

## Hoare Logic and Model Checking

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1

## Motivation

We often fail to write programs that meet our expectations, which we phrased in their specifications:

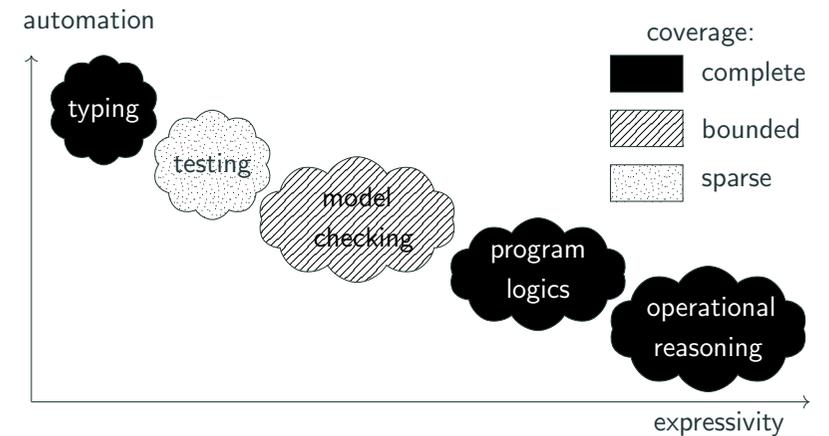
- we fail to write programs that meet their specification;
- we fail to write specifications that meet our expectations.

Addressing the former issue is called verification, and addressing the latter is called validation.

2

## Background

There are many verification & validation techniques of varying coverage, expressivity, level of automation, ..., for example:



3

## Choice of technique

More expressive and complete techniques lead to more confidence.

It is important to choose the right set of verification & validation techniques for the task at hand:

- verified designs may still not work;
- verification can give a false sense of security;
- verification can be very expensive and time-consuming.

More heavyweight techniques should be used together with testing, not as a replacement.

4

## Course structure

This course is about two techniques, their underlying ideas, how to use them, and why they are correct:

- **Hoare logic** (Lectures 1-6);
- **Model checking** (Lectures 7-12).

These are not just techniques, but also ways of thinking about programs.

5

## Lecture plan

Lecture 1: Informal introduction to Hoare logic

Lecture 2: Formal semantics of Hoare logic

Lecture 3: Examples, loop invariants, and total correctness

Lecture 4: Mechanised program verification

Lecture 5: Separation logic

Lecture 6: Examples in separation logic

6

## Hoare logic

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## Hoare logic

Hoare logic is a formalism for relating the **initial** and **terminal** state of a program.

Hoare logic was invented in 1969 by Tony Hoare, inspired by earlier work of Robert Floyd.

There was little-known prior work by Alan Turing.

Hoare logic is still an active area of research.

7

## Partial correctness triples

Hoare logic uses **partial correctness triples** (also “Hoare triples”) for specifying and reasoning about the behaviour of programs:

$$\{P\} C \{Q\}$$

is a logical statement about a command  $C$ , where  $P$  and  $Q$  are state predicates:

- $P$  is called the precondition, and describes the initial state;
- $Q$  is called the postcondition, and describes the terminal state.

8

## Components of a Hoare logic

To define a Hoare logic, we need four main components:

- the programming language that we want to reason about: its syntax and dynamic (e.g. operational) semantics;
- an assertion language for defining state predicates: its syntax and an interpretation;
- an interpretation of Hoare triples;
- a (sound) syntactic proof system for deriving Hoare triples.

This lecture will introduce each component informally. In the coming lectures, we will cover the formal details.

9

## The WHILE language

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## Commands of the WHILE language

WHILE is the prototypical imperative language. Programs consist of commands, which include branching, iteration, and assignment:

$$\begin{aligned} C &::= \text{skip} \\ &| C_1; C_2 \\ &| V := E \\ &| \text{if } B \text{ then } C_1 \text{ else } C_2 \\ &| \text{while } B \text{ do } C \end{aligned}$$

Here,  $V$  is a variable,  $E$  is an arithmetic expression, which evaluates to an integer, and  $B$  is a boolean expression, which evaluates to a boolean.

States are mappings from variables to integers.

10

## Assertions and specifications

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## Expressions of the WHILE language

The grammar for arithmetic expressions and boolean expressions includes the usual arithmetic operations and comparison operators, respectively:

$$\begin{aligned} E &::= N \mid V \mid E_1 + E_2 && \text{arithmetic expressions} \\ &| E_1 - E_2 \mid E_1 \times E_2 \mid \dots \end{aligned}$$
$$\begin{aligned} B &::= \mathbf{T} \mid \mathbf{F} \mid E_1 = E_2 && \text{boolean expressions} \\ &| E_1 \leq E_2 \mid E_1 \geq E_2 \mid \dots \end{aligned}$$

Note that expressions do not have side effects.

11

## The assertion language

Assertions (also “state predicates”)  $P, Q, \dots$  include boolean expressions (which can contain program variables), combined using the usual logical operators:  $\wedge, \vee, \neg, \Rightarrow, \forall, \exists, \dots$

For instance, the predicate  $X = Y + 1 \wedge Y > 0$  describes states in which the variable  $Y$  contains a positive value, and the value of  $X$  is equal to the value of  $Y$  plus 1.

12

## Informal semantics of partial correctness triples

The partial correctness triple  $\{P\} C \{Q\}$  holds if and only if:

- assuming  $C$  is executed in an initial state satisfying  $P$ ,
- and assuming moreover that this execution terminates,
- then the terminal state of the execution satisfies  $Q$ .

For instance,

- $\{X = 1\} X := X + 1 \{X = 2\}$  holds;
- $\{X = 1\} X := X + 1 \{X = 3\}$  does not hold.

13

## Informal semantics of total correctness

There is no standard notation for total correctness triples; we will use  $[P] C [Q]$ .

The total correctness triple  $[P] C [Q]$  holds if and only if:

- assuming  $C$  is executed in an initial state satisfying  $P$ ,
- then the execution terminates,
- and the terminal state satisfies  $Q$ .

15

## Partial correctness

Partial correctness triples are called **partial** because they only specify the intended behaviour of terminating executions.

For instance,  $\{X = 1\} \mathbf{while} X > 0 \mathbf{do} X := X + 1 \{X = 0\}$  holds, because the given program never terminates when executed from an initial state where  $X$  is 1.

Hoare logic also features total correctness triples that strengthen the specification to require termination.

14

## Total correctness

The following total correctness triple does not hold:

$$[X = 1] \mathbf{while} X > 0 \mathbf{do} X := X + 1 [X = 0]$$

- the loop never terminates when executed from an initial state where  $X$  is positive.

The following total correctness triple does hold:

$$[X = 0] \mathbf{while} X > 0 \mathbf{do} X := X + 1 [X = 0]$$

- the loop always terminates immediately when executed from an initial state where  $X$  is zero.

16

## Total correctness, partial correctness, and termination

Informally: total correctness = partial correctness + termination.

It is often easier to show partial correctness and termination separately.

Termination is usually straightforward to show, but there are examples where it is not: no one knows whether the program below terminates for all values of  $X$ :

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while  $X > 1$  do
  if  $ODD(X)$  then  $X := 3 \times X + 1$  else  $X := X \text{ DIV } 2$ 
```

Microsoft's T2 tool is used to prove termination of systems code.

17

## Corner cases of partial correctness triples

$\{\perp\} C \{Q\}$

- this says nothing about the behaviour of  $C$ , because  $\perp$  never holds for any initial state.

$\{\top\} C \{Q\}$

- this says that whenever  $C$  halts,  $Q$  holds.

$\{P\} C \{\top\}$

- this holds for every precondition  $P$  and command  $C$ , because  $\top$  always holds in the terminate state.

18

## Examples of specifications

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## Corner cases of total correctness triples

$[P] C [\top]$

- this says that  $C$  always terminates when executed from an initial state satisfying  $P$ .

$[\top] C [Q]$

- this says that  $C$  always terminates, and ends up in a state where  $Q$  holds.

19

## The need for auxiliary variables

How can we specify that a program  $C$  computes the maximum of two variables  $X$  and  $Y$ , and stores the result in a variable  $Z$ ?

Is this a good specification for  $C$ ?

$$\{\top\} C \{(X \leq Y \Rightarrow Z = Y) \wedge (Y \leq X \Rightarrow Z = X)\}$$

No! Take  $C$  to be

$$X := 0; Y := 0; Z := 0$$

Then  $C$  satisfies the above specification!

The postcondition should refer to the **initial** values of  $X$  and  $Y$ .

20

## Formal proof system for Hoare logic

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## Auxiliary variables

In Hoare logic, we use **auxiliary variables** (also “ghost variables”, or “logical variables”), which are not allowed not occur in the program, to refer to the initial values of variables in postconditions.

Notation: program variables are uppercase, and auxiliary variables are lowercase.  $v$  ranges over auxiliary variables, and concrete values are  $x, y, \dots$

For instance,  $\{X = x \wedge Y = y\} C \{X = y \wedge Y = x\}$  expresses that if  $C$  terminates, then it exchanges the values of variables  $X$  and  $Y$ .

21

## Hoare logic

We will now introduce a natural deduction proof system for partial correctness triples due to Tony Hoare.

The logic consists of a set of **inference rule schemas** for deriving consequences from premises.

If  $S$  is a statement, we will write  $\vdash S$  to mean that the statement  $S$  is derivable. We will have two derivability judgements:

- $\vdash P$ , for derivability of assertions; and
- $\vdash \{P\} C \{Q\}$ , for derivability of partial correctness triples.

22

## Inference rule schemas

The inference rule schemas of Hoare logic will be specified as follows:

$$\frac{\vdash S_1 \quad \dots \quad \vdash S_n}{\vdash S}$$

This expresses that  $S$  may be deduced from assumptions  $S_1, \dots, S_n$ .

These are schemas that may contain meta-variables.

23

## Proof trees

A proof tree for  $\vdash S$  in Hoare logic is a tree with  $\vdash S$  at the root, constructed using the inference rules of Hoare logic, where all nodes are shown to be derivable (so leaves require no further derivations):

$$\frac{\frac{\overline{\vdash S_1} \quad \overline{\vdash S_2}}{\vdash S_3} \quad \overline{\vdash S_4}}{\vdash S}$$

We typically write proof trees with the root at the bottom.

24

## Formal proof system for Hoare logic

$$\overline{\vdash \{P\} \text{ skip } \{P\}} \quad \overline{\vdash \{P[E/V]\} V := E \{P\}}$$

$$\frac{\vdash \{P\} C_1 \{Q\} \quad \vdash \{Q\} C_2 \{R\}}{\vdash \{P\} C_1; C_2 \{R\}}$$

$$\frac{\vdash \{P \wedge B\} C_1 \{Q\} \quad \vdash \{P \wedge \neg B\} C_2 \{Q\}}{\vdash \{P\} \text{ if } B \text{ then } C_1 \text{ else } C_2 \{Q\}}$$

$$\frac{\vdash \{P \wedge B\} C \{P\}}{\vdash \{P\} \text{ while } B \text{ do } C \{P \wedge \neg B\}}$$

$$\frac{\vdash P_1 \Rightarrow P_2 \quad \vdash \{P_2\} C \{Q_2\} \quad \vdash Q_2 \Rightarrow Q_1}{\vdash \{P_1\} C \{Q_1\}}$$

25

## The skip rule

$$\overline{\vdash \{P\} \text{ skip } \{P\}}$$

The **skip** rule expresses that any assertion that holds before **skip** is executed also holds afterwards.

$P$  is a meta-variable ranging over an arbitrary state predicate.

For instance,  $\vdash \{X = 1\} \text{ skip } \{X = 1\}$ .

26

## The assignment rule

$$\frac{}{\vdash \{P[E/V]\} V := E \{P\}}$$

Here,  $P[E/V]$  means the assertion  $P$  with the expression  $E$  substituted for all occurrences of the variable  $V$ .

For instance,

$$\begin{aligned} & \vdash \{X + 1 = 2\} X := X + 1 \{X = 2\} \\ & \vdash \{Y + X = Y + 10\} X := Y + X \{X = Y + 10\} \end{aligned}$$

27

## The assignment rule

The assignment rule reads right-to-left; could we use another rule that reads more easily?

Consider the following plausible alternative assignment rule:

$$\frac{}{\vdash \{P\} V := E \{P[E/V]\}}$$

We can instantiate this rule to obtain the following triple, which does not hold:

$$\{X = 0\} X := 1 \{1 = 0\}$$

28

## The rule of consequence

$$\frac{\vdash P_1 \Rightarrow P_2 \quad \vdash \{P_2\} C \{Q_2\} \quad \vdash Q_2 \Rightarrow Q_1}{\vdash \{P_1\} C \{Q_1\}}$$

The rule of consequence allows us to strengthen preconditions and weaken postconditions.

Note: the  $\vdash P \Rightarrow Q$  hypotheses are a different kind of judgment.

For instance, from  $\vdash \{X + 1 = 2\} X := X + 1 \{X = 2\}$ , we can deduce  $\vdash \{X = 1\} X := X + 1 \{X = 2\}$ .

29

## Sequential composition

$$\frac{\vdash \{P\} C_1 \{Q\} \quad \vdash \{Q\} C_2 \{R\}}{\vdash \{P\} C_1; C_2 \{R\}}$$

If the postcondition of  $C_1$  matches the precondition of  $C_2$ , we can derive a specification for their sequential composition.

For example, if we have deduced:

- $\vdash \{X = 1\} X := X + 1 \{X = 2\}$
- $\vdash \{X = 2\} X := X \times 2 \{X = 4\}$

we may deduce that  $\vdash \{X = 1\} X := X + 1; X := X \times 2 \{X = 4\}$ .

30

## The conditional rule

$$\frac{\vdash \{P \wedge B\} C_1 \{Q\} \quad \vdash \{P \wedge \neg B\} C_2 \{Q\}}{\vdash \{P\} \text{ if } B \text{ then } C_1 \text{ else } C_2 \{Q\}}$$

For instance, to prove that

$$\vdash \{T\} \text{ if } X \geq Y \text{ then } Z := X \text{ else } Z := Y \{Z = \max(X, Y)\}$$

it suffices to prove that  $\vdash \{T \wedge X \geq Y\} Z := X \{Z = \max(X, Y)\}$   
and  $\vdash \{T \wedge \neg(X \geq Y)\} Z := Y \{Z = \max(X, Y)\}$ .

31

## The loop rule

$$\frac{\vdash \{P \wedge B\} C \{P\}}{\vdash \{P\} \text{ while } B \text{ do } C \{P \wedge \neg B\}}$$

The loop rule says that

- if  $P$  is an invariant of the loop body when the loop condition succeeds, then  $P$  is an invariant for the whole loop, and
- if the loop terminates, then the loop condition failed.

We will return to be problem of finding loop invariants.

32

## (Redundant) Conjunction and disjunction rules

$$\frac{\vdash \{P_1\} C \{Q\} \quad \vdash \{P_2\} C \{Q\}}{\vdash \{P_1 \vee P_2\} C \{Q\}}$$
$$\frac{\vdash \{P\} C \{Q_1\} \quad \vdash \{P\} C \{Q_2\}}{\vdash \{P\} C \{Q_1 \wedge Q_2\}}$$

These rules are useful for splitting up proofs.

Any proof with these rules could be done without using them

- i.e. they are theoretically redundant (proof omitted),
- however, they are useful in practice.

33

## Summary

Hoare logic is a formalism for reasoning about the behaviour of programs by relating their initial and terminal state.

It uses an assertion logic based on first-order logic to reason about program states, and extends this with Hoare triples to reason about the programs.

Papers of historical interest:

- C. A. R. Hoare. An axiomatic basis for computer programming. 1969.
- R. W. Floyd. Assigning meanings to programs. 1967.
- A. M. Turing. Checking a large routine. 1949.

In the next lecture, we will formalise the intuitions we gave today, and prove soundness of Hoare logic.

34