

**A Medley of C++**

Walter E. Brown, Ph.D.

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**A little about me**

- B.A. (math's); M.S., Ph.D. (computer science).
- Professional programmer for over 50 years, programming in C++ since 1982.
- Experienced in industry, academia, consulting, and research:
  - Founded a Computer Science Dept.; served as Professor and Dept. Head; taught and mentored at all levels.
  - Managed and mentored the programming staff for a reseller.
  - Lectured internationally as a software consultant and commercial trainer.
  - Retired from the Scientific Computing Division at Fermilab, specializing in C++ programming and in-house consulting.
- Not dead — still doing training & consulting. ([Email me!](#))

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**Emeritus participant in C++ standardization**

- Written ~175 papers for WG21, proposing such now-standard C++ library features as `gcd/lcm`, `cbegin/cend`, `common_type`, and `void t`, as well as all of headers `<random>` and `<ratio>`.
- Influenced such core language features as *alias templates*, *contextual conversions*, and *variable templates*; recently worked on *requires-expressions*, `operator<>`, and more!
- Conceived and served as Project Editor for *Int'l Standard on Mathematical Special Functions in C++* (ISO/IEC 29124), now incorporated into C++17's `<cmath>`.
- Be forewarned: Based on my training and experience, I hold some rather strong opinions about computer software and programming methodology — these opinions are not shared by all programmers, but they should be! ☺

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**The origin(?) of "Lightning Talks"**

- “A *lightning talk* is a very short presentation ... given at a conference or similar forum.”
- It’s claimed that:
  - “The term was first coined ... in June 2000 [although] ...”
  - “The practice of lightning talks was first known to be used in 1997.”
- Yet I remember that:
  - At the 1<sup>st</sup> programmers’ conference I ever attended ...
  - We had an hour of short talks under the common title, “**What Every FORTRAN Programmer Ought to Know.**”

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**Today: an homage**

- That 1971 talk was memorable (at least to me):
  - In part because not every topic needs a full hour, right?
- So I have for you today several mini-talks:
  - In the approximate style that I witnessed ~50 years ago.
  - With C++ (rather than Fortran) as their unifying theme.
- As the common title for this talk, I first thought of:
  - “**What Every F- C++ Programmer Ought to Know.**”
  - But that seemed too obvious; too much like a clone.
  - Instead, I chose the simpler “**A Medley of C++**”

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**Today's program**

①	“ <b>The Universe of C++ Types</b> ”
②	“... C++ Declaration Syntax”
③	“ <b>Why Are They Named Lambdas?</b> ”
④	“What Does C++20 Owe to ...”

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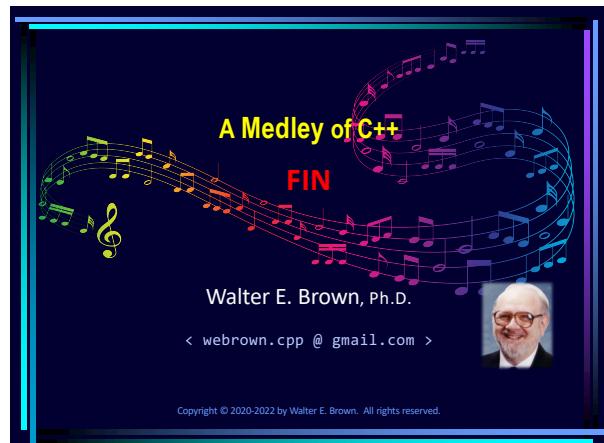
Today's program



- ⑤ "A Review of Published Code"
- ⑥ "An Adventure in Applied Detection"
- ⑦ "Expression Categories"
- ⑧ "decltype, auto, and decltype(auto)"
- ⑨ "It's Not Only Unique"

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The Universe of C++ Types

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### Let's explore/partition this universe

- The C++ *primary type classifications* do not overlap:
  - The *core language* specifies these in `[basic.types]`.
  - The *standard library* specifies corresponding *type traits* in `[meta.unary]`.
- Fortunately, they mostly agree.
- A type's cv-qual's does not affect its classification.
- But here's a related puzzle for you (answer at the end):
 

For which primary classification(s) of types **T** would the following predicate yield **false**?  
`std::is_const_v< T const >`

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### Fundamental types

- **void types**
  - There are 4 (counting cv-qualification).
- **std::nullptr\_t types:**
  - Like the `void`s, these 4 have their own classification.
- **Arithmetic types:**
  - **Floating-point types:** { `float`, `double`, `long double` }\*
  - **Integral/integer types:** See next page.

\* More coming in C++23 (e.g., `bfloat16`); details in P1467.

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### Integral types, a.k.a. integer types

- { `bool`, `char`, `wchar_t`, `char8_t`, `char16_t`, `char32_t` }
- **Signed integer types:**
  - **Standard signed integer types:**  
`signed { char, short int, int, long int, long long int }`
  - **Extended signed integer types:**  
 Implementation-defined (but does anyone?).
- **Unsigned integer types:**
  - **Standard unsigned integer types:**  
`unsigned { char, short int, int, long int, long long int }`
  - **Extended unsigned integer types:**  
 Implementation-defined (again, does anyone?).

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*Compound types* (i.e., types based on  $n \geq 1$  other types)

- Arrays of { known, unknown } extent:
  - Homogeneous; i.e., composed of objects (elements) of a single specified type.
- { *lvalue*, *rvalue* } references:
  - To an { object, free function, static member function } of some specified type.
- Pointers:
  - To void, or ...
  - To an { object, free function, static member function } of some specified type.

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*Compound types* (continued)

- Functions:
  - Have  $m \geq 0$  parameters of specified types, and ...
  - A bool value denoting its noexcept status, and ...
  - A return { void, object, reference } type.
- Classes:
  - Contain a sequence of  $m \geq 0$  objects of various (i.e., possibly heterogeneous) specified types, and ...
  - Contain a set of specified types, enumerations, and functions for manipulating these objects, and ...
  - Contain a set of restrictions on these members' access.

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*Compound types* (concluded)

- Unions:
  - Classes that may contain objects of different specified types ...
  - At different times.
- Enumerations { scoped, unscoped }:
  - Comprise a set of named constant values ...
  - That share a single underlying specified integral type.
- Pointers-to-member-of:
  - Identify non-static { data, function } members of a specified type ...
  - Within objects of a specified class type.

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Exactly one of these traits will be true for every type  $T$

$\cdots \_v < T >$ (red = fundamental; blue = compound)	
is_void	is_lvalue_reference
is_null_pointer	is_rvalue_reference
is_signed	is_member_object_pointer
is_unsigned	is_member_function_pointer
is_floating_point	is_enum
is_bounded_array	is_union
is_unbounded_array	is_class
is_pointer	is_function

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Some composite type classifications

- Class types:
  - All types declared with a class-key { class, struct, union }.
- Function object types (std library def'n):
  - All ptr-to-function types, and ...
  - All class types with an operator() member, and ...
  - All class types with a conversion function whose target type is a { ptr, ref, ref-to-ptr }-to-function type.
- Callable types (std library def'n):
  - All { function object, ptr-to-member } types.

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A few more composite type classifications

- Scalar types:
  - All { arithmetic, enumeration, pointer, pointer-to-member, std::nullptr\_t } types.
- Object types:
  - All non-{ function, reference, void } types.
- Incomplete types:
  - All void types, and ...
  - All declared-but-not-defined class types, and ...
  - All enumerations "in certain contexts", and ...
  - All array types such that { bound is unknown, element type is incomplete }.

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**Example: detecting a type's completeness (since C++11)**

- Apply (a variant of) the *detection idiom*:
  - `template< class, class = std::size_t > //primary template  
bool is_complete_v = false;`
  - `template< class T > //partial specialization  
bool is_complete_v<T, decltype( sizeof(T) )> = true;`
- Use such a trait carefully! For some types, the answer might be different at different points in your program:
  - E.g., `false` after a class's forward declaration (incomplete) vs. `true` after that class's later definition (now complete).
  - Such inconsistency violates the C++ One Definition Rule (**ODR**), so query a type's completeness at most once.

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**Finally: the puzzle's answer**

- `std::is_const_v< T const >` yields `false` when ...
  - `T` is either a *reference type* or a *function type*.
- Perhaps this is not useful knowledge every day, but:
  - Historically, the `std::is_function` trait was implemented via a primary template + 48 (!) partial specializations:
  - 48 = 4 cv qual's × 3 ref qual's × 2 `noexcept` × 2 ellipsis arg.
  - These don't include non-standard calling conventions!
  - `template< class T >  
bool is_function_v  
= not is_const_v< T const > //true iff ref-or-fctn type  
and not is_reference_v< T >; //now rule out ref type`

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The Universe of C++ Types

FIN



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## The Principle behind C++ Declaration Syntax

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### Some claim our declarations are impossible, but ...

*“Impossible is not a declaration.  
It’s a dare.”*

— Muhammad Ali

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### C declarations' guiding principle (emphasis added)

“The style used in **expressions** carries through to **declarations**....”

— Dennis M. Ritchie,  
*The Development of the C Language*  
(presented at HOPL-II, 1993)

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### From expressions to declarations

- That principle applies in C++, too — let's look at some examples.
- For an entity `x`, what expressions could give a result of type `int`?
  - If a simple variable: `x`.
  - If an array: `x[ ⋯ ]`.
  - If a pointer: `*x`.
  - If a function: `x( ⋯ )`.
- So, how would `x` be declared in each of these cases?
  - `int x;` // simple variable
  - `int x[ ⋯ ];` // array
  - `int *x;` // pointer
  - `int x( ⋯ );` // function

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**The parts of a typical declaration, left to right**

- First we write a **type**, followed by ...
- An **expression (declarator)** of a form that could give a value of that type, and then ...
- **Punctuation** (a semicolon if at end, else a comma).
- Examples (redux):
  - `int x; // simple variable`
  - `int x[ ... ]; // array`
  - `int *x; // pointer`
  - `int x( ... ); // function`
  - Redundant paren's:
    - `int (x);`
    - `int (x[ ... ]);`
    - `int (*x);`
    - `int (x( ... ));`

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**Precedence applies, even in declarators**

- E.g., recall that **operator ()** has **precedence over (binds more tightly than/has seniority over) operator \*** :
  - So in an expression, **operator ()** claims all its operands ...
  - Before **operator \*** begins to claim **its** operands.
- Similar expressions can therefore **differ in meaning**:
  - `* p( ... ) // p is callable, and ...`  
`// ... the call's result is dereferenceable`
  - `(*q)( ... ) // q is dereferenceable, and ...`  
`// ... the dereferenced result is callable`
- That difference is reflected in their resp. declarators:
  - `int * p( ... ); // p has a function type int*(...)`
  - `int (*q)( ... ); // q has a pointer-to-function type int(*)(...)`

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**Multiple declarators**

- Multiple declarators may share a common type:
  - `int k, a[ 10 ], *p, g( double );`
  - `int k, , a[ 10 ], *p, g( double )`  
`// known as the One True Comma layout`
- Even class members can be declared to share a type:
  - `struct S { int zero = 0, one[ 1 ] = { 1 }, two(); };`
  - `int S::two() { return 2; }`

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**According to [dcl.decl.general]/3**

- “A declaration with several declarators is usually equivalent to the corresponding sequence of declarations each with a single declarator.”
- But not quite always:
  - ✗ `auto i = 1, j = 2.0; // error: deduced types do not match`
  - ✓ `auto i = 1; // okay, i deduced to have type int`  
`auto j = 2.0; // okay, j deduced to have type double`
  - ✓ `struct S { ... };`  
`S S, T; // declare two variables of type S`
  - ✗ `struct S { ... };`  
`S S; // okay (but please don't do this!)`  
`S T; // error: variable S hides type S`

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**More syntax options**

- We earlier said: “First we write a **type**, ...”:
  - We did **not** say, “First we write a **type name**, ....”!
- Examples:
  - `struct S { ... } s, t;`  
`// defines type S, also defines variables s and t`
  - `struct { ... } u;`  
`// defines variable u with an unutterable type`

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**C++ offers still more syntax options**

- **Attributes:** `[[ ... ]]`.
- **Initializers:** `= ...`, `( ... )`, `{ ... }`.
- **Qualifiers:** `const`, `volatile`, `&`, `&&`.
- **Specifiers:** `constexpr`, `consteval`, `constinit`, `extern`, `friend`, `inline`, `mutable`, `static`, `thread_local`, `typedef`, `virtual`, ....

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Recap of the main takeaway (please teach this!)

“The style used in **expressions** carries through to **declarations**....”



— Dennis M. Ritchie,  
*The Development of the C Language*  
(presented at HOPL-II, 1993)

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This principle applies even to **typedefs**

- To write a traditional **typedef**:
  - Pretend to write a variable’s declaration, then ...
  - Just write the keyword **typedef** in front!
- Example:
  - A variable of a ptr-to-fctn type: `int (* ptf)( float );`
  - An alias for such a type: `typedef int (* ptf)( float );`
  - Since C++11, equiv. to: `using ptf = int (*)( float );`

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Outside the C subset, C++ had to adapt

- Recall (a) that C has no reference types, and (b) that C++ has **no expressions of reference type**:
  - “If an expression initially has the type `reference_to T`, the type is adjusted to `T` ...” (see [expr.type]/1).
  - Thus, no C++ operator can produce any ref. type.
- Instead, C++ adapted pointer syntax to declare an entity of reference type:
  - We use `&` or `&&` in the declarator instead of `*`.
  - Example: `int * x ...; // x has pointer type` compare to: `int & y ...; // y has lvalue-ref type` and to: `int && z ...; // z has rvalue-ref type`

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One more C++ innovation was needed ...

- ... since C has no **scope-resolution operator** (`::`).
- Example:
  - `struct S { bool b; double d( float ); };`
  - Member `S :: b` has type `bool`, an object type.
  - Member `S :: d` has type `double( float )`, a fctn type.
- Declaring a pointer-to-member both (a) **names the containing class** and (b) **gives the pointee’s type**:
  - `bool S :: * pb = & S :: b;`
  - `double ( S :: * pd )( float ) = & S :: d;`

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A final caveat

- This is, of course, not quite the complete story.
- For example, we haven’t mentioned the role of **type aliases** in declaring other entities.
- Nor have we discussed the forbidden ref-to-ref (a.k.a. **reference-collapsing**) types.
- Nor have we described such recent additions as **late-specified return types** or **structured bindings**.
- So, as seems typical in C++:
  - There’s **always more to learn!**

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Nonetheless, we have a principle to guide us

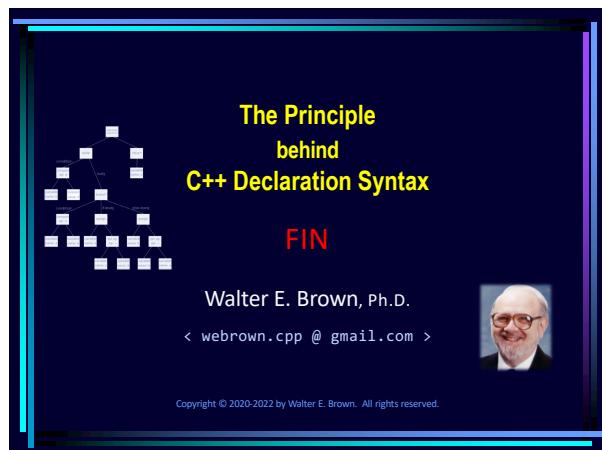
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β? τ?  
θ? μ?  
δ?  
ρ?  
κ?  
π?  
ω?

Why Are They Named *Lambdas*?

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### We owe much to these pioneers of computation ...

	Alan Turing 1912–1954		Emil Post 1897–1954
	Alonzo Church 1903–1995		Kurt Gödel 1906–1978
	Stephen Kleene 1909–1994		

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### ... As well as to these pioneers of computation

	Andrey Markov, Jr. 1903–1979		Axel Thue 1863–1922
	Dana Scott 1932–		Bertrand Russell 1872–1970
	Alfred Whitehead 1861–1947		

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### From theory to practice

- They researched the **foundations of mathematics**:
  - Eventually their respective works largely converged into a branch of math's known as **computability theory**.
  - But Church's notation became the foundation of the **LISP** programming language [McCarthy, 1958].
- “Lisp is today's equivalent of Latin. Educated people are supposed to have studied and forgotten it.”

— Peter Dimov,  
*Simple C++11 metaprogramming*,  
2015

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**Functional programming lives on**

- In such **higher-order programming**, functions are not only **callable**, but are **copyable values**, too:
  - In C++, **function objects** have always fit this description, ...
  - So C++11 introduced “**lambda-expr’s [as] a concise way to create a simple function object**” (see [*expr.prim.lambda*]/1).
  - And, as we know, C++ lambdas have evolved ever since.
- Some consider that “the untyped  $\lambda$ -calculus was the first object-oriented language.”

— William R. Cook,  
*On Understanding Data Abstraction, Revisited,*  
OOPSLA 2009



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**Origin of *lambda* as a term of art**

- Today, math functions are **named** (e.g.,  $f(y) = 3y + 1$ ):
  - (It’s believed Leonhard Euler was first to do so [1734].)
- But Alonzo Church used [1930s] **anonymous fctn def’ns** (e.g.,  $\hat{y} \cdot 3y + 1$ ) in his **computing foundations** work:
  - He’d adapted the  $\hat{y}$  notation (for **function-abstraction**) from Whitehead & Russell’s notation (for **class-abstraction**).
  - (BTW, that’s the form I first learned in graduate school.)
- Church wrote [1964] that when he published his work:
  - His **caret** (hat,  $\hat{\phantom{x}}$ ) was typeset separately (e.g.,  $\hat{\Lambda}y \cdot 3y + 1$  ...)
  - Thus resembling a Greek **capital Lambda**, that was later changed to **lower case** (e.g.,  $\lambda y \cdot 3y + 1$ ).

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**However, ...**

- Dana Scott (Church’s former student and 1976 Turing Award recipient) **told a different story** in his [2018] talk *Looking Backward; Looking Forward*.
- Scott said that he once appealed to Church’s son-in-law (John Addison) to **ask Church the origin of lambda**:
  - So Addison wrote Church a postcard, asking ...
  - “ ... Why did you choose lambda as your operator?”
- Church allegedly returned the postcard in an envelope, having annotated the postcard with the words, “**eenie, meenie, miney, mo**”!

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**In either case ...**

- Church’s notation for functions/function abstraction became known as **lambda expressions**, ...
- And Church’s collected work in this area became known as the **lambda calculus**, ...
- Long since recognized as a **universal model of computation** ...
- That’s been proven **equivalent in computational power** to the models set forth by Post, Kleene, and Turing, among others.

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**Why Are They Named *Lambdas*?**

**FIN**

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## What Does C++20 Owe to Prof. Dr. Emmy Noether?

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- Experienced in industry, academia, consulting, and research:
  - Founded a Computer Science Dept.; served as Professor and Dept. Head; taught and mentored at all levels.
  - Managed and mentored the programming staff for a reseller.
  - Lectured internationally as a software consultant and commercial trainer.
  - Retired from the Scientific Computing Division at Fermilab, specializing in C++ programming and in-house consulting.
- Not dead — still doing training & consulting. (Email me!)



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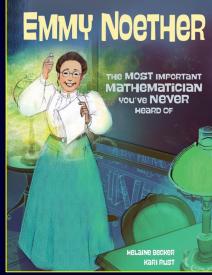
### Emeritus participant in C++ standardization

- Written ~175 papers for WG21, proposing such now-standard C++ library features as `gcd/lcm`, `cbegin/cend`, `common_type`, and `void_t`, as well as all of headers `<random>` and `<ratio>`.
- Influenced such core language features as *alias templates*, *contextual conversions*, and *variable templates*; recently worked on *requires-expressions*, `operator<=>`, and more!
- Conceived and served as Project Editor for *Int'l Standard on Mathematical Special Functions in C++* (ISO/IEC 29124), now incorporated into C++17's `<cmath>`.
- Be forewarned: Based on my training and experience, I hold some rather strong opinions about computer software and programming methodology — these opinions are not shared by all programmers, but they should be! ☺

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3

### "The Most Important Mathematician You've Never Heard Of"



"Scientists are a famously anonymous lot, but few can match [the] perverse and unmerited obscurity [of] the 20th-century mathematical genius Amalie [Emmy] Noether."

— Natalie Angier,  
*The New York Times*, 2012-03-26

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### Emmy Noether (1882-1935) [adapted from A. Borsch-Dan]

- Although she was a mathematician's daughter, she was not allowed to enroll in Univ. classes:
  - The academic senate warned that coed education would "overthrow all academic order." E.g., a faculty member said, "What will our soldiers think when they ... find that they are required to learn at the feet of a woman?"
  - To which mathematician David Hilbert famously replied, "I do not see that the candidate's gender is an argument against her admission.... After all, we are a university, not a bathhouse."
- Noether was at last officially permitted to study, but had to ask permission from each lecturer she attended.

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### At the start of her career

- After winning the right to matriculate, Noether earned a Ph.D. in 1907, but no faculty jobs were then open to women:
  - So she worked without pay for 7+ years.
  - Then "hired" by Hilbert at the Univ. of Göttingen in 1915, but spent years lecturing under his name, still unpaid.
- After completing a second doctorate (*Habilitation*, 1919), she was finally appointed to a faculty position in 1923 as *Lehrbeauftragte für Algebra*.



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.... Emmy Noether, Einstein's Equal"

- "Noether continued to teach as she produced papers and theories at a staggering pace," including many rarely acknowledged contributions to works written by her students and colleagues.
- "She developed a reputation as a fast talker, a stern critic, and a devoted teacher."

— Troy Brownfield,  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, 2018

- A decade later (1933), she fled to the U.S.A. to escape Nazi persecution.

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In the USA, she joined Bryn Mawr, with ties to Princeton's IAS

- "Dr. Noether is the most eminent woman in mathematics in Europe and has had more students at Göttingen than anyone else in the department."

— Dr. Marion Edwards Park  
President, Bryn Mawr College

- "Miss Noether's methods of thinking and working ... were [to] recognize the unessentials [and] brush them aside.... This was ... far from a superficial achievement...."

— Dr. Ruth Stauffer,  
Noether's last doctoral student

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Some of Noether's significant contributions



- "The development of abstract algebra, ... one of the most distinctive innovations of 20<sup>th</sup> century math's, is largely due to her – in her published papers, in lectures, and in ... influence on her contemporaries."

— Nathan Jacobson



- **Noether's Theorem** [1915, pub. 1918] is "one of the most important ... theorems ever proved in ... the development of modern physics, possibly on a par with the Pythagorean theorem."

— Leon Lederman & Christopher Hill

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"Emmy Noether saved General Relativity" w/ her theorem

- "[Since] 1915, General Relativity, a new ... way of thinking about gravity, had captured the attention of physicists.... But [this new theory had] difficulties which even Einstein could not resolve.
- "We would likely not be celebrating this landmark theory were it not for [Emmy Noether] who, at her prime, couldn't even secure a teaching role in her homeland because of her gender.
- "[Noether's Theorem provided] the mathematical breakthroughs that general relativity needed to win over physicists."

— Robert Lea

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But Noether is now recalled by relatively few of us

- Her mathematical originality was "absolute beyond comparison"

— Bartel L. van der Waerden

- She "changed the face of algebra by her work."

— Hermann Weyl

- She "is ... the greatest woman mathematician who has ever lived; and the greatest woman scientist of any sort now living, and a scholar at least on the plane of Madame Curie."

— Norbert Wiener

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A very special posthumous tribute [excerpted]

- "Within the past few days a distinguished mathematician, Professor Emmy Noether, ... died in her fifty-third year."
- "In the judgment of the most competent living mathematicians, [she] was the most significant creative mathematical genius thus far produced ...".



*Albert Einstein*  
— Albert Einstein,  
"Professor Einstein Writes in Appreciation of a Fellow-Mathematician,"  
*The New York Times*, 1935-05-05

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A biographer summarizes



- "In her 53 years,
- "many spent bucking a system that impeded her pursuit of mathematics,
- "Noether had an extraordinary impact on both algebra and physics.
- "There's no telling what else she might have accomplished if society and fate had been more kind."

— Steve Nadis,  
*The Universe According to Emmy Noether*

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What does Noether's work have to do with C++20?



- "It was she who taught us to think in terms of simple and general algebraic concepts..."

— Pavel S. Alexandrov



- "For Emmy Noether, relationships among numbers, functions, and operations became ... amenable to generalisation ... only after they have been ... reduced to general conceptual relationships...."

— Bartel L. van der Waerden

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"The greatest thing ... in 20<sup>th</sup> century mathematics!"

- "What was [Noether's] idea? [It was that you could separate concepts from implementation. You could just deal with concepts....]
- "So, if anybody invented generic programming, she did.... She realized it all. She realized that you could fully separate these two things.
- "Her contribution needs to be remembered."



— Alexander Stepanov, 2003

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Emmy Noether, "Mathematical genius"



"Even now, the world still learns from Noether, whose abstract principles are fundamental..."

— Emily Barone, 2020

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**C++20 Owes Concepts to Prof. Dr. Emmy Noether**



"Her contribution needs to be remembered."

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matching bytes:  
A Review of Published Code

Walter E. Brown, Ph.D.  
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1

**A little about me**

- B.A. (math's); M.S., Ph.D. (computer science).
- Professional programmer for over 50 years; programming in C++ since 1982.
- Experienced in industry, academia, consulting, and research:
  - Founded a Computer Science Dept., served as Professor and Dept. Head; taught and mentored at all levels.
  - Managed and mentored the programming staff for a reseller.
  - Lectured internationally as a software consultant and commercial trainer.
  - Retired from the Scientific Computing Division at Fermilab, specializing in C++ programming and in-house consulting.
- **Not dead — still doing training & consulting. (Email me!)**

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2

**Emeritus participant in C++ standardization**

- Written ~175 papers for WG21, proposing such now-standard C++ library features as `gcd/lcm`, `cbegin/cend`, `common_type`, and `void_t`, as well as all of headers `<random>` and `<ratio>`.
- Influenced such core language features as `alias templates`, `contextual conversions`, and `variable templates`; recently worked on `requires-expressions`, `operator<>`, and more!
- Conceived and served as Project Editor for ISO/IEC 29124: *Int'l Standard on Mathematical Special Functions in C++*, now part of `<cmath>`.
- Be forewarned: Based on my training and experience, I hold some rather strong opinions about computer software and programming methodology — these opinions are not shared by all programmers, but they should be! ☺

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**Background**

- A while ago, I read a blog post that started with this problem statement:
  - “Suppose that you give me two ASCII strings having the same number of characters.”
  - “I wish to compute ... the number of matching characters (same position, same character).”
  - “The conventional approach in C would look as follow[s]:”
  - [code block, forthcoming]
  - “There is nothing wrong with this code. ...”
- While there may indeed be “nothing wrong” with the `algorithm`, I respectfully opine that the published `code` is not of publication quality.

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**Before I show you the code ...**

- Please, please don't seek out the blog's original author:
  - I truly have no wish to embarrass anyone, ...
  - Nor do I wish to start any sort of code war or feud.
- Instead, kindly accept this review as an opinion:
  - Which, as always, you are free to adopt, adapt, or reject.
- Finally, please keep in mind that the blog article's main thrust was the speedup of the initial algorithm, ...
  - Which I found to be an interesting analysis, but comparing algorithms is not my topic today.
  - Rather, this short talk is about `code quality` and about making `incremental improvements` toward `quality code`.

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**My approach to code review**

- When assessing code, I seek good things to praise:
  - E.g., when I (once upon a time) graded students' programs, ...
  - I looked for `reasons to reward with a better grade`, ...
  - Rather than for reasons to penalize with a poorer grade.
- In my rubric at the time, code that:
  - Fails even to `compile` merited only an F (a failing grade).
  - Compiles and runs, but `crashes` or `gives incorrect results`, merited only a D (a barely-passing grade).
  - Runs to completion and `gives correct results` merited at least a C (a grade of minimal competence).
  - After that, I sought `evidence of further programming lessons learned`.

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The published blog code

```
• uint64_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    size_t i = 0;
    for( ; i < n; i++ ) {
        if( c1[i] == c2[i] ) { count++; }
    }
    return count;
}
```

- Recall that this code was intended for use in comparing algorithms:
  - The code works, but what (if anything) would you do differently?
  - What would I do differently?
  - Let me show you, one small step at a time.

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First:

```
• uint64_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    size_t i = 0;
    for( ; i < n; i++ ) {
        if( c1[i] == c2[i] ) { count++; }
    }
    return count;
}
```

- Note the type mismatch.
- So let's change the return type to `size_t`.

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Second:

```
• size_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    size_t i = 0;
    for( ; i < n; i++ ) {
        if( c1[i] == c2[i] ) { count++; }
    }
    return count;
}
```

- Let's fix the inconsistent indentation:
  - Let's indent the body of the `if` as is the `for`'s body.
  - Let's also remove the `for`'s unnecessary braces, since they suggest a complexity that's not present.

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Third:

```
• size_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    size_t i = 0;
    for( ; i < n; i++ )
        if( c1[i] == c2[i] )
            count++;
    return count;
}
```

- Let's reduce the scope of the loop counter, `i`:
  - Let's move its definition to the `for`'s initialization clause.
  - Let's also rename that variable, since many fonts make `i`'s, `I`'s and `l`'s, etc., difficult to distinguish.

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Fourth:

```
• size_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    for( size_t k = 0; k < n; k++ )
        if( c1[k] == c2[k] )
            count++;
    return count;
}
```

- Let's avoid unused/unnecessary/discarded copies:
  - Let's use `pre-increment` instead of `post-increment`.
  - Post-increment always incurs a copy (of the original value) that not every compiler for every optimization level, flag combination, and platform can necessarily elide.

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Fifth:

```
• size_t matching_bytes( char * c1, char * c2, size_t n ) {
    size_t count = 0;
    for( size_t k = 0; k < n; ++k )
        if( c1[k] == c2[k] )
            ++count;
    return count;
}
```

- Let's say that we want `exactly n` iterations:
  - As written, the loop's exit condition is `k >= n`, which means "`k` (the number of iterations) is at least `n`."
  - We prefer the exit condition be `k == n`, namely, "`k` (the number of iterations) is `exactly n`." (This is analogous to what we do in loops controlled by iterators, right?)

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**Sixth:**

- `size_t matching_bytes(char * c1, char * c2, size_t n) {`  
 `size_t count = 0;`  
 `for( size_t k = 0; k != n; ++k )`  
 `if( c1[k] == c2[k] )`  
 `++ count;`  
 `return count;`  
`}`
- Let's improve the interface:
  - This algorithm doesn't mutate the supplied characters, so let's say so.

Copyright © 2021-2022 by Walter E. Brown. All rights reserved.13**Seventh:**

- `size_t matching_bytes( char const * c1, char const * c2,`  
 `, size_t n ) {`  
 `size_t count = 0;`  
 `for( size_t k = 0; k != n; ++k )`  
 `if( c1[k] == c2[k] )`  
 `++ count;`  
 `return count;`  
`}`
- Let's improve names a bit:
  - E.g., `count` doesn't say what's being counted.
  - Nor does `n` convey its purpose.
  - And no `_bytes` are in sight to be `matching`.

Copyright © 2021-2022 by Walter E. Brown. All rights reserved.14**Which leaves us with this for now:**

- `size_t matching_chars( char const * c1, char const * c2,`  
 `, size_t n_chars ) {`  
 `size_t n_matches = 0;`  
 `for( size_t k = 0; k != n_chars; ++k )`  
 `if( c1[k] == c2[k] )`  
 `++ n_matches;`  
 `return n_matches;`  
`}`
- While there's more to consider, this seems a good place to stop for now.
- What do you think? I welcome your considered opinions:
  - Kindly keep the conversation professional though — I'm really tired of threats, angry outbursts, factual inaccuracies, and other incivilities.

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Walter E. Brown, Ph.D.

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