

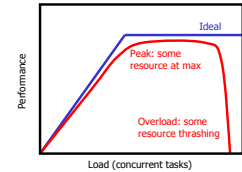
## Why Events Are A Bad Idea (for high-concurrency servers)

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A Talk HotOS 2003

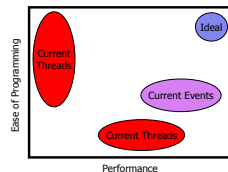
## The Stage

- Highly concurrent applications
  - Internet servers (Flash, Ninja, SEDA)
  - Transaction processing databases
- Workload
  - Operate "near the knee"
  - Avoid thrashing!
- What makes concurrency hard?
  - Race conditions
  - Scalability (no  $O(n)$  operations)
  - Scheduling & resource sensitivity
  - Inevitable overload
  - Code complexity



## The Debate

- Performance vs. Programmability
  - Current threads pick one
  - Events somewhat better
- Questions
  - Threads vs. Events?
  - How do we performance and programmability?



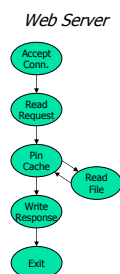
## Our Position

- Thread-event duality still holds
- But threads are better anyway
  - More natural to program
  - Better fit with tools and hardware
- Compiler-runtime integration is key

## The Duality Argument

- General assumption: follow "good practices"
- Observations
  - Major concepts are analogous
  - Program structure is similar
  - Performance should be similar
    - Given good implementations!

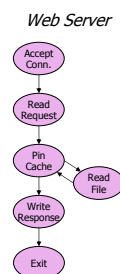
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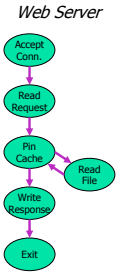
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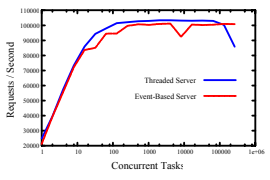


# "But Events Are Better!"

- Recent arguments for events
  - Lower runtime overhead
  - Better live state management
  - Inexpensive synchronization
  - More flexible control flow
  - Better scheduling and locality
- All true but...
  - No *inherent* problem with threads!
  - Thread implementations can be improved

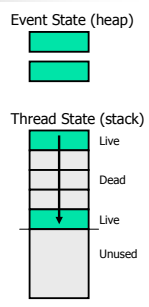
# Runtime Overhead

- Criticism: Threads don't perform well for high concurrency
- Response
  - Avoid  $O(n)$  operations
  - Minimize context switch overhead
- Simple scalability test
  - Slightly modified GNU Pth
  - Thread-per-task vs. single thread
  - Same performance!



# Live State Management

- Criticism: Stacks are bad for live state
- Response
  - Fix with compiler help
  - Stack overflow vs. wasted space
    - Dynamically link stack frames
  - Retain dead state
    - Static lifetime analysis
    - Plan arrangement of stack
    - Put some data on heap
    - Pop stack before tail calls
  - Encourage inefficiency
    - Warn about inefficiency

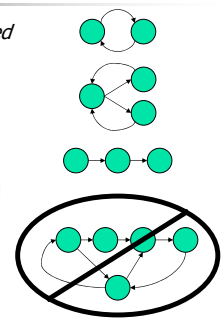


# Synchronization

- Criticism: Thread synchronization is heavyweight
- Response
  - Cooperative multitasking works for threads, too!
  - Also presents same problems
    - Starvation & fairness
    - Multiprocessors
    - Unexpected blocking (page faults, etc.)
  - Compiler support helps

# Control Flow

- Criticism: Threads have restricted control flow
- Response
  - Programmers use simple patterns
    - Call / return
    - Parallel calls
    - Pipelines
  - Complicated patterns are unnatural
    - Hard to understand
    - Likely to cause bugs



## Scheduling

- Criticism: Thread schedulers are too generic**
  - Can't use application-specific information
- Response**
  - 2D scheduling: task & program location**
    - Threads schedule based on task only
    - Events schedule by location (e.g. SEDA)
      - Allows batching
      - Allows prediction for SRCT
  - Threads can use 2D, too!**
    - Runtime system tracks current location
    - Call graph allows prediction

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## The Proof's in the Pudding

- User-level threads package**
  - Subset of pthreads
  - Intercept blocking system calls
  - No  $O(n)$  operations
  - Support > 100K threads
  - 5000 lines of C code
- Simple web server: Knot**
  - 700 lines of C code
- Similar performance**
  - Linear increase, then steady
  - Drop-off due to poll() overhead

## Our Big But...

- More natural programming model**
  - Control flow is more apparent
  - Exception handling is easier
  - State management is automatic
- Better fit with current tools & hardware**
  - Better existing infrastructure
  - Allows better performance?

## Control Flow

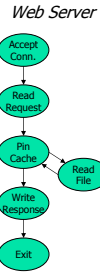
- Events obscure control flow**
  - For programmers *and* tools

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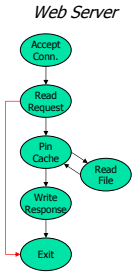
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## Exceptions

- Exceptions complicate control flow
  - Harder to understand program flow
  - Cause bugs in cleanup code

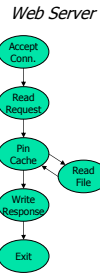
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## State Management

- Events require manual state management
  - Hard to know when to free
    - Use GC or risk bugs

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## Existing Infrastructure

- Lots of infrastructure for threads
  - Debuggers
  - Languages & compilers
- Consequences
  - More amenable to analysis
  - Less effort to get working systems

## Better Performance?

- Function pointers & dynamic dispatch
  - Limit compiler optimizations
  - Hurt branch prediction & I-cache locality
- More context switches with events?
  - Example: Haboob does 6x more than Knot
  - Natural result of queues
- More investigation needed!

## The Future: Compiler-Runtime Integration

- Insight
  - Automate things event programmers do by hand
  - Additional analysis for other things
- Specific targets
  - Dynamic stack growth\*
  - Live state management
  - Synchronization
  - Scheduling\*
- Improve performance *and* decrease complexity

\* Working prototype in threads package

## Conclusion

- Threads  $\approx$  Events
  - Performance
  - Expressiveness
- Threads  $>$  Events
  - Complexity / Manageability
- Performance *and* Ease of use?
  - Compiler-runtime integration is key

