

Halt!  
by L.K.

Theorem. In a given programming language  $L$ , there is no (algorithmic) way to list all the algorithms in  $L$  that halt.

Proof. Suppose that  $S = \{A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots\}$  is any (algorithmically produced) list of halting algorithms written in the language  $L$ . We shall assume that each  $A_i$  accepts integers  $n$  as inputs and for each  $n$ ,  $A_i(n)$  halts. Now define a new algorithm  $A$  as follows:

To run  $A(i)$ :

1. Get a simulation of  $A_i$ .
2. Run  $A_i(i)$ .

Now suppose that  $A = A_j$  for some  $j$ .

Then to run  $A(j)$ , we must

1. Get a simulation of  $A_j$ .
2. Run  $A_j(j)$ .

But  $A_j = A$ . So when we run  $A_j(j)$ , we run  $A(j)$  and so this takes us back to step 1. In other words, the algorithm  $A$  will have an infinite loop if  $A$  is of the form  $A_j$  for any  $j$ . Therefore  $A$  is not on the list.

The list of halting algorithms is incomplete.

Q.E.D.

Note that this is exactly the same logic as:

A set  $X$  is well-founded (wf for short) if  $X$  has no infinite descending chains of membership.

Theorem. Any set of wf sets is incomplete. In particular, if  $W$  is a set of wf sets, then  $W$  is itself well-founded and  $W$  is not a member of itself.

Proof. Any set  $W$  of wf sets is wf. For if we look for a descending chain of membership, we shall have to choose a member of  $W$  and look there. But that member is wf and so all chains of membership in that element terminate.  $W$  cannot be a member of itself, for then  $W$  would have an infinite descending chain of membership.

Q.E.D.