Return to java.util.concurrent

CSCI 5828: Foundations of Software Engineering
Lecture 25 — 11/17/2015
Goals

• Explore the services of java.util.concurrent
  • ExecutorService
  • Callable/Future
  • ForkJoinPool and ForkJoinTask

• The examples in this lecture come from the excellent book: Programming Concurrency on the JVM from Pragmatic Programmers

• Source Code for these examples is available here:
  • https://pragprog.com/book/vspcon/programming-concurrency-on-the-jvm#links

• I’m not allowed to distribute it myself
ExecutorService (I)

• ExecutorService is a Java interface that defines a common set of services for an abstract thread pool;
  • this interface has a variety of concrete implementations that provide a range of concurrent behavior to developers

• What’s a thread pool? (A review)
  • Thread creation is a slow process
  • Thread pools create a bunch of threads all at once (typically at launch)
  • When a new thread is needed, one is taken from the pool and it starts executing immediately
    • very helpful in situations where, e.g., a server is responding to incoming network requests
ExecutorService (II)

• Static factory methods on the Executors class are used to create instances of the ExecutorService; for instance
  
  • **CachedThreadPool**: creates threads as needed but will reuse previous ones if they are available
  
  • **FixedThreadPool**: creates a fixed set of threads
  
  • **ScheduledThreadPool**: creates a thread pool that can execute tasks after a delay or periodically
  
  • **SingleThreadExecutor**: creates a thread pool with only a single thread

• You write code that only depends on the `interface` ExecutorService and then be free to select the actual threading behavior you get *at run-time* based on external factors
  
  • you can even switch threading behaviors *on the fly*
ExecutorService (III)

• The API of the ExecutorService allows you to
  • submit a single task for execution
  • submit a collection of tasks for execution
    • where you want all of the tasks results (invokeAll)
    • or where you want just one of the results (invokeAny)
  • shutdown the thread pool when you are done with it
Callable/Future: Making this all work

• In order to give tasks to the thread pool and receive results back, you make use of two additional interfaces
  • Callable\(<T>\) and Future\(<T>\)
  
• Both make use of Java generics to give flexibility in the return types of the computation
  • For instance, I can promise that my task returns a string

```java
Callable\<String> callMe = new Callable\<String\>() {
    public String call() throws Exception {
        ...; return result;
    }
}
```

• callMe is now a Task that I can hand to an ExecutorService
Callable/Future (II)

- When I give callMe to an ExecutorService, it is going to hand the task to a thread and ask the thread to execute it
  - At the time, we have no idea how long it will take for the task to complete
    - Thus, the ExecutorService gives me an instance of Future<String> so I can get the value once the task is complete
      - Future<String> myString = service.submit(callMe);
  - This call does NOT block, I get a reference to myString almost immediately
  - I can then decide to retrieve the string whenever I need it by calling get()
    - String result = myString.get();
  - This call MAY block, if the task is still being executed; otherwise, I get the result right away. I can also call a version of get() that accepts a timeout.
Portfolio Calculator (I)

• A simple program to retrieve stock quotes from Yahoo
  • Designed as one abstract superclass AbstractNAV (Net Asset Value)
    • methods for
      • reading in stock symbols and number of shares
      • timing how long it takes to calculate the portfolio
  • Two subclasses
    • one sequential => loops over list of symbols and calls Yahoo to get current price
    • one concurrent => creates futures for each stock to retrieve prices; hands them all over to an executor service to execute in parallel
Portfolio Calculator (II)

• Since these tasks are io bound, the program needs to decide how many threads it will need
  
  • Each task is going to be blocked for most of its life and then it will do a single calculation: \( \text{numberOfShares} \times \text{retrievedPrice} \)
  
  • We estimate that waiting for Yahoo to give us the current price is going to take about 90% of the task’s life cycle
  
  • So to estimate the number of threads, we use the following formula
    
    • \( \text{Number of Threads} = \frac{\text{Number of Cores}}{1 - \text{Blocking Coefficient}} \)
  
  • My machine has 8 cores, so
    
    • \( \frac{8}{1-0.9} = \frac{8}{0.1} = 80 \) threads
It then creates an array to store all of our Callable objects

```
final List<Callable<Double>> partitions = new ArrayList<Callable<Double>>();
```

It populates that List by creating one Callable<Double> for each stock symbol

```
It then hands the list over to the executor service which hands back a list of Future<Double> objects

final List<Future<Double>> valueOfStocks = executorPool.invokeAll(partitions, 10000, TimeUnit.SECONDS);
```

Finally, it loops over each Future object and totals up the final value

```
for (final Future<Double> valueOfAStock : valueOfStocks) {
    netAssetValue += valueOfAStock.get();
}
```

It is this call to get() that can finally block, waiting for the task to complete
Portfolio Calculator (IV)

• Let’s see this in action
  • As you will see, the concurrent version of the program is significantly faster
    • Why? => Latency!
  • Each request to Yahoo takes a certain amount of time to create the connection, wait for Yahoo to retrieve the data, and stream the result back
  • With the sequential version of the program, we take that latency and add it for each stock request; say the latency was 2 seconds
    • For 80 stocks, we would expect to wait 160 seconds for the whole sequential program to complete
    • In the concurrent program, all tasks contact Yahoo at the same time, the 2 second latency for each task overlaps. As a result, the program takes ~2-3 seconds
Finding Primes (again)

• The reason we saw such an amazing speed-up with the previous program was due to the fact that its tasks were IO-bound.
  
  • With compute-bound tasks, we have to limit the number of threads to the number of cores

• I won’t spend much time on this example since we’ve seen it many times
  
  • Let’s just look at the code briefly to see how the code creates a bunch of Callable<Integer> tasks that count primes for a given partition

  • The executor service then gives us back a list of Future<Integer> and we call those to total up the number of primes in a given range
Coordinating Threads (I)

• A key challenge in the design of concurrent systems is the coordination of threads

• We may want to

  • start them
  • wait for them to finish
  • assign tasks to them
  • retrieve results from them
  • allow threads to exchange data
  • etc.
Coordinating Threads (II)

• With the ExecutorService, the most typical case now involves
  • submitting a task to a thread pool of type Callable
  • receiving a Future in response
  • when ready, calling get() on the Future to retrieve the result

• Let’s see this in action with an example called File Size Calculator
  • First, let’s take a look at the sequential version of this program

• Design is straightforward; recursive function that returns either the size for a single file or, for directories, the combined size of all of its children
Disk Cache

- With programs that target the disk, performance will vary
  - The first time through a particular section of the disk, the time will be slower than subsequent runs on the same section of the disk
- The reason for this is the disk cache
  - The operating system will
    - take the most recently read sections of disk
    - and cache them in memory
    - under the assumption that they will be read again fairly soon
- The difference may not be major but it will be there
  - First run sequential on /usr: 36.02 seconds; Second run: 27.3 seconds
First Stab at Concurrency

- Creates a thread pool of 100 threads
- Makes use of recursive function to calculate size of files and directories
  - If its handed a file, return the file size
  - If its handed a directory
    - loop through children
      - submit() a task to the thread pool to calculate the size of the child
        - Each task is a Callable<Long>
          - Thread pool returns a Future<Long> that gets added to an array
            - loop through array calling get() on each Future to add up subtotals
            - return the result
Result? DEADLOCK!

- This approach to the program has a flaw that appears on “deep directories”
  - Each task adds new tasks to the thread pool and then waits for those tasks to return
  - That means that the calling task is STILL ON THE POOL
    - blocked waiting for its subtasks to complete
  - If your directory has lots of subdirectories (more than 100 in this case)
    - You can get into the situation where each of the 100 threads in the thread pool are blocked waiting for subdirectory calculations to complete
      - when this happens, the program deadlocks
        - or thanks to the timeout that we set, eventually the timeout fires and the program terminates
Discussion

• This problem is unfortunate because
  • the approach is straightforward and understandable
    • you’d likely come up with it on a first pass design

• But, a machine’s resources are finite
  • you might be able to make this code work on more directories by upping the number of threads
  • but that approach is not generic
    • eventually you’ll run into the limit concerning the number of threads the operating system will allow a single process to create
    • and you’ll be stuck
New Approach: Find Directories, Total Later

• To make progress, we need an approach that
  • submits tasks for sub-directories
    • but doesn’t require the submitting task to hang around for the results
• New Approach
  • Create a data structure that holds the total size of a directory’s files and a list of all of that directory’s sub-directories
  • Tasks now calculate the size of files in their assigned directory and create a list of all subdirectories; allowing them to complete and not stick around
  • The main thread takes care of submitting new tasks and totaling results
    • 6 seconds vs. 36 seconds!
Terrific Results But...

• increased complexity!
  • We got great results but the approach we used is not intuitive
    • Creating a class to store partial (immutable) results
    • Creating the function executed by tasks such that it completes quickly
    • Adopting a while loop strategy in main to iterate while there were directories to process
      • and then ensuring that the while loop would not terminate until all directories had been processed
  • Let’s look at features that java.util.concurrent has that might reduce the complexity of the code
CountDownLatch (I)

- The next approach examines the use of a CountDownLatch
  - plus it relaxes our constraint to avoid shared mutability
- but it achieves the same results with simpler code
  - Simplicity is not to be discounted
    - it has significant impacts on the ability to maintain software systems
CountDownLatch (II)

• What’s a CountDownLatch?
  • It is a synchronization aid to help coordinate threads
  • It maintains a count and has three primary methods
    • CountDownLatch(n) - creates the latch with a specific count
    • await() - block the calling thread until the latch’s count == 0
    • countDown() -- decrement the count of the latch

• Typical scenario:
  • create a bunch of threads and start() them
  • but don’t let them run() until some point in the future
    • i.e. have their first line in run() call await()
New Approach

- Instead of returning subdirectories, we let each task update two shared variables
  - each an instance of AtomicLong (like AtomicInteger but stores long value)
- One AtomicLong stores the total file size
- The second AtomicLong stores the number of “pending file visits”
  - This value gets incremented each time we find a subdirectory to visit
  - It gets decremented each time we are done processing a subdirectory
  - When this value equals zero, we call countDown() on the latch
- The main thread initializes the latch to a value of 1, starts the directory search, and calls await()
Performance

• Comparable performance to previous approach (4.6 seconds vs 6.1 seconds)
  • but with simpler code!
Third Approach: Queue (I)

- We have seen two approaches for exchanging data between threads
  - Callable/Future and Atomic<Type>
- both techniques ensured that we could pass information between threads
- A third approach is to use a data structure such as a queue to pass information between threads
  - as long as there is space in the queue, producers will not block
  - as long as there are items on the queue, consumers will not block
  - contention will occur only when the queue is full (producers) or when it is empty (consumers)
Third Approach: Queue (II)

• This version of the program creates a blocking queue with 500 slots

• An atomic long is used to keep track of pending file visits

• Tasks traverse the directories as normal, adding file sizes to the queue and updating the atomic long as they submit more tasks to the thread pool

• The main program kicks off the traversal and then sits in a loop
  • it reads items off the queue until there are no more file visits pending and the queue is empty

• Performance:
  • First Run: 4.96 seconds
  • Essentially same performance, just slightly different abstractions, perhaps simpler
    • not by much
Java 7: Fork-Join API

• Java 7 introduced a new type of thread pool and task
  • ForkJoinPool and ForkJoinTask

• The key benefit of this new thread pool is that threads can steal tasks generated by other active tasks
  • This solves the problem we encountered with the first approach to the concurrent file size calculator
  • When a task generates a bunch of other tasks and blocks, its thread can let it go and work on the other tasks

• With this approach, we get a program very similar to our “naive” approach
  • without the danger for deadlock like we saw before => 5.5 seconds
Summary

• We learned the ins and outs of using the ExecutorService in various ways
  • Saw how Callable and Future work to allow us to pass information between threads
  • Explored various problems that can still occur when using ExecutorService
  • Saw a number of different ways to design the same program
    • Performance was usually the same
      • What was different was the complexity of each design
        • Certain designs provided more simplicity than others
        • If two designs perform the same, prefer the one that is less complex to make it easier to maintain that solution
Coming Up Next

• Lecture 25: Refactoring a poorly designed concurrent program written in Java