

# Automatic Memory Management

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## Rationale

Explicit memory management (via, e.g. `malloc()` and `free()`) is prone to errors. All modern languages provide forms of automatic memory management, also called “implicit memory management.”

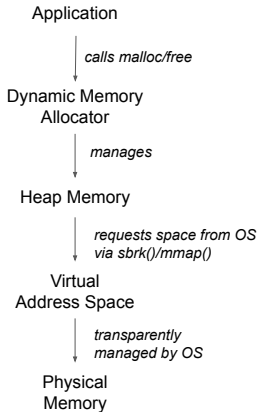
- Manual (explicit) memory management is difficult, many errors are possible
  - Free memory too early, risk use-after-free errors
  - Free too late (or forget to free (\*)), risk memory leaks
- Requires principled design that identifies ownership and lifetimes of objects
- Complicates design of APIs

Will study

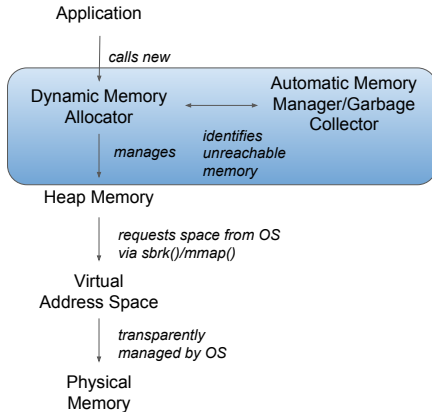
- Garbage Collection: Principles, Implementation, and Tuning
- Reference-counting approaches
- Related Programming Issues: Leaks, Churn, and Bloat

# Explicit vs. Implicit Memory Management

## Explicit Memory Management



## Implicit Memory Management



# Garbage Collection

## Key Idea

Identify those objects that the program may be accessing in the future. Keep them, reclaim the rest.

- Invented in 1960 by McCarthy for LISP [1]
- Assumption: well-defined programs cannot legally access objects to which they do not have pointers/references
  - Assumes no pointer  $\leftrightarrow$  integer conversion
- Objects that can be accessed are said to be reachable
- We do not know if program will access any reachable object in the future
  - Those that won't be accessed are said to be leaked
- Essential abstraction: reachability graph

# Reachability Graph: Java Example

```
class B {  
    int x, y;  
    B(int x, int y) {  
        this.x = x;  
        this.y = y;  
    }  
}  
  
public class A {  
    static A S;  
    B f;  
    public static void main(String[] args) {  
        S = new A();  
        A local = new A();  
        B b = new B(1, 2);  
        set(local, b);  
        b = null;  
        local = null;  
    }  
    static void set(A t, B b) {  
        t.f = b;  
    }  
}
```

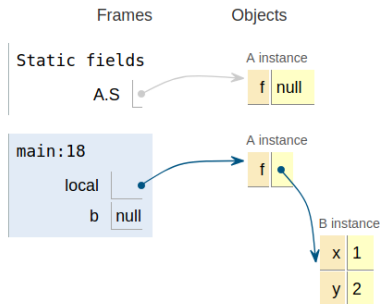


Figure 1: Reachability graph after setting `b = null`. Made with <http://pythontutor.com/java.html>

# Mark and Sweep Garbage Collection

- Identify roots, e.g., in Java
  - Static fields
  - Local variables of in-progress method calls of all threads
  - JVM Internal roots
- Traverse the entire heap via, e.g. DFS, “mark”ing all reachable objects
- Reclaim (“sweep”) all objects not marked

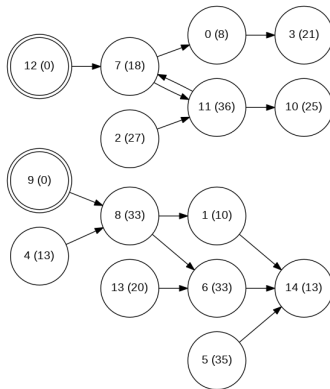


Figure 2: Reachability Graph

[1] John McCarthy.

Recursive functions of symbolic expressions and their computation by machine, part I.

*Communications of the ACM*, 3(4):184–195, 1960.