## The Essence of C++

with examples in C++84, C++98, C++11, and C++14

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#### **Abstract**

- C++11 is being deployed and the shape of C++14 is becoming clear. This talk
  examines the foundations of C++. What is essential? What sets C++ apart from
  other languages? How does new and old features support (or distract from) design
  and programming relying on this essence.
- I focus on the abstraction mechanisms (as opposed to the mapping to the machine): Classes and templates. Fundamentally, if you understand vector, you understand C++.
- Type safety and resource safety are key design aims for a program. These aims must be met without limiting the range of applications and without imposing significant run-time or space overheads. I address issues of resource management (garbage collection is not an ideal answer and pointers should not be used as resource handles), generic programming (we must make it simpler and safer), compile-time computation (how and when?), and type safety (casts belongs in the lowest-level hardware interface). I will touch upon move semantics, exceptions, concepts, type aliases, and more. My aim is not so much to present novel features and technique, but to explore how C++'s feature set supports a new and more effective design and programming style.
- Primary audience
  - Experienced programmers with weak C++ understanding
  - Academics/Teachers/Mentors
  - Architects (?)

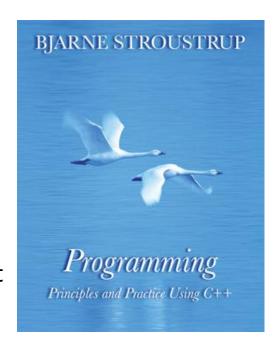
#### Overview

- Aims and constraints
- C++ in four slides
- Resource management
- OOP: Classes and Hierarchies
  - (very briefly)
- GP: Templates
  - Requirements checking
- Challenges



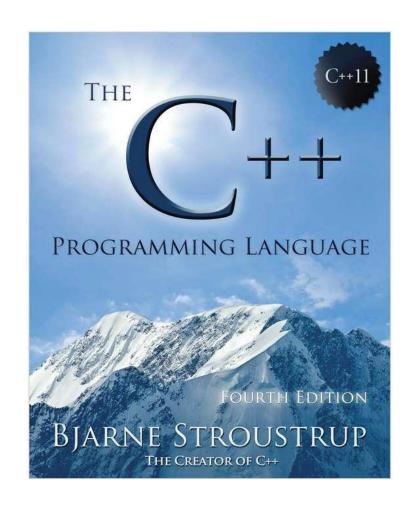
## What did/do I want?

- Type safety
  - Encapsulate necessary unsafe operations
- Resource safety
  - It's not all memory
- Performance
  - For some parts of almost all systems, it's important
- Predictability
  - For hard and soft real time
- Teachability
  - Complexity of code should be proportional to the complexity of the task
- Readability
  - People and machines ("analyzability")



## Who did/do I want it for?

- Primary concerns
  - Systems programming
  - Embedded systems
  - Resource constrained systems
  - Large systems
- Experts
  - "C++ is expert friendly"
- Novices
  - C++ Is not just expert friendly



Template meta-programming!

### What is C++?

Class hierarchies

A hybrid language

Buffer overflows

Classes

Too big!



Generic programming

A multi-paradigm programming language

It's C!

Embedded systems programming language

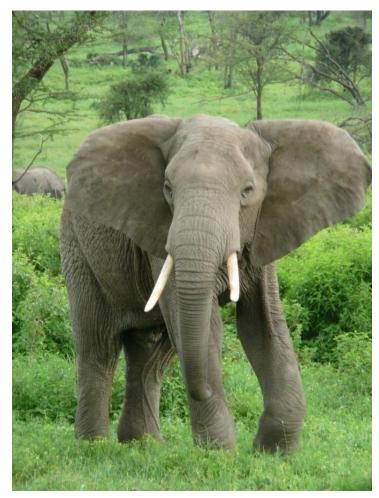
Low level!

An object-oriented a programming language A random collection of features

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#### **C++**

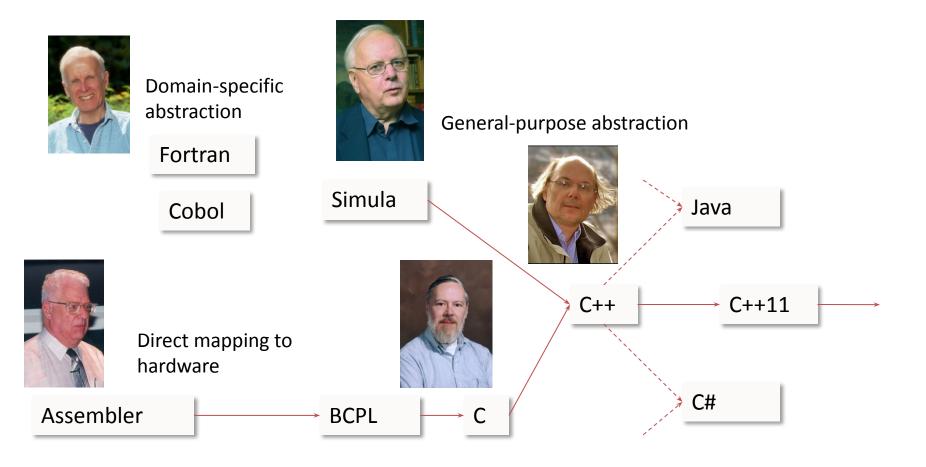
A light-weight abstraction programming language



#### Key strengths:

- software infrastructure
- resource-constrained applications

## **Programming Languages**



#### What does C++ offer?

- Not perfection
  - Of course
- Not everything for everybody
  - Of course
- A solid fundamental model
  - Yes, really
- 30+ years of real-world "refinement"
  - It works
- Performance
  - A match for anything
- The best is buried in "compatibility stuff"
  - long-term stability is a feature









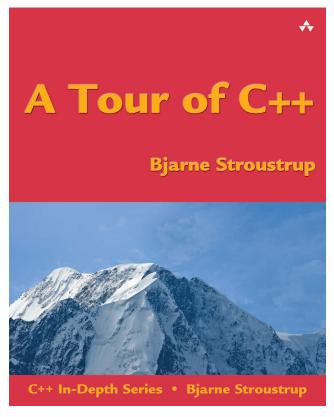






#### What does C++ offer?

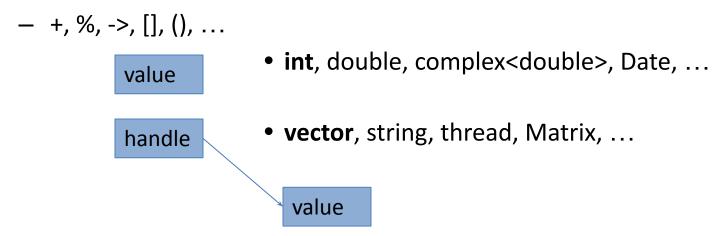
- C++ in Four slides
  - Map to hardware
  - Classes
  - Inheritance
  - Parameterized types



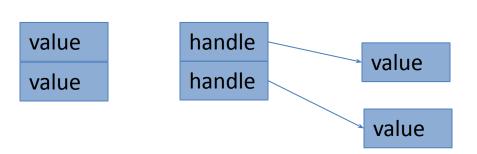
- If you understand int and vector, you understand C++
  - The rest is "details" (1,300+ pages of details)

## Map to Hardware

Primitive operations => instructions

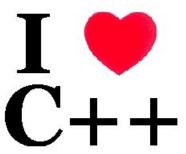


- Objects can be composed by simple concatenation:
  - Arrays
  - Classes/structs



# Classes: Construction/Destruction

• From the first week of "C with Classes" (1979)



"A constructor establishes the environment for the members to run in; the destructor reverses its actions."

#### Abstract Classes and Inheritance

Insulate the user from the implementation

- No data members, all data in derived classes
  - "not brittle"
- Manipulate through pointer or reference
  - Typically allocated on the free store ("dynamic memory")
  - Typically requires some form of lifetime management (use resource handles)
- Is the root of a hierarchy of derived classes

## Parameterized Types and Classes

#### Templates

- Essential: Support for generic programming
- Secondary: Support for compile-time computation

```
template<typename T>
class vector { /* ... */ }; // a generic type
```

**vector**<**double**> **constants** = **{3.14159265359, 2.54, 1, 6.62606957E-34, }; //** *a use* 

```
template<typename C>
void sort (Cont& c) { /* ... */ }  // a generic function
sort(constants);  // a use
```

# Not C++ (fundamental)

- No crucial dependence on a garbage collector
  - GC is a last and imperfect resort
- No guaranteed type safety
  - Not for all constructs
  - C compatibility, history, pointers/arrays, unions, casts, ...
- No virtual machine
  - For many reasons, we often want to run on the real machine
  - You can run on a virtual machine (or in a sandbox) if you want to



# Not C++ (market realities)

- No huge "standard" library
  - No owner
    - To produce "free" libraries to ensure market share
  - No central authority
    - To approve, reject, and help integration of libraries
- No standard
  - Graphics/GUI
    - Competing frameworks
  - XML support
  - Web support
  - **–** ...



# Resource Management



## Resource management

- A resource should be owned by a "handle"
  - A "handle" should present a well-defined and useful abstraction
    - E.g. a vector, string, file, thread
- Use constructors and a destructor

```
class Vector {
                            // vector of doubles
    Vector(initializer_list<double>); // acquire memory; initialize elements
     ~Vector();
                           // destroy elements; release memory
private:
     double* elem;// pointer to elements
    int sz; // number of elements
                                                           handle
};
void fct()
                                                                            Value
    Vector v {1, 1.618, 3.14, 2.99e8}; // vector of doubles
    // ...
```

## Resource management

- A handle usually is scoped
  - Handles lifetime (initialization, cleanup), and more

## Resource management

- What about errors?
  - A resource is something you acquire and release
  - A resource should have an owner
  - Ultimately "root" a resource in a (scoped) handle
  - "Resource Acquisition Is Initialization" (RAII)
    - Acquire during construction
    - Release in destructor
  - Throw exception in case of failure
    - Can be simulated, but not conveniently
  - Never throw while holding a resource not owned by a handle
- In general
  - Leave established invariants intact when leaving a scope

## "Resource Acquisition is Initialization" (RAII)

- For all resources
  - Memory (done by std::string, std::vector, std::map, ...)
  - Locks (e.g. std::unique\_lock), files (e.g. std::fstream), sockets, threads
     (e.g. std::thread), ...

```
std::mutex mtx; // a resource
int sh; // shared data

void f()
{
    std::lock_guard lck {mtx}; // grab (acquire) the mutex
    sh+=1; // manipulate shared data
} // implicitly release the mutex
```

#### Pointer Misuse

Many (most?) uses of pointers in local scope are not exception safe

- But, garbage collection would not release non-memory resources anyway
- But, why use a "naked" pointer?

#### Resource Handles and Pointers

 A std::shared\_ptr releases its object at when the last shared\_ptr to it is destroyed

```
void f(int n, int x)
{
    shared_ptr<Gadget> p {new Gadget{n}};  // manage that pointer!
    // ...
    if (x<100) throw std::runtime_error{"Weird!"}; // no leak
    if (x<200) return;  // no leak
    // ...
}</pre>
```

- shared\_ptr provides a form of garbage collection
- But I'm not sharing anything
  - use a unique\_ptr

#### Resource Handles and Pointers

- But why use a pointer at all?
- If you can, just use a scoped variable

```
void f(int n, int x)
{
  Gadget g {n};
  // ...
  if (x<100) throw std::runtime_error{"Weird!"}; // no leak
  if (x<200) return; // no leak
  // ...
}</pre>
```

## Why do we use pointers?

- And references, iterators, etc.
- To represent ownership
  - Don't! Instead, use handles
- To reference resources
  - from within a handle
- To represent positions
  - Be careful
- To pass large amounts of data (into a function)
  - E.g. pass by const reference
- To return large amount of data (out of a function)
  - Don't! Instead use move operations

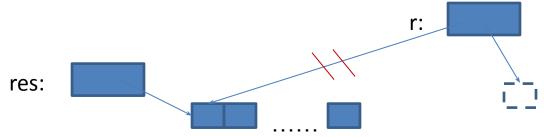
#### How to get a lot of data cheaply out of a function?

#### Ideas

- Return a pointer to a **new**'d object
  - Who does the delete?
- Return a reference to a new'd object
  - Who does the **delete**?
  - Delete what?
- Pass a target object
  - We are regressing towards assembly code
- Return an object
  - Copies are expensive
  - Tricks to avoid copying are brittle
  - Tricks to avoid copying are not general
- Return a handle
  - Simple and cheap

#### Move semantics

- Define move a constructor for Matrix
  - don't copy; "steal the representation"



#### Move semantics

```
Direct support in C++11: Move constructor
    class Matrix {
         Representation rep;
         // ...
             Matrix(Matrix&& a) // move constructor
                 rep = a.rep; // *this gets a's elements
                 a.rep = {}; // a becomes the empty Matrix
    Matrix res = a+b;
                                                   r:
                res:
```

## No garbage collection needed

- For general, simple, implicit, and efficient resource management
- Apply these techniques in order:
  - Store data in containers
    - The semantics of the fundamental abstraction is reflected in the interface
    - Including lifetime
  - 2. Manage *all* resources with resource handles
    - RAII
    - Not just memory: all resources
  - 3. Use "smart pointers"
    - They are still pointers
  - 4. Plug in a garbage collector
    - For "litter collection"
    - C++11 specifies an interface
    - Can still leak non-memory resources

## Range-for, auto, and move

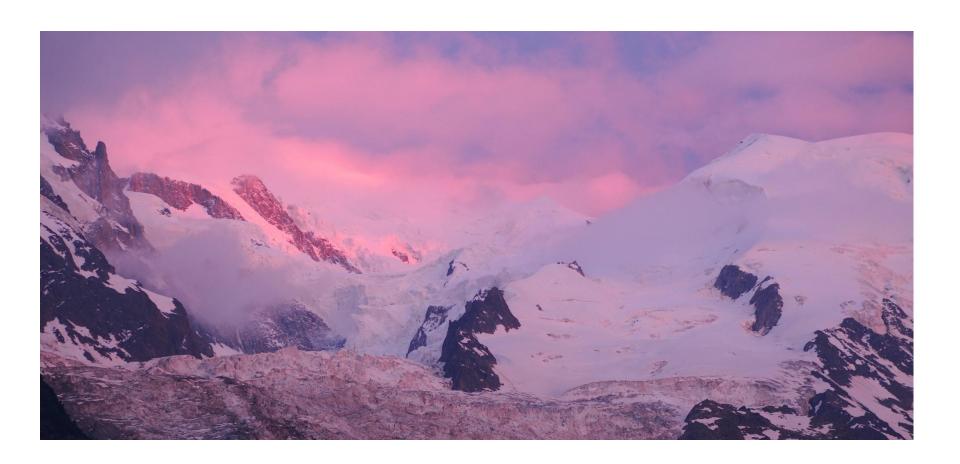
 As ever, what matters is how features work in combination template<typename C, typename V> vector<Value\_type<C>\*> find\_all(C& c, V v) // find all occurrences of v in c vector<Value\_type<C>\*> res; for (auto& x : c) 1f /<del>//==</del>v) res.push\_back(&x); return res: string m {"Mary had a little lamb"}; for (const auto p : find\_all(m,'a')) // p is a char\* (\***#**!='a') cerr << "string bug!\n";</pre>

## **RAII** and Move Semantics

- All the standard-library containers provide it
  - vector
  - **list, forward\_list** (singly-linked list), ...
  - map, unordered\_map (hash table),...
  - set, multi\_set, ...
  - ...
  - string
- So do other standard resources
  - thread, lock\_guard, ...
  - istream, fstream, ...
  - unique\_ptr, shared\_ptr
  - ...



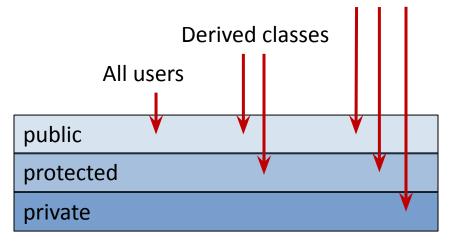
# OOP



### Class hierarchies

Class' own members

Protection model

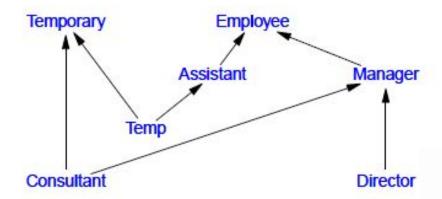


- No universal base class
  - an unnecessary implementation-oriented artifact
  - imposes avoidable space and time overheads.
  - encourages underspecified (overly general) interfaces
- Multiple inheritance
  - Separately consider interface and implementation
  - Abstract classes provide the most stable interfaces
- Minimal run-time type identification
  - dynamic\_cast<D\*>(pb)
  - typeid(p)

#### Inheritance

#### Use it

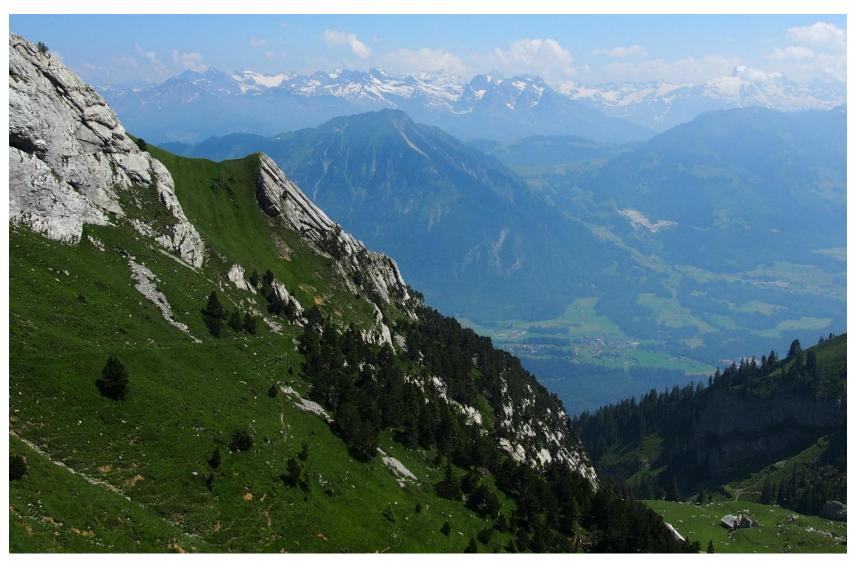
- When the domain concepts are hierarchical
- When there is a need for run-time selection among hierarchically ordered alternatives



#### • Warning:

- Inheritance has been seriously and systematically overused and misused
  - "When your only tool is a hammer everything looks like a nail"

# GP



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## Generic Programming: Templates

- 1980: Use macros to express generic types and functions
- 1987 (and current) aims:
  - Extremely general/flexible
    - "must be able to do much more than I can imagine"
  - Zero-overhead
    - vector/Matrix/... to compete with C arrays
  - Well-specified interfaces
    - Implying overloading, good error messages, and maybe separate compilation
- "two out of three ain't bad"
  - But it isn't really good either
  - it has kept me concerned/working for 20+ years

## **Templates**

- Compile-time duck typing
  - Leading to template metaprogramming
- A massive success in C++98, better in C++11, better still in C++14
  - STL containers
    - template<typename T> class vector { /\* ... \*/ };
  - STL algorithms
    - sort(v.begin(),v.end());
  - And much more
- Better support for compile-time programming
  - C++11: constexpr (improved in C++14)

## Algorithms

- Messy code is a major source of errors and inefficiencies
- We must use more explicit, well-designed, and tested algorithms
- The C++ standard-library algorithms are expressed in terms of half-open sequences [first:last)
  - For generality and efficiency

We parameterize over element type and container type

## Algorithms

- Simple, efficient, and general implementation
  - For any forward iterator
  - For any (matching) value type

# Algorithms and Function Objects

- Parameterization with criteria, actions, and algorithms
  - Essential for flexibility and performance

```
void g(vector< string>& vs)
{
    auto p = find_if(vs.begin(), vs.end(), Less_than{"Griffin"});
// ...
}
```

# Algorithms and Function Objects

The implementation is still trivial

```
template<typename Iter, typename Predicate>
Iter find_if(Iter first, Iter last, Predicate pred) // find first p in [first:last) so that pred(*p)
{
    while (first!=last && !pred(*first))
    ++first;
    return first;
}
```

### Function Objects and Lambdas

- General function object
  - Can carry state
  - Easily inlined (i.e., close to optimally efficient)

```
struct Less_than {
    String s;
    Less_than(const string& ss) :s{ss} {} // store the value to compare against
    bool operator()(const string& v) const { return v<s; } // the comparison
};</pre>
```

#### Lambda notation

We can let the compiler write the function object for us

# Container algorithms

- The C++ standard-library algorithms are expressed in terms of half-open sequences [first:last)
  - For generality and efficiency
  - If you find that verbose, define container algorithms

```
namespace Extended_STL {
    // ...

template<typename C, typename Predicate>
Iterator<C> find_if(C& c, Predicate pred)
    {
        return std::find_if(c.begin(),c.end(),pred);
    }
    // ...
}
```

auto p = find\_if(v, [](int x) { return x%2; } ); // assuming v is a vector<int>

## Duck Typing is Insufficient

- There are no proper interfaces
- Leaves error detection far too late
  - Compile- and link-time in C++
- Encourages a focus on implementation details
  - Entangles users with implementation
- Leads to over-general interfaces and data structures
  - As programmers rely on exposed implementation "details"
- Does not integrate well with other parts of the language
  - Teaching and maintenance problems
- We must think of generic code in ways similar to other code
  - Relying on well-specified interfaces (like OO, etc.)

#### Generic Programming is just Programming

Traditional code

```
double sqrt(double d);  // C++84: accept any d that is a double
double d = 7;
double d2 = sqrt(d);  // fine: d is a double
double d3 = sqrt(&d); // error: &d is not a double
```

Generic code

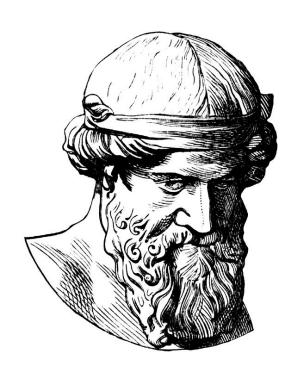
```
void sort(Container& c);  // C++14: accept any c that is a Container
vector<string> vs { "Hello", "new", "World" };
sort(vs);  // fine: vs is a Container
sort(&vs);  // error: &vs is not a Container
```

#### C++14: Constraints aka "Concepts lite"

- How do we specify requirements on template arguments?
  - state intent
    - Explicitly states requirements on argument types
  - provide point-of-use checking
    - No checking of template definitions
  - use constexpr functions
- Voted as C++14 Technical Report
- Design by B. Stroustrup, G. Dos Reis, and A. Sutton
- Implemented by Andrew Sutton in GCC
- There are no C++0x concept complexities
  - No concept maps
  - No new syntax for defining concepts
  - No new scope and lookup issues

# What is a Concept?

- Concepts are fundamental
  - They represent fundamental concepts of an application area
  - Concepts are come in "clusters" describing an application area
- A concept has semantics (meaning)
  - Not just syntax
  - "Subtractable" is not a concept
- We have always had concepts
  - C++: Integral, arithmetic
  - STL: forward iterator, predicate
  - Informally: Container, Sequence
  - Algebra: Group, Ring, ...



# What is a Concept?

- Don't expect to find a new fundamental concept every year
- A concept is *not* the minimal requirements for an implementation
  - An implementation does not define the requirements
  - Requirements should be stable
- Concepts support interoperability
  - There are relatively few concepts
  - We can remember a concept



# C++14 Concepts (Constraints)

A concept is a predicate on one or more arguments

```
– E.g. Sequence<T>() // is T a Sequence?
```

Template declaration

```
template <typename S, typename T>
  requires Sequence<S>()
    && Equality_comparable<Value_type<S>, T>()
Iterator_of<S> find(S& seq, const T& value);
```

• Template use

```
void use(vector<string>& vs)
{
  auto p = find(vs,"Jabberwocky");
  // ...
}
```

# C++14 Concepts: Error handling

Error handling is simple (and fast)

```
template<Sortable Cont>
  void sort(Cont& container);

vector<double> vec {1.2, 4.5, 0.5, -1.2};
list<int> lst {1, 3, 5, 4, 6, 8,2};

sort(vec); // OK: a vector is Sortable
sort(lst); // Error at (this) point of use: Sortable requires random access
```

Actual error message

error: 'list<int>' does not satisfy the constraint 'Sortable'

#### C++14 Concepts: "Shorthand Notation"

Shorthand notation

```
template <Sequence S, Equality_comparable<Value_type<S>> T>
Iterator_of<C> find(S& seq, const T& value);
```

- We can handle essentially all of the Palo Alto TR
  - (STL algorithms) and more
    - Except for the axiom parts
  - We see no problems checking template definitions in isolation
    - But proposing that would be premature (needs work, experience)
  - We don't need explicit requires much (the shorthand is usually fine)

# C++14 Concepts: Overloading

 Overloading is easy template <Sequence S, Equality\_comparable<Value\_type<S>> T> Iterator of <S> find (S& seq, const T& value); template<Associative container C> Iterator\_type<C> find(C& assoc, const Key\_type<C>& key); vector<int> v { /\* ... \*/ }; multiset<int> s { /\* ... \*/ }; auto vi = find(v, 42); // calls 1st overload: // a vector is a Sequence **auto si = find(s, 12-12-12);** // calls 2nd overload: **//** a multiset is an Associative container

# C++14 Concepts: Overloading

- Overloading based on predicates
  - specialization based on subset
  - Far easier than writing lots of tests

```
template<Input_iterator Iter>
void advance(Iter& p, Difference_type<Iter> n) { while (n--) ++p; }

template<Bidirectional_iterator Iter>
    void advance(Iter& i, Difference_type<Iter> n)
    { if (n > 0) while (n--) ++p; if (n < 0) while (n++) --ip}

template<Random_access_iterator Iter>
    void advance(Iter& p, Difference_type<Iter> n) { p += n; }
```

We don't say

Input\_iterator < Bidirectional\_iterator < Random\_access\_iterator
we compute it</pre>

## C++14 Concepts: Definition

- How do you write constraints?
  - Any bool expression
    - Including type traits and constexpr function
  - a requires(expr) expression
    - requires() is a compile time intrinsic function
    - **true** if **expr** is a valid expression
- To recognize a concept syntactically, we can declare it concept
  - Rather than just constexpr

 We can use a concept name as the name of a type than satisfy the concept

```
void sort(Container& c);  // terse notation
means
   template<Container ___Cont> // shorthand notation
       void sort(__Cont& c);
means
   template<typename __Cont> // explicit use of predicate
       requires Container<__Cont>()
        void sort(__Cont)& c;

    Accepts any type that is a Container

   vector<string> vs;
   sort(vs);
```

- We have reached the conventional notation
  - with the conventional meaning
- Traditional code

```
double sqrt(double d);  // C++84: accept any d that is a double
double d = 7;
double d2 = sqrt(d);  // fine: d is a double
double d3 = sqrt(&d); // error: &d is not a double
```

Generic code

```
void sort(Container& c);  // C++14: accept any c that is a Container
vector<string> vs { "Hello", "new", "World" };
sort(vs);  // fine: vs is a Container
sort(&vs);  // error: &vs is not a Container
```

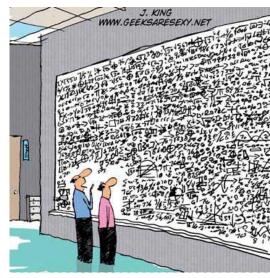
- Consider std::merge
- Explicit use of predicates:

```
typename For2,
typename Out>
requires Forward_iterator<For>()
&& Forward_iterator<For2>()
&& Output_iterator<Out>()
&& Assignable<Value_type<For>,Value_type<Out>>()
&& Comparable<Value_type<For>,Value_type<For2>)()
void merge(For p, For q, For2 p2, For2 q2, Out p);
```

Headache inducing, and accumulate() is worse

Better, use the shorthand notation
 template<Forward\_iterator For,
 Forward\_iterator For2,
 Output\_iterator Out>
 requires Mergeable<For,For2,Out>()
 void merge(For p, For q, For2 p2, For2 q2, Out p);

• Quite readable



"...And that, in simple terms, is what's wrong with your software design."

Better still, use the "terse notation":

Mergeable{For,For2,Out} // Mergeable is a concept requiring three types void merge(For p, For q, For2 p2, For2 q2, Out p);

The

```
concept-name { identifier-list }
notation introduces constrained names
```

Make simple things simple!

Now we just need to define Mergeable:

```
template<typename For, typename For2, typename Out>
concept bool Mergeable()
{
    return Forward_iterator<For>()
        && Forward_iterator<For2>()
        && Output_iterator<Out>()
        && Assignable<Value_type<For>,Value_type<Out>>()
        && Assignable<Value_type<For2,Value_type<Out>>()
        && Comparable<Value_type<For>,Value_type<For2>>();
}
```

It's just a predicate

# Challenges



## C++ Challenges

- Obviously, C++ is not perfect
  - How can we make programmers prefer modern styles over low-level code
    - which is far more error-prone and harder to maintain, yet no more efficient?
  - How can we make C++ a better language given the Draconian constraints of C and C++ compatibility?
  - How can we improve and complete the techniques and models (incompletely and imperfectly) embodied in C++?
- Solutions that eliminate major C++ strengths are not acceptable
  - Compatibility
    - link, source code
  - Performance
    - uncompromising
  - Portability
  - Range of application areas
    - Preferably increasing the range ce Going Native 13

## Long-term C++ Challenges

- Close more type loopholes
  - in particular, find a way to prevent misuses of delete without spoiling RAII
- Simplify concurrent programming
  - in particular, provide some higher-level concurrency models as libraries
- Simplify generic programming
  - in particular, introduce simple and effective concepts
- Simplify programming using class hierarchies
  - in particular, eliminate use of the visitor pattern
- Better support for combinations of object-oriented and generic programming
- Make exceptions usable for hard-real-time projects
  - that will most likely be a tool rather than a language change
- Find a good way of using multiple address spaces
  - as needed for distributed computing
  - would probably involve defining a more general module mechanism that would also address dynamic linking, and more.
- Provide many more domain-specific libraries
- Develop a more precise and formal specification of C++

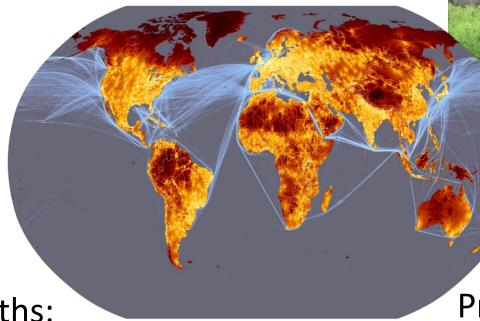
# "Paradigms"

- Much of the distinction between object-oriented programming, generic programming, and "conventional programming" is an illusion
  - based on a focus on language features
  - incomplete support for a synthesis of techniques
  - The distinction does harm
    - by limiting programmers, forcing workarounds

```
void draw_all(Container& c)  // is this OOP, GP, or conventional?
requires Same_type<Value_type<Container>,Shape*>
{
   for_each(c, [](Shape* p) { p->draw(); } );
}
```

Questions?

C++: A light-weight abstraction programming language



Key strengths:

software infrastructure

resource-constrained applications

Practice type-rich programming