

# Automation of Boolos' Curious Inference in Isabelle/HOL

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March 24, 2023

## Abstract

Boolos' Curious Inference is automated in Isabelle/HOL after interactive speculation of a suitable shorthand notation (one or two definitions).

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## 1 Introduction

In his article *A Curious Inference* [6], George Boolos discusses an example of the hyper-exponential speedup of proofs when moving from first-order logic to higher-order logic. The first-order proof problem he presents (hereafter called BCP, for Boolos' Curious Problem) has no short proof in first-order logic, but it has an elegant short proof in higher-order logic.

The feasibility of interactive reconstructions of proofs of the BCP at the same level of proof granularity as exercised in Boolos' original paper was shown already one and half decades ago by Benzmüller and Brown [2]. Such an exercise has just recently been repeated in Isabelle/HOL by Ketland [8]. However, as demonstrated in [4], interactive proof for solving BCP is no longer needed, since proof automation in higher-order logic has progressed

to the extent that short proofs for BCP can now be found by state-of-the-art higher-order automated theorem provers nearly fully automatically: the only extra human input is to provide one or two suitable shorthand notations.

In this AFP paper, we provide Isabelle/HOL sources related to experiments performed in [4], showing that interactive proof development for BCP (and related problems), as recently practiced by Ketland [8], can now be replaced by almost fully automated proofs. The availability of a powerful hammer tool, such as *Sledgehammer* [5], is of course an essential prerequisite.

In the formalisation presented below, we stick as closely as possible to the syntax of Boolos' original work; this is made easy in the user interface of Isabelle/HOL [11].

## 2 Boolos Curious Proof Problem

**theory** *Boolos-Curious-Inference-Automated* **imports** *Main*  
**begin**

First declare a non-empty type  $i$  of objects (natural numbers in the context of this paper).

**typedecl**  $i$

The signature for BCP consists of four uninterpreted constant symbols.

**consts**

$e :: i$  (**e**) — one  
 $s :: i \Rightarrow i$  (**s-**) — successor function  
 $f :: i \Rightarrow i \Rightarrow i$  (**f-**) — binary function; axiomatised below as Ackermann function  
 $d :: i \Rightarrow \text{bool}$  (**d-**) — arbitrary uninterpreted unary predicate

Axioms  $A1$ - $A3$  model the Ackermann function and Axioms  $A4$  and  $A5$  stipulate the properties of predicate  $d$ .

**axiomatization where**

$A1$ :  $\forall n. fne = se$  **and** — Axiom 1 for Ackermann function  $f$   
 $A2$ :  $\forall y. fesy = ssfey$  **and** — Axiom 2 for Ackermann function  $f$   
 $A3$ :  $\forall x y. fsxsy = fxf(sx)y$  **and** — Axiom 3 for Ackermann function  $f$   
 $A4$ : **de and** —  $d$  (an arbitrary predicate) holds for one  
 $A5$ :  $\forall x. dx \longrightarrow dsx$  — if  $d$  holds for  $x$  it also holds for the successor of  $x$

Trying to prove automatically with *Sledgehammer* [5] that  $d$  holds for  $fsssssssse$  still fails at this point. As Boolos' explains, a naive first-order proof would require more modus ponens steps (with  $A5$  and  $A4$ ) than there are atoms in the universe.

**lemma**  $dfssssssse$  — sledgehammer **oops** — no proof found; timeout

### 3 Automated Proof: Using Two Definitions

We interactively provide two shorthand notations  $ind$  and  $p$ . After their introduction a proof can be found fully automatically with *Sledgehammer*.  $ind\ X$  is defined to hold if and only if  $X$  is ‘inductive’ over  $\mathbf{e}$  and  $s$ .  $p\ xy$  holds if and only if  $pxy$  is in smallest inductive set over  $\mathbf{e}$  and  $s$ . Note that the symbols  $ind$  and  $p$  do not occur in the BCP problem statement.

**definition**  $ind$  (**ind**-) **where**  $ind \equiv \lambda X. X\mathbf{e} \wedge (\forall x. X\ x \longrightarrow X\ \mathbf{s}x)$

**definition**  $p$  (**p**-) **where**  $p \equiv \lambda x\ y. (\lambda z::i. (\forall X. \mathbf{ind}\ X \longrightarrow X\ z))\ \mathbf{f}\ x\ y$

Using these definitions, state-of-art higher-order ATPs integrated with Isabelle/HOL can now fully automatically prove Boolos’ Curious Problem:

**theorem**  $dfsssssssse$  — *sledgehammer*

**by** (*metis A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 ind-def p-def*) — metis proof reconstruction succeeds

In experiments (using a MacBook Pro (16-inch, 2019), 2,6 GHz 6-Core Intel Core i7, 16 GB 2667 MHz DDR4) running Isabelle2022 automatically found proofs were reported by various theorem provers, including *Z3* [7], *Vampire* [9], *Zipperposition* [1], *E* [10], and Leo-II (*remote-leo2*) [3].

### 4 Automated Proof: Using a Single Definition

**definition**  $p'$  (**p'**-) **where**

$p' \equiv \lambda x\ y. (\lambda z::i. (\forall X. (X\mathbf{e} \wedge (\forall x. X\ x \longrightarrow X\ \mathbf{s}x)) \longrightarrow X\ z))\ \mathbf{f}\ x\ y$

**theorem**  $dfsssssssse$  — *sledgehammer* (*A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 p'-def*)

**by** (*smt A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 p'-def*) — smt proof reconstruction succeeds

In experiments (using the same environment as above) several provers reported proofs, including *Z3* and *E*.

### 5 Proof Reconstruction: E’s Proof from [6]

In this section we reconstruct and verify in Isabelle/HOL the proof argument found by E as reported in [6]. Analysing E’s proof we can identify the following five lemmata:

**lemma** *L1a*: **ind**  $d$  **by** (*simp add: A4 A5 ind-def*)

**lemma** *L1b*:  $\forall x. \mathbf{p}x\mathbf{e}$  **by** (*simp add: A1 ind-def p-def*)

**lemma** *L1c*: **ind**  $\mathbf{p}e$  **by** (*metis A2 L1b ind-def p-def*)

**lemma** *L2*:  $\forall x\ Y. (\mathbf{ind}\ \mathbf{p}x \wedge \mathbf{ind}\ \mathbf{p}sx \wedge \mathbf{ind}\ Y) \longrightarrow Y\ \mathbf{f}x\ \mathbf{s}x\ \mathbf{s}e$  **by** (*metis ind-def p-def*)

**lemma** *L3*:  $\forall x. \mathbf{ind}\ \mathbf{p}x \longrightarrow \mathbf{ind}\ \mathbf{p}sx$  **by** (*metis A3 L1b ind-def p-def*)

Using these lemmata E then constructs the following refutation argument:

```

theorem dfsssssssse
proof -
  { assume L4: ¬dfsssssssse
    have L5: ¬ind psssse ∨ ¬ind psse using L1a L1b L1c L2 L4 by blast
    have L6: ¬ind pssse ∧ ¬ind psse ∧ ¬ind pse using L3 L5 by blast
    have False using L1c L3 L6 by auto
  }
then show ?thesis by blast
qed

```

This refutation argument can alternatively be replaced by:

```

theorem dfsssssssse
proof -
  have L7: ind pse using L1c L3 by blast
  have L8: ind psse using L3 L7 by blast
  have L9: ind pssse using L3 L8 by blast
  have L10: ind psssse using L3 L9 by blast
  have L11: (ind psse ∧ ind psssse ∧ ind d) using L10 L1a L9 by blast
then show ?thesis using L2 by blast
qed

```

Lemma *L2* can actually be simplified (this was also hinted at by an anonymous reviewer of [4]):

```

lemma L2-1: ∀ x Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yfxe by (metis ind-def p-def)
lemma L2-2: ∀ x Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yfxse by (metis ind-def p-def)
lemma L2-3: ∀ x Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yfxsse by (metis ind-def p-def)
lemma L2-4: ∀ x Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yfxssse by (metis ind-def p-def)
lemma L2-5: ∀ x Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yfxsssse by (metis ind-def p-def)

```

etc.

The following statement, however, has a countermodel.

```

lemma L2-1: ∀ x y Y. (ind px ∧ ind Y) → Yf x y
nitpick[user-axioms,expect=genuine] oops — countermodel by nitpick

```

Instead of using *L2* we can now use *L2-5* in our proof of BCP from above:

```

theorem dfsssssssse
proof -
  have L7: ind pse using L1c L3 by blast
  have L8: ind psse using L3 L7 by blast
  have L9: ind pssse using L3 L8 by blast
  have L10: ind psssse using L3 L9 by blast
  have L11: (ind psse ∧ ind psssse ∧ ind d) using L10 L1a L9 by blast
then show ?thesis using L2-5 by blast
qed

```

## 6 Conclusion

Isabelle/HOL data sources were provided in relation to [4], which describes recent progress and remaining challenges in automating Boolos' Curious Problem. The interactive introduction of lemmas, as still exercised in [8] and earlier in [2], is no longer necessary, since higher-order theorem provers are now able to speculate the required lemmas automatically, provided that appropriate shorthand notations are provided (see the definitions of *ind* and *p*).

Since Boolos' example for speeding up proofs is interesting in several respects, it is now being used as an exercise in lecture courses at several universities (including University of Bamberg, University of Greifswald, University of Luxembourg, Free University of Berlin); having our source files permanently maintained in AFP hence makes sense.

end

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