25

Dynamic Asynchronous Tasking with Dependencies

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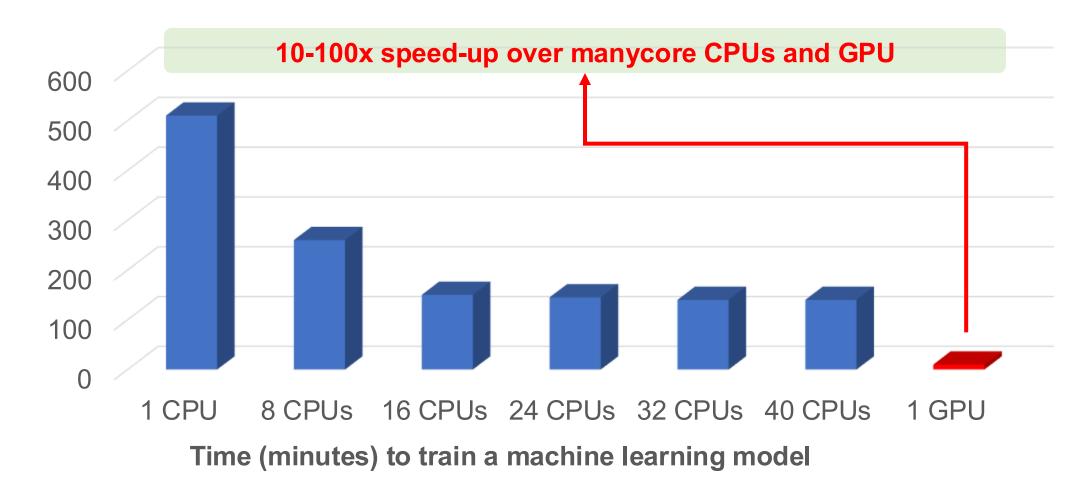
Takeaways

- Understand the importance of asynchronous tasking with dependencies
- Recognize the limitations of existing asynchronous tasking models
- Introduce a new dynamic task graph programming model called AsyncTask
- Overcome the scheduling challenges to support the model
- Demonstrate the efficiency of AsyncTask
- Conclude the talk



Why Parallel Computing?

Advances performance to a new level previously out of reach





Modern Hardware is Designed to Run in Parallel

Intel Haswell microarchitecture

- Released in June 2013
- Typically comes with four cores
- Has an integrated GPU
- 1.4 B transistors with 22 nm technology
- Sophisticated design for ILP acceleration
- Deep pipeline 16 stages

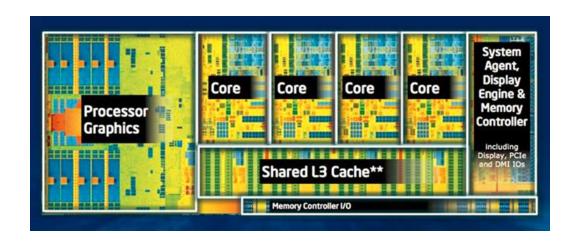
Superscalar architecture

 Can issue and complete multiple independent instructions per cycle

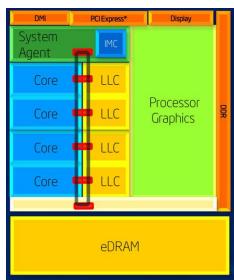
Supports hyper-threading tech (HTT)

 Allows a single physical CPU core to appear as two logical processors to the OS

If you don't do parallel programming, you are not utilizing your hardware efficiently ...



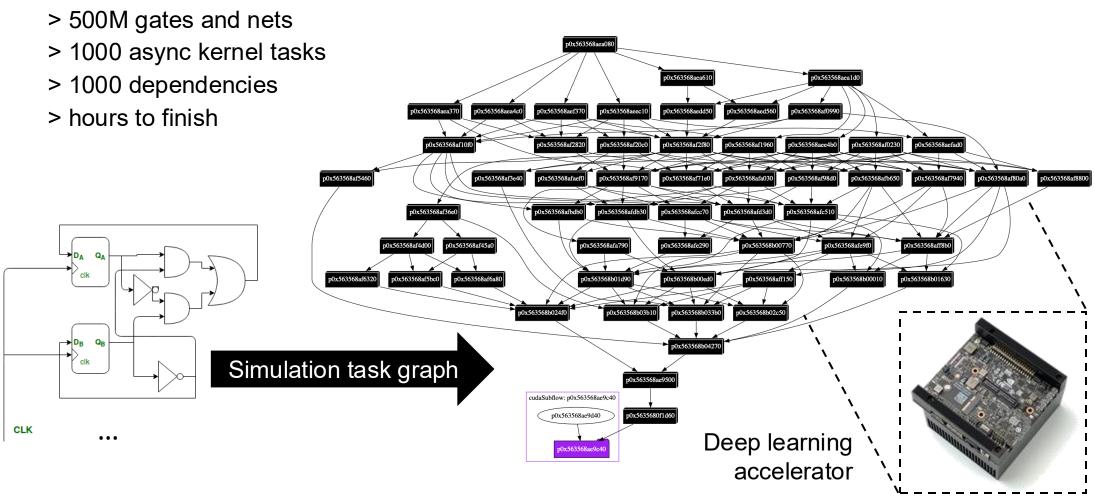






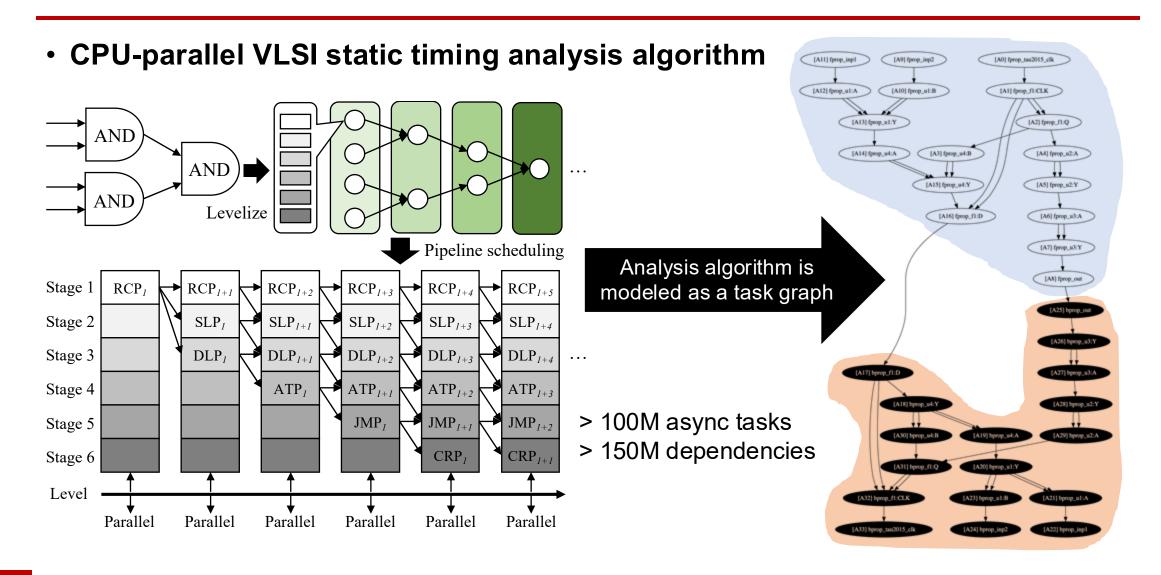
Today's Parallel Computing Problem is Very Irregular

Computational task graph of a GPU-parallel circuit simulation workload¹





Another Example of Irregular Parallel Workload



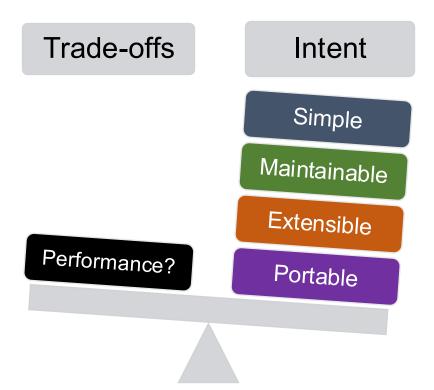
Parallelizing such Irregular Problems is Not Easy ...

You need to deal with A LOT OF technical details

- Parallelism abstraction (software + hardware)
- Concurrency control
- Synchronization
- Task and data race avoidance
- Dependency constraints
- Scheduling efficiencies (load balancing)
- Programming productivity
- Performance portability
- ...

And, don't forget about trade-offs

Performance vs Developer's intent



We want a solution that can sit on top to help programmers manage these details as much as possible because programmers care how fast (performance + productivity) they can get things done!



Why Task-parallel Programming (TPP)?

- TPP is an effective solution for parallelizing irregular workloads
 - Captures developers' intention in decomposing an algorithm into a *top-down* task graph
 - Delegates difficult scheduling details (e.g., load balancing) to an optimized runtime
- Modern parallel programming libraries are moving towards task parallelism
 - OpenMP 4.0 task dependency clauses (omp depend)
 - C++26 execution control library (std::exec)
 - TBB flow graph (tbb::flow::graph)
 - Taskflow control Taskflow graph (CTFG) model
 - ... (many others)



StarPU

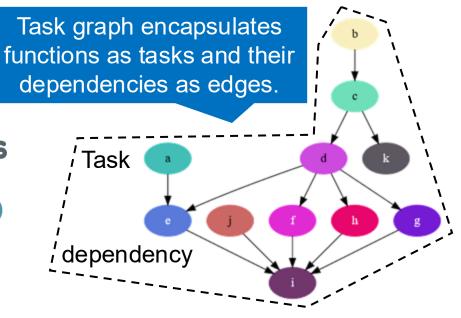














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Create an Asynchronous Task using std::async1

A high-level standard library facility to launch a task asynchronously

```
#include <future>
#include <iostream>

int compute(int v) {
    return v;
}

Use std::async to asynchronously run the
    function compute(42) on a new thread.

int main() {
    std::future<int> fu = std::async(std::launch::async, compute, 42);
    std::cout << fu.get() << std::endl; // prints 42
}</pre>
```

Return a std::future to wait for this asynchronous task to finish and access its result (i.e., 42)



An Example Implementation of std::async

```
template <typename F, typename... Args>
auto async(F&& func, Args&&... args) {
  using ReturnType = std::invoke_result_t<F, Args...>;
  // promise-future pair for intern-thread sync
                                                           I promise you that I will run your
  std::promise<ReturnType> prom;
                                                           function, and you can access the
  std::future<ReturnType> fu = prom.get_future();
                                                            result from the future object ...
  std::thread t([prom=std::move(prom),
    f=std::forward<F>(func), ...args=std::forward<Args>(args)] () mutable {
    if constexpr(std::is_void_v<ReturnType>) {
      f(std::move(args)...);
                                                        We create a thread from a lambda
      prom.set value();
                                                     function object that captures the function
    } else {
                                                    and its argument (with perfect forwarding<sup>1</sup>)
      prom.set_value(f(std::move(args)...));
                                                       and invoke the function in the body.
  });
  t.detach(); // mimic fire-and-forget behavior of std::async
  return fu;
```

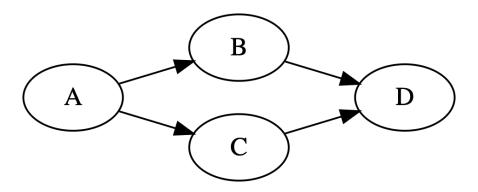


Build a Task Graph w/ std::async and std::future

std::future allows us to perform task-specific synchronization

```
auto A = std::async(std::launch::async,
  [](){ std::cout << "A\n"; }
A.wait();
auto B = std::async(std::launch::async,
  [](){ std::cout << "B\n"; }
auto C = std::async(std::launch::async,
  [](){ std::cout << "C\n"; }
B.wait();
C.wait();
auto D = std::async(std::launch::async,
  [](){ std::cout << "D\n"; }
D.wait();
```

We need to wait for A to finish before launching B and C asynchronously.



We need to wait for B and C to finish before launching D asynchronously

By properly synchronizing tasks using future.wait, we can dynamically create a task graph (i.e., dynamic task graph)



Sender-Receiver Version (with std::exec1)

A standardized abstraction for composing tasks and dependencies

```
Schedule tasks on a pool of worker threads
exec::static thread pool pool;
auto scheduler = pool.get scheduler();
// create a sender task for A
auto sa = exec::then(exec::schedule(scheduler), []{ std::cout<<"A\n"; });</pre>
exec::sync wait(sa); // wait for A
// create two parallel sender tasks for B and C
auto sb = exec::then(exec::schedule(scheduler), []{ std::cout<<"B\n"; });</pre>
auto sc = exec::then(exec::schedule(scheduler), []{ std::cout<<"C\n"; });</pre>
exec::sync_wait(exec::when_all(sb, sc)); // wait for B and C
// create a sender task for D
auto sd = exec::then(exec::schedule(scheduler), []{ std::cout<<"D\n"; });</pre>
exec::sync_wait(sd); // wait for D
```



Intel's TBB Library with tbb::task_group¹

A class to create asynchronous tasks and wait for their completion

```
tbb::task_group tg; ◀
// A
tg.run([] { std::cout << "A\n"; });</pre>
// B and C in parallel
tg.run([] { std::cout << "B\n"; });</pre>
tg.run([] { std::cout << "C\n"; });</pre>
tg.wait(); ←
// D
tg.run([] { std::cout << "D\n"; });</pre>
tg.wait();
```

A class in TBB to create asynchronous tasks and wait for their completion

Need to task_group::wait on A before running B and C

Need to task_group::wait on B and C before running D



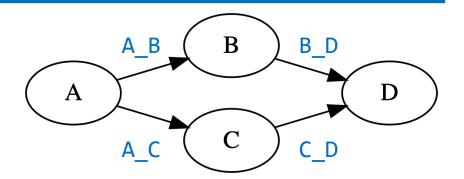
OpenMP Tasking Model with depend Clauses¹

Leverages compiler directives to define tasks and dependencies

```
#omp parallel
  int A_B, A_C, B_D, C_D;
  #pragma omp task depend(out: A_B, A_C)
  std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
  #pragma omp task depend(in: A_B; out: B_D)
  std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
  #pragma omp task depend(in: A_C; out: C_D)
  std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
  #pragma omp task depend(in: B_D, C_D)
  std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
```

Define dependency handles

Specify task dependencies using in and out clauses when creating an OpenMP task



With these OpenMP directives, the compiler will insert parallel code that launches asynchronous tasks and enforces their dependencies.



OpenCilk Version

- A fork-join programming model relying on compiler-generated parallel code
 - With language extensions like cilk_spawn and cilk_sync

```
void A() { std::cout << "A\n"; }</pre>
void B() { std::cout << "B\n"; }</pre>
void C() { std::cout << "C\n"; }</pre>
void D() { std::cout << "D\n"; }</pre>
int main() {
  A();
  cilk_spawn B();
  C();
  cilk_sync;
  D();
```

You need a compiler that supports OpenCilk syntax to run this code.

Spawn a child task on B using cilk_spawn and continue with C in the main thread

Synchronize both B and C using cilk_sync before running task D



Limitations of Existing Async Tasking Models

Tasks and their dependencies are decoupled during task graph creation

- If dependencies are not expressed alongside the task creation logic, it's difficult to reason about the overall task graph structure
- Without a clear dependency structure, the runtime loses opportunities to optimize task placement and load balancing when constructing an asynchronous task

Correct placement of wait calls is left to programmers

- Programmers must determine a correct synchronization order at a fine-grained level
 - In the worst case, the number of waits equals the number of dependencies
- In practice, many applications only care about the completion of the entire task graph instead of intermediate tasks, making such fine-grained waiting unnecessary, costly, and buggy

Limited support for building highly dynamic task graphs

- Highly dynamic task graphs → those whose structures, dependencies, and task content are highly dependent on runtime variables or dynamic control-flow results
 - Ex: OpenMP is not a good fit for this scenario as it relies on static compiler directives
- May require a non-standard C++ compiler to generate parallel code



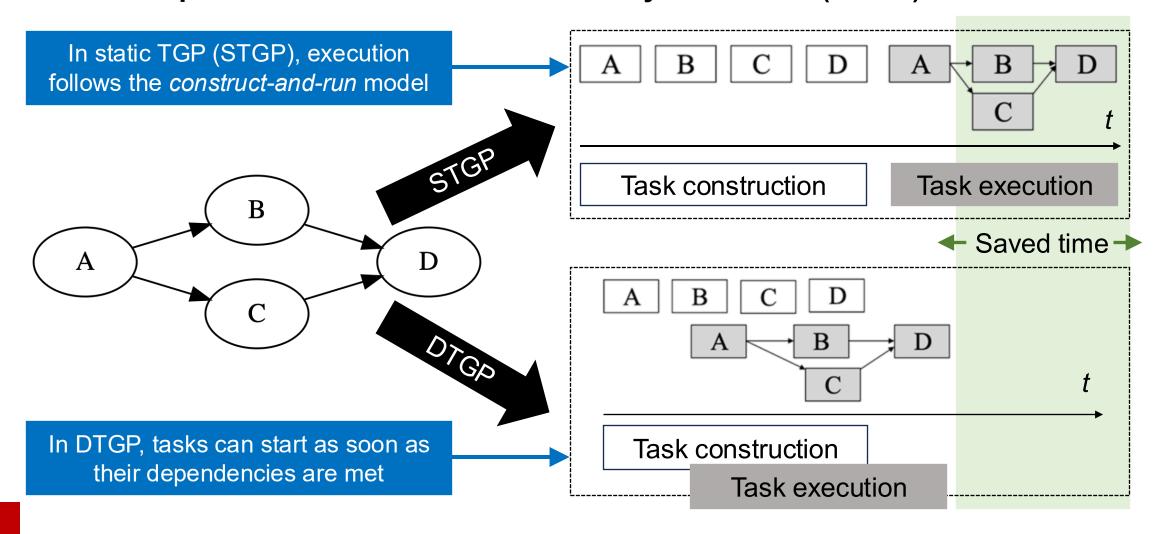
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Static vs Dynamic Task Graph Programming (TGP)

All examples we've discussed so far are dynamic TGP (DTGP)

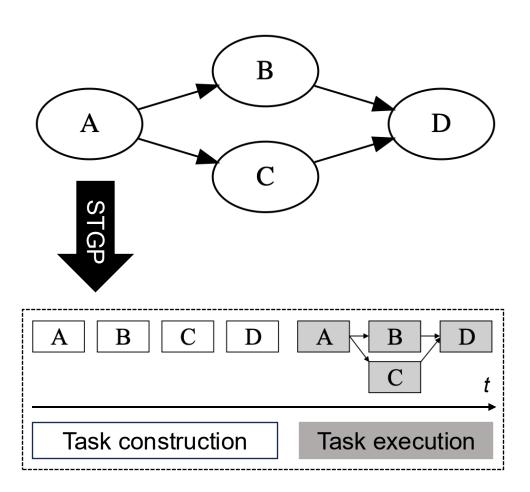




Static Task Graph Programming in Taskflow¹

```
#include <taskflow/taskflow.hpp> // Live: https://godbolt.org/z/j8hx3xnnx
```

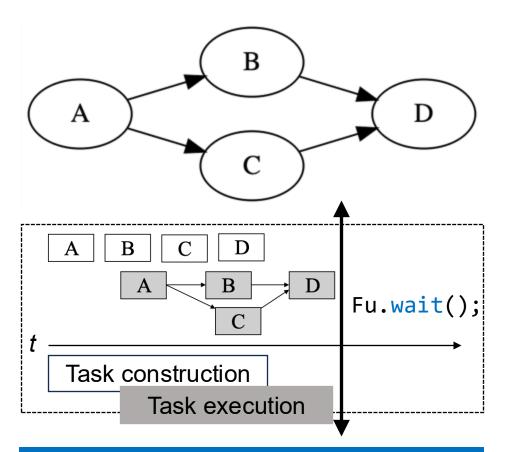
```
int main(){
 tf::Taskflow taskflow;
 tf::Executor executor;
  auto [A, B, C, D] = taskflow.emplace(
    [] () { std::cout << "TaskA\n"; }
    [] () { std::cout << "TaskB\n"; },</pre>
    [] () { std::cout << "TaskC\n"; },
    [] () { std::cout << "TaskD\n"; }
 A.precede(B, C);
 D.succeed(B, C);
  executor.run(taskflow).wait();
  return 0;
```





AsyncTask: Dynamic Task Graph Programming in Taskflow

```
// Live: https://godbolt.org/z/j76ThGbWK
tf::Executor executor;
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
});
auto B = executor.silent dependent async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto C = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto [D, Fu] = executor.dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B, C);←
Fu.wait();
```

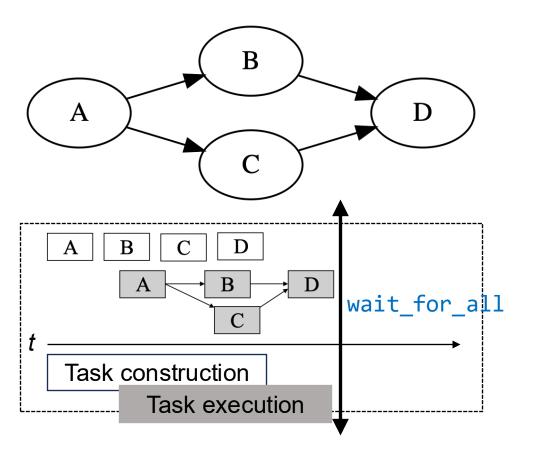


Specify variable task dependencies using C++ variadic parameter pack



Wait for All Tasks to Finish

```
// Live: https://godbolt.org/z/T87PrTarx
tf::Executor executor;
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
});
auto B = executor.silent dependent async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto C = executor.silent dependent async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto D = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B, C);
```



executor.wait_for_all(); <</pre>

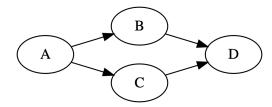
Wait for the entire graph to finish.

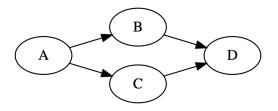


Need a Correct Topological Order

```
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskA\n"; }
);
auto B = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskB\n"; }, A
);
auto C = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskC\n"; }, A
);
auto D = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskD\n"; }, B, C
);</pre>
```

Topological order #1: $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$





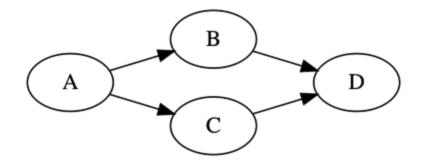
Topological order #2: $A \rightarrow C \rightarrow B \rightarrow D$

```
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskA\n"; }
);
auto C = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskC\n"; }, A
);
auto B = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskB\n"; }, A
);
auto D = executor.silent_dependent_async(
    [](){ std::cout << "TaskD\n"; }, B, C
);</pre>
```



Incorrect Topological Order ...

```
tf::Executor executor;
auto A = executor.silent dependent async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
});
auto D = executor.silent dependent async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B-is-unavailable-yet, C-is-unavailable-yet);
auto B = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto C = executor.silent_dependent_async([](){
    std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
executor.wait_for_all();
```



An incorrect topological order (A→D→B→C) prevents you from expressing a correct dynamic task graph.



Variable Range of Task Dependencies

- Both methods can take a variable range of dependent-async tasks
 - Useful when the task dependencies come as a runtime variable (e.g., loaded from a file)

```
// Live: https://godbolt.org/z/6Pvco4KeE
std::vector<tf::AsyncTask> tasks = {
   executor.silent_dependent_async([](){ std::cout << "TaskA\n"; }),
   executor.silent_dependent_async([](){ std::cout << "TaskB\n"; }),
   executor.silent_dependent_async([](){ std::cout << "TaskC\n"; }),
   executor.silent_dependent_async([](){ std::cout << "TaskD\n"; })
};
// create a dependent-async tasks that depends on tasks, A, B, C, and D
executor.dependent_async([](){}, tasks.begin(), tasks.end());
// create a silent-dependent-async task that depends on tasks, A, B, C, and D
executor.silent_dependent_async([](){}, tasks.begin(), tasks.end());</pre>
```

While this feature may look trivial, I found it very difficult to achieve with existing asynchronous tasking libraries because their task creation and dependency expression are decoupled from each other ...



DTGP is Flexible for Runtime-driven Execution

Assemble task graphs driven by runtime variables and control-flow results

```
if (a == true) {
  G1 = build_task_graph1();
  if (b == true) {
    G2 = build_task_graph2();
    G1.precede(G2);
    if (c == true) {
      ... // defined other TGPs
  else {
    G3 = build_task_graph3();
    G1.precede(G3);
```

```
G1 = build_task_graph1();
G2 = build_task_graph2();
if (G1.num_tasks() == 100) {
  G1.precede(G2);
else {
  G3 = build task graph3();
  G1.precede(G2, G3);
  if(G2.num_dependencies()>=10){
    ... // define another TGP
  } else {
    ... // define another TGP
```

This type of dynamic task graph is very difficult to achieve using static task graph programming ...



AsyncTask doesn't Touch Data Abstraction

- Focus on coarse-grained task parallelism not fine-grained data parallelism
 - Our goal is to have users describe tasks and their dependencies in an expressive language

- Users describe func as a lambda and capture necessary data or func arguments themselves
- The advantage of this decision is twofold:
 - Users retain full control over data layout and ownership, allowing them to optimize data structures and memory layout for their specific application domains
 - Letting users decide how and where to store data keeps AsyncTask lightweight and nonintrusive – no need to modify existing data structures to fit our framework
 - Ex: Models that count on data abstraction (e.g., Fastflow, TBB pipeline) require users to rewrite their code to library-specific data abstraction in order to gain parallelism



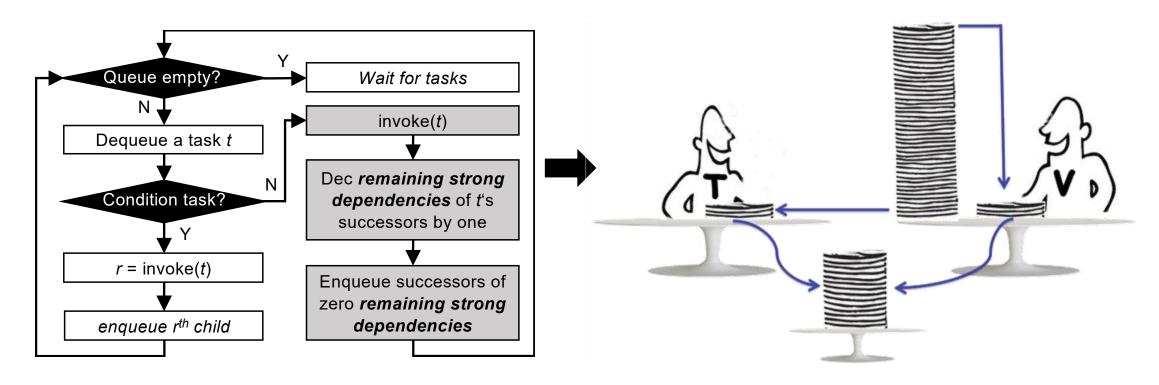
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Overview: Taskflow's Work-stealing Scheduler¹

Task-level scheduling

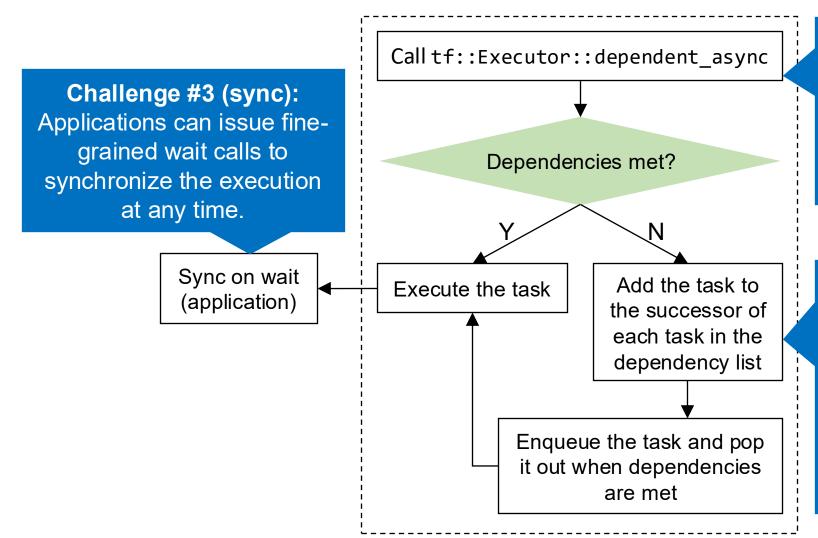
Worker-level scheduling



Key results: schedule tasks with in-graph control flow with a strong balance between the number of active workers and dynamically generated tasks – *low latency, energy efficient, and high throughput*



Scheduling a Dynamic Task Graph



Challenge #1 (ABA):
Dependent async tasks
must exist correctly – we
cannot specify a task
dependency that points to
an invalid memory location.

Challenge #2 (race):
Since task graph
construction and execution
in DTGP can happen
simultaneously, multiple
workers may concurrently
access the successor of a
dependent-async task.



Solving Challenge #1: ABA Problem

```
tf::Executor executor;
                                                                           worker #1
                                                           A (0x0010)
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
                                                                       Runtime opt
});
                                                                     (e.g., mem pool)
auto B = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
                                                           A' (0x0010)
                                                                           worker #2
}, A); <
auto C = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto D = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B, C);
executor.wait for all();
```



Retain a Shared Ownership of Each Task Needed

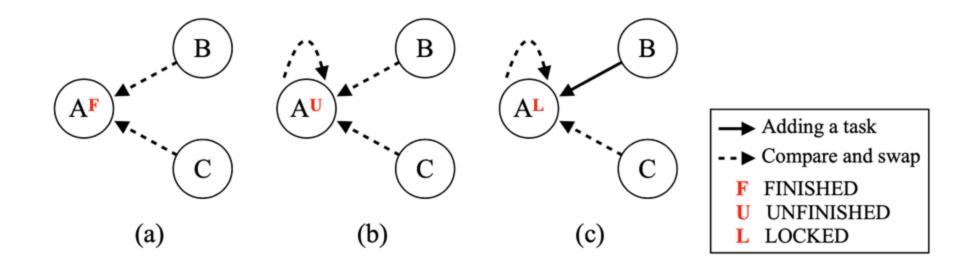
```
tf::Executor executor;
tf::AsyncTask A = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
});
tf::AsyncTask B = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
}, A); <
tf::AsyncTask C = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
tf::AsyncTask D = executor.silent dependent async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B, C);
executor.wait_for_all();
```

tf::AsyncTask acts like a std::shared_ptr to ensure tasks stay alive when they are used



Solving Challenge #2: Data Race

- Both B and C want to add themselves to the successors of A
 - Meanwhile, A may want to remove some of its successor when the task finishes



- Use compare-and-swap (CAS) with spinning to enable exclusive access
 - Spinning does not incur much overhead because most task graphs are sparse
 - If you task graph is very dense, probably DTGP is not the right solution to your application



Solving Challenge #3: Synchronization

- Users can issue both coarse- and fine-grained synchronizations at any time
 - Coarse-grained sync: executor.wait_for_all()

```
• Fine-grained sync: future.wait()

tf::Executor executor;
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{});
auto B = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{}, A);
executor.wait_for_all(); // wait for A and B
// lock-based sync
std::unique_lock lock(mtx);
cv.wait(lock, [&](){
    return num_tasks == 0;
});
```

We leverage C++20 atomic variables to perform waiting/notifying operations¹, which allows much of the synchronization to occur in user space rather than in the kernel space (~11% performance improvement).

```
// atomic wait-based sync
auto n = num_tasks.load();
while(n != 0) {
  num_tasks.wait(n);
  n = num_tasks.load();
});
```





```
Algorithm 1 dependent_async(callable, deps)
                                                            Algorithm 3 schedule async task(task)
 1: Create a future
                                                              1: target state \leftarrow UNFINISHED
 2: num \ deps \leftarrow sizeof(deps)
                                                              2: while not task.state.CAS(target state, FINISHED)
 3: task \leftarrow initialize task(callable, num deps, future)
                                                                 do
 4: for all dep \in deps do
                                                                    target state \leftarrow UNFINISHED
      process dependent(task, dep, num deps)
 6: end for
                                                              4: end while
 7: if num deps == 0 then
                                                              5: Invoke(task.callable)
      schedule async task(task)
                                                              6: for all successor \in task.successors do
 9: end if
                                                                    if AtomDec(successor.join counter) == 0 then
10: return (task, future)
                                                                        schedule async task(successor)
                                                              8:
Algorithm 2 process dependent(task, dep, num deps)
                                                                     end if
 1: dep state \leftarrow dep.state
                                                             10: end for
 2: target state \leftarrow UNFINISHED
                                                             11: if AtomDec(task.ref\_count) == 0 then
 3: if dep state.CAS(target state, LOCKED) then
                                                                    Delete task
                                                             12:
      dep.successors.push(task)
                                                             13: end if
      dep \ state \leftarrow UNFINISHED
 6: else if target state == FINISHED then
      num \ deps \leftarrow AtomDec(task.join \ counter)
 8: else
      goto line 2
10: end if
```

^{1:} Cheng-Hsiang Chiu, et. al, "Programming Dynamic Task Parallelism for Heterogeneous EDA Algorithms," IEEE/ACM ICCAD, 2023



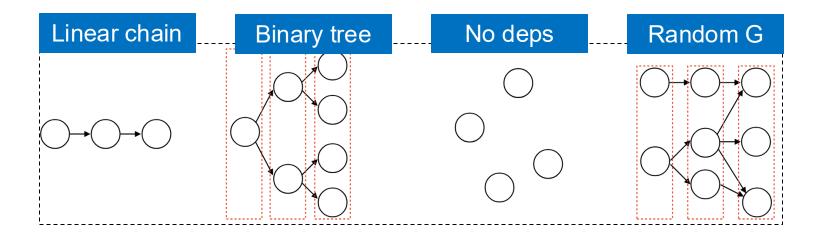
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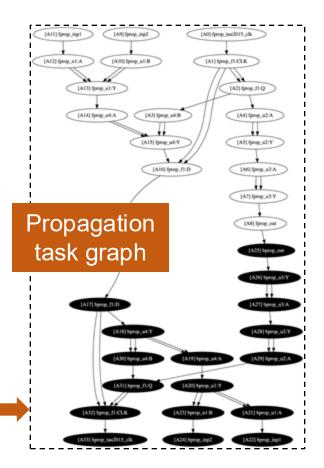




- Evaluated on both microbenchmarks and a real-world application
 - Study the performance of AsyncTask w/o and w/ the impact of application tasks
- Microbenchmarks
 - Measure the performance on four commonly used graph patterns



- Real-world application: VLSI Static Timing Analysis¹
 - Parallelize the timing propagation algorithm using AsyncTask







We consider the following baselines:

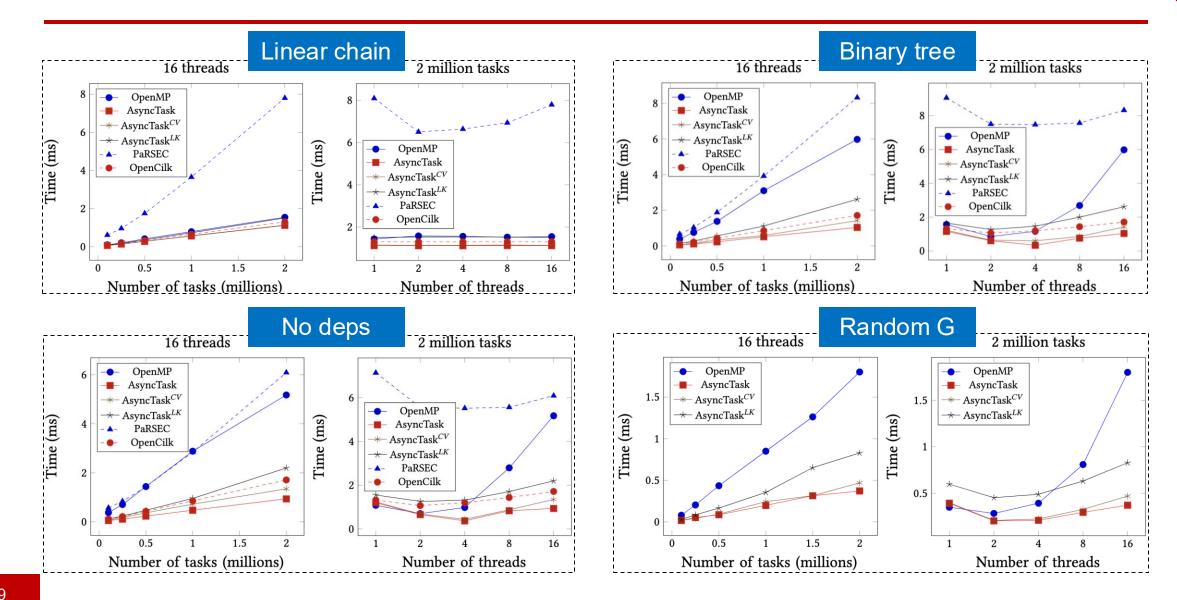
- OpenMP tasking: https://www.openmp.org/spec-html/5.0/openmpsu99.html
- PaRSEC: https://github.com/ICLDisco/parsec
- OpenCilk: https://github.com/opencilk
- AsyncTask^{LK}: replaced AsyncTask's scheduler with OpenMP's task scheduler¹
 We want to see how good our lock-free scheduling algorithm is
- AsyncTask^{CV}: replaced AsyncTask's atomic wait with std::condition_variable
 We want to see how good our C++20-based notification algorithm is

We compiled all programs using g++12 with -std=c++20 and -03

- 64-bit Linux machine with 128 GB RAM and 20 Intel i5-13500 CPU cores at 4.8 GHz
- All data is an average of ten runs to reduce variance



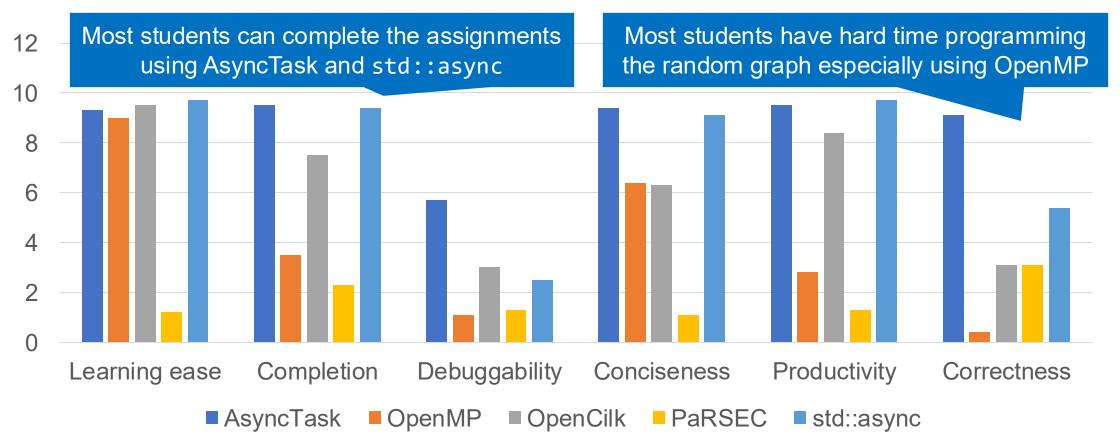






Ease of Use of AsyncTask

- Surveyed 300+ graduate students in my HPC course at UW-Madison
 - Asked students to finish four microbenchmarks using five DTGP models
 - Rated each library in 1–10 (the higher the better) by the end of this programming assignment



Δ)

Real-world Application: Static Timing Analysis (STA)

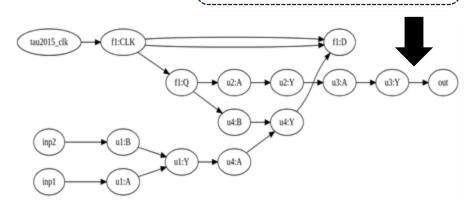
Implemented task-parallel STA¹ using AsyncTask

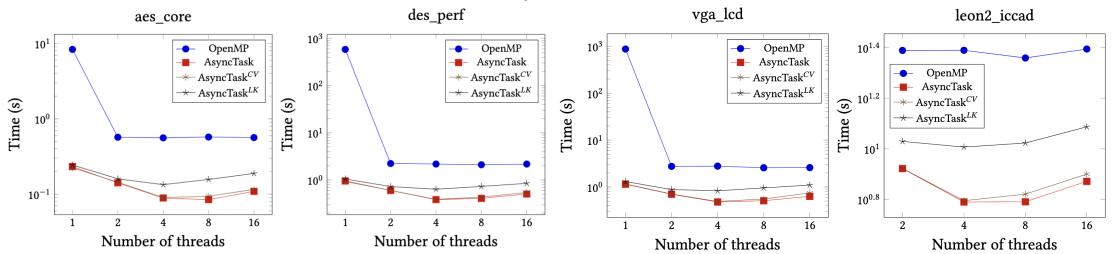
Models the timing propagation as a dynamic task graph

Propagates timing data from inputs to outputs

Evaluated on four industrial circuit graphs

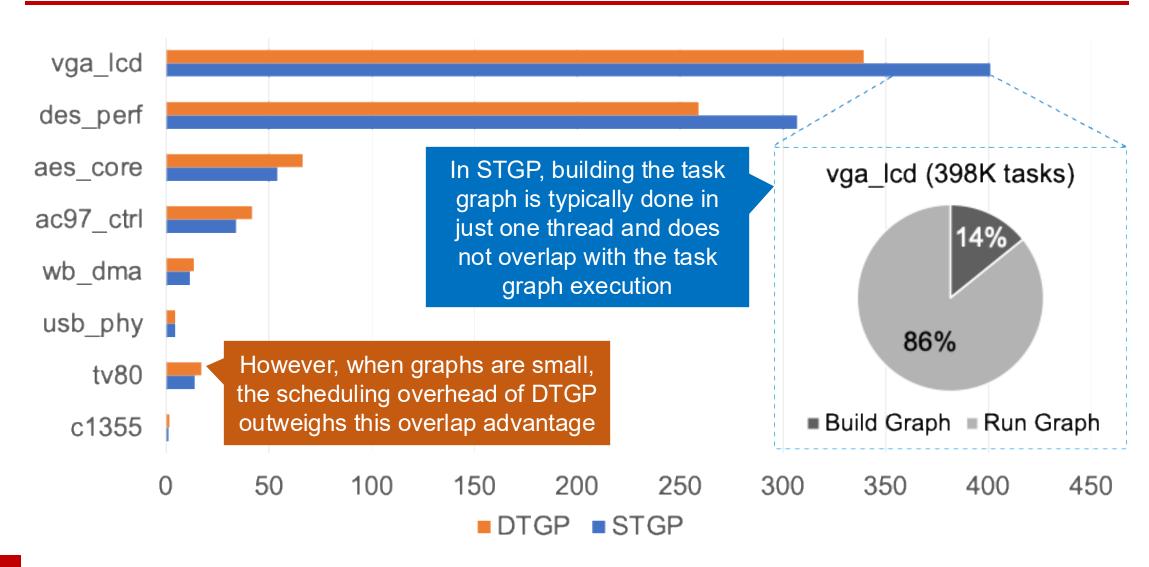
- aes_core: 66,751 tasks and 86,446 dependencies
- des_perf: 303,690 tasks and 387,291 dependencies
- vga_lcd: 397,809 tasks and 498,863 dependencies
- leon2: 4,328,255 tasks and 7,984,262 dependencies





^{1:} Tsung-Wei Huang, et al, "OpenTimer v2: A New Parallel Incremental Timing Analysis Engine," IEEE TCAD, 2022

Runtime Comparison: STGP¹ vs DTGP





Takeaways

- Understand the importance of asynchronous tasking with dependencies
- Recognize the limitations of existing asynchronous tasking models
- Introduce a new dynamic task graph programming model called AsyncTask
- Overcome the scheduling challenges to support the model
- Demonstrate the efficiency of AsyncTask
- Conclude the talk



Everything has been Integrated to Taskflow¹

- Taskflow is a header-only C++ library for task-parallel programming
 - Started in 2018 to help DARPA parallelize critical design automation workloads
- Using AsyncTask is very easy

```
# clone the Taskflow project
~$ git clone https://github.com/taskflow/taskflow.git
~$ cd taskflow
# compile your program and tell your compiler where to find Taskflow header files
~$ g++ -std=c++20 examples/simple.cpp -I ./ -O2 -pthread -o simple
~$ ./simple
TaskA
TaskC
TaskB
TaskD
```

























































































Questions?







Static task graph parallelism

```
// Live: https://godbolt.org/z/j8hx3xnnx
tf::Taskflow taskflow;
tf::Executor executor;
auto [A, B, C, D] = taskflow.emplace(
  [](){ std::cout << "TaskA\n"; }
  [](){ std::cout << "TaskB\n"; },</pre>
  [](){ std::cout << "TaskC\n"; },
  [](){ std::cout << "TaskD\n"; }
A.precede(B, C);
D.succeed(B, C);
executor.run(taskflow).wait();
```

Dynamic task graph parallelism

```
// Live: https://godbolt.org/z/T87PrTarx
tf::Executor executor;
auto A = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
  std::cout << "TaskA\n";</pre>
});
auto B = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
   std::cout << "TaskB\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto C = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
   std::cout << "TaskC\n";</pre>
}, A);
auto D = executor.silent_dependent_async([]{
   std::cout << "TaskD\n";</pre>
}, B, C);
executor.wait for all();
```