `Cons`, the two arguments that were passed to it will be retrieved (and the first discarded).

Even more elaborate sum types are implemented in C++ using polymorphic class hierarchies. A family of classes with a common ancestor may be understood as one variant type, in which the vtable serves as a hidden tag. What in Haskell would be done by pattern matching on the constructor, and by calling specialized code, in C++ is accomplished by dispatching a call to a virtual function based on the vtable pointer.

You will rarely see union used as a sum type in C++ because of severe limitations on what can go into a union. You can't even put a `std::string` into a union because it has a copy constructor.

## 6.4 Algebra of Types

Taken separately, product and sum types can be used to define a variety of useful data structures, but the real strength comes from combining the two. Once again we are invoking the power of composition.

Let's summarize what we've discovered so far. We've seen two commutative monoidal structures underlying the type system: We have the sum types with `Void` as the neutral element, and the product types with the unit type, `()`, as the neutral element. We'd like to think of them as analogous to addition and multiplication. In this analogy, `Void` would correspond to zero, and unit, `()`, to one.

Let's see how far we can stretch this analogy. For instance, does multiplication by zero give zero? In other words, is a product type with one component being `Void` isomorphic to `Void`? For example, is it possible to create a pair of, say `Int` and `Void`?

To create a pair you need two values. Although you can easily come up with an integer, there is no value of type `Void`. Therefore, for any type `a`, the type `(a, Void)` is uninhabited — has no values — and is therefore equivalent to `Void`. In other words,  $a * 0 = 0$ .

Another thing that links addition and multiplication is the distributive property:

$$a * (b + c) = a * b + a * c$$

Does it also hold for product and sum types? Yes, it does — up to isomorphisms, as usual. The left hand side corresponds to the type:

$$(a, \text{Either } b \text{ } c)$$

and the right hand side corresponds to the type:

```
Either (a, b) (a, c)
```

Here's the function that converts them one way:

```
prodToSum :: (a, Either b c) -> Either (a, b) (a, c)
prodToSum (x, e) =
    case e of
        Left y -> Left (x, y)
        Right z -> Right (x, z)
```

and here's one that goes the other way:

```
sumToProd :: Either (a, b) (a, c) -> (a, Either b c)
sumToProd e =
    case e of
        Left (x, y) -> (x, Left y)
        Right (x, z) -> (x, Right z)
```

The `case of` statement is used for pattern matching inside functions. Each pattern is followed by an arrow and the expression to be evaluated when the pattern matches. For instance, if you call `prodToSum` with the value:

```
prod1 :: (Int, Either String Float)
prod1 = (2, Left "Hi!")
```

the `e` in `case e of` will be equal to `Left "Hi!"`. It will match the pattern `Left y`, substituting `"Hi!"` for `y`. Since the `x` has already been matched to 2, the result of the `case of` clause, and the whole function, will be `Left (2, "Hi!")`, as expected.

I'm not going to prove that these two functions are the inverse of each other, but if you think about it, they must be! They are just trivially re-packing the contents of the two data structures. It's the same data, only different format.

Mathematicians have a name for such two intertwined monoids: it's called a *semiring*. It's not a full *ring*, because we can't define subtraction of types. That's why a semiring is sometimes called a *rig*, which is a pun on "ring without an *n*" (negative). But barring that, we can get a lot of mileage from translating statements about, say, natural numbers, which form a rig, to statements about types. Here's a translation table with some entries of interest:

Numbers	Types
0	Void
1	()
$a + b$	Either a b = Left a   Right b
$a * b$	(a, b) or Pair a b = Pair a b
$2 = 1 + 1$	data Bool = True   False
$1 + a$	data Maybe = Nothing   Just a

The list type is quite interesting, because it's defined as a solution to an equation. The type we are defining appears on both sides of the equation:

```
List a = Nil | Cons a (List a)
```

If we do our usual substitutions, and also replace `List a` with `x`, we get the equation:

```
x = 1 + a * x
```

We can't solve it using traditional algebraic methods because we can't subtract or divide types. But we can try a series of substitutions, where we keep replacing  $x$  on the right hand side with  $(1 + a*x)$ , and use the distributive property. This leads to the following series:

$$\begin{aligned}x &= 1 + a*x \\x &= 1 + a*(1 + a*x) = 1 + a + a*a*x \\x &= 1 + a + a*a*(1 + a*x) = 1 + a + a*a + a*a*a*x \\\dots \\x &= 1 + a + a*a + a*a*a + a*a*a*a\dots\end{aligned}$$

We end up with an infinite sum of products (tuples), which can be interpreted as: A list is either empty,  $1$ ; or a singleton,  $a$ ; or a pair,  $a*a$ ; or a triple,  $a*a*a$ ; etc... Well, that's exactly what a list is — a string of  $a$ s!

There's much more to lists than that, and we'll come back to them and other recursive data structures after we learn about functors and fixed points.

Solving equations with symbolic variables — that's algebra! It's what gives these types their name: algebraic data types.

Finally, I should mention one very important interpretation of the algebra of types. Notice that a product of two types  $a$  and  $b$  must contain both a value of type  $a$  *and* a value of type  $b$ , which means both types must be inhabited. A sum of two types, on the other hand, contains either a value of type  $a$  *or* a value of type  $b$ , so it's enough if one of them is inhabited. Logical *and* and *or* also form a semiring, and it too can be mapped into type theory:

---

Logic	Types
false	Void

---

Logic	Types
true	()
a    b	Either a b = Left a   Right b
a && b	(a, b)

This analogy goes deeper, and is the basis of the Curry-Howard isomorphism between logic and type theory. We'll come back to it when we talk about function types.

## 6.5 Challenges

1. Show the isomorphism between `Maybe a` and `Either () a`.
2. Here's a sum type defined in Haskell:

```
data Shape = Circle Float
           | Rect Float Float
```

When we want to define a function like `area` that acts on a `Shape`, we do it by pattern matching on the two constructors:

```
area :: Shape -> Float
area (Circle r) = pi * r * r
area (Rect d h) = d * h
```

Implement `Shape` in C++ or Java as an interface and create two classes: `Circle` and `Rect`. Implement `area` as a virtual function.

3. Continuing with the previous example: We can easily add a new function `circ` that calculates the circumference of a `Shape`. We can do it without touching the definition of `Shape`:

```
circ :: Shape -> Float
circ (Circle r) = 2.0 * pi * r
circ (Rect d h) = 2.0 * (d + h)
```

Add `circ` to your C++ or Java implementation. What parts of the original code did you have to touch?

4. Continuing further: Add a new shape, `Square`, to `Shape` and make all the necessary updates. What code did you have to touch in Haskell vs. C++ or Java? (Even if you're not a Haskell programmer, the modifications should be pretty obvious.)
5. Show that  $a + a = 2 * a$  holds for types (up to isomorphism). Remember that `2` corresponds to `Bool`, according to our translation table.

# 7

## Functors

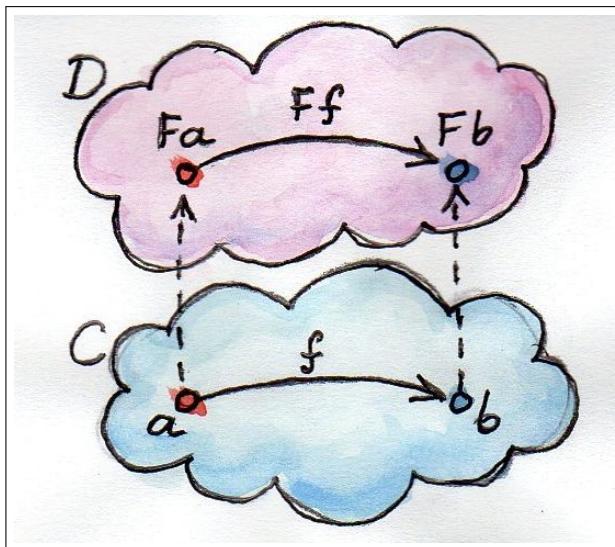
AT THE RISK of sounding like a broken record, I will say this about functors: A functor is a very simple but powerful idea. Category theory is just full of those simple but powerful ideas. A functor is a mapping between categories. Given two categories, C and D, a functor  $F$  maps objects in C to objects in D – it's a function on objects. If  $a$  is an object in C, we'll write its image in D as  $F a$  (no parentheses). But a category is not just objects – it's objects and morphisms that connect them. A functor also maps morphisms – it's a function on morphisms. But it doesn't map morphisms willy-nilly – it preserves connections. So if a morphism  $f$  in C connects object  $a$  to object  $b$ ,

$$f :: a \rightarrow b$$

the image of  $f$  in D,  $F f$ , will connect the image of  $a$  to the image of  $b$ :

$$F f :: F a \rightarrow F b$$

(This is a mixture of mathematical and Haskell notation that hopefully makes sense by now. I won't use parentheses when applying functors to objects or morphisms.)

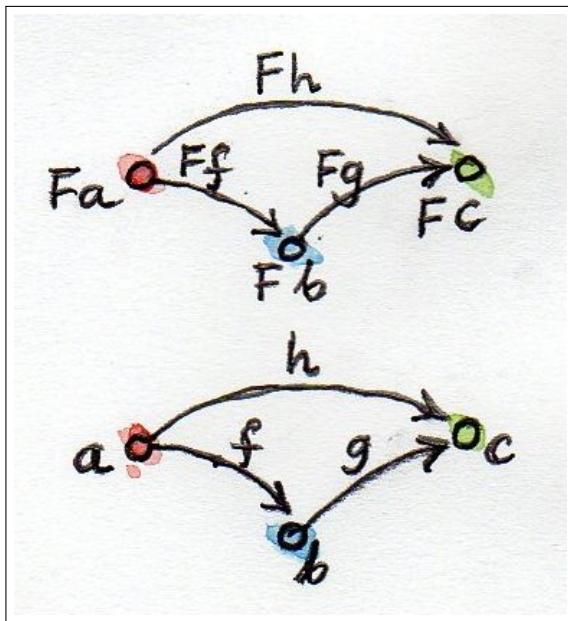


As you can see, a functor preserves the structure of a category: what's connected in one category will be connected in the other category. But there's something more to the structure of a category: there's also the composition of morphisms. If  $h$  is a composition of  $f$  and  $g$ :

$$h = g \circ f$$

we want its image under  $F$  to be a composition of the images of  $f$  and  $g$ :

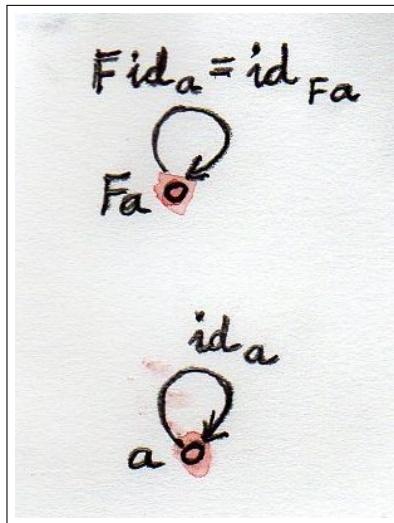
$$F h = F g \circ F f$$



Finally, we want all identity morphisms in C to be mapped to identity morphisms in D:

$$F \text{id}_a = \text{id}_{F a}$$

Here,  $\text{id}_a$  is the identity at the object  $a$ , and  $\text{id}_{F a}$  the identity at  $F a$ . Note that these conditions make functors much more restrictive than regular functions. Functors must preserve the structure of a category. If you picture a category as a collection of objects held together by a network of morphisms, a functor is not allowed to introduce any tears into this fabric. It may smash objects together, it may glue multiple morphisms into one, but it may never break things apart. This no-tearing constraint is similar to the continuity condition you might



know from calculus. In this sense functors are “continuous” (although there exists an even more restrictive notion of continuity for functors). Just like functions, functors may do both collapsing and embedding. The embedding aspect is more prominent when the source category is much smaller than the target category. In the extreme, the source can be the trivial singleton category — a category with one object and one morphism (the identity). A functor from the singleton category to any other category simply selects an object in that category. This is fully analogous to the property of morphisms from singleton sets selecting elements in target sets. The maximally collapsing functor is called the constant functor  $\Delta_c$ . It maps every object in the source category to one selected object  $c$  in the target category. It also maps every morphism in the source category to the identity morphism  $id_c$ . It acts like a black hole, compacting everything into one singularity. We’ll see more of this

functor when we discuss limits and colimits.

## 7.1 Functors in Programming

Let's get down to earth and talk about programming. We have our category of types and functions. We can talk about functors that map this category into itself — such functors are called endofunctors. So what's an endofunctor in the category of types? First of all, it maps types to types. We've seen examples of such mappings, maybe without realizing that they were just that. I'm talking about definitions of types that were parameterized by other types. Let's see a few examples.

### 7.1.1 The Maybe Functor

The definition of `Maybe` is a mapping from type `a` to type `Maybe a`:

```
data Maybe a = Nothing | Just a
```

Here's an important subtlety: `Maybe` itself is not a type, it's a *type constructor*. You have to give it a type argument, like `Int` or `Bool`, in order to turn it into a type. `Maybe` without any argument represents a function on types. But can we turn `Maybe` into a functor? (From now on, when I speak of functors in the context of programming, I will almost always mean endofunctors.) A functor is not only a mapping of objects (here, types) but also a mapping of morphisms (here, functions). For any function from `a` to `b`:

```
f :: a -> b
```

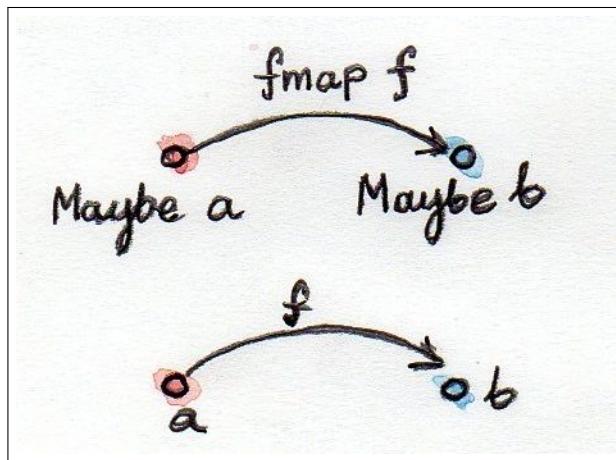
we would like to produce a function from `Maybe a` to `Maybe b`. To define such a function, we'll have two cases to consider, corresponding to the

two constructors of Maybe. The Nothing case is simple: we'll just return Nothing back. And if the argument is Just, we'll apply the function  $f$  to its contents. So the image of  $f$  under Maybe is the function:

```
f' :: Maybe a -> Maybe b  
f' Nothing = Nothing  
f' (Just x) = Just (f x)
```

(By the way, in Haskell you can use apostrophes in variables names, which is very handy in cases like these.) In Haskell, we implement the morphism-mapping part of a functor as a higher order function called  $fmap$ . In the case of Maybe, it has the following signature:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> (Maybe a -> Maybe b)
```



We often say that  $fmap$  *lifts* a function. The lifted function acts on Maybe values. As usual, because of currying, this signature may be interpreted

in two ways: as a function of one argument – which itself is a function ( $a \rightarrow b$ ) – returning a function ( $\text{Maybe } a \rightarrow \text{Maybe } b$ ); or as a function of two arguments returning  $\text{Maybe } b$ :

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> Maybe a -> Maybe b
```

Based on our previous discussion, this is how we implement `fmap` for `Maybe`:

```
fmap _ Nothing = Nothing  
fmap f (Just x) = Just (f x)
```

To show that the type constructor `Maybe` together with the function `fmap` form a functor, we have to prove that `fmap` preserves identity and composition. These are called “the functor laws,” but they simply ensure the preservation of the structure of the category.

### 7.1.2 Equational Reasoning

To prove the functor laws, I will use *equational reasoning*, which is a common proof technique in Haskell. It takes advantage of the fact that Haskell functions are defined as equalities: the left hand side equals the right hand side. You can always substitute one for another, possibly renaming variables to avoid name conflicts. Think of this as either inlining a function, or the other way around, refactoring an expression into a function. Let’s take the identity function as an example:

```
id x = x
```

If you see, for instance, `id y` in some expression, you can replace it with `y` (Inlining). Further, if you see `id` applied to an expression, say `id`

$(y + 2)$ , you can replace it with the expression itself  $(y + 2)$ . And this substitution works both ways: you can replace any expression  $e$  with  $\text{id } e$  (refactoring). If a function is defined by pattern matching, you can use each sub-definition independently. For instance, given the above definition of  $\text{fmap}$  you can replace  $\text{fmap } f \text{ Nothing}$  with  $\text{Nothing}$ , or the other way around. Let's see how this works in practice. Let's start with the preservation of identity:

```
fmap id = id
```

There are two cases to consider: `Nothing` and `Just`. Here's the first case (I'm using Haskell pseudo-code to transform the left hand side to the right hand side):

```
fmap id Nothing
= { definition of fmap }
  Nothing
= { definition of id }
  id Nothing
```

Notice that in the last step I used the definition of `id` backwards. I replaced the expression `Nothing` with `id Nothing`. In practice, you carry out such proofs by “burning the candle at both ends,” until you hit the same expression in the middle — here it was `Nothing`. The second case is also easy:

```
fmap id (Just x)
= { definition of fmap }
  Just (id x)
= { definition of id }
  Just x
```

```
= { definition of id }
  id (Just x)
```

Now, lets show that `fmap` preserves composition:

```
fmap (g . f) = fmap g . fmap f
```

First the Nothing case:

```
fmap (g . f) Nothing
= { definition of fmap }
  Nothing
= { definition of fmap }
  fmap g Nothing
= { definition of fmap }
  fmap g (fmap f Nothing)
```

And then the Just case:

```
fmap (g . f) (Just x)
= { definition of fmap }
  Just ((g . f) x)
= { definition of composition }
  Just (g (f x))
= { definition of fmap }
  fmap g (Just (f x))
= { definition of fmap }
  fmap g (fmap f (Just x))
= { definition of composition }
  (fmap g . fmap f) (Just x)
```

It's worth stressing that equational reasoning doesn't work for C++ style "functions" with side effects. Consider this code:

```
int square(int x) {
    return x * x;
}

int counter() {
    static int c = 0;
    return c++;
}

double y = square(counter());
```

Using equational reasoning, you would be able to inline `square` to get:

```
double y = counter() * counter();
```

This is definitely not a valid transformation, and it will not produce the same result. Despite that, the C++ compiler will try to use equational reasoning if you implement `square` as a macro, with disastrous results.

### 7.1.3 Optional

Functors are easily expressed in Haskell, but they can be defined in any language that supports generic programming and higher-order functions. Let's consider the C++ analog of `Maybe`, the template type `optional`. Here's a sketch of the implementation (the actual implementation is much more complex, dealing with various ways the argument may be passed, with copy semantics, and with the resource management issues characteristic of C++):

```

template<class T>
class optional {
    bool _isValid; // the tag
    T _v;
public:
    optional() : _isValid(false) {}           // Nothing
    optional(T x) : _isValid(true) , _v(x) {} // Just
    bool isValid() const { return _isValid; }
    T val() const { return _v; } };

```

This template provides one part of the definition of a functor: the mapping of types. It maps any type  $T$  to a new type  $\text{optional} < T >$ . Let's define its action on functions:

```

template<class A, class B>
std::function<optional<B>(optional<A>) >
fmap(std::function<B(A)> f) {
    return [f](optional<A> opt) {
        if (!opt.isValid())
            return optional<B>{};
        else
            return optional<B>{ f(opt.val()) };
    };
}

```

This is a higher order function, taking a function as an argument and returning a function. Here's the uncurried version of it:

```

template<class A, class B>
optional<B> fmap(std::function<B(A)> f, optional<A> opt) {

```

```

if (!opt.isValid())
    return optional<B>{};
else
    return optional<B>{ f(opt.val()) };
}

```

There is also an option of making `fmap` a template method of `optional`. This embarrassment of choices makes abstracting the functor pattern in C++ a problem. Should functor be an interface to inherit from (unfortunately, you can't have template virtual functions)? Should it be a curried or an uncurried free template function? Can the C++ compiler correctly infer the missing types, or should they be specified explicitly? Consider a situation where the input function `f` takes an `int` to a `bool`. How will the compiler figure out the type of `g`:

```
auto g = fmap(f);
```

especially if, in the future, there are multiple functors overloading `fmap`? (We'll see more functors soon.)

### 7.1.4 Typeclasses

So how does Haskell deal with abstracting the functor? It uses the type-class mechanism. A typeclass defines a family of types that support a common interface. For instance, the class of objects that support equality is defined as follows:

```
class Eq a where
(==) :: a -> a -> Bool
```

This definition states that type `a` is of the class `Eq` if it supports the operator `(==)` that takes two arguments of type `a` and returns a `Bool`. If you want to tell Haskell that a particular type is `Eq`, you have to declare it an *instance* of this class and provide the implementation of `(==)`. For example, given the definition of a 2D Point (a product type of two `FLOAT`s):

```
data Point = Pt FLOAT FLOAT
```

you can define the equality of points:

```
instance Eq Point where  
  (Pt x y) == (Pt x' y') = x == x' && y == y'
```

Here I used the operator `(==)` (the one I'm defining) in the infix position between the two patterns `(Pt x y)` and `(Pt x' y')`. The body of the function follows the single equal sign. Once `Point` is declared an instance of `Eq`, you can directly compare points for equality. Notice that, unlike in C++ or Java, you don't have to specify the `Eq` class (or interface) when defining `Point` — you can do it later in client code. Typeclasses are also Haskell's only mechanism for overloading functions (and operators). We will need that for overloading `fmap` for different functors. There is one complication, though: a functor is not defined as a type but as a mapping of types, a type constructor. We need a typeclass that's not a family of types, as was the case with `Eq`, but a family of type constructors. Fortunately a Haskell typeclass works with type constructors as well as with types. So here's the definition of the `Functor` class:

```
class Functor f where  
  fmap :: (a -> b) -> f a -> f b
```

It stipulates that  $f$  is a Functor if there exists a function  $fmap$  with the specified type signature. The lowercase  $f$  is a type variable, similar to type variables  $a$  and  $b$ . The compiler, however, is able to deduce that it represents a type constructor rather than a type by looking at its usage: acting on other types, as in  $f\ a$  and  $f\ b$ . Accordingly, when declaring an instance of Functor, you have to give it a type constructor, as is the case with Maybe:

```
instance Functor Maybe where
    fmap _ Nothing = Nothing
    fmap f (Just x) = Just (f x)
```

By the way, the Functor class, as well as its instance definitions for a lot of simple data types, including Maybe, are part of the standard Prelude library.

### 7.1.5 Functor in C++

Can we try the same approach in C++? A type constructor corresponds to a template class, like `optional`, so by analogy, we would parameterize `fmap` with a *template template parameter*  $F$ . This is the syntax for it:

```
template<template<class> F, class A, class B>
F<B> fmap(std::function<B(A)>, F<A>);
```

We would like to be able to specialize this template for different functors. Unfortunately, there is a prohibition against partial specialization of template functions in C++. You can't write:

```
template<class A, class B>
optional<B> fmap<optional>(std::function<B(A)> f, optional<A> opt)
```

Instead, we have to fall back on function overloading, which brings us back to the original definition of the uncurried `fmap`:

```
template<class A, class B>
optional<B> fmap(std::function<B(A)> f, optional<A> opt) {
    if (!opt.isValid())
        return optional<B>{};
    else
        return optional<B>{ f(opt.val()) };
}
```

This definition works, but only because the second argument of `fmap` selects the overload. It totally ignores the more generic definition of `fmap`.

### 7.1.6 The List Functor

To get some intuition as to the role of functors in programming, we need to look at more examples. Any type that is parameterized by another type is a candidate for a functor. Generic containers are parameterized by the type of the elements they store, so let's look at a very simple container, the list:

```
data List a = Nil | Cons a (List a)
```

We have the type constructor `List`, which is a mapping from any type `a` to the type `List a`. To show that `List` is a functor we have to define the lifting of functions: Given a function `a->b` define a function `List a -> List b`:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> (List a -> List b)
```

A function acting on `List` a must consider two cases corresponding to the two list constructors. The `Nil` case is trivial — just return `Nil` — there isn't much you can do with an empty list. The `Cons` case is a bit tricky, because it involves recursion. So let's step back for a moment and consider what we are trying to do. We have a list of `a`, a function `f` that turns `a` to `b`, and we want to generate a list of `b`. The obvious thing is to use `f` to turn each element of the list from `a` to `b`. How do we do this in practice, given that a (non-empty) list is defined as the `Cons` of a head and a tail? We apply `f` to the head and apply the lifted (`fmap`) `f` to the tail. This is a recursive definition, because we are defining lifted `f` in terms of lifted `f`:

```
fmap f (Cons x t) = Cons (f x) (fmap f t)
```

Notice that, on the right hand side, `fmap f` is applied to a list that's shorter than the list for which we are defining it — it's applied to its tail. We recurse towards shorter and shorter lists, so we are bound to eventually reach the empty list, or `Nil`. But as we've decided earlier, `fmap f` acting on `Nil` returns `Nil`, thus terminating the recursion. To get the final result, we combine the new head (`f x`) with the new tail (`fmap f t`) using the `Cons` constructor. Putting it all together, here's the instance declaration for the list functor:

```
instance Functor List where
    fmap _ Nil = Nil
    fmap f (Cons x t) = Cons (f x) (fmap f t)
```

If you are more comfortable with C++, consider the case of a `std::vector`, which could be considered the most generic C++ container. The implementation of `fmap` for `std::vector` is just a thin encapsulation of `std::transform`:

```

template<class A, class B>
std::vector<B> fmap(std::function<B(A)> f, std::vector<A> v) {
    std::vector<B> w;
    std::transform( std::begin(v)
                    , std::end(v)
                    , std::back_inserter(w)
                    , f);
    return w;
}

```

We can use it, for instance, to square the elements of a sequence of numbers:

```

std::vector<int> v{ 1, 2, 3, 4 };
auto w = fmap([](int i) { return i*i; }, v);
std::copy( std::begin(w)
            , std::end(w)
            , std::ostream_iterator(std::cout, ", "));

```

Most C++ containers are functors by virtue of implementing iterators that can be passed to `std::transform`, which is the more primitive cousin of `fmap`. Unfortunately, the simplicity of a functor is lost under the usual clutter of iterators and temporaries (see the implementation of `fmap` above). I'm happy to say that the new proposed C++ range library makes the functorial nature of ranges much more pronounced.

### 7.1.7 The Reader Functor

Now that you might have developed some intuitions — for instance, functors being some kind of containers — let me show you an example which at first sight looks very different. Consider a mapping of type a

to the type of a function returning  $a$ . We haven't really talked about function types in depth – the full categorical treatment is coming – but we have some understanding of those as programmers. In Haskell, a function type is constructed using the arrow type constructor ( $\rightarrow$ ) which takes two types: the argument type and the result type. You've already seen it in infix form,  $a \rightarrow b$ , but it can equally well be used in prefix form, when parenthesized:

```
(\rightarrow) a b
```

Just like with regular functions, type functions of more than one argument can be partially applied. So when we provide just one type argument to the arrow, it still expects another one. That's why:

```
(\rightarrow) a
```

is a type constructor. It needs one more type  $b$  to produce a complete type  $a \rightarrow b$ . As it stands, it defines a whole family of type constructors parameterized by  $a$ . Let's see if this is also a family of functors. Dealing with two type parameters can get a bit confusing, so let's do some renaming. Let's call the argument type  $r$  and the result type  $a$ , in line with our previous functor definitions. So our type constructor takes any type  $a$  and maps it into the type  $r \rightarrow a$ . To show that it's a functor, we want to lift a function  $a \rightarrow b$  to a function that takes  $r \rightarrow a$  and returns  $r \rightarrow b$ . These are the types that are formed using the type constructor  $(\rightarrow) r$  acting on, respectively,  $a$  and  $b$ . Here's the type signature of `fmap` applied to this case:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> (r -> a) -> (r -> b)
```

We have to solve the following puzzle: given a function  $f :: a \rightarrow b$  and a function  $g :: r \rightarrow a$ , create a function  $r \rightarrow b$ . There is only one way we can compose the two functions, and the result is exactly what we need. So here's the implementation of our `fmap`:

```
instance Functor ((->) r) where
    fmap f g = f . g
```

It just works! If you like terse notation, this definition can be reduced further by noticing that composition can be rewritten in prefix form:

```
fmap f g = (.) f g
```

and the arguments can be omitted to yield a direct equality of two functions:

```
fmap = (.)
```

This combination of the type constructor  $(-\rightarrow) r$  with the above implementation of `fmap` is called the reader functor.

## 7.2 Functors as Containers

We've seen some examples of functors in programming languages that define general-purpose containers, or at least objects that contain some value of the type they are parameterized over. The reader functor seems to be an outlier, because we don't think of functions as data. But we've seen that pure functions can be memoized, and function execution can be turned into table lookup. Tables are data. Conversely, because of Haskell's laziness, a traditional container, like a list, may actually be implemented as a function. Consider, for instance, an infinite list of natural numbers, which can be compactly defined as:

```
nats :: [Integer] nats = [1..]
```

In the first line, a pair of square brackets is the Haskell's built-in type constructor for lists. In the second line, square brackets are used to create a list literal. Obviously, an infinite list like this cannot be stored in memory. The compiler implements it as a function that generates Integers on demand. Haskell effectively blurs the distinction between data and code. A list could be considered a function, and a function could be considered a table that maps arguments to results. The latter can even be practical if the domain of the function is finite and not too large. It would not be practical, however, to implement `strlen` as table lookup, because there are infinitely many different strings. As programmers, we don't like infinities, but in category theory you learn to eat infinities for breakfast. Whether it's a set of all strings or a collection of all possible states of the Universe, past, present, and future — we can deal with it! So I like to think of the functor object (an object of the type generated by an endofunctor) as containing a value or values of the type over which it is parameterized, even if these values are not physically present there. One example of a functor is a C++ `std::future`, which may at some point contain a value, but it's not guaranteed it will; and if you want to access it, you may block waiting for another thread to finish execution. Another example is a Haskell `I0` object, which may contain user input, or the future versions of our Universe with "Hello World!" displayed on the monitor. According to this interpretation, a functor object is something that may contain a value or values of the type it's parameterized upon. Or it may contain a recipe for generating those values. We are not at all concerned about being able to access the values — that's totally optional, and outside of the scope of the functor. All we are interested in is to be able to manipulate those values using functions. If the values can be accessed, then we should be able to see

the results of this manipulation. If they can't, then all we care about is that the manipulations compose correctly and that the manipulation with an identity function doesn't change anything. Just to show you how much we don't care about being able to access the values inside a functor object, here's a type constructor that ignores completely its argument `a`:

```
data Const c a = Const c
```

The `Const` type constructor takes two types, `c` and `a`. Just like we did with the arrow constructor, we are going to partially apply it to create a functor. The data constructor (also called `Const`) takes just one value of type `c`. It has no dependence on `a`. The type of `fmap` for this type constructor is:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> Const c a -> Const c b
```

Because the functor ignores its type argument, the implementation of `fmap` is free to ignore its function argument — the function has nothing to act upon:

```
instance Functor (Const c) where
    fmap _ (Const v) = Const v
```

This might be a little clearer in C++ (I never thought I would utter those words!), where there is a stronger distinction between type arguments — which are compile-time — and values, which are run-time:

```
template<class C, class A>
struct Const {
    Const(C v) : _v(v) {}
    C _v;
};
```

The C++ implementation of `fmap` also ignores the function argument and essentially re-casts the `Const` argument without changing its value:

```
template<class C, class A, class B>
Const<C, B> fmap(std::function<B(A)> f, Const<C, A> c) {
    return Const<C, B>{c._v};
}
```

Despite its weirdness, the `Const` functor plays an important role in many constructions. In category theory, it's a special case of the  $\Delta_c$  functor I mentioned earlier — the endo-functor case of a black hole. We'll be seeing more of it in the future.

### 7.3 Functor Composition

It's not hard to convince yourself that functors between categories compose, just like functions between sets compose. A composition of two functors, when acting on objects, is just the composition of their respective object mappings; and similarly when acting on morphisms. After jumping through two functors, identity morphisms end up as identity morphisms, and compositions of morphisms finish up as compositions of morphisms. There's really nothing much to it. In particular, it's easy to compose endofunctors. Remember the function `maybeTail`? I'll rewrite it using the Haskell's built in implementation of lists:

```
maybeTail :: [a] -> Maybe [a]
maybeTail [] = Nothing
maybeTail (x:xs) = Just xs
```

(The empty list constructor that we used to call `Nil` is replaced with the empty pair of square brackets `[]`. The `Cons` constructor is replaced with

the infix operator : (colon).) The result of `maybeTail` is of a type that's a composition of two functors, `Maybe` and `[]`, acting on `a`. Each of these functors is equipped with its own version of `fmap`, but what if we want to apply some function `f` to the contents of the composite: a `Maybe` list? We have to break through two layers of functors. We can use `fmap` to break through the outer `Maybe`. But we can't just send `f` inside `Maybe` because `f` doesn't work on lists. We have to send `(fmap f)` to operate on the inner list. For instance, let's see how we can square the elements of a `Maybe` list of integers:

```
square x = x * x

mis :: Maybe [Int]
mis = Just [1, 2, 3]

mis2 = fmap (fmap square) mis
```

The compiler, after analyzing the types, will figure out that, for the outer `fmap`, it should use the implementation from the `Maybe` instance, and for the inner one, the list functor implementation. It may not be immediately obvious that the above code may be rewritten as:

```
mis2 = (fmap . fmap) square mis
```

But remember that `fmap` may be considered a function of just one argument:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> (f a -> f b)
```

In our case, the second `fmap` in `(fmap . fmap)` takes as its argument:

```
square :: Int -> Int
```

and returns a function of the type:

```
[Int] -> [Int]
```

The first `fmap` then takes that function and returns a function:

```
Maybe [Int] -> Maybe [Int]
```

Finally, that function is applied to `ms`. So the composition of two functors is a functor whose `fmap` is the composition of the corresponding `fmaps`. Going back to category theory: It's pretty obvious that functor composition is associative (the mapping of objects is associative, and the mapping of morphisms is associative). And there is also a trivial identity functor in every category: it maps every object to itself, and every morphism to itself. So functors have all the same properties as morphisms in some category. But what category would that be? It would have to be a category in which objects are categories and morphisms are functors. It's a category of categories. But a category of *all* categories would have to include itself, and we would get into the same kinds of paradoxes that made the set of all sets impossible. There is, however, a category of all *small* categories called `Cat` (which is big, so it can't be a member of itself). A small category is one in which objects form a set, as opposed to something larger than a set. Mind you, in category theory, even an infinite uncountable set is considered "small." I thought I'd mention these things because I find it pretty amazing that we can recognize the same structures repeating themselves at many levels of abstraction. We'll see later that functors form categories as well.

## 7.4 Challenges

1. Can we turn the `Maybe` type constructor into a functor by defining:

```
fmap _ _ = Nothing
```

which ignores both of its arguments? (Hint: Check the functor laws.)

2. Prove functor laws for the reader functor. Hint: it's really simple.
3. Implement the reader functor in your second favorite language (the first being Haskell, of course).
4. Prove the functor laws for the list functor. Assume that the laws are true for the tail part of the list you're applying it to (in other words, use *induction*).

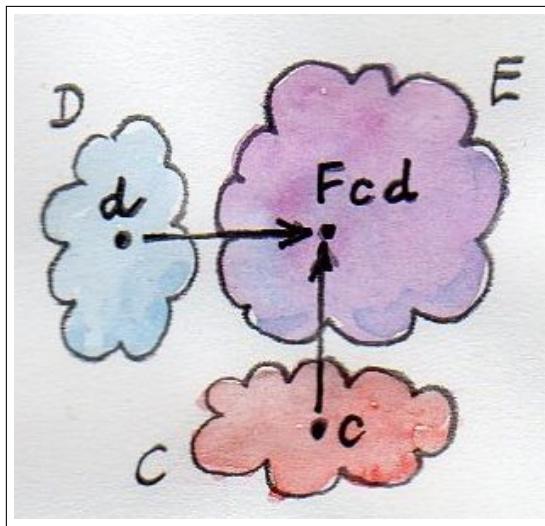
# 8

## Functors

NOW THAT YOU know what a functor is, and have seen a few examples, let's see how we can build larger functors from smaller ones. In particular it's interesting to see which type constructors (which correspond to mappings between objects in a category) can be extended to functors (which include mappings between morphisms).

### 8.1 Bifunctors

Since functors are morphisms in *Cat* (the category of categories), a lot of intuitions about morphisms — and functions in particular — apply to functors as well. For instance, just like you can have a function of two arguments, you can have a functor of two arguments, or a *bifunctor*. On objects, a bifunctor maps every pair of objects, one from category C, and one from category D, to an object in category E. Notice that this is just saying that it's a mapping from a *cartesian product* of categories



$C \times D$  to  $E$ .

That's pretty straightforward. But functoriality means that a bifunctor has to map morphisms as well. This time, though, it must map a pair of morphisms, one from  $C$  and one from  $D$ , to a morphism in  $E$ .

Again, a pair of morphisms is just a single morphism in the product category  $C \times D$ . We define a morphism in a cartesian product of categories as a pair of morphisms which goes from one pair of objects to another pair of objects. These pairs of morphisms can be composed in the obvious way:

$$(f, g) \quad (f', g') = (f \quad f', g \quad g')$$

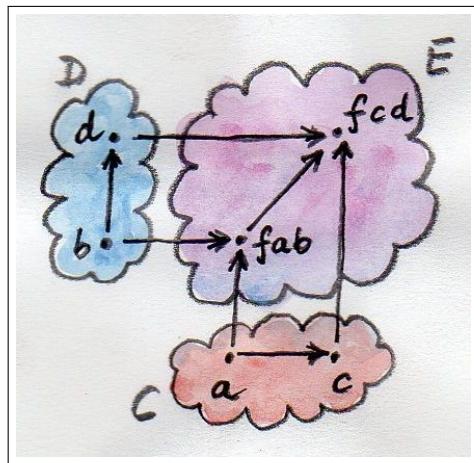
The composition is associative and it has an identity — a pair of identity morphisms ( $id, id$ ). So a cartesian product of categories is indeed a category.

But an easier way to think about bifunctors is that they are functors in both arguments. So instead of translating functorial laws — associativity and identity preservation — from functors to bifunctors, it's enough to check them separately for each argument. If you have a mapping from a pair of categories to a third category, and you prove that it is functorial in each argument separately (i.e., keeping the other argument constant), then the mapping is automatically a bifunctor. By *functorial* I mean that it acts on morphisms like an honest functor.

Let's define a bifunctor in Haskell. In this case all three categories are the same: the category of Haskell types. A bifunctor is a type constructor that takes two type arguments. Here's the definition of the `Bifunctor` typeclass taken directly from the library `Control.Bifunctor`:

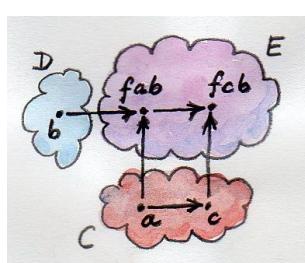
```
class Bifunctor f where
    bimap :: (a -> c) -> (b -> d) -> f a b -> f c d
    bimap g h = first g . second h
    first :: (a -> c) -> f a b -> f c b
    first g = bimap g id
    second :: (b -> d) -> f a b -> f a d
    second = bimap id
```

The type variable `f` represents the bifunctor. You can see that in all type signatures it's always applied to two type arguments. The first type signature defines `bimap`: a mapping of two functions at once. The result is a lifted function, (`f a b -> f c d`), operating on types generated by the bifunctor's type constructor. There is a default implementation of `bimap` in terms of `first` and `second`, which shows that it's enough to have functoriality in each argument separately to be able to define a bifunctor.

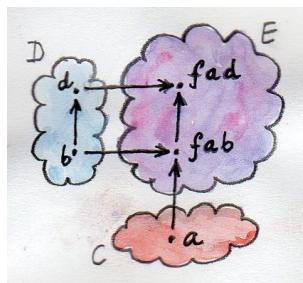


bimap

The two other type signatures, `first` and `second`, are the two `fmaps` witnessing the functoriality of `f` in the first and the second argument, respectively.



first



second

The typeclass definition provides default implementations for both of

them in terms of `bimap`.

When declaring an instance of `Bifunctor`, you have a choice of either implementing `bimap` and accepting the defaults for `first` and `second`, or implementing both `first` and `second` and accepting the default for `bimap` (of course, you may implement all three of them, but then it's up to you to make sure they are related to each other in this manner).

## 8.2 Product and Coproduct Bifunctors

An important example of a bifunctor is the categorical product — a product of two objects that is defined by a **universal construction**. If the product exists for any pair of objects, the mapping from those objects to the product is bifunctorial. This is true in general, and in Haskell in particular. Here's the `Bifunctor` instance for a pair constructor — the simplest product type:

```
instance Bifunctor (,) where
    bimap f g (x, y) = (f x, g y)
```

There isn't much choice: `bimap` simply applies the first function to the first component, and the second function to the second component of a pair. The code pretty much writes itself, given the types:

```
bimap :: (a -> c) -> (b -> d) -> (a, b) -> (c, d)
```

The action of the bifunctor here is to make pairs of types, for instance:

```
(,) a b = (a, b)
```

By duality, a coproduct, if it's defined for every pair of objects in a category, is also a bifunctor. In Haskell, this is exemplified by the `Either` type constructor being an instance of `Bifunctor`:

```
instance Bifunctor Either where
    bimap f _ (Left x) = Left (f x)
    bimap _ g (Right y) = Right (g y)
```

This code also writes itself.

Now, remember when we talked about monoidal categories? A monoidal category defines a binary operator acting on objects, together with a unit object. I mentioned that `Set` is a monoidal category with respect to cartesian product, with the singleton set as a unit. And it's also a monoidal category with respect to disjoint union, with the empty set as a unit. What I haven't mentioned is that one of the requirements for a monoidal category is that the binary operator be a bifunctor. This is a very important requirement — we want the monoidal product to be compatible with the structure of the category, which is defined by morphisms. We are now one step closer to the full definition of a monoidal category (we still need to learn about naturality, before we can get there).

## 8.3 Functorial Algebraic Data Types

We've seen several examples of parameterized data types that turned out to be functors — we were able to define `fmap` for them. Complex data types are constructed from simpler data types. In particular, algebraic data types (ADTs) are created using sums and products. We have just seen that sums and products are functorial. We also know that functors

compose. So if we can show that the basic building blocks of ADTs are functorial, we'll know that parameterized ADTs are functorial too.

So what are the building blocks of parameterized algebraic data types? First, there are the items that have no dependency on the type parameter of the functor, like `Nothing` in `Maybe`, or `Nil` in `List`. They are equivalent to the `Const` functor. Remember, the `Const` functor ignores its type parameter (really, the *second* type parameter, which is the one of interest to us, the first one being kept constant).

Then there are the elements that simply encapsulate the type parameter itself, like `Just` in `Maybe`. They are equivalent to the identity functor. I mentioned the identity functor previously, as the identity morphism in *Cat*, but didn't give its definition in Haskell. Here it is:

```
data Identity a = Identity a

instance Functor Identity where
    fmap f (Identity x) = Identity (f x)
```

You can think of `Identity` as the simplest possible container that always stores just one (immutable) value of type `a`.

Everything else in algebraic data structures is constructed from these two primitives using products and sums.

With this new knowledge, let's have a fresh look at the `Maybe` type constructor:

```
data Maybe a = Nothing | Just a
```

It's a sum of two types, and we now know that the sum is functorial. The first part, `Nothing` can be represented as a `Const ()` acting on a (the first type parameter of `Const` is set to unit — later we'll see more interesting uses of `Const`). The second part is just a different name for

the identity functor. We could have defined `Maybe`, up to isomorphism, as:

```
type Maybe a = Either (Const () a) (Identity a)
```

So `Maybe` is the composition of the bifunctor `Either` with two functors, `Const ()` and `Identity`. (`Const` is really a bifunctor, but here we always use it partially applied.)

We've already seen that a composition of functors is a functor – we can easily convince ourselves that the same is true of bifunctors. All we need is to figure out how a composition of a bifunctor with two functors works on morphisms. Given two morphisms, we simply lift one with one functor and the other with the other functor. We then lift the resulting pair of lifted morphisms with the bifunctor.

We can express this composition in Haskell. Let's define a data type that is parameterized by a bifunctor `bf` (it's a type variable that is a type constructor that takes two types as arguments), two functors `fu` and `gu` (type constructors that take one type variable each), and two regular types `a` and `b`. We apply `fu` to `a` and `gu` to `b`, and then apply `bf` to the resulting two types:

```
newtype BiComp bf fu gu a b = BiComp (bf (fu a) (gu b))
```

That's the composition on objects, or types. Notice how in Haskell we apply type constructors to types, just like we apply functions to arguments. The syntax is the same.

If you're getting a little lost, try applying `BiComp` to `Either`, `Const ()`, `Identity`, `a`, and `b`, in this order. You will recover our bare-bone version of `Maybe` (`b` (`a` is ignored)).

The new data type `BiComp` is a bifunctor in `a` and `b`, but only if `bf` is itself a Bifunctor and `fu` and `gu` are Functors. The compiler must know

that there will be a definition of `bimap` available for `bf`, and definitions of `fmap` for `fu` and `gu`. In Haskell, this is expressed as a precondition in the instance declaration: a set of class constraints followed by a double arrow:

```
instance (Bifunctor bf, Functor fu, Functor gu) =>
    Bifunctor (BiComp bf fu gu) where
        bimap f1 f2 (BiComp x) = BiComp ((bimap (fmap f1) (fmap f2)) x)
```

The implementation of `bimap` for `BiComp` is given in terms of `bimap` for `bf` and the two `fmaps` for `fu` and `gu`. The compiler automatically infers all the types and picks the correct overloaded functions whenever `BiComp` is used.

The `x` in the definition of `bimap` has the type:

```
bf (fu a) (gu b)
```

which is quite a mouthful. The outer `bimap` breaks through the outer `bf` layer, and the two `fmaps` dig under `fu` and `gu`, respectively. If the types of `f1` and `f2` are:

```
f1 :: a -> a'  
f2 :: b -> b'
```

then the final result is of the type `bf (fu a') (gu b')`:

```
bimap (fu a -> fu a') -> (gu b -> gu b')  
-> bf (fu a) (gu b) -> bf (fu a') (gu b')
```

If you like jigsaw puzzles, these kinds of type manipulations can provide hours of entertainment.

So it turns out that we didn't have to prove that `Maybe` was a functor — this fact followed from the way it was constructed as a sum of two functorial primitives.

A perceptive reader might ask the question: If the derivation of the `Functor` instance for algebraic data types is so mechanical, can't it be automated and performed by the compiler? Indeed, it can, and it is. You need to enable a particular Haskell extension by including this line at the top of your source file:

```
{-# LANGUAGE DeriveFunctor #-}
```

and then add `deriving Functor` to your data structure:

```
data Maybe a = Nothing | Just a deriving Functor
```

and the corresponding `fmap` will be implemented for you.

The regularity of algebraic data structures makes it possible to derive instances not only of `Functor` but of several other type classes, including the `Eq` type class I mentioned before. There is also the option of teaching the compiler to derive instances of your own typeclasses, but that's a bit more advanced. The idea though is the same: You provide the behavior for the basic building blocks and sums and products, and let the compiler figure out the rest.

## 8.4 Functors in C++

If you are a C++ programmer, you obviously are on your own as far as implementing functors goes. However, you should be able to recognize some types of algebraic data structures in C++. If such a data structure is made into a generic template, you should be able to quickly implement `fmap` for it.

Let's have a look at a tree data structure, which we would define in Haskell as a recursive sum type:

```
data Tree a = Leaf a | Node (Tree a) (Tree a)
    deriving Functor
```

As I mentioned before, one way of implementing sum types in C++ is through class hierarchies. It would be natural, in an object-oriented language, to implement `fmap` as a virtual function of the base class `Functor` and then override it in all subclasses. Unfortunately this is impossible because `fmap` is a template, parameterized not only by the type of the object it's acting upon (the `this` pointer) but also by the return type of the function that's been applied to it. Virtual functions cannot be templated in C++. We'll implement `fmap` as a generic free function, and we'll replace pattern matching with `dynamic_cast`.

The base class must define at least one virtual function in order to support dynamic casting, so we'll make the destructor virtual (which is a good idea in any case):

```
template<class T>
struct Tree {
    virtual ~Tree() {};
};
```

The `Leaf` is just an Identity functor in disguise:

```
template<class T>
struct Leaf : public Tree<T> {
    T _label;
    Leaf(T l) : _label(l) {}
};
```

The Node is a product type:

```
template<class T>
struct Node : public Tree<T> {
    Tree<T> * _left;
    Tree<T> * _right;
    Node(Tree<T> * l, Tree<T> * r) : _left(l), _right(r) {}
};
```

When implementing `fmap` we take advantage of dynamic dispatching on the type of the `Tree`. The `Leaf` case applies the `Identity` version of `fmap`, and the `Node` case is treated like a bifunctor composed with two copies of the `Tree` functor. As a C++ programmer, you're probably not used to analyzing code in these terms, but it's a good exercise in categorical thinking.

```
template<class A, class B>
Tree<B> * fmap(std::function<B(A)> f, Tree<A> * t) {
    Leaf<A> * pl = dynamic_cast <Leaf<A>*>(t);
    if (pl)
        return new Leaf<B>(f (pl->_label));
    Node<A> * pn = dynamic_cast<Node<A>*>(t);
    if (pn)
        return new Node<B>( fmap<A>(f, pn->_left)
                            , fmap<A>(f, pn->_right));
    return nullptr;
}
```

For simplicity, I decided to ignore memory and resource management issues, but in production code you would probably use smart pointers (unique or shared, depending on your policy).

Compare it with the Haskell implementation of `fmap`:

```
instance Functor Tree where
    fmap f (Leaf a) = Leaf (f a)
    fmap f (Node t t') = Node (fmap f t) (fmap f t')
```

This implementation can also be automatically derived by the compiler.

## 8.5 The Writer Functor

I promised that I would come back to the [Kleisli category](#) I described earlier. Morphisms in that category were represented as “embellished” functions returning the `Writer` data structure.

```
type Writer a = (a, String)
```

I said that the embellishment was somehow related to endofunctors. And, indeed, the `Writer` type constructor is functorial in `a`. We don’t even have to implement `fmap` for it, because it’s just a simple product type.

But what’s the relation between a Kleisli category and a functor – in general? A Kleisli category, being a category, defines composition and identity. Let me remind you that the composition is given by the fish operator:

```
(>=>) :: (a -> Writer b) -> (b -> Writer c) -> (a -> Writer c)
m1 >=> m2 = \x ->
    let (y, s1) = m1 x
        (z, s2) = m2 y
    in (z, s1 ++ s2)
```

and the identity morphism by a function called `return`:

```
return :: a -> Writer a return x = (x, "")
```

It turns out that, if you look at the types of these two functions long enough (and I mean, *long* enough), you can find a way to combine them to produce a function with the right type signature to serve as `fmap`. Like this:

```
fmap f = id >=> (\x -> return (f x))
```

Here, the fish operator combines two functions: one of them is the familiar `id`, and the other is a lambda that applies `return` to the result of acting with `f` on the lambda's argument. The hardest part to wrap your brain around is probably the use of `id`. Isn't the argument to the fish operator supposed to be a function that takes a "normal" type and returns an embellished type? Well, not really. Nobody says that `a` in `a -> Writer b` must be a "normal" type. It's a type variable, so it can be anything, in particular it can be an embellished type, like `Writer b`.

So `id` will take `Writer a` and turn it into `Writer a`. The fish operator will fish out the value of `a` and pass it as `x` to the lambda. There, `f` will turn it into a `b` and `return` will embellish it, making it `Writer b`. Putting it all together, we end up with a function that takes `Writer a` and returns `Writer b`, exactly what `fmap` is supposed to produce.

Notice that this argument is very general: you can replace `Writer` with any type constructor. As long as it supports a fish operator and `return`, you can define `fmap` as well. So the embellishment in the Kleisli category is always a functor. (Not every functor, though, gives rise to a Kleisli category.)

You might wonder if the `fmap` we have just defined is the same `fmap` the compiler would have derived for us with deriving `Functor`.

Interestingly enough, it is. This is due to the way Haskell implements polymorphic functions. It's called *parametric polymorphism*, and it's a source of so called *theorems for free*. One of those theorems says that, if there is an implementation of `fmap` for a given type constructor, one that preserves identity, then it must be unique.

## 8.6 Covariant and Contravariant Functors

Now that we've reviewed the writer functor, let's go back to the reader functor. It was based on the partially applied function-arrow type constructor:

```
(->) r
```

We can rewrite it as a type synonym:

```
type Reader r a = r -> a
```

for which the `Functor` instance, as we've seen before, reads:

```
instance Functor (Reader r) where
    fmap f g = f . g
```

But just like the pair type constructor, or the `Either` type constructor, the function type constructor takes two type arguments. The pair and `Either` were functorial in both arguments — they were bifunctors. Is the function constructor a bifunctor too?

Let's try to make it functorial in the first argument. We'll start with a type synonym — it's just like the `Reader` but with the arguments flipped:

```
type Op r a = a -> r
```

This time we fix the return type,  $r$ , and vary the argument type,  $a$ . Let's see if we can somehow match the types in order to implement  $fmap$ , which would have the following type signature:

```
fmap :: (a -> b) -> (a -> r) -> (b -> r)
```

With just two functions taking  $a$  and returning, respectively,  $b$  and  $r$ , there is simply no way to build a function taking  $b$  and returning  $r$ ! It would be different if we could somehow invert the first function, so that it took  $b$  and returned  $a$  instead. We can't invert an arbitrary function, but we can go to the opposite category.

A short recap: For every category  $C$  there is a dual category  $C^{op}$ . It's a category with the same objects as  $C$ , but with all the arrows reversed.

Consider a functor that goes between  $C^{op}$  and some other category  $D$ :

$$F : C^{op} \rightarrow D$$

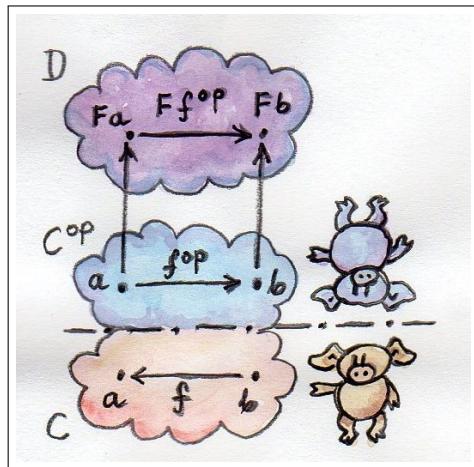
Such a functor maps a morphism  $f^{op} : a \rightarrow b$  in  $C^{op}$  to the morphism  $F f^{op} : F a \rightarrow F b$  in  $D$ . But the morphism  $f^{op}$  secretly corresponds to some morphism  $f : b \rightarrow a$  in the original category  $C$ . Notice the inversion.

Now,  $F$  is a regular functor, but there is another mapping we can define based on  $F$ , which is not a functor — let's call it  $G$ . It's a mapping from  $C$  to  $D$ . It maps objects the same way  $F$  does, but when it comes to mapping morphisms, it reverses them. It takes a morphism  $f : b \rightarrow a$  in  $C$ , maps it first to the opposite morphism  $f^{op} : a \rightarrow b$  and then uses the functor  $F$  on it, to get  $F f^{op} : F a \rightarrow F b$ .

Considering that  $F a$  is the same as  $G a$  and  $F b$  is the same as  $G b$ , the whole trip can be described as:

$$G f : (b \rightarrow a) \rightarrow (G a \rightarrow G b)$$

It's a "functor with a twist." A mapping of categories that inverts the direction of morphisms in this manner is called a *contravariant functor*. Notice that a contravariant functor is just a regular functor from the opposite category. The regular functors, by the way — the kind we've been studying thus far — are called *covariant* functors.



Here's the typeclass defining a contravariant functor (really, a contravariant *endofunctor*) in Haskell:

```
class Contravariant f where
    contramap :: (b -> a) -> (f a -> f b)
```

Our type constructor `Op` is an instance of it:

```
instance Contravariant (Op r) where
    -- (b -> a) -> Op r a -> Op r b
    contramap f g = g . f
```

Notice that the function  $f$  inserts itself *before* (that is, to the right of) the contents of  $\text{Op}$  — the function  $g$ .

The definition of `contramap` for  $\text{Op}$  may be made even terser, if you notice that it's just the function composition operator with the arguments flipped. There is a special function for flipping arguments, called `flip`:

```
flip :: (a -> b -> c) -> (b -> a -> c)
flip f y x = f x y
```

With it, we get:

```
contramap = flip (.)
```

## 8.7 Profunctors

We've seen that the function-arrow operator is contravariant in its first argument and covariant in the second. Is there a name for such a beast? It turns out that, if the target category is `Set`, such a beast is called a *profunctor*. Because a contravariant functor is equivalent to a covariant functor from the opposite category, a profunctor is defined as:

$$C^{\text{op}} \times D \rightarrow \text{Set}$$

Since, to first approximation, Haskell types are sets, we apply the name `Profunctor` to a type constructor  $p$  of two arguments, which is contra-functorial in the first argument and functorial in the second. Here's the appropriate typeclass taken from the `Data.Profunctor` library:

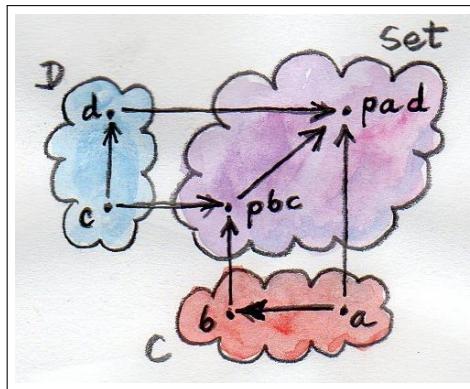
```
class Profunctor p where
    dimap :: (a -> b) -> (c -> d) -> p b c -> p a d
```

```

dimap f g = lmap f . rmap g
lmap :: (a -> b) -> p b c -> p a c
lmap f = dimap f id
rmap :: (b -> c) -> p a b -> p a c
rmap = dimap id

```

All three functions come with default implementations. Just like with `Bifunctor`, when declaring an instance of `Profunctor`, you have a choice of either implementing `dimap` and accepting the defaults for `lmap` and `rmap`, or implementing both `lmap` and `rmap` and accepting the default for `dimap`.



dimap

Now we can assert that the function-arrow operator is an instance of a `Profunctor`:

```

instance Profunctor (->) where
    dimap ab cd bc = cd . bc . ab
    lmap = flip (.)

```

```
rmap = (.)
```

Profunctors have their application in the Haskell lens library. We'll see them again when we talk about ends and coends.

## 8.8 Challenges

1. Show that the data type:

```
data Pair a b = Pair a b
```

is a bifunctor. For additional credit implement all three methods of `Bifunctor` and use equational reasoning to show that these definitions are compatible with the default implementations whenever they can be applied.

2. Show the isomorphism between the standard definition of `Maybe` and this desugaring:

```
type Maybe' a = Either (Const () a) (Identity a)
```

Hint: Define two mappings between the two implementations. For additional credit, show that they are the inverse of each other using equational reasoning.

3. Let's try another data structure. I call it a `PreList` because it's a precursor to a `List`. It replaces recursion with a type parameter `b`.

```
data PreList a b = Nil | Cons a b
```

You could recover our earlier definition of a `List` by recursively applying `PreList` to itself (we'll see how it's done when we talk about fixed points).

Show that `PreList` is an instance of `Bifunctor`.

4. Show that the following data types define bifunctors in  $a$  and  $b$ :

```
data K2 c a b = K2 c
```

```
data Fst a b = Fst a
```

```
data Snd a b = Snd b
```

For additional credit, check your solutions against Conor McBride's paper [Clowns to the Left of me, Jokers to the Right](#).

5. Define a bifunctor in a language other than Haskell. Implement `bimap` for a generic pair in that language.
6. Should `std::map` be considered a bifunctor or a profunctor in the two template arguments `Key` and `T`? How would you redesign this data type to make it so?

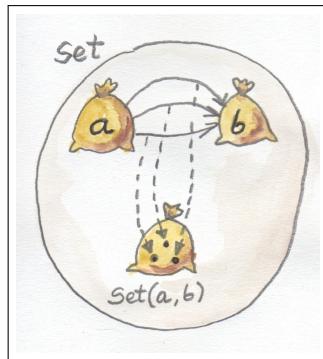
# 9

## Function Types

SO FAR I'VE been glossing over the meaning of function types. A function type is different from other types.

Take Integer, for instance: It's just a set of integers. Bool is a two element set. But a function type  $a \rightarrow b$  is more than that: it's a set of morphisms between objects  $a$  and  $b$ . A set of morphisms between two objects in any category is called a hom-set. It just so happens that in the category Set every hom-set is itself an object in the same category —because it is, after all, a set.

The same is not true of other categories where hom-sets are external to a category. They are even called *external*



Hom-set in Set is just a set

hom-sets.

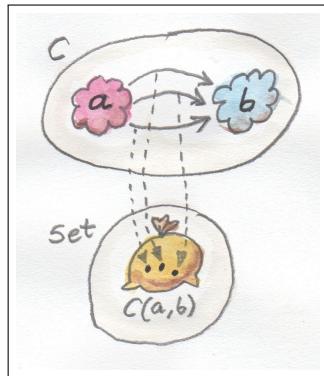
It's the self-referential nature of the category **Set** that makes function types special. But there is a way, at least in some categories, to construct objects that represent hom-sets. Such objects are called *internal* hom-sets.

## 9.1 Universal Construction

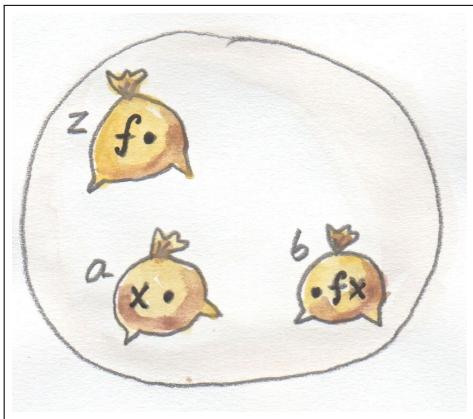
Let's forget for a moment that function types are sets and try to construct a function type, or more generally, an internal hom-set, from scratch. As usual, we'll take our cues from the **Set** category, but carefully avoid using any properties of sets, so that the construction will automatically work for other categories.

A function type may be considered a composite type because of its relationship to the argument type and the result type. We've already seen the constructions of composite types — those that involved relationships between objects. We used universal constructions to define a **product type** and a **coproduct types**. We can use the same trick to define a function type. We will need a pattern that involves three objects: the function type that we are constructing, the argument type, and the result type.

The obvious pattern that connects these three types is called *function application* or *evaluation*. Given a candidate for a function type, let's call it  $z$  (notice that, if we are not in the category **Set**, this is just an object like any other object), and the argument type  $a$  (an object), the application maps this pair to the result type  $b$  (an object). We have



Hom-set in category  $C$  is an external set



In Set we can pick a function  $f$  from a set of functions  $z$  and we can pick an argument  $x$  from the set (type)  $a$ . We get an element  $f x$  in the set (type)  $b$ .

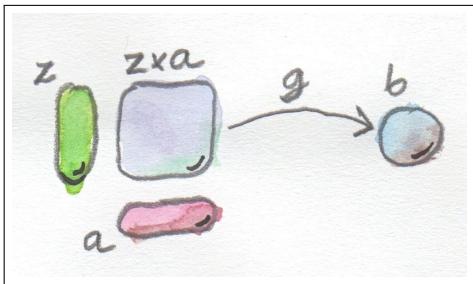
three objects, two of them fixed (the ones representing the argument type and the result type).

We also have the application, which is a mapping. How do we incorporate this mapping into our pattern? If we were allowed to look inside objects, we could pair a function  $f$  (an element of  $z$ ) with an argument  $x$  (an element of  $a$ ) and map it to  $f x$  (the application of  $f$  to  $x$ , which is an element of  $b$ ).

But instead of dealing with individual pairs  $(f, x)$ , we can as well talk about the whole *product* of the function type  $z$  and the argument type  $a$ . The product  $z \times a$  is an object, and we can pick, as our application morphism, an arrow  $g$  from that object to  $b$ . In Set,  $g$  would be the function that maps every pair  $(f, x)$  to  $f x$ .

So that's the pattern: a product of two objects  $z$  and  $a$  connected to another object  $b$  by a morphism  $g$ .

Is this pattern specific enough to single out the function type using

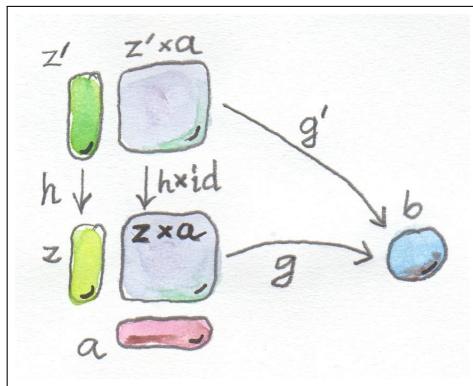


A pattern of objects and morphisms that is the starting point of the universal construction

a universal construction? Not in every category. But in the categories of interest to us it is. And another question: Would it be possible to define a function object without first defining a product? There are categories in which there is no product, or there isn't a product for all pairs of objects. The answer is no: there is no function type, if there is no product type. We'll come back to this later when we talk about exponentials.

Let's review the universal construction. We start with a pattern of objects and morphisms. That's our imprecise query, and it usually yields lots and lots of hits. In particular, in  $\text{Set}$ , pretty much everything is connected to everything. We can take any object  $z$ , form its product with  $a$ , and there's going to be a function from it to  $b$  (except when  $b$  is an empty set).

That's when we apply our secret weapon: ranking. This is usually done by requiring that there be a unique mapping between candidate objects — a mapping that somehow factorizes our construction. In our case, we'll decree that  $z$  together with the morphism  $g$  from  $z \times a$  to  $b$  is *better* than some other  $z'$  with its own application  $g'$ , if and only if there is a unique mapping  $h$  from  $z'$  to  $z$  such that the application of  $g'$  factors through the application of  $g$ . (Hint: Read this sentence while



Establishing a ranking between candidates for the function object

looking at the picture.)

Now here's the tricky part, and the main reason I postponed this particular universal construction till now. Given the morphism  $h : z' \rightarrow z$ , we want to close the diagram that has both  $z'$  and  $z$  crossed with  $a$ . What we really need, given the mapping  $h$  from  $z'$  to  $z$ , is a mapping from  $z' \times a$  to  $z \times a$ . And now, after discussing the functoriality of the product, we know how to do it. Because the product itself is a functor (more precisely an endo-bi-functor), it's possible to lift pairs of morphisms. In other words, we can define not only products of objects but also products of morphisms.

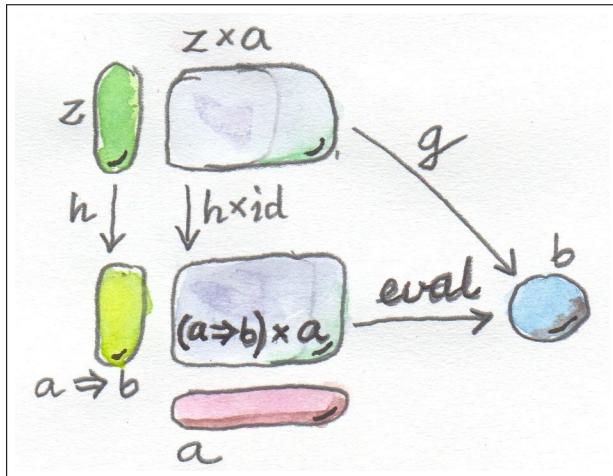
Since we are not touching the second component of the product  $z' \times a$ , we will lift the pair of morphisms  $(h, \text{id})$ , where  $\text{id}$  is an identity on  $a$ .

So, here's how we can factor one application,  $g$ , out of another application  $g'$ :

$$g' = g \circ (h \times \text{id})$$

The key here is the action of the product on morphisms.

The third part of the universal construction is selecting the object that is universally the best. Let's call this object  $a \Rightarrow b$  (think of this as a symbolic name for one object, not to be confused with a Haskell typeclass constraint – I'll discuss different ways of naming it later). This object comes with its own application – a morphism from  $(a \Rightarrow b) \times a$  to  $b$  – which we will call  $\text{eval}$ . The object  $a \Rightarrow b$  is the best if any other candidate for a function object can be uniquely mapped to it in such a way that its application morphism  $g$  factorizes through  $\text{eval}$ . This object is better than any other object according to our ranking.



The definition of the universal function object. This is the same diagram as above, but now the object  $a \Rightarrow b$  is *universal*.

Formally:

---

A function object from  $a$  to  $b$  is an object  $a \Rightarrow b$  together with the morphism

$\text{eval} :: ((a \Rightarrow b) \times a) \rightarrow b$

such that for any other object  $z$  with a morphism

$g :: z \times a \rightarrow b$

there is a unique morphism

$h :: z \rightarrow (a \Rightarrow b)$

that factors  $g$  through  $\text{eval}$ :

$g = \text{eval} \circ (h \times \text{id})$

---

Of course, there is no guarantee that such an object  $a \Rightarrow b$  exists for any pair of objects  $a$  and  $b$  in a given category. But it always does in  $\text{Set}$ . Moreover, in  $\text{Set}$ , this object is isomorphic to the hom-set  $\text{Set}(a, b)$ .

This is why, in Haskell, we interpret the function type  $a \rightarrow b$  as the categorical function object  $a \Rightarrow b$ .

## 9.2 Currying

Let's have a second look at all the candidates for the function object. This time, however, let's think of the morphism  $g$  as a function of two variables,  $z$  and  $a$ .

$g :: z \times a \rightarrow b$

Being a morphism from a product comes as close as it gets to being a function of two variables. In particular, in **Set**,  $g$  is a function from pairs of values, one from the set  $z$  and one from the set  $a$ .

On the other hand, the universal property tells us that for each such  $g$  there is a unique morphism  $h$  that maps  $z$  to a function object  $a \Rightarrow b$ .

$h :: z \rightarrow (a \rightarrow b)$

In **Set**, this just means that  $h$  is a function that takes one variable of type  $z$  and returns a function from  $a$  to  $b$ . That makes  $h$  a higher order function. Therefore the universal construction establishes a one-to-one correspondence between functions of two variables and functions of one variable returning functions. This correspondence is called *currying*, and  $h$  is called the curried version of  $g$ .

This correspondence is one-to-one, because given any  $g$  there is a unique  $h$ , and given any  $h$  you can always recreate the two-argument function  $g$  using the formula:

$g = \text{eval} \circ (h \times \text{id})$

The function  $g$  can be called the *uncurried* version of  $h$ .

Currying is essentially built into the syntax of Haskell. A function returning a function:

$a \rightarrow (b \rightarrow c)$

is often thought of as a function of two variables. That's how we read the un-parenthesized signature:

$a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c$

This interpretation is apparent in the way we define multi-argument functions. For instance:

```
catstr :: String -> String -> String  
catstr s s' = s ++ s'
```

The same function can be written as a one-argument function returning a function — a lambda:

```
catstr' s = \s' -> s ++ s'
```

These two definitions are equivalent, and either can be partially applied to just one argument, producing a one-argument function, as in:

```
greet :: String -> String  
greet = catstr "Hello "
```

Strictly speaking, a function of two variables is one that takes a pair (a product type):

$(a, b) \rightarrow c$

It's trivial to convert between the two representations, and the two (higher-order) functions that do it are called, unsurprisingly, *curry* and *uncurry*:

```
curry :: ((a, b)->c) -> (a->b->c)  
curry f a b = f (a, b)
```

and

```
uncurry :: (a->b->c) -> ((a, b)->c)
uncurry f (a, b) = f a b
```

Notice that `curry` is the *factorizer* for the universal construction of the function object. This is especially apparent if it's rewritten in this form:

```
factorizer :: ((a, b)->c) -> (a->(b->c))
factorizer g = \a -> (\b -> g (a, b))
```

(As a reminder: A factorizer produces the factorizing function from a candidate.)

In non-functional languages, like C++, currying is possible but non-trivial. You can think of multi-argument functions in C++ as corresponding to Haskell functions taking tuples (although, to confuse things even more, in C++ you can define functions that take an explicit `std::tuple`, as well as variadic functions, and functions taking initializer lists).

You can partially apply a C++ function using the template `std::bind`. For instance, given a function of two strings:

```
std::string catstr(std::string s1, std::string s2) {
    return s1 + s2;
}
```

you can define a function of one string:

```
using namespace std::placeholders;

auto greet = std::bind(catstr, "Hello ", _1);
std::cout << greet("Haskell Curry");
```

Scala, which is more functional than C++ or Java, falls somewhere in between. If you anticipate that the function you're defining will be partially applied, you define it with multiple argument lists:

```
def catstr(s1: String)(s2: String) = s1 + s2
```

Of course that requires some amount of foresight or prescience on the part of a library writer.

## 9.3 Exponentials

In mathematical literature, the function object, or the internal hom-object between two objects  $a$  and  $b$ , is often called the *exponential* and denoted by  $ba$ . Notice that the argument type is in the exponent. This notation might seem strange at first, but it makes perfect sense if you think of the relationship between functions and products. We've already seen that we have to use the product in the universal construction of the internal hom-object, but the connection goes deeper than that.

This is best seen when you consider functions between finite types — types that have a finite number of values, like `Bool`, `Char`, or even `Int` or `Double`. Such functions, at least in principle, can be fully memoized or turned into data structures to be looked up. And this is the essence of the equivalence between functions, which are morphisms, and function types, which are objects.

For instance a (pure) function from `Bool` is completely specified by a pair of values: one corresponding to `False`, and one corresponding to `True`. The set of all possible functions from `Bool` to, say, `Int` is the set of all pairs of `Int`s. This is the same as the product `Int × Int` or, being a little creative with notation, `Int2`.

For another example, let's look at the C++ type `char`, which contains 256 values (Haskell `Char` is larger, because Haskell uses Unicode). There are several functions in the `<iostream>` part of the C++ Standard Library that are usually implemented using lookups. Functions like `isupper` or `isspace` are implemented using tables, which are equivalent to tuples of 256 Boolean values. A tuple is a product type, so we are dealing with products of 256 Booleans: `bool × bool × bool × ... × bool`. We know from arithmetics that an iterated product defines a power. If you “multiply” `bool` by itself 256 (or `char`) times, you get `bool` to the power of `char`, or `boolchar`.

How many values are there in the type defined as 256-tuples of `bool`? Exactly  $2^{256}$ . This is also the number of different functions from `char` to `bool`, each function corresponding to a unique 256-tuple. You can similarly calculate that the number of functions from `bool` to `char` is  $256^2$ , and so on. The exponential notation for function types makes perfect sense in these cases.

We probably wouldn't want to fully memoize a function from `int` or `double`. But the equivalence between functions and data types, if not always practical, is there. There are also infinite types, for instance lists, strings, or trees. Eager memoization of functions from those types would require infinite storage. But Haskell is a lazy language, so the boundary between lazily evaluated (infinite) data structures and functions is fuzzy. This function vs. data duality explains the identification of Haskell's function type with the categorical exponential object — which corresponds more to our idea of *data*.

## 9.4 Cartesian Closed Categories

Although I will continue using the category of sets as a model for types and functions, it's worth mentioning that there is a larger family of categories that can be used for that purpose. These categories are called *cartesian closed*, and **Set** is just one example of such a category.

A cartesian closed category must contain:

1. The terminal object,
2. A product of any pair of objects, and
3. An exponential for any pair of objects.

If you consider an exponential as an iterated product (possibly infinitely many times), then you can think of a cartesian closed category as one supporting products of an arbitrary arity. In particular, the terminal object can be thought of as a product of zero objects — or the zero-th power of an object.

What's interesting about cartesian closed categories from the perspective of computer science is that they provide models for the simply typed lambda calculus, which forms the basis of all typed programming languages.

The terminal object and the product have their duals: the initial object and the coproduct. A cartesian closed category that also supports those two, and in which product can be distributed over coproduct

$$\begin{aligned} a \times (b + c) &= a \times b + a \times c \\ (b + c) \times a &= b \times a + c \times a \end{aligned}$$

is called a *bicartesian closed* category. We'll see in the next section that bicartesian closed categories, of which **Set** is a prime example, have some interesting properties.

## 9.5 Exponentials and Algebraic Data Types

The interpretation of function types as exponentials fits very well into the scheme of algebraic data types. It turns out that all the basic identities from high-school algebra relating numbers zero and one, sums, products, and exponentials hold pretty much unchanged in any bicartesian closed category theory for, respectively, initial and final objects, coproducts, products, and exponentials. We don't have the tools yet to prove them (such as adjunctions or the Yoneda lemma), but I'll list them here nevertheless as a source of valuable intuitions.

### 9.5.1 Zeroth Power

$$a^0 = 1$$

In the categorical interpretation, we replace 0 with the initial object, 1 with the final object, and equality with isomorphism. The exponential is the internal hom-object. This particular exponential represents the set of morphisms going from the initial object to an arbitrary object  $a$ . By the definition of the initial object, there is exactly one such morphism, so the hom-set  $C(0, a)$  is a singleton set. A singleton set is the terminal object in Set, so this identity trivially works in Set. What we are saying is that it works in any bicartesian closed category.

In Haskell, we replace 0 with `Void`; 1 with the unit type `()`; and the exponential with function type. The claim is that the set of functions from `Void` to any type  $a$  is equivalent to the unit type — which is a singleton. In other words, there is only one function `Void->a`. We've seen this function before: it's called `absurd`.

This is a little bit tricky, for two reasons. One is that in Haskell we don't really have uninhabited types — every type contains the “result

of a never ending calculation,” or the bottom. The second reason is that all implementations of absurd are equivalent because, no matter what they do, nobody can ever execute them. There is no value that can be passed to absurd. (And if you manage to pass it a never ending calculation, it will never return!)

### 9.5.2 Powers of One

$$1^a = 1$$

This identity, when interpreted in Set, restates the definition of the terminal object: There is a unique morphism from any object to the terminal object. In general, the internal hom-object from  $a$  to the terminal object is isomorphic to the terminal object itself.

In Haskell, there is only one function from any type  $a$  to unit. We’ve seen this function before — it’s called `unit`. You can also think of it as the function `const` partially applied to `()`.

### 9.5.3 First Power

$$a^1 = a$$

This is a restatement of the observation that morphisms from the terminal object can be used to pick “elements” of the object  $a$ . The set of such morphisms is isomorphic to the object itself. In Set, and in Haskell, the isomorphism is between elements of the set  $a$  and functions that pick those elements,  $(\text{()}) \rightarrow a$ .

### 9.5.4 Exponentials of Sums

$$a^{b+c} = a^b \times a^c$$

Categorically, this says that the exponential from a coproduct of two objects is isomorphic to a product of two exponentials. In Haskell, this algebraic identity has a very practical, interpretation. It tells us that a function from a sum of two types is equivalent to a pair of functions from individual types. This is just the case analysis that we use when defining functions on sums. Instead of writing one function definition with a case statement, we usually split it into two (or more) functions dealing with each type constructor separately. For instance, take a function from the sum type (Either Int Double):

```
f :: Either Int Double -> String
```

It may be defined as a pair of functions from, respectively, Int and Double:

```
f (Left n) = if n < 0 then "Negative int" else "Positive
              ↵   int"
f (Right x) = if x < 0.0 then "Negative double" else
              ↵   "Positive double"
```

Here, n is an Int and x is a Double.

### 9.5.5 Exponentials of Exponentials

$$(a^b)^c = a^{b \times c}$$

This is just a way of expressing currying purely in terms of exponential objects. A function returning a function is equivalent to a function from a product (a two-argument function).

### 9.5.6 Exponentials over Products

$$(a \times b)^c = a^c \times b^c$$

In Haskell: A function returning a pair is equivalent to a pair of functions, each producing one element of the pair.

It's pretty incredible how those simple high-school algebraic identities can be lifted to category theory and have practical application in functional programming.

## 9.6 Curry-Howard Isomorphism

I have already mentioned the correspondence between logic and algebraic data types. The `Void` type and the unit type `()` correspond to false and true. Product types and sum types correspond to logical conjunction  $\wedge$  (AND) and disjunction  $\vee$  (OR). In this scheme, the function type we have just defined corresponds to logical implication  $\Rightarrow$ . In other words, the type `a -> b` can be read as “if a then b.”

According to the Curry-Howard isomorphism, every type can be interpreted as a proposition — a statement or a judgment that may be true or false. Such a proposition is considered true if the type is inhabited and false if it isn't. In particular, a logical implication is true if the function type corresponding to it is inhabited, which means that there exists a function of that type. An implementation of a function is therefore a proof of a theorem. Writing programs is equivalent to proving theorems. Let's see a few examples.

Let's take the function `eval` we have introduced in the definition of the function object. Its signature is:

```
eval :: ((a -> b), a) -> b
```

It takes a pair consisting of a function and its argument and produces a result of the appropriate type. It's the Haskell implementation of the morphism:

```
eval :: (a⇒b) × a -> b
```

which defines the function type  $a \Rightarrow b$  (or the exponential object  $ba$ ). Let's translate this signature to a logical predicate using the Curry-Howard isomorphism:

$$((a \Rightarrow b) \wedge a) \Rightarrow b$$

Here's how you can read this statement: If it's true that  $b$  follows from  $a$ , and  $a$  is true, then  $b$  must be true. This makes perfect intuitive sense and has been known since antiquity as *modus ponens*. We can prove this theorem by implementing the function:

```
eval :: ((a -> b), a) -> b  
eval (f, x) = f x
```

If you give me a pair consisting of a function  $f$  taking  $a$  and returning  $b$ , and a concrete value  $x$  of type  $a$ , I can produce a concrete value of type  $b$  by simply applying the function  $f$  to  $x$ . By implementing this function I have just shown that the type  $((a \rightarrow b), a) \rightarrow b$  is inhabited. Therefore *modus ponens* is true in our logic.

How about a predicate that is blatantly false? For instance: if  $a$  or  $b$  is true then  $a$  must be true.

$$a \vee b \Rightarrow a$$

This is obviously wrong because you can chose an a that is false and a b that is true, and that's a counter-example.

Mapping this predicate into a function signature using the Curry-Howard isomorphism, we get:

```
Either a b -> a
```

Try as you may, you can't implement this function — you can't produce a value of type a if you are called with the Right value. (Remember, we are talking about *pure* functions.)

Finally, we come to the meaning of the absurd function:

```
absurd :: Void -> a
```

Considering that Void translates into false, we get:

```
false => a
```

Anything follows from falsehood (*ex falso quodlibet*). Here's one possible proof (implementation) of this statement (function) in Haskell:

```
absurd (Void a) = absurd a
```

where Void is defined as:

```
newtype Void = Void Void
```

As always, the type Void is tricky. This definition makes it impossible to construct a value because in order to construct one, you would need to provide one. Therefore, the function absurd can never be called.

These are all interesting examples, but is there a practical side to Curry-Howard isomorphism? Probably not in everyday programming.

But there are programming languages like Agda or Coq, which take advantage of the Curry-Howard isomorphism to prove theorems.

Computers are not only helping mathematicians do their work – they are revolutionizing the very foundations of mathematics. The latest hot research topic in that area is called Homotopy Type Theory, and is an outgrowth of type theory. It's full of Booleans, integers, products and coproducts, function types, and so on. And, as if to dispel any doubts, the theory is being formulated in Coq and Agda. Computers are revolutionizing the world in more than one way.

## 9.7 Bibliography

1. Ralph Hinze, Daniel W. H. James, [Reason Isomorphically!](#). This paper contains proofs of all those high-school algebraic identities in category theory that I mentioned in this chapter.

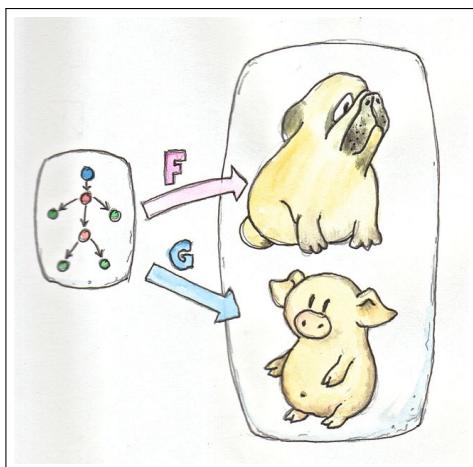
# 10

## Natural Transformations

WE TALKED ABOUT functors as mappings between categories that preserve their structure.

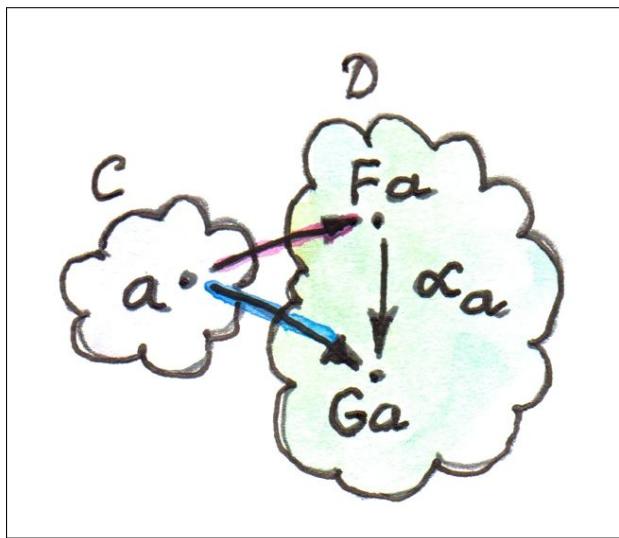
A functor “embeds” one category in another. It may collapse multiple things into one, but it never breaks connections. One way of thinking about it is that with a functor we are modeling one category inside another. The source category serves as a model, a blueprint, for some structure that’s part of the target category.

There may be many ways of embedding one category in another. Sometimes they are equivalent,



sometimes very different. One may collapse the whole source category into one object, another may map every object to a different object and every morphism to a different morphism. The same blueprint may be realized in many different ways. Natural transformations help us compare these realizations. They are mappings of functors – special mappings that preserve their functorial nature.

Consider two functors  $F$  and  $G$  between categories  $C$  and  $D$ . If you focus on just one object  $a$  in  $C$ , it is mapped to two objects:  $F a$  and  $G a$ . A mapping of functors should therefore map  $F a$  to  $G a$ .



Notice that  $F a$  and  $G a$  are objects in the same category  $D$ . Mappings between objects in the same category should not go against the grain of the category. We don't want to make artificial connections between objects. So it's *natural* to use existing connections, namely morphisms. A natural transformation is a selection of morphisms: for every object

$\alpha$ , it picks one morphism from  $F a$  to  $G a$ . If we call the natural transformation  $\alpha$ , this morphism is called the *component* of  $\alpha$  at  $a$ , or  $\alpha_a$ .

$$\alpha_a :: F a \rightarrow G a$$

Keep in mind that  $a$  is an object in  $C$  while  $\alpha_a$  is a morphism in  $D$ .

If, for some  $a$ , there is no morphism between  $F a$  and  $G a$  in  $D$ , there can be no natural transformation between  $F$  and  $G$ .

Of course that's only half of the story, because functors not only map objects, they map morphisms as well. So what does a natural transformation do with those mappings? It turns out that the mapping of morphisms is fixed – under any natural transformation between  $F$  and  $G$ ,  $F f$  must be transformed into  $G f$ . What's more, the mapping of morphisms by the two functors drastically restricts the choices we have in defining a natural transformation that's compatible with it. Consider a morphism  $f$  between two objects  $a$  and  $b$  in  $C$ . It's mapped to two morphisms,  $F f$  and  $G f$  in  $D$ :

$$F f :: F a \rightarrow F b$$

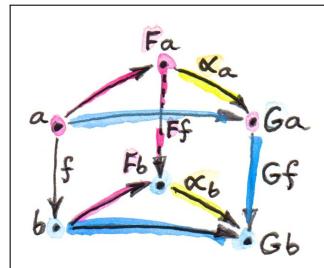
$$G f :: G a \rightarrow G b$$

The natural transformation  $\alpha$  provides two additional morphisms that complete the diagram in  $D$ :

$$\alpha_a :: F a \rightarrow G a$$

$$\alpha_b :: F b \rightarrow G b$$

Now we have two ways of getting from  $F a$  to  $G b$ . To make sure that they are equal, we must impose the *naturality condition* that holds for any  $f$ :

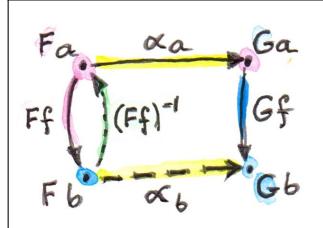


$$G f \circ \alpha_a = \alpha_b \circ F f$$

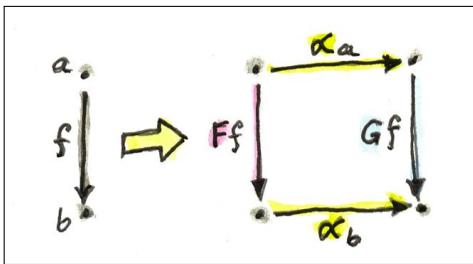
The naturality condition is a pretty stringent requirement. For instance, if the morphism  $F f$  is invertible, naturality determines  $\alpha_b$  in terms of  $\alpha_a$ . It *transports*  $\alpha_a$  along  $f$ :

$$\alpha_b = (G f) \circ \alpha_a \circ (F f)^{-1}$$

If there is more than one invertible morphism between two objects, all these transports have to agree. In general, though, morphisms are not invertible; but you can see that the existence of natural transformations between two functors is far from guaranteed. So the scarcity or the abundance of functors that are related by natural transformations may tell you a lot about the structure of categories between which they operate. We'll see some examples of that when we talk about limits and the Yoneda lemma.



Looking at a natural transformation component-wise, one may say that it maps objects to morphisms. Because of the naturality condition, one may also say that it maps morphisms to commuting squares — there is one commuting naturality square in  $D$  for every morphism in  $C$ .



This property of natural transformations comes in very handy in a lot of categorical constructions, which often include commuting diagrams. With a judicious choice of functors, a lot of these commutativity conditions may be transformed into naturality conditions. We'll see examples of that when we get to limits, colimits, and adjunctions.

Finally, natural transformations may be used to define isomorphisms of functors. Saying that two functors are naturally isomorphic is almost like saying they are the same. *Natural isomorphism* is defined as a natural transformation whose components are all isomorphisms (invertible morphisms).

## 10.1 Polymorphic Functions

We talked about the role of functors (or, more specifically, endofunctors) in programming. They correspond to type constructors that map types to types. They also map functions to functions, and this mapping is implemented by a higher order function `fmap` (or `transform`, `then`, and the like in C++).

To construct a natural transformation we start with an object, here a type,  $a$ . One functor,  $F$ , maps it to the type  $F\ a$ . Another functor,  $G$ , maps it to  $G\ a$ . The component of a natural transformation  $\alpha$  at  $a$

is a function from  $F\ a$  to  $G\ a$ . In pseudo-Haskell:

```
alphaa :: F a -> G a
```

A natural transformation is a polymorphic function that is defined for all types  $a$ :

```
alpha :: forall a . F a -> G a
```

The `forall a` is optional in Haskell (and in fact requires turning on the language extension `ExplicitForAll`). Normally, you would write it like this:

```
alpha :: F a -> G a
```

Keep in mind that it's really a family of functions parameterized by  $a$ . This is another example of the terseness of the Haskell syntax. A similar construct in C++ would be slightly more verbose:

```
template<class A> G<A> alpha(F<A>);
```

There is a more profound difference between Haskell's polymorphic functions and C++ generic functions, and it's reflected in the way these functions are implemented and type-checked. In Haskell, a polymorphic function must be defined uniformly for all types. One formula must work across all types. This is called *parametric polymorphism*.

C++, on the other hand, supports by default *ad hoc polymorphism*, which means that a template doesn't have to be well-defined for all types. Whether a template will work for a given type is decided at instantiation time, where a concrete type is substituted for the type parameter. Type checking is deferred, which unfortunately often leads to incomprehensible error messages.

In C++, there is also a mechanism for function overloading and template specialization, which allows different definitions of the same function for different types. In Haskell this functionality is provided by type classes and type families.

Haskell's parametric polymorphism has an unexpected consequence: any polymorphic function of the type:

```
alpha :: F a -> G a
```

where  $F$  and  $G$  are functors, automatically satisfies the naturality condition. Here it is in categorical notation ( $f$  is a function  $f :: a \rightarrow b$ ):

$$G f \circ \alpha_a = \alpha_b \circ F f$$

In Haskell, the action of a functor  $G$  on a morphism  $f$  is implemented using `fmap`. I'll first write it in pseudo-Haskell, with explicit type annotations:

$$\text{fmap}_G f . \alpha_a = \alpha_b . \text{fmap}_F f$$

Because of type inference, these annotations are not necessary, and the following equation holds:

$$\text{fmap } f . \alpha = \alpha . \text{fmap } f$$

This is still not real Haskell — function equality is not expressible in code — but it's an identity that can be used by the programmer in equational reasoning; or by the compiler, to implement optimizations.

The reason why the naturality condition is automatic in Haskell has to do with “theorems for free.” Parametric polymorphism, which is used to define natural transformations in Haskell, imposes very strong

limitations on the implementation – one formula for all types. These limitations translate into equational theorems about such functions. In the case of functions that transform functors, free theorems are the naturality conditions.<sup>1</sup>

One way of thinking about functors in Haskell that I mentioned earlier is to consider them generalized containers. We can continue this analogy and consider natural transformations to be recipes for repackaging the contents of one container into another container. We are not touching the items themselves: we don't modify them, and we don't create new ones. We are just copying (some of) them, sometimes multiple times, into a new container.

The naturality condition becomes the statement that it doesn't matter whether we modify the items first, through the application of `fmap`, and repackage later; or repackage first, and then modify the items in the new container, with its own implementation of `fmap`. These two actions, repackaging and `fmapping`, are orthogonal. “One moves the eggs, the other boils them.”

Let's see a few examples of natural transformations in Haskell. The first is between the list functor, and the `Maybe` functor. It returns the head of the list, but only if the list is non-empty:

```
safeHead :: [a] -> Maybe a
safeHead [] = Nothing
safeHead (x:xs) = Just x
```

It's a function polymorphic in `a`. It works for any type `a`, with no limitations, so it is an example of parametric polymorphism. Therefore it is a

---

<sup>1</sup>You may read more about free theorems in my blog [Parametricity: Money for Nothing and Theorems for Free](#).

natural transformation between the two functors. But just to convince ourselves, let's verify the naturality condition.

```
fmap f . safeHead = safeHead . fmap f
```

We have two cases to consider; an empty list:

```
fmap f (safeHead []) = fmap f Nothing = Nothing
```

```
safeHead (fmap f []) = safeHead [] = Nothing
```

and a non-empty list:

```
fmap f (safeHead (x:xs)) = fmap f (Just x) = Just (f x)
```

```
safeHead (fmap f (x:xs)) = safeHead (f x : fmap f xs) = Just  
    ↳ (f x)
```

I used the implementation of `fmap` for lists:

```
fmap f [] = []
```

```
fmap f (x:xs) = f x : fmap f xs
```

and for `Maybe`:

```
fmap f Nothing = Nothing
```

```
fmap f (Just x) = Just (f x)
```

An interesting case is when one of the functors is the trivial `Const` functor. A natural transformation from or to a `Const` functor looks just like a function that's either polymorphic in its return type or in its argument type.

For instance, `length` can be thought of as a natural transformation from the list functor to the `Const Int` functor:

```
length :: [a] -> Const Int a
length [] = Const 0
length (x:xs) = Const (1 + unConst (length xs))
```

Here, `unConst` is used to peel off the `Const` constructor:

```
unConst :: Const c a -> c
unConst (Const x) = x
```

Of course, in practice `length` is defined as:

```
length :: [a] -> Int
```

which effectively hides the fact that it's a natural transformation.

Finding a parametrically polymorphic function *from* a `Const` functor is a little harder, since it would require the creation of a value from nothing. The best we can do is:

```
scam :: Const Int a -> Maybe a
scam (Const x) = Nothing
```

Another common functor that we've seen already, and which will play an important role in the Yoneda lemma, is the Reader functor. I will rewrite its definition as a newtype:

```
newtype Reader e a = Reader (e -> a)
```

It is parameterized by two types, but is (covariantly) functorial only in the second one:

```
instance Functor (Reader e) where
  fmap f (Reader g) = Reader (\x -> f (g x))
```

For every type  $e$ , you can define a family of natural transformations from  $\text{Reader } e$  to any other functor  $f$ . We'll see later that the members of this family are always in one to one correspondence with the elements of  $f \circ e$  (the Yoneda lemma).

For instance, consider the somewhat trivial unit type  $()$  with one element  $()$ . The functor  $\text{Reader } ()$  takes any type  $a$  and maps it into a function type  $(\text{--}) \rightarrow a$ . These are just all the functions that pick a single element from the set  $a$ . There are as many of these as there are elements in  $a$ . Now let's consider natural transformations from this functor to the  $\text{Maybe}$  functor:

```
alpha :: Reader () a -> Maybe a
```

There are only two of these, dumb and obvious:

```
dumb (Reader _) = Nothing
```

and

```
obvious (Reader g) = Just (g ())
```

(The only thing you can do with  $g$  is to apply it to the unit value  $()$ .)

And, indeed, as predicted by the Yoneda lemma, these correspond to the two elements of the  $\text{Maybe } ()$  type, which are  $\text{Nothing}$  and  $\text{Just } ()$ . We'll come back to the Yoneda lemma later — this was just a little teaser.

## 10.2 Beyond Naturality

A parametrically polymorphic function between two functors (including the edge case of the  $\text{Const}$  functor) is always a natural transformation. Since all standard algebraic data types are functors, any polymorphic function between such types is a natural transformation.

We also have function types at our disposal, and those are functorial in their return type. We can use them to build functors (like the Reader functor) and define natural transformations that are higher-order functions.

However, function types are not covariant in the argument type. They are *contravariant*. Of course contravariant functors are equivalent to covariant functors from the opposite category. Polymorphic functions between two contravariant functors are still natural transformations in the categorical sense, except that they work on functors from the opposite category to Haskell types.

You might remember the example of a contravariant functor we've looked at before:

```
newtype Op r a = Op (a -> r)
```

This functor is contravariant in a:

```
instance Contravariant (Op r) where
    contramap f (Op g) = Op (g . f)
```

We can write a polymorphic function from, say, `Op Bool` to `Op String`:

```
predToStr (Op f) = Op (\x -> if f x then "T" else "F")
```

But since the two functors are not covariant, this is not a natural transformation in `Hask`. However, because they are both contravariant, they satisfy the “opposite” naturality condition:

```
contramap f . predToStr = predToStr . contramap f
```

Notice that the function `f` must go in the opposite direction than what you'd use with `fmap`, because of the signature of `contramap`:

```
contramap :: (b -> a) -> (Op Bool a -> Op Bool b)
```

Are there any type constructors that are not functors, whether covariant or contravariant? Here's one example:

```
a -> a
```

This is not a functor because the same type  $a$  is used both in the negative (contravariant) and positive (covariant) position. You can't implement `fmap` or `contramap` for this type. Therefore a function of the signature:

```
(a -> a) -> f a
```

where  $f$  is an arbitrary functor, cannot be a natural transformation. Interestingly, there is a generalization of natural transformations, called dinatural transformations, that deals with such cases. We'll get to them when we discuss ends.

## 10.3 Functor Category

Now that we have mappings between functors — natural transformations — it's only natural to ask the question whether functors form a category. And indeed they do! There is one category of functors for each pair of categories,  $C$  and  $D$ . Objects in this category are functors from  $C$  to  $D$ , and morphisms are natural transformations between those functors.

We have to define composition of two natural transformations, but that's quite easy. The components of natural transformations are morphisms, and we know how to compose morphisms.

Indeed, let's take a natural transformation  $\alpha$  from functor  $F$  to  $G$ . Its component at object  $a$  is some morphism:

$$\alpha_a :: F a \rightarrow G a$$

We'd like to compose  $\alpha$  with  $\beta$ , which is a natural transformation from functor  $G$  to  $H$ . The component of  $\beta$  at  $a$  is a morphism:

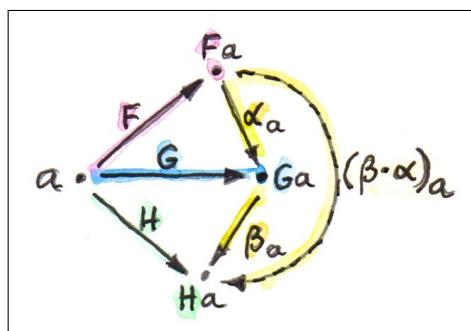
$$\beta_a :: G a \rightarrow H a$$

These morphisms are composable and their composition is another morphism:

$$\beta_a \circ \alpha_a :: F a \rightarrow H a$$

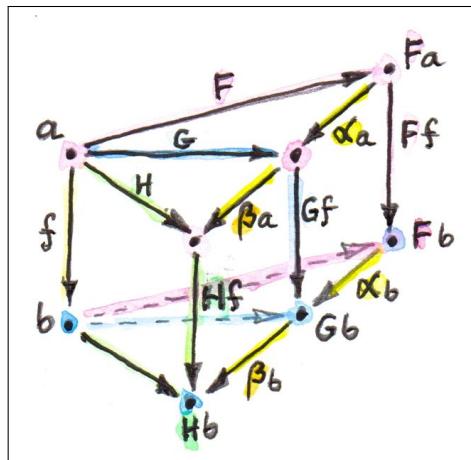
We will use this morphism as the component of the natural transformation  $\beta \cdot \alpha$  — the composition of two natural transformations  $\beta$  after  $\alpha$ :

$$(\beta \cdot \alpha)_a = \beta_a \circ \alpha_a$$



One (long) look at a diagram convinces us that the result of this composition is indeed a natural transformation from  $F$  to  $H$ :

$$H f \circ (\beta \cdot \alpha)_a = (\beta \cdot \alpha)_b \circ F f$$



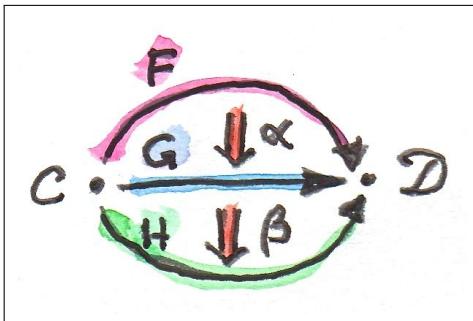
Composition of natural transformations is associative, because their components, which are regular morphisms, are associative with respect to their composition.

Finally, for each functor  $F$  there is an identity natural transformation  $1_F$  whose components are the identity morphisms:

$$\text{id}_{F a} :: F a \rightarrow F a$$

So, indeed, functors form a category.

A word about notation. Following Saunders Mac Lane I use the dot for the kind of natural transformation composition I have just described. The problem is that there are two ways of composing natural transformations. This one is called the vertical composition, because the functors are usually stacked up vertically in the diagrams that describe

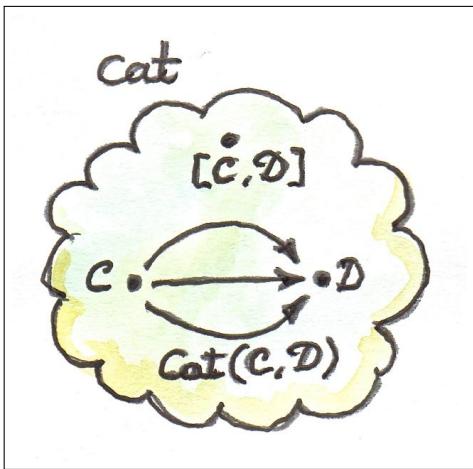


it. Vertical composition is important in defining the functor category. I'll explain horizontal composition shortly.

The functor category between categories  $C$  and  $D$  is written as  $\text{Fun}(C, D)$ , or  $[C, D]$ , or sometimes as  $DC$ . This last notation suggests that a functor category itself might be considered a function object (an exponential) in some other category. Is this indeed the case?

Let's have a look at the hierarchy of abstractions that we've been building so far. We started with a category, which is a collection of objects and morphisms. Categories themselves (or, strictly speaking *small* categories, whose objects form sets) are themselves objects in a higher-level category  $\text{Cat}$ . Morphisms in that category are functors. A Hom-set in  $\text{Cat}$  is a set of functors. For instance  $\text{Cat}(C, D)$  is a set of functors between two categories  $C$  and  $D$ .

A functor category  $[C, D]$  is also a set of functors between two categories (plus natural transformations as morphisms). Its objects are the same as the members of  $\text{Cat}(C, D)$ . Moreover, a functor category, being a category, must itself be an object of  $\text{Cat}$  (it so happens that the functor category between two small categories is itself small). We have a relationship between a Hom-set in a category and an object in the



same category. The situation is exactly like the exponential object that we've seen in the last section. Let's see how we can construct the latter in  $\text{Cat}$ .

As you may remember, in order to construct an exponential, we need to first define a product. In  $\text{Cat}$ , this turns out to be relatively easy, because small categories are *sets* of objects, and we know how to define cartesian products of sets. So an object in a product category  $C \times D$  is just a pair of objects,  $(c, d)$ , one from  $C$  and one from  $D$ . Similarly, a morphism between two such pairs,  $(c, d)$  and  $(c', d')$ , is a pair of morphisms,  $(f, g)$ , where  $f :: c \rightarrow c'$  and  $g :: d \rightarrow d'$ . These pairs of morphisms compose component-wise, and there is always an identity pair that is just a pair of identity morphisms. To make the long story short,  $\text{Cat}$  is a full-blown cartesian closed category in which there is an exponential object  $D^C$  for any pair of categories. And by “object” in  $\text{Cat}$  I mean a category, so  $D^C$  is a category, which we can identify with the functor category between  $C$  and  $D$ .

## 10.4 2-Categories

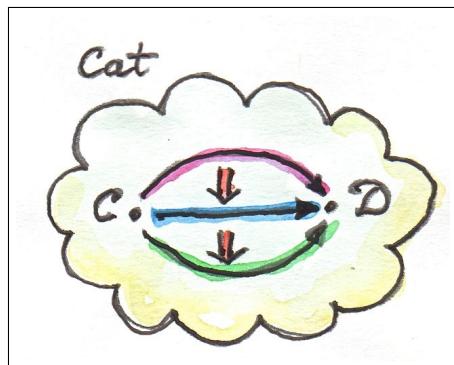
With that out of the way, let's have a closer look at  $\text{Cat}$ . By definition, any Hom-set in  $\text{Cat}$  is a set of functors. But, as we have seen, functors between two objects have a richer structure than just a set. They form a category, with natural transformations acting as morphisms. Since functors are considered morphisms in  $\text{Cat}$ , natural transformations are morphisms between morphisms.

This richer structure is an example of a 2-category, a generalization of a category where, besides objects and morphisms (which might be called 1-morphisms in this context), there are also 2-morphisms, which are morphisms between morphisms.

In the case of  $\text{Cat}$  seen as a 2-category we have:

- Objects: (Small) categories
- 1-morphisms: Functors between categories
- 2-morphisms: Natural transformations between functors.

Instead of a Hom-set between two categories  $C$  and  $D$ , we have a Hom-category — the functor category  $D^C$ . We have regular functor composition: a functor  $F$  from  $D^C$  composes with a functor  $G$  from  $E^D$  to give  $G \circ F$  from  $E^C$ . But we also have composition inside each Hom-category — vertical composition of natural transformations, or 2-morphisms, between functors.



With two kinds of composition in a 2-category, the question arises:  
How do they interact with each other?

Let's pick two functors, or 1-morphisms, in Cat:

$$F :: C \rightarrow D$$

$$G :: D \rightarrow E$$

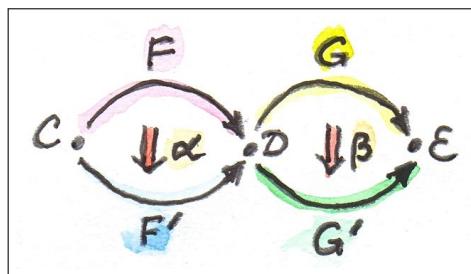
and their composition:

$$G \circ F :: C \rightarrow E$$

Suppose we have two natural transformations,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , that act, respectively, on functors  $F$  and  $G$ :

$$\alpha :: F \rightarrow F'$$

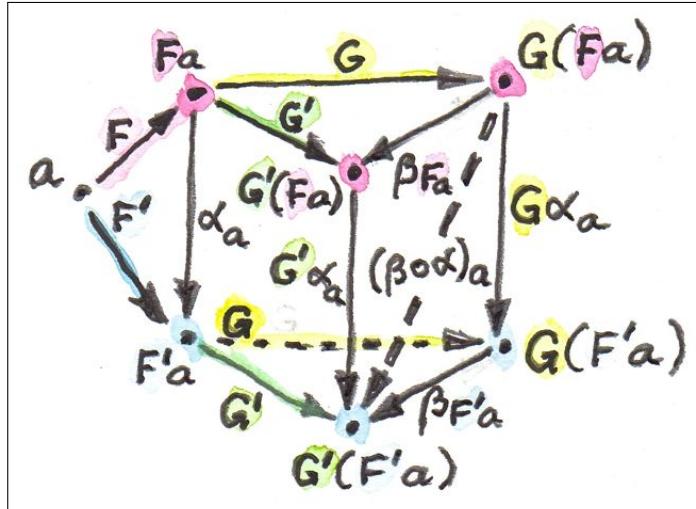
$$\beta :: G \rightarrow G'$$



Notice that we cannot apply vertical composition to this pair, because the target of  $\alpha$  is different from the source of  $\beta$ . In fact they are members of two different functor categories:  $D^C$  and  $E^D$ . We can, however, apply composition to the functors  $F'$  and  $G'$ , because the target of  $F'$  is the

source of  $G'$  — it's the category D. What's the relation between the functors  $G \circ F$  and  $G' \circ F'$ ?

Having  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  at our disposal, can we define a natural transformation from  $G \circ F$  to  $G' \circ F'$ ? Let me sketch the construction.



As usual, we start with an object  $a$  in C. Its image splits into two objects in D:  $Fa$  and  $F'a$ . There is also a morphism, a component of  $\alpha$ , connecting these two objects:

$$\alpha_a : F a \rightarrow F'a$$

When going from D to E, these two objects split further into four objects:

$$G(Fa), G'(Fa), G(F'a), G'(F'a)$$

We also have four morphisms forming a square. Two of these morphisms are the components of the natural transformation  $\beta$ :

$$\beta_{F a} :: G(F a) \rightarrow G'(F a)$$

$$\beta_{F' a} :: G(F' a) \rightarrow G'(F' a)$$

The other two are the images of  $\alpha_a$  under the two functors (functors map morphisms):

$$G \alpha_a :: G(F a) \rightarrow G(F' a)$$

$$G' \alpha_a :: G'(F a) \rightarrow G'(F' a)$$

That's a lot of morphisms. Our goal is to find a morphism that goes from  $G(F a)$  to  $G'(F' a)$ , a candidate for the component of a natural transformation connecting the two functors  $G \circ F$  and  $G' \circ F'$ . In fact there's not one but two paths we can take from  $G(F a)$  to  $G'(F' a)$ :

$$G' \alpha_a \circ \beta_{F a}$$

$$\beta_{F' a} \circ G \alpha_a$$

Luckily for us, they are equal, because the square we have formed turns out to be the naturality square for  $\beta$ .

We have just defined a component of a natural transformation from  $G \circ F$  to  $G' \circ F'$ . The proof of naturality for this transformation is pretty straightforward, provided you have enough patience.

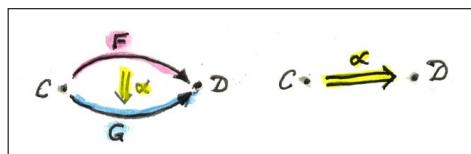
We call this natural transformation the *horizontal composition* of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ :

$$\beta \circ \alpha :: G \circ F \rightarrow G' \circ F'$$

Again, following Mac Lane I use the small circle for horizontal composition, although you may also encounter star in its place.

Here's a categorical rule of thumb: Every time you have composition, you should look for a category. We have vertical composition of natural transformations, and it's part of the functor category. But what about the horizontal composition? What category does that live in?

The way to figure this out is to look at  $\text{Cat}$  sideways. Look at natural transformations not as arrows between functors but as arrows between categories. A natural transformation sits between two categories, the ones that are connected by the functors it transforms. We can think of it as connecting these two categories.



Let's focus on two objects of  $\text{Cat}$  — categories  $C$  and  $D$ . There is a set of natural transformations that go between functors that connect  $C$  to  $D$ . These natural transformations are our new arrows from  $C$  to  $D$ . By the same token, there are natural transformations going between functors that connect  $D$  to  $E$ , which we can treat as new arrows going from  $D$  to  $E$ . Horizontal composition is the composition of these arrows.

We also have an identity arrow going from  $C$  to  $C$ . It's the identity natural transformation that maps the identity functor on  $C$  to itself. Notice that the identity for horizontal composition is also the identity for vertical composition, but not vice versa.

Finally, the two compositions satisfy the interchange law:

$$(\beta' \quad \alpha') \quad (\beta \quad \alpha) = (\beta' \quad \beta) \quad (\alpha' \quad \alpha)$$

I will quote Saunders Mac Lane here: The reader may enjoy writing down the evident diagrams needed to prove this fact.

There is one more piece of notation that might come in handy in the future. In this new sideways interpretation of Cat there are two ways of getting from object to object: using a functor or using a natural transformation. We can, however, re-interpret the functor arrow as a special kind of natural transformation: the identity natural transformation acting on this functor. So you'll often see this notation:

$F \circ \alpha$

where  $F$  is a functor from  $D$  to  $E$ , and  $\alpha$  is a natural transformation between two functors going from  $C$  to  $D$ . Since you can't compose a functor with a natural transformation, this is interpreted as a horizontal composition of the identity natural transformation  $1_F$  after  $\alpha$ .

Similarly:

$\alpha \circ F$

is a horizontal composition of  $\alpha$  after  $1_F$ .

## 10.5 Conclusion

This concludes the first part of the book. We've learned the basic vocabulary of category theory. You may think of objects and categories as nouns; and morphisms, functors, and natural transformations as verbs. Morphisms connect objects, functors connect categories, natural transformations connect functors.

But we've also seen that, what appears as an action at one level of abstraction, becomes an object at the next level. A set of morphisms

turns into a function object. As an object, it can be a source or a target of another morphism. That's the idea behind higher order functions.

A functor maps objects to objects, so we can use it as a type constructor, or a parametric type. A functor also maps morphisms, so it is a higher order function – `fmap`. There are some simple functors, like `Const`, product, and coproduct, that can be used to generate a large variety of algebraic data types. Function types are also functorial, both covariant and contravariant, and can be used to extend algebraic data types.

Functors may be looked upon as objects in the functor category. As such, they become sources and targets of morphisms: natural transformations. A natural transformation is a special type of polymorphic function.

## 10.6 Challenges

1. Define a natural transformation from the `Maybe` functor to the list functor. Prove the naturality condition for it.
2. Define at least two different natural transformations between `Reader ()` and the list functor. How many different lists of `()` are there?
3. Continue the previous exercise with `Reader Bool` and `Maybe`.
4. Show that horizontal composition of natural transformation satisfies the naturality condition (hint: use components). It's a good exercise in diagram chasing.
5. Write a short essay about how you may enjoy writing down the evident diagrams needed to prove the interchange law.
6. Create a few test cases for the opposite naturality condition of transformations between different `Op` functors. Here's one choice:

```
op :: Op Bool Int
op = Op (\x -> x > 0)
```

and

```
f :: String -> Int
f x = read x
```

## **Part II**

## **Part Two**

**Part III**

**Part Three**

# 1 1

## It's All About Morphisms

IF I HAVEN'T convinced you yet that category theory is all about morphisms then I haven't done my job properly. Since the next topic is adjunctions, which are defined in terms of isomorphisms of hom-sets, it makes sense to review our intuitions about the building blocks of hom-sets. Also, you'll see that adjunctions provide a more general language to describe a lot of constructions we've studied before, so it might help to review them too.

### 11.1 Functors

To begin with, you should really think of functors as mappings of morphisms — the view that's emphasized in the Haskell definition of the `Functor` typeclass, which revolves around `fmap`. Of course, functors also map objects — the endpoints of morphisms — otherwise we wouldn't be able to talk about preserving composition. Objects tell us which pairs of morphisms are composable. The target of one morphism

must be equal to the source of the other — if they are to be composed. So if we want the composition of morphisms to be mapped to the composition of *lifted* morphisms, the mapping of their endpoints is pretty much determined.

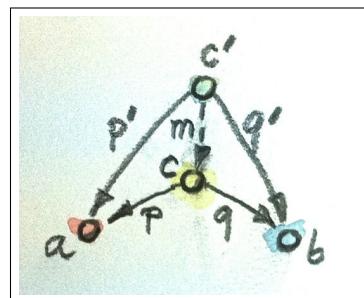
## 11.2 Commuting Diagrams

A lot of properties of morphisms are expressed in terms of commuting diagrams. If a particular morphism can be described as a composition of other morphisms in more than one way, then we have a commuting diagram.

In particular, commuting diagrams form the basis of almost all universal constructions (with the notable exceptions of the initial and terminal objects). We've seen this in the definitions of products, coproducts, various other (co-)limits, exponential objects, free monoids, etc.

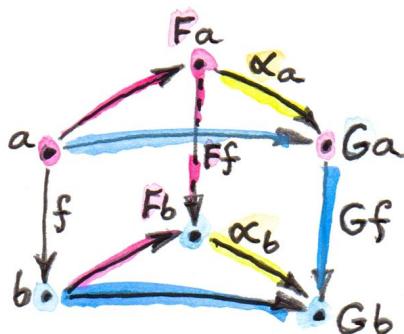
The product is a simple example of a universal construction. We pick two objects  $a$  and  $b$  and see if there exists an object  $c$ , together with a pair of morphisms  $p$  and  $q$ , that has the universal property of being their product.

A product is a special case of a limit. A limit is defined in terms of cones. A general cone is built from commuting diagrams. Commutativity of those diagrams may be replaced with a suitable naturality condition for the mapping of functors. This way commutativity is reduced to the role of the assembly language for the higher level language of natural transformations.



## 11.3 Natural Transformations

In general, natural transformations are very convenient whenever we need a mapping from morphisms to commuting squares. Two opposing sides of a naturality square are the mappings of some morphism  $f$  under two functors  $F$  and  $G$ . The other sides are the components of the natural transformation (which are also morphisms).



Naturality means that when you move to the “neighboring” component (by neighboring I mean connected by a morphism), you’re not going against the structure of either the category or the functors. It doesn’t matter whether you first use a component of the natural transformation to bridge the gap between objects, and then jump to its neighbor using the functor; or the other way around. The two directions are orthogonal. A natural transformation moves you left and right, and the functors move you up and down or back and forth — so to speak. You can visualize the *image* of a functor as a sheet in the target category. A natural transformation maps one such sheet corresponding to  $F$ , to another, corresponding to  $G$ .

We've seen examples of this orthogonality in Haskell. There the action of a functor modifies the content of a container without changing its shape, while a natural transformation repackages the untouched contents into a different container. The order of these operations doesn't matter.

We've seen the cones in the definition of a limit replaced by natural transformations. Naturality ensures that the sides of every cone commute. Still, a limit is defined in terms of mappings *between* cones. These mappings must also satisfy commutativity conditions. (For instance, the triangles in the definition of the product must commute.)

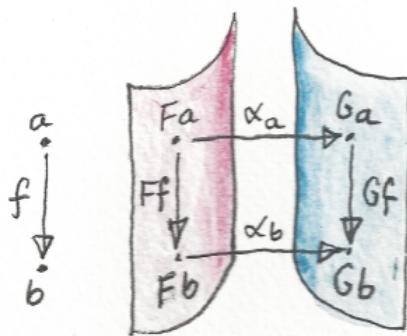
These conditions, too, may be replaced by naturality. You may recall that the *universal* cone, or the limit, is defined as a natural transformation between the (contravariant) hom-functor:

$$F :: c \rightarrow C(c, \text{Lim } D)$$

and the (also contravariant) functor that maps objects in  $C$  to cones, which themselves are natural transformations:

$$G :: c \rightarrow \text{Nat}(\Delta_c, D)$$

Here,  $\Delta_c$  is the constant functor, and  $D$  is the functor that defines the diagram in  $C$ . Both functors  $F$  and  $G$  have well defined actions on morphisms in  $C$ . It so happens that this particular natural transformation between  $F$  and  $G$  is an *isomorphism*.



## 11.4 Natural Isomorphisms

A natural isomorphism — which is a natural transformation whose every component is reversible — is category theory’s way of saying that “two things are the same.” A component of such a transformation must be an isomorphism between objects — a morphism that has the inverse. If you visualize functor images as sheets, a natural isomorphism is a one-to-one invertible mapping between those sheets.

## 11.5 Hom-Sets

But what are morphisms? They do have more structure than objects: unlike objects, morphisms have two ends. But if you fix the source and the target objects, the morphisms between the two form a boring set (at least for locally small categories). We can give elements of this set names like  $f$  or  $g$ , to distinguish one from another — but what is it, really, that makes them different?

The essential difference between morphisms in a given hom-set lies in the way they compose with other morphisms (from abutting hom-sets). If there is a morphism  $h$  whose composition (either pre- or post-) with  $f$  is different than that with  $g$ , for instance:

$$h \circ f \neq h \circ g$$

then we can directly “observe” the difference between  $f$  and  $g$ . But even if the difference is not directly observable, we might use functors to zoom in on the hom-set. A functor  $F$  may map the two morphisms to distinct morphisms:

$$F f \neq F g$$

in a richer category, where the abutting hom-sets provide more resolution, e.g.,

$$h' \circ F f \neq h' \circ F g$$

where  $h'$  is not in the image of  $F$ .

## 11.6 Hom-Set Isomorphisms

A lot of categorical constructions rely on isomorphisms between hom-sets. But since hom-sets are just sets, a plain isomorphism between them doesn't tell you much. For finite sets, an isomorphism just says that they have the same number of elements. If the sets are infinite, their cardinality must be the same. But any meaningful isomorphism of hom-sets must take into account composition. And composition involves more than one hom-set. We need to define isomorphisms that span whole collections of hom-sets, and we need to impose some compatibility conditions that interoperate with composition. And a *natural* isomorphism fits the bill exactly.

But what's a natural isomorphism of hom-sets? Naturality is a property of mappings between functors, not sets. So we are really talking about a natural isomorphism between hom-set-valued functors. These functors are more than just set-valued functors. Their action on morphisms is induced by the appropriate hom-functors. Morphisms are canonically mapped by hom-functors using either pre- or post-composition (depending on the covariance of the functor).

The Yoneda embedding is one example of such an isomorphism. It maps hom-sets in  $C$  to hom-sets in the functor category; and it's natural. One functor in the Yoneda embedding is the hom-functor in  $C$

and the other maps objects to sets of natural transformations between hom-sets.

The definition of a limit is also a natural isomorphism between hom-sets (the second one, again, in the functor category):

$$\mathcal{C}(c, \lim D) \simeq \text{Nat}(\Delta_c, D)$$

It turns out that our construction of an exponential object, or that of a free monoid, can also be rewritten as a natural isomorphism between hom-sets.

This is no coincidence — we'll see next that these are just different examples of adjunctions, which are defined as natural isomorphisms of hom-sets.

## 11.7 Asymmetry of Hom-Sets

There is one more observation that will help us understand adjunctions. Hom-sets are, in general, not symmetric. A hom-set  $\mathcal{C}(a, b)$  is often very different from the hom-set  $\mathcal{C}(b, a)$ . The ultimate demonstration of this asymmetry is a partial order viewed as a category. In a partial order, a morphism from  $a$  to  $b$  exists if and only if  $a$  is less than or equal to  $b$ . If  $a$  and  $b$  are different, then there can be no morphism going the other way, from  $b$  to  $a$ . So if the hom-set  $\mathcal{C}(a, b)$  is non-empty, which in this case means it's a singleton set, then  $\mathcal{C}(b, a)$  must be empty, unless  $a = b$ . The arrows in this category have a definite flow in one direction.

A preorder, which is based on a relation that's not necessarily antisymmetric, is also “mostly” directional, except for occasional cycles. It's convenient to think of an arbitrary category as a generalization of a preorder.

A preorder is a thin category — all hom-sets are either singletons or empty. We can visualize a general category as a “thick” preorder.

## 11.8 Challenges

1. Consider some degenerate cases of a naturality condition and draw the appropriate diagrams. For instance, what happens if either functor  $F$  or  $G$  map both objects  $a$  and  $b$  (the ends of  $f :: a \rightarrow b$ ) to the same object, e.g.,  $F a = F b$  or  $G a = G b$ ? (Notice that you get a cone or a co-cone this way.) Then consider cases where either  $F a = G a$  or  $F b = G b$ . Finally, what if you start with a morphism that loops on itself —  $f :: a \rightarrow a$ ?

# 12

## Adjunctions

IN MATHEMATICS WE HAVE various ways of saying that one thing is like another. The strictest is equality. Two things are equal if there is no way to distinguish one from another. One can be substituted for the other in every imaginable context. For instance, did you notice that we used *equality* of morphisms every time we talked about commuting diagrams? That's because morphisms form a set (hom-set) and set elements can be compared for equality.

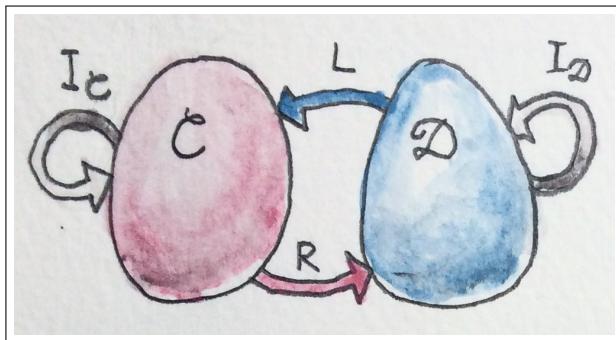
But equality is often too strong. There are many examples of things being the same for all intents and purposes, without actually being equal. For instance, the pair type `(Bool, Char)` is not strictly equal to `(Char, Bool)`, but we understand that they contain the same information. This concept is best captured by an *isomorphism* between two types — a morphism that's invertible. Since it's a morphism, it preserves the structure; and being “iso” means that it's part of a round trip that lands you in the same spot, no matter on which side you start. In the case of pairs, this isomorphism is called `swap`:

```
swap :: (a,b) -> (b,a)  
swap (a,b) = (b,a)
```

swap happens to be its own inverse.

## 12.1 Adjunction and Unit/Counit Pair

When we talk about categories being isomorphic, we express this in terms of mappings between categories, a.k.a. functors. We would like to be able to say that two categories  $C$  and  $D$  are isomorphic if there exists a functor  $R$  (“right”) from  $C$  to  $D$ , which is invertible. In other words, there exists another functor  $L$  (“left”) from  $D$  back to  $C$  which, when composed with  $R$ , is equal to the identity functor  $I$ . There are two possible compositions,  $R \circ L$  and  $L \circ R$ ; and two possible identity functors: one in  $C$  and another in  $D$ .



But here's the tricky part: What does it mean for two functors to be *equal*? What do we mean by this equality:

$$R \circ L = I_D$$

or this one:

$$L \circ R = I_C$$

It would be reasonable to define functor equality in terms of equality of objects. Two functors, when acting on equal objects, should produce equal objects. But we don't, in general, have the notion of object equality in an arbitrary category. It's just not part of the definition. (Going deeper into this rabbit hole of "what equality really is," we would end up in Homotopy Type Theory.)

You might argue that functors *are* morphisms in the category of categories, so they should be equality-comparable. And indeed, as long as we are talking about small categories, where objects form a set, we can indeed use the equality of elements of a set to equality-compare objects.

But, remember,  $\text{Cat}$  is really a 2-category. Hom-sets in a 2-category have additional structure — there are 2-morphisms acting between 1-morphisms. In  $\text{Cat}$ , 1-morphisms are functors, and 2-morphisms are natural transformations. So it's more natural (can't avoid this pun!) to consider natural isomorphisms as substitutes for equality when talking about functors.

So, instead of isomorphism of categories, it makes sense to consider a more general notion of *equivalence*. Two categories  $C$  and  $D$  are *equivalent* if we can find two functors going back and forth between them, whose composition (either way) is *naturally isomorphic* to the identity functor. In other words, there is a two-way natural transformation between the composition  $R \circ L$  and the identity functor  $I_D$ , and another between  $L \circ R$  and the identity functor  $I_C$ .

Adjunction is even weaker than equivalence, because it doesn't require that the composition of the two functors be *isomorphic* to the

identity functor. Instead it stipulates the existence of a *one way* natural transformation from  $I_D$  to  $R \circ L$ , and another from  $L \circ R$  to  $I_C$ . Here are the signatures of these two natural transformations:

$$\eta : I_D \rightarrow R \circ L$$

$$\varepsilon : L \circ R \rightarrow I_C$$

$\eta$  is called the unit, and  $\varepsilon$  the counit of the adjunction.

Notice the asymmetry between these two definitions. In general, we don't have the two remaining mappings:

$R \circ L \rightarrow I_D$  -- not necessarily

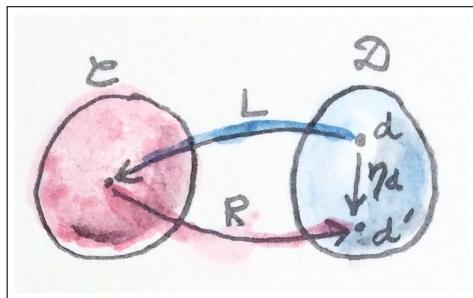
$I_C \rightarrow L \circ R$  -- not necessarily

Because of this asymmetry, the functor  $L$  is called the *left adjoint* to the functor  $R$ , while the functor  $R$  is the right adjoint to  $L$ . (Of course, left and right make sense only if you draw your diagrams one particular way.)

The compact notation for the adjunction is:

$$L \dashv R$$

To better understand the adjunction, let's analyze the unit and the counit in more detail.

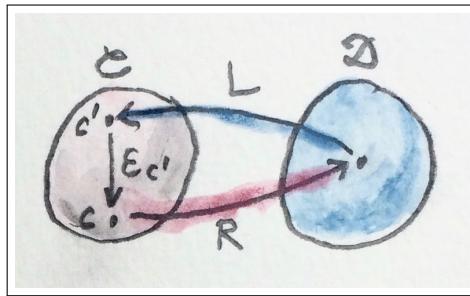


Let's start with the unit. It's a natural transformation, so it's a family of morphisms. Given an object  $d$  in  $D$ , the component of  $\eta$  is a morphism between  $I \circ d$ , which is equal to  $d$ , and  $(R \circ L) \circ d$ ; which, in the picture, is called  $d'$ :

$$\eta_d :: d \rightarrow (R \circ L) \circ d$$

Notice that the composition  $R \circ L$  is an endofunctor in  $D$ .

This equation tells us that we can pick any object  $d$  in  $D$  as our starting point, and use the round trip functor  $R \circ L$  to pick our target object  $d'$ . Then we shoot an arrow — the morphism  $\eta_d$  — to our target.



By the same token, the component of the counit  $\varepsilon$  can be described as:

$$\varepsilon_{c'} :: (L \circ R) \circ c' \rightarrow c$$

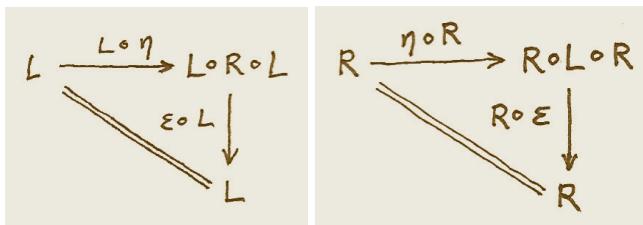
where  $c'$  is  $(L \circ R) \circ c$ . It tells us that we can pick any object  $c$  in  $C$  as our target, and use the round trip functor  $L \circ R$  to pick the source  $c'$ . Then we shoot the arrow — the morphism  $\varepsilon_{c'}$  — from the source to the target.

Another way of looking at unit and counit is that unit lets us *introduce* the composition  $R \circ L$  anywhere we could insert an identity functor on  $D$ ; and counit lets us *eliminate* the composition  $L \circ R$ , replacing it with the identity on  $C$ . That leads to some “obvious” consistency conditions, which make sure that introduction followed by elimination doesn’t change anything:

$$L = L \circ I_D \rightarrow L \circ R \quad L \rightarrow I_C \circ L = L$$

$$R = I_D \circ R \rightarrow R \circ L \circ R \rightarrow R \circ I_C = R$$

These are called triangular identities because they make the following diagrams commute:



These are diagrams in the functor category: the arrows are natural transformations, and their composition is the horizontal composition of natural transformations. In components, these identities become:

$$\begin{aligned} \varepsilon_{L_d} \circ L \eta_d &= \text{id}_{L_d} \\ R \varepsilon_c \circ \eta_{R_c} &= \text{id}_{R_c} \end{aligned}$$

We often see unit and counit in Haskell under different names. Unit is known as `return` (or `pure`, in the definition of Applicative):

```
return :: d -> m d
```

and counit as extract:

```
extract :: w c -> c
```

Here,  $m$  is the (endo-) functor corresponding to  $R \circ L$ , and  $w$  is the (endo-) functor corresponding to  $L \circ R$ . As we'll see later, they are part of the definition of a monad and a comonad, respectively.

If you think of an endofunctor as a container, the unit (or `return`) is a polymorphic function that creates a default box around a value of arbitrary type. The counit (or `extract`) does the reverse: it retrieves or produces a single value from a container.

We'll see later that every pair of adjoint functors defines a monad and a comonad. Conversely, every monad or comonad may be factorized into a pair of adjoint functors — this factorization is not unique, though.

In Haskell, we use monads a lot, but only rarely factorize them into pairs of adjoint functors, primarily because those functors would normally take us out of Hask.

We can however define adjunctions of *endofunctors* in Haskell. Here's part of the definition taken from `Data.Functor.Adjunction`:

```
class (Functor f, Representable u) =>
    Adjunction f u | f -> u, u -> f where
    unit :: a -> u (f a)
    counit :: f (u a) -> a
```

This definition requires some explanation. First of all, it describes a multi-parameter type class — the two parameters being  $f$  and  $u$ . It establishes a relation called `Adjunction` between these two type constructors.

Additional conditions, after the vertical bar, specify functional dependencies. For instance,  $f \dashv u$  means that  $u$  is determined by  $f$  (the relation between  $f$  and  $u$  is a function, here on type constructors). Conversely,  $u \dashv f$  means that, if we know  $u$ , then  $f$  is uniquely determined.

I'll explain in a moment why, in Haskell, we can impose the condition that the right adjoint  $u$  be a *representable* functor.

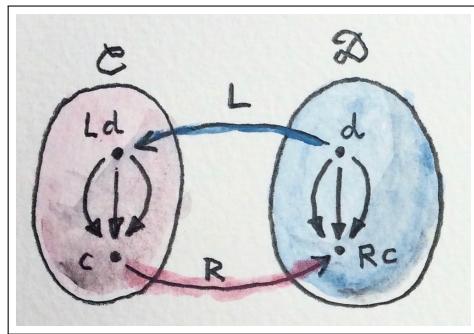
## 12.2 Adjunctions and Hom-Sets

There is an equivalent definition of the adjunction in terms of natural isomorphisms of hom-sets. This definition ties nicely with universal constructions we've been studying so far. Every time you hear the statement that there is some unique morphism, which factorizes some construction, you should think of it as a mapping of some set to a hom-set. That's the meaning of "picking a unique morphism."

Furthermore, factorization can be often described in terms of natural transformations. Factorization involves commuting diagrams — some morphism being equal to a composition of two morphisms (factors). A natural transformation maps morphisms to commuting diagrams. So, in a universal construction, we go from a morphism to a commuting diagram, and then to a unique morphism. We end up with a mapping from morphism to morphism, or from one hom-set to another (usually in different categories). If this mapping is invertible, and if it can be naturally extended across all hom-sets, we have an adjunction.

The main difference between universal constructions and adjunctions is that the latter are defined globally — for all hom-sets. For instance, using a universal construction you can define a product of two

select objects, even if it doesn't exist for any other pair of objects in that category. As we'll see soon, if the product of *any pair* of objects exists in a category, it can be also defined through an adjunction.



Here's the alternative definition of the adjunction using hom-sets. As before, we have two functors  $L : D \rightarrow C$  and  $R : C \rightarrow D$ . We pick two arbitrary objects: the source object  $d$  in  $D$ , and the target object  $c$  in  $C$ . We can map the source object  $d$  to  $C$  using  $L$ . Now we have two objects in  $C$ ,  $L d$  and  $c$ . They define a hom-set:

$$C(L d, c)$$

Similarly, we can map the target object  $c$  using  $R$ . Now we have two objects in  $D$ ,  $d$  and  $R c$ . They, too, define a hom set:

$$D(d, R c)$$

We say that  $L$  is left adjoint to  $R$  iff there is an isomorphism of hom sets:

$$C(L d, c) \cong D(d, R c)$$

that is natural both in  $d$  and  $c$ . Naturality means that the source  $d$  can be varied smoothly across  $D$ ; and the target  $c$ , across  $C$ . More precisely, we have a natural transformation  $\phi$  between the following two (covariant) functors from  $C$  to  $\text{Set}$ . Here's the action of these functors on objects:

$$\begin{aligned} c &\rightarrow C(L d, c) \\ c &\rightarrow D(d, R c) \end{aligned}$$

The other natural transformation,  $\psi$ , acts between the following (contravariant) functors:

$$\begin{aligned} d &\rightarrow C(L d, c) \\ d &\rightarrow D(d, R c) \end{aligned}$$

Both natural transformations must be invertible.

It's easy to show that the two definitions of the adjunction are equivalent. For instance, let's derive the unit transformation starting from the isomorphism of hom-sets:

$$C(L d, c) \cong D(d, R c)$$

Since this isomorphism works for any object  $c$ , it must also work for  $c = L d$ :

$$C(L d, L d) \cong D(d, (R \circ L) d)$$

We know that the left hand side must contain at least one morphism, the identity. The natural transformation will map this morphism to an element of  $D(d, (R \circ L) d)$  or, inserting the identity functor  $I$ , a morphism in:

$$D(I d, (R \circ L) d)$$

We get a family of morphisms parameterized by  $d$ . They form a natural transformation between the functor  $I$  and the functor  $R \circ L$  (the naturality condition is easy to verify). This is exactly our unit,  $\eta$ .

Conversely, starting from the existence of the unit and co-unit, we can define the transformations between hom-sets. For instance, let's pick an arbitrary morphism  $f$  in the hom-set  $C(L d, c)$ . We want to define a  $\phi$  that, acting on  $f$ , produces a morphism in  $D(d, R c)$ .

There isn't really much choice. One thing we can try is to lift  $f$  using  $R$ . That will produce a morphism  $R f$  from  $R(L d)$  to  $R c$  — a morphism that's an element of  $D((R \circ L) d, R c)$ .

What we need for a component of  $\phi$ , is a morphism from  $d$  to  $R c$ . That's not a problem, since we can use a component of  $\eta_d$  to get from  $d$  to  $(R \circ L) d$ . We get:

$$\phi_f = R f \circ \eta_d$$

The other direction is analogous, and so is the derivation of  $\psi$ .

Going back to the Haskell definition of Adjunction, the natural transformations  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  are replaced by polymorphic (in  $a$  and  $b$ ) functions `leftAdjunct` and `rightAdjunct`, respectively. The functors  $L$  and  $R$  are called  $f$  and  $u$ :

```
class (Functor f, Representable u) =>
    Adjunction f u | f -> u, u -> f where
    leftAdjunct :: (f a -> b) -> (a -> u b)
    rightAdjunct :: (a -> u b) -> (f a -> b)
```

The equivalence between the unit/counit formulation and the `leftAdjunct/rightAdjunct` formulation is witnessed by these mappings:

```

unit          = leftAdjunct id
counit        = rightAdjunct id
leftAdjunct f = fmap f . unit
rightAdjunct f = counit . fmap f

```

It's very instructive to follow the translation from the categorical description of the adjunction to Haskell code. I highly encourage this as an exercise.

We are now ready to explain why, in Haskell, the right adjoint is automatically a representable functor. The reason for this is that, to the first approximation, we can treat the category of Haskell types as the category of sets.

When the right category  $D$  is  $\text{Set}$ , the right adjoint  $R$  is a functor from  $C$  to  $\text{Set}$ . Such a functor is representable if we can find an object  $\text{rep}$  in  $C$  such that the hom-functor  $\mathcal{C}(\text{rep}, \_)$  is naturally isomorphic to  $R$ . It turns out that, if  $R$  is the right adjoint of some functor  $L$  from  $\text{Set}$  to  $C$ , such an object always exists — it's the image of the singleton set  $()$  under  $L$ :

```
rep = L ()
```

Indeed, the adjunction tells us that the following two hom-sets are naturally isomorphic:

$$\mathcal{C}(L(), c) \cong \text{Set}((), R c)$$

For a given  $c$ , the right hand side is the set of functions from the singleton set  $()$  to  $R c$ . We've seen earlier that each such function picks one element from the set  $R c$ . The set of such functions is isomorphic to the set  $R c$ . So we have:

$$C(L(\ ), -) \cong R$$

which shows that  $R$  is indeed representable.

## 12.3 Product from Adjunction

We have previously introduced several concepts using universal constructions. Many of those concepts, when defined globally, are easier to express using adjunctions. The simplest non-trivial example is that of the product. The [gist of the universal construction of the product](#) is the ability to factorize any product-like candidate through the universal product.

More precisely, the product of two objects  $a$  and  $b$  is the object  $(a \times b)$  (or  $(a, b)$  in the Haskell notation) equipped with two morphisms  $\text{fst}$  and  $\text{snd}$  such that, for any other candidate  $c$  equipped with two morphisms  $p : c \rightarrow a$  and  $q : c \rightarrow b$ , there exists a unique morphism  $m : c \rightarrow (a, b)$  that factorizes  $p$  and  $q$  through  $\text{fst}$  and  $\text{snd}$ .

As we've seen earlier, in Haskell, we can implement a `factorizer` that generates this morphism from the two projections:

```
factorizer :: (c -> a) -> (c -> b) -> (c -> (a, b))
factorizer p q = \x -> (p x, q x)
```

It's easy to verify that the factorization conditions hold:

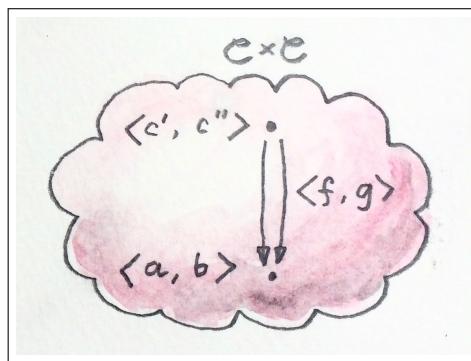
```
fst . factorizer p q = p
snd . factorizer p q = q
```

We have a mapping that takes a pair of morphisms  $p$  and  $q$  and produces another morphism  $m = \text{factorizer } p \ q$ .

How can we translate this into a mapping between two hom-sets that we need to define an adjunction? The trick is to go outside of Hask and treat the pair of morphisms as a single morphism in the product category.

Let me remind you what a product category is. Take two arbitrary categories  $C$  and  $D$ . The objects in the product category  $C \times D$  are pairs of objects, one from  $C$  and one from  $D$ . The morphisms are pairs of morphisms, one from  $C$  and one from  $D$ .

To define a product in some category  $C$ , we should start with the product category  $C \times C$ . Pairs of morphism from  $C$  are single morphisms in the product category  $C \times C$ .



It might be a little confusing at first that we are using a product category to define a product. These are, however, very different products. We don't need a universal construction to define a product category. All we need is the notion of a pair of objects and a pair of morphisms.

However, a pair of objects from  $C$  is *not* an object in  $C$ . It's an object in a different category,  $C \times C$ . We can write the pair formally as  $\langle a, b \rangle$ , where  $a$  and  $b$  are objects of  $C$ . The universal construction, on

the other hand, is necessary in order to define the object  $a \times b$  (or  $(a, b)$  in Haskell), which is an object in *the same* category  $C$ . This object is supposed to represent the pair  $\langle a, b \rangle$  in a way specified by the universal construction. It doesn't always exist and, even if it exists for some, might not exist for other pairs of objects in  $C$ .

Let's now look at the factorizer as a mapping of hom-sets. The first hom-set is in the product category  $C \times C$ , and the second is in  $C$ . A general morphism in  $C \times C$  would be a pair of morphisms  $\langle f, g \rangle$ :

$$f :: c' \rightarrow a \quad g :: c'' \rightarrow b$$

with  $c''$  potentially different from  $c'$ . But to define a product, we are interested in a special morphism in  $C \times C$ , the pair  $p$  and  $q$  that share the same source object  $c$ . That's okay: In the definition of an adjunction, the source of the left hom-set is not an arbitrary object — it's the result of the left functor  $L$  acting on some object from the right category. The functor that fits the bill is easy to guess — it's the diagonal functor from  $C$  to  $C \times C$ , whose action on objects is:

$$\Delta c = \langle c, c \rangle$$

The left-hand side hom-set in our adjunction should thus be:

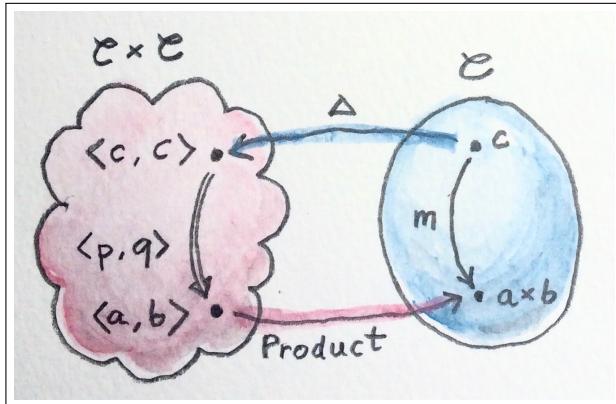
$$(C \times C)(\Delta c, \langle a, b \rangle)$$

It's a hom-set in the product category. Its elements are pairs of morphisms that we recognize as the arguments to our factorizer:

$$(c \rightarrow a) \rightarrow (c \rightarrow b) \dots$$

The right-hand side hom-set lives in  $C$ , and it goes between the source object  $c$  and the result of some functor  $R$  acting on the target object in  $C \times C$ . That's the functor that maps the pair  $\langle a, b \rangle$  to our product object,  $a \times b$ . We recognize this element of the hom-set as the *result* of the factorizer:

$\dots \rightarrow (c \rightarrow (a, b))$



We still don't have a full adjunction. For that we first need our factorizer to be invertible — we are building an *isomorphism* between hom-sets. The inverse of the factorizer should start from a morphism  $m$  — a morphism from some object  $c$  to the product object  $a \times b$ . In other words,  $m$  should be an element of:

$$C(c, a \times b)$$

The inverse factorizer should map  $m$  to a morphism  $\langle p, q \rangle$  in  $C \times C$  that goes from  $\langle c, c \rangle$  to  $\langle a, b \rangle$ ; in other words, a morphism that's an element of:

$$(C \times C)(\Delta, \langle a, b \rangle)$$

If that mapping exists, we conclude that there exists the right adjoint to the diagonal functor. That functor defines a product.

In Haskell, we can always construct the inverse of the factorizer by composing `m` with, respectively, `fst` and `snd`.

```
p = fst ∘ m
```

```
q = snd ∘ m
```

To complete the proof of the equivalence of the two ways of defining a product we also need to show that the mapping between hom-sets is natural in  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$ . I will leave this as an exercise for the dedicated reader.

To summarize what we have done: A categorical product may be defined globally as the *right adjoint* of the diagonal functor:

$$(C \times C)(\Delta, \langle a, b \rangle) \cong C(c, a \times b)$$

Here,  $a \times b$  is the result of the action of our right adjoint functor `Product` on the pair  $\langle a, b \rangle$ . Notice that any functor from  $C \times C$  is a bifunctor, so `Product` is a bifunctor. In Haskell, the `Product` bifunctor is written simply as `(,)`. You can apply it to two types and get their product type, for instance:

```
(,) Int Bool ~ (Int, Bool)
```

## 12.4 Exponential from Adjunction

The exponential  $b^a$ , or the function object  $a \Rightarrow b$ , can be defined using a **universal construction**. This construction, if it exists for all pairs of

objects, can be seen as an adjunction. Again, the trick is to concentrate on the statement:

For any other object  $z$  with a morphism

$$g :: z \times a \rightarrow b$$

there is a unique morphism

$$h :: z \rightarrow (a \Rightarrow b)$$

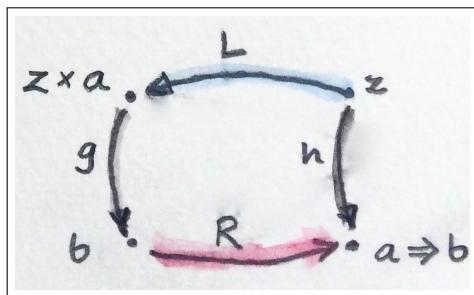
This statement establishes a mapping between hom-sets.

In this case, we are dealing with objects in the same category, so the two adjoint functors are endofunctors. The left (endo-)functor  $L$ , when acting on object  $z$ , produces  $z \times a$ . It's a functor that corresponds to taking a product with some fixed  $a$ .

The right (endo-)functor  $R$ , when acting on  $b$  produces the function object  $a \Rightarrow b$  (or  $b^a$ ). Again,  $a$  is fixed. The adjunction between these two functors is often written as:

$$- \times a \dashv (-)^a$$

The mapping of hom-sets that underlies this adjunction is best seen by redrawing the diagram that we used in the universal construction.



Notice that the eval morphism is nothing else but the counit of this adjunction:

$$(a \Rightarrow b) \times a \rightarrow b$$

where:

$$(a \Rightarrow b) \times a = (L \circ R) b$$

I have previously mentioned that a universal construction defines a unique object, up to isomorphism. That's why we have "the" product and "the" exponential. This property translates to adjunctions as well: if a functor has an adjoint, this adjoint is unique up to isomorphism.

## 12.5 Challenges

1. Derive the naturality square for  $\psi$ , the transformation between the two (contravariant) functors:

$$a \rightarrow C(L a, b)$$

$$a \rightarrow D(a, R b)$$

2. Derive the counit  $\epsilon$  starting from the hom-sets isomorphism in the second definition of the adjunction.
3. Complete the proof of equivalence of the two definitions of the adjunction.
4. Show that the coproduct can be defined by an adjunction. Start with the definition of the factorizer for a coproduct.
5. Show that the coproduct is the left adjoint of the diagonal functor.
6. Define the adjunction between a product and a function object in Haskell.

# 13

## Free/Forgetful Adjunctions

FREE CONSTRUCTIONS ARE a powerful application of adjunctions. A *free functor* is defined as the left adjoint to a *forgetful functor*. A forgetful functor is usually a pretty simple functor that forgets some structure. For instance, lots of interesting categories are built on top of sets. But categorical objects, which abstract those sets, have no internal structure — they have no elements. Still, those objects often carry the memory of sets, in the sense that there is a mapping — a functor — from a given category  $C$  to  $\text{Set}$ . A set corresponding to some object in  $C$  is called its *underlying set*.

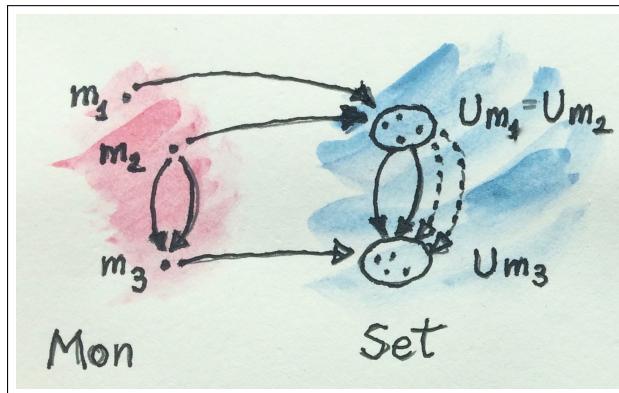
Monoids are such objects that have underlying sets — sets of elements. There is a forgetful functor  $U$  from the category of monoids  $\text{Mon}$  to the category of sets, which maps monoids to their underlying sets. It also maps monoid morphisms (homomorphisms) to functions between sets.

I like to think of  $\text{Mon}$  as having split personality. On the one hand,

it's a bunch of sets with multiplication and unit elements. On the other hand, it's a category with featureless objects whose only structure is encoded in morphisms that go between them. Every set-function that preserves multiplication and unit gives rise to a morphism in **Mon**.

Things to keep in mind:

- There may be many monoids that map to the same set, and
- There are fewer (or at most as many as) monoid morphisms than there are functions between their underlying sets.



Monoids  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  have the same underlying set. There are more functions between the underlying sets of  $m_2$  and  $m_3$  than there are morphisms between them.

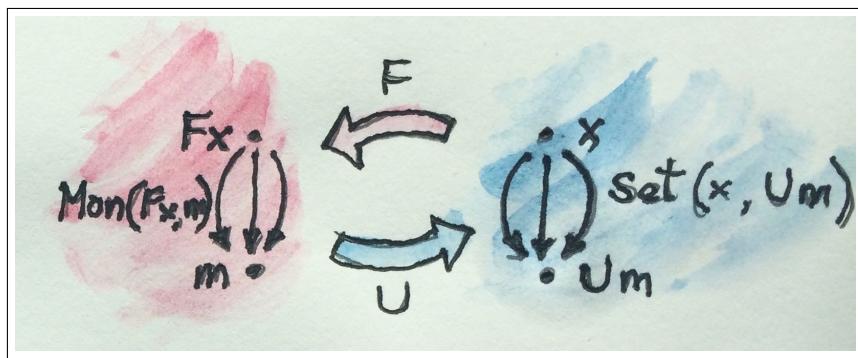
The functor  $F$  that's the left adjoint to the forgetful functor  $U$  is the free functor that builds free monoids from their generator sets. The adjunction follows from the free monoid universal construction we've discussed before.

In terms of hom-sets, we can write this adjunction as:

$$\text{Mon}(F x, m) \cong \text{Set}(x, U m)$$

This (natural in  $x$  and  $m$ ) isomorphism tells us that:

- For every monoid homomorphism between the free monoid  $F x$  generated by  $x$  and an arbitrary monoid  $m$  there is a unique function that embeds the set of generators  $x$  in the underlying set of  $m$ . It's a function in  $\text{Set}(x, U m)$ .
- For every function that embeds  $x$  in the underlying set of some  $m$  there is a unique monoid morphism between the free monoid generated by  $x$  and the monoid  $m$ . (This is the morphism we called  $h$  in our universal construction.)



The intuition is that  $F x$  is the “maximum” monoid that can be built on the basis of  $x$ . If we could look inside monoids, we would see that any morphism that belongs to  $\text{Mon}(F x, m)$  *embeds* this free monoid in some other monoid  $m$ . It does it by possibly identifying some elements. In particular, it embeds the generators of  $F x$  (i.e., the elements of  $x$ ) in  $m$ . The adjunction shows that the embedding of  $x$ , which is given

by a function from  $\text{Set}(x, \cup m)$  on the right, uniquely determines the embedding of monoids on the left, and vice versa.

In Haskell, the list data structure is a free monoid (with some caveats: see [Dan Doel's blog post](#)). A list type `[a]` is a free monoid with the type `a` representing the set of generators. For instance, the type `[Char]` contains the unit element — the empty list `[]` — and the singletons like `['a']`, `['b']` — the generators of the free monoid. The rest is generated by applying the “product.” Here, the product of two lists simply appends one to another. Appending is associative and unital (that is, there is a neutral element — here, the empty list). A free monoid generated by `Char` is nothing but the set of all strings of characters from `Char`. It’s called `String` in Haskell:

```
type String = [Char]
```

(`type` defines a type synonym — a different name for an existing type).

Another interesting example is a free monoid built from just one generator. It’s the type of the list of units, `[()`. Its elements are `[]`, `[()]`, `[(), ()]`, etc. Every such list can be described by one natural number — its length. There is no more information encoded in the list of units. Appending two such lists produces a new list whose length is the sum of the lengths of its constituents. It’s easy to see that the type `[()]` is isomorphic to the additive monoid of natural numbers (with zero). Here are the two functions that are the inverse of each other, witnessing this isomorphism:

```
toNat :: [()] -> Int
toNat = length
toLst :: Int -> [()]
toLst n = replicate n ()
```

For simplicity I used the type `Int` rather than `Natural`, but the idea is the same. The function `replicate` creates a list of length `n` pre-filled with a given value — here, the unit.

## 13.1 Some Intuitions

What follows are some hand-waving arguments. Those kind of arguments are far from rigorous, but they help in forming intuitions.

To get some intuition about the free/forgetful adjunctions it helps to keep in mind that functors and functions are lossy in nature. Functors may collapse multiple objects and morphisms, functions may bunch together multiple elements of a set. Also, their image may cover only part of their codomain.

An “average” hom-set in `Set` will contain a whole spectrum of functions starting with the ones that are least lossy (e.g., injections or, possibly, isomorphisms) and ending with constant functions that collapse the whole domain to a single element (if there is one).

I tend to think of morphisms in an arbitrary category as being lossy too. It’s just a mental model, but it’s a useful one, especially when thinking of adjunctions — in particular those in which one of the categories is `Set`.

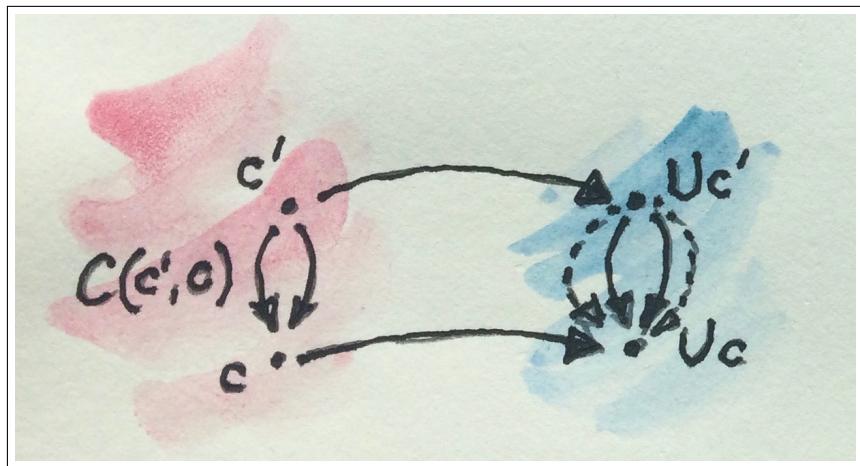
Formally, we can only speak of morphisms that are invertible (isomorphisms) or non-invertible. It’s that latter kind that may be thought of as lossy. There is also a notion of mono- and epi- morphisms that generalize the idea of injective (non-collapsing) and surjective (covering the whole codomain) functions, but it’s possible to have a morphism that is both mono and epi, and which is still non-invertible.

In the `Free`  $\dashv$  `Forgetful` adjunction, we have the more constrained category `C` on the left, and a less constrained category `D` on the right.

Morphisms in  $C$  are “fewer” because they have to preserve some additional structure. In the case of  $\text{Mon}$ , they have to preserve multiplication and unit. Morphisms in  $D$  don’t have to preserve as much structure, so there are “more” of them.

When we apply a forgetful functor  $U$  to an object  $c$  in  $C$ , we think of it as revealing the “internal structure” of  $c$ . In fact, if  $D$  is  $\text{Set}$  we think of  $U$  as *defining* the internal structure of  $c$  — its underlying set. (In an arbitrary category, we can’t talk about the internals of an object other than through its connections to other objects, but here we are just hand-waving.)

If we map two objects  $c'$  and  $c$  using  $U$ , we expect that, in general, the mapping of the hom-set  $C(c', c)$  will cover only a subset of  $D(U c', U c)$ . That’s because morphisms in  $C(c', c)$  have to preserve the additional structure, whereas the ones in  $D(U c', U c)$  don’t.

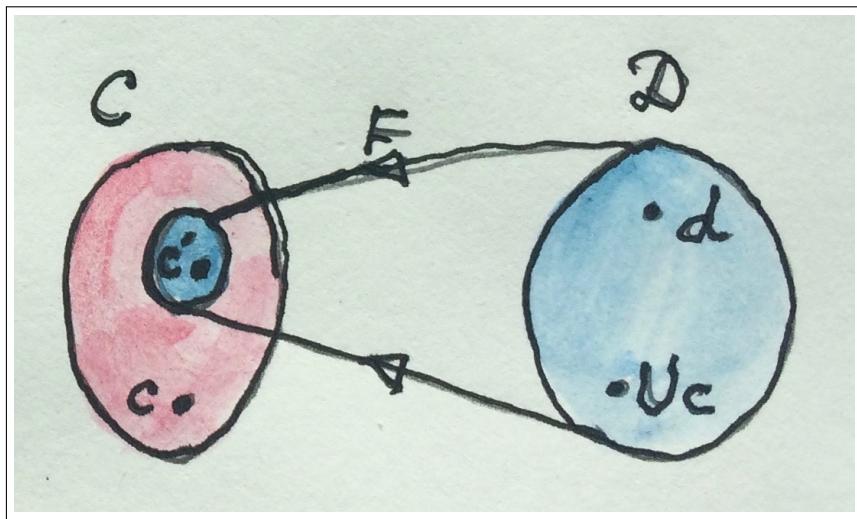


But since an adjunction is defined as an *isomorphism* of particular

hom-sets, we have to be very picky with our selection of  $c'$ . In the adjunction,  $c'$  is picked not from just anywhere in  $C$ , but from the (presumably smaller) image of the free functor  $F$ :

$$C(F d, c) \cong D(d, U c)$$

The image of  $F$  must therefore consist of objects that have lots of morphisms going to an arbitrary  $c$ . In fact, there has to be as many structure-preserving morphisms from  $F d$  to  $c$  as there are non-structure preserving morphisms from  $d$  to  $U c$ . It means that the image of  $F$  must consist of essentially structure-free objects (so that there is no structure to preserve by morphisms). Such “structure-free” objects are called free objects.



In the monoid example, a free monoid has no structure other than what's generated by unit and associativity laws. Other than that, all

multiplications produce brand new elements.

In a free monoid,  $2 * 3$  is not 6 — it's a new element  $[2, 3]$ . Since there is no identification of  $[2, 3]$  and 6, a morphism from this free monoid to any other monoid  $\mathbb{m}$  is allowed to map them separately. But it's also okay for it to map both  $[2, 3]$  and 6 (their product) to the same element of  $\mathbb{m}$ . Or to identify  $[2, 3]$  and 5 (their sum) in an additive monoid, and so on. Different identifications give you different monoids.

This leads to another interesting intuition: Free monoids, instead of performing the monoidal operation, accumulate the arguments that were passed to it. Instead of multiplying 2 and 3 they remember 2 and 3 in a list. The advantage of this scheme is that we don't have to specify what monoidal operation we will use. We can keep accumulating arguments, and only at the end apply an operator to the result. And it's then that we can chose what operator to apply. We can add the numbers, or multiply them, or perform addition modulo 2, and so on. A free monoid separates the creation of an expression from its evaluation. We'll see this idea again when we talk about algebras.

This intuition generalizes to other, more elaborate free constructions. For instance, we can accumulate whole expression trees before evaluating them. The advantage of this approach is that we can transform such trees to make the evaluation faster or less memory consuming. This is, for instance, done in implementing matrix calculus, where eager evaluation would lead to lots of allocations of temporary arrays to store intermediate results.

## 13.2 Challenges

1. Consider a free monoid built from a singleton set as its generator. Show that there is a one-to-one correspondence between

morphisms from this free monoid to any monoid  $\mathfrak{m}$ , and functions from the singleton set to the underlying set of  $\mathfrak{m}$ .

# 14

## Monads: Programmer's Definition

PROGRAMMERS HAVE DEVELOPED a whole mythology around monads. It's supposed to be one of the most abstract and difficult concepts in programming. There are people who "get it" and those who don't. For many, the moment when they understand the concept of the monad is like a mystical experience. The monad abstracts the essence of so many diverse constructions that we simply don't have a good analogy for it in everyday life. We are reduced to groping in the dark, like those blind men touching different parts of the elephant and exclaiming triumphantly: "It's a rope," "It's a tree trunk," or "It's a burrito!"

Let me set the record straight: The whole mysticism around the monad is the result of a misunderstanding. The monad is a very simple concept. It's the diversity of applications of the monad that causes the confusion.

As part of research for this post I looked up duct tape (a.k.a., duck tape) and its applications. Here's a little sample of things that you can

do with it:

- sealing ducts
- fixing CO<sub>2</sub> scrubbers on board Apollo 13
- wart treatment
- fixing Apple's iPhone 4 dropped call issue
- making a prom dress
- building a suspension bridge

Now imagine that you didn't know what duct tape was and you were trying to figure it out based on this list. Good luck!

So I'd like to add one more item to the collection of "the monad is like..." clichés: The monad is like duct tape. Its applications are widely diverse, but its principle is very simple: it glues things together. More precisely, it composes things.

This partially explains the difficulties a lot of programmers, especially those coming from the imperative background, have with understanding the monad. The problem is that we are not used to thinking of programming in terms of function composition. This is understandable. We often give names to intermediate values rather than pass them directly from function to function. We also inline short segments of glue code rather than abstract them into helper functions. Here's an imperative-style implementation of the vector-length function in C:

```
double vlen(double * v) {  
    double d = 0.0;  
    int n;  
    for (n = 0; n < 3; ++n)  
        d += v[n] * v[n];  
    return sqrt(d);  
}
```

Compare this with the (stylized) Haskell version that makes function composition explicit:

```
vlen = sqrt . sum . fmap (flip (^) 2)
```

(Here, to make things even more cryptic, I partially applied the exponentiation operator ( $\wedge$ ) by setting its second argument to 2.)

I'm not arguing that Haskell's point-free style is always better, just that function composition is at the bottom of everything we do in programming. And even though we are effectively composing functions, Haskell does go to great lengths to provide imperative-style syntax called the do notation for monadic composition. We'll see its use later. But first, let me explain why we need monadic composition in the first place.

## 14.1 The Kleisli Category

We have previously arrived at the **writer monad** by embellishing regular functions. The particular embellishment was done by pairing their return values with strings or, more generally, with elements of a monoid. We can now recognize that such embellishment is a functor:

```
newtype Writer w a = Writer (a, w)

instance Functor (Writer w) where
    fmap f (Writer (a, w)) = Writer (f a, w)
```

We have subsequently found a way of composing embellished functions, or Kleisli arrows, which are functions of the form:

```
a -> Writer w b
```

It was inside the composition that we implemented the accumulation of the log.

We are now ready for a more general definition of the Kleisli category. We start with a category  $C$  and an endofunctor  $\mathbf{m}$ . The corresponding Kleisli category  $K$  has the same objects as  $C$ , but its morphisms are different. A morphism between two objects  $a$  and  $b$  in  $K$  is implemented as a morphism:

```
a -> m b
```

in the original category  $C$ . It's important to keep in mind that we treat a Kleisli arrow in  $K$  as a morphism between  $a$  and  $b$ , and not between  $a$  and  $\mathbf{m} b$ .

In our example,  $\mathbf{m}$  was specialized to `Writer w`, for some fixed monoid  $w$ .

Kleisli arrows form a category only if we can define proper composition for them. If there is a composition, which is associative and has an identity arrow for every object, then the functor  $\mathbf{m}$  is called a *monad*, and the resulting category is called the Kleisli category.

In Haskell, Kleisli composition is defined using the fish operator `>=`, and the identity arrow is a polymorphic function called `return`. Here's the definition of a monad using Kleisli composition:

```
class Monad m where
  (>=) :: (a -> m b) -> (b -> m c) -> (a -> m c)
  return :: a -> m a
```

Keep in mind that there are many equivalent ways of defining a monad, and that this is not the primary one in the Haskell ecosystem. I like it for its conceptual simplicity and the intuition it provides, but there are

other definitions that are more convenient when programming. We'll talk about them momentarily.

In this formulation, monad laws are very easy to express. They cannot be enforced in Haskell, but they can be used for equational reasoning. They are simply the standard composition laws for the Kleisli category:

```
(f >=> g) >=> h = f >=> (g >=> h) -- associativity
return >=> f = f                         -- left
unit f >=> return = f                      -- right unit
```

This kind of a definition also expresses what a monad really is: it's a way of composing embellished functions. It's not about side effects or state. It's about composition. As we'll see later, embellished functions may be used to express a variety of effects or state, but that's not what the monad is for. The monad is the sticky duct tape that ties one end of an embellished function to the other end of an embellished function.

Going back to our `Writer` example: The logging functions (the Kleisli arrows for the `Writer` functor) form a category because `Writer` is a monad:

```
instance Monoid w => Monad (Writer w) where
    f >=> g = \a ->
        let Writer (b, s) = f a
            Writer (c, s') = g b
        in Writer (c, s `mappend` s')
    return a = Writer (a, mempty)
```

Monad laws for `Writer w` are satisfied as long as monoid laws for `w` are satisfied (they can't be enforced in Haskell either).

There's a useful Kleisli arrow defined for the `Writer` monad called `tell`. It's sole purpose is to add its argument to the log:

```
tell :: w -> Writer w ()  
tell s = Writer ((()), s)
```

We'll use it later as a building block for other monadic functions.

## 14.2 Fish Anatomy

When implementing the fish operator for different monads you quickly realize that a lot of code is repeated and can be easily factored out. To begin with, the Kleisli composition of two functions must return a function, so its implementation may as well start with a lambda taking an argument of type `a`:

```
(>=>) :: (a -> m b) -> (b -> m c) -> (a -> m c)  
f >=> g = \a -> ...
```

The only thing we can do with this argument is to pass it to `f`:

```
f >=> g = \a -> let mb = f a  
in ...
```

At this point we have to produce the result of type `m c`, having at our disposal an object of type `m b` and a function `g :: b -> m c`. Let's define a function that does that for us. This function is called *bind* and is usually written in the form of an infix operator:

```
(>>=) :: m a -> (a -> m b) -> m b
```

For every monad, instead of defining the fish operator, we may instead define bind. In fact the standard Haskell definition of a monad uses bind:

```
class Monad m where
  (">>=) :: m a -> (a -> m b) -> m b
  return :: a -> m a
```

Here's the definition of bind for the Writer monad:

```
(Writer (a, w)) >= f = let Writer (b, w') = f a
                           in Writer (b, w `mappend` w')
```

It is indeed shorter than the definition of the fish operator.

It's possible to further dissect bind, taking advantage of the fact that  $m$  is a functor. We can use `fmap` to apply the function  $a \rightarrow m b$  to the contents of  $m a$ . This will turn  $a$  into  $m b$ . The result of the application is therefore of type  $m (m b)$ . This is not exactly what we want — we need the result of type  $m b$  — but we're close. All we need is a function that collapses or flattens the double application of  $m$ . Such function is called `join`:

```
join :: m (m a) -> m a
```

Using `join`, we can rewrite bind as:

```
ma >= f = join (fmap f ma)
```

That leads us to the third option for defining a monad:

```
class Functor m => Monad m where
  join :: m (m a) -> m a
  return :: a -> m a
```

Here we have explicitly requested that `m` be a Functor. We didn't have to do that in the previous two definitions of the monad. That's because any type constructor `m` that either supports the fish or bind operator is automatically a functor. For instance, it's possible to define `fmap` in terms of bind and `return`:

```
fmap f ma = ma >>= \a -> return (f a)
```

For completeness, here's `join` for the `Writer` monad:

```
join :: Monoid w => Writer w (Writer w a) -> Writer w a
join (Writer ((Writer (a, w'))), w)) = Writer (a, w `mappend` w')
```

## 14.3 The do Notation

One way of writing code using monads is to work with Kleisli arrows — composing them using the fish operator. This mode of programming is the generalization of the point-free style. Point-free code is compact and often quite elegant. In general, though, it can be hard to understand, bordering on cryptic. That's why most programmers prefer to give names to function arguments and intermediate values.

When dealing with monads it means favoring the bind operator over the fish operator. Bind takes a monadic value and returns a monadic value. The programmer may choose to give names to those values. But that's hardly an improvement. What we really want is to pretend that we are dealing with regular values, not the monadic containers that encapsulate them. That's how imperative code works — side effects, such as updating a global log, are mostly hidden from view. And that's what the do notation emulates in Haskell.

You might be wondering then, why use monads at all? If we want to make side effects invisible, why not stick to an imperative language? The answer is that the monad gives us much better control over side effects. For instance, the log in the Writer monad is passed from function to function and is never exposed globally. There is no possibility of garbling the log or creating a data race. Also, monadic code is clearly demarcated and cordoned off from the rest of the program.

The do notation is just syntactic sugar for monadic composition. On the surface, it looks a lot like imperative code, but it translates directly to a sequence of binds and lambda expressions.

For instance, take the example we used previously to illustrate the composition of Kleisli arrows in the Writer monad. Using our current definitions, it could be rewritten as:

```
process :: String -> Writer String [String]
process = upCase >=> toWords
```

This function turns all characters in the input string to upper case and splits it into words, all the while producing a log of its actions.

In the do notation it would look like this:

```
process s = do
    upStr <- upCase s
    toWords upStr
```

Here, upStr is just a String, even though upCase produces a Writer:

```
upCase :: String -> Writer String String
upCase s = Writer (map toUpper s, "upCase ")
```

This is because the do block is desugared by the compiler to:

```
process s =  
    upCase s >>= \upStr ->  
        toWords upStr
```

The monadic result of `upCase` is bound to a lambda that takes a `String`. It's the name of this string that shows up in the `do` block. When reading the line:

```
upStr <- upCase s
```

we say that `upStr` *gets* the result of `upCase s`.

The pseudo-imperative style is even more pronounced when we inline `toWords`. We replace it with the call to `tell`, which logs the string "`toWords`", followed by the call to `return` with the result of splitting the string `upStr` using `words`. Notice that `words` is a regular function working on strings.

```
process s = do  
    upStr <- upCase s  
    tell "toWords"  
    return (words upStr)
```

Here, each line in the `do` block introduces a new nested bind in the desugared code:

```
process s =  
    upCase s >>= \upStr ->  
        tell "toWords" >>= \() ->  
            return (words upStr)
```

Notice that `tell` produces a unit value, so it doesn't have to be passed to the following lambda. Ignoring the contents of a monadic result (but not its effect — here, the contribution to the log) is quite common, so there is a special operator to replace bind in that case:

```
(>>) :: m a -> m b -> m b m  
>> k = m >>= (\_ -> k)
```

The actual desugaring of our code looks like this:

```
process s =  
    upCase s >>= \upStr ->  
        tell "toWords" >>  
            return (words upStr)
```

In general, do blocks consist of lines (or sub-blocks) that either use the left arrow to introduce new names that are then available in the rest of the code, or are executed purely for side-effects. Bind operators are implicit between the lines of code. Incidentally, it is possible, in Haskell, to replace the formatting in the do blocks with braces and semicolons. This provides the justification for describing the monad as a way of overloading the semicolon.

Notice that the nesting of lambdas and bind operators when desugaring the do notation has the effect of influencing the execution of the rest of the do block based on the result of each line. This property can be used to introduce complex control structures, for instance to simulate exceptions.

Interestingly, the equivalent of the do notation has found its application in imperative languages, C++ in particular. I'm talking about resumable functions or coroutines. It's not a secret that C++ **futures** form

a monad. It's an example of the continuation monad, which we'll discuss shortly. The problem with continuations is that they are very hard to compose. In Haskell, we use the do notation to turn the spaghetti of "my handler will call your handler" into something that looks very much like sequential code. Resumable functions make the same transformation possible in C++. And the same mechanism can be applied to turn the spaghetti of nested loops into list comprehensions or "generators," which are essentially the do notation for the list monad. Without the unifying abstraction of the monad, each of these problems is typically addressed by providing custom extensions to the language. In Haskell, this is all dealt with through libraries.

# 15

## Monads and Effects

NOW THAT WE KNOW what the monad is for — it lets us compose embellished functions — the really interesting question is why embellished functions are so important in functional programming. We've already seen one example, the `Writer` monad, where embellishment let us create and accumulate a log across multiple function calls. A problem that would otherwise be solved using impure functions (e.g., by accessing and modifying some global state) was solved with pure functions.

### 15.1 The Problem

Here is a short list of similar problems, copied from [Eugenio Moggi's seminal paper](#), all of which are traditionally solved by abandoning the purity of functions.

- Partiality: Computations that may not terminate

- Nondeterminism: Computations that may return many results
- Side effects: Computations that access/modify state
  - Read-only state, or the environment
  - Write-only state, or a log
  - Read/write state
- Exceptions: Partial functions that may fail
- Continuations: Ability to save state of the program and then restore it on demand
- Interactive Input
- Interactive Output

What really is mind blowing is that all these problems may be solved using the same clever trick: turning to embellished functions. Of course, the embellishment will be totally different in each case.

You have to realize that, at this stage, there is no requirement that the embellishment be monadic. It's only when we insist on composition — being able to decompose a single embellished function into smaller embellished functions — that we need a monad. Again, since each of the embellishments is different, monadic composition will be implemented differently, but the overall pattern is the same. It's a very simple pattern: composition that is associative and equipped with identity.

The next section is heavy on Haskell examples. Feel free to skim or even skip it if you're eager to get back to category theory or if you're already familiar with Haskell's implementation of monads.

## 15.2 The Solution

First, let's analyze the way we used the `Writer` monad. We started with a pure function that performed a certain task — given arguments, it pro-

duced a certain output. We replaced this function with another function that embellished the original output by pairing it with a string. That was our solution to the logging problem.

We couldn't stop there because, in general, we don't want to deal with monolithic solutions. We needed to be able to decompose one log-producing function into smaller log-producing functions. It's the composition of those smaller functions that led us to the concept of a monad.

What's really amazing is that the same pattern of embellishing the function return types works for a large variety of problems that normally would require abandoning purity. Let's go through our list and identify the embellishment that applies to each problem in turn.

### 15.2.1 Partiality

We modify the return type of every function that may not terminate by turning it into a “lifted” type — a type that contains all values of the original type plus the special “bottom” value  $\perp$ . For instance, the Bool type, as a set, would contain two elements: True and False. The lifted Bool contains three elements. Functions that return the lifted Bool may produce True or False, or execute forever.

The funny thing is that, in a lazy language like Haskell, a never-ending function may actually return a value, and this value may be passed to the next function. We call this special value the bottom. As long as this value is not explicitly needed (for instance, to be pattern matched, or produced as output), it may be passed around without stalling the execution of the program. Because every Haskell function may be potentially non-terminating, all types in Haskell are assumed to be lifted. This is why we often talk about the category **Hask** of Haskell (lifted) types and functions rather than the simpler **Set**. It is not clear,

though, that Hask is a real category (see this [Andrej Bauer post](#)).

### 15.2.2 Nondeterminism

If a function can return many different results, it may as well return them all at once. Semantically, a non-deterministic function is equivalent to a function that returns a list of results. This makes a lot of sense in a lazy garbage-collected language. For instance, if all you need is one value, you can just take the head of the list, and the tail will never be evaluated. If you need a random value, use a random number generator to pick the n-th element of the list. Laziness even allows you to return an infinite list of results.

In the list monad — Haskell’s implementation of nondeterministic computations — `join` is implemented as `concat`. Remember that `join` is supposed to flatten a container of containers — `concat` concatenates a list of lists into a single list. `return` creates a singleton list:

```
instance Monad [] where
    join = concat
    return x = [x]
```

The bind operator for the list monad is given by the general formula: `fmap` followed by `join` which, in this case gives:

```
as >>= k = concat (fmap k as)
```

Here, the function `k`, which itself produces a list, is applied to every element of the list `as`. The result is a list of lists, which is flattened using `concat`.

From the programmer’s point of view, working with a list is easier than, for instance, calling a non-deterministic function in a loop, or

implementing a function that returns an iterator (although, [in modern C++](#), returning a lazy range would be almost equivalent to returning a list in Haskell).

A good example of using non-determinism creatively is in game programming. For instance, when a computer plays chess against a human, it can't predict the opponent's next move. It can, however, generate a list of all possible moves and analyze them one by one. Similarly, a non-deterministic parser may generate a list of all possible parses for a given expression.

Even though we may interpret functions returning lists as non-deterministic, the applications of the list monad are much wider. That's because stitching together computations that produce lists is a perfect functional substitute for iterative constructs — loops — that are used in imperative programming. A single loop can be often rewritten using `fmap` that applies the body of the loop to each element of the list. The `do` notation in the list monad can be used to replace complex nested loops.

My favorite example is the program that generates Pythagorean triples — triples of positive integers that can form sides of right triangles.

```
triples = do
    z <- [1..]
    x <- [1..z]
    y <- [x..z]
    guard (x^2 + y^2 == z^2)
    return (x, y, z)
```

The first line tells us that `z` gets an element from an infinite list of positive numbers `[1..]`. Then `x` gets an element from the (finite) list

$[1..z]$  of numbers between 1 and z. Finally y gets an element from the list of numbers between x and z. We have three numbers  $1 \leq x \leq y \leq z$  at our disposal. The function guard takes a Bool expression and returns a list of units:

```
guard :: Bool -> [()]
guard True = [()]
guard False = []
```

This function (which is a member of a larger class called `MonadPlus`) is used here to filter out non-Pythagorean triples. Indeed, if you look at the implementation of bind (or the related operator `>>`), you'll notice that, when given an empty list, it produces an empty list. On the other hand, when given a non-empty list (here, the singleton list containing unit `[()]`), bind will call the continuation, here return  $(x, y, z)$ , which produces a singleton list with a verified Pythagorean triple. All those singleton lists will be concatenated by the enclosing binds to produce the final (infinite) result. Of course, the caller of `triples` will never be able to consume the whole list, but that doesn't matter, because Haskell is lazy.

The problem that normally would require a set of three nested loops has been dramatically simplified with the help of the list monad and the `do` notation. As if that weren't enough, Haskell let's you simplify this code even further using list comprehension:

```
triples = [(x, y, z) | z <- [1..]
                      , x <- [1..z]
                      , y <- [x..z]
                      , x^2 + y^2 == z^2]
```

This is just further syntactic sugar for the list monad (strictly speaking, `MonadPlus`).

You might see similar constructs in other functional or imperative languages under the guise of generators and coroutines.

### 15.2.3 Read-Only State

A function that has read-only access to some external state, or environment, can be always replaced by a function that takes that environment as an additional argument. A pure function  $(a, e) \rightarrow b$  (where  $e$  is the type of the environment) doesn't look, at first sight, like a Kleisli arrow. But as soon as we curry it to  $a \rightarrow (e \rightarrow b)$  we recognize the embellishment as our old friend the reader functor:

```
newtype Reader e a = Reader (e -> a)
```

You may interpret a function returning a `Reader` as producing a mini-executable: an action that given an environment produces the desired result. There is a helper function `runReader` to execute such an action:

```
runReader :: Reader e a -> e -> a  
runReader (Reader f) e = f e
```

It may produce different results for different values of the environment.

Notice that both the function returning a `Reader`, and the `Reader` action itself are pure.

To implement bind for the `Reader` monad, first notice that you have to produce a function that takes the environment  $e$  and produces a  $b$ :

```
ra >>= k = Reader (\e -> ...)
```

Inside the lambda, we can execute the action `ra` to produce an  $a$ :

```
ra >>= k = Reader (\e -> let a = runReader ra e  
in ...)
```

We can then pass the a to the continuation k to get a new action rb:

```
ra >>= k = Reader (\e -> let a = runReader ra e  
rb = k a  
in ...)
```

Finally, we can run the action rb with the environment e:

```
ra >>= k = Reader (\e -> let a = runReader ra e  
rb = k a  
in runReader rb e)
```

To implement return we create an action that ignores the environment and returns the unchanged value.

Putting it all together, after a few simplifications, we get the following definition:

```
instance Monad (Reader e) where  
  ra >>= k = Reader (\e -> runReader (k (runReader ra e)) e)  
  return x = Reader (\e -> x)
```

#### 15.2.4 Write-Only State

This is just our initial logging example. The embellishment is given by the Writer functor:

```
newtype Writer w a = Writer (a, w)
```

For completeness, there's also a trivial helper `runWriter` that unpacks the data constructor:

```
runWriter :: Writer w a -> (a, w)
runWriter (Writer (a, w)) = (a, w)
```

As we've seen before, in order to make `Writer` composable, `w` has to be a monoid. Here's the monad instance for `Writer` written in terms of the bind operator:

```
instance (Monoid w) => Monad (Writer w) where
    (Writer (a, w)) >>= k = let (a', w') = runWriter (k a)
                                in Writer (a', w' `mappend` w')
    return a = Writer (a, mempty)
```

### 15.2.5 State

Functions that have read/write access to state combine the embellishments of the `Reader` and the `Writer`. You may think of them as pure functions that take the state as an extra argument and produce a pair value/state as a result:  $(a, s) \rightarrow (b, s)$ . After currying, we get them into the form of Kleisli arrows  $a \rightarrow (s \rightarrow (b, s))$ , with the embellishment abstracted in the `State` functor:

```
newtype State s a = State (s -> (a, s))
```

Again, we can look at a Kleisli arrow as returning an action, which can be executed using the helper function:

```
runState :: State s a -> s -> (a, s)
runState (State f) s = f s
```

Different initial states may not only produce different results, but also different final states.

The implementation of bind for the State monad is very similar to that of the Reader monad, except that care has to be taken to pass the correct state at each step:

```
sa >>= k = State (\s -> let (a, s') = runState sa s
                      sb = k a
                      in runState sb s')
```

Here's the full instance:

```
instance Monad (State s) where
    sa >>= k = State (\s -> let (a, s') = runState sa s
                           in runState (k a) s')
    return a = State (\s -> (a, s))
```

There are also two helper Kleisli arrows that may be used to manipulate the state. One of them retrieves the state for inspection:

```
get :: State s s
get = State (\s -> (s, s))
```

and the other replaces it with a completely new state:

```
put :: s -> State s ()
put s' = State (\s -> (((), s')))
```

### 15.2.6 Exceptions

An imperative function that throws an exception is really a partial function — it's a function that's not defined for some values of its arguments. The simplest implementation of exceptions in terms of pure total functions uses the `Maybe` functor. A partial function is extended to a total function that returns `Just a` whenever it makes sense, and `Nothing` when it doesn't. If we want to also return some information about the cause of the failure, we can use the `Either` functor instead (with the first type fixed, for instance, to `String`).

Here's the Monad instance for `Maybe`:

```
instance Monad Maybe where
    Nothing >>= k = Nothing
    Just a >>= k = k a
    return a = Just a
```

Notice that monadic composition for `Maybe` correctly short-circuits the computation (the continuation `k` is never called) when an error is detected. That's the behavior we expect from exceptions.

### 15.2.7 Continuations

It's the “Don't call us, we'll call you!” situation you may experience after a job interview. Instead of getting a direct answer, you are supposed to provide a handler, a function to be called with the result. This style of programming is especially useful when the result is not known at the time of the call because, for instance, it's being evaluated by another thread or delivered from a remote web site. A Kleisli arrow in this case returns a function that accepts a handler, which represents “the rest of the computation”:

```
data Cont r a = Cont ((a -> r) -> r)
```

The handler  $a \rightarrow r$ , when it's eventually called, produces the result of type  $r$ , and this result is returned at the end. A continuation is parameterized by the result type. (In practice, this is often some kind of status indicator.)

There is also a helper function for executing the action returned by the Kleisli arrow. It takes the handler and passes it to the continuation:

```
runCont :: Cont r a -> (a -> r) -> r
runCont (Cont k) h = k h
```

The composition of continuations is notoriously difficult, so its handling through a monad and, in particular, the do notation, is of extreme advantage.

Let's figure out the implementation of bind. First let's look at the stripped down signature:

```
(>>=) :: ((a -> r) -> r) ->
           (a -> (b -> r) -> r) ->
           ((b -> r) -> r)
```

Our goal is to create a function that takes the handler  $(b \rightarrow r)$  and produces the result  $r$ . So that's our starting point:

```
ka >>= kab = Cont (\hb -> ...)
```

Inside the lambda, we want to call the function  $ka$  with the appropriate handler that represents the rest of the computation. We'll implement this handler as a lambda:

```
runCont ka (\a -> ...)
```

In this case, the rest of the computation involves first calling `kab` with `a`, and then passing `hb` to the resulting action `kb`:

```
runCont ka (\a -> let kb = kab a  
              in runCont kb hb)
```

As you can see, continuations are composed inside out. The final handler `hb` is called from the innermost layer of the computation. Here's the full instance:

```
instance Monad (Cont r) where  
    ka >>= kab = Cont (\hb -> runCont ka (\a -> runCont (kab a) hb))  
    return a = Cont (\ha -> ha a)
```

### 15.2.8 Interactive Input

This is the trickiest problem and a source of a lot of confusion. Clearly, a function like `getChar`, if it were to return a character typed at the keyboard, couldn't be pure. But what if it returned the character inside a container? As long as there was no way of extracting the character from this container, we could claim that the function is pure. Every time you call `getChar` it would return exactly the same container. Conceptually, this container would contain the superposition of all possible characters.

If you're familiar with quantum mechanics, you should have no problem understanding this analogy. It's just like the box with the Schrödinger's cat inside — except that there is no way to open or peek inside the box. The box is defined using the special built-in `IO` functor. In our example, `getChar` could be declared as a Kleisli arrow:

```
getChar :: () -> IO Char
```

(Actually, since a function from the unit type is equivalent to picking a value of the return type, the declaration of `getChar` is simplified to `getChar :: IO Char.`)

Being a functor, `IO` lets you manipulate its contents using `fmap`. And, as a functor, it can store the contents of any type, not just a character. The real utility of this approach comes to light when you consider that, in Haskell, `IO` is a monad. It means that you are able to compose Kleisli arrows that produce `IO` objects.

You might think that Kleisli composition would allow you to peek at the contents of the `IO` object (thus “collapsing the wave function,” if we were to continue the quantum analogy). Indeed, you could compose `getChar` with another Kleisli arrow that takes a character and, say, converts it to an integer. The catch is that this second Kleisli arrow could only return this integer as an `(IO Int)`. Again, you’ll end up with a superposition of all possible integers. And so on. The Schrödinger’s cat is never out of the bag. Once you are inside the `IO` monad, there is no way out of it. There is no equivalent of `runState` or `runReader` for the `IO` monad. There is no `runIO!`

So what can you do with the result of a Kleisli arrow, the `IO` object, other than compose it with another Kleisli arrow? Well, you can return it from `main`. In Haskell, `main` has the signature:

```
main :: IO ()
```

and you are free to think of it as a Kleisli arrow:

```
main :: () -> IO ()
```

From that perspective, a Haskell program is just one big Kleisli arrow in the `IO` monad. You can compose it from smaller Kleisli arrows using

monadic composition. It's up to the runtime system to do something with the resulting `IO` object (also called `IO` action).

Notice that the arrow itself is a pure function — it's pure functions all the way down. The dirty work is relegated to the system. When it finally executes the `IO` action returned from `main`, it does all kinds of nasty things like reading user input, modifying files, printing obnoxious messages, formatting a disk, and so on. The Haskell program never dirties its hands (well, except when it calls `unsafePerformIO`, but that's a different story).

Of course, because Haskell is lazy, `main` returns almost immediately, and the dirty work begins right away. It's during the execution of the `IO` action that the results of pure computations are requested and evaluated on demand. So, in reality, the execution of a program is an interleaving of pure (Haskell) and dirty (system) code.

There is an alternative interpretation of the `IO` monad that is even more bizarre but makes perfect sense as a mathematical model. It treats the whole Universe as an object in a program. Notice that, conceptually, the imperative model treats the Universe as an external global object, so procedures that perform I/O have side effects by virtue of interacting with that object. They can both read and modify the state of the Universe.

We already know how to deal with state in functional programming — we use the state monad. Unlike simple state, however, the state of the Universe cannot be easily described using standard data structures. But we don't have to, as long as we never directly interact with it. It's enough that we assume that there exists a type `RealWorld` and, by some miracle of cosmic engineering, the runtime is able to provide an object of this type. An `IO` action is just a function:

```
type IO a = RealWorld -> (a, RealWorld)
```

Or, in terms of the State monad:

```
type IO = State RealWorld
```

However, `>=>` and `return` for the `IO` monad have to be built into the language.

### 15.2.9 Interactive Output

The same `IO` monad is used to encapsulate interactive output. `RealWorld` is supposed to contain all output devices. You might wonder why we can't just call output functions from Haskell and pretend that they do nothing. For instance, why do we have:

```
putStr :: String -> IO ()
```

rather than the simpler:

```
putStr :: String -> ()
```

Two reasons: Haskell is lazy, so it would never call a function whose output — here, the unit object — is not used for anything. And, even if it weren't lazy, it could still freely change the order of such calls and thus garble the output. The only way to force sequential execution of two functions in Haskell is through data dependency. The input of one function must depend on the output of another. Having `RealWorld` passed between `IO` actions enforces sequencing.

Conceptually, in this program:

```
main :: IO ()  
main = do  
    putStrLn "Hello "  
    putStrLn "World!"
```

the action that prints “World!” receives, as input, the Universe in which “Hello” is already on the screen. It outputs a new Universe, with “Hello World!” on the screen.

### 15.3 Conclusion

Of course I have just scratched the surface of monadic programming. Monads not only accomplish, with pure functions, what normally is done with side effects in imperative programming, but they also do it with a high degree of control and type safety. They are not without drawbacks, though. The major complaint about monads is that they don’t easily compose with each other. Granted, you can combine most of the basic monads using the monad transformer library. It’s relatively easy to create a monad stack that combines, say, state with exceptions, but there is no formula for stacking arbitrary monads together.

# 16

## Monads Categorically

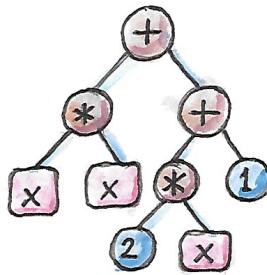
IF YOU MENTION MONADS to a programmer, you'll probably end up talking about effects. To a mathematician, monads are about algebras. We'll talk about algebras later — they play an important role in programming — but first I'd like to give you a little intuition about their relation to monads. For now, it's a bit of a hand-waving argument, but bear with me.

Algebra is about creating, manipulating, and evaluating expressions. Expressions are built using operators. Consider this simple expression:

$$x^2 + 2x + 1$$

This expression is formed using variables like  $x$ , and constants like 1 or 2, bound together with operators like plus or times. As programmers, we often think of expressions as trees.

Trees are containers so, more generally, an expression is a container for storing variables. In category theory, we represent containers as endofunctors. If we assign the type  $a$  to the variable  $x$ , our expression will have the type  $m\ a$ , where  $m$  is an endofunctor that builds expression trees. (Nontrivial branching expressions are usually created using recursively defined endofunctors.)



What's the most common operation that can be performed on an expression? It's substitution: replacing variables with expressions. For instance, in our example, we could replace  $x$  with  $y - 1$  to get:

$$(y - 1)^2 + 2(y - 1) + 1$$

Here's what happened: We took an expression of type  $m\ a$  and applied a transformation of type  $a \rightarrow m\ b$  ( $b$  represents the type of  $y$ ). The result is an expression of type  $m\ b$ . Let me spell it out:

$$m\ a \rightarrow (a \rightarrow m\ b) \rightarrow m\ b$$

Yes, that's the signature of monadic bind.

That was a bit of motivation. Now let's get to the math of the monad. Mathematicians use different notation than programmers. They prefer to use the letter  $T$  for the endofunctor, and Greek letters:  $\mu$  for join and  $\eta$  for return. Both join and return are polymorphic functions, so we can guess that they correspond to natural transformations.

Therefore, in category theory, a monad is defined as an endofunctor  $T$  equipped with a pair of natural transformations  $\mu$  and  $\eta$ .

$\mu$  is a natural transformation from the square of the functor  $T^2$  back to  $T$ . The square is simply the functor composed with itself,  $T \circ T$  (we can only do this kind of squaring for endofunctors).

$$\mu :: T^2 \rightarrow T$$

The component of this natural transformation at an object  $a$  is the morphism:

$$\mu_a :: T(T a) \rightarrow T a$$

which, in *Hask*, translates directly to our definition of `join`.

$\eta$  is a natural transformation between the identity functor  $I$  and  $T$ :

$$\eta :: I \rightarrow T$$

Considering that the action of  $I$  on the object  $a$  is just  $a$ , the component of  $\eta$  is given by the morphism:

$$\eta_a :: a \rightarrow T a$$

which translates directly to our definition of `return`.

These natural transformations must satisfy some additional laws. One way of looking at it is that these laws let us define a Kleisli category for the endofunctor  $T$ . Remember that a Kleisli arrow between  $a$  and  $b$  is defined as a morphism  $a \rightarrow T b$ . The composition of two such arrows ( $I'll$  write it as a circle with the subscript  $T$ ) can be implemented using  $\mu$ :

$$g \circ_T f = \mu_c \circ (T g) \circ f$$

where

```
f :: a -> T b  
g :: b -> T c
```

Here  $T$ , being a functor, can be applied to the morphism  $g$ . It might be easier to recognize this formula in Haskell notation:

```
f >=> g = join . fmap g . f
```

or, in components:

```
(f >=> g) a = join (fmap g (f a))
```

In terms of the algebraic interpretation, we are just composing two successive substitutions.

For Kleisli arrows to form a category we want their composition to be associative, and  $\eta_a$  to be the identity Kleisli arrow at  $a$ . This requirement can be translated to monadic laws for  $\mu$  and  $\eta$ . But there is another way of deriving these laws that makes them look more like monoid laws. In fact  $\mu$  is often called multiplication, and  $\eta$  unit.

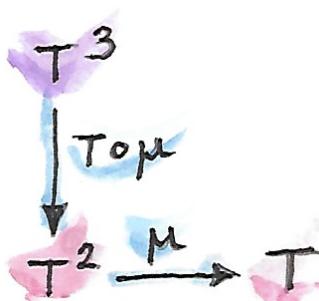
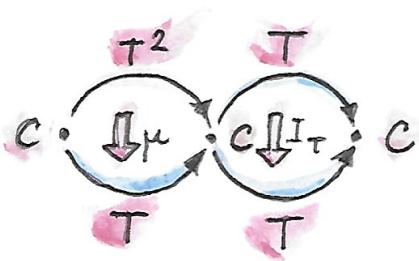
Roughly speaking, the associativity law states that the two ways of reducing the cube of  $T$ ,  $T^3$ , down to  $T$  must give the same result. Two unit laws (left and right) state that when  $\eta$  is applied to  $T$  and then reduced by  $\mu$ , we get back  $T$ .

Things are a little tricky because we are composing natural transformations and functors. So a little refresher on horizontal composition is in order. For instance,  $T^3$  can be seen as a composition of  $T$  after  $T^2$ . We can apply to it the horizontal composition of two natural transformations:

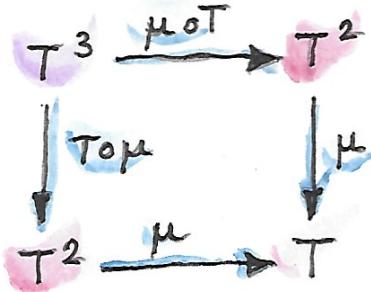
```
I_T ∘ μ
```

and get  $T \circ T$ ; which can be further reduced to  $T$  by applying  $\mu$ .  $I_T$  is the identity natural transformation from  $T$  to  $T$ . You will often see the notation for this type of horizontal composition  $I_T \circ \mu$  shortened to  $T \circ \mu$ . This notation is unambiguous because it makes no sense to compose a functor with a natural transformation, therefore  $T$  must mean  $I_T$  in this context.

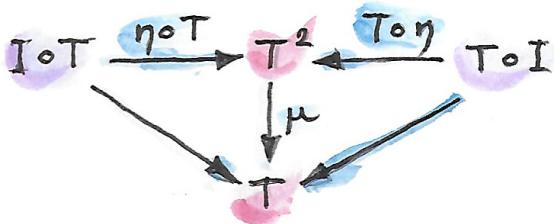
We can also draw the diagram in the (endo-) functor category  $[C, C]$ :



Alternatively, we can treat  $T^3$  as the composition of  $T^2 \circ T$  and apply  $\mu \circ T$  to it. The result is also  $T \circ T$  which, again, can be reduced to  $T$  using  $\mu$ . We require that the two paths produce the same result.



Similarly, we can apply the horizontal composition  $\eta \circ T$  to the composition of the identity functor  $I$  after  $T$  to obtain  $T^2$ , which can then be reduced using  $\mu$ . The result should be the same as if we applied the identity natural transformation directly to  $T$ . And, by analogy, the same should be true for  $T \circ \eta$ .



You can convince yourself that these laws guarantee that the composition of Kleisli arrows indeed satisfies the laws of a category.

The similarities between a monad and a monoid are striking. We have multiplication  $\mu$ , unit  $\eta$ , associativity, and unit laws. But our definition of a monoid is too narrow to describe a monad as a monoid. So let's generalize the notion of a monoid.

## 16.1 Monoidal Categories

Let's go back to the conventional definition of a monoid. It's a set with a binary operation and a special element called unit. In Haskell, this can be expressed as a typeclass:

```
class Monoid m where
    mappend :: m -> m -> m
    mempty  :: m
```

The binary operation `mappend` must be associative and unital (i.e., multiplication by the unit `mempty` is a no-op).

Notice that, in Haskell, the definition of `mappend` is curried. It can be interpreted as mapping every element of `m` to a function:

```
mappend :: m -> (m -> m)
```

It's this interpretation that gives rise to the definition of a monoid as a single-object category where endomorphisms (`m -> m`) represent the elements of the monoid. But because currying is built into Haskell, we could as well have started with a different definition of multiplication:

```
mu :: (m, m) -> m
```

Here, the cartesian product (`m, m`) becomes the source of pairs to be multiplied.

This definition suggests a different path to generalization: replacing the cartesian product with categorical product. We could start with a category where products are globally defined, pick an object `m` there, and define multiplication as a morphism:

```
 $\mu :: m \times m \rightarrow m$ 
```

We have one problem though: In an arbitrary category we can't peek inside an object, so how do we pick the unit element? There is a trick to it. Remember how element selection is equivalent to a function from the singleton set? In Haskell, we could replace the definition of `mempty` with a function:

```
 $\text{eta} :: () \rightarrow m$ 
```

The singleton is the terminal object in `Set`, so it's natural to generalize this definition to any category that has a terminal object `t`:

```
 $\eta :: t \rightarrow m$ 
```

This lets us pick the unit "element" without having to talk about elements.

Unlike in our previous definition of a monoid as a single-object category, monoidal laws here are not automatically satisfied — we have to impose them. But in order to formulate them we have to establish the monoidal structure of the underlying categorical product itself. Let's recall how monoidal structure works in Haskell first.

We start with associativity. In Haskell, the corresponding equational law is:

$$\text{mu } x \cdot (\text{mu } y \cdot z) = \text{mu } (\text{mu } x \cdot y) \cdot z$$

Before we can generalize it to other categories, we have to rewrite it as an equality of functions (morphisms). We have to abstract it away from its action on individual variables — in other words, we have to use point-free notation. Knowing that the cartesian product is a bifunctor, we can write the left hand side as:

```
(mu . bimap id mu)(x, (y, z))
```

and the right hand side as:

```
(mu . bimap mu id)((x, y), z)
```

This is almost what we want. Unfortunately, the cartesian product is not strictly associative —  $(x, (y, z))$  is not the same as  $((x, y), z)$  — so we can't just write point-free:

```
mu . bimap id mu = mu . bimap mu id
```

On the other hand, the two nestings of pairs are isomorphic. There is an invertible function called the associator that converts between them:

```
alpha :: ((a, b), c) -> (a, (b, c))
alpha ((x, y), z) = (x, (y, z))
```

With the help of the associator, we can write the point-free associativity law for `mu`:

```
mu . bimap id mu . alpha = mu . bimap mu id
```

We can apply a similar trick to unit laws which, in the new notation, take the form:

```
mu (eta (), x) = x mu (x, eta ()) = x
```

They can be rewritten as:

```
(mu . bimap eta id) (((), x) = lambda(((), x)
(mu . bimap id eta) (x, ()) = rho (x, ())
```

The isomorphisms `lambda` and `rho` are called the left and right unitor, respectively. They witness the fact that the unit `()` is the identity of the cartesian product up to isomorphism:

```
lambda :: ((), a) -> a
lambda ((), x) = x
```

```
rho :: (a, ()) -> a
rho (x, ()) = x
```

The point-free versions of the unit laws are therefore:

```
mu . bimap id eta = lambda mu . bimap eta id = rho
```

We have formulated point-free monoidal laws for `mu` and `eta` using the fact that the underlying cartesian product itself acts like a monoidal multiplication in the category of types. Keep in mind though that the associativity and unit laws for the cartesian product are valid only up to isomorphism.

It turns out that these laws can be generalized to any category with products and a terminal object. Categorical products are indeed associative up to isomorphism and the terminal object is the unit, also up to isomorphism. The associator and the two unitors are natural isomorphisms. The laws can be represented by commuting diagrams.

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 ((a \times a) \times a) & \xrightarrow{\alpha} & a \times (a \times a) \\
 \downarrow \mu \times id & & \downarrow id \times \mu \\
 a \times a & \xrightarrow{\mu} & a \times a \\
 & \searrow \mu \quad \swarrow \mu & \\
 & a & 
 \end{array}$$

Notice that, because the product is a bifunctor, it can lift a pair of morphisms — in Haskell this was done using `bimap`.

We could stop here and say that we can define a monoid on top of any category with categorical products and a terminal object. As long as we can pick an object  $m$  and two morphisms  $\mu$  and  $\eta$  that satisfy monoidal laws, we have a monoid. But we can do better than that. We don't need a full-blown categorical product to formulate the laws for  $\mu$  and  $\eta$ . Recall that a product is defined through a universal construction that uses projections. We haven't used any projections in our formulation of monoidal laws.

A bifunctor that behaves like a product without being a product is called a tensor product, often denoted by the infix operator  $\otimes$ . A definition of a tensor product in general is a bit tricky, but we won't worry about it. We'll just list its properties — the most important being associativity up to isomorphism.

Similarly, we don't need the object  $t$  to be terminal. We never used its terminal property — namely, the existence of a unique morphism from any object to it. What we require is that it works well in concert with the tensor product. Which means that we want it to be the unit of the tensor product, again, up to isomorphism. Let's put it all together:

A monoidal category is a category  $C$  equipped with a bifunctor called the tensor product:

$$\otimes :: C \times C \rightarrow C$$

and a distinct object  $i$  called the unit object, together with three natural isomorphisms called, respectively, the associator and the left and right unitors:

$$\alpha_{a,b,c} :: (a \otimes b) \otimes c \rightarrow a \otimes (b \otimes c)$$

$$\lambda_a :: i \otimes a \rightarrow a$$

$$\rho_a :: a \otimes i \rightarrow a$$

(There is also a coherence condition for simplifying a quadruple tensor product.)

What's important is that a tensor product describes many familiar bifunctors. In particular, it works for a product, a coproduct and, as we'll see shortly, for the composition of endofunctors (and also for some more esoteric products like Day convolution). Monoidal categories will play an essential role in the formulation of enriched categories.

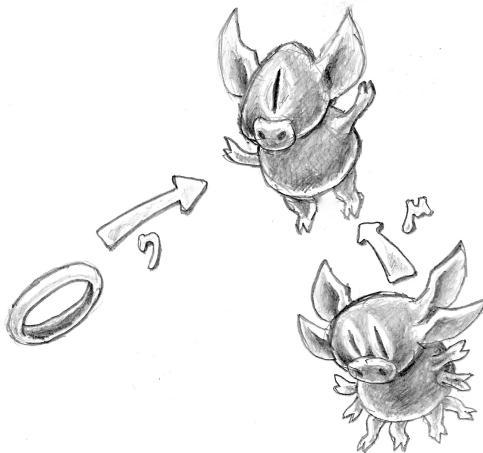
## 16.2 Monoid in a Monoidal Category

We are now ready to define a monoid in a more general setting of a monoidal category. We start by picking an object  $m$ . Using the tensor product we can form powers of  $m$ . The square of  $m$  is  $m \otimes m$ . There are two ways of forming the cube of  $m$ , but they are isomorphic through the associator. Similarly for higher powers of  $m$  (that's where we need the coherence conditions). To form a monoid we need to pick two morphisms:

$$\mu : m \otimes m \rightarrow m$$

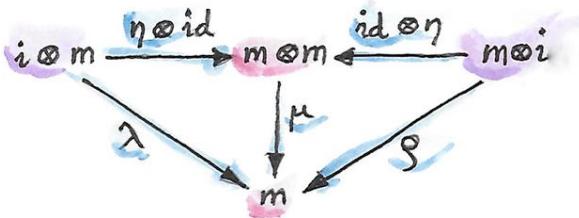
$$\eta : i \rightarrow m$$

where  $i$  is the unit object for our tensor product.



These morphisms have to satisfy associativity and unit laws, which can be expressed in terms of the following commuting diagrams:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} (m \otimes m) \otimes m & \xrightarrow{\cong} & m \otimes (m \otimes m) \\ \downarrow \mu \otimes id & & \downarrow id \otimes \mu \\ m \otimes m & \xrightarrow{\mu} & m \otimes m \end{array}$$



Notice that it's essential that the tensor product be a bifunctor because we need to lift pairs of morphisms to form products such as  $\mu \otimes \text{id}$  or  $\eta \otimes \text{id}$ . These diagrams are just a straightforward generalization of our previous results for categorical products.

### 16.3 Monads as Monoids

Monoidal structures pop up in unexpected places. One such place is the functor category. If you squint a little, you might be able to see functor composition as a form of multiplication. The problem is that not any two functors can be composed — the target category of one has to be the source category of the other. That's just the usual rule of composition of morphisms — and, as we know, functors are indeed morphisms in the category  $\text{Cat}$ . But just like endomorphisms (morphisms that loop back to the same object) are always composable, so are endofunctors. For any given category  $C$ , endofunctors from  $C$  to  $C$  form the functor category  $[C, C]$ . Its objects are endofunctors, and morphisms are natural transformations between them. We can take any two objects from this category, say endofunctors  $F$  and  $G$ , and produce a third object  $F \circ G$  — an endofunctor that's their composition.

Is endofunctor composition a good candidate for a tensor product? First, we have to establish that it's a bifunctor. Can it be used to lift a

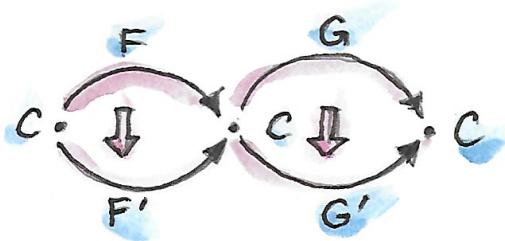
pair of morphisms — here, natural transformations? The signature of the analog of `bimap` for the tensor product would look something like this:

$$\text{bimap} :: (a \rightarrow b) \rightarrow (c \rightarrow d) \rightarrow (a \otimes c \rightarrow b \otimes d)$$

If you replace objects by endofunctors, arrows by natural transformations, and tensor products by composition, you get:

$$(F \rightarrow F') \rightarrow (G \rightarrow G') \rightarrow (F \circ G \rightarrow F' \circ G')$$

which you may recognize as the special case of horizontal composition.



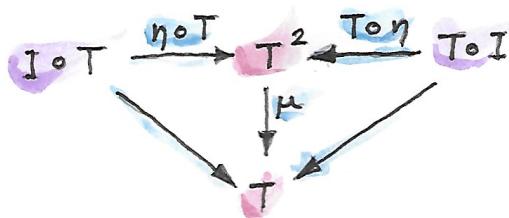
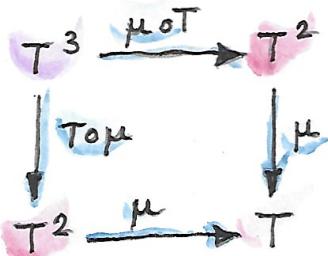
We also have at our disposal the identity endofunctor  $I$ , which can serve as the identity for endofunctor composition — our new tensor product. Moreover, functor composition is associative. In fact associativity and unit laws are strict — there's no need for the associator or the two unitors. So endofunctors form a strict monoidal category with functor composition as tensor product.

What's a monoid in this category? It's an object — that is an endofunctor  $T$ ; and two morphisms — that is natural transformations:

$$\mu :: T \circ T \rightarrow T$$

$$\eta :: I \rightarrow T$$

Not only that, here are the monoid laws:



They are exactly the monad laws we've seen before. Now you understand the famous quote from Saunders Mac Lane:

All told, monad is just a monoid in the category of endofunctors.

You might have seen it emblazoned on some t-shirts at functional programming conferences.

## 16.4 Monads from Adjunctions

An **adjunction**,  $L \dashv R$ , is a pair of functors going back and forth between two categories  $C$  and  $D$ . There are two ways of composing them giving rise to two endofunctors,  $R \circ L$  and  $L \circ R$ . As per an adjunction, these endofunctors are related to identity functors through two natural transformations called unit and counit:

$$\begin{aligned}\eta &:: I_D \rightarrow R \circ L \\ \epsilon &:: L \circ R \rightarrow I_C\end{aligned}$$

Immediately we see that the unit of an adjunction looks just like the unit of a monad. It turns out that the endofunctor  $R \circ L$  is indeed a monad. All we need is to define the appropriate  $\mu$  to go with the  $\eta$ . That's a natural transformation between the square of our endofunctor and the endofunctor itself or, in terms of the adjoint functors:

$$R \circ L \circ R \circ L \rightarrow R \circ L$$

And, indeed, we can use the counit to collapse the  $L \circ R$  in the middle. The exact formula for  $\mu$  is given by the horizontal composition:

$$\mu = R \circ \epsilon \circ L$$

Monadic laws follow from the identities satisfied by the unit and counit of the adjunction and the interchange law.

We don't see a lot of monads derived from adjunctions in Haskell, because an adjunction usually involves two categories. However, the definitions of an exponential, or a function object, is an exception. Here are the two endofunctors that form this adjunction:

```
L z = z × s  
R b = s ⇒ b
```

You may recognize their composition as the familiar state monad:

```
R (L z) = s ⇒ (z × s)
```

We've seen this monad before in Haskell:

```
newtype State s a = State (s -> (a, s))
```

Let's also translate the adjunction to Haskell. The left functor is the product functor:

```
newtype Prod s a = Prod (a, s)
```

and the right functor is the reader functor:

```
newtype Reader s a = Reader (s -> a)
```

They form the adjunction:

```
instance Adjunction (Prod s) (Reader s) where  
    counit (Prod (Reader f, s)) = f s  
    unit a = Reader (\s -> Prod (a, s))
```

You can easily convince yourself that the composition of the reader functor after the product functor is indeed equivalent to the state functor:

```
newtype State s a = State (s -> (a, s))
```

As expected, the unit of the adjunction is equivalent to the return function of the state monad. The counit acts by evaluating a function acting on its argument. This is recognizable as the uncurried version of the function `runState`:

```
runState :: State s a -> s -> (a, s)
runState (State f) s = f s
```

(uncurried, because in counit it acts on a pair).

We can now define `join` for the state monad as a component of the natural transformation  $\mu$ . For that we need a horizontal composition of three natural transformations:

```
 $\mu = R \circ \varepsilon \circ L$ 
```

In other words, we need to sneak the counit  $\varepsilon$  across one level of the reader functor. We can't just call `fmap` directly, because the compiler would pick the one for the `State` functor, rather than the `Reader` functor. But recall that `fmap` for the reader functor is just left function composition. So we'll use function composition directly.

We have to first peel off the data constructor `State` to expose the function inside the `State` functor. This is done using `runState`:

```
ssa :: State s (State s a)
runState ssa :: s -> (State s a, s)
```

Then we left-compose it with the counit, which is defined by `uncurry runState`. Finally, we clothe it back in the `State` data constructor:

```
join :: State s (State s a) -> State s a
join ssa = State (uncurry runState . runState ssa)
```

This is indeed the implementation of `join` for the State monad.

It turns out that not only every adjunction gives rise to a monad, but the converse is also true: every monad can be factorized into a composition of two adjoint functors. Such factorization is not unique though.

We'll talk about the other endofunctor  $L \circ R$  in the next section.

## Acknowledgments

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Any inaccuracies in this index may be explained by the fact that it has been prepared with the help of a computer.

—Donald E. Knuth, *Fundamental Algorithms*  
(Volume 1 of *The Art of Computer Programming*)

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# Colophon

**T**HIS BOOK IS ...

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