

# Reasoning with Object Capabilities

James Noble



Susan Eisenbach



Julian Mackay



and in earlier works

Mark Miller

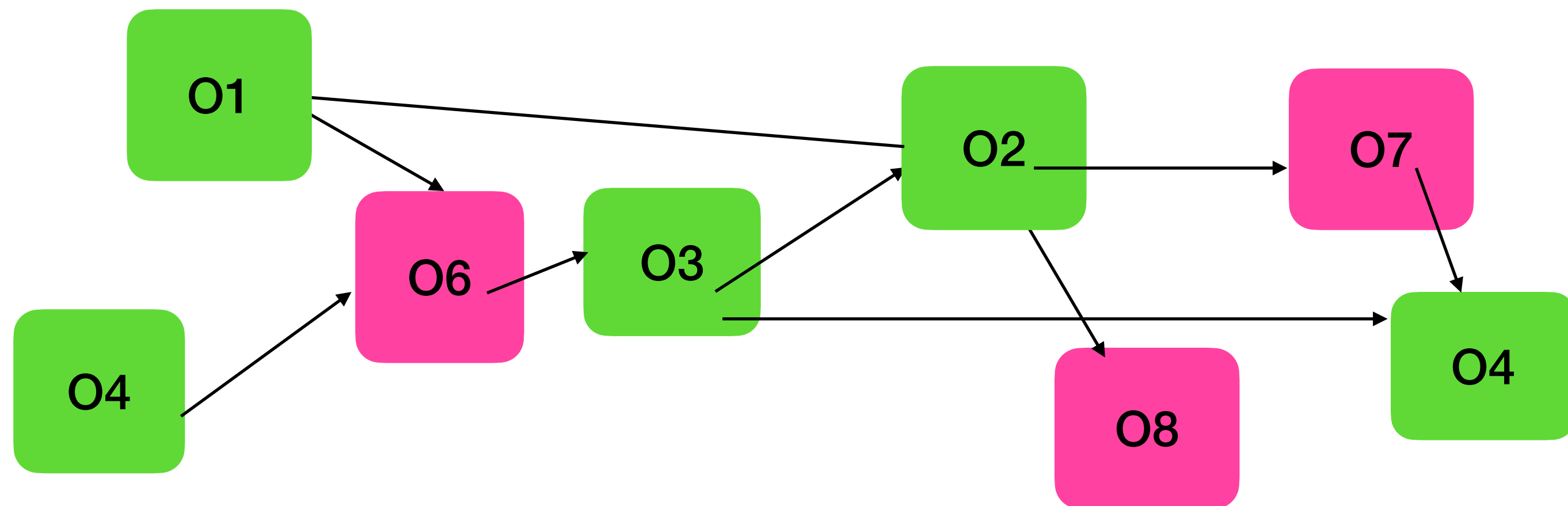


Toby Murray



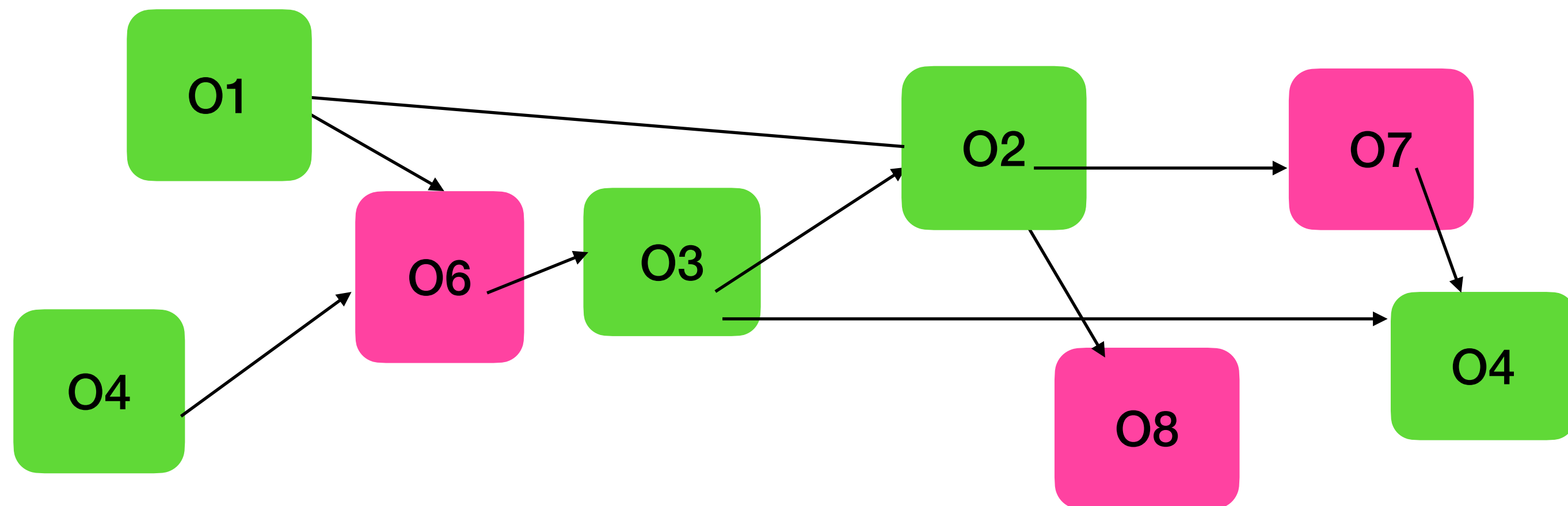
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Reason about how our, **internal, trusted** objects can interact securely with the **external, untrusted**, potentially malicious, objects.



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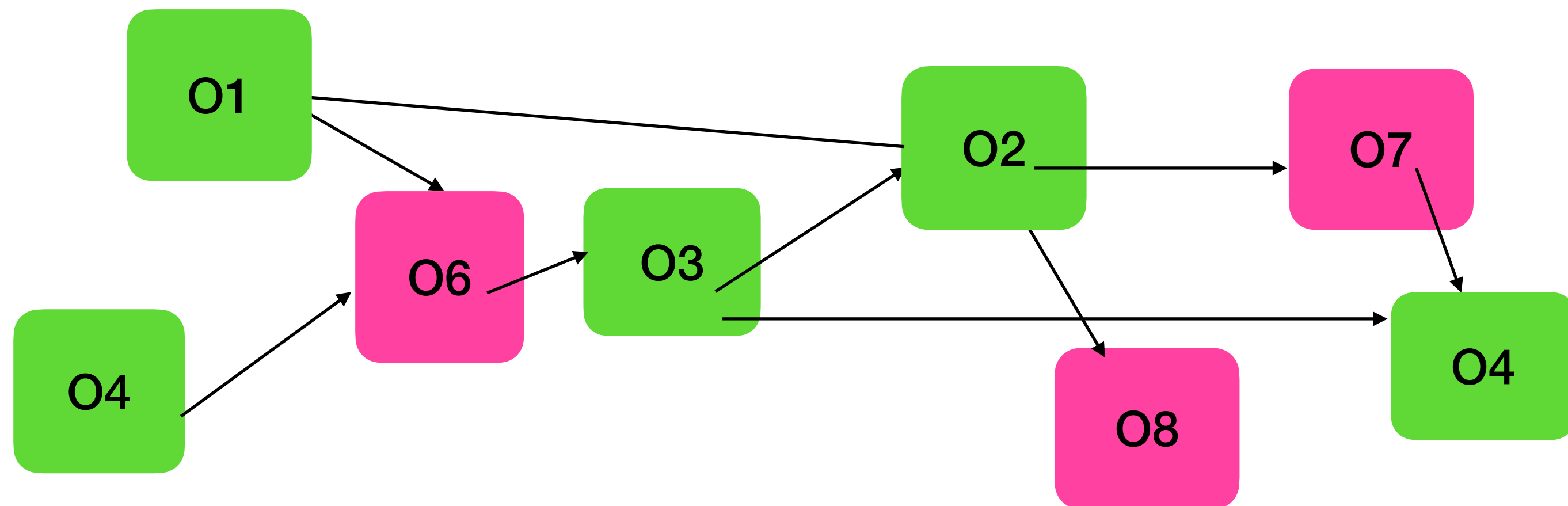


# Our research Question

Reason about how our, **internal, trusted** objects can interact securely with the **external, untrusted**, potentially malicious, objects, using capabilities.

*Literature:* “A **capability** describes a transferable right to perform one (or more) operations.”

“References cannot be forged.  
Capability transferred only through messages or through creation.”





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**Our Insights:**

**Capabilities are necessary conditions for *effects* (not operations)**

***Tracking access to capabilities is paramount.***

# **Example and Four Challenges**



# Three Modules

.. assuming all methods are public, and fields are private

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module Modgood
  class Account
    field balance:int
    field pwd: Password
    method transfer(dest:Account, pwd':Password) -> void
      if this.pwd==pwd'
        this.balance-=100
        dest.balance+=100
    method init(pwd':Password) -> void
      if this.pwd==null
        this.pwd=pwd'
  class Password
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module Modbetter
  class Account
    field balance:int
    field pwd: Password
    method transfer(..)
      ... as earlier ...

    method set(pwd',pwd'': Password)
      if (this.pwd==pwd')
        this.pwd=pwd''
class Password
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**Challenge\_1:** A module spec S, such that

$M_{\text{good}} \models S$

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**Challenge\_2:** An inference system, such that

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**Challenge\_3:** Inference system should be algorithmic

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---

```
1 module Mod1
2     ...
3     method cautious(untrusted:Object)
4         a = new Account
5         p = new Password
6         a.set(null,p)
7         ...
8         untrusted.make_payment(a)
9         ...
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If Account comes from a “good” module,  
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External call

**Challenge\_4:** An inference system, such that we can prove **external** calls.

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**So:** “The password enables withdrawal from the account”?



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**Motto:**  
**Capability is a *necessary* condition  
for some effect**

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*In general:*  $\forall x1:C1, x2:C2 \dots (| A |) (| A' |)$

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**Challenge\_1\_b :** Meaning of  $\forall x1:C1, x2:C2 \dots (| A |) (| A' |)$

## Challenge\_1\_a : Meaning of $\times_{prt}$

Remember:

...how our, **internal, trusted objects** will interact securely with the **external, untrusted, potentially malicious, objects**.

**Def:**  $o \text{ prt-frm } o'$ , if any path from  $o'$  to  $o$  goes through an **internal** object.

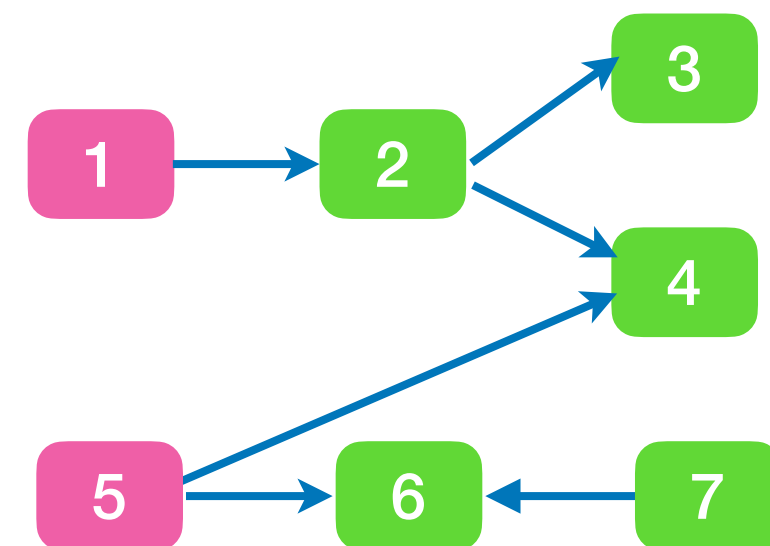
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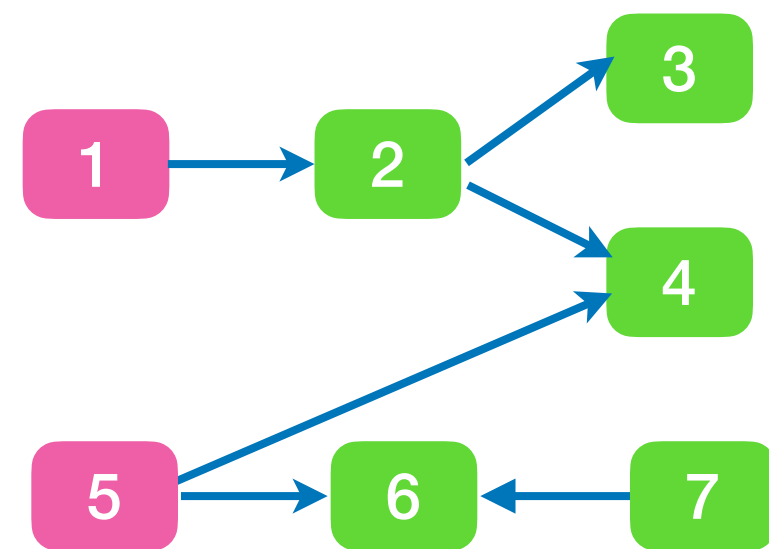
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$o3 \text{ prt-frm } o1$

$o4 \text{ prt-frm } o1$

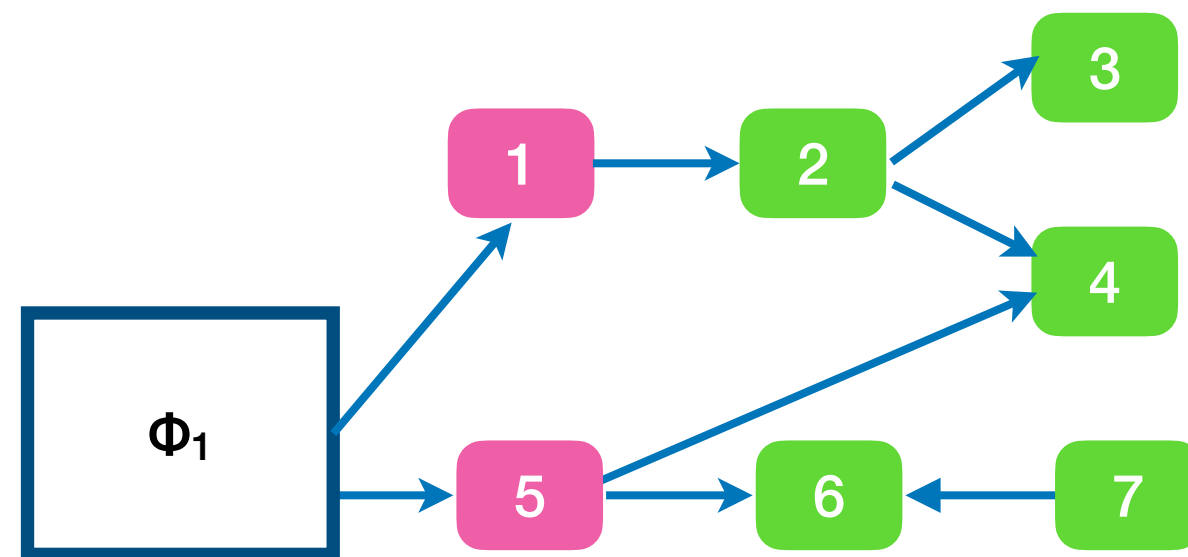
$\neg (o4 \text{ prt-frm } o5)$

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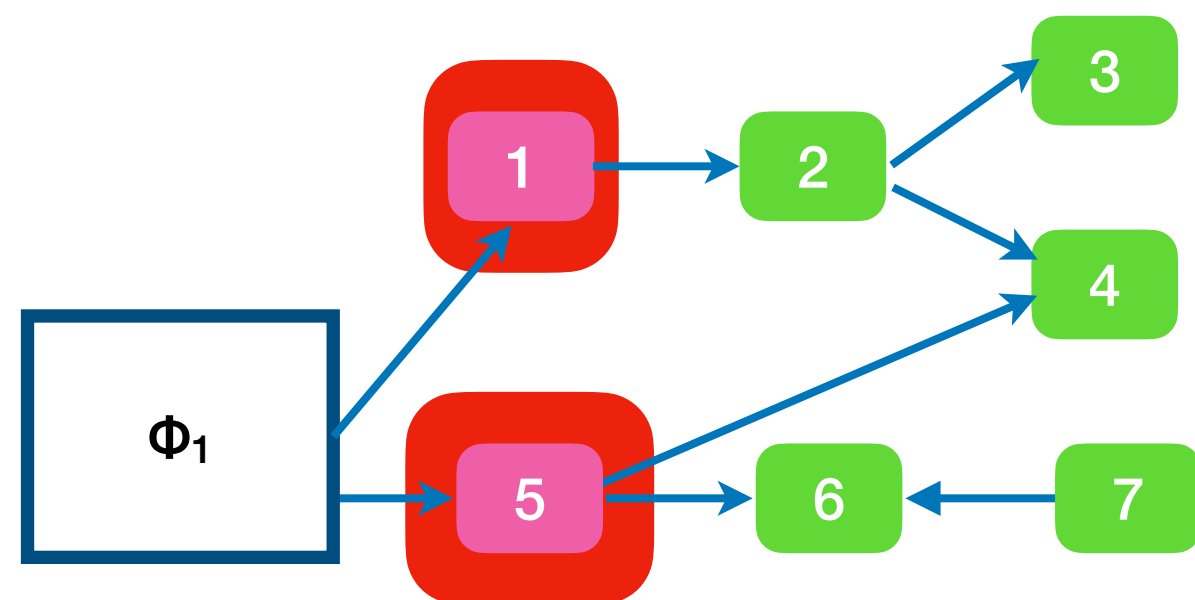


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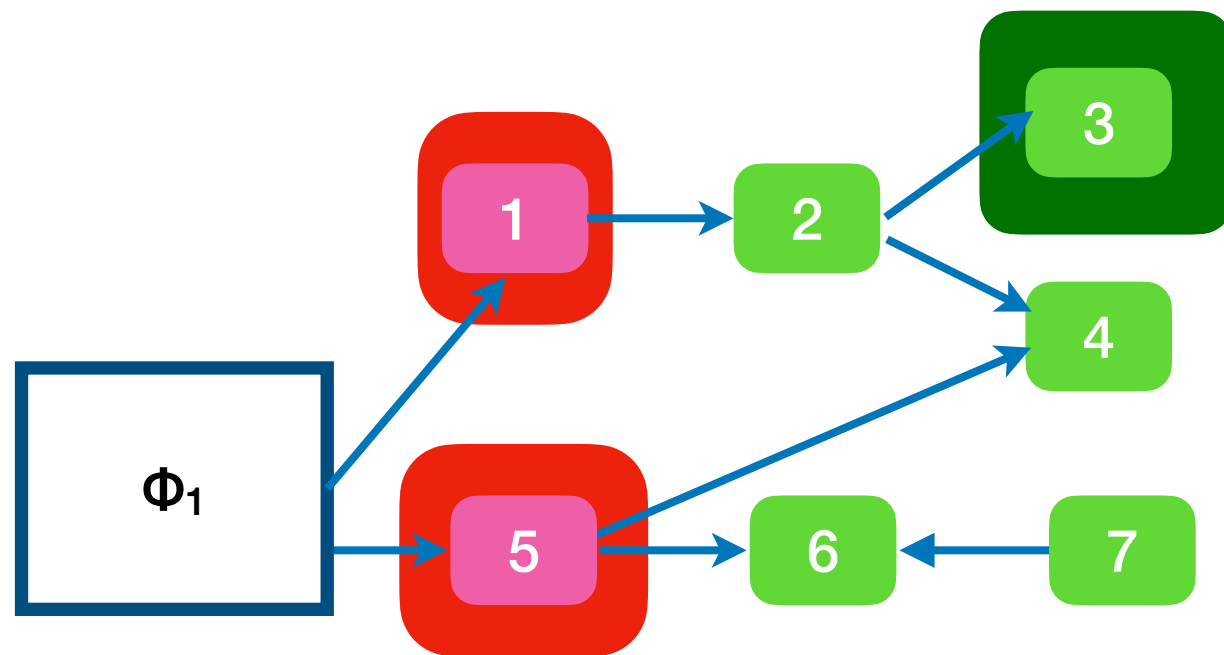


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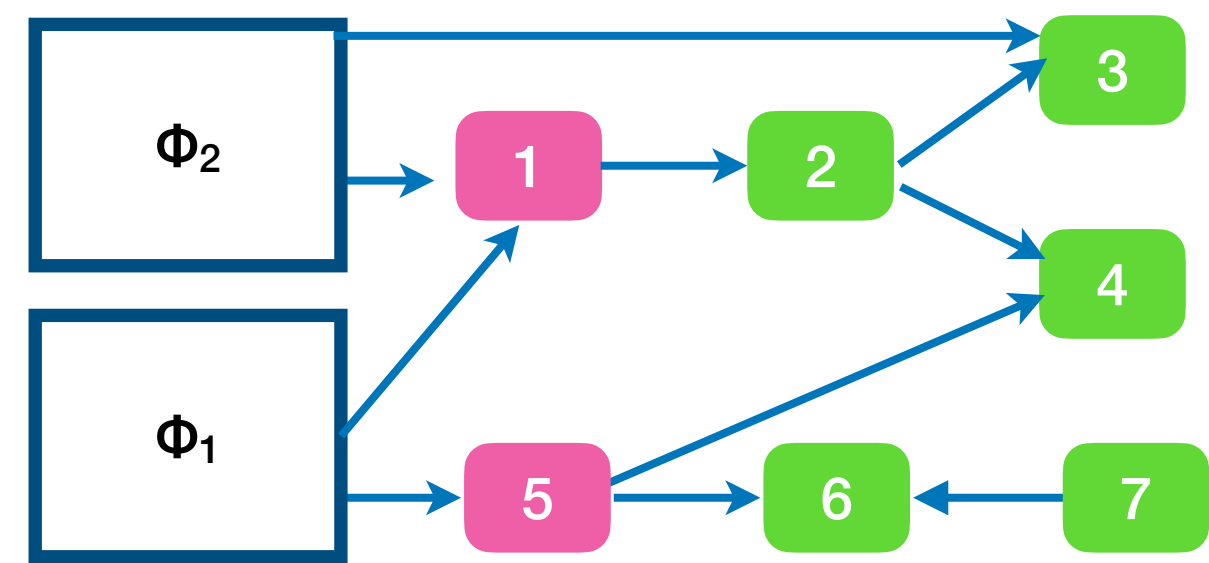
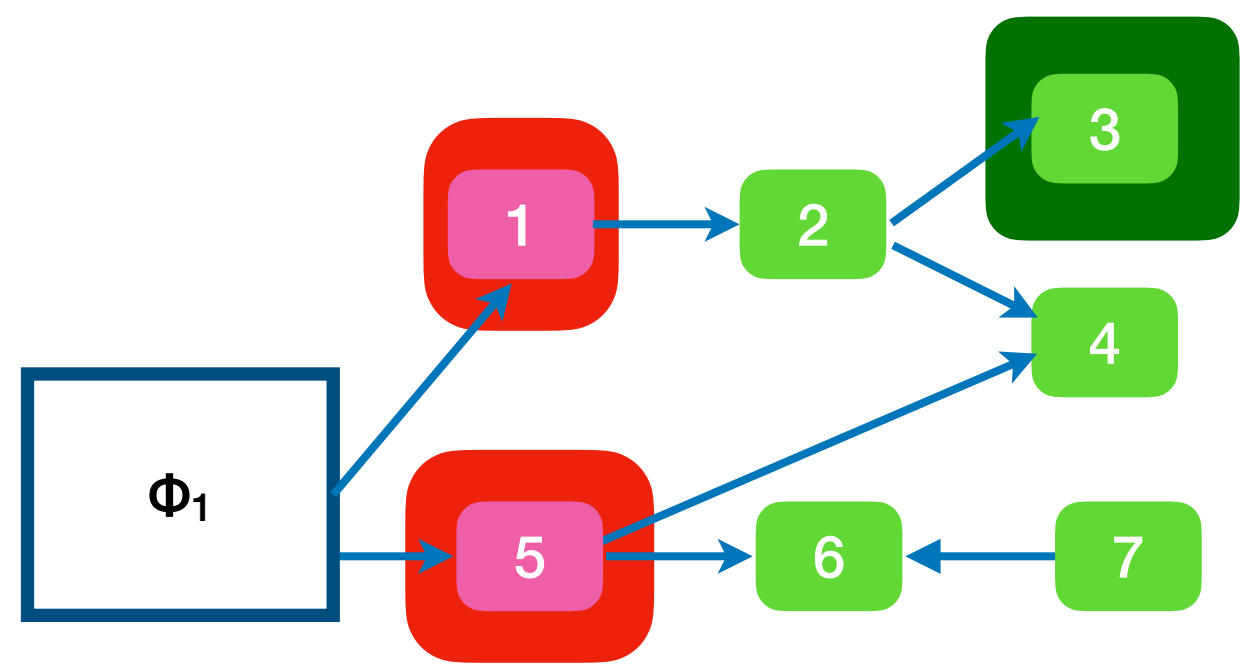


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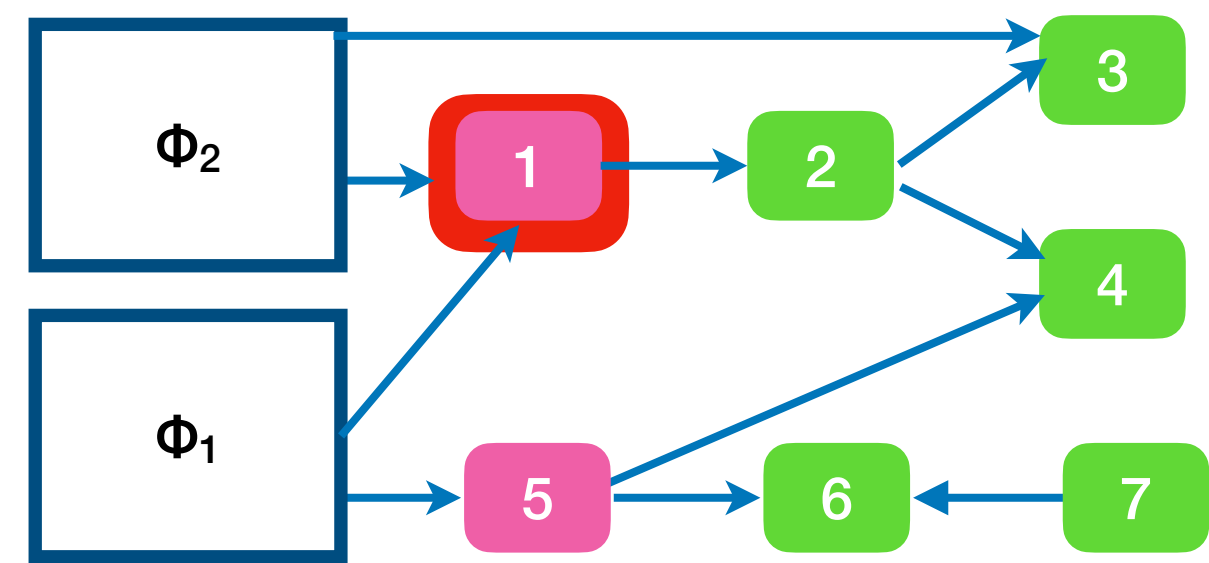
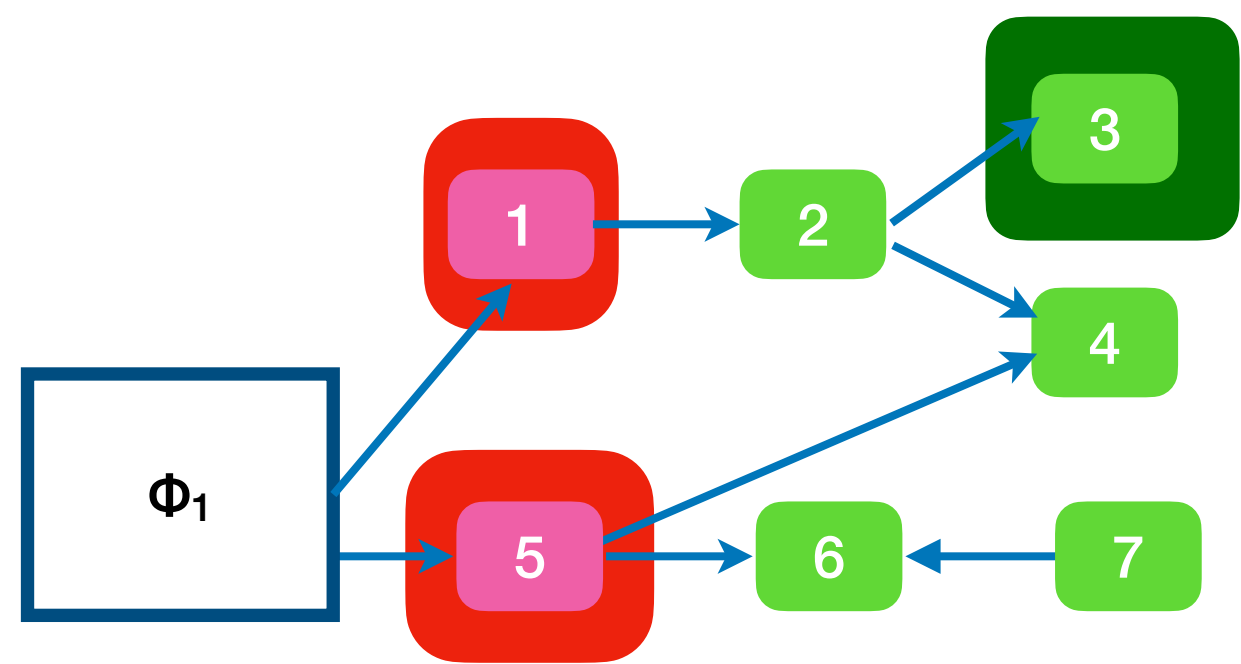


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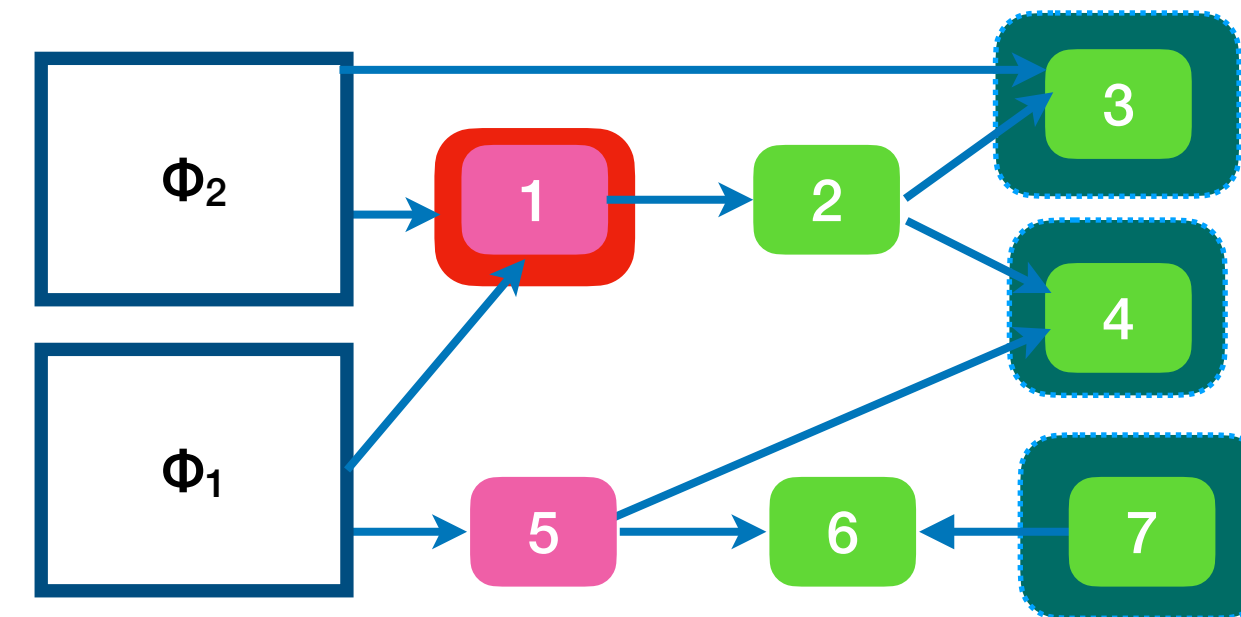
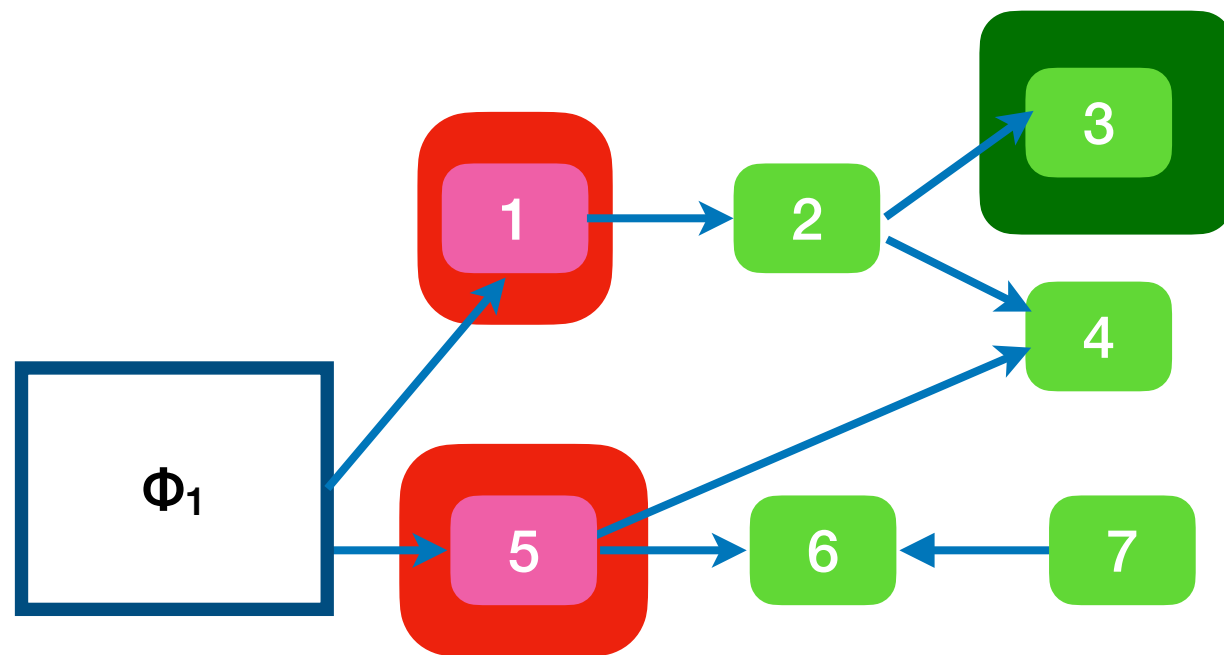


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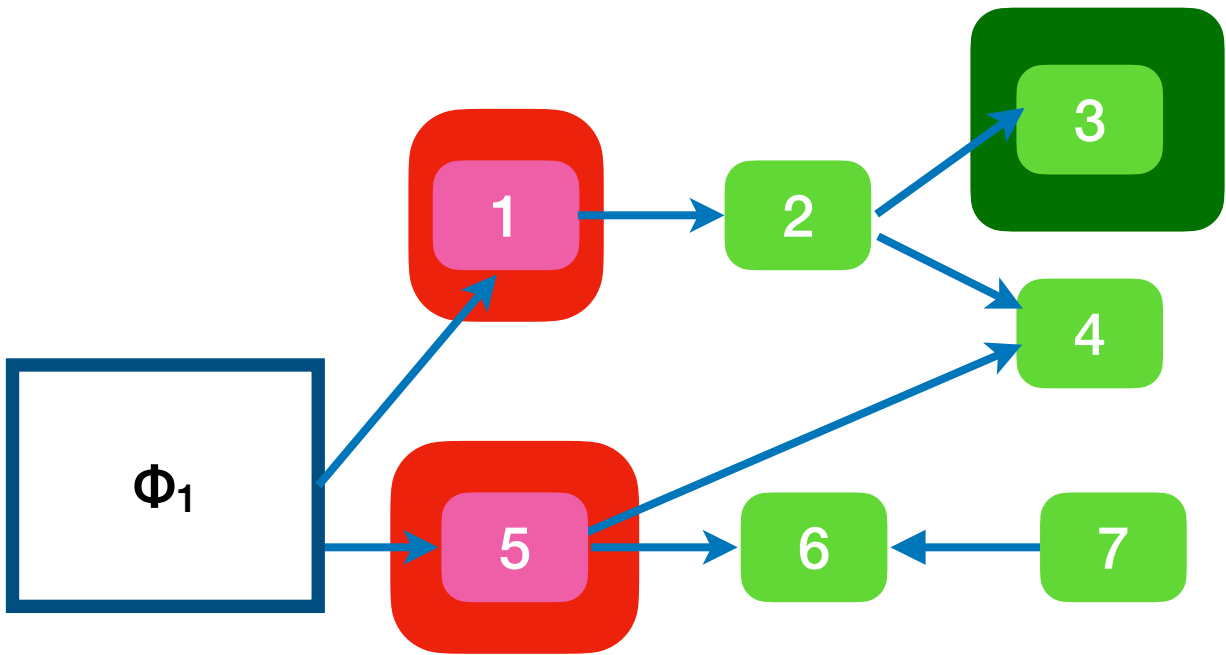


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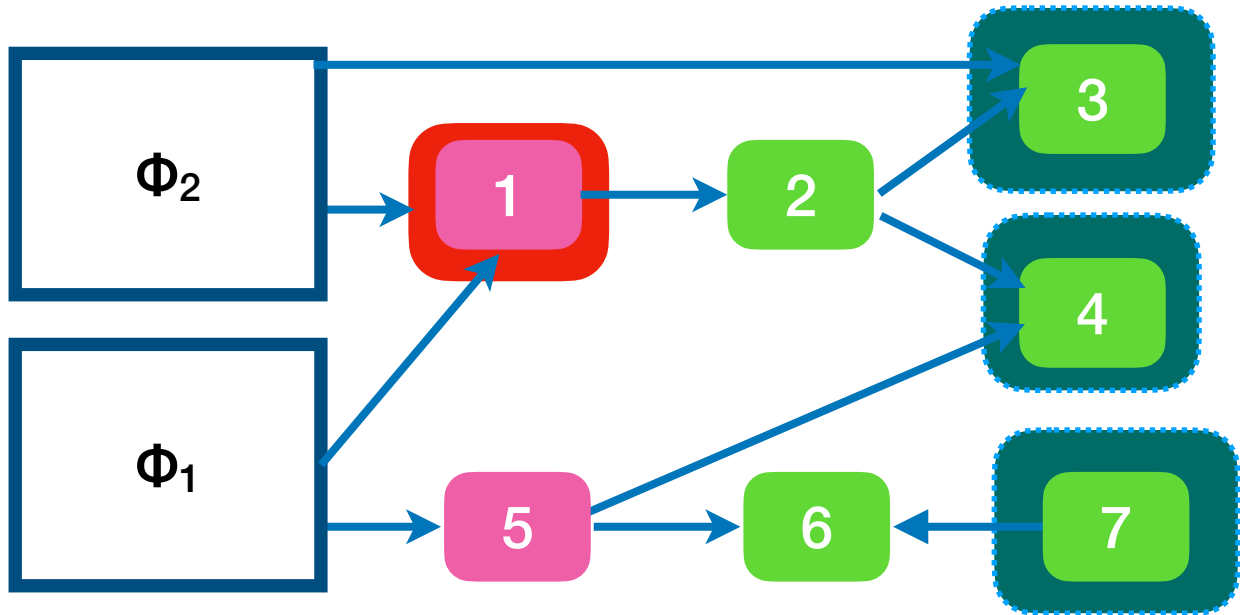
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Motto:  
Tracking access to Capabilities



**Challenge\_1\_b** : Meaning of  $\forall x_1:C_1, x_2:C_2 \dots (| A |) (| A' |)$

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If  $\sigma$  satisfies  $A$

## Challenge\_1\_b : Meaning of $\forall x_1:C_1, x_2:C_2 \dots (| A |) (| A' |)$

For all states  $\sigma$  arising from execution of our internal module, combined with any possible external module,  
for all future states  $\sigma'$  arising from  $\sigma$  without returning from top frame,  
for all globally accessible objects  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  of class  $C_1, \dots, C_n$ ,

If  $\sigma$  satisfies  $A$

Then

## Challenge\_1\_b : Meaning of $\forall x_1:C_1, x_2:C_2 \dots (| A |) (| A' |)$

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If  $\sigma$  satisfies  $A$

Then

$\sigma'$  satisfies  $A'$

## Putting it together

## Putting it together

Therefore,

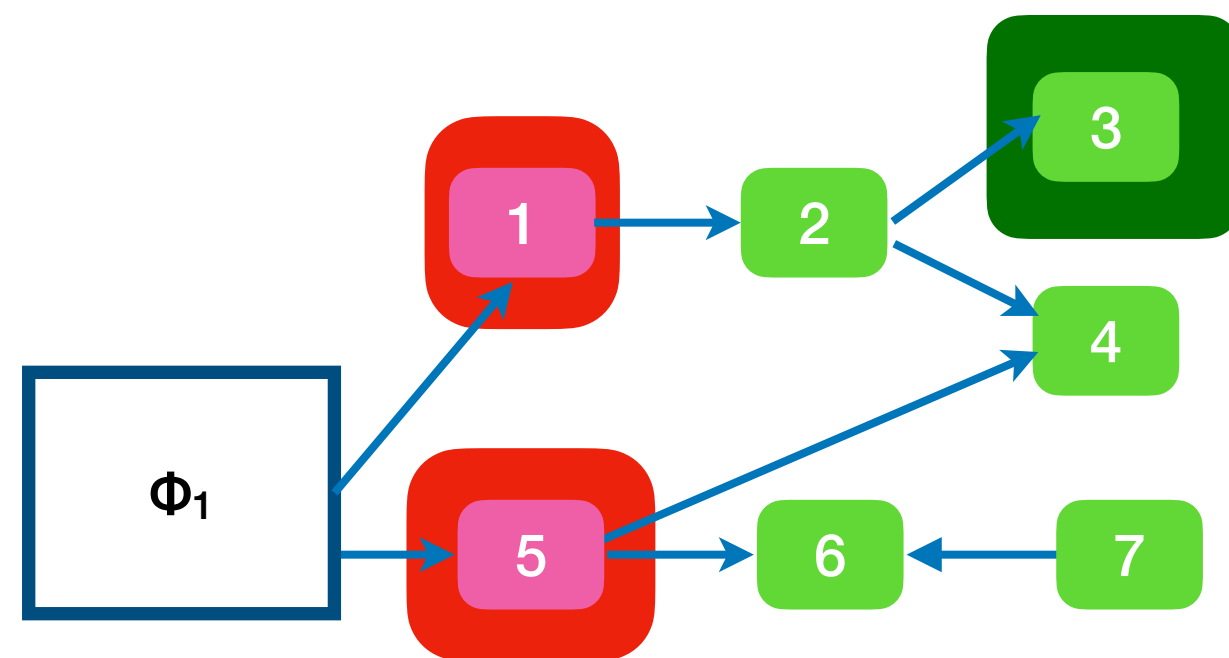
$$\forall x: \text{Object} (| \mathbf{prt} \ x \ \wedge \ A(x) \ |) (| \ A(x) \ |)$$

## Putting it together

Therefore,

$$\forall x: \text{Object } (| \mathbf{prt} \ x \ \wedge \ A(x) |) \ (| \ A(x) |)$$

guarantees that if we start below,

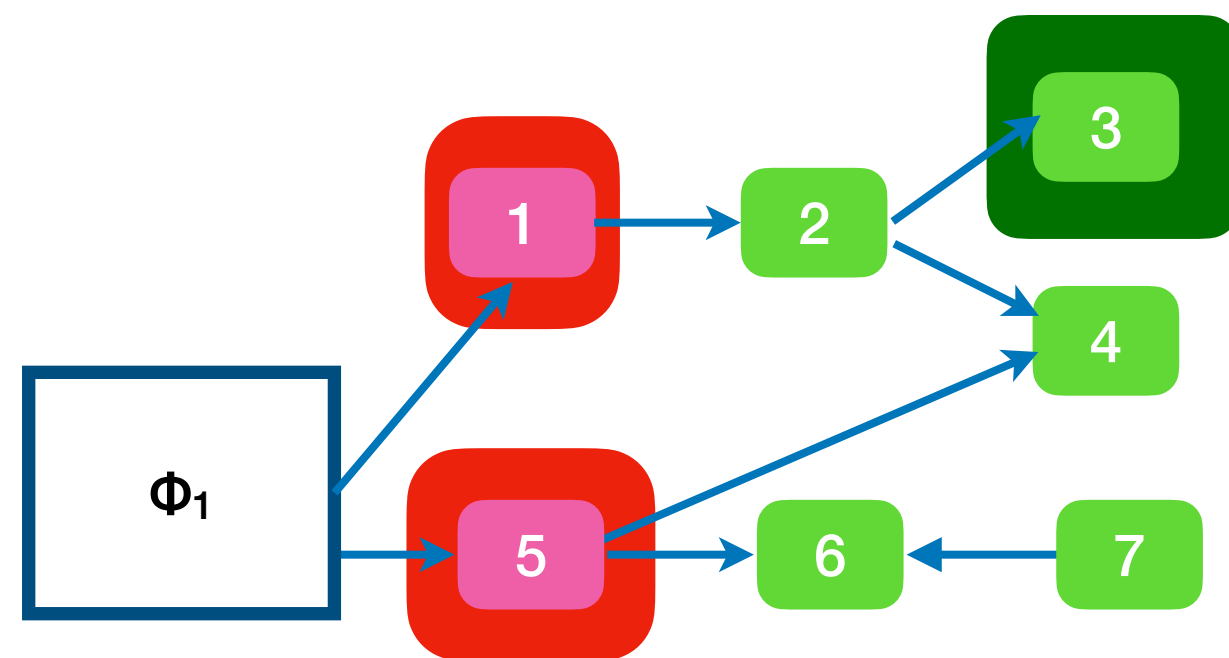


## Putting it together

Therefore,

$$\forall x: \text{Object } (| \mathbf{prt} \ x \ \wedge \ A(x) |) \ (| \ A(x) |)$$

guarantees that if we start below,



then,  $A(o3)$  will be preserved

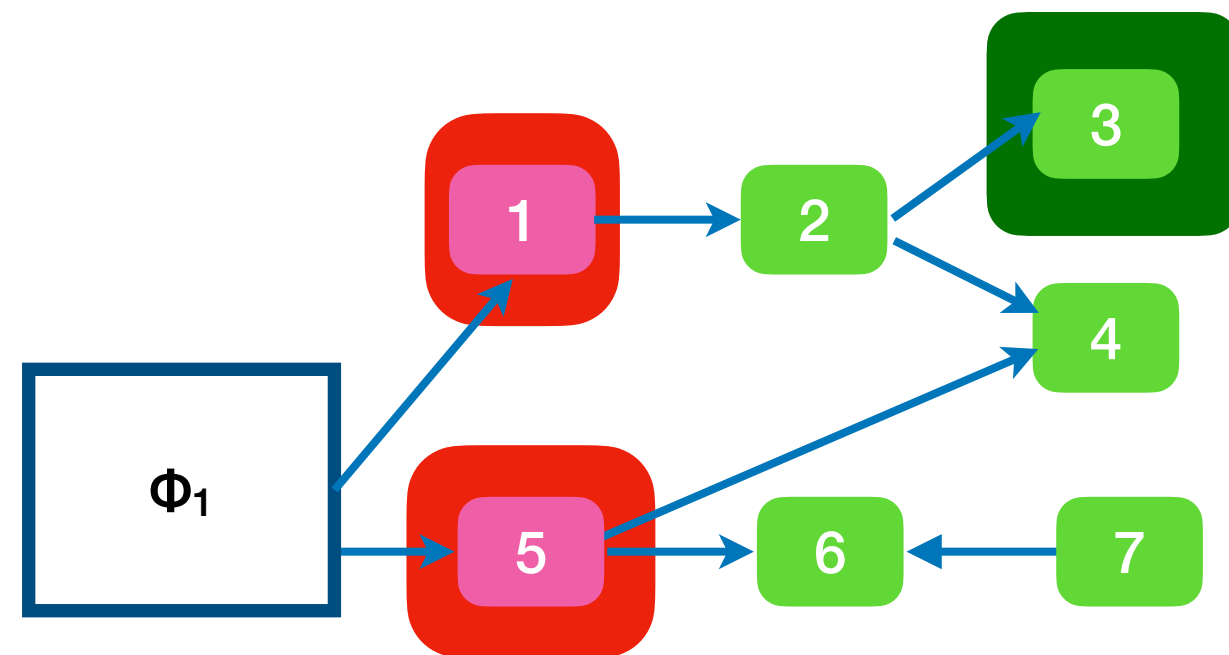


## Putting it together

Therefore,

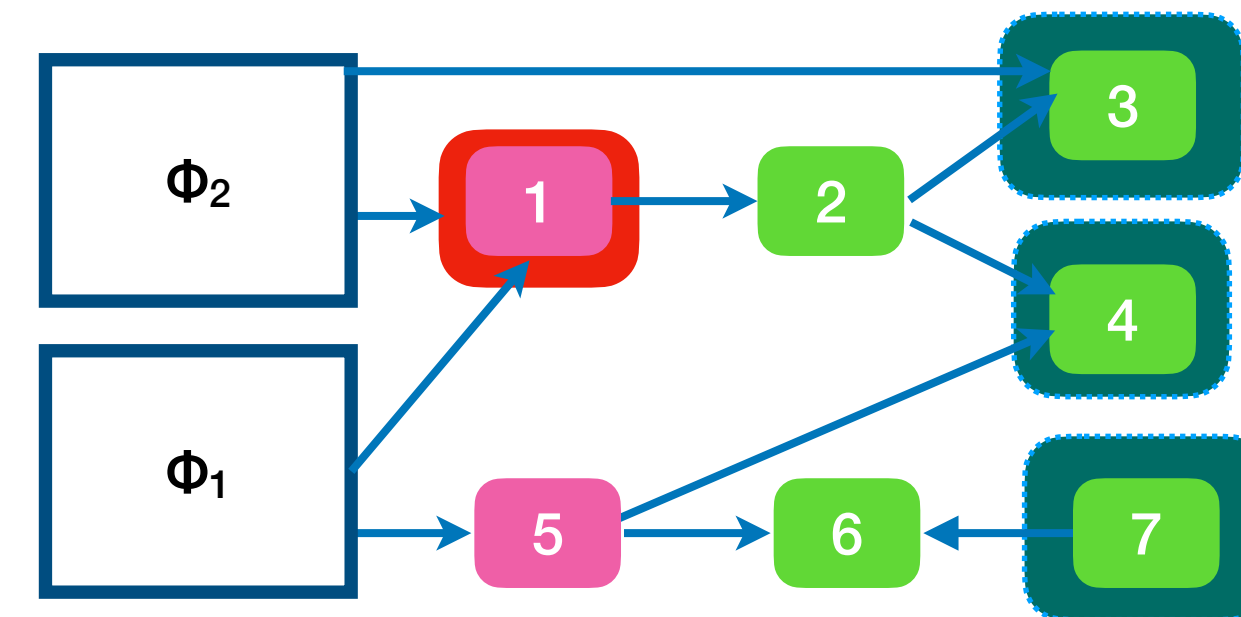
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And if we start below,

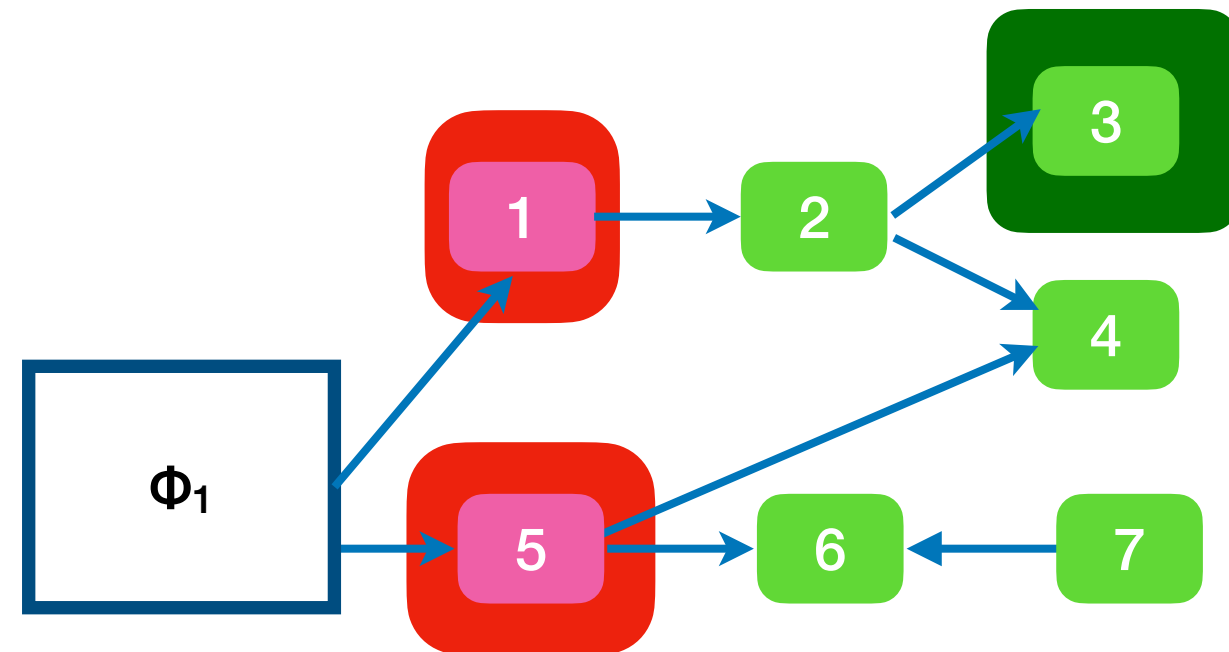


## Putting it together

Therefore,

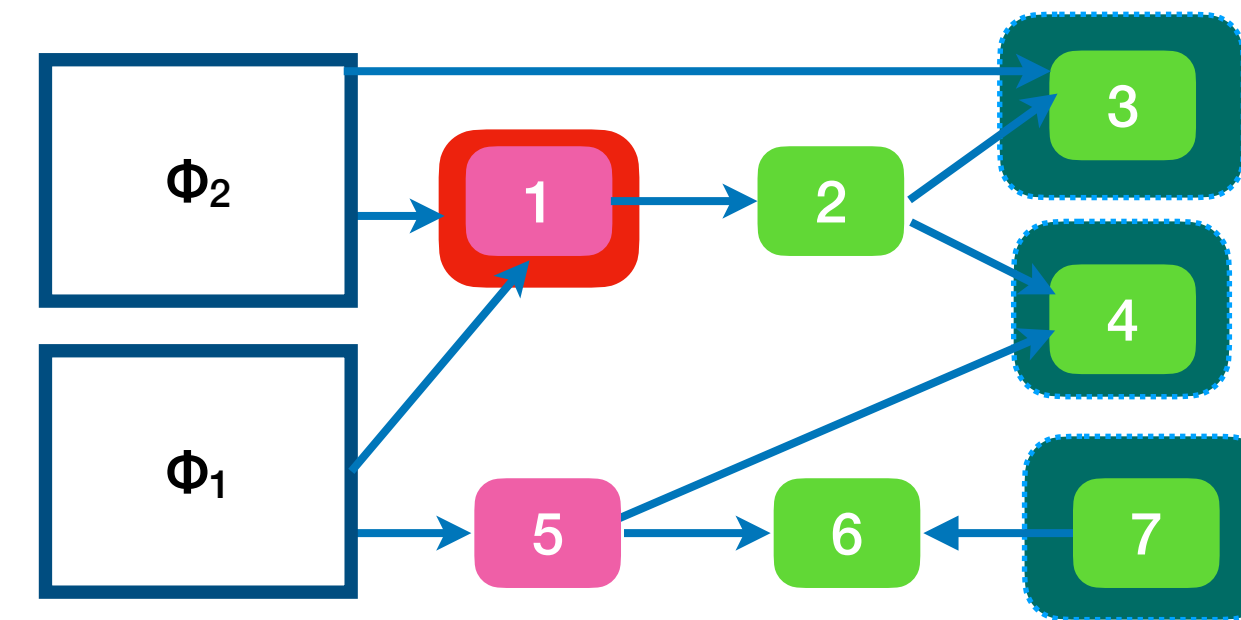
$$\forall x: \text{Object } (| \mathbf{prt} \ x \wedge A(x) |) (| A(x) |)$$

guarantees that if we start below,



then,  $A(o3)$  will be preserved

And if we start below,



then,  $A(o3)$  and  $A(o4)$  and  $A(o7)$  will be preserved

**Challenge\_1:** A module spec  $S$ , such that

$M_{\text{good}} \models S$

$M_{\text{bad}} \not\models S$

$M_{\text{better}} \models S$

$S =$

- $\forall a:\text{Account} (| \text{prt } a |) (| \text{prt } a |)$
- $\wedge$
- $\forall a:\text{Account} (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} |) (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} |)$
- $\wedge$
- $\forall a:\text{Account}. \forall b:\text{Num} (| \text{prt } a \wedge a.\text{balance} = b |) (| a.\text{balance} = b |)$
- $\wedge$
- $\forall a:\text{Account}. \forall b:\text{Num} (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} \wedge a.\text{balance} = b |) (| \text{prt } a.\text{balance} \geq b |)$

**Challenge\_1:** A module spec  $S$ , such that

$$\begin{aligned} M_{\text{good}} &\models S \\ M_{\text{bad}} &\not\models S \\ M_{\text{better}} &\models S \end{aligned}$$

$S =$

$$\begin{aligned} &\forall a:\text{Account} \ (| \text{prt } a |) \ (| \text{prt } a |) \\ &\wedge \\ &\forall a:\text{Account} \ (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} |) \ (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} |) \\ &\wedge \\ &\forall a:\text{Account}. \forall b:\text{Num} \ (| \text{prt } a \wedge a.\text{balance} = b |) \ (| a.\text{balance} = b |) \\ &\wedge \\ &\forall a:\text{Account}. \forall b:\text{Num} \ (| \text{prt } a.\text{password} \wedge a.\text{balance} = b |) \ (| \text{prt } a.\text{balance} \geq b |) \end{aligned}$$

API - agnostic:  
 $a.\text{balance}$ ,  $a.\text{password}$  can be ghost

Talks about effects

Talks about  
emergent  
behaviour

**Challenge\_2:** An inference system, such that

$M_{\text{good}} \vdash S$

$M_{\text{bad}} \not\vdash S$

$M_{\text{better}} \vdash S$

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

An assertion  $A$  is **encapsulated** by module  $M$ , if it can only be invalidated through calls to methods from  $M$ .

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

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For example:

$$\text{Mod}_{\text{bad}} \models \textit{Encaps}(a : \text{Account} \wedge a.\text{balance} = \text{bal})$$
$$\text{Mod}_{\text{better}} \models \textit{Encaps}(a : \text{Account} \wedge a.\text{balance} = \text{bal})$$

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

An assertion  $A$  is **encapsulated** by module  $M$ , if it can only be invalidated through calls to methods from  $M$ .

For example:

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$$\text{Mod}_{\text{better}} \models \textit{Encaps}(a : \text{Account} \wedge a.\text{balance} = \text{bal})$$

Assume two further modules,  $\text{Mod}_{ul}$  and  $\text{Mod}_{pl}$ , which use ledgers to keep a map between accounts and their balances, which export functions that allow the update of this map. In  $\text{Mod}_{ul}$  the ledger is *not* protected, while in  $\text{Mod}_{pl}$  the ledger is protected.

$$\text{Mod}_{ul} \not\models \textit{Encaps}(a : \text{Account} \wedge a.\text{balance} = \text{bal})$$
$$\text{Mod}_{pl} \models \textit{Encaps}(a : \text{Account} \wedge a.\text{balance} = \text{bal})$$



## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

TWO-STATE

???

---

$$M \vdash \overline{\forall x : C. (A) (A)}$$

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

TWO-STATE

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} M \vdash \text{Encaps}(\overline{x : C} \wedge A) \\ \text{for all public methods from } D, \text{ with } \text{mBody}(m, D, M) = \overline{y : D} \{ s \} \\ M \vdash \{ \overline{x : C} \wedge A \wedge \text{this} : D \wedge \overline{y : D} \} s \{ A \} \end{array}}{M \vdash \forall x : C. (\overline{A}) (A)}$$

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ...

TWO-STATE

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c} M \vdash \text{Encaps}(\overline{x : C} \wedge A) \\ \text{for all public methods from } D, \text{ with } \text{mBody}(m, D, M) = \overline{y : D} \{ s \} \\ M \vdash \{ \overline{x : C} \wedge A \wedge \text{this} : D \wedge \overline{y : D} \} s \{ A \} \end{array}}{M \vdash \forall x : C. (\overline{A}) (\overline{A})}$$

WEAKEN

$$\frac{M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S \sqsubseteq S'}{M \vdash S'}$$

MULTI

$$\frac{M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S'}{M \vdash S \wedge S'}$$

**Challenge\_4:** An inference system, such that  
we can prove external calls

**Challenge\_4:** An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \underline{\text{intl } \bar{y}} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y}$$

---


$$M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \text{???} \}$$

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \underline{\text{intl } \bar{y}} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y}$$

---

$$M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \quad \quad \quad \}$$

Motto:  
Capability is a *necessary* condition  
for some effect

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y} \\
 \vdash M : \forall \bar{x} : \bar{C}. ( \bar{A}_1 ) ( \bar{A}_2 ) \\
 M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \bar{x} : \bar{C} \wedge \bar{A}_1 ) \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \bar{A}_2 \}
 \end{array}$$



## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y} \\
 \vdash M : \forall x : C. ( \overline{A_1} ) ( \overline{A_2} ) \\
 M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow ( \overline{x : C \wedge A_1} ) \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \quad A_2 \quad \}
 \end{array}$$

$$\text{Lift}(v = v', \bar{z}, \bar{y}) = v = v'$$

$$\text{Lift}(x.f = v, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) = x.f = v$$

$$\text{Lift}(\text{prt } x, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) = \text{prt } x$$

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 \text{Lift}(x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) = \text{prt } x & \text{if } \bar{z} \subseteq \bar{u}, \text{ and } x \notin \bar{y} \\
 = \text{true} & \text{otherwise}
 \end{array}$$

...

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y} \\
 \vdash M : \forall \bar{x} : \bar{C}. (\bar{A}_1) (\bar{A}_2) \\
 M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow (\bar{x} : \bar{C} \wedge \bar{A}_1) \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \text{Lower}(\bar{A}_2) \}
 \end{array}$$

$$\text{Lower}(v = v') = v = v'$$

$$\text{Lower}(x.f = v) = x.f = v$$

$$\text{Lower}(\text{prt } x) = \text{true}$$

$$\text{Lower}(x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}) = x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}$$

...

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l} M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y} \\ \vdash M : \forall \bar{x} : \bar{C}. ( \lfloor A_1 \rfloor \rfloor \lfloor A_2 \rfloor ) \\ M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow ( \overline{x : C} \wedge A_1 ) \end{array}}{M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \text{Lower}(A_2) \wedge A \}}$$

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} ) \quad \bar{v} \text{ is a permutation of } \bar{u}, \bar{y} \\
 \vdash M : \overline{\forall x : C. (A_1 \mid A_2)} \\
 M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow ( \overline{x : C} \wedge A_1 ) \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \text{Lower}(A_2) \wedge \text{Prsv}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}, M) \}
 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{lll}
 \text{Prsv}(v = v', \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) & = & v = v' \\
 \text{Prsv}(x.f = v, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) & = & x.f = v \quad \text{if } \vdash M : \overline{\forall x' : C, x : D. (x.f = v \wedge A_1 \mid x.f = v)} \\
 & & \text{and } M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow ( \overline{x : D} \wedge A_1 ) \\
 & = & \text{true} \quad \text{otherwise} \\
 \text{Prsv}(\text{prt } x, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) & = & \text{prt } x \\
 \text{Prsv}(x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) & = & x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u} \quad \text{if } \vdash M : \overline{\forall x' : C, x : D. (x.f = v \wedge A_1 \mid x.f = v)} \\
 & & \text{and } M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow ( \overline{x : D} \wedge A_1 ) \\
 & = & \text{true} \quad \text{otherwise}
 \end{array}$$

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

EXTCALL

$$M \vdash A \rightarrow ( \text{extl } z \wedge \text{extl } \bar{u} \wedge \text{intl } \bar{y} \mid \vdash M : \overline{\forall x : C}$$

$$M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow (x : C \wedge A_1)$$

---


$$M \vdash \{ A \} z.m(\bar{v}) \{ \text{Lower}(A_2) \wedge \text{Prsv}(A, \{z, \bar{u}\}, \bar{y}, M) \}$$

Motto:

Capability is a *necessary* condition  
for some effect

$$\text{Prsv}(v = v', \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) = v = v'$$

$$\text{Prsv}(x.f = v, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) = x.f = v$$

$$= \text{true}$$

$$\text{Prsv}(\text{prt } x, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) = \text{prt } x$$

$$\text{Prsv}(x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}, \bar{z}, \bar{y}, M) = x \text{ prt-frm } \bar{u}$$

$$= \text{true}$$

if  $\vdash M : \overline{\forall x' : C}, x : D. (x.f = v \wedge A_1) \mid (x.f = v)$   
and  $M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow (\overline{x : D} \wedge A_1)$   
otherwise

if  $\vdash M : \overline{\forall x' : C}, x : D. (x.f = v \wedge A_1) \mid (x.f = v)$   
and  $M \vdash \text{Lift}(A, \bar{z}, \bar{y}) \rightarrow (\overline{x : D} \wedge A_1)$   
otherwise



## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

PROT-1

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \wedge \text{intl } v \} v = v' \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-2

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \wedge \text{extl } v \wedge z \neq v \} v = v' \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-3

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } \{ v \wedge \text{extl } z \} z = v \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-4

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \} y.f = v \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

## Challenge\_4: An inference system, such we can prove external calls

PROT-1

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \wedge \text{intl } v \} v = v' \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-2

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \wedge \text{extl } v \wedge z \neq v \} v = v' \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-3

$$\frac{}{M \vdash \{ x \text{ prt-frm } \{ v \wedge \text{extl } z \} z = v \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

PROT-4

$$\frac{}{\{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \} y.f = v \{ x \text{ prt-frm } z \}}$$

**Motto:**  
**Tracking access to Capabilities**

## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ... — revisit

TWO-STATE

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash \text{Encaps}(\overline{x : C} \wedge A) \\
 \text{for all public methods from } D, \text{ with } \text{mBody}(m, D, M) = \overline{y : D} \{ s \} \\
 M \vdash \{ \overline{x : C} \wedge A \wedge \text{this} : D \wedge \overline{y : D} \} s \{ A \} \parallel A \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \forall x : C. (\overline{A}) (\overline{A})
 \end{array}$$

BODY

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash \{ A' \} s \{ A \} \\
 \forall s', z, m. [ (s = s'; z.m(\_); \_ \wedge M \vdash \{ A' \} s' \{ \mathbf{ext1} z \} \implies M \vdash \{ A' \} s' \{ A \} ) ] \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A' \} s \{ A \} \parallel A
 \end{array}$$

WEAKEN

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S \sqsubseteq S' \\
 \hline
 M \vdash S'
 \end{array}$$

MULTI

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S' \\
 \hline
 M \vdash S \wedge S'
 \end{array}$$



## Challenge\_2: An inference system, such that ... — revisit

TWO-STATE

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash \text{Encaps}(\overline{x : C} \wedge A) \\
 \text{for all public methods from } D, \text{ with } \text{mBody}(m, D, M) = \overline{y : D} \{ s \} \\
 M \vdash \{ \overline{x : C} \wedge A \wedge \text{this} : D \wedge \overline{y : D} \} s \{ A \} \parallel A \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \forall x : C. (A) (A)
 \end{array}$$

BODY

$$\begin{array}{c}
 M \vdash \{ A' \} s \{ A \} \\
 \forall s', z, m. [ (s = s'; z.m(\_); \_ \wedge M \vdash \{ A' \} s' \{ \text{extl } z \} \implies M \vdash \{ A' \} s' \{ A \} ) ] \\
 \hline
 M \vdash \{ A' \} s \{ A \} \parallel A
 \end{array}$$

WEAKEN

$$\frac{M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S \sqsubseteq S'}{M \vdash S'}$$

MULTI

$$\frac{M \vdash S \quad M \vdash S'}{M \vdash S \wedge S'}$$

**Challenge\_3:** The inference system should be  
algorithmic

**Happy!**

**Convinced!**

**Surprised!**

# Summary

- Distinction between external/internal objects
- Specifications talk about necessary conditions for effect:  
 $\forall x: \text{Object } (| \text{denial of capability} \wedge A |) (| A |)$   
means that **capability** is needed in order to invalidate A
- **pri** x: expresses that capability x is protected from external objects
- **pri** x                      only protects from *locally-relevant* objects;  
 $\forall x: ..(|..|)(|...|)$     talks about *globally-relevant* objects
- “future is shallow”
- Algorithmic inference system;
- Can deal with external calls
- Hand-written soundness and adherence proof

**Happy!**

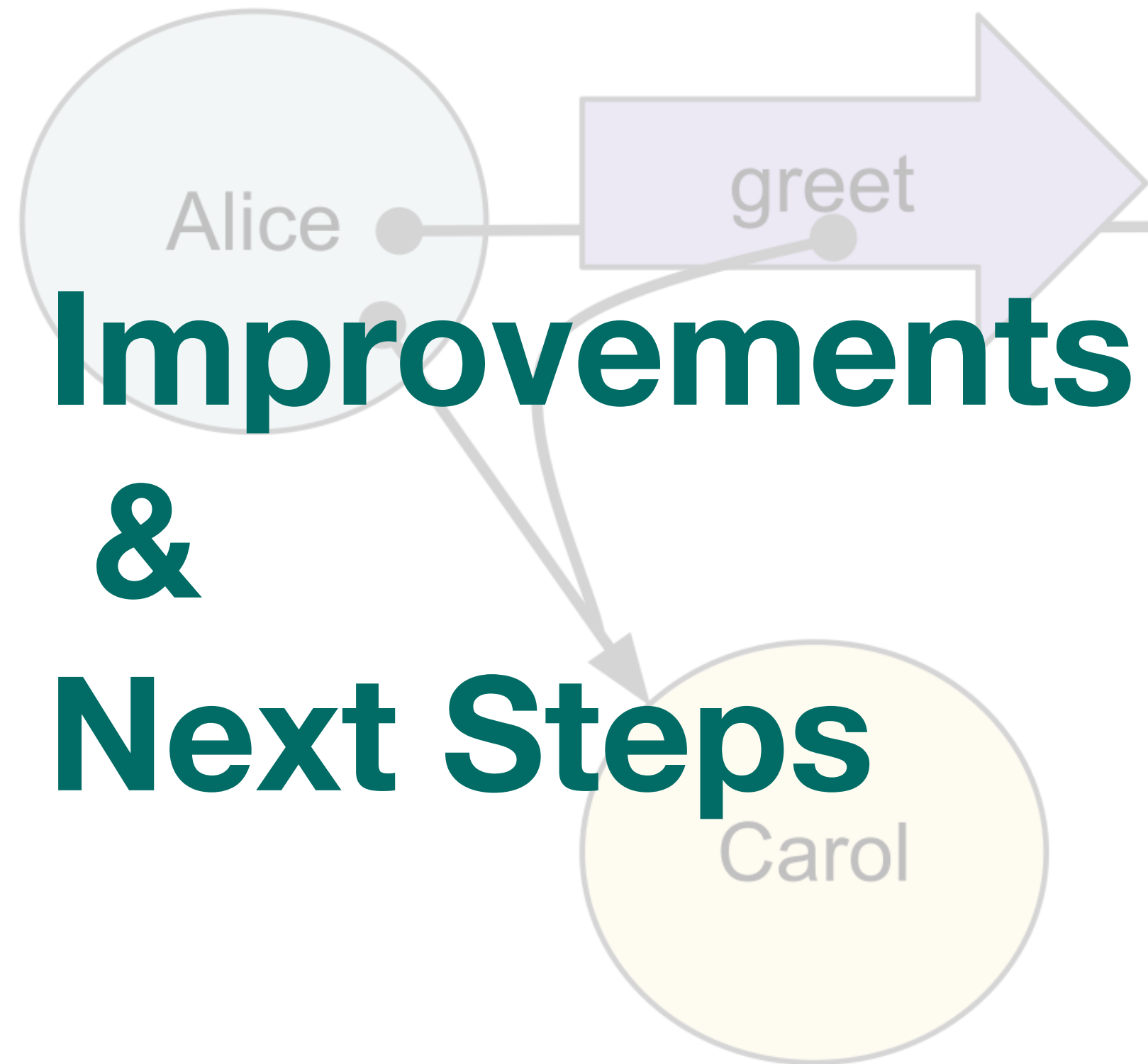
**Convinced:** object capabilities are about the necessary conditions for effects caused by external objects.

**Surprised!**

**Happy!**

**Convinced!**

**Surprised:** Even though we talk about *necessary* conditions, we reason with *sufficient* conditions.



- Soundness machine checked
- Completeness?
- Revisit protection:  
What if more than one capability for an effect?  
protection in logical implications?
- Beyond private types: Ownership types, membranes etc
- Instance-level protection
- More than one module
- Trust and Risk
- Other programming Paradigms