Theorem lam.1. Let $M$, $N_1$, and $N_2$ be terms, such that $M \triangleright N_1$ and $M \triangleright N_2$. Then there is a term $P$ such that $N_1 \triangleright P$ and $N_2 \triangleright P$.

Corollary lam.2. Suppose $M$ can be reduced to normal form. Then this normal form is unique.

Proof. If $M \triangleright N_1$ and $M \triangleright N_2$, by the previous theorem there is a term $P$ such that $N_1$ and $N_2$ both reduce to $P$. If $N_1$ and $N_2$ are both in normal form, this can only happen if $N_1 = P = N_2$.

Finally, we will say that two terms $M$ and $N$ are $\beta$-equivalent, or just equivalent, if they reduce to a common term; in other words, if there is some $P$ such that $M \triangleright P$ and $N \triangleright P$. This is written $M \equiv N$. Using Theorem lam.1, you can check that $\equiv$ is an equivalence relation, with the additional property that for every $M$ and $N$, if $M \triangleright N$ or $N \triangleright M$, then $M \equiv N$. (In fact, one can show that $\equiv$ is the smallest equivalence relation having this property.)

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Bibliography