

Software deployment with Nix

NLUUG meeting, 31/03/2006

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Nix

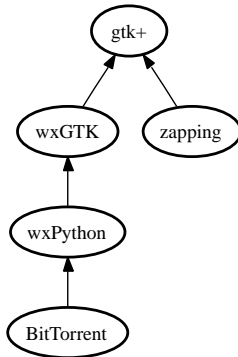
- ▶ Motivation: Existing package managers (like RPM, **apt**, ...) have lots of problems
- ▶ We set out to improve this
- ▶ Result: Nix — basically a package manager (but more!)

Deployment Problems

- ▶ Software deployment: the art of **transferring software** (packages) from one machine to another (and managing it).
- ▶ The hard part: packages should **work the same** on the target machine.
 - ▶ “DLL hell”
 - ▶ “Dependency hell”

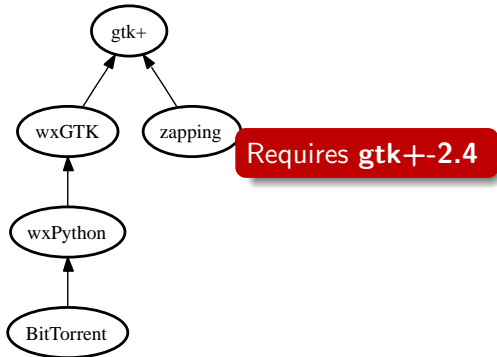
So why is this hard?

- ▶ Difficult to have multiple versions; but we want this to
 - ▶ Test upgrades
 - ▶ Deal with conflicting dependencies
 - ▶ Support different user / service requirements



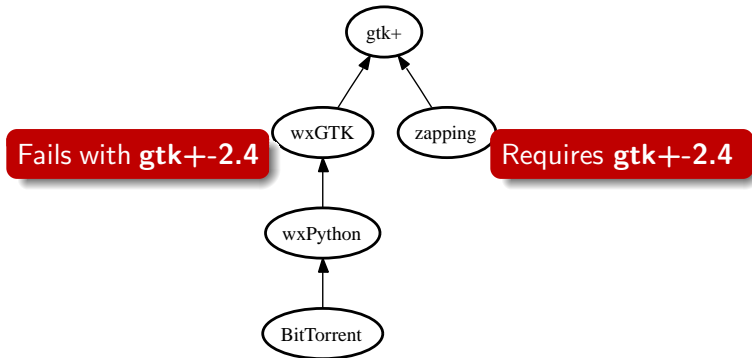
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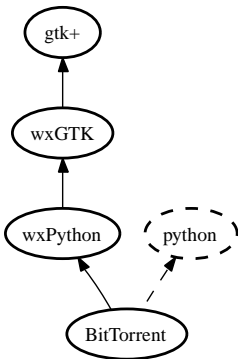
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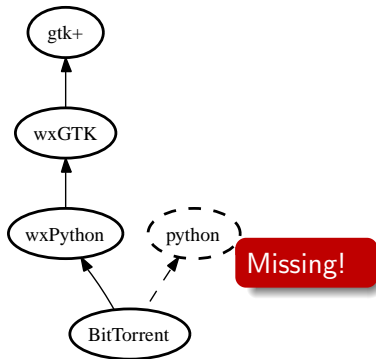
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- ▶ Unreliable dependency information
 - ▶ What components are needed?
 - ▶ What versions?

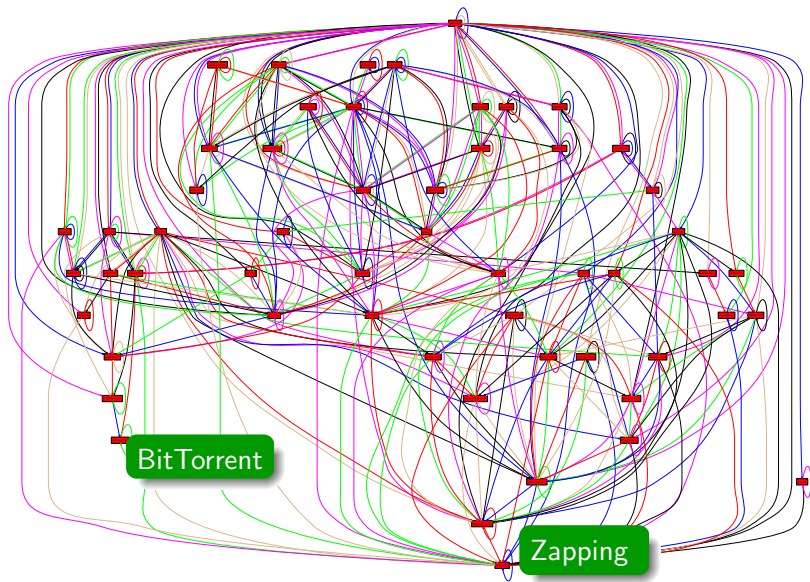


So why is this hard?

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So why is this hard?



- ▶ Deployment was (is) often done in an *ad hoc*, undisciplined fashion.
 - ▶ Files installed in global locations (**/usr/bin**, **C:/Windows/System32**).
 - ▶ “DLL Hell” — overwriting of shared components with older/newer versions.
 - ▶ “Dependency Hell” — components may have gazillions of dependencies.
 - ▶ Each application has its own (un)installer (so no unified view on the system).
 - ▶ Interactive installers ⇒ considered harmful (hard to automate).
 - ▶ Packaging = lots of work.
- ▶ Package managers manage software installations in a unified way: RPM, FreeBSD Ports/Packages, Depot, Debian apt-get/dpkg, ..., Nix.

Requirements on a Deployment System

- ▶ Support multiple versions, variants.
- ▶ Handle dependencies.
- ▶ Ensure safe upgrades / uninstalls.
- ▶ Atomic upgrades/downgrades (e.g., important in server environments).
- ▶ Allow different “views” for multiple users.
- ▶ Configuration management aspects:
 - ▶ Identification
 - ▶ Reproducibility

The Nix Deployment System

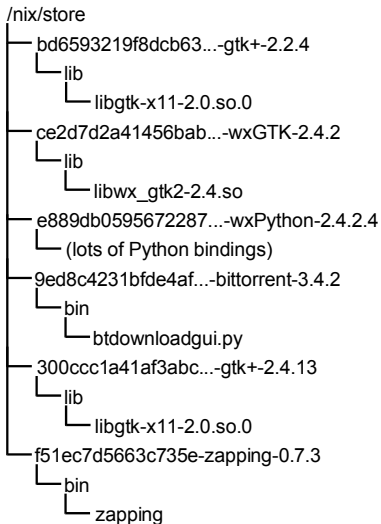
- ▶ Central idea: store all components in isolation.
- ▶ Unique paths:

```
/nix/store/jjp9pirx8b3nqs9k...-firefox
```

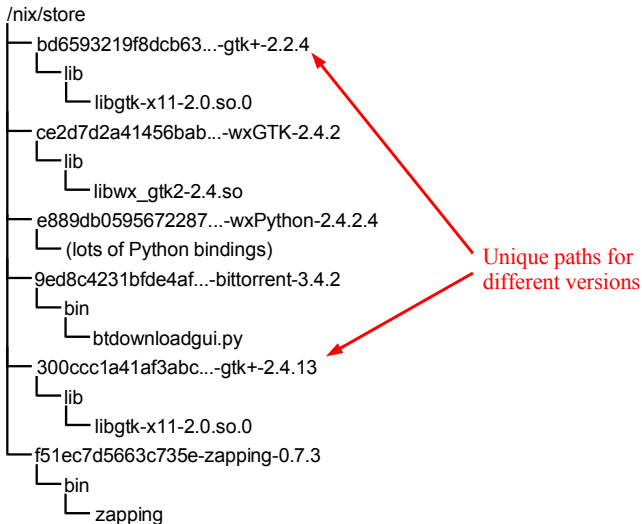
which is an 160-bit **cryptographic hash** of **all** inputs used to build the component:

- ▶ Sources
 - ▶ Libraries
 - ▶ Compilers
 - ▶ Build scripts
 - ▶ Build parameters
 - ▶ System type
 - ▶ ...
- ▶ **Prevent** undeclared **build time** dependencies.
 - ▶ **Scan** for **runtime** dependencies.
 - ▶ Deploy only **closures** under the **depends-on** relation.

Nix store



Nix store



Nix expressions

hello/default.nix

Packages are built using *Nix expressions*:

```
{stdenv, fetchurl, perl}:
```

```
stdenv.mkDerivation {  
  name = "hello-2.1.1";  
  builder = ./builder.sh;  
  src = fetchurl {  
    url =  
      ftp://ftp.gnu.org/pub/gnu/hello/hello-2.1.1.tar.gz;  
    md5 = "70c9ccf9fac07f762c24f2df2290784d";  
  };  
  inherit perl;  
}
```

Nix expressions

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Function arguments

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  };  
  inherit perl;  
}
```

Build attributes

hello/builder.sh

```
source $stdenv/setup

PATH=$perl/bin:$PATH

tar xvfz $src
cd hello-*
./configure --prefix=$out
make
make install
```

hello/builder.sh

```
source $stdenv/setup
```

```
PATH=$perl/bin:$PATH
```

```
tar xvfz $src
```

```
cd hello-*
```

```
./configure --pref
```

```
make
```

```
make install
```

Environment initially empty; prevents undeclared dependencies


system/all-packages.nix

```
hello = (import ../applications/misc/hello/ex-1) {  
    inherit fetchurl stdenv perl;  
};  
  
perl = (import ../development/interpreters/perl) {  
    inherit fetchurl stdenv;  
};  
  
fetchurl = (import ../build-support/fetchurl) {  
    inherit stdenv; ...  
};  
  
stdenv = ...;
```

Nix expressions

system/all-packages.nix

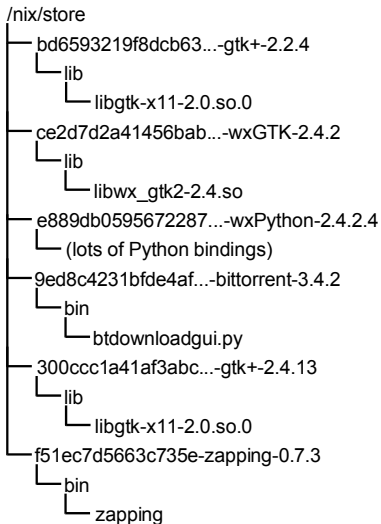
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    inherit fetchurl stdenv perl;  
};  
  
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};  
  
fetchurl = (import ../build-support/fetchurl) {  
    inherit stdenv; ...  
};  
  
stdenv = ...;
```



Variability

```
bittorrent = (import ../tools/networking/bittorrent) {  
    inherit fetchurl stdenv wxGTK;  
};  
  
wxGTK = (import ../development/libraries/wxGTK) {  
    inherit fetchurl stdenv pkgconfig;  
    gtk = gtkLibs22.gtk;  
};  
  
firefox = (import ../applications/browsers/firefox) {  
    inherit fetchurl stdenv pkgconfig perl zip libIDL libXi;  
    gtk = gtkLibs24.gtk;  
};
```

Finding runtime dependencies



Finding runtime dependencies

```
/nix/store
├── bd6593219f8dcb63...-gtk+-2.2.4
│   └── lib
│       └── libgtk-x11-2.0.so.0
├── ce2d7d2a41456bab...-wxGTK-2.4.2
│   └── lib
│       └── libwx_gtk2-2.4.so
├── e889d...
│   └── (lots of other files)
├── 9ed8c4...
│   └── bin
├── 300ccc...
│   └── lib
├── f51ec7...
│   └── bin
└── ...
```

Contents of libwx_gtk2-2.4.so

```
9ed8c4... 2e 36 00 6c 69 62 73 74 64 63 2b 2b 2e 73 6f 2e |.6.libstdc++.so.|
├── bin 36 00 6c 69 62 67 63 63 5f 73 2e 73 6f 2e 31 00 |6.libgcc_s.so.1.|
├── 300ccc... 6c 69 62 70 74 68 72 65 61 64 2e 73 6f 2e 30 00 |libpthread.so.0.|
├── lib 6c 69 62 63 2e 73 6f 2e 36 00 5f 5f 63 78 61 5f |libc.so.6.__cxa_|
├── f51ec7... 61 74 65 78 69 74 00 5f 65 64 61 74 61 00 5f 5f |latexit._edata.__|
├── bin 62 73 73 5f 73 74 61 72 74 00 2f 6e 69 78 2f 73 |bss_start./nix/s|
├── 300ccc... 74 6f 72 65 2f 62 64 36 35 39 33 32 31 39 66 38 |tore/bd6593219f8|
├── f51ec7... 64 63 62 36 33 30 61 34 35 35 62 31 61 35 37 66 |dcb630a455b1a57f|
├── bin 36 34 36 33 33 2d 67 74 6b 2b 2d 32 2e 32 2e 34 |64633-gtk+-2.2.4|
├── 300ccc... 2f 6c 69 62 3a 2f 6e 69 78 2f 73 74 6f 72 65 2f |/lib:/nix/store/|
├── f51ec7... 62 37 65 62 34 37 36 64 36 32 62 61 65 38 62 63 |b7eb476d62bae8bc|
└── ...
```


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│                   └── bin
│                       └── ...
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6c 69 62 70 74 68 72 65 61 64 2e 73 6f 2e 30 00 |libpthread.so.0.|
6c 69 62 63 2e 73 6f 2e 36 00 5f 5f 63 78 61 5f |libc.so.6.__cxa_|
61 74 65 78 69 74 00 5f 65 64 61 74 61 00 5f 5f |latexit._edata.__|
62 73 73 5f 73 74 61 72 74 00 2f 6e 69 78 2f 73 |bss_start./nix/s|
74 6f 72 65 2f 62 64 36 35 39 33 32 31 39 66 38 |tore/bd6593219f8|
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36 34 36 33 33 2d 67 74 6b 2b 2d 32 2e 32 2e 34 |64633-gtk+-2.2.4|
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...
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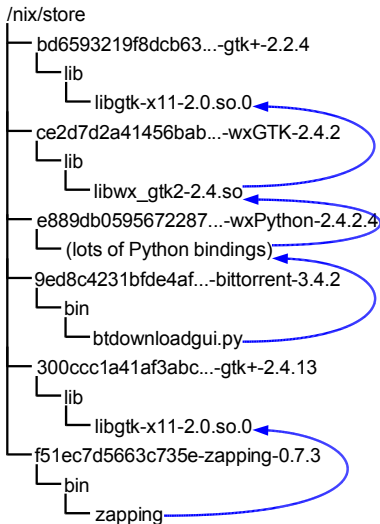
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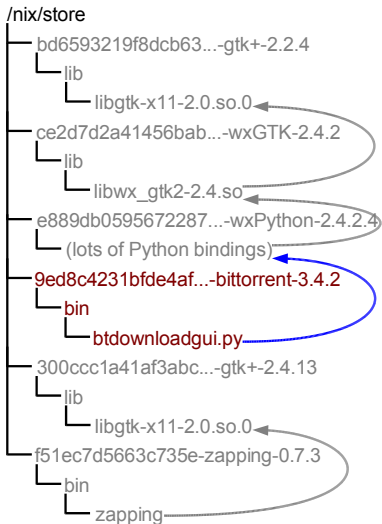
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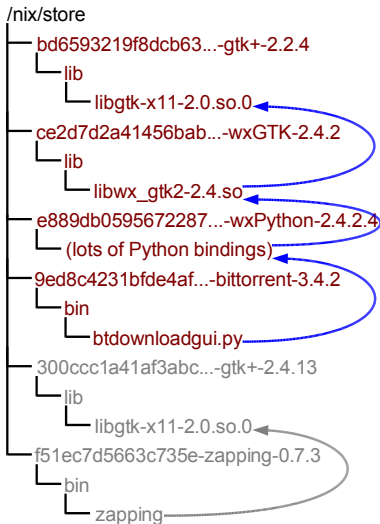
Finding runtime dependencies



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Finding runtime dependencies



User operations

- ▶ To build and install Hello:

```
$ nix-env -if .../all-packages.nix hello
```

- ▶ When a new version comes along:

```
$ nix-env -uf .../all-packages.nix hello
```

- ▶ If it doesn't work:

```
$ nix-env --rollback
```

- ▶ Delete unused components:

```
$ nix-collect-garbage
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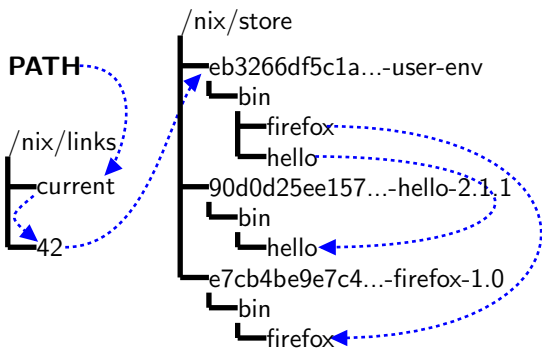
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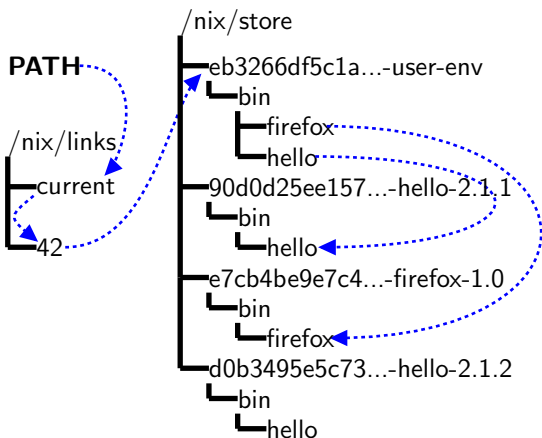
User environments

- Users can have different sets of installed applications.
- **nix-env** operations create new **user environments** in the store.
- We can atomically switch between them.
- These are roots of the garbage collector.



User environments

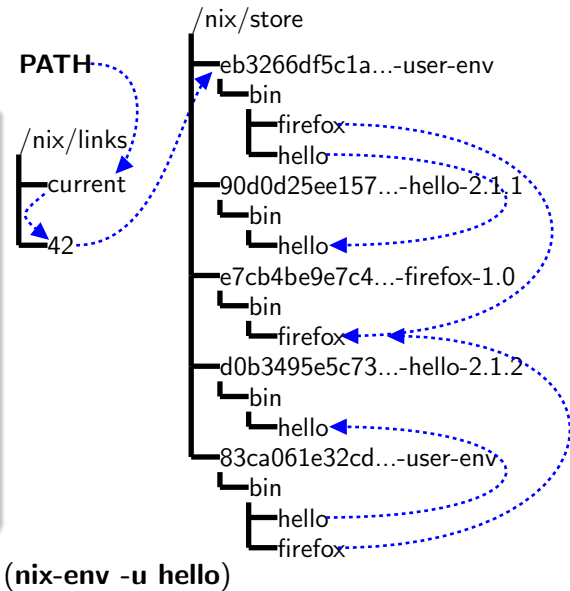
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(nix-env -u hello)

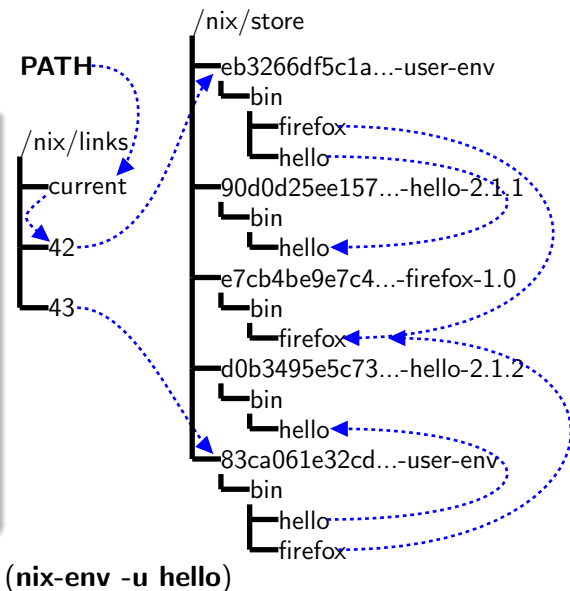
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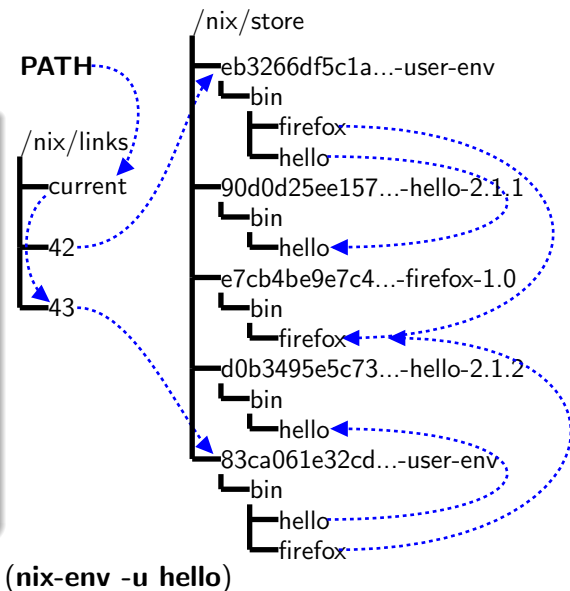
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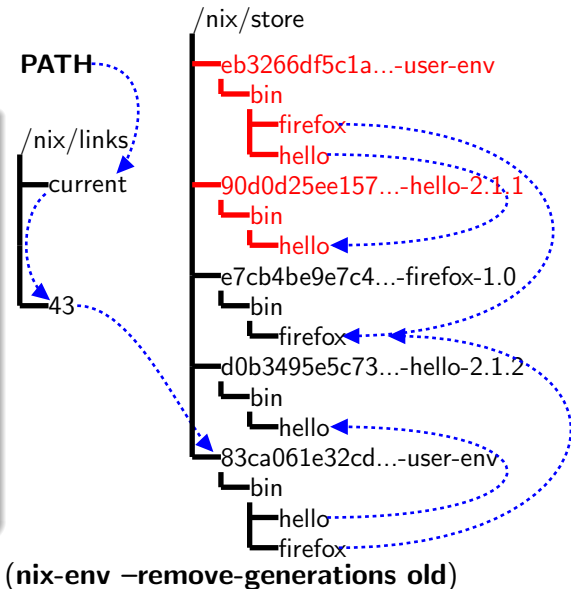
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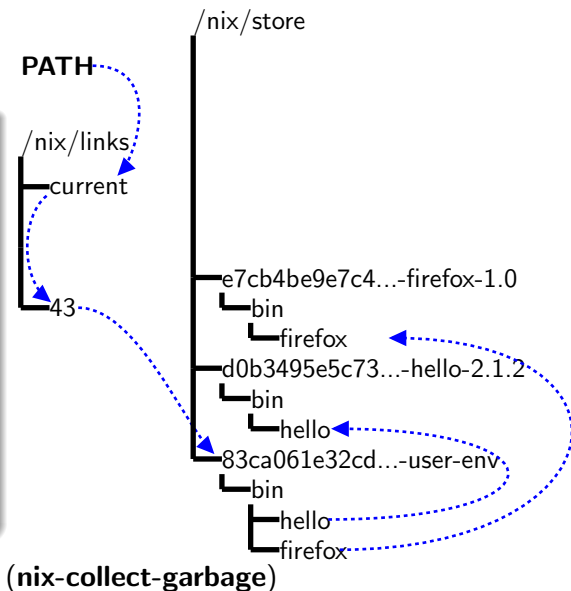
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Deployment using Nix

- ▶ This is conceptually a **source deployment model**.
- ▶ We get **binary deployment** by sharing pre-built components.
- ▶ On the producer side:

```
$ nix-push $(nix-instantiate ../all-packages.nix) \  
http://server/cache
```

- ▶ On the client side:

```
$ nix-pull http://server/cache  
$ nix-env -if ../all-packages.nix hello
```

- ▶ Installation will now reuse pre-built components, **iff** they are exactly the same.

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An example deployment policy: channels

- ▶ Channels allow Nix expressions to be updated automatically.
- ▶ Subscribe to a channel:

```
$ nix-channel --add http://.../channels/nixpkgs-stable
```

- ▶ Fetch latest channel instance:

```
$ nix-channel --update
```

- ▶ Update all installed packages:

```
$ nix-env -u '*'
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Nixpkgs

- ▶ Contains Nix expressions for 716 existing Unix packages.
 - ▶ Development tools: GCC, Perl, Mono, ...
 - ▶ Libraries: Glibc, GTK, Qt, X11, ...
 - ▶ Applications: Firefox, Xine, Quake 3, ...
 - ▶ Servers: **httpd**, PostgreSQL, ...
- ▶ On Linux/x86, fully bootstrapped (no external dependencies).


Services: sets of running programs that provide some useful facility on a system or network.

Example: Subversion service

Subversion Repoman - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help

https://svn.cs.uu.nl:12443/repoman

 Universiteit Utrecht

Subversion Server

Administrative tasks

- You can [create a new repository](#).
- You can [add a new user](#) (only within the cs.uu.nl domain).
- You can [edit your user information](#).

Online information

- [Subversion homepage](#).
- [Subversion: The Definitive Guide](#).

Repositories

The following repositories are hosted on this server:

Name	Owner	Description
3bate	kuipers	Repository van 3bate
adaptivewavelets	dijkema	Adaptive Wavelet Project
aeis	eelco	Portable cryptographic file system
afp-exercises-jenr	neus	afp
afp-exercises	bdumitri	Advanced Functional Programming exercises (Bogdan, Ze)
afp-exercises-ra	rjlwanro	AFP 2005 Exercises, Rjlwanro, Amiddelk
afp-project	bdumitri	Advanced Functional Programming project (Ze, Bogdan, Huapwan, Jinfoo)

Done

svn.cs.uu.nl:12443

Example: Issue tracking service

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying `https://bugs.cs.uu.nl/browse/NIXOS-16`. The page title is "[#NIXOS-16] NixOS should not wipe my hard drive - Stratego/XT JIRA - Mozilla Firefox". The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Go, Bookmarks, Tools, and Help. The JIRA interface has a blue header with the JIRA logo and "Stratego/XT JIRA". Navigation tabs include HOME, BROWSE PROJECT, FIND ISSUES, CREATE NEW ISSUE, and a QUICK SEARCH field. The main content area is titled "Issue Details" and shows the following information:

- Key:** [NIXOS-16](#)
- Type:** Bug
- Status:** Open
- Priority:** Blocker
- Assignee:** [Armijn Hemel](#)
- Reporter:** [Felco Dolstra](#)
- Votes:** 0
- Watchers:** 0

Under the "Operations" section, there are links to "Clone this issue" and "Comment on this issue". A note states: "If you were [logged in](#) you would be able to see more operations."

The issue title is "NixOS should not wipe my hard drive". It was created on 2005-08-23 14:26 and updated on 2005-08-23 14:26. The component, affected versions, and fix versions are all listed as "None".

Summary statistics show: Original Estimate: Unknown, Remaining Estimate: Unknown, Time Spent: Unknown.

The "Description" section contains the text: "The installer should" followed by a list:

- a) ask for confirmation before installing
- b) not wipe the existing Nix store but reuse it

Below the description are tabs for "All", "Comments", "Work Log", and "Change History". The "Comments" tab is active, showing "There are no comments yet on this issue."

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The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Done" and the URL "bugs.cs.uu.nl".

Service deployment is hard

Service deployment involves a number of steps:

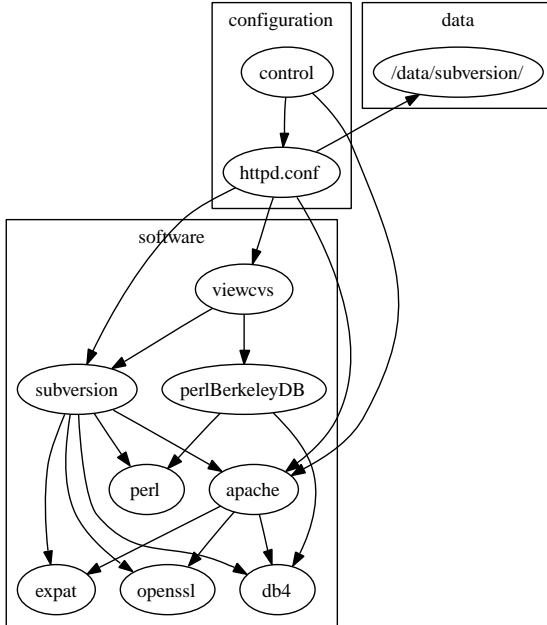
- ▶ Deploy software components (e.g., Apache, PostgreSQL, Subversion)
- ▶ Edit configuration files (e.g., **httpd.conf**, **viewcvs.conf**)
- ▶ Initialise state (e.g., logging directories, database tables)
- ▶ Start/stop processes
- ▶ ... and all of this possibly on multiple machines / platforms

- ▶ Poor reproducibility (bad CM)
- ▶ Hard to support parallel configurations
- ▶ Cross-cutting configuration choices

Problem 1: Poor reproducibility

- ▶ Goal: it should be possible to realise a service by running a single command.
 - ▶ E.g., to move it to another machine
 - ▶ So no manual installing of missing software components, tweaking of configuration files, creating missing directories, etc.
- ▶ Why is reproducibility hard?
 - ▶ Admins often manually edit configuration files and initialise state
 - ▶ Service configuration doesn't express software component dependencies

Example



Gap between package management and service configuration

- ▶ Software components are typically deployed through package managers such as RPM
- ▶ Service configuration is typically kept under version management
- ▶ However, there is no good way to express the dependencies of the service on the software components

Problem 2: Parallel configurations

- ▶ It should be easy to create different instances of a service
 - ▶ Test vs. production servers (running on different ports, using different databases, etc.)
 - ▶ Instantiations for different users
 - ▶ Evolution through time (rollbacks)
- ▶ This is hard to support because there are typically lots of configuration files and control scripts that refer to lots of paths for components, state, static data files, etc.
 - ▶ `/etc/apache/httpd.conf`,
`/etc/init.d/apache`,
`/etc/apache/viewcvs.conf`, ...

Example

`/etc/apache/httpd.conf` for Subversion service (fragment)

```
ServerRoot "/var/httpd"
ServerName svn.cs.uu.nl:8080
LoadModule dav_svn_module /usr/lib/modules/mod_dav_svn.so
<Location /repos>
    AuthType Basic
    AuthDBMUserFile /data/subversion/db/svn-users
    ...
    SVNParentPath /data/subversion/repos
</Location>
ScriptAlias /viewcvs /usr/viewcvs/www/cgi/viewcvs.cgi
```

Example

/etc/init.d/httpd for Subversion service (fragment)

```
/usr/sbin/apachectl -k start -f /etc/apache/httpd.conf
```

Use cases

- ▶ Try out with a different set of repositories.
- ▶ Try out a different Apache.
- ▶ Try out a different Subversion module.

Problem 3: Cross-cutting configuration choices

- ▶ Many configuration choices are *cross-cutting*, i.e., impact many different (parts of) configuration files, scripts, etc.
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ Port numbers
 - ▶ Host names
 - ▶ Paths (major source of problems!)
- ▶ So a change to the configuration choices must be realised in many different places
- ▶ Lots of work
- ▶ Danger of inconsistency

Example: port number

In `/etc/init.d/httpd.conf`

```
ServerName www.example.org:12443  
Listen 12443  
<VirtualHost _default_:12443>
```

In `repoman.pl`

```
my $url = "https://www.example.org:12443/"  
print "... <a href='$url/repos/$repoName'> ...";
```

Treat all the *static parts* of configurations as Nix components:

- ▶ Software
- ▶ Configuration files
- ▶ Control scripts
- ▶ Static data files (e.g., static web pages)

But not mutable state, e.g. databases

Advantages

- ▶ Support multiple configurations side-by-side
- ▶ Nix's functional language: can easily support multiple configurations
- ▶ Atomic upgrades / rollbacks
- ▶ SCM support:
 - ▶ Full knowledge of dependencies
 - ▶ Reproducibility (easy to move to another machine)

Example

Nix expression for **svn.cs.uu.nl**

```
{productionServer ? true}:
let {
  webServer = import ../../apache-httpd {
    hostname = "svn.cs.uu.nl";
    httpPort = if productionServer then 80 else 12080;
    httpsPort = if productionServer then 443 else 12443;
    adminAddr = "eelco@cs.uu.nl";
    subServices = [ subversionService ];
    ...
  };

  subversionService = import ../../subversion {
    reposDir = rootDir + "/repos"; ...
  }
}
```

Building the test instance

\$ upgrade-server.sh svn ./default.nix test

- ▶ Produces (say) **/nix/store/98wl...-apache-httpd-service**.
- ▶ Generated configuration files (e.g.,
/nix/store/98wl...-apache-httpd-service/conf/httpd.conf
tell server to run on port 12080/12443.
- ▶ Old test server is stopped, new server is started.

Building the production instance

\$ upgrade-server.sh svn ./default.nix production

- ▶ Produces (say) **/nix/store/6sc6...-apache-httpd-service**.
- ▶ Generated configuration files (e.g.,
/nix/store/6sc6...-apache-httpd-service/conf/httpd.conf
tell server to run on port 80/443.
- ▶ Old production server is stopped, new server is started.

Building the test instance

\$ upgrade-server.sh svn ./default.nix test

- ▶ Produces (say) **/nix/store/98wl...-apache-httpd-service**.
- ▶ Generated configuration files (e.g.,
/nix/store/98wl...-apache-httpd-service/conf/httpd.conf
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Building the production instance

\$ upgrade-server.sh svn ./default.nix production

- ▶ Produces (say) **/nix/store/6sc6...-apache-httpd-service**.
- ▶ Generated configuration files (e.g.,
/nix/store/6sc6...-apache-httpd-service/conf/httpd.conf
tell server to run on port 80/443.
- ▶ Old production server is stopped, new server is started.

- ▶ Nix usually used on existing Unix systems (e.g., SuSE Linux, Fedora Core, Mac OS X, FreeBSD)
- ▶ Taking it all the way: NixOS (Armijn Hemel)
- ▶ All packages installed through Nix
- ▶ Also hope to improve system configuration
 - ▶ Stuff in **/etc** become Nix service components, so we get rollbacks etc.

- ▶ Contributions:
 - ▶ Safe, automatic coexistence of versions/variants.
 - ▶ Reliable dependencies.
 - ▶ Multiple concurrent configurations.
 - ▶ Atomic upgrades/rollbacks.
 - ▶ Safe garbage collection.
 - ▶ Binary deployment is automatic.
 - ▶ Can accomodate many deployment policies.
 - ▶ Useful for service deployment.
 - ▶ Integrated continuous integration / release management.
- ▶ Available at <http://www.cs.uu.nl/groups/ST/Trace/Nix>.

- ICSE'04 E. Dolstra, E. Visser, and M. de Jonge, *Imposing a Memory Management Discipline on Software Deployment*
- LISA'04 E. Dolstra, M. de Jonge, and E. Visser, *Nix: A Safe and Policy-Free System for Software Deployment*
- CBSE'05 E. Dolstra, *Efficient Upgrading in a Purely Functional Component Deployment Model*
- ASE'05 E. Dolstra, *Secure Sharing Between Untrusted Users in a Transparent Source/Binary Deployment Model*
- PhD thesis E. Dolstra, *The Purely Functional Software Deployment Model*