

TCSS 343 - Week 4

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Homework 2

2.10 Why do some systems store the operating system in firmware, while others store it on disk?

ANSWER: Embedded devices are typically smaller, many would like to have to map ROM directly to memory. As such they have no need for a file system or any of niceties that go along with systems that store the OS on disk. The gameboy is an example of such an embedded device. This gameboy would map ROM directly to memory, storing the OS in firmware. To change the OS on the gameboy you would need to flash the firmware.

2.16 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the same system-call interface for manipulating both files and devices?

ANSWER: A major advantage of interoperability between using the same systemcall interface for manipulating both files and devices is allowing for a higher level of abstraction. This abstraction leads to less code re-use. A major disadvantage of this is the potential to lose performance, but this is a disadvantage that is harder to pin down. Whenever you add any layer of abstraction to a system you include the potential for the loss of functionality or performance. That said, I think the advantage of say, UNIX's ability to treat hardware devices as files is a major advantage outweighing most disadvantages.

2.18 What are the two models of interprocess communication? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches?

ANSWER: The two models of interprocess communication are the message-passing model and the shared-memory model. Since message-passing is a system call, it has a slightly higher overhead than shared-memory model. This lack of system calls on the other hand mean than it takes more overhead from the programmer to take care of how the memory is shared.

2.19 Why is the separation of mechanism and policy desirable?

ANSWER: If there was no separation between the mechanism and policy the system would lack the resilience to implement the functionalities that are desirable in a computing system. The book gives a timer as an example of a mechanism which ensures CPU protection, the decision that decides how long the timer is to be set for are particular user is a policy decision. I didn't like this example. I think a working directory (unix) or "context sensitive addressing" is a mechanism which references a different object depending upon the context in which the address is used, but the decision as to how this protection is implemented is dependent on each particular user, especially in Linux but also true for many other operating systems. I don't know if this works but I would rather attempt to answer the question without regurgitating what the book is telling me, but apply what the book is telling in some way.

2.21 What is the main advantage of the microkernel approach to system design? How do user programs and system services interact in a microkernel architecture? What are the disadvantages of using the microkernel approach?

ANSWER: The main advantage of the microkernel approach is that when you add some new service in the operating system that does not modify the kernel. Like a government that rules a nation and all its states, the kernel is the central set of instructions that not only governs how processes interact with the body politic but also provides the rules on how they should use the institutions in the computing device, such as the disk, the memory or I/O devices. Like any good government it should be hard to change the core institutions, which is where the microkernel comes in.

Programs that manage each individual I/O device, for example, are the staff which keep all the departments which use these I/O device of the OS run-

ning smoothing. Communication through message passing and shared memory(not mentioned in the book but I believe is also true) is the main function of the microkernel. This, I believe, is what leads to what you mentioned in class of having for example “good mixture of different heavy CPU intensive tasks and I/O tasks”.

By introducing microkernels you can suffer from performance decreases due to the inflation of system function overhead that comes with more microkernels.