rec.1 The Normal Form Theorem

Theorem rec.1 (Kleene’s Normal Form Theorem). There is a primitive recursive relation \( T(e, x, s) \) and a primitive recursive function \( U(s) \), with the following property: if \( f \) is any partial recursive function, then for some \( e \),

\[
f(x) \simeq U(\mu s T(e, x, s))
\]

for every \( x \).

The proof of the normal form theorem is involved, but the basic idea is simple. Every partial recursive function has an index \( e \), intuitively, a number coding its program or definition. If \( f(x) \downarrow \), the computation can be recorded systematically and coded by some number \( s \), and that \( s \) codes the computation of \( f \) on input \( x \) can be checked primitive recursively using only \( x \) and the definition \( e \). This means that \( T \) is primitive recursive. Given the full record of the computation \( s \), the “upshot” of \( s \) is the value of \( f(x) \), and it can be obtained from \( s \) primitive recursively as well.

The normal form theorem shows that only a single unbounded search is required for the definition of any partial recursive function. We can use the numbers \( e \) as “names” of partial recursive functions, and write \( \varphi_e \) for the function \( f \) defined by the equation in the theorem. Note that any partial recursive function can have more than one index—in fact, every partial recursive function has infinitely many indices.

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Bibliography