Type Traits Without Compiler Intrinsics

The Promise of Static Reflection

ANDREI ZISSU

Who am I

Andrei Zissu

Worked in multiple industries over 2 decades, mostly in C++ and on Windows

Tech Lead at Morphisec, provider of anti-ransomware based on Automatic Moving Target Defense (AMTD)

WG21 member for the past 3 years, mainly involved in reflection and contracts

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this talk are mine and mine only (hopefully yours too by the time we're done here)

Agenda

We can probably implement all type traits based on reflection

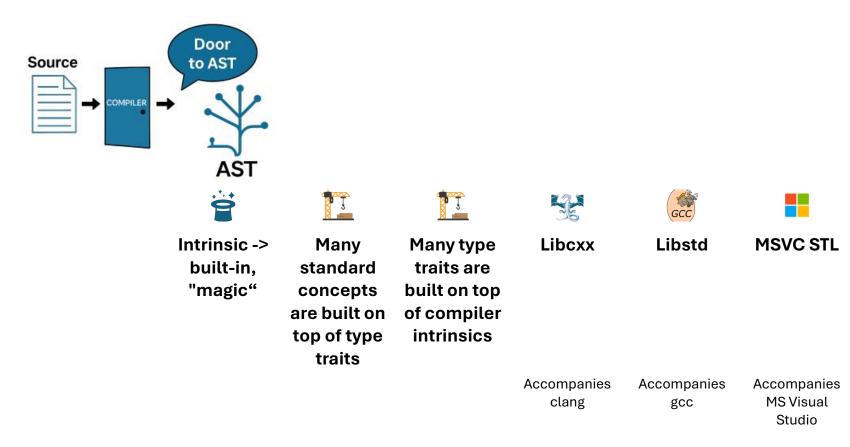
Reflection-based type traits are key to future decoupling between libraries and toolchains

A future where you are free to mix any compiler with any standard library implementation

Come with me on a journey to that future!



Lay of the land



Introduction to Type Traits

```
ASM generation compiler returned: 0
Execution build compiler returned: 0
Program returned: 0
Type is integral.
Type is floating-point.
Type is a pointer.
Type is something else.
```



```
#include <type_traits>
#include <iostream>
template <typename T>
void printTypeInfo() {
    if constexpr (std::is_integral_v<T>) {
        std::cout << "Type is integral.\n";</pre>
    } else if constexpr (std::is_floating_point_v<T>) {
        std::cout << "Type is floating-point.\n";</pre>
    } else if constexpr (std::is_pointer_v<T>) {
        std::cout << "Type is a pointer.\n";</pre>
    } else {
        std::cout << "Type is something else.\n";</pre>
int main() {
    printTypeInfo<int>();
                                     // Output: Type is integral.
    printTypeInfo<double>();
                                     // Output: Type is floating-point.
    printTypeInfo<int*>();
                                     // Output: Type is a pointer.
    printTypeInfo<std::string>();
                                     // Output: Type is something else.
    return 0;
```

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    printTypeInfo<std::string>(); // Output: Type is something else.
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```

```
ASM generation compiler returned: 0
Execution build compiler returned: 0
Program returned: 0
Integral value: 42
Floating-point value: 3.14
```



```
#include <type_traits>
#include <iostream>
// Function enabled if T is an integral type
template<typename T>
typename std::enable_if<std::is_integral<T>::value>::type
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Integral value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
// Function enabled if T is a floating-point type
template<typename T>
typename std::enable_if<std::is_floating_point<T>::value>::type
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Floating-point value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
int main() {
    print(42);
                   // Outputs: Integral value: 42
    print(3.14);
                   // Outputs: Floating-point value: 3.14
    return 0;
```



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#include <iostream>
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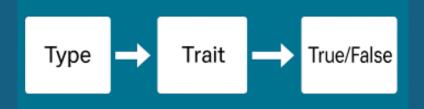
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```
#include <type_traits>
#include <iostream>
// Function enabled if T is an integral type
template<typename T>
typename std::enable_if_t<std::is_integral_v<T>>
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Integral value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
// Function enabled if T is a floating-point type
template<typename T>
typename std::enable_if_t<std::is_floating_point_v<T>>
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Floating-point value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
int main() {
                  // Outputs: Integral value: 42
    print(42);
    print(3.14);
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    return 0;
```

Boolean Query Traits

is_const

is_lvalue_reference

is_integral

is_constructible

is_same

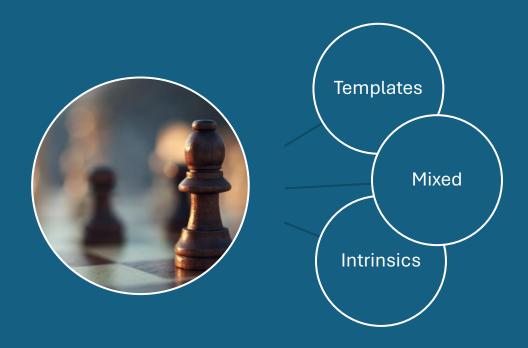
is_convertible

Type Transformations remove_cv

add_lvalue_reference

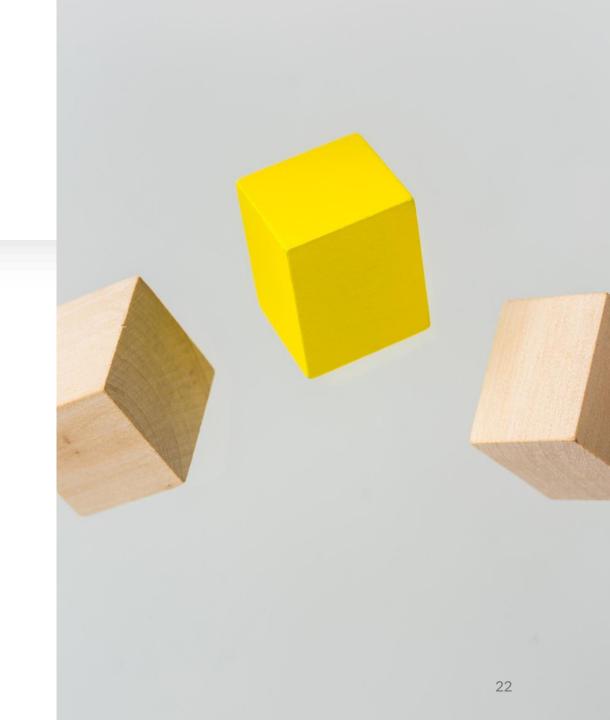
make_signed

Overall Implementation Strategies



Template-based Implementations

Basic Building Blocks: integral_constant, bool_constant enable_if



std::integral_constant

```
template < class T, T v>
struct integral_constant
{
    static constexpr T value = v;
```

std::true_type
std::false_type

```
template<class T, T v>
struct integral_constant
{
    static constexpr T value = v;
```

```
typedef integral_constant<bool, true> true_type;
typedef integral_constant<bool, false> false_type;
```

std::bool_constant

```
template<class T, T v>
struct integral_constant
    static constexpr T value = v;
typedef integral_constantkbool, true> true_type;
typedef integral_constant<bool, false> false_type;
template< bool B >
using bool_constant = integral_constant<bool, B>;
```

std::enable_if

```
template<bool B, class T = void>
struct enable_if {};

template<class T>
struct enable_if<true, T> { typedef T type; };
```

std::enable_if

```
template < bool B, class T = void >
struct enable_if {};

template < class T >
struct enable_if < true, T > { typedef T type; };

template < bool B, class T = void >
using enable_if_t = typename enable_if < B, T > :: type;
```

std::enable_if

```
template < bool B, class T = void >
struct enable_if {};

template < class T >
struct enable_if < true, T > { typedef T type; };

template < bool B, class T = void >
using enable_if_t = typename enable_if < B, T > :: type;
```

Substitution Failure Is Not An Error - SFINAE

```
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```

```
#include <type_traits>
#include <iostream>
// Function enabled if T is an integral type
template<typename T>
std::enable_if_t<std::is_integral_v<T>>
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Integral value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
}
// Function enabled if T is a floating-point type
template<typename T>
std::enable_if_t<std::is_floating_point_v<T>>
print(T value) {
    std::cout << "Floating-point value: " << value << std::endl;</pre>
}
int main() {
                  // Outputs: Integral value: 42
    print(42);
                   // Outputs: Floating-point value: 3.14
    print(3.14);
    return 0;
```

Implementing helper variable templates

```
template< class T >
constexpr bool is_integral_v = is_integral<T>::value;
```

Struct Templates



std::is_null_pointer (gcc)

```
template<typename _Tp>
struct is_null_pointer
  : public std::false_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<const std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<volatile std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<const volatile std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
```

std::is_null_pointer (gcc)

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template<typename _Tp>
struct is_null_pointer
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  : public std::true_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<volatile std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
template<>
struct is_null_pointer<const volatile std::nullptr_t>
  : public std::true_type { };
```

std::is_signed (gcc)

```
template<typename _Tp, bool = is_arithmetic<_Tp>::value>
struct __is_signed_helper
  : public false_type { };
template<typename _Tp>
struct __is_signed_helper<_Tp, true>
  : public __bool_constant<_Tp(-1) < _Tp(0) > { };
template<typename _Tp>
struct is_signed
  : public __is_signed_helper<_Tp>::type { };
```

std::is_signed (gcc)

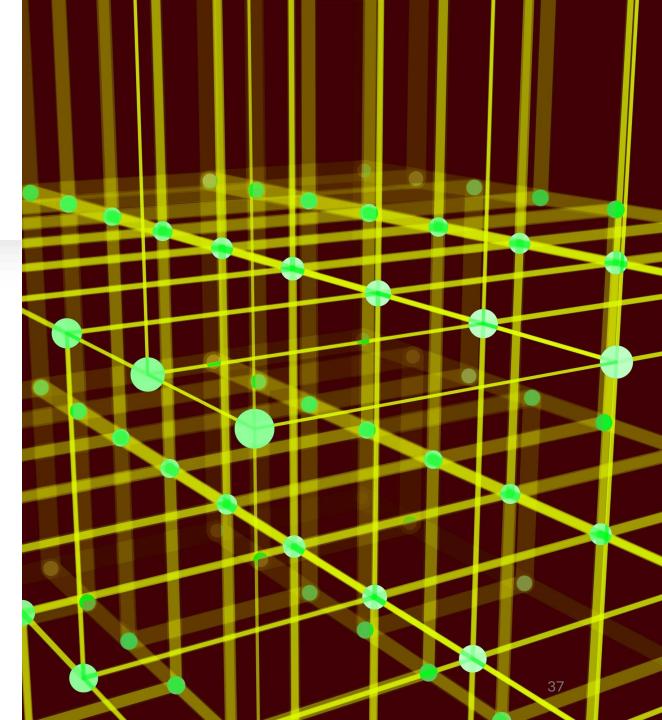
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template<typename _Tp, bool = is_arithmetic<_Tp>::value>
struct __is_signed_helper
  : public false_type { };
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struct is_signed
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std::is_signed (gcc)

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template<typename _Tp>
struct is_signed
  : public __is_signed_helper<_Tp>::type { };
```

Variable Templates

```
template <typename _Tp>
  inline constexpr bool is_signed_v = is_signed<_Tp>::value;
template <typename _Tp>
  inline constexpr bool is_unsigned_v = is_unsigned<_Tp>::value;
```



std::is_const (msvc)

```
_EXPORT_STD template <class>
constexpr bool is_const_v = false;

template <class _Ty>
constexpr bool is_const_v < const _Ty> = true;

_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
struct is_const : bool_constant < is_const_v < _Ty> {};
```

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_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
struct is_const : bool_constant < is_const_v < _Ty > {};
```

Type TraitsImplemented viaCompiler Internals







clang (std::is_const)

```
#if has builtin( is const)
template ⟨class Tp>
struct _LIBCPP_TEMPLATE_VIS _LIBCPP_NO_SPECIALIZATIONS is_const : _BoolConstant<__is_const(_Tp)> {};
# if LIBCPP STD VER >= 17
template ⟨class Tp>
_LIBCPP_NO_SPECIALIZATIONS inline constexpr bool is_const_v = __is_const(_Tp);
# endif
#else
template <class Tp>
struct LIBCPP TEMPLATE VIS is const : public false type {};
template <class _Tp>
struct LIBCPP TEMPLATE VIS is const< Tp const> : public true type {};
# if LIBCPP STD VER >= 17
template <class Tp>
inline constexpr bool is_const_v = is_const<_Tp>::value;
# endif
#endif // has builtin( is const)
```

clang (std::is_enum)

```
template <class _Tp>
struct _LIBCPP_TEMPLATE_VIS _LIBCPP_NO_SPECIALIZATIONS is_enum : public integral_constant<bool, __is_enum(_Tp)> {};

#if _LIBCPP_STD_VER >= 17

template <class _Tp>
_LIBCPP_NO_SPECIALIZATIONS inline constexpr bool is_enum_v = __is_enum(_Tp);
#endif
```

gcc

```
/// is_enum
template<typename _Tp>
  struct is_enum
  : public __bool_constant<__is_enum(_Tp)>
 { };
/// is_union
template<typename _Tp>
  struct is_union
  : public __bool_constant<__is_union(_Tp)>
 { };
/// is class
template<typename _Tp>
  struct is_class
  : public __bool_constant<__is_class(_Tp)>
  { };
```

gcc (std::is_reference)

```
/// is reference
#if GLIBCXX USE BUILTIN TRAIT( is reference)
 template<typename _Tp>
    struct is_reference
    : public __bool constant< is reference(_Tp)>
    { };
#else
 template<typename Tp>
    struct is_reference
    : public false type
    { };
 template<typename _Tp>
    struct is_reference<_Tp&>
    : public true type
    { };
 template<typename _Tp>
    struct is_reference<_Tp&&>
    : public true type
    { };
#endif
```

msvc

```
EXPORT STD template <class Ty>
struct is_polymorphic : bool_constant<__is_polymorphic(_Ty)> {};
EXPORT STD template <class Ty>
constexpr bool is polymorphic v = is polymorphic( Ty);
EXPORT STD template <class Ty>
struct is abstract : bool constant< is abstract( Ty)> {}; // det
EXPORT STD template <class Ty>
constexpr bool is_abstract_v = __is_abstract(_Ty);
_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
struct is_final : bool_constant<__is_final(_Ty)> {}; // determine
EXPORT STD template <class Ty>
constexpr bool is final v = is final(Ty);
```

msvc (is_member_function_pointer)

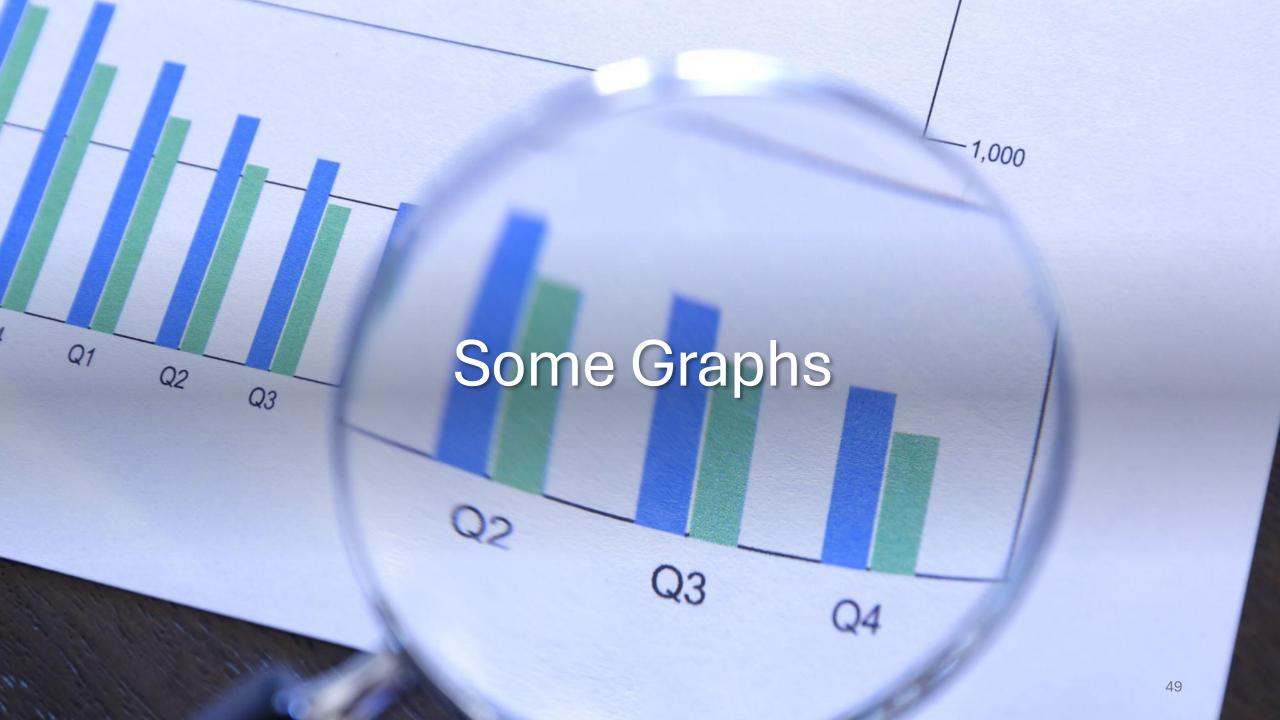
```
#ifdef __clang__
_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
constexpr bool is_member_function_pointer v = __is_member_function_pointer(_Ty);
#else // ^^^ Clang / Other vvv
_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
constexpr bool is_member_function_pointer_v = _Is_memfunptr<remove_cv_t<_Ty>>::_Bool_type::value;
#endif // ^^^ Other ^^^
_EXPORT_STD template <class _Ty>
struct is_member_function_pointer : bool_constant<is_member_function_pointer_v<_Ty>> {};
```

And this is what __Is__memfunptr looks like...

```
template <class _Ty>
struct Is memfunptr { // base class for member function pointer predicates
    using _Bool_type = false_type; // NB: members are user-visible via _Weak_types
};
#define _IS_MEMFUNPTR(CALL_OPT, CV_OPT, REF_OPT, NOEXCEPT_OPT)
    template <class _Ret, class _Arg0, class... _Types>
    struct Is memfunptr< Ret (CALL OPT Arg0::*)( Types...) CV OPT REF OPT NOEXCEPT OPT> \
        : _Arg_types<CV_OPT _Arg0*, _Types...> {
        using _Bool_type
                                                                  true_type;
        using _RESULT_TYPE_NAME _CXX17_DEPRECATE_ADAPTOR_TYPEDEFS = _Ret;
        using _Class_type
                                                                  = Arg0;
        using Guide type = enable if<!is same v<int REF OPT, int&&>, Ret( Types...)>;
    };
_MEMBER_CALL_CV_REF_NOEXCEPT(_IS_MEMFUNPTR)
#undef _IS_MEMFUNPTR
#define IS MEMFUNPTR ELLIPSIS(CV REF NOEXCEPT OPT)
    template <class _Ret, class _Arg0, class... _Types>
    struct _Is_memfunptr<_Ret (_Arg0::*)(_Types..., ...)</pre>
            CV_REF_NOEXCEPT_OPT> { /* no calling conventions for ellipsis */
        using _Bool_type
                                                                  = true type;
        using _RESULT_TYPE_NAME _CXX17_DEPRECATE_ADAPTOR_TYPEDEFS = _Ret;
        using Class type

    Arg0;

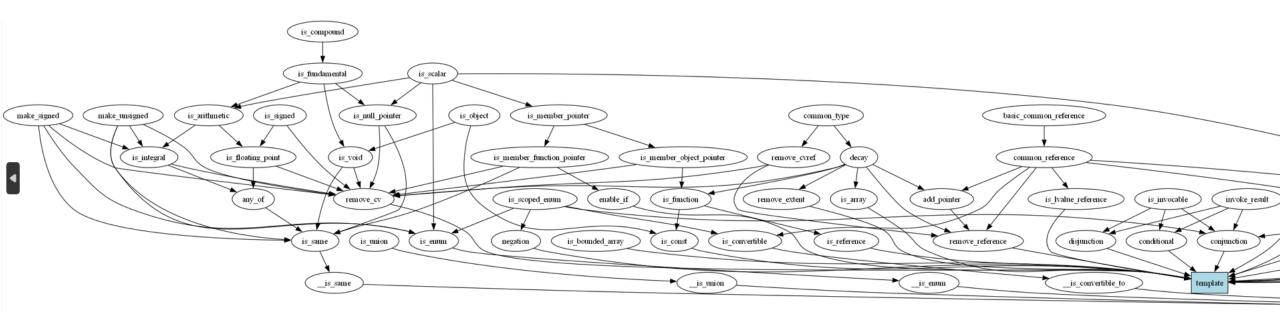
                                                                  = enable_if<false>; \
        using _Guide_type
    };
_CLASS_DEFINE_CV_REF_NOEXCEPT(_IS_MEMFUNPTR_ELLIPSIS)
#undef _IS_MEMFUNPTR_ELLIPSIS
#if _HAS_CXX23 && !defined(__clang__) // TRANSITION, DevCom-10107077, Clang has not implemented Deducing this
#define _IS_MEMFUNPTR_EXPLICIT_THIS_GUIDES(CALL_OPT, CV_OPT, REF_OPT, NOEXCEPT_OPT) \
    template <class _Ret, class _Self, class... _Args>
    struct _Is_memfunptr<_Ret(CALL_OPT*)(_Self, _Args...) NOEXCEPT_OPT> {
        using _Bool_type = false_type;
        using _Guide_type = _Identity<_Ret(_Args...)>;
    };
```



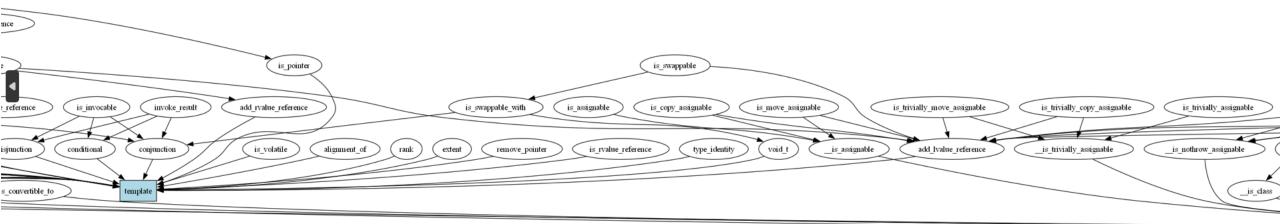


MSVC **S**

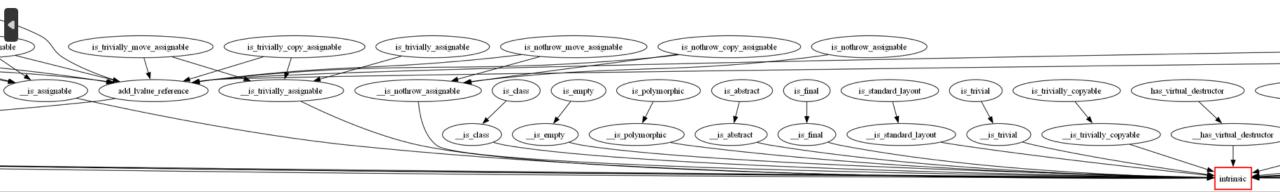




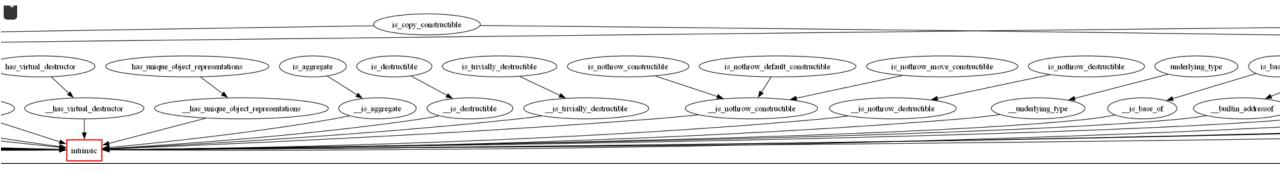




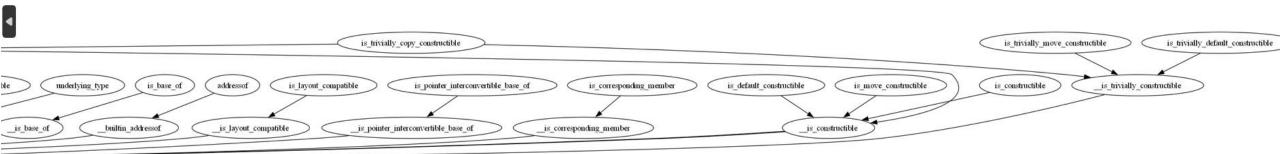




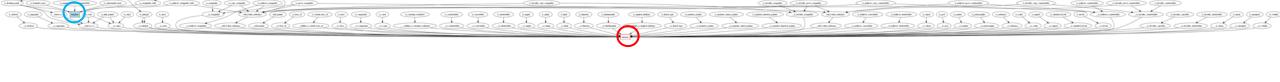






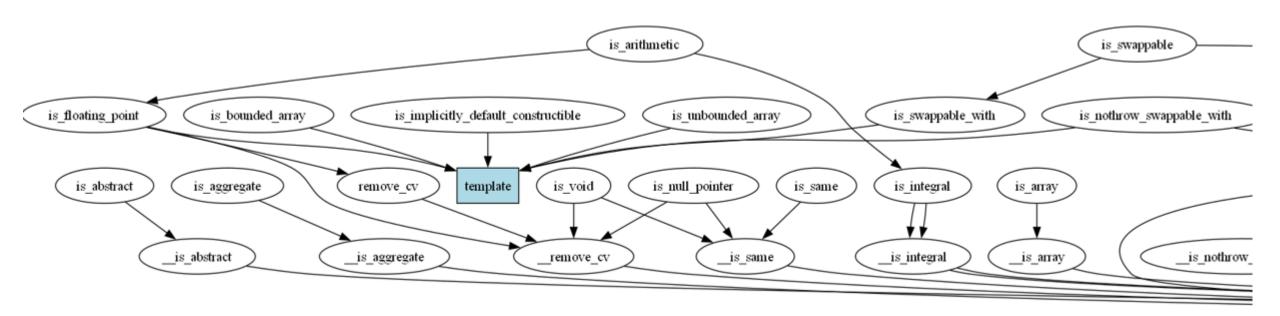




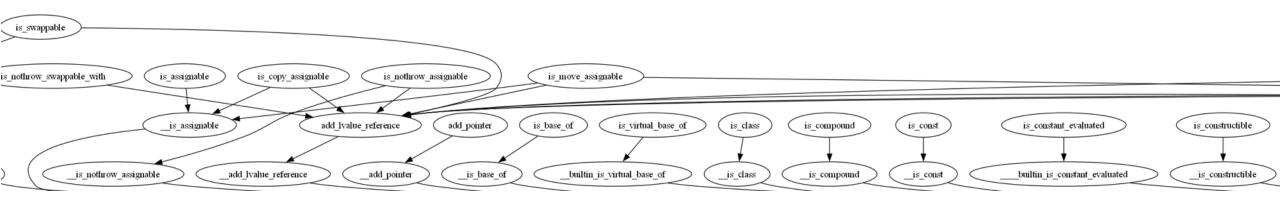


CLANG (libcxx)

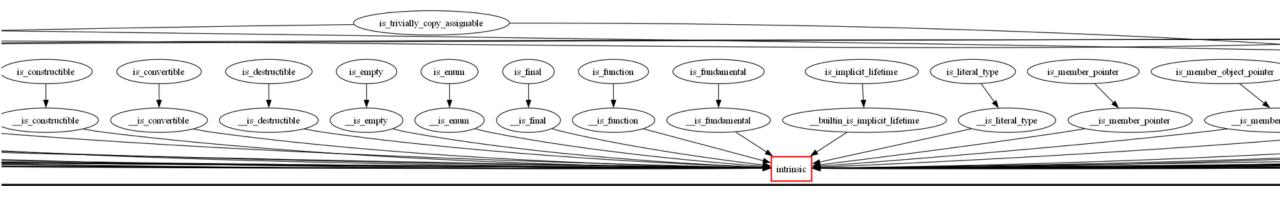




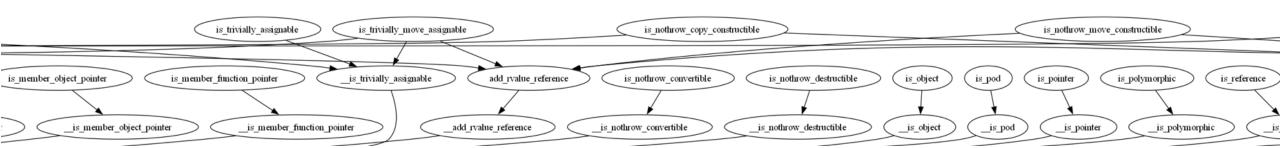




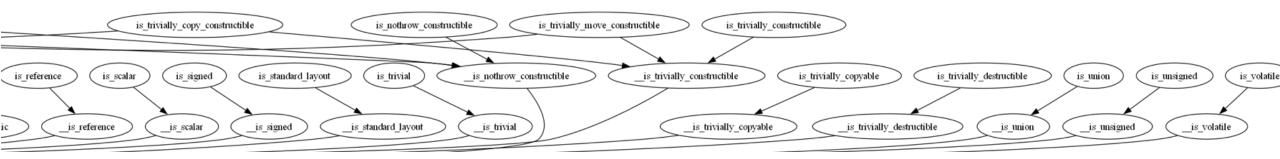




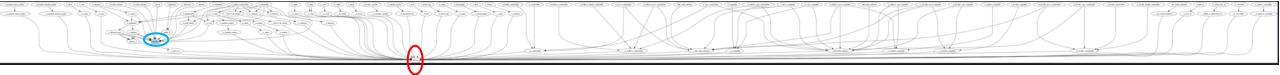




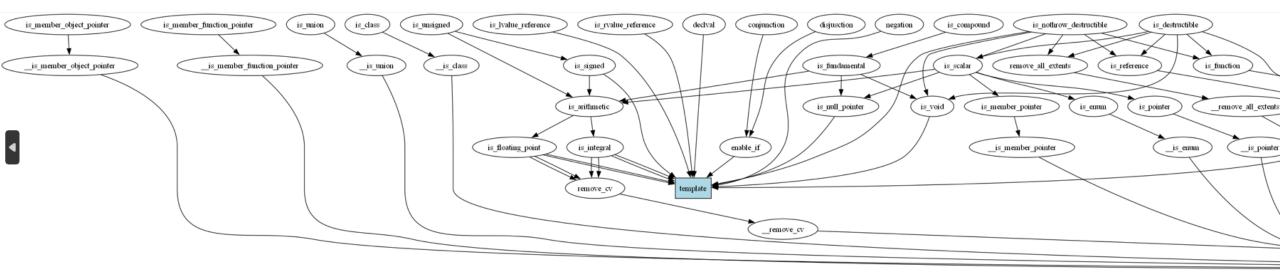




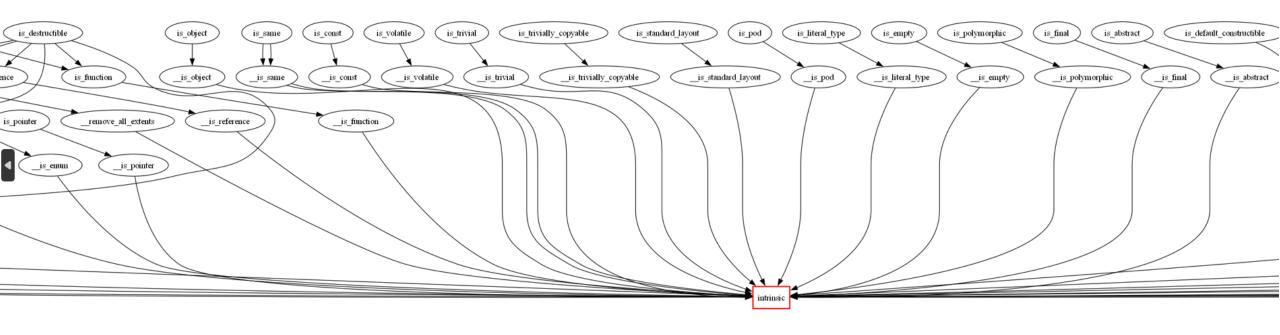




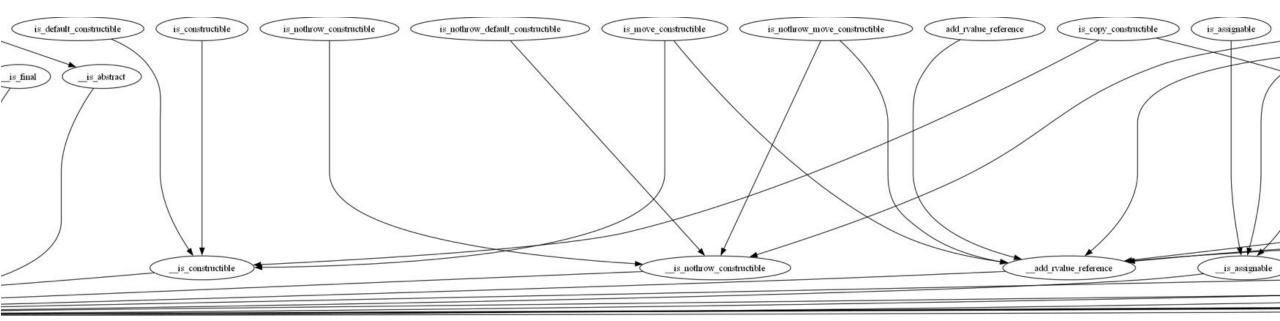




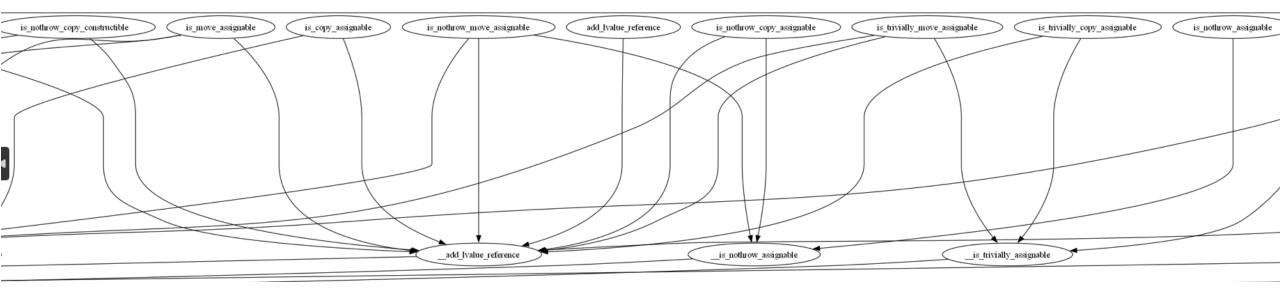




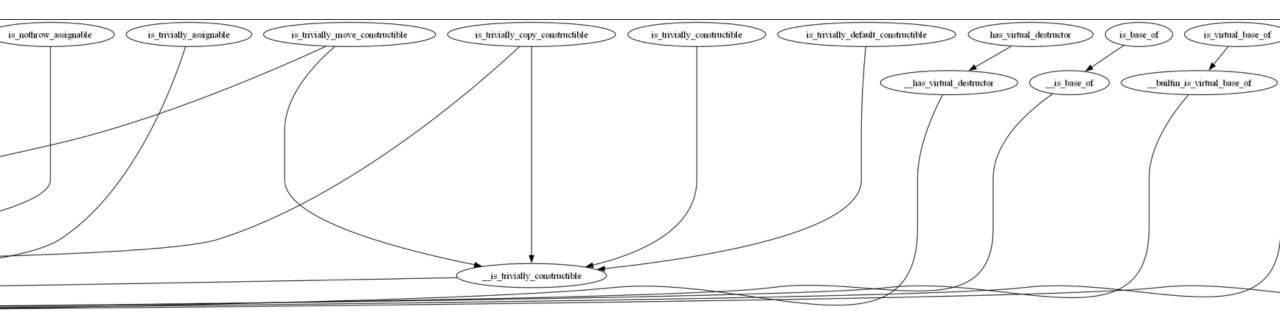














Comparative Analysis



- Rich (a.k.a complicated (convoluted?) template-based type traits
- Late comer into the intrinsics world



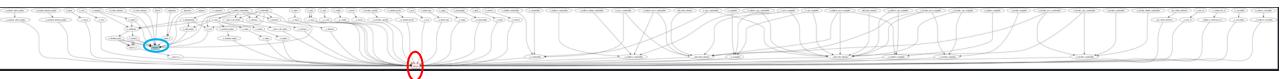




- Most heavily inclined towards intrinsics-based type traits
- Probably started like this from the get-go (just my conjecture)

CLANG (libcxx)

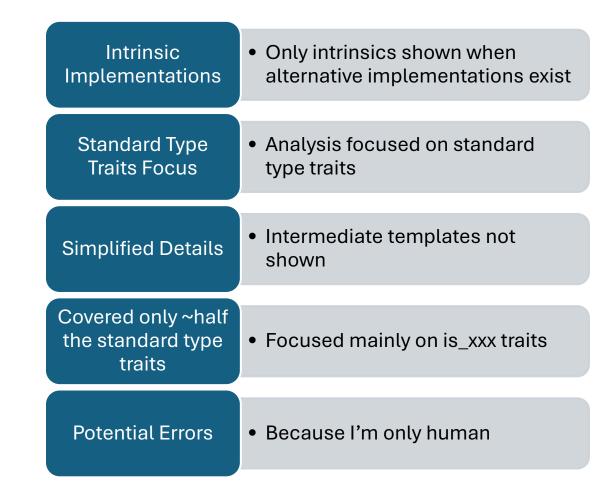




- Somewhat of a middle ground between clang and MSVC
- Increasingly dependent on intrinsics



Assumptions and Caveats



Cross-Toolchain Support

- MSVC -> clang
- Libcxx (clang) -> gcc

Recap - Drawbacks and Limitations of Current Type Trait Implementations

Complicated, hard to follow, logical programming style

- Presumably hard to maintain
- Long cryptic compilation errors (concepts only partly to the rescue)

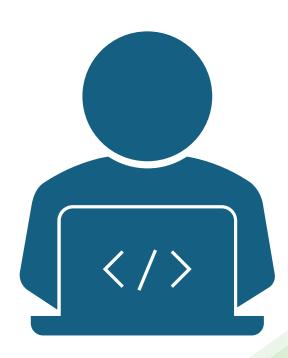
Template-based ones likely slow to compile

• The composite ones may often require maintenance

Some traits require "magic"

- e.g.: is_implicit_lifetime (P2674)
- Magic wands often trivially and portably implementable via reflection





Static Reflection



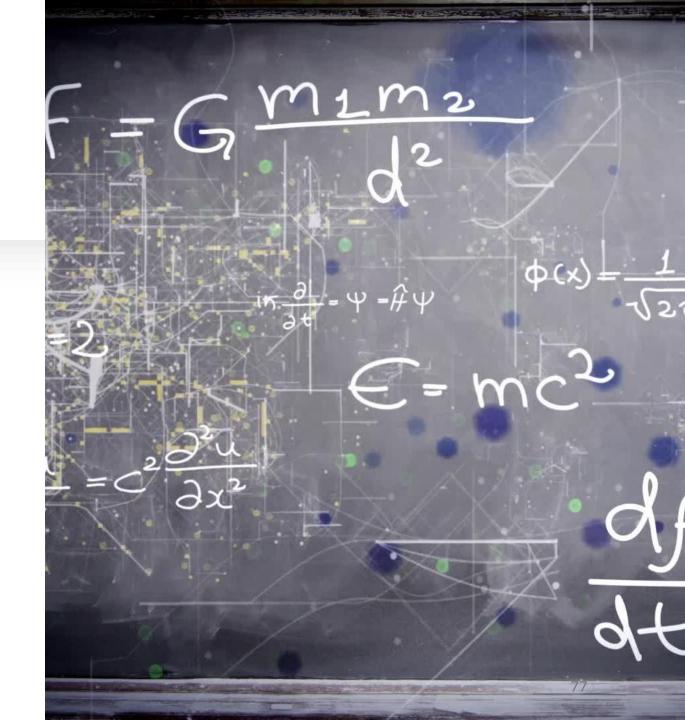


- What do we mean by "static"?
 - Static = compile time
 - Dynamic reflection is more prevalent in other languages

Current State

Key Features Approved for C++26

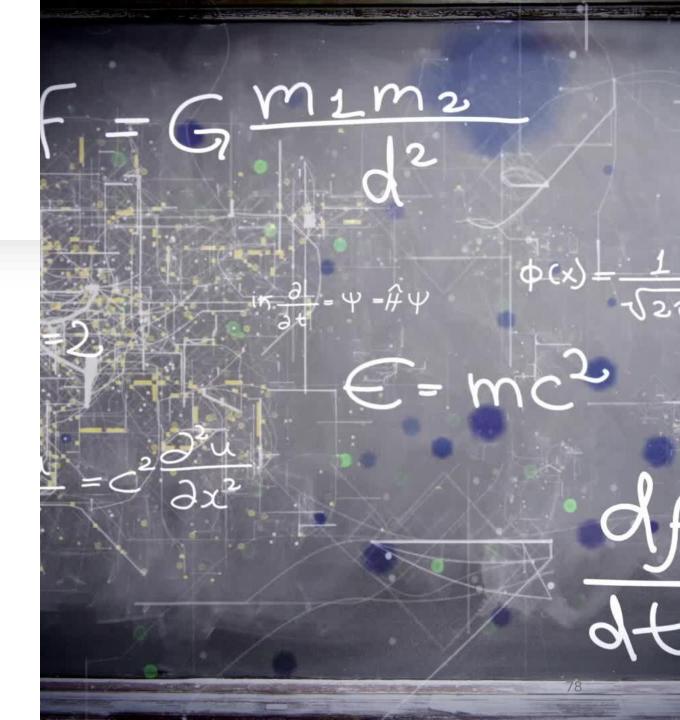
- 1. Approved in plenary with value-based approach (P2996)
- 2. Includes introspection but excludes injection (except splicing and define_aggregate)
- 3. No AST modifications; reflection uses pure value semantics
- 4. Expansion statements (*template for*) also approved (P1306)



Current State

Key Points About std::meta::info

- 1. Relies on std::meta::info opaque type
- 2. Motivated by future compatibility with C++ type model
- 3. Future type-full wrapper libraries?



```
namespace std {
  namespace meta {
    using info = decltype(^^::);
  }
}
```

std::meta::info

- any (C++) type and type alias
- any function or member function
- any variable, static data member, or structured binding
- any non-static data member
- any enumerator
- any template
- any namespace (including the global namespace) or namespace alias
- any object that is a *permitted result of a constant expression*
- any value with *structural type* that is a permitted result of a constant expression
- the null reflection (when default-constructed)

std::meta::info

```
constexpr auto r = ^{int};
typename [r:] x = 42; // Same as: int x = 42;
typename [^^char:] c = '*'; // Same as: char c = '*';
```

```
constexpr auto r = ^{int};
typename [r:] x = 42; // Same as: int x = 42;
typename [^^char:] c = '*'; // Same as: char c = '*';
```

```
Oops-should actually be [:r:] conster ; typename [r:] x = 42; // Same as: int x = 42; typename [^^char:] c = '*'; // Same as: char c = '*';
```

```
constexpr auto r = ^{int};
typename [r:] x = 42; // Same as: int x = 42;
typename [^^char:] c = '*'; // Same as: char c = '*';
```

```
struct S { unsigned i:2, j:6; };
consteval auto member_number(int n) {
    if (n == 0) return ^^S::i;
    else if (n == 1) return ^^S::j;
int main() {
    S s\{0, 0\};
    s.[member_number(1):] = 42; // Same as: s.j = 42;
    s.[member_number(5):] = 0; // Error (member_number(5) is not a constant)
```

Selecting Members

```
struct S { unsigned i:2, j:6; };
consteval auto member_number(int n) {
    if (n == 0) return ^^S::i;
    else if (n == 1) return ^^S::j;
int main() {
    S = \{0, 0\};
    s.[member_number(1):] = 42; // Same as: s.j = 42;
    s.[member_number(5):] = 0; // Error (member_number(5) is not a constant).
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Selecting Members

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struct S { unsigned i:2, j:6; };
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int main() {
    S s\{0, 0\};
    s.[member_number(1):] = 42; // Same as: s.j = 42;
    s. [member_number(5):] = 0; // Error (member_number(5) is not a constant).
```

Selecting Members

```
constexpr std::array types = {^^int, ^^float, ^^double};
constexpr std::array sizes = []{
   std::array<std::size_t, types.size()> r;
   std::views::transform(types, r.begin(), std::meta::size_of);
   return r;
}();
```

List of Types to List of Sizes

```
template <typename E>
 requires std::is enum v<E>
constexpr std::string enum_to_string(E value) {
 template for (constexpr auto e : std::meta::enumerators_of(^^E)) {
   if (value == [:e:]) {
      return std::string(std::meta::identifier of(e));
 return "<unnamed>";
enum Color { red, green, blue };
static assert(enum to string(Color::red) == "red");
static assert(enum to string(Color(42)) == "<unnamed>");
```

Enum to String

The Discarded Candidate – Type-Based Reflection

Challenges of Value-Based Reflection

- 1. Type hierarchy (rather than meta::info values)
- 2. Offers a complex OO API
- 3. Likely hard on build times and memory usage
- 4. May hinder future language scheme changes

Reflection and Type Traits



• Can we use reflection to yank intrinsics out of standard traits implementations?

Perhaps... Probably... Mostly...

- Conceptual POC (Bloomberg experimental P2996 GCC fork on Godbolt)
- Aided by MS Copilot + Think Deeper
- ~half the current standard type traits implemented, with no stdlib dependencies

https://compiler-explorer.com/z/4cn5j45Gv





```
// PRIMARY TYPE TRAITS
template <typename T>
struct is_void : std::bool_constant<</pre>
    std::meta::is_same_type( ^^T, ^^void )
> { };
template <typename T>
struct is null pointer : std::bool constant<
    std::meta::is same type( ^^T, ^^std::nullptr t )
> { };
template <typename T>
struct is_integral : std::bool_constant
    std::meta::is integral type( ^^T )
> { };
template <typename T>
struct is_floating_point : std::bool_constant<</pre>
    std::meta::is_floating_point_type( ^^T )
};
template <typename T>
struct is_array : std::bool_constant
    std::meta::is_array_type( ^^T )
> { };
template <typename T>
struct is_pointer : std::bool_constant
    std::meta::is pointer type( ^^T )
> { };
```

```
// TYPE MODIFICATIONS
template <typename T>
using remove_const_t = typename [: std::meta::remove_const( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using remove volatile t = typename [: std::meta::remove volatile( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using remove cv t = typename [: std::meta::remove cv( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using remove reference t = typename [: std::meta::remove reference( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using remove pointer t = typename [: std::meta::remove pointer( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using add_pointer_t = typename [: std::meta::add_pointer( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using add_lvalue_reference_t = [: std::meta::add_lvalue_reference( ^^T ) :];
template <typename T>
using add_rvalue_reference_t = [: std::meta::add_rvalue_reference(_^^T_) :];
```



Should we implement *all* type traits based on reflection?



- Definitely worth looking into
- Should be faster than complex templatebased implementations
 - But possibly a little slower than direct intrinsics invocations (due to the added thin template layer)
- Code would be trivial where matching reflection traits exist
 - That's the low hanging fruit we should start with
- Not doing this would create 2 sources of truth
 - Which might diverge if either one is buggy
 - "In terms of" rocks!



Summary and Future Directions

TLDR

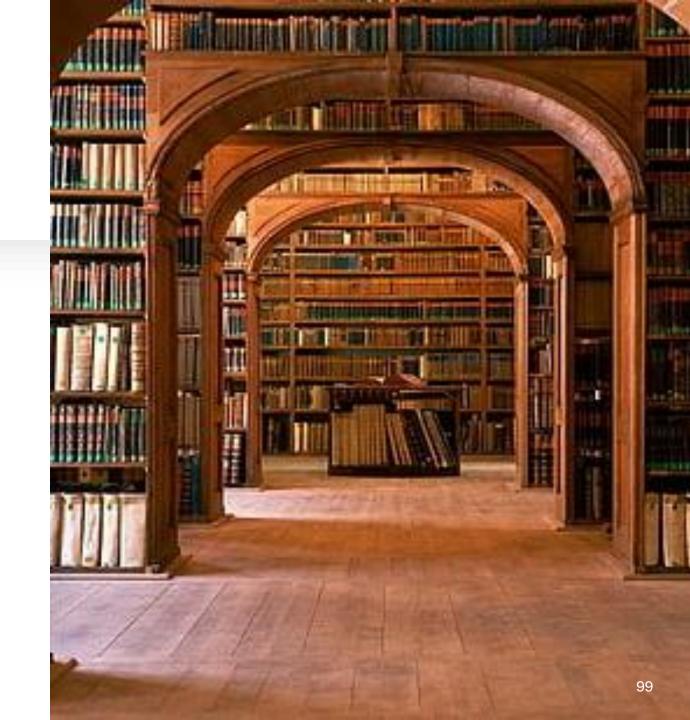
- Type traits are mostly implemented via compiler intrinsics, but often still via highly complex and longbuilding template shenanigans
- Value-based (std::meta::info) static reflection is coming in C++26
 - Initially without code injection, only with splicing
- Many type traits are directly implementable via reflection metafunctions
 - Rather than templates and compiler intrinsics
- Which begs the question...

Can we have standard library implementations completely independent from toolchains?



<meta> will have to be compiler-specific

- An always non-portable part of the standard library
- May have to use bespoke utilities in order to avoid cyclic dependencies.
- Example of a <meta> implementation from the Bloomberg clang P2996 fork:
- https://github.com/bloomberg/clangp2996/blob/p2996/libcxx/include/meta





Key Takeaway

Reflection-based type traits are key to future decoupling between libraries and toolchains

- If that's what we want
 - Possible motivation: combining different vendors' strengths and velocities in implementing new C++ standards
 - Additional motivation: single source of truth
- We can get there gradually by ever-increasing the portable parts, ultimately being left only with <meta> and a few other performance-heavy vendor-specific parts
 - Which would also be standardized, but wouldn't have portable implementations
- Disclaimer These are my own opinions. Cross-compiler portability of the standard library is currently not a stated goal of WG21.

Thank You for joining me in my reflections on the future!



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Questions?





