

# Programming with Threads

## CS 475

### Topics

- Shared variables
- The need for synchronization
- Synchronizing with semaphores
- Thread safety and reentrancy
- Races and deadlocks

This lecture is based upon Sections 13.3-8 of Computer Systems: A Programmer's Perspective  
by Bryant & O'Halloran

## Shared Variables in Threaded C Programs

**Question:** Which variables in a threaded C program are shared variables?

- The answer is not as simple as “global variables are shared” and “stack variables are private”.

**Requires answers to the following questions:**

- What is the memory model for threads?
- How are variables mapped to memory instances?
- How many threads reference each of these instances?

# Threads Memory Model

## Conceptual model:

- Each thread runs in the context of a process.
- Each thread has its own separate thread context.
  - Thread ID, stack, stack pointer, program counter, condition codes, and general purpose registers.
- All threads share the remaining process context.
  - Code, data, heap, and shared library segments of the process virtual address space.
  - Open files and installed handlers

## Operationally, this model is not strictly enforced:

- While register values are truly separate and protected....
- Any thread can read and write the stack of any other thread.

*Mismatch between the conceptual and operation model is a source of confusion and errors.*

- 3 -

CS 475

# Example of Threads Accessing Another Thread's Stack

```
char **ptr; /* global */

int main()
{
    int i;
    pthread_t tid;
    char *msgs[N] = {
        "Hello from foo",
        "Hello from bar"
    };
    ptr = msgs;
    for (i = 0; i < 2; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid,
            NULL,
            thread,
            (void *)i);
    Pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp)
{
    int myid = (int)vargp;
    static int svar = 0;

    printf("[%d]: %s (svar=%d)\n",
        myid, ptr[myid], ++svar);
}
```

*Peer threads access main thread's stack indirectly through global ptr variable*

- 4 -

CS 475

## Mapping Variables to Mem. Instances

Global var: 1 instance (ptr [data])

Local automatic vars: 1 instance (i.m, msgs.m )

```
char **ptr; /* global */

int main()
{
    int i;
    pthread_t tid;
    char *msgs[N] = {
        "Hello from foo",
        "Hello from bar"
    };
    ptr = msgs;
    for (i = 0; i < 2; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid,
            NULL,
            thread,
            (void *)i);
    Pthread_exit(NULL);
}
```

Local automatic var: 2 instances ( myid.p0[peer thread 0's stack], myid.p1[peer thread 1's stack] )

```
/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp)
{
    int myid = (int)vargp;
    static int svar = 0;

    printf("[%d]: %s (svar=%d)\n",
        myid, ptr[myid], ++svar);
}
```

Local static var: 1 instance (svar [data])

- 5 -

CS 475

## Shared Variable Analysis

Which variables are shared?

Variable instance	Referenced by main thread?	Referenced by peer thread 0?	Referenced by peer thread 1?
ptr	yes	yes	yes
svar	no	yes	yes
i.m	yes	no	no
msgs.m	yes	yes	yes
myid.p0	no	yes	no
myid.p1	no	no	yes

**Answer: A variable x is shared iff multiple threads reference at least one instance of x. Thus:**

- ptr, svar, and msgs are shared.
- i and myid are **NOT** shared.

- 6 -

CS 475

## badcnt.c: An Improperly Synchronized Threaded Program

```
unsigned int cnt = 0; /* shared */

int main() {
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;
    Pthread_create(&tid1, NULL,
                  count, NULL);
    Pthread_create(&tid2, NULL,
                  count, NULL);

    Pthread_join(tid1, NULL);
    Pthread_join(tid2, NULL);

    if (cnt != (unsigned)NITERS*2)
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%d\n",
              cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%d\n",
              cnt);
}
```

```
/* thread routine */
void *count(void *arg) {
    int i;
    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++)
        cnt++;
    return NULL;
}
```

```
linux> ./badcnt
BOOM! cnt=198841183

linux> ./badcnt
BOOM! cnt=198261801

linux> ./badcnt
BOOM! cnt=198269672
```

**cnt should be  
equal to 200,000,000.  
What went wrong?!**

CS 475

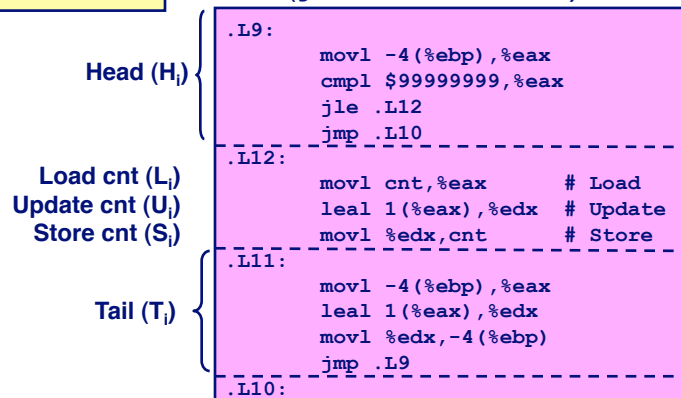
- 7 -

## Assembly Code for Counter Loop

C code for counter loop

```
for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++)
    cnt++;
```

Corresponding asm code  
(gcc -O0 -fforce-mem)



- 8 -

CS 475

## Concurrent Execution

**Key idea:** In general, any sequentially consistent interleaving is possible, but some are incorrect!

- $I_i$  denotes that thread  $i$  executes instruction  $I$
- $\%eax_i$  is the contents of  $\%eax$  in thread  $i$ 's context

$i$ (thread)	$instr_i$	$\%eax_1$	$\%eax_2$	cnt
1	$H_1$	-	-	0
1	$L_1$	0	-	0
1	$U_1$	1	-	0
1	$S_1$	1	-	1
2	$H_2$	-	-	1
2	$L_2$	-	1	1
2	$U_2$	-	2	1
2	$S_2$	-	2	2
2	$T_2$	-	2	2
1	$T_1$	1	-	2

OK

- 9 -

CS 475

## Concurrent Execution (cont)

**Incorrect ordering:** two threads increment the counter, but the result is 1 instead of 2.

$i$ (thread)	$instr_i$	$\%eax_1$	$\%eax_2$	cnt
1	$H_1$	-	-	0
1	$L_1$	0	-	0
1	$U_1$	1	-	0
2	$H_2$	-	-	0
2	$L_2$	-	0	0
1	$S_1$	1	-	1
1	$T_1$	1	-	1
2	$U_2$	-	1	1
2	$S_2$	-	1	1
2	$T_2$	-	1	1

Oops!

- 10 -

CS 475

## Concurrent Execution (cont)

How about this ordering?

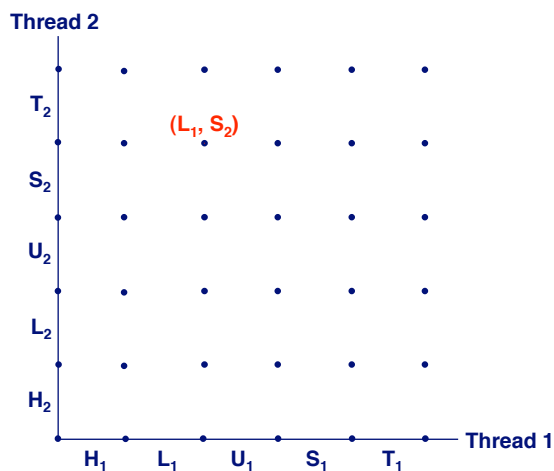
i (thread)	instr <sub>i</sub>	%eax <sub>1</sub>	%eax <sub>2</sub>	cnt
1	H <sub>1</sub>			
1	L <sub>1</sub>			
2	H <sub>2</sub>			
2	L <sub>2</sub>			
2	U <sub>2</sub>			
2	S <sub>2</sub>			
1	U <sub>1</sub>			
1	S <sub>1</sub>			
1	T <sub>1</sub>			
2	T <sub>2</sub>			

We can clarify our understanding of concurrent execution with the help of the *progress graph*

– 11 –

CS 475

## Progress Graphs



A *progress graph* depicts the discrete *execution state space* of concurrent threads.

Each axis corresponds to the sequential order of instructions in a thread.

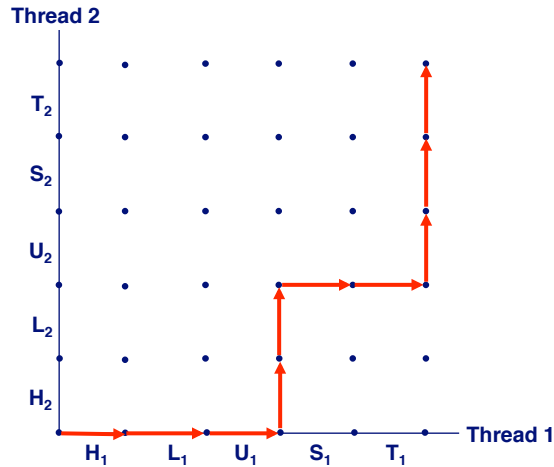
Each point corresponds to a possible *execution state* (Inst<sub>1</sub>, Inst<sub>2</sub>).

E.g., (L<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>) denotes state where thread 1 has completed L<sub>1</sub> and thread 2 has completed S<sub>2</sub>.

– 12 –

CS 475

## Trajectories in Progress Graphs



A **trajectory** is a sequence of legal state transitions that describes one possible concurrent execution of the threads.

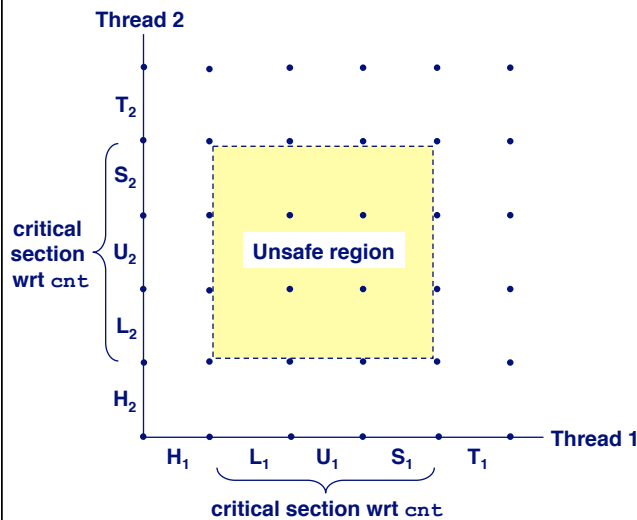
Example:

$H_1, L_1, U_1, H_2, L_2, S_1, T_1, U_2, S_2, T_2$

- 13 -

CS 475

## Critical Sections and Unsafe Regions



$L, U,$  and  $S$  form a **critical section** with respect to the shared variable `cnt`.

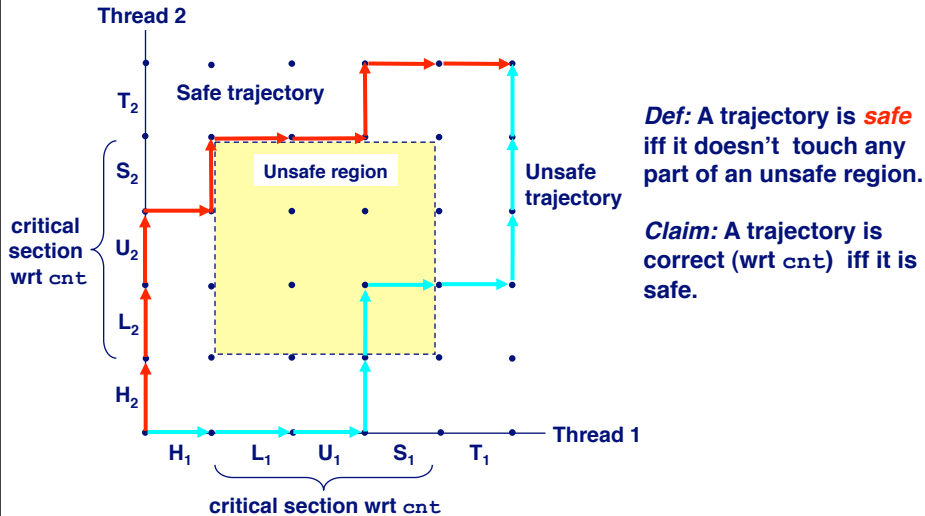
Instructions in critical sections (wrt to some shared variable) should not be interleaved.

Sets of states where such interleaving occurs form **unsafe regions**.

- 14 -

CS 475

## Safe and Unsafe Trajectories



- 15 -

CS 475

## Semaphores

**Question:** How can we guarantee a safe trajectory?

- We must *synchronize* the threads so that they never enter an unsafe state.

**Classic solution:** Dijkstra's P and V operations on semaphores.

- **semaphore:** non-negative integer synchronization variable.
  - P(s): [ while (s == 0) wait(); s--; ]
    - » Dutch for "Proberen" (test)
  - V(s): [ s++; ]
    - » Dutch for "Verhogen" (increment)
- OS guarantees that operations between brackets [ ] are executed indivisibly.
  - Only one P or V operation at a time can modify s.
  - When while loop in P terminates, only that P can decrement s.

**Semaphore invariant:** ( $s \geq 0$ )

- 16 -

CS 475



## Safe Sharing with Semaphores

Here is how we would use P and V operations to synchronize the threads that update cnt.

```
/* Semaphore s is initially 1 */

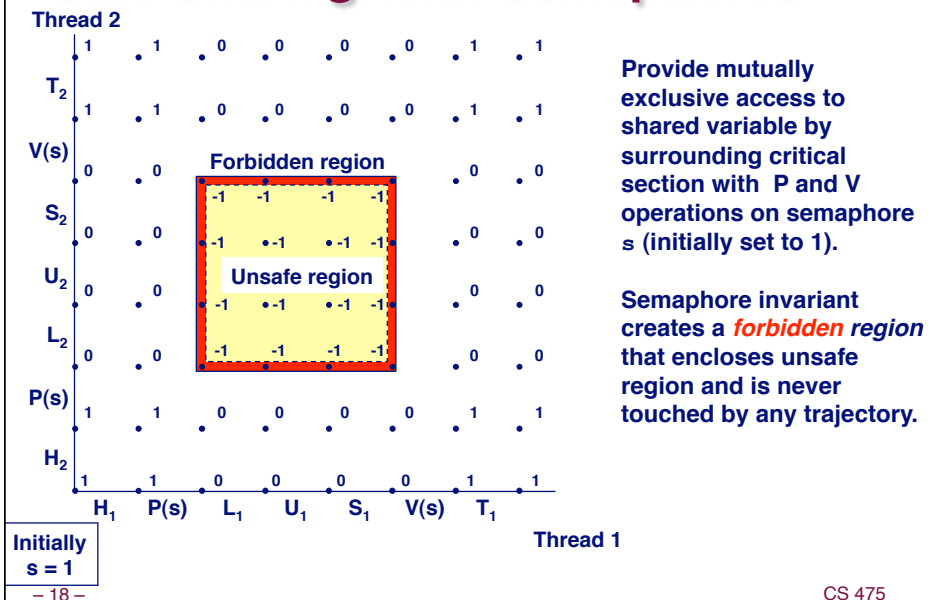
/* Thread routine */
void *count(void *arg)
{
    int i;

    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
        P(s);
        cnt++;
        V(s);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

- 17 -

CS 475

## Safe Sharing With Semaphores



- 18 -

CS 475

## POSIX Semaphores

```
/* Initialize semaphore sem to value */
/* pshared=0 if thread, pshared=1 if process */
void Sem_init(sem_t *sem, int pshared, unsigned int value) {
    if (sem_init(sem, pshared, value) < 0)
        unix_error("Sem_init");
}

/* P operation on semaphore sem */
void P(sem_t *sem) {
    if (sem_wait(sem))
        unix_error("P");
}

/* V operation on semaphore sem */
void V(sem_t *sem) {
    if (sem_post(sem))
        unix_error("V");
}
```

- 19 -

CS 475

## Sharing With POSIX Semaphores

```
/* goodcnt.c - properly sync'd
counter program */
#include "csapp.h"
#define NITERS 10000000

unsigned int cnt; /* counter */
sem_t sem; /* semaphore */

int main() {
    pthread_t tid1, tid2;

    Sem_init(&sem, 0, 1); /* sem=1 */

    /* create 2 threads and wait */
    ...

    if (cnt != (unsigned)NITERS*2)
        printf("BOOM! cnt=%d\n", cnt);
    else
        printf("OK cnt=%d\n", cnt);
    exit(0);
}
```

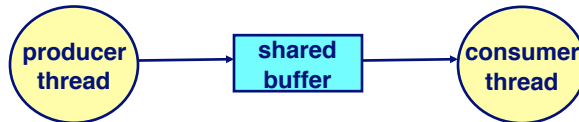
```
/* thread routine */
void *count(void *arg)
{
    int i;

    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
        P(&sem);
        cnt++;
        V(&sem);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

- 20 -

CS 475

## Signaling With Semaphores



### Common synchronization pattern:

- Producer waits for slot, inserts item in buffer, and “signals” consumer.
- Consumer waits for item, removes it from buffer, and “signals” producer.
  - “signals” in this context has nothing to do with Unix signals

### Examples

- Multimedia processing:
  - Producer creates MPEG video frames, consumer renders the frames
- Event-driven graphical user interfaces
  - Producer detects mouse clicks, mouse movements, and keyboard hits and inserts corresponding events in buffer.
  - Consumer retrieves events from buffer and paints the display.

– 21 –

CS 475

## Producer-Consumer on a Buffer That Holds One Item

```
/* buf1.c - producer-consumer
on 1-element buffer */
#include "csapp.h"

#define NITERS 5

void *producer(void *arg);
void *consumer(void *arg);

struct {
    int buf; /* shared var */
    sem_t full; /* sems */
    sem_t empty;
} shared;
```

```
int main() {
    pthread_t tid_producer;
    pthread_t tid_consumer;

    /* initialize the semaphores */
    Sem_init(&shared.empty, 0, 1);
    Sem_init(&shared.full, 0, 0);

    /* create threads and wait */
    Pthread_create(&tid_producer, NULL,
                  producer, NULL);
    Pthread_create(&tid_consumer, NULL,
                  consumer, NULL);
    Pthread_join(tid_producer, NULL);
    Pthread_join(tid_consumer, NULL);

    exit(0);
}
```

– 22 –

CS 475

## Producer-Consumer (cont)

Initially: empty = 1, full = 0.

```
/* producer thread */
void *producer(void *arg) {
    int i, item;

    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
        /* produce item */
        item = i;
        printf("produced %d\n",
            item);

        /* write item to buf */
        P(&shared.empty);
        shared.buf = item;
        V(&shared.full);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

```
/* consumer thread */
void *consumer(void *arg) {
    int i, item;

    for (i=0; i<NITERS; i++) {
        /* read item from buf */
        P(&shared.full);
        item = shared.buf;
        V(&shared.empty);

        /* consume item */
        printf("consumed %d\n",
            item);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

- 23 -

CS 475

## Thread Safety

Functions called from a thread must be **thread-safe**.

We identify four (non-disjoint) classes of thread-unsafe functions:

- Class 1: Failing to protect shared variables.
- Class 2: Relying on persistent state across invocations.
- Class 3: Returning a pointer to a static variable.
- Class 4: Calling thread-unsafe functions.

- 24 -

CS 475

# Thread-Unsafe Functions

## Class 1: Failing to protect shared variables.

- **Fix:** Use P and V semaphore operations.
- **Issue:** Synchronization operations will slow down code.
- **Example:** `goodcnt.c`

– 25 –

CS 475

# Thread-Unsafe Functions (cont)

## Class 2: Relying on persistent state across multiple function invocations.

- **Random number generator relies on static state**
- **Fix:** Rewrite function so that caller passes in all necessary state.

```
/* rand - return pseudo-random integer on 0..32767 */
int rand(void)
{
    static unsigned int next = 1;
    next = next*1103515245 + 12345;
    return (unsigned int) (next/65536) % 32768;
}

/* srand - set seed for rand() */
void srand(unsigned int seed)
{
    next = seed;
}
```

– 26 –

CS 475

## Thread-Unsafe Functions (cont)

### Class 3: Returning a ptr to a static variable.

#### Fixes:

- 1. Rewrite code so caller passes pointer to struct.

» Issue: Requires changes in caller and callee.

```
struct hostent
*gethostbyname(char name)
{
    static struct hostent h;
    <contact DNS and fill in h>
    return &h;
}
```

```
hostp = Malloc(...);
gethostbyname r(name, hostp);
```

- 2. *Lock-and-copy*

» Issue: Requires only simple changes in caller (and none in callee)

» However, caller must free memory.

```
struct hostent
*gethostbyname_ts(char *p)
{
    struct hostent *q = Malloc(...);
    P(&mutex); /* lock */
    p = gethostbyname(name);
    *q = *p; /* copy */
    V(&mutex);
    return q;
}
```

- 27 -

## Thread-Unsafe Functions

### Class 4: Calling thread-unsafe functions.

- Calling one thread-unsafe function makes an entire function thread-unsafe.
- Fix: Modify the function so it calls only thread-safe functions

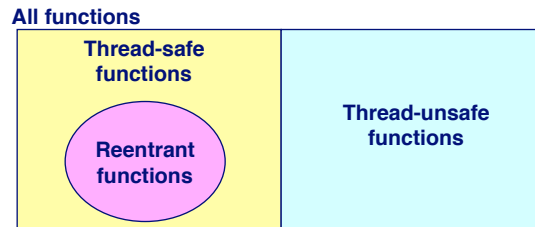
- 28 -

CS 475

# Reentrant Functions

A function is **reentrant** iff it accesses **NO** shared variables when called from multiple threads.

- Reentrant functions are a proper subset of the set of thread-safe functions.



- **NOTE:** The fixes to Class 2 and 3 thread-unsafe functions require modifying the function to make it reentrant.

# Thread-Safe Library Functions

All functions in the Standard C Library (at the back of your K&R text) are thread-safe.

- Examples: malloc, free, printf, scanf

Most Unix system calls are thread-safe, with a few exceptions:

Thread-unsafe function	Class	Reentrant version
asctime	3	asctime_r
ctime	3	ctime_r
gethostbyaddr	3	gethostbyaddr_r
gethostbyname	3	gethostbyname_r
inet_ntoa	3	(none)
localtime	3	localtime_r
rand	2	rand_r

## Races

A **race** occurs when the correctness of the program depends on one thread reaching point x before another thread reaches point y.

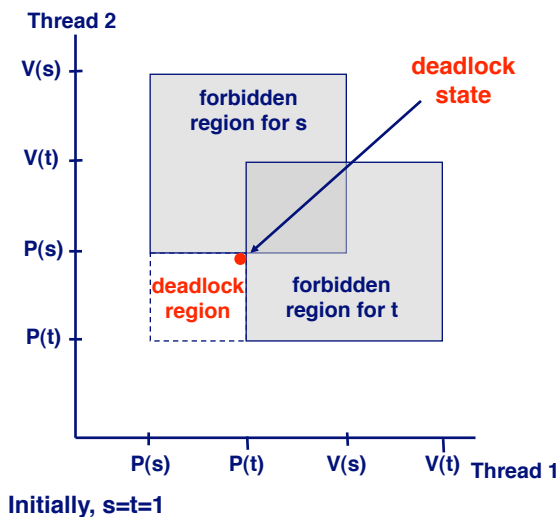
```
/* a threaded program with a race */
int main() {
    pthread_t tid[N];
    int i;
    for (i = 0; i < N; i++)
        Pthread_create(&tid[i], NULL, thread, &i);
    for (i = 0; i < N; i++)
        Pthread_join(tid[i], NULL);
    exit(0);
}

/* thread routine */
void *thread(void *vargp) {
    int myid = *((int *)vargp);
    printf("Hello from thread %d\n", myid);
    return NULL;
}
```

- 31 -

CS 475

## Deadlock



Locking introduces the potential for **deadlock**: waiting for a condition that will never be true.

Any trajectory that enters the **deadlock region** will eventually reach the **deadlock state**, waiting for either *s* or *t* to become nonzero.

Other trajectories luck out and skirt the deadlock region.

Unfortunate fact: deadlock is often non-deterministic.

- 32 -

CS 475



# Threads Summary

Threads provide a mechanism for writing concurrent programs.

Threads have clear advantages

- Somewhat cheaper than processes.
- Easy to share data between threads.

However, the ease of sharing has a cost:

- Easy to introduce subtle synchronization errors.
- Tread carefully with threads!

For more info:

- Online tutorials (see useful links on class web page)
- Many books, for example:
  - D. Butenhof, “Programming with Posix Threads”, Addison-Wesley, 1997.
  - B. Lewis & D. Berg, “Multithreaded Programming with Pthreads”, Prentice Hall , 1998