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We give a negative answer to the question of whether every partial combinatory algebra can be completed. The explicit counterexample will be an intricately constructed term model. The construction and the proof that it works depend heavily on syntactic techniques. In particular, it provides a nice example of reasoning with elementary diagrams and descendants. We also include a domain-theoretic proof of the existence of an incompletable partial combinatory algebra.

1. Introduction

Consider a structure $\mathcal{A} = \langle A, s, k, \cdot \rangle$, where $A$ is some set containing the distinguished elements $s, k$, equipped with a binary operation $\cdot$ on $A$, called application, which may be partial.

Notation 1.1.

1 Instead of $a \cdot b$ we write $ab$; and in writing applicative expressions, the usual convention of association to the left is employed. So for elements $a, b, c \in A$, the expression $aba(ac)$ is short for $((a \cdot b) \cdot a) \cdot (a \cdot c)$.

2 $ab \downarrow$ will mean that $ab$ is defined; $ab \uparrow$ means that $ab$ is not defined. Obviously, an applicative expression can only be defined if all its subexpressions are.

3 If $t_1, t_2$ are applicative expressions, $t_1 \cong t_2$ means that either both $t_1 \uparrow$ and $t_2 \uparrow$, or $t_1 \downarrow$ and $t_2 \downarrow$ and $t_1 = t_2$.

Definition 1.2. A structure $\mathcal{A}$ as indicated above is a partial combinatory algebra (pca) if for all $a, b, c \in A$:

1 $ka \downarrow, sa \downarrow, sab \downarrow$.

2 $kab \cong a$ and $sabc \cong ac(bc)$. 
If, moreover, the application operator is total, that is, if $ab \downarrow$ for all $a, b \in A$, then $A$ is called total, or just a combinatory algebra (ca).

Note that instead of $kab \cong a$, we can equivalently write $kab = a$. In general, we have $t_1 = t_2$ whenever $t_1 \cong t_2$ and $t_2 \downarrow$.

**Examples 1.3.**

1. A well-known example of a pca is Kleene’s $R = \langle \mathbb{N}, s, k, app \rangle$, where $app$ is defined as the Kleene-bracket application from recursion theory: $app(m,n) \cong \{m\}(n)$, and $s$ and $k$ are appropriately chosen to satisfy the characterizing axioms. (See Example 5.6.5 in Mitchell (1996).) As a matter of fact, there are (infinitely) many possible choices for $s, k$, with each choice yielding an alternative variant of $R$.

2. Another example is given by the Uniformly Reflexive Structures of Strong (1968) and Wagner (1969).

3. The ‘initial’ pca is obtained within Combinatory Logic (CL). Here one takes all closed, strongly normalizable CL-terms modulo convertibility by means of the S- and K-axioms. Application is defined iff the result is again strongly normalizing. In every pca all applicative expressions corresponding to strongly normalizing CL-terms are defined. In particular, all normal forms are defined.

4. One might also think that the weakly normalizing CL-terms modulo CL-convertibility constitute a pca, with application defined iff the result is again weakly normalizing, by analogy with the pca of SN-terms in (3). However, this is not the case. For, consider $\omega = SII$ with $I = SKK$. Then $S \cdot K \cdot (\omega \cdot \omega)$ is defined, but $K \cdot (\omega \cdot (\omega \cdot \omega))$ is undefined.

5. On the other hand; there is an interesting class of CL-terms that we will call PN, persistently normalizable CL-terms, for which the construction in (4) does yield a pca. Define $M \in PN$ iff every subterm of a reduct of $M$ has a normal form. If SN is the set of strongly normalizable CL-terms and WN the set of weakly normalizable CL-terms, we have SN $\subseteq$ PN $\subseteq$ WN. An example of a term in PN - SN is $[S(K(KI))(SII)][S(K(KI))(SII)]$.

6. Asperti and Ciabatoni (1995; 1996) have introduced ‘effective applicative structures’ (eas); an eas is equivalent to a pca. See Remark 8.1 for a description of the notion of an eas.

**Remark 1.4.**

1. In proper pca’s (i.e., nontotal pca’s) we have $sk \not\equiv ki$ with $(i = skk)$. For, if $sk = ki$, it would follow from $skab \equiv kb(ab)$ and $kiab \equiv ib \equiv b$ that every $ab$ is defined.

2. Likewise, in every proper pca we have for all $a \in A$ that $k(ka) \not\equiv s(k(ka))$. Otherwise it would follow from

$$k(ka)bc \equiv kab \equiv a$$

and

$$k(ka)bc = s(k(ka))bc \equiv k(ka)b(bc) \equiv ka(bc)$$

that $bc \downarrow$, for all $b, c \in A$. 

The question we address in this paper is whether it will always be possible to extend a partial combinatory algebra to a total combinatory algebra by, if needed, supplementing the domain with new elements, and completing the application operation on the extended domain. Formally, the notion of extension is given by the following definition.

**Definition 1.5.** An extension of a partial combinatory algebra \( \mathfrak{A} = \langle A, s, k, \cdot \rangle \) is a partial combinatory algebra \( \mathfrak{B} = \langle B, s, k, \cdot \rangle \) (same \( s \) and \( k \)), such that \( A \subseteq B \) and \( \cdot_A = \cdot_B | \text{dom}(\cdot_A) \), that is, \( \cdot_A \) coincides with the restriction of \( \cdot_B \) to \( \text{dom}(\cdot_A) \).

So the question is whether every pca has a total extension. It was raised by H.P. Barendregt, G. Mitschke and D. Scott and included in the list of open problems at the Swansea lambda calculus meeting of September 1979, which was organized by Roger Hindley. We quote from Hindley (1980):

This question was originally asked about the time of the Swansea 1974 meeting, and it seems both important and difficult. Whatever the answer, some interesting mathematics will probably result.

The negative answer was announced in Klop (1982), in a short note. The present paper elaborates that announcement, along the lines of the sketch given there.

2. Heuristics

It was observed as early as Hindley (1980) that the following straightforward attempt to complete a pca \( \mathfrak{A} = \langle A, s, k, \cdot \rangle \) fails: add a new element \( * \) to \( A \), and extend \( \cdot \) to \( A \cup \{ * \} \) by defining \( ab = * \) if \( ab \uparrow \) in \( \mathfrak{A} \), and \( *a = a* = ** = * \).

The reason this does not work is that for all \( a \in A \), we then have \( a = ka* = * \).

Another reason why this fails is that in the pca of Example 1.3(3) (of the strongly normalizable CL-terms modulo convertibility) it is inconsistent to equate all not strongly normalizable terms. See, for example, Barendregt (1984).

Next, one might try to proceed by adding 'formal elements' \( ab \) whenever \( ab \uparrow \), extending the application to such \( a \) and \( b \) by stipulating \( ab = \hat{ab} \), and then dividing out the 'appropriate' equivalence relation. However, as our proof of the existence of incompletable pca’s will show, no such procedure can be uniformly successful.

It is well known that one can formulate a ‘non-erasing’ version CL\(_J\) of CL, using instead of \( S \) and \( K \) the basic combinators \( I, J \), satisfying \( Ia = a, Jabcd = ab(adc) \). Also, the well-known combinators \( B, C, I, W \) can be used for a non-erasing version of CL. It is obvious how to formulate the corresponding notion of ‘non-erasing’ pca, with distinguished elements \( i, j \) (or \( b, c, i, w \)). Now it is not hard to show that for such non-erasing pca’s based on \{i, j\} or \{b, c, i, w\} with corresponding rules there is no problem in extending to a total ca along the lines mentioned above.

We will now describe the intuition behind our syntactic construction of a pca \( \mathfrak{A} \) that cannot be completed. In completing a pca, a previously undefined expression \( kt_1t_2 \) may become equal to a previously defined expression \( t_1 \) by virtue of the k-equation

\[
kt_1t_2 = t_1.
\]

Now suppose that a pca could be devised in such a way, that after any would-be
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completion we would be forced to have \( kt_1 t_2 = ks_1 s_2 \), where \( s_1 \) is again a previously defined expression, but such that in the original pca \( t_1 \neq s_1 \). Then the assumption that a completion exists would necessarily yield an inconsistency:

\[
t_1 = kt_1 t_2 = ks_1 s_2 = s_1.
\]

A counterexample pca where this indeed happens can be realized as follows. Consider a pca \( \mathcal{A} \), containing distinct elements \( a, b, c \), and such that \( s(ac) = s(bc) \).

Then we have as follows a conversion between \( ac \) and \( bc \):

\[
\begin{align*}
s(sk)ac & = s(sk)bc \\
skc(ac) & = skc(bc) \\
k(ac)(c(ac)) & = k(bc)(c(bc)) \\
ac & = bc.
\end{align*}
\]

Now suppose we can arrange that in \( \mathcal{A} \) we have \( ac \downarrow, bc \downarrow, ac \neq bc \), but \( c(ac) \uparrow, c(bc) \uparrow \). The above conversion between \( ac \) and \( bc \) will then be ruled out since it involves the undefined expressions \( c(ac) \) and \( c(bc) \). We will also arrange that other conversions between \( ac \) and \( bc \) will be ruled out; they 'essentially' amount to the one above and will contain subterms 'essentially' the same as the forbidden \( c(ac) \) and \( c(bc) \). Such a pca \( \mathcal{A} \) will be incompletable. For in any completion \( \mathcal{A}^* \) of \( \mathcal{A} \) the conversion between the distinct elements \( ac \) and \( bc \) would go through.

As a guideline for the construction of a pca \( \mathcal{A} \) as sketched above, one can think of \( a, b, c \) as 'bearers of undefinedness'. In small doses, isolated or in an application such as \( ac, bc \) they are harmless, but the presence in an expression of 'large' clusters of them, like \( c(ac) \), where large means 'length \( \geq 3 \)' make the expression undefined. Also, expressions that reduce, in the usual Combinatory Logic sense, to undefined expressions, will be undefined. (So, for example, \( \omega(\omega a) \), where \( \omega = sii \), is an undefined expression, since it reduces to the large cluster \( aa(aa) \)).

The construction just sketched will be performed within Combinatory Logic. In order to construct elements \( a, b, c \) with the required properties, some new constants \( A, B \) and \( C \) will be added to the combinators \( S \) and \( K \). Note, also in view of the completability of non-erasing pca's (see above), that the 'culprit' is the \( K \)-combinator, or, in the pca, the axiom for \( k \), with its erasing effect.

In Figure 1 we have summarized the situation. The terms \( AC, BC \) are convertible using the axioms for \( S, K \) (the downward arrows) and the axiom \( S(SK)AC = S(SK)BC \) (the horizontal transition). However this conversion is not valid as it leads through 'forbidden territory', namely through the area \( D \) of undefined expressions (\( G \) is the area of defined expressions). This area \( D \), the shaded, cone-like part of the figure, is an absolute barrier; every attempted conversion between the two terms \( AC, BC \) must pass the forbidden area. The forbidden area contains all expressions that reduce to the utmost forbidden terms on the bottom of the cone, namely those terms containing a 'large cluster', among them \( C(AC) \) and \( C(BC) \).
3. Combinatory Logic and traces in CL conversions

In this section we collect the necessary basic properties of Combinatory Logic reduction. We emphasize the use of elementary diagrams in constructing Church–Rosser diagrams, and introduce the notion of ‘trace’.

3.1. Descendants

We start with the classical notion of descendants and ancestors in CL. Definitions of this notion can be found in Curry and Feys (1958) and Barendregt (1984). Here we will give an ‘algebraic’ definition, using a labelled version of CL. In fact, our definition works in general for orthogonal first-order TRSs, of which CL is an example. Our definition is taken from Bethke et al. (1997a) and Bethke et al. (1997b).

Let \( L = \{\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \ldots\} \) be a set of labels. They can be thought of as colours that will be used to keep track of symbols. A term is labelled by equipping some of its symbol occurrences with a label as superscript. A labelling of a term \( t \) can be seen as a partial function from the set of symbol occurrences in \( t \) to \( L \). If this function is \( I \), we also denote the labelled term by \( t_I \). A labelling \( I \) is initial if it is total and injective. This means that in \( t_I \) all symbol occurrences have different labels.

Let \( R \) be an orthogonal first-order TRS (see, for example, Baader and Nipkow (1998) and Klop (1992)). Let \( R \) have a rewrite rule, for example, \( \rho : F(G(x, y), H) \rightarrow S(T(y), y) \).

Then a labelled version of \( \rho \) has the form

\[ F^\alpha(G^\beta(x, y), H^\gamma) \rightarrow S(T(y), y) \]

for some \( \alpha, \beta, \gamma \in L \). That is, every occurrence of a function symbol in the redex pattern \( F(G(\cdot, \cdot), H) \) is equipped with a label as superscript; in the contractum pattern \( S(T(\cdot), \cdot) \) no symbol is labelled.
Now the simply labelled version $R_L$ of $R$ is defined by taking as terms the terms of $R$ where each symbol may have a label, and as rewrite rules all labelled versions of the rules of $R$.

**Example 3.1.1.** Specializing this definition to CL, we have the following rules for the labelled system $CL_L$ (for all $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta \in L$):

\[
\begin{align*}
\@^x(@^\beta(@^\gamma(S^\delta, x), y), z) & \rightarrow \ @(\@^\delta(x, z), \@^\gamma(y, z)) \\
\@^\gamma(@^\beta(K^\gamma, x), y) & \rightarrow x.
\end{align*}
\]

Here the prefix symbol @ is used for application.

**Proposition 3.1.2.**

1. If $R$ is an orthogonal TRS, then its simply labelled version $R_L$ is also orthogonal.
2. If $t^\tau$ is a labelling of $t$, then each reduction step $t \rightarrow s$ in $R$ can be lifted, in a unique way, to a reduction step $t^\tau \rightarrow s^\tau$ in $R_L$.

We can now define descendants in reductions in $R$.

**Definition 3.1.3.** Let $t \rightarrow s$ be a reduction step in $R$. Give $t$ an initial labelling $t^\tau$ and assume that lifting the step $t \rightarrow s$ results in the labelled step $t^\tau \rightarrow s^\tau$, for some label $\alpha \in L$. Then we say that $p \in t$ is the *ancestor* of $q \in s$, or that $q$ is the *descendant* of $p$, or that $p, q$ are in the ancestor–descendant relation.

In Klop (1980) the notation $p \rightarrow q$ is used to denote the fact that $q$ descends from $p$. We will also say that $p$ traces to $q$, or that $q$ can be traced back to $p$.

Note that in a step $t \rightarrow s$, every symbol $q$ in $s$ has a unique ancestor symbol in $t$. Instead of defining the descendant relation between symbol occurrences, we could equivalently have defined the descendant relation between subterm occurrences. The equivalence is seen by noting that symbol occurrences are in 1–1 correspondence with subterm occurrences, namely by taking the top (the root) of the subterm. Traditionally, descendants of redex occurrences are also called *residuals*. Note that the redex contracted in $t \rightarrow s$ has no descendants.

Now that we have defined the descendant relation for single steps $s \rightarrow t$, it is obvious how to define the descendant relation for many step reductions $s \rightarrow t$ by transitivity. The transitive descendant relation is denoted by $\rightarrow \cdots$. So, for example, in the two-step reduction $s \rightarrow r \rightarrow t$, we have for $p \in s$ and $q \in t$ that $p \rightarrow q$ if there is an intermediate symbol $v$ in $r$ such that $p \rightarrow v \rightarrow q$.

**Remark 3.1.4.** There is a small subtlety here. We could have defined $\rightarrow \cdots$ for many-step reductions as follows. Give $t$ an initial labelling $t^\tau$ and lift the reduction $t \rightarrow s$ to the labelled reduction $t^\tau \rightarrow s^\tau$. Now define, as before, that a symbol $p$ in $t$ traces to $q$ in $s$ iff its label (in $t^\tau$) is the same as the label of $q$ (in $s^\tau$). So the difference is that in the former

† We use the term simply labelled in order to distinguish this notion of reduction from more sophisticated variants such as those introduced by Levy (1975) and others.
defining tracing is defined by repeated initialization of the labels: in each step the labels
are ‘refreshed’ to an initial labelling. Fortunately, we can without much effort prove that
both ways yield the same result. In other words, repeated initialization is superfluous. (A
closer look shows that the reason is that labelled reduction stays preserved under not
necessarily injective renaming of labels.)

We will now prove that the descendant relation satisfies the property of ‘right cancella-
tion’.

Proposition 3.1.5. Consider a reduction \( s \rightarrow r \rightarrow t \), with symbol occurrences \( p \in s, v \in r, q \in t \) such that \( p \rightarrow q \) and \( v \rightarrow q \). Then \( p \rightarrow v \).

Proof. The proof follows immediately from transitivity of the trace relation and unicity
of the ancestor: suppose \( v \in r \) traces back to \( p' \in s \). Then, by transitivity of ‘trace’, \( q \in t \)
also traces back to \( p' \in s \). Since \( q \) also traces back to \( p \in s \), and as ancestors are unique,
we have \( p = p' \). Hence \( p \rightarrow v \). \( \square \)

Remark 3.1.6. labelling (colouring) preserves the descendant relation. By this we mean the
following. Consider a reduction \( s \rightarrow t \), with symbol occurrences \( p \in s, q \in t \), such that \( p \rightarrow q \). Lift this reduction to the labelled reduction \( t^I \rightarrow s^I \) with \( I \) initial. Then the symbol
occurrences \( p, q \) will be in the labelled version \( p^\alpha \) and \( q^\alpha \). Now these coloured symbols
\( p^\alpha, q^\alpha \) are also in the descendant relation in the labelled TRS. This is not as trivial as it
may look at first sight, but it is not hard to convince oneself of this fact.

In the construction of an incompletable pca in this paper we want to be able to trace
symbols not only along a reduction, but through an arbitrary conversion. The ensuing
notion of connectedness extends the ancestor–descendant relation.

Definition 3.1.7.
1 The relation is the symmetric closure of \( \rightarrow \).
2 Consider a conversion \( \Gamma : s_0 \leftarrow s_1 \leftarrow \cdots \leftarrow s_n \). Here each occurrence of ‘\( \leftarrow \)’ stands for
   either \( \leftarrow \) or \( \rightarrow \). A trace through \( \Gamma \) is a sequence \( p_0 \leftarrow p_1 \leftarrow \cdots \leftarrow p_n \), with \( p_i \in s_i \).
   The symbol occurrences \( p_0 \) and \( p_n \) are said to be connected by this trace.

Example 3.1.8. In the conversion \( xz(yz) \leftarrow Sxyz \rightarrow xz(yz) \) we have that all the occurrences
of \( z \) in the two end terms \( xz(yz) \) are connected to each other, via the \( z \) in \( Sxyz \).

3.2. Elementary diagrams

The construction of elementary diagrams emerges from a standard proof of the weak
Church–Rosser property (WCR) for CL or any other orthogonal term rewriting system.
Two diverging one-step reductions are made to converge by contracting the residuals of
the originally contracted redexes.

In the construction of reduction diagrams below, for which the elementary diagrams
are the building stones, it is essential that we also take into account any so-called ‘empty
steps’.
**Definition 3.2.1.**

1. A proper elementary reduction diagram (e.d.) with initial point \( t \) is determined as follows. Let \( r_1, r_2 \) be redexes in \( t \), such that contraction of \( r_i \) results in the reduction step \( t \rightarrow t_i \) \((i = 1, 2)\). Then the corresponding e.d. has these reduction steps as left-hand side and upper side, respectively. The right-hand side of the e.d. consists of contracting the set \( R_1 \) of the residuals of \( r_1 \) after the \( r_2 \)-step (performed, say, in left to right order). The lower side is defined dually. (See Figure 1)

2. If \( R_1 \) (or \( R_2 \)) is empty, as may happen, for example, when the contraction of one of the redexes \( r_1, r_2 \) erases the other, then the corresponding side is a so-called **empty step**. We then have \( t_3 \equiv t_2 \) (or \( t_3 \equiv t_1 \)).

3. A special case of (2) is when \( r_1 \) and \( r_2 \) coincide. Then, by the definition of residuals, both \( R_1 \) and \( R_2 \) are empty, and the e.d. is completed with two empty steps.

4. Improper e.d.’s arise by the interaction of empty steps and proper (or again empty) steps in the obvious way. See Figure 4.

An example of an e.d. is given in Figure 3.2. It belongs to CL with the extra constant \( I \) and the corresponding rule \( Ix \rightarrow x \). We call the term in the left-hand upper corner the ‘initial’ point of an e.d.; the ‘final’ point is the term in the right-hand lower corner.

For CL we have e.d.’s of the types shown in Figure 4. We indicate the sides that consist of an empty step by dashed lines, which can be seen as reductions of length zero. So, if \( s \dashv \dashv \dashv t \) is an empty step, we have \( s \equiv t \).

We extend the definition of the descendant–ancestor relation to the case of empty steps \( s \dashv \dashv \dashv t \): the relation is simply the identity relation. In the following we will allow
conversions to contain empty steps too. It is obvious how to extend the notion of trace, Definition 3.1.7, to conversions with empty steps.

Remark 3.2.2. Colourability of elementary diagrams. Consider an e.d. in an orthogonal TRS. Label the initial point with an initial labelling. We can now extend this initial colouring through the whole e.d. by lifting the reductions that constitute the e.d. Then there is the following question to consider. The e.d. consists of a lower reduction and an upper reduction from initial to final point. In lifting these reductions, why is the final term uniquely coloured? It is conceivable that lifting via the upper reduction and lifting via the lower reduction results in differently coloured final terms.

To see that this discrepancy cannot occur, we invoke Remark 3.1.6. That observation gives us that the redexes contracted in the right-hand side of the coloured e.d. are actually descendants (in the coloured TRS!) of the redex contracted in the left-hand side, and likewise dually. This is because they were descendants in the original uncoloured TRS, and colouring was seen to preserve the descendant relation.

But then these coloured lifted upper and lower reductions constitute, by definition, an e.d. in the coloured TRS. Of course any e.d. in an orthogonal TRS, coloured or not, has a unique final point, and hence so also does this coloured e.d. That means that the original e.d. was ‘colourable’, without the a priori possible discrepancy.

The next proposition states a non-trivial property concerning the descendant relation of elementary diagrams in orthogonal TRSs.

Proposition 3.2.3. Let q be a symbol occurrence in the final point of an e.d. Then the ancestor of q in the initial point of the e.d. traced back via the lower side of the e.d. coincides with the ancestor via the upper side.

Proof. The proof is immediate from Remark 3.2.2, stating the colourability of e.d.’s, and the definition of the descendant relation using colours, and using Remark 3.1.4.

3.3. Reduction diagrams

We now turn to building ‘reduction diagrams’ composed of the e.d.’s of the previous section in a ‘paving’ process, with the goal of finding a common reduct for terms obtained by different diverging reductions. An example is given in Figure 5. From proofs of the
Church–Rosser theorem for CL, or, more generally, for orthogonal TRSs, we know that such constructions of ‘Church–Rosser diagrams’ will indeed terminate successfully. (See, for example, Klop (1980).) In the figure, the e.d.’s contain some transverse arrows that are intended to indicate the ‘propagation’ of residuals of the various contracted redexes through the diagram. If we set out one reduction step against a reduction of arbitrary length, the situation that arises by completing the diagram is known as the ‘Parallel Moves Lemma’ (PML). Figure 6 gives an example. The rightmost side of the diagram consists of a reduction of all descendant redexes of the original redex contracted in the downward step. These descendants are disjoint, hence the name ‘parallel moves’. We will use PML below, in the proofs of Propositions 5.1 and 5.2. Next, consider a diagram construction that has not yet been finished but is in an intermediate stage (Figure 7). We will be especially interested in the border of such an unfinished diagram, the staircase-like part. It is a conversion in CL, possibly interlaced with empty steps.
Remark 3.3.1. We have described above how a completed reduction diagram (a ‘Church–Rosser diagram’) arises by tiling with e.d.’s, starting from an initial configuration formed by two diverging reductions. We should point out that we can start with an arbitrary conversion (a ‘staircase’) as initial configuration, and similarly be assured of successful completion. Figure 8 illustrates this situation.

3.4. Trace lifting

Definition 3.4.1. Consider (in Figure 9) an unfinished diagram, the lightly shaded one, with a border $\Gamma$. Let the border after adjoining the darker shaded e.d. be $\Gamma'$. Then we say that the conversion $\Gamma$ is higher than $\Gamma$, notation $\Gamma \Rightarrow \Gamma'$. We will denote the transitive-reflexive closure of this relation with the same notation. Note, in particular, that in a completed reduction diagram (as in Figure 8), the initial conversion (the staircase) is higher than the final conversion of the converging reductions (lower and right-hand side).

Proposition 3.4.2. Consider an e.d. as in Figure 10. Let symbols $q \in t$, $q' \in t'$ be connected via the conversion $t \rightarrow r \leftarrow t'$ (the lower side of the diagram). Then they are also connected via $t \leftarrow s \rightarrow t'$ (the upper side of the diagram).

Proof. Consider the trace connecting $q$ and $q'$ through the lower side. Say it intersects $r$ in $v$. Now let $p \in s$ be the unique ancestor of $v \in r$; by Proposition 3.2.3 it is independent.

Fig. 8. Completion of an arbitrary conversion

Fig. 9.
of whether it is found via the upper or the lower reduction of the e.d. Now, applying
the right cancellation property (Proposition 3.1.5), we find that $p$ is connected to $t'$, and
likewise to $t$. Hence $q$ and $q'$ are connected via the upper half of the e.d., as we sought to
prove. □

Proposition 3.4.3. (Trace lifting). Consider two conversions $\Gamma$ and $\Gamma'$ of intermediate
construction stages in a completed reduction diagram such that $\Gamma \Rightarrow \Gamma'$. Let $s, t$ be
the common endpoints of both conversions. Moreover, let $p \in s$, $q \in t$ be symbol occurrences
connected via a trace through $\Gamma'$. Then $p$ and $q$ are also connected via the higher
conversion $\Gamma$.

Proof. The proof is immediate from the corresponding fact for e.d.'s (Proposition 3.4.2),
the construction of diagrams, and the definition of ‘higher’. □

Remark 3.1. The converse of trace lifting does not hold. A trace through a conversion
cannot always be pushed down to a trace through a lower conversion. A counterexample
has already been shown in Example 3.1.8. Consider the e.d. with two identical diverging
steps $Sxyz \rightarrow xz(yz)$ and hence two empty converging steps. Along the upper conversion,
consisting of the diverging steps, all $z$’s are connected. But this is not the case along the
lower conversion, consisting of the empty steps.

4. Definition of the counterexample

Definition 4.1.
1. Let $X = \{A, B, C\}$ be a set of three new constants and let $\text{CL}_X$ be Combinatory Logic
extended with this set: that is, the equational system having

$$\text{Ter(\text{CL}_X)} = \{M \mid M \text{ is built by application from } S, K, A, B, C\}$$

as set of terms, and equipped with the usual axioms for $S$ and $K$.

2. $\text{CL}_X \vdash M = N$ means that the terms $M, N$ are convertible by means of the $S$- and
$K$-axiom.

3. We will also consider $S$- and $K$-reduction and write $\text{CL}_X \vdash M \rightarrow N$ when $M$ can be
reduced to $N$ using the reduction rules

$$Sxyz \rightarrow xz(yz)$$
$$Kxy \rightarrow x.$$
**Definition 4.2.** To the equational system $\mathrm{CL}_X$ we add the axiom

$$S(SK)A = S(SK)B.$$  

The result will be denoted as $\mathrm{CL}_X^*$, and $\mathrm{CL}_X^* \vdash M = N$ denotes convertibility (or derivability) in the extended system.

Next we define the crucial notion of relativized convertibility.

**Definition 4.3.** If $\Sigma$ is an equational calculus and $D \subseteq \mathrm{Ter}(\Sigma)$, then $\Sigma \vdash_D M = N$ iff there is a conversion $M = M' = M'' = \cdots = N$ between $M$ and $N$ in $\Sigma$, such that $\{M, M', M'', \ldots, N\} \subseteq D$.

**Definition 4.4.**

1. If $M \in \mathrm{Ter}(\mathrm{CL}_X)$ contains only $A, B, C$, we will call $M$ a cluster. A cluster is large if its length is $\geq 3$, where the length of a cluster is defined inductively by $\text{length}(M) = 1$ if $M \in \{A, B, C\}$, and $\text{length}(M_1M_2) = \text{length}(M_1) + \text{length}(M_2)$ otherwise.
2. The set $D \subseteq \mathrm{Ter}(\mathrm{CL}_X)$ is defined as follows:

   $$M \in D \iff \text{no } N \text{ such that } \mathrm{CL}_X \vdash M \rightarrow N \text{ contains a large cluster}.$$  

   The set $D$ is to be thought of as the set of defined expressions.

**Remark 4.5.**

1. $D$ is closed under reduction.
2. The complement of $D$, the set $U$ of undefined terms, is closed under expansion.
3. If $M \in D$ and $M'$ results from $M$ by replacing an occurrence of a symbol from $X$ by another, say $A$ by $B$, then $M' \in D$ also.

Observations (1) and (2) are immediately clear.

As for (3), if $M' \notin D$, then there is a large cluster $L'$ such that $M' \rightarrow C[L']$. Reversing the replacement and carrying this through for the complete reduction would then result in a reduction $M \rightarrow C[L]$, with $L$ a large cluster, contradicting the assumption that $M \in D$.

We will now define the pca $\mathcal{A}$ that cannot be completed.

**Definition 4.6.**

1. Define $\mathcal{A}$ as the pca that has as universe the set $A$ of $\sim$-equivalence classes $[M]$ of terms, where $\sim$ is defined by

   $$M \sim N \iff \mathrm{CL}_X^* \vdash_D M = N.$$  

   (Note that $M \sim N \Rightarrow M, N \in D$.)
2. We put $s = [S], k = [K], a = [A], b = [B], c = [C]$.
3. Application in $\mathcal{A}$ is defined as follows. If $x = [X], y = [Y]$, then

   $$x \cdot y = \begin{cases} [XY] & \text{if } XY \in D, \\ \uparrow & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}.$$  

- **Remark 4.5.**
  
  (1) $D$ is closed under reduction.
  
  (2) The complement of $D$, the set $U$ of undefined terms, is closed under expansion.
  
  (3) If $M \in D$ and $M'$ results from $M$ by replacing an occurrence of a symbol from $X$ by another, say $A$ by $B$, then $M' \in D$ also.

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   $$x \cdot y = \begin{cases} [XY] & \text{if } XY \in D, \\ \uparrow & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}.$$  


5. Proof that $\mathcal{A}$ is a pca

We have first to make sure that application is well defined, i.e., independent of the choice of the representing terms $M, N$. This is implied by the following proposition.

**Proposition 5.1.** Let $M \sim M'$ and $N \sim N'$. Then $MN \in \mathcal{D} \Rightarrow M'N' \in \mathcal{D}$.

**Proof.** We will only consider a one-step conversion in one of the terms $M, N$. Then the proposition follows by induction on the total number of steps in the two conversions given by $M \sim M'$ and $N \sim N'$. So assume $MN \in \mathcal{D}$. We now consider only the case that the one-step conversion takes place in $M$; the reasoning for $N$ will be the same. So we have the assumption that $M \sim M'$ by a one-step conversion and must verify that $M'N \in \mathcal{D}$. There are three cases to consider.

1. $M \rightarrow M'$: Then $MN \rightarrow M'N$, and $M'N \in \mathcal{D}$ follows since $\mathcal{D}$ is closed under reduction, by Remark 4.5(1).
2. $M \sim M'$ by an application of $S(SK)A = S(SK)B$: Then $M'N \in \mathcal{D}$ follows by Remark 4.5(3).
3. $M' \rightarrow M$: Assume for a proof by contradiction, that $M'N \notin \mathcal{D}$. Then $M'N \rightarrow C[L]$ for some context $C[ ]$ containing a large cluster $L$. The Parallel Moves Lemma now yields the diagram in Figure 11, with $P \in \mathcal{D}$ because it is a reduct of $MN$. The reduction from $C[L]$ to $P$ consists of contractions of residuals of the redex $r$, and, since $P \in \mathcal{D}$, this reduction erases the large cluster $L$. Such erasure is only possible by a K-step, say by contraction of the redex $r' = KQ(\cdots L \cdots)$. Since $r'$ is a residual of $r$, we must have $r = KQ'L'$, where $L' \rightarrow (\cdots L \cdots)$. But then $M' \notin \mathcal{D}$, contradicting the assumption that $M \sim M'$.

In order to see that with $\mathcal{A}$ we have indeed defined a pca, Clauses 1 and 2 of Definition 1.2 must be verified.

**Proposition 5.2.**

1. For all $x, y \in A$ we have $kx \downarrow$, $sy \downarrow$, $sxy \downarrow$.
2. In $\mathcal{A}$ the equations $kxy \equiv x$ and $sxyz \equiv xz(yz)$ hold for all $x, y, z \in A$. 

![Fig. 11.](image-url)
Proof.

1. We consider \( sxy \downarrow \), the other two cases being even more obvious. It amounts to showing: \( M \in \mathcal{D}, N \in \mathcal{D} \Rightarrow SMN \in \mathcal{D} \). Note that all reducts of \( SMN \) are of the form \( SM'N' \), with \( M \rightarrow M' \) and \( N \rightarrow N' \). A large cluster in \( SM'N' \) should lie within either \( M' \) or \( N' \), contradicting the assumption that \( M, N \in \mathcal{D} \).

2. Obviously, \( KMN \in \mathcal{D} \iff M, N \in \mathcal{D} \), and hence for \( M, N \in \mathcal{D} \) we have \( KMN \sim M \) by an application of the K-rule; so \( kxy = x \).

Likewise, verifying the s-axiom boils down to proving that \( SMNP \in \mathcal{D} \iff MP(NP) \in \mathcal{D} \). One direction, \( \Rightarrow \), is obvious, since \( \mathcal{D} \) is closed under reduction. For \( \Leftarrow \), suppose \( SMNP \notin \mathcal{D} \). So there is a context \( C[ ] \) and a large cluster \( L \), such that \( SMNP \rightarrow C[L] \).

Now the Parallel Moves Lemma can be used again as in Figure 12. It follows, since S-steps are non-erasing, that \( Q \) must contain at least one occurrence of \( L \). Hence \( MP(NP) \notin \mathcal{D} \).

\[ \square \]

6. Proof that \( \mathfrak{A} \) is incompletable

We need only to execute the plan that was outlined in Section 2. That is, the result that \( \mathfrak{A} \) is not completable follows from the following proposition.

**Proposition 6.1.**

1. In \( \mathfrak{A} \) we have \( ac \downarrow, bc \downarrow, c(ac) \uparrow, c(bc) \uparrow \) and \( ac \neq bc \).

2. In every supposed completion \( \mathfrak{A}^* \) of \( \mathfrak{A} \), however, \( ac = bc \).

**Proof.** Part (2) is already covered by the conversion given in Section 2 (there for \( a,b,c \)):

\[
\begin{align*}
S(SK)AC &= S(SK)BC \\
SKC(AC) &= SKC(BC) \\
K(AC)(C(AC)) &= K(BC)(C(BC)) \\
AC &= BC.
\end{align*}
\]

Of part (1), the first four assertions follow at once from the definitions. For example, \( c(ac) \uparrow \) because \( C(AC) \) is a large cluster.

In order to prove \( ac \neq bc \), we must show that \( CL_X \nvdash AC = BC \). To do this, we will show that every conversion between \( AC, BC \) in \( CL_X \) necessarily contain undefined terms, i.e., terms that reduce to a term containing a large cluster. (For the shortest
conversion, as given above, this is seen to hold at once: except for \( AC \), \( BC \) every term in it is not an element of \( \emptyset \).) So let \( \Gamma^* \) be an arbitrary \( \text{CL}_{\mathcal{X}} \)-conversion \( AC \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow BC \) for a proof by contradiction. Replace every \( B \) in \( \Gamma^* \) by \( A \). Since a step \( S(SK)A = S(SK)B \) is transformed into an empty step, the result is a \( \text{CL}_{\mathcal{X}} \)-conversion \( \Gamma : AC \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow AC \). By Church–Rosser and the fact that \( AC \) is a normal form, we have the diagram in Figure 13. Obviously, the \( A \)'s in \( AC \) and \( AC \) are connected via the empty reductions (\( \emptyset \)). Since \( \Gamma \Rightarrow \cdots \Rightarrow \emptyset \), by the trace lifting Proposition 3.4.3, we have that the \( A \) in the first term of \( \Gamma \) can be traced to the \( A \) in the last term. Now consider the trace \( A \rightarrow A \rightarrow A \rightarrow \cdots A \) through \( \Gamma \). Restoring the original \( B \)'s, we have a 'pseudo trace' \( A \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow B \); hence a step \( A \rightarrow B \) where \( A \) changes to \( B \). This can only happen in a step in \( \Gamma^* \) of the form \( C[S(SK)A] \Rightarrow C[S(SK)B] \), for some context \( C[ \] \). (In the Figures 13, 14 the term \( C[S(SK)A] \) is rendered as \( \ldots S(SK)A \ldots \).)

So in \( \Gamma \) one of the terms is of the form \( C[S(SK)A] \). In the diagram of Figure 13 we obviously have (by the procedure of constructing reduction diagrams) a reduction \( \mathcal{R} : C[S(SK)A] \rightarrow AC \), as shown in Figure 14. Now in pushing up the lower trace (through the empty reductions), it is clearly possible to do this in such a way that one of
the intermediate stages gives a trace through $R$ as in Figure 14. Since $R$ is a reduction, this means that the $A$ in $C[S(SK)A]$ is in fact the ancestor of the $A$ in $AC$. Now we note that $A$ is passive in $S(SK)A$ and active in $AC$. By some simple arguments it is easily shown that such a change in status entails that $R$ must have the form as in Figure 15. And some further consideration shows easily that $R$ has the more detailed form of Figure 16, where there is a trace through the occurrences of $A$ displayed as $A$. Here $G \rightarrow G_1 \rightarrow G_2, G_1 \rightarrow G_3 \rightarrow G_4 \rightarrow G_5 \rightarrow G_6 \rightarrow C, G_2(AG_3) \rightarrow H$, and $C_i[ ] \rightarrow C_{i+1}[ ]$. Hence, by Church–Rosser, we also have $G_2 \rightarrow C$, and thus $G_2(AG_3) \rightarrow C(AC)$, which is a large cluster. Hence several of the terms in $R$ are not in $D$: in particular, the first one, $C_1[S(SK)A]$, which is a term in $\Gamma$ isn’t. But then $\Gamma^*$ also contains a term not in $D$ (by

\[ C_1[S(SK)A] \rightarrow C_2[S(SK)A] \rightarrow C_3[S(SK)A] \rightarrow C_4[S(SK)A] \rightarrow C_5[S(SK)A] \rightarrow C_6[S(SK)A] \rightarrow AC \]

Fig. 15.


Fig. 16.

\[ \dagger \text{ In an application } MN \text{ the term } M \text{ is in active position, } N \text{ in passive position.} \]
Remark 4.5(3)). However, $\Gamma^*$ was a $\text{CL}_X$-conversion, which gives a contradiction. Hence $ac \neq bc$.

7. Domain-theoretic considerations

In this section we will briefly indicate how an incompletable pca can be constructed by domain-theoretic considerations. It boils down to the incompletability of all so-called extensional pca’s that are nontotal.

It is well known that domains $D$ satisfying one of two conditions in Table 1 lend themselves to the construction of pca’s. Here

1. $A \triangleleft B$ denotes that $A$ is a retract of $B$;
2. $[D \to D]$ is the set of partial continuous functions from $D$ to $D$, that is, functions whose domain of definition is a Scott-open subset of $D$, and whose restriction to this subset is a (total) continuous function;
3. $[D_\bot \to D_\bot]$ is the set of continuous functions from $D_\bot$ (that is, $D$ equipped with a bottom element) to $D_\bot$ that preserve the bottom element.

In particular, domains $D$ satisfying either $D \cong [D \to D]$ or $D \cong [D_\bot \to D_\bot]$ give rise to extensional pcas. As stipulated in the following definition, in an extensional pca elements with the same functional behaviour are equal.

**Definition 7.1.** A pca $\mathfrak{A}$ is extensional if for all $a, a' \in A$ we have

$$(\forall a'' \in A \ a \cdot a'' \cong a' \cdot a'') \Rightarrow a = a'.$$

These extensional pcas, if they are nontotal, can be easily shown to be incompletable (Bethke 1987; Bethke and Klop 1996).

**Theorem 7.2.** Let $\mathfrak{A}$ be an extensional, nontotal pca. Then $\mathfrak{A}$ is incompletable.

**Proof.** Suppose $\mathfrak{A} = \langle A, s, k, \cdot \rangle$ is such a pca and assume $\mathfrak{A}' = \langle A', s, k, \cdot \rangle$ is a completion of $\mathfrak{A}$. Let $\bot \in A$ be some totally undefined element – for instance, one constructed as follows: take $a, a' \in A$ such that $aa' \uparrow$ and put $\bot = s(ka)(ka')$. Then, indeed, $\bot a'' \uparrow$ for every $a'' \in A$. So we have $s(k(kk))\bot a'' \uparrow$ and $s(k(ks))\bot a'' \uparrow$ for every $a'' \in A$. By extensionality, we therefore have $s(k(kk))\bot = s(k(ks))\bot$, and hence $s(k(kk))\bot k = s(k(ks))\bot k$. But then in $\mathfrak{A}'$ we have

$$s = ks(\bot k) = k(ks)k(\bot k) = s(k(ks))\bot k = s(k(kk))\bot k + k(kk)\bot k = k,$$

which gives a contradiction. □
Remark 7.3.
1. Note that in fact ‘⊥-extensionality’ (i.e., equality of all nowhere defined elements) is already a sufficient condition for incompletability.
2. Whereas the proof of the incompletability of extensional nontotal pca’s consists of just a few lines, showing the existence of such structures is a laborious matter that requires no less effort than the syntactic construction and proofs above (see, for example, Bethke (1987)).

8. Concluding remarks and questions

Remark 8.1. A weaker notion of completability. In Asperti and Ciabatoni (1997) the authors show that satisfaction of Barendregt’s axiom\(^\dagger\) guarantees a weaker notion of completability, namely the one where application can be extended to a total operation with the constants \(s\) and \(k\) possibly chosen anew. This already follows from Asperti and Ciabatoni (1996) where it was proved that the unique head-normal forms condition, which is sufficient for completability (Bethke et al. 1996), can be equivalently expressed by the effective and injective realization of the recursion-theoretic s-m-n theorem.

The precise formalization of this property relies on an alternative characterization of pca’s as suitable collections of partial functions introduced in Asperti and Ciabatoni (1995) under the name ‘Effective Applicative Structures’ (eas). An eas is a collection of indexed partial functions that is closed under composition, contains all projections and an interpreter, and satisfies the s-m-n theorem. In Asperti and Ciabatoni (1996) it was, moreover, proved that the injectivity of the realization is equivalent to the so-called ‘Padding Lemma’. Since Barendregt’s axiom implies the lemma (see Barendregt (1975)), one gets as a corollary that this axiom is enough to ensure weak completability.

Remark 8.2. It is also possible to avoid the use of extraneous constants \(A, B, C\) as above and to give an incompletable pca whose whole universe is generated by \(\{S, K\}\) alone. This can be done by defining

\[
A^* = SII(SII) \quad \text{with} \quad I = SKK \\
B^* = SII'(SI'I') \quad \text{with} \quad I' = SKS \\
C^* = SI''I''(SI'I') \quad \text{with} \quad I'' = SK(SK).
\]

In this way, \(A^*, B^*, C^*\) behave sufficiently like the inert constants \(A, B, C\) (they are terms of order zero, and are not able to interact with the context); the arguments involving tracing become more complicated though, because \(A^*, B^*, C^*\) may still exhibit some internal activity.

Remark 8.3. Curry’s equations. As noted in Remark 1.4, a pca satisfying \(sk = ki\) must be complete; likewise when the pca satisfies \(k(ka) = s(k(a))\) for some \(a\). In fact, the equation \(sk = ki\) is derivable from Curry’s equations \(A_8\) (Barendregt 1984). For, \((SK)_i :=_p (KI)_i\) as a simple verification shows. Theorem 7.3.10 in Barendregt (1984) now states that CL + \(A_8\) \(\vdash\) SK = KI. This does not yet imply that a pca satisfying \(A_8\) is already complete, since the conversion between SK and KI in CL + \(A_8\) could employ undefined subterms. However, one can exhibit an actual derivation CL + \(A_8\) \(\vdash\) SK = KI that only employs defined subterms. Hence we arrive at the following fact.

\[\dagger\] Barendregt’s axiom (Barendregt 1975, Definition 1.1.7) is: \(sab = sa'b' \Rightarrow a = a' \& b = b'\).
Theorem 8.4. $\mathcal{U} \models A_\beta \Rightarrow \mathcal{U}$ is total.

Proof. As explained above, we have $\text{CL} + A_\beta \vdash SK = KI$. We need, moreover, an actual derivation in which only defined subterms occur. Now both sides of all axioms in $A_\beta$ are normal forms, and hence are always defined. The use of the $S$-axiom is always ‘safe’ too. So, we need an actual derivation in which the applications of the $K$-axiom do not erase or introduce undefined terms. Such a derivation was given by Wojtek Swiatek, and is included in the Appendix. It consists of 44 steps; and it is easily checked that the only terms erased or introduced by the $K$-axiom are normal forms, and hence are defined. In fact these terms are $K, I, KI$ and $S(KS)(SKK)$.

Appendix

The material in this appendix was kindly made available to us by Wojtek Swiatek.

Let $\text{CL}$ be the following set of axioms:

$$
\begin{align*}
KPQ &= P \\
SPQR &= PR(QR) \\
P &= P \\
P &= Q \Rightarrow Q = P \\
P &= Q, Q = R \Rightarrow P = R \\
P &= Q \Rightarrow PR = QR \\
P &= Q \Rightarrow RP = RQ
\end{align*}
$$

Let $A_\beta$ be the following set of axioms:

\begin{align*}
(A.1) & \quad K = S(S(KS)(S(KK)K))(K(SKK)) \\
(A.2) & \quad S = S(S(KS)(S(KS)))S(K(SKK))(K(SKK)) \\
(A.3) & \quad S(S(KS)(S(KS)))(KK) = S(KK) \\
(A.4) & \quad S(KS)(S(KK)) = S(KK)(S(S(KS)(S(KK)(SKK)))(K(SKK))) \\
\end{align*}

We will show that in $\text{CL}$ with $A_\beta$ it is true that $SK = KI$, by a conversion that only erases normal forms. Let

$$
\begin{align*}
I &= SKK, \\
F &= S(KS), \\
G &= S(KK), \\
D &= S(F(GI))(KI).
\end{align*}
$$

Hence the axioms (A.1),…,(A.5) can be written as:

\begin{align*}
(A.1) & \quad K = S(F(GK))(KI) \\
(A.2) & \quad S = S(F(S(KF)(S(KG)S))(K(KI))) \\
(A.3) & \quad S(F(G(KF)))(KK) = G \\
(A.4) & \quad FG = GD \\
(A.5) & \quad S(KF)(FF) = S(F(G(F(S(KF)S))))(KS)
\end{align*}

Note that for all terms $P$ and $Q$ we have:

$$
\begin{align*}
FPQ & \equiv S(KS)PQ = KSQ(PQ) = SPQ, \\
GPQ & \equiv S(KK)PQ = KKQ(PQ) = K(PQ).
\end{align*}
$$
We now have

\[
SK = S(F(GK))(KI)
\]

\[
≡ S(F(\text{S}(KF)(\text{S}(KGS))))(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(F(GK))(\text{KI})\quad (A.1)
\]

\[
≡ S(F(\text{S}(KF)(\text{S}(KGS))))(F(GK))(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(F(\text{GK}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.2)
\]

\[
≡ S(F(\text{SK})\text{S}(\text{SK})\text{S})(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.1)
\]

\[
≡ S(F(\text{SK})\text{S}(\text{SK})\text{S})(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.2)
\]

\[
≡ S(\text{K}(\text{K}K)\text{K})(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.1)
\]

\[
≡ S(\text{K}K)\text{K}(\text{K}K)\quad (A.2)
\]

\[
F \equiv \text{S}(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.1)
\]

\[
≡ \text{S}(\text{K}(\text{KI}))(\text{K}K)\quad (A.2)
\]
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References


