SYNTHESIS OF ASYMMETRIC TETRACARBOXYLIC ACIDS AND CORRESPONDING DIANHYDRIDES

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References Cited
U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS
4,294,976 A 10/1981 Itatani .................... 560/76

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

OTHER PUBLICATIONS
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ABSTRACT

This invention relates to processes for preparing asymmetrical biphenyl tetracarboxylic acids and the corresponding asymmetrical dianhydrides, namely 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA), 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride (a-BTDA) and 3,4'-methylenediphthalic anhydride (-MDPA). By cross-coupling reactions of reactive metal substituted o-xylene or by cross-coupling o-xylene derivatives in the presence of catalysts, this invention specifically produces asymmetrical biphenyl intermediates that are subsequently oxidized or hydrolyzed and oxidized to provide asymmetrical biphenyl tetracarboxylic acids in comparatively high yields. These asymmetrical biphenyl tetracarboxylic acids are subsequently converted to the corresponding asymmetrical dianhydrides without contamination by symmetrical biphenyl dianhydrides.

30 Claims, No Drawings
SYNTHESIS OF ASYMMETRIC TETRACARBOXYLIC ACIDS AND CORRESPONDING DIANHYDRIDES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Currently, asymmetrical a-BPDA is being prepared from o-xylene or o-phthalate via an oxidative coupling reaction, which essentially yields a mixture of 3,3',4,4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) and a minor product (2-6%) of a-BPDA. Consequently, a-BPDA is being produced in limited quantity and therefore is not commercially available in sufficient amounts, despite an enormous interest in preparing polyimides using a-BPDA. This invention discloses alternative and more efficient processes for exclusively producing asymmetric 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA), 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride (a-BTDA) and 3,4'-methylenediphthalic anhydride (a-MDPA). The symmetric 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) has received more attention, because this dianhydride can produce polyimide resins having low-melt viscosities and higher glass-transition temperatures (Tg) than the symmetrical 3,3',4,4'-biphenyl dianhydride (s-BPDA).

The prior art (U.S. Pat. No. 3,940,426, UBE Industries) process for making a-BPDA relies on oxidative coupling of o-xylene or methyl o-phthalate with an organic acid salt of palladium under oxygen pressure to produce symmetrical and unsymmetrical intermediates which are oxidized and cyclodehydrated to form a mixture of a-BPDA and s-BPDA. This mixture requires the additional process of separating the two isomers.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,294,976 discloses a process for preparing a mixture of biphenyltetra-carboxylic acids (3,3',4,4'-isomer, 2,3,3',4'-isomer and 2,2',3,3'-isomer) via an oxidative coupling of either o-xylene or o-phthalate in the presence of palladium catalyst, followed by hydrolysis. The mixture of isomeric biphenyltetra-carboxylic acids were then subjected to fractionally recrystallization to obtain each of the corresponding 2,3,3',4'-(minor amount) and 3,3',4,4'-(major amount) and minute amount of 2,2',3,3'-biphenyldianhydrides.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,958,002 teaches a dehydrogenation process to obtain 3,3',4,4'-biphenyl dianhydride after the corresponding 3,3',4,4'-biphenyltetra-carboxylic acid was isolated from 2,3,3',4'-biphenyltetra-carboxylic acid. U.S. Pat. No. 5,258,530 (Mitsubishi) describes a coupling reaction of phthalic anhydride directly to a mixture of 2,3,3',4'- (major) and 2,3,3',4'-(minor) benzophenone dianhydrides. U.S. Patent Publication No. 008120 A (2003) discloses a process for producing predominantly 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) over a minor amount of 3,3',4,4'-biphenyl dianhydride (s-BPDA) using a palladium and copper catalyst along with bidentate ligand. These prior art processes yield mixtures of asymmetric 2,3,3',4'-BPDA together with symmetrical 3,3',4,4'-BPDA, which then requires the separation of these isomers. In comparison, this invention discloses an asymmetrical coupling of substituted o-xylene to provide asymmetrical 2,3,3',4'-BPDA exclusively without a mixture or contamination by the symmetrical 3,3',4,4'-BPDA or 2,2',3,3'-BPDA.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

By employing a cross-coupling reaction (Suzuki coupling) with 3- and 4-substituted o-xylene in the presence of catalyst, this invention exclusively produces asymmetric precursors; namely, 2,3,3',4'-tetramethylbenzophenone and 2,3,3',4'-tetramethylenediphthalic anhydride. These asymmetric precursors are oxidized or hydrolyzed and oxidized to produce the corresponding asymmetric tetracarboxylic acids and subsequently converted to the corresponding dianhydrides (a-BPDA, a-BTDA, and a-MDPA) in reasonable high yields.

The dianhydrides of this invention are useful particularly in preparing polyimides which comprise an important class of polymers because of their desirable characteristics i.e. low dielectric constant, high breakdown voltage, good wear resistance, radiation resistance, inertness to solvents, good adhesion properties, hydrolytic stability, low thermal expansion, long-term stability, and excellent mechanical properties. Specifically, high temperature polyimides, such as PMR-15, are extremely valuable particularly for aerospace applications. However, making components from these polyimides via
prepreg process is labor intensive and expensive. Resin Transfer Molding (RTM) is a cost-effective approach to making components and has been successfully deployed with low-temperature polymers. U.S. Pat. No. 7,015,304 discloses preparation of polyimides with melt viscosities sufficiently low to enable RTM processing while maintaining stability and high temperature properties.

Accordingly, it is an object of this invention to provide processes for cross-coupling 3- and 4-substituted o-xylenes and corresponding derivatives to produce asymmetric precursors which are subsequently oxidized to tetracarboxylic acids and then converted to the corresponding dianhydrides.

It is another object of this invention to provide processes for preparing asymmetrical tetracarboxylic acids and the corresponding dianhydrides useful in producing polyimides having lower-melt viscosities and high glass transition temperatures ($T_g$).

It is a further object of this invention to provide processes for the synthesis of a-BPDA and two additional dianhydrides a-BTDA and a-MDPA by cross-coupling substituted o-xylenes to produce asymmetric precursors which are subsequently oxidized to the corresponding tetracarboxylic acids and then converted to the corresponding asymmetric dianhydrides in comparatively high yields.

These and other objects of this invention will become apparent from a further and more detailed description of the processes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Recently, asymmetric 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) has received more attention, because it can be used thalate with an organic acid salt of palladium under oxygen pressure to produce symmetrical and unsymmetrical intermediates which are oxidized and cyclodehydrated to obtain a mixture of a-BPDA and s-BPDA, followed by a process of which requires separating the two isomers.

The present invention exclusively provides processes for preparing asymmetrical tetracarboxylic acids and the corresponding dianhydrides, namely 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA), 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride, (a-BTDA and 3,4'-methylene diphthalic anhydride (a-MDPA), without the complex process of separating the isomers. By employing the cross-coupling of reactive metals such as magnesium (Mg), zinc (Zn) or lithium (Li) [Scheme 1 as well as the cross-reaction (Suzuki coupling) as shown in Scheme II and Scheme III using catalysts, alone or with co-catalysts or co-ligands, this invention specifically produces asymmetrical biphenyl intermediates that are subsequently hydrolyzed and oxidized or only oxidized to the asymmetric biphenyl tetracarboxylic acids. These asymmetric biphenyl tetracarboxylic acids are converted to the corresponding asymmetrical dianhydrides either through cyclodehydration thermally or in the presence of an anhydride, without contamination of any symmetrical dianhydrides.

Scheme I of this invention illustrates the synthetic route via the active metal coupling of either substituted o-xylene (A) or 4-halophthalic anhydride or 4-halophthalimide (B) to afford the coupled intermediates of (D) and (E), which are oxidized or hydrolyzed and oxidized to form the tetracarboxylic acid (F), followed by dehydration e.g. with acetic anhydride to obtain the corresponding asymmetrical dianhydrides (G), which corresponds to 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) when R is nil, and 3,4'-methylene diphthalic anhydride (a-MDPA) when R is CH$_2$.

As shown in the reactions of Scheme II, the asymmetric dianhydrides are obtained by cross-coupling o-xylene derivatives (I) and (II), if (I) is a 3-boron substituted o-xylene, then (II) is a 4-substituted o-xylene, or if (I) is a 4-boron substituted o-xylene, then (II) is a 3-substituted o-xylene derivative.
2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (a-BPDA) is prepared by cross-coupling (I) and (II), where X is selected from the group consisting of Cl, Br, I, OSO₂CF₃, OSO₂CH₃ and Y is (OH)₂, or (OR)₂, where R is a lower alkyl group such as CH₃, C₂H₅, i-Pr, in order to form the asymmetrical 2,3,3',4'-tetramethylbiphenyl (III) in a common organic solvent, e.g. toluene, N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF), dimethoxyethane (DME), 1,4-dioxane, tetrahydrofuran (THF), anisole, or aqueous solution with phase transfer catalysts in the presence of palladium or nickel catalysts, either with or without a co-catalyst or co-ligands, such as Pd(PPh₃)₄, Pd(OAc)₂, Pd(PPh₅)₂Cl₂, PdCl₂(CH₃CN)₂, Pd(dba)₃/P(i-Bu)₃, Pd₂(dba)₃/[i-Bu]₅, Pd[I]BF₄, NiCl₂(PPh₃)₂, NiCl₂(PCy₃)₂, NiCl₂(dppe), NiCl₂(dppb), and their corresponding polymer bound palladium or nickel catalysts.

Compound (III) is oxidized by potassium permanganate (KMnO₄), chromium trioxide (CrO₃), or by other oxidation methods such as low or high pressure nitric acid oxidation or by oxygen to form the 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl/tetracarboxylic acid (IV), which upon dehydration e.g. by acetic anhydride or thermal dehydration, yields 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (V). Alternatively, compounds (I) and (II) are cross-coupled with carbon monoxide gas in the presence of the Pd or nickel catalysts to form the asymmetrical 2,3,3',4'-tetramethylbenzophenone (VI), which is further oxidized e.g. by KMnO₄, CrO₃, low pressure nitric acid with oxygen, or with other known oxidation method to form 2,3,3',4'-benzophenonetetraacarboxylic acid (VII) which is then dehydrated by acetic anhydride or thermally cyclodehydrated to yield 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride (VII). Alternatively, 2,3,3',4'-benzophenonetetraacarboxylic acid (VIII) is reduced by hydrazine to form 3,4'-methylene-diphthalic acid (IX), which upon dehydration e.g. by acetic anhydride yields 3,4'-methylene-diphthalic anhydride (X).

**Scheme II: Synthesis of Asymmetrical Dianhydrides from o-xylene Derivatives**
In Scheme I, using catalysts described in Scheme II, a similar Suzuki cross-coupling reaction is carried out between 3- or 4-substituted boron-substituted o-xylene (1), boron-substituted phthalic anhydride (1a) or boron-substituted phthalic diester (1b), and 4- or 3-halo-substituted phthalic anhydrides or phthalimides (2), or diesters of phthalic acid respectively, to produce the coupled asymmetrical 4-(2,3-dimethylphenyl)phthalic anhydride or phthalimide (3). Compound (3) can be hydrolyzed e.g. by potassium hydroxide, followed by oxidation e.g. by potassium permanganate, KMnO4, and other oxidizing methods such as low or high pressure nitric acid or with oxygen, to afford 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid (5), which upon dehydration e.g. with acetic anhydride or thermal cyclodehydration to yield 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid (a-BPDA). In the presence of carbon monoxide gas, 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid (10), a selected palladium catalyst (139 mmol) were added along with 200 ml of dry dioxane. The heterogeneous reaction mixture was heated to reflux until it becomes homogeneous overnight, and then all of the ethanol was distilled off via a Dean-Stark trap. The aqueous reaction mixture was allowed to proceed at 80°C until the purple color disappeared periodically. The excess potassium permanganate, KMnO4 (~5 equiv.) was added as a solid in portion when the purple color persisted for 30 min. The excess KMnO4 was killed by ethanol and the precipitated MnO2 was filtered off. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and the resulting residue was acidified to pH=1. The aqueous acidic solution was cooled in the refrigerator to induce crystallization. The solid was collected and dried to afford the desired product.

EXAMPLE I

Synthesis of 4-(2,3-Dimethylphenyl)-N-methylphthalimide

To a 250 ml 3-necked flask equipped with mechanical stirrer, 4-(2,3-dimethylphenyl)phthalic acid (16 g, 48.5 mmol) was added, then potassium hydroxide (5.4 g, 97 mmol) in 60 ml of water was added. The reaction mixture was warmed to 80°C until the purple color of KMnO4 persisted for 30 min. The excess KMnO4 was killed by ethanol and the precipitated MnO2 was filtered off. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and the resulting residue was acidified to pH=1. The aqueous acidic solution was cooled in the refrigerator to induce crystallization. The solid was collected and dried to afford the desired product.

Synthesis of 2,3,3',4'-Biphenyltetracarboxylic acid (5)

To a 250 ml 3-necked flask, 4-(2,3-dimethylphenyl)phthalic acid (16 g, 48.5 mmol) was added, then potassium hydroxide (5.4 g, 97 mmol) in 60 ml of water was added. The reaction mixture was warmed to 80°C until the purple color of KMnO4 persisted for 30 min. The excess KMnO4 was killed by ethanol and the precipitated MnO2 was filtered off. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and the resulting residue was acidified to pH=1. The aqueous acidic solution was cooled in the refrigerator to induce crystallization. The solid was collected and dried to afford the desired product.

Synthesis of 2,3,3',4'-Biphenyltetracarboxylic acid (5)

To a 250 ml 3-necked flask, 4-(2,3-dimethylphenyl)phthalic acid (16 g, 48.5 mmol) was added, then potassium hydroxide (5.4 g, 97 mmol) in 60 ml of water was added. The reaction mixture was warmed to 80°C until the purple color of KMnO4 persisted for 30 min. The excess KMnO4 was killed by ethanol and the precipitated MnO2 was filtered off. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and the resulting residue was acidified to pH=1. The aqueous acidic solution was cooled in the refrigerator to induce crystallization. The solid was collected and dried to afford the desired product.

Synthesis of Asymmetrical 2,3,3',4'-Biphenyltetracarboxylic acid (5)

To a 250 ml 3-necked flask, 4-(2,3-dimethylphenyl)phthalic acid (16 g, 48.5 mmol) was added, then potassium hydroxide (5.4 g, 97 mmol) in 60 ml of water was added. The reaction mixture was warmed to 80°C until the purple color of KMnO4 persisted for 30 min. The excess KMnO4 was killed by ethanol and the precipitated MnO2 was filtered off. The solvent was evaporated to dryness and the resulting residue was acidified to pH=1. The aqueous acidic solution was cooled in the refrigerator to induce crystallization. The solid was collected and dried to afford the desired product.
The dianhydrides prepared by the processes of this invention are particularly useful in preparing polyimides from one or more of a combination of reactants comprising dianhydrides selected from the group consisting of 2,3,3',4'-biphenyldianhydride (a-BPDA), 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride (a-BTDA), and 3,4'-methyleneedianhydride (a-MDPA), with at least one diamine and an endcap that can be melt-processed at temperatures between 232-270°C (450-520°F), without any solvent. The imide oligomers from this reaction have low-melt viscosities of 1-60 poise at 260-280°C. These imide oligomers are amenable to TRM, VARTM or resin infusion processes at 260-280°C to product high quality polymer composites comprising carbon, glass, quartz or synthetic fibers for use at temperatures ranging up to about 550°F to 650°F.

An example of preparing the oligomers and polyimides using the asymmetric dianhydrides prepared by the processes of this invention is illustrated by the following reaction:
While this invention has been described by a number of specific examples, it is obvious that there are other variations and modifications that can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. Process for preparing asymmetrical tetracarboxylic acids which comprises cross-coupling a compound selected from the group consisting of:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{H}_3\text{C} - \text{CH}_3 - \text{BY}, \\
&\text{R}’\text{OOC} - \text{COOR’}
\end{align*}
\]

with a compound selected from the group consisting of:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{XR} - \text{CH}_3, \\
&\text{XR} - \text{COOR’}
\end{align*}
\]

in the presence of catalysts and additives to obtain a coupled intermediate having a formula selected from the group consisting of:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{H}_3\text{C} - \text{CH}_3 - \text{BY}, \\
&\text{R}’\text{OOC} - \text{COOR’}
\end{align*}
\]

wherein R is nil, CH2 or C==O, R’ is a low alkyl group, Y is (OH)2 or (OR)2, Z is oxygen or nitrogen, X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, OSO2CF3, and OSO2CH3, and B is boron; subsequently converting said intermediate to obtain tetracarboxylic acid selected from the group consisting of:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{HOOC - COOH}, \\
&\text{HOOC - COOH}
\end{align*}
\]
2. The process of claim 1 wherein palladium or nickel catalysts are present in the cross-coupling reaction.

3. The process of claim 1 wherein X is halogen and Y is (OH)₂, and the catalyst comprises palladium or nickel compounds.

4. The process of claim 1 wherein X is halogen, Y is (OR)₂, and the catalyst comprises palladium or nickel compounds.

5. The process of claim 1 wherein the 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid (a) is converted by dehydration into the corresponding 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride having the formula:

6. The process of claim 1 wherein the 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid is converted to 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride by dehydration with acetic anhydride.

7. The process of claim 1 wherein 3,4'-methylenediphthalic acid (b) is converted by dehydration into the corresponding 3,4'-methylenediphthalic anhydride having the formula:

8. The process of claim 1 wherein the 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid (c) is converted by dehydration into the corresponding 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride having the formula:

9. The process of claim 1 wherein the substituted compound has the formula:

10. The process of claim 1 wherein the substituted compound has the formula:
in the presence of catalysts to yield the biphenyl intermediate having the formula:

 said intermediate subsequently hydrolyzed and oxidized to obtain the tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

wherein R is nil, Y is (OH), (OR'), X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, OSO₂CF₃ and OSO₂CH₃, and B is boron, R' is lower alkyl group, Z is nitrogen; said intermediate subsequently hydrolyzed and oxidized to obtain biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

12. The process of claim 1 wherein a compound has the formula:

coupled with a compound having the formula:

in the presence of catalysts to yield the biphenyl intermediate having the formula:

coupled with a phthalic ester to obtain compound having the formula:

in the presence of catalyst to yield the biphenyl intermediate having the formula:

wherein B is boron, Y is (OH), (OR'), X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, OSO₂CF₃ and OSO₂CH₃, R' is lower alkyl group; said intermediate subsequently hydrolyzed to obtain the biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

13. The process of claim 1 wherein a compound has the formula:

wherein R is nil, Y is (OH)₂, (OR')₂, X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, OSO₂CF₃ and OSO₂CH₃, and B is boron halogen, R' is lower alkyl group;
coupled with a compound having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image1)

in the presence of catalysts to yield the biphenyl intermediate having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image2)

wherein R is nil, B is boron, Y is \((\text{OH})_2\), \((\text{OR})_2\), X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, \(\text{OSO}_2\text{CF}_3\) and \(\text{OSO}_2\text{CH}_3\). Z is nitrogen or oxygen, \(R'\) is lower alkyl group; said intermediate subsequently hydrolyzed to obtain the biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image3)

The process of claim 9 wherein 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid is converted by thermal or chemical dehydration to the corresponding 2,3,3',4'-biphenyl dianhydride (alpha-BPDA) having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image4)

wherein R is CH$_2$ or C=O, X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, \(\text{OSO}_2\text{CF}_3\) and \(\text{OSO}_2\text{CH}_3\). B is boron, Y is \((\text{OH})_2\) or \((\text{OR})_2\); said intermediate subsequently oxidized to obtain the tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image5)

The process of claim 15 wherein the benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid (c) is reduced with hydrazine to 3,4'-methylenediphthalic acid having the formula:

![Chemical Structure](image6)

The process of claim 9 wherein the biphenyl tetracarboxylic acid is dehydrated with acetic anhydride to the corresponding biphenyl dianhydride.
18. Process for preparing asymmetrical benzophenone tetracarboxylic acids which comprises cross-coupling with a compound having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

with a compound having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

in the presence of catalysts and carbon monoxide when R is nil; but without carbon dioxide when R is C=O, to obtain benzophenone intermediates having a formula:

![Chemical structure image]

19. The process claim 18 wherein the compound has the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

subsequently hydrolyzing and oxidizing said intermediate to obtain tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

wherein R' is a low alkyl group, Y is (OH)₂ or (OR)₂, Z is oxygen or nitrogen, X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen, OSO₂CH₃, and B is boron.

20. The process claim 18 wherein the compound has the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

coupled in the presence of catalysts and carbon dioxide with a compound having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

yields a coupled intermediate having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]

subsequent oxidized to obtain the tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

![Chemical structure image]
20. The process claim 18 wherein the compound has the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
H_3C & \quad CH_3 \\
\text{BY} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

coupled in the presence of catalysts with a compound having the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O} & \\
CH_3 & \\
\text{CH}_3 & \\
\end{align*}
\]

to obtain an coupled intermediate having a formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
H_3C & \quad CH_3 \\
\text{CH}_3 & \quad \text{O} \\
\end{align*}
\]

wherein B is boron, Y is (OH), or (OR)', X is halogen, R is C=O; said intermediate subsequently oxidized to afford benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid.

21. The process of claim 18 for preparing asymmetric tetracarboxylic acids which comprises cross-coupling a compound having the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
H_3C & \quad CH_3 \\
\text{BY} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

coupled with a substituted phthalic ester having the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{COOR'} & \quad \text{COOR'} \\
\text{X} & \quad \text{C=O} \\
\text{CH}_3 & \quad \text{CH}_3 \\
\end{align*}
\]

wherein R is CH$_2$, R' is a low alkyl group, Y is (OH)$_2$, or (OR)', X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen OSO$_2$CF$_3$, and OSO$_2$CH$_3$, and B is boron; said intermediate subsequently hydrolyzed and oxidized to obtain tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:

22. The process of claim 18 for preparing asymmetric tetracarboxylic acids which comprises cross-coupling a compound having the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
H_3C & \quad CH_3 \\
\text{BY} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

coupled with a substituted phthalimide having the formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{XR} & \quad \text{Z} & \quad \text{R'} \\
\text{O} & & \\
\end{align*}
\]

wherein R is CH$_2$, or C=O, R' is a low alkyl group, Y is (OH)$_2$, or (OR)', X is halogen, or (OR)', X is selected from the group consisting of a halogen OSO$_2$CF$_3$, and OSO$_2$CH$_3$, and B is boron, Z is oxygen or nitrogen; said subsequently hydrolyzed and oxidized to obtain tetracarboxylic acid having the formula:
with a compound having the formula:

23. The process claim 18 wherein the 2,3,3',4'-tetracarboxylic acid is converted by dehydration into the corresponding 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride having the formula:

24. The process of claim 18 wherein the 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid is converted to 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride by dehydration.

25. The process of claim 18 wherein 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone tetracarboxylic acid is converted to 2,3,3',4'-benzophenone dianhydride by dehydration with acetic anhydride.

26. The process of claim 18 wherein palladium or nickel catalysts are present in the cross-coupling reaction.

27. The process claim of 17 wherein the tetracarboxylic acid is converted by dehydration into the corresponding 3,4'-methylenediphthalic anhydride.

28. Process for preparing asymmetrical tetracarboxylic acids which comprises cross-coupling a substituted o-xylene having the formula:

29. The process of claim 28 wherein the tetracarboxylic acid is converted by dehydration into the corresponding dianhydride having the formula:

30. The process of claim 28 wherein M is a reactive metal selected from the group consisting of lithium, magnesium and zinc.