Topic 3: Cooperating Processes and Synchronization

- **Synchronization**: using atomic operations to ensure correct cooperation between processes.

- The ‘‘Too Much Milk’’ problem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person A</th>
<th>Person B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:05 Leave for store.</td>
<td>Leave for store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10 Arrive at store.</td>
<td>Leave store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 Leave store.</td>
<td>Arrive at store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:20 Arrive home, put milk away.</td>
<td>Leave store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:25</td>
<td>Arrive home. OH, NO!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- One of the most important things in synchronization is to figure out what you want to achieve.

  In the given problem: *somebody gets milk, but we don’t get too much milk.*

- **Mutual exclusion**: Mechanisms that ensure that only one person or process is doing certain things at one time (others are excluded). E.g. only one person goes shopping at a time.

- **Critical section**: A section of code, or collection of operations, in which only one process may be executing at a given time. E.g. shopping.
There are many ways to achieve mutual exclusion. Most involve some sort of locking mechanism: prevent someone from doing something. For example, before shopping, leave a note on the refrigerator.

Three elements of locking:

1. Must lock before using. 
   leave note
2. Must unlock when done. 
   remove note
3. Must wait if locked. 
   don’t shop if note

1st attempt at computerized milk buying:

Processes A & B

1   if (NoMilk) {
2       if (NoNote) {
3           Leave Note;
4           Buy Milk;
5           Remove Note;
6       }
7   }

Will it work?

If not, why not?

Making the problem less likely to occur - that is typical of first attempts at solutions to synchronization problems.

What happens if we leave the note at the very beginning: does this make everything work?
• 2nd attempt: change meaning of note. A buys if there’s no note, B buys if there is a note.

Process A

1 if (NoNote) {
2 if (NoMilk) {
3 Buy Milk;
4 }
5 Leave Note;
6 }

Process B

1 if (Note) {
2 if (NoMilk) {
3 Buy Milk;
4 }
5 Remove Note;
6 }

• Does this work? How can you tell?

• Ideally, we shouldn’t rely on intuitions or informal reasoning when dealing with complex parallel programs: we should be able to prove that they behave correctly. Unfortunately, formal verification has only been successful on very small programs. For example, in the above example:
  • A note will be left only by A, and only if there isn’t already a note.
  • A note will be removed only by B, and only if there is a note.
  • Thus, there is either one note, or no note.
  • If there is a note, only B will buy milk.
  • If there is not a note, only A will buy milk.
  • Thus, only one process will buy milk.
3rd attempt: use 2 notes.

**Process A**

1. Leave NoteA;
2. if (NoNoteB) {
3.     if (NoMilk) {
4.         Buy Milk;
5.     }
6. }
7. Remove NoteA;

Process B is the same except interchange NoteA and NoteB.

What can you say about this solution?

4th attempt: in case of tie, B will buy milk. Process A stays the same as before.

**Process B**

1. Leave NoteB;
2. while (NoteA) DoNothing;
3. if (NoMilk) {
4.     Buy Milk;
5. }
6. Remove NoteB;

Does this solution work?

Any disadvantages?