Function Approximation

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Value Iteration

Algorithm:

Start with $V_0^*(s) = 0$ for all s.

Impractical for large state spaces

For i = 1, ..., H

For all states s in S:

$$V_{i+1}^{*}(s) \leftarrow \max_{a} \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma V_{i}^{*}(s') \right]$$

$$\pi_{i+1}^*(s) \leftarrow \arg\max_{a \in A} \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma V_i^*(s') \right]$$

This is called a value update or Bellman update/back-up

 $V_i^*(s)$ = expected sum of rewards accumulated starting from state s, acting optimally for i steps $\pi_i^*(s)$ = optimal action when in state s and getting to act for i steps

Similar issue for policy iteration and linear programming

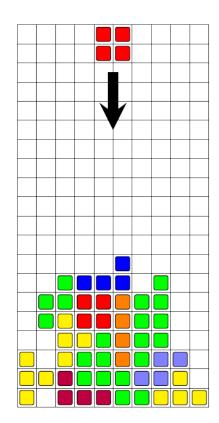
Outline

- Function approximation
- Value iteration with function approximation
- Policy iteration with function approximation
- Linear programming with function approximation

Function Approximation Example1: Tetris

- state: board configuration + shape of the falling piece ~2²⁰⁰ states!
- action: rotation and translation applied to the falling piece
- ullet 22 features aka basis functions $\,\phi_i$
 - Ten basis functions, $0, \ldots, 9$, mapping the state to the height h[k] of each column.
 - Nine basis functions, $10, \ldots, 18$, each mapping the state to the absolute difference between heights of successive columns: |h[k+1] h[k]|, $k = 1, \ldots, 9$.
 - One basis function, 19, that maps state to the maximum column height: $\max_{k} h[k]$
 - One basis function, 20, that maps state to the number of 'holes' in the board.
 - One basis function, 21, that is equal to 1 in every state.

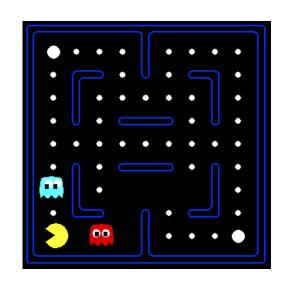
$$\hat{V}_{\theta}(s) = \sum_{i=0}^{21} \theta_i \phi_i(s) = \theta^{\top} \phi(s)$$



Function Approximation Example 2: Pacman

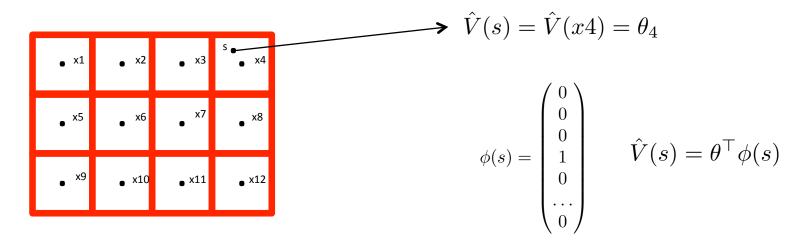
$$\begin{aligned} &\mathsf{V(s)} = & \theta_0 \\ &+ \theta_1 \text{ "distance to closest ghost"} \\ &+ \theta_2 \text{ "distance to closest power pellet"} \\ &+ \theta_3 \text{ "in dead-end"} \\ &+ \theta_4 \text{ "closer to power pellet than ghost"} \\ &+ \dots \end{aligned}$$

$$= & \sum_{i=0}^n \theta_i \phi_i(s) = \theta^\top \phi(s)$$



Function Approximation Example 3: Nearest Neighbor

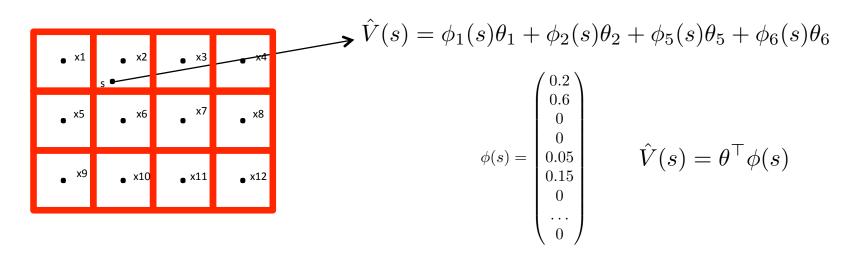
O'th order approximation (1-nearest neighbor):



Only store values for x1, x2, ..., x12 — call these values $\theta_1, \theta_2, \dots, \theta_{12}$ Assign other states value of nearest "x" state

Function Approximation Example 4: k-Nearest Neighbor

1'th order approximation (k-nearest neighbor interpolation):



Only store values for x1, x2, ..., x12

– call these values $\theta_1, \theta_2, \dots, \theta_{12}$

Assign other states interpolated value of nearest 4 "x" states

More Function Approximation Examples

Examples:

$$S = \mathbb{R}, \quad \hat{V}(s) = \theta_1 + \theta_2 s$$

$$S = \mathbb{R}, \quad \hat{V}(s) = \theta_1 + \theta_2 s + \theta_3 s^2$$

$$S = \mathbb{R}, \quad \hat{V}(s) = \sum_{i=0}^{n} \theta_i s^i$$

$$\hat{V}(s) = \log(\frac{1}{1 + \exp(\theta^{\top} \phi(s))})$$

Function Approximation

- Main idea:
 - Use approximation $\hat{V}_{ heta}$ of the true value function V ,
 - ullet θ is a free parameter to be chosen from its domain Θ
 - Representation size: $|S| o ext{downto: } |\Theta|$
 - +: less parameters to estimate
 - : less expressiveness, typically there exist many V for which there is no θ such that $\hat{V}_\theta = V$

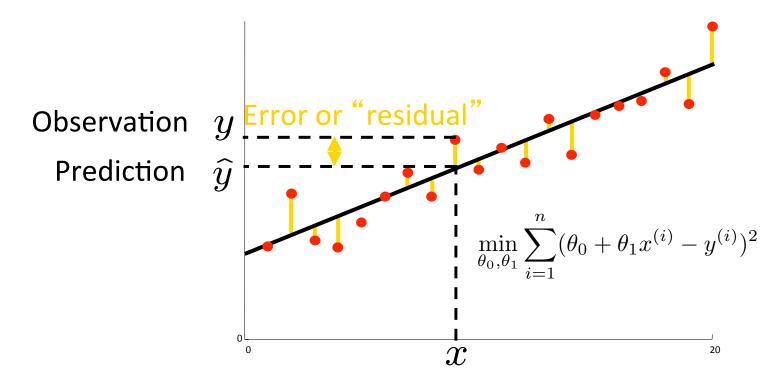
Supervised Learning

- Given:
 - set of examples $(s^{(1)}, V(s^{(1)})), (s^{(2)}, V(s^{(2)})), \dots, (s^{(m)}, V(s^{(m)})),$
- Asked for:
 - ullet "best" $\hat{V}_{ heta}$
- lacktriangle Representative approach: find heta through least squares

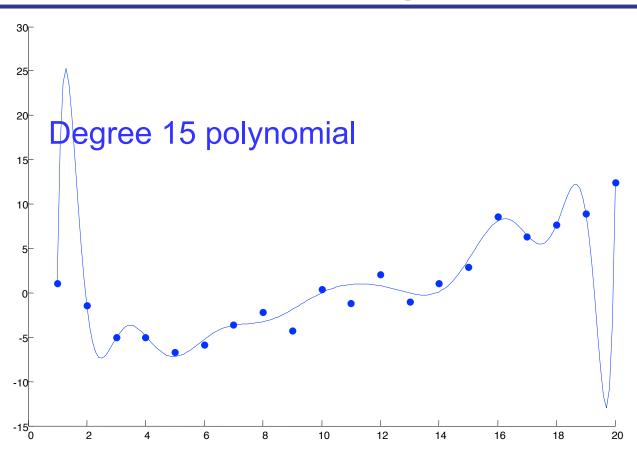
$$\min_{\theta \in \Theta} \sum_{i=1}^{m} (\hat{V}_{\theta}(s^{(i)}) - V(s^{(i)}))^{2}$$

Supervised Learning Example

Linear regression



Overfitting



Overfitting

- To avoid overfitting: reduce number of features used
- Practical approach: leave-out validation
 - Perform fitting for different choices of feature sets using just 70% of the data
 - Pick feature set that led to highest quality of fit on the remaining 30% of data

Status

Function approximation through supervised learning

BUT: where do the supervised examples come from?



Value Iteration with Function Approximation

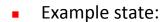
- lacksquare Pick some $S'\subseteq S$ (typically |S'|<<|S|)
- ullet Initialize by choosing some setting for $\, heta^{(0)}$
- Iterate for i = 0, 1, 2, ..., H:
 - Step 1: Bellman back-ups

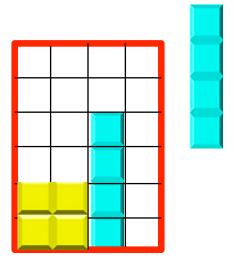
$$\forall s \in S': \quad \bar{V}_{i+1}(s) \leftarrow \max_{a} \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma \hat{V}_{\theta(i)}(s') \right]$$

Step 2: Supervised learning

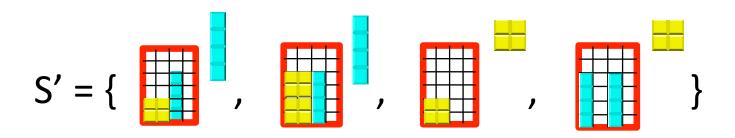
find
$$\theta^{(i+1)}$$
 as the solution of: $\min_{\theta} \sum_{s \in S'} \left(\hat{V}_{\theta^{(i+1)}}(s) - \bar{V}_{i+1}(s) \right)^2$

Mini-tetris: two types of blocks, can only choose translation (not rotation)



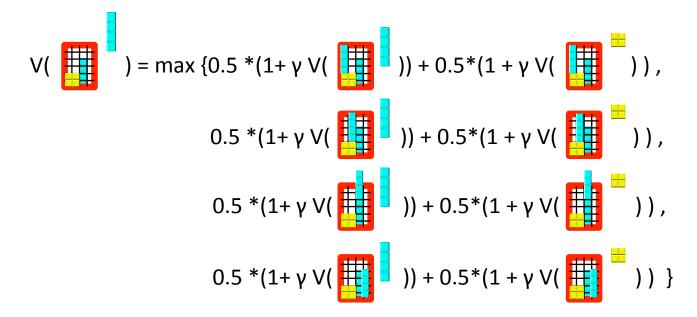


- Reward = 1 for placing a block
- Sink state / Game over is reached when block is placed such that part of it extends above the red rectangle
- If you have a complete row, it gets cleared

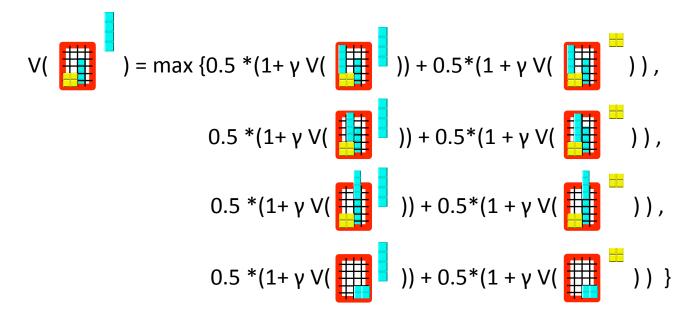


- 10 features (also called basis functions) φ_i
 - Four basis functions, $0, \ldots, 3$, mapping the state to the height h[k] of each of the four columns.
 - Three basis functions, $4, \ldots, 6$, each mapping the state to the absolute difference between heights of successive columns: |h[k+1] h[k]|, $k = 1, \ldots, 3$.
 - One basis function, 7, that maps state to the maximum column height: $\max_k h[k]$
 - One basis function, 8, that maps state to the number of 'holes' in the board.
 - One basis function, 9, that is equal to 1 in every state.
- Init with $\theta^{(0)} = (-1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -2, 10)$

Bellman back-ups for the states in S':



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$$\theta^{(0)} = (-1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -2, 20)$$

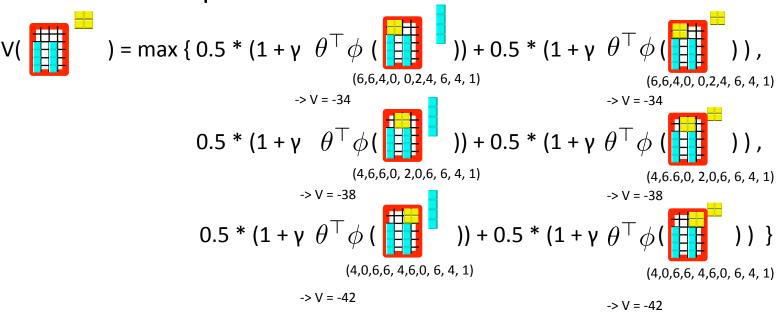
Bellman back-ups for the second state in S':

$$\theta^{(0)} = (-1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -2, 20)$$

Bellman back-ups for the third state in S':

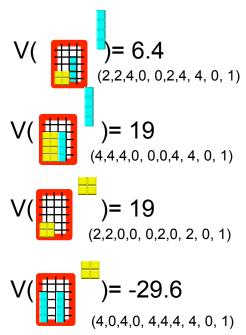
$$\theta^{(0)} = (-1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -2, 20)$$

Bellman back-ups for the fourth state in S':



= -29.6

 After running the Bellman backups for all 4 states in S' we have:



We now run supervised learning on these 4 examples to find a new θ:

$$\min_{\theta} (6.4 - \theta^{\top} \phi(\blacksquare))^{2} + (19 - \theta^{\top} \phi(\blacksquare))^{2} + (19 - \theta^{\top} \phi(\blacksquare))^{2} + ((-29.6) - \theta^{\top} \phi(\blacksquare))^{2}$$

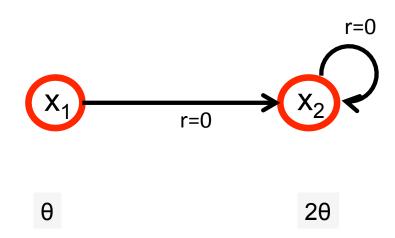
Running least squares gives:

$$\theta^{(1)} = (0.195, 6.24, -2.11, 0, -6.05, 0.13, -2.11, 2.13, 0, 1.59)$$

Potential Guarantees?



Simple Example**



Function approximator: [1 2] * θ

Simple Example**

$$ar{J}_{ heta} = \left[egin{array}{c} 1 \ 2 \end{array}
ight] heta$$

$$\bar{J}^{(1)}(x_1) = 0 + \gamma \hat{J}_{\theta^{(0)}}(x_2) = 2\gamma \theta^{(0)}$$
$$\bar{J}^{(1)}(x_2) = 0 + \gamma \hat{J}_{\theta^{(0)}}(x_2) = 2\gamma \theta^{(0)}$$

Function approximation with least squares fit:

$$\left[\begin{array}{c}1\\2\end{array}\right]\theta^{(1)}\approx\left[\begin{array}{c}2\gamma\theta^{(0)}\\2\gamma\theta^{(0)}\end{array}\right]$$

Least squares fit results in:

$$\theta^{(1)} = \frac{6}{5} \gamma \theta^{(0)}$$

Repeated back-ups and function approximations result in:

$$\theta^{(i)} = \left(\frac{6}{5}\gamma\right)^i \theta^{(0)}$$

which diverges if $\gamma>\frac{5}{6}$ even though the function approximation class can represent the true value function.]

Composing Operators**

- **Definition.** An operator G is a *non-expansion* with respect to a norm $| \cdot |$ if $||GJ_1 GJ_2|| \le ||J_1 J_2||$
- **Fact.** If the operator F is a γ-contraction with respect to a norm $|\cdot|$. $|\cdot|$ and the operator G is a non-expansion with respect to the same norm, then the sequential application of the operators G and F is a γ-contraction, i.e., $||GFJ_1 GFJ_2|| \le \gamma ||J_1 J_2||$
- Corollary. If the supervised learning step is a non-expansion, then iteration in value iteration with function approximation is a γ-contraction, and in this case we have a convergence guarantee.

Averager Function Approximators Are Non-Expansions**

DEFINITION: A real-valued function approximation scheme is an averager if every fitted value is the weighted average of zero or more target values and possibly some predetermined constants. The weights involved in calculating the fitted value \hat{Y}_i may depend on the sample vector X_0 , but may not depend on the target values Y. More precisely, for a fixed X_0 , if Y has n elements, there must exist n real numbers k_i , n^2 nonnegative real numbers β_{ij} , and n nonnegative real numbers β_i , so that for each i we have $\beta_i + \sum_j \beta_{ij} = 1$ and $\hat{Y}_i = \beta_i k_i + \sum_j \beta_{ij} Y_j$.

Examples:

- nearest neighbor (aka state aggregation)
- linear interpolation over triangles (tetrahedrons, ...)

Averager Function Approximators Are Non-Expansions**

Proof: Let J_1 and J_2 be two vectors in \Re^n . Consider a particular entry s of ΠJ_1 and ΠJ_2 :

$$|(\Pi J_1)(s) - (\Pi J_2)(s)| = |\beta_{s0} + \sum_{s'} \beta_{ss'} J_1(s') - \beta_{s0} + \sum_{s'} \beta_{ss'} J_2(s')|$$

$$= |\sum_{s'} \beta_{ss'} (J_1(s') - J_2(s'))|$$

$$\leq \max_{s'} |J_1(s') - J_2(s')|$$

$$= ||J_1 - J_2||_{\infty}$$

This holds true for all s, hence we have

$$\|\Pi J_1 - \Pi J_2\|_{\infty} \le \|J_1 - J_2\|_{\infty}$$

Linear Regression (2) **

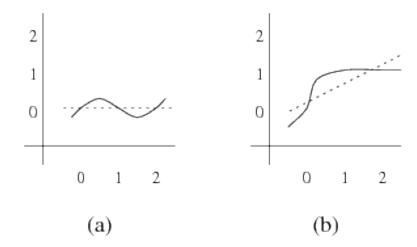


Figure 2: The mapping associated with linear regression when samples are taken at the points x = 0, 1, 2. In (a) we see a target value function (solid line) and its corresponding fitted value function (dotted line). In (b) we see another target function and another fitted function. The first target function has values y = 0, 0, 0 at the sample points; the second has values y = 0, 1, 1. Regression exaggerates the difference between the two functions: the largest difference between the two target functions at a sample point is 1 (at x = 1 and x = 2), but the largest difference between the two fitted functions at a sample point is $\frac{7}{6}$ (at x = 2).

Example taken from Gordon, 1995

Guarantees for Fixed Point**

Theorem. Let J^* be the optimal value function for a finite MDP with discount factor γ . Let the projection operator Π be a non-expansion w.r.t. the infinity norm and let \tilde{J} be any fixed point of Π . Suppose $\|\tilde{J} - J^*\|_{\infty} \leq \epsilon$. Then ΠT converges to a value function \bar{J} such that:

$$\|\bar{J} - J^*\| \le 2\epsilon + \frac{2\gamma\epsilon}{1 - \gamma}$$

- I.e., if we pick a non-expansion function approximator which can approximate
 J* well, then we obtain a good value function estimate.
- To apply to discretization: use continuity assumptions to show that J* can be approximated well by chosen discretization scheme

Outline

✓ Value iteration with function approximation

Linear programming with function approximation

Outline

- Function approximation
- Value iteration with function approximation
 - Policy iteration with function approximation
 - Linear programming with function approximation

Policy Iteration

One iteration of policy iteration:

- Policy evaluation: with fixed current policy π , find values with simplified Bellman updates:
 - Iterate until values converge

Insert Function
Approximation Here

$$V_{i+1}^{\pi_k}(s) \leftarrow \sum_{s'} T(s, \pi_k(s), s') \left[R(s, \pi_k(s), s') + \gamma V_i^{\pi_k}(s') \right]$$

 Policy improvement: with fixed utilities, find the best action according to one-step look-ahead

$$\pi_{k+1}(s) = \arg\max_{a} \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma V^{\pi_k}(s') \right]$$

- Repeat until policy converges
- At convergence: optimal policy; and converges faster under some conditions

Policy Evaluation Revisited

Idea 1: modify Bellman updates

$$V_0^{\pi}(s) = 0$$

$$V_{i+1}^{\pi}(s) \leftarrow \sum_{s'} T(s, \pi(s), s') [R(s, \pi(s), s') + \gamma V_i^{\pi}(s')]$$

Insert Function
Approximation Here

Idea 2: it is just a linear system, solve with Matlab (or whatever)

variables: $V^{\pi}(s)$

constants: T, R

$$\forall s \ V^{\pi}(s) = \sum_{s'} T(s, \pi(s), s') [R(s, \pi(s), s') + \gamma V^{\pi}(s')]$$

Insert Function Approximation Here

And Here

Outline

- Function approximation
- Value iteration with function approximation
- Policy iteration with function approximation
 - Linear programming with function approximation



Infinite Horizon Linear Program

$$\min_{V} \sum_{s \in S} \mu_0(s) V(s)$$

s.t.
$$V(s) \ge \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') [R(s, a, s') + \gamma V(s')], \quad \forall s \in S, a \in A$$

Theorem. V^* is the solution to the above LP.

 μ_0 is a probability distribution over S, with $\mu_0(s) > 0$ for all s in S.

Infinite Horizon Linear Program

$$\min_{V} \sum_{s \in S} \mu_0(s) V(s)$$

s.t.
$$V(s) \ge \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') [R(s, a, s') + \gamma V(s')], \quad \forall s \in S, a \in A$$

Let $V(s) = \theta^{\top} \phi(s)$, and consider S' rather than S:

$$\min_{\theta} \sum_{s \in S'} \mu_0(s) \theta^{\top} \phi(s)$$

s.t.
$$\theta^{\top} \phi(s) \ge \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma \theta^{\top} \phi(s') \right], \quad \forall s \in S', a \in A$$

We find approximate value function $\hat{V}_{\theta}(s) = \theta^{\top} \phi(s)$

Approximate Linear Program – Guarantees**

$$\min_{\theta} \sum_{s \in S'} \mu_0(s) \theta^{\top} \phi(s)$$
s.t. $\theta^{\top} \phi(s) \ge \sum_{s'} T(s, a, s') \left[R(s, a, s') + \gamma \theta^{\top} \phi(s') \right], \quad \forall s \in S', a \in A$

- LP solver will converge
- Solution quality: [de Farias and Van Roy, 2002]

Assuming one of the features is the feature that is equal to one for all states, and assuming S'=S we have that:

$$||V^* - \Phi\theta||_{1,\mu_0} \le \frac{2}{1-\gamma} \min_{\theta} ||V^* - \Phi\theta||_{\infty}$$

(slightly weaker, probabilistic guarantees hold for S' not equal to S, these guarantees require size of S' to grow as the number of features grows)