Reflection – Metaobjects

value-based

Reflection uses constant values of a single built-in type:

```
info x = reflect(argument);
```

type-based

Reflection uses constant values of multiple types:

```
auto x = reflect(argument);
```

The actual (implementation-defined) type might be:

```
template <info X>
struct __metaobject {
  consteval operator info() const {
    return X;
  }
};
```

Reflection – APIs

value-based

Either purely `consteval` or template functions with non-type template parameters:

```
consteval auto foo(info mo);
```

```
template <info MO>
consteval auto bar();
```

type-based

`consteval` template functions taking metaobjects as function arguments:

```
consteval auto foo(metaobject auto mo);
consteval auto bar(metaobject auto mo);
```

```
template <typename T>
concept metaobject = unspecified;
```

Reflection – Implementation

value-based

Very fast to compile:

```
consteval auto foo(info mo);
```

Somewhat slower to compile:

```
template <info MO>
consteval auto bar();
```

type-based

Very fast to compile, but requires `consteval` conversion from `metaobject` to `info`:

```
consteval auto foo(info mo);
```

Slower to compile:

```
template <info MO>
consteval auto bar(__metaobject<MO> mo);
```

Reflection – Usage

value-based

Dual syntax:

```
use(foo(reflect(argument));
```

or

```
use(bar<reflect(argument)>();
```

When to use which?

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type-based

Uniform syntax:

```
use(foo(reflect(argument));
```

and

```
use(bar(reflect(argument));
```

Reflection – Containers

value-based

Spans, vectors, etc. must be fixed to work in `consteval`.

```
span<info> x = members_of(...);
vector<info> y = bases_of(...);
```

Can be used with some STL algorithms, unless splicing is involved.

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type-based

Containers (sequences) are metaobjects themselves.

```
auto x = get_data_members(...);
auto y = get_base_classes(...);
```

Have their own implementation of reflection-related algorithms, splicing is no problem.

Reflection – Pros

value-based

- Faster to compile
- Uses less resources to compile

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type-based

- Consistent and unified API
- More friendly to generic programming
- Plays better with ADL
- Better usability
- Easier to teach

Reflection – Cons

value-based

- Inconsistent API
- The `foo(...)` vs. `bar<...>()` syntax makes it less generic
- Rules when to use which, are sort of complicated and may look arbitrary
- More complicated to teach
- Issues with ADL on NTTPs

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type-based

- Slower to compile
- Uses more resources to compile

How to materialize 100'000s of metaobjects?

Use a shell script. . .

```
L=100  # number of repeats
S=1000 # sampling step size
for l in $(seq 1 ${L})
do
  N=$((l * S))
  # factorize N into three integers
  D=...; E=...; F=...
```

. . . to generate a C++ source file. . .

```
  int main() {
    return bool(qux(make_index_sequence<${D}>{})) ? 0 : 1;
  }
```

. . . , compile and measure:

```
  time $(CXX) $(CXXFLAGS) -o /dev/null $<
done
```

The boilerplate – level 1

```
template <size_t ... K>
consteval auto qux(index_sequence<K...>) {
  return ( ... + baz(
    integral_constant<size_t, K>{},
    make_index_sequence<${E}>{}));
}
```

The boilerplate – level 2

```
template <size_t K, size_t ... J>
consteval auto baz(
  integral_constant<size_t, K>,
  index_sequence<J...>) {
  return ( ... + bar(
    integral_constant<size_t, K>{},
    integral_constant<size_t, J>{},
    make_index_sequence<${F}>{}));
}
```

The boilerplate – level 3

```
template <size_t K, size_t J, size_t ... I>
consteval auto bar(
  integral_constant<size_t, K>,
  integral_constant<size_t, J>,
  index_sequence<I...>) {
    // Simulate the metaobject "id" as:
    // MOID =
    //    K * $((N / D)) +
    //    J * $((N / (D * E))) +
    //    I;
    return /* Do something with MOID... */
}
```

The baseline

Just sum the *MOID* values at compile-time

```
template <size_t K, size_t J, size_t ... I>
consteval auto bar(
  integral_constant<size_t, K>,
  integral_constant<size_t, J>,
  index_sequence<I...>) {
    return (... +
      K * $((N / D)) +
      J * $((N / (D * E))) +
      I);
}
```

Measure how long does this take to compile and subtract from “real” measurements.

Type-based metaobject & template function

```
template <size_t M>
struct wrapper {
  consteval operator size_t() const {
    return M;
  }
};

template <size_t M>
consteval size_t foo(wrapper<M> w) {
  return w;
}
```

```
return ( ... + foo(wrapper<MOID>{}));
```

Type-based metaobject & consteval function

```
template <size_t M>
struct wrapper {
  consteval operator size_t() const {
    return M;
  }
};

consteval size_t foo(size_t m) {
  return m;
}
```

```
return ( ... + foo(wrapper<MOID>{}));
```

Value-based metaobject & template function

```
template <size_t M>
consteval size_t foo() {
  return M;
}
```

```
return ( ... + foo<MOID>());
```

Value-based metaobject & consteval function

```
consteval size_t foo(size_t i) {
  return i;
}
```

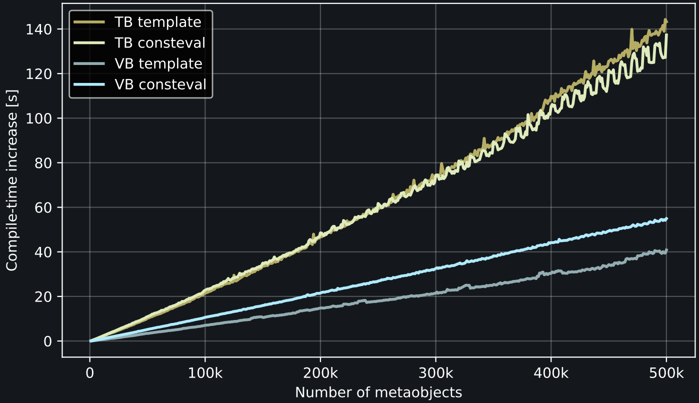
```
return ( ... + foo(MOID));
```

Test hardware

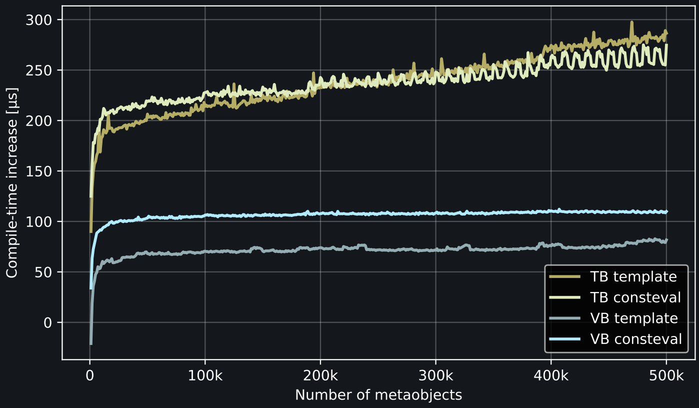
- Old desktop[1]:
  - i5-2400U @ 3.10GHz (4 cores)
  - 24GB RAM
- Corporate dev laptop[2]:
  - i7-1185G7 @ 3.0GHz (8 cores)
  - 32GB RAM
- Mid-range gaming laptop[3]:
  - AMD Ryzen7 4800HS (16 cores)
  - 16GB RAM
- RPi 4B
  - ARM v7l
  - 4GB RAM

[1] 2010
[2] 2021
[3] 2019

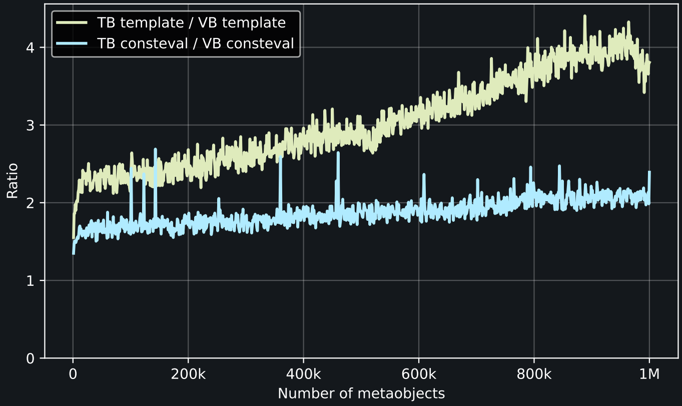
i5-2400 – compile time increase per N metaobjects



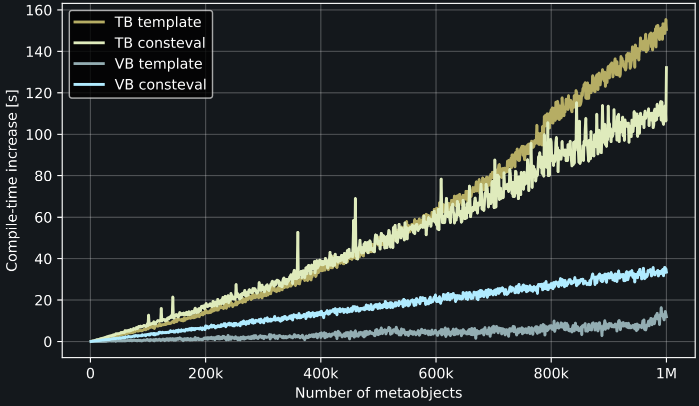
i5-2400 – compile time increase per 1 metaobject



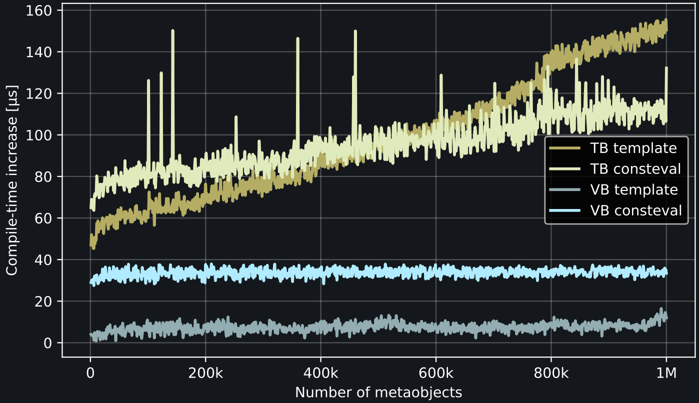
i5-2400 – How much faster is VB vs. TB



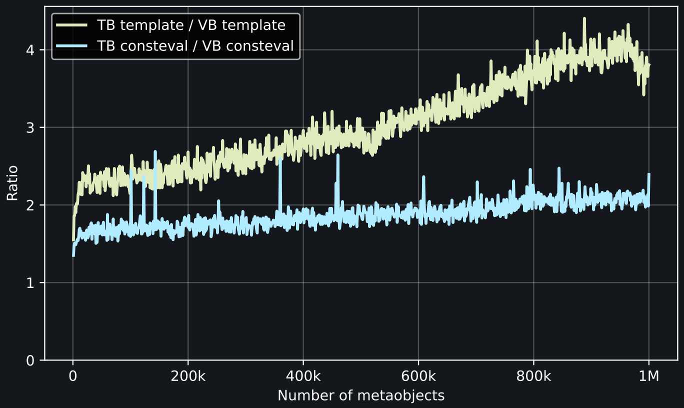
i7-1185 – compile time increase per N metaobjects



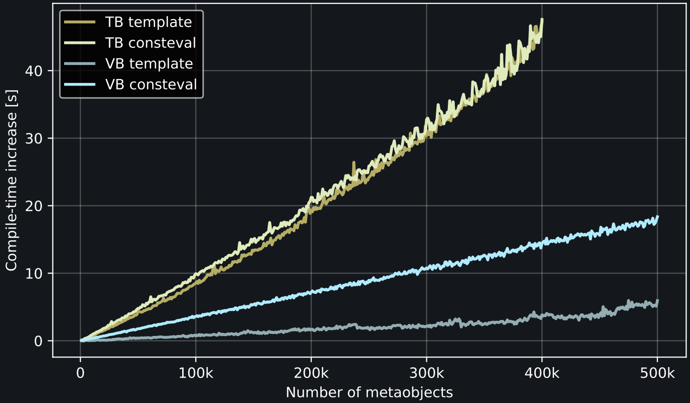
i7-1185 – compile time increase per 1 metaobject



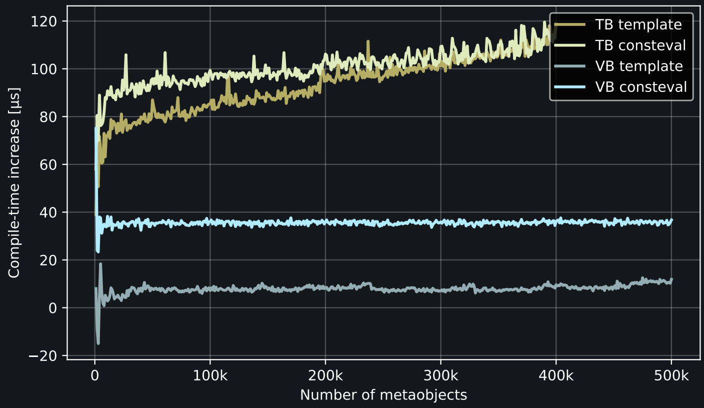
i7-1185 – How much faster is VB vs. TB



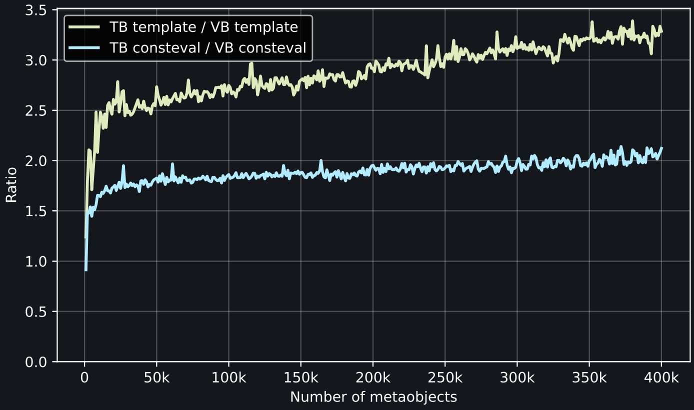
Ryzen7-4800HS– compile time increase per N metaobjects



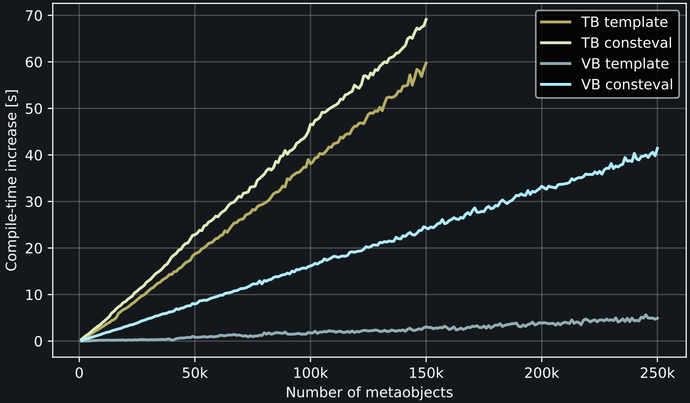
Ryzen7-4800HS – compile time increase per 1 metaobject



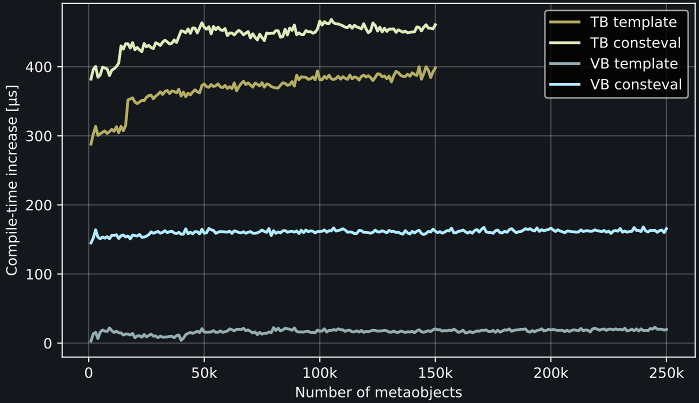
Ryzen7-4800HS – How much faster is VB vs. TB



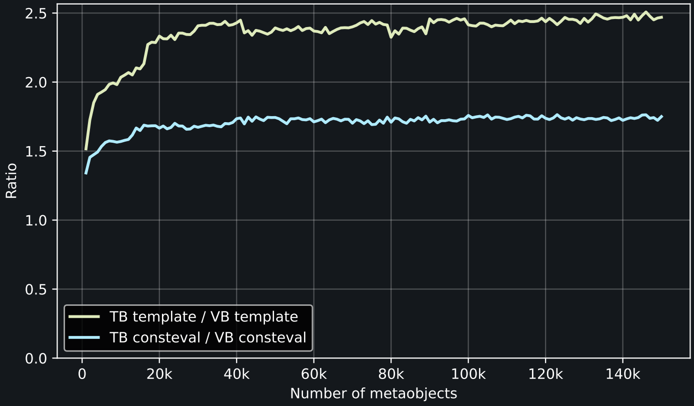
ARMv7– compile time increase per N metaobjects



ARMv7– compile time increase per 1 metaobject



ARMv7 – How much faster is VB vs. TB



The cost of reflection in a "large-ish" project?

- Let's try `clang`
  - Estimate the number of "things" to reflect
  - Measure the overall compilation time
  - Measure the contribution of reflection
  - Compare purely value-based and typed metaobjects

Estimating number of declarations in clang

Let's try *documented* declarations

Edit doxygen-cfg.in:

```
- GENERATE_XML    = NO
+ GENERATE_XML    = YES
```

Configure:

```
cmake \
  -DLLVM_ENABLE_DOXYGEN=On \
  ...
```

Generate Doxygen docs:

```
ninja doxygen-clang
```

Merge into a single XML file clang.xml:

```
xsltproc combine.xslt index.xml > clang.xml
```

Counting documented declarations in clang

Create count.xslt:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf8"?>
<xsl:stylesheet version = '1.0'
 xmlns:xsl='http://www.w3.org/1999/XSL/Transform'>
  <xsl:template match="/">
    <xsl:value-of select="count(
      descendant::compounddef⁴|
      descendant::member⁵|
      descendant::value⁶|
      descendant::para⁷|
      descendant::param⁸)
    "/>
  </xsl:template>
</xsl:stylesheet>
```

[4] struct, class, enum, ...
[5] data members, member functions, enumerators, ...
[6] enumerator values, default arguments, ...
[7] function/constructor/operator parameters, ...
[8] template parameters, ...

Counting documented declarations in clang

Calculate!

```
xsltproc \
    count.xslt \
    clang.xml
```

The result:

379091

- That's for version 15.0.0
- Around FEB-05-2022
- Round that up to 400'000, 500'000 or even 1'000'000
- Let's assume we want to reflect every single declaration

Clean build of clang

Edit toolchain.cmake:

```
set(LLVM_USE_LINKER lld)
set(CMAKE_EXE_LINKER_FLAGS -fuse-ld=${LLVM_USE_LINKER})
set(CMAKE_SHARED_LINKER_FLAGS -fuse-ld=${LLVM_USE_LINKER})
```

Configure:

```
cmake \
  -DLLVM_ENABLE_PROJECTS="clang;clang-tools-extra" \
  -DLLVM_ENABLE_RUNTIMES="libcxx;libcxxabi" \
  -DLLVM_TOOLCHAIN_FILE="toolchain.cmake" \
  ...
```

Build and measure elapsed time:

```
time ninja -j 16 install install-cxx install-cxxabi
```

Clean build of `clang`

Results:

CPU:	i5-2400	i7-1185	Ryzen 7
real	122m25,943s	66m59,909s	34m45,899s
user	433m50,123s	510m55,382s	525m16,660s
sys	11m22,881s	12m52,287s	17m5,738s

Added, rounded and converted to seconds:

CPU:	i5-2400	i7-1185	Ryzen 7
real-time	7346s	4020s	2086s
cpu-time (user+sys)	27313s	31427s	32543s

Compared to build-time with 400’000 metaobjects

Compile-time of a typical `clang` build vs.
compile-time spent on materializing 400’000 metaobjects:

CPU:	i5-2400	i7-1185	Ryzen 7
clang:	27313s	31427s	32543s
400k MO (TB-template):	115.9s	48.8s	62.4s
	0.42%	0.16%	0.19%
400k MO (TB-consteval):	111.3s	53.4s	62.7
	0.41%	0.16%	0.19%
400k MO (VB-template):	36.3s	16.5s	19.0s
	0.13%	0.05%	0.06%
400k MO (VB-consteval):	50.3s	27.4s	29.6s
	0.18%	0.09%	0.09%

Conclusions

- The typical compile-time overhead of materializing a metaobject is on the order of tens or hundreds of microseconds
- The type-based metaobject representation is between 2x and 4x slower to compile compared to the purely value-based representation

Conclusions – (cont.)

- Most typical reflection use-cases don't require reflecting every declaration in a project
- Even if reflecting almost everything, the overhead compared to total build time is a fraction of a percent even in the worst case

The big question

Is the improvement in compile-time worth the decrease in usability of the value-based reflection API?