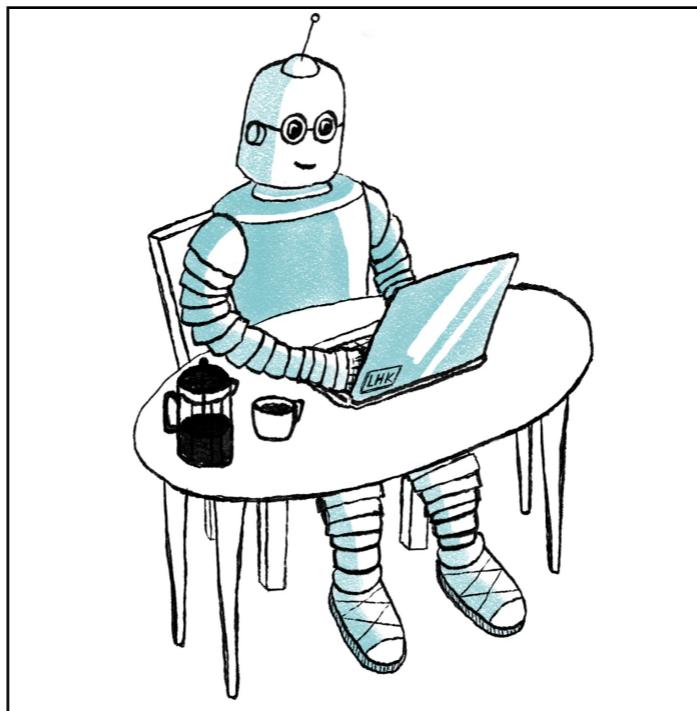


The Automatic Computer Scientist



Andrew Cropper

University of Oxford

What is this talk about?

Introduction to inductive logic programming

Algorithms are ubiquitous!

Algorithms are ubiquitous!



Algorithms are ubiquitous!



↔ Round trip ▾ 1 Economy ▾

○ London ✈ Helsinki

Fri, 5 Feb < > Tue, 9 Feb < >

Stops ▾ Airlines ▾ Bags ▾ Price ▾ Times ▾ Connecting airports ▾ Duration ▾ More ▾

Track prices ⓘ

Date grid Price graph

Travel restricted
There's a government travel restriction related to coronavirus (COVID-19). [More details](#)

Best departing flights ⓘ
Total price includes taxes + fees for 1 adult. [Additional bag fees](#) and other fees may apply.

Sort by:

KLM	11:45 – 23:55 KLM	10 hrs 10 min LHR-HEL	1 stop 6 hrs 30 min AMS	£121 round trip
KLM	17:05 – 23:55 KLM · Operated by KLM Cityhopper	4 hrs 50 min LHR-HEL	1 stop 1 hr 10 min AMS	£134 round trip
KLM	06:30 – 13:10 KLM	4 hrs 40 min LHR-HEL	1 stop 50 min AMS	£161 round trip
Finnair	18:10 – 23:00 <small>Separate tickets booked together</small> · Finnair	2 hrs 50 min LHR-HEL	Non-stop	£221 round trip

Algorithms are ubiquitous!



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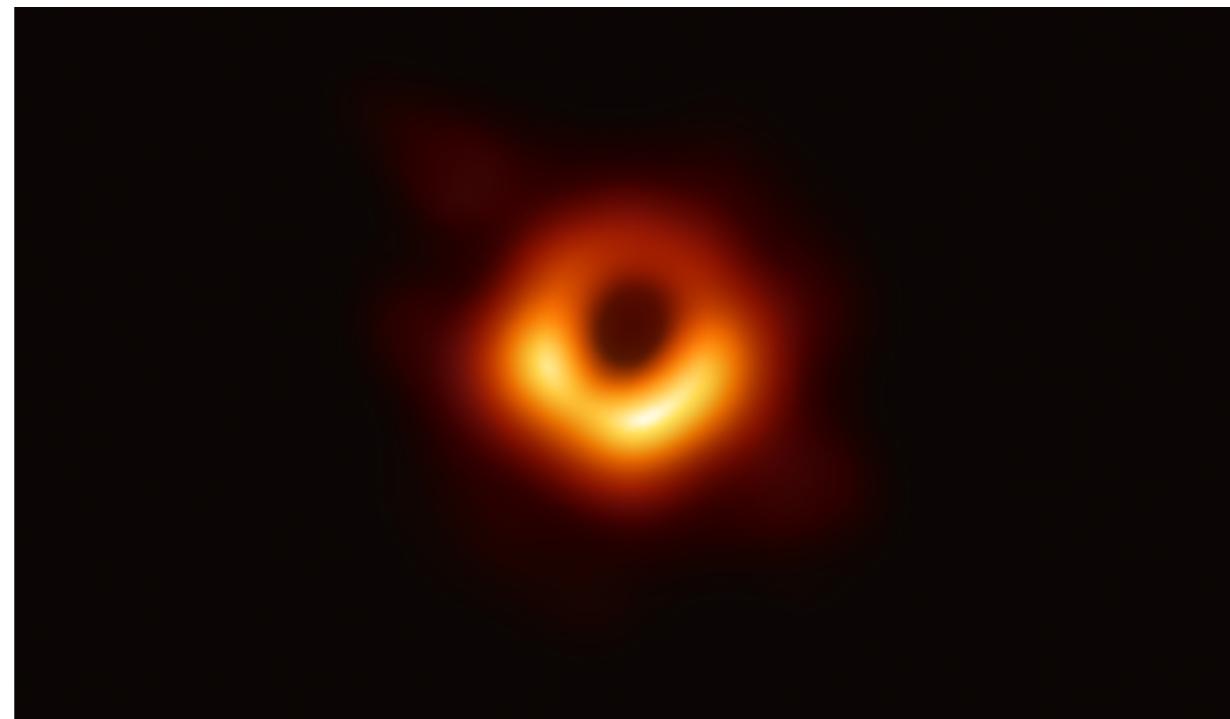
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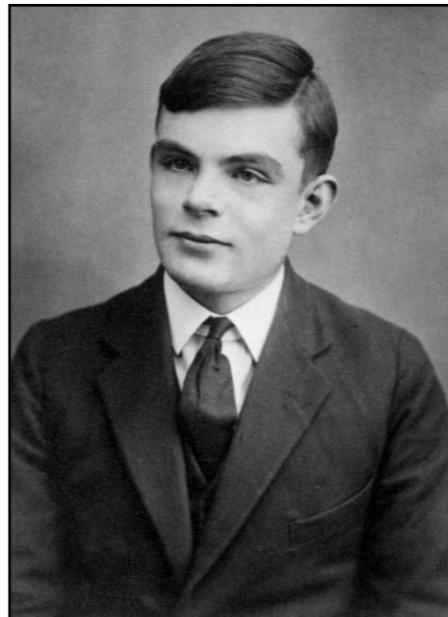
How do we design novel algorithms?

How do we design novel algorithms?

Problem

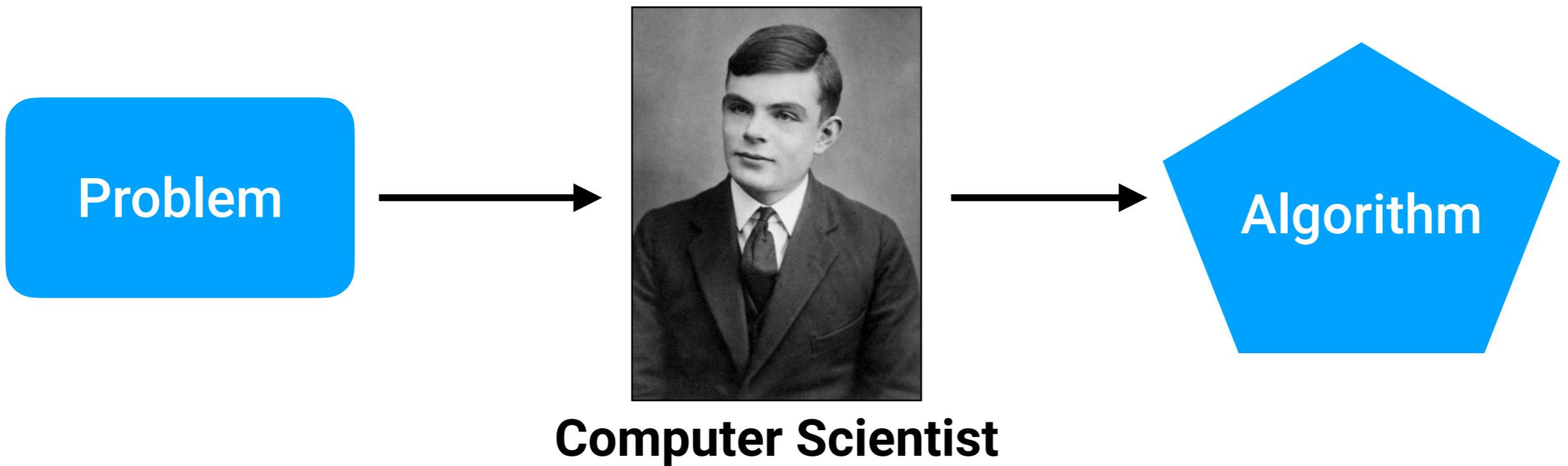
How do we design novel algorithms?

Problem



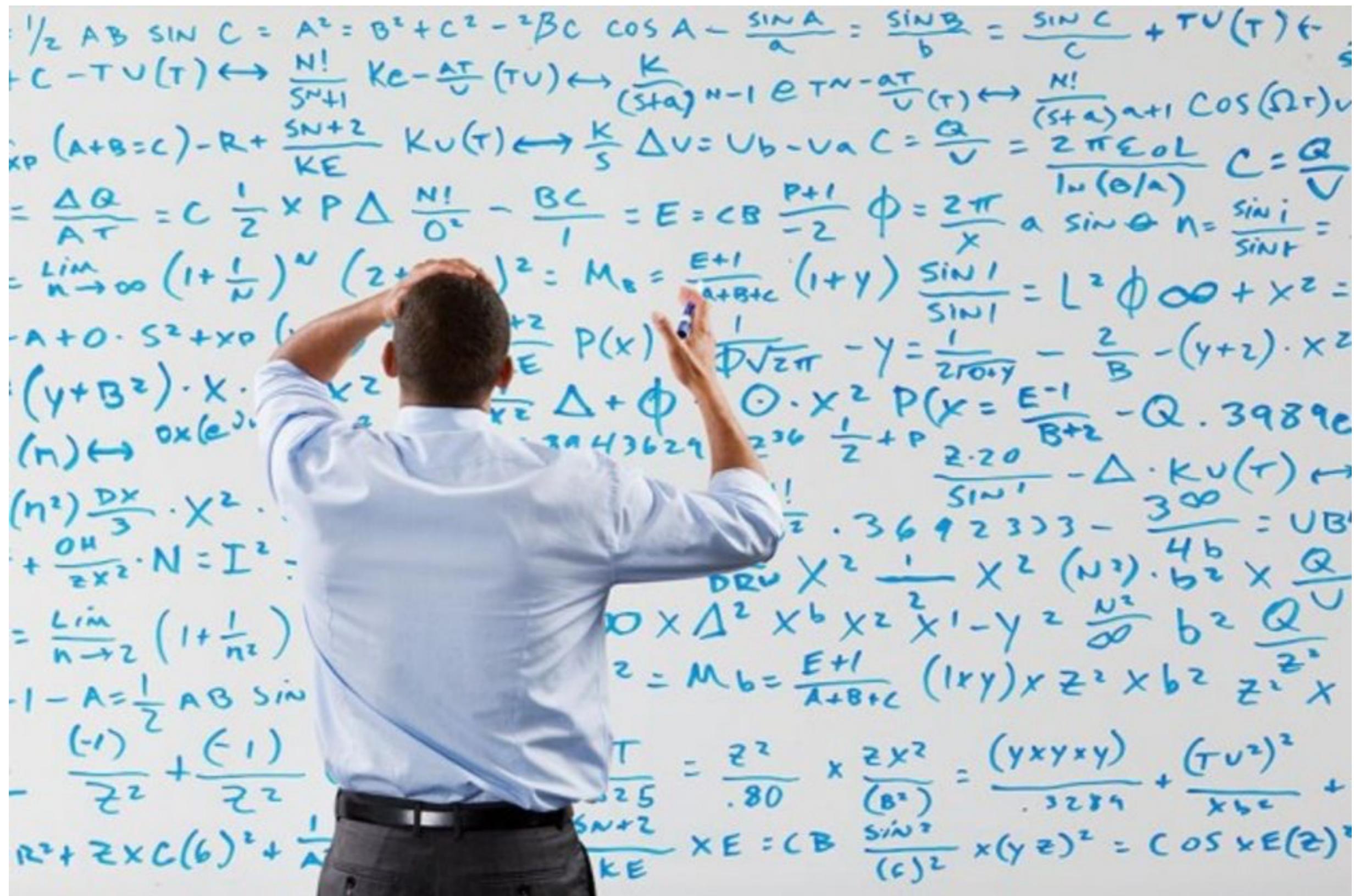
Computer Scientist

How do we design novel algorithms?

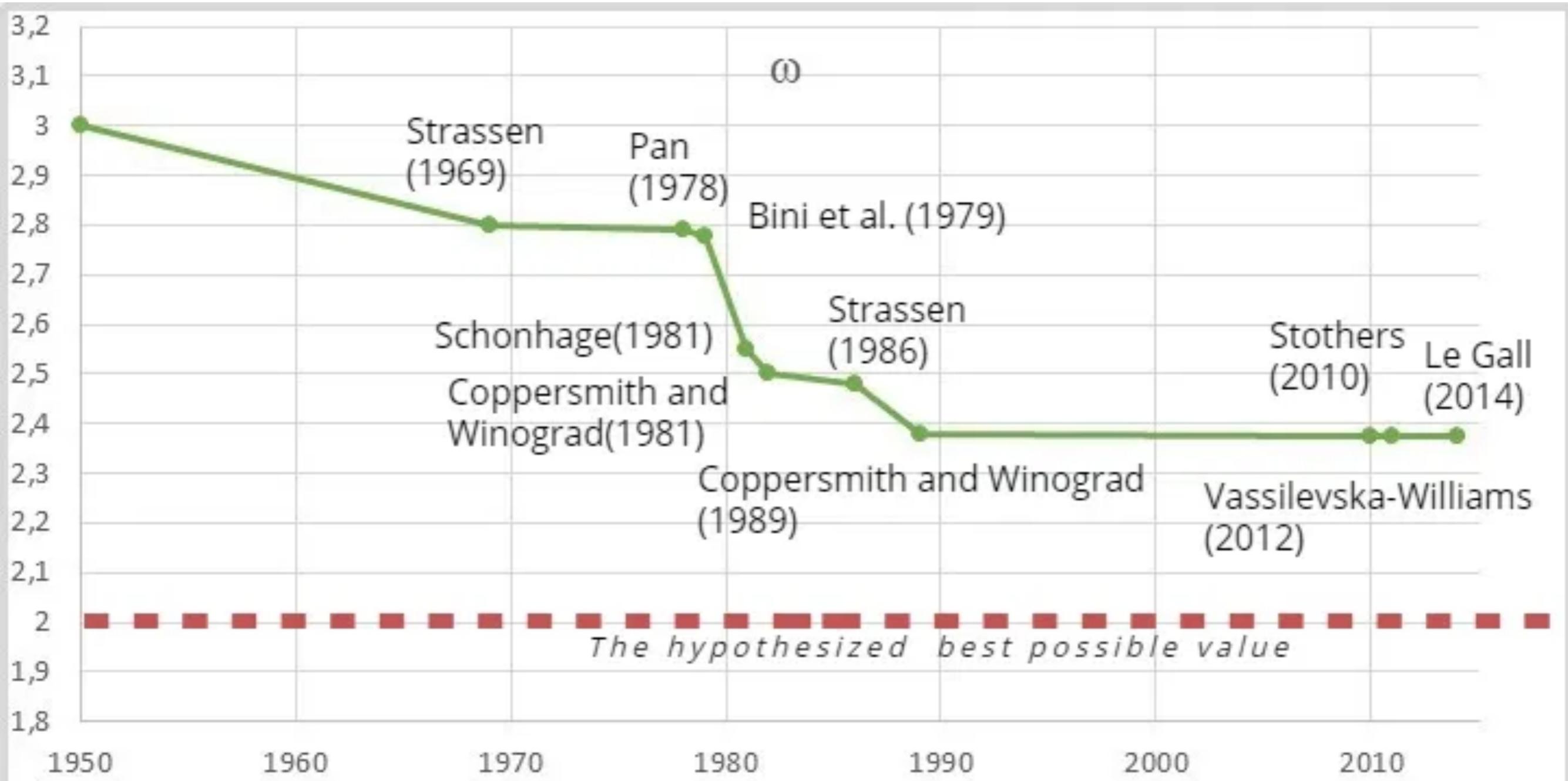


Any problems?

Problem 1: algorithm design is difficult



Matrix multiplication

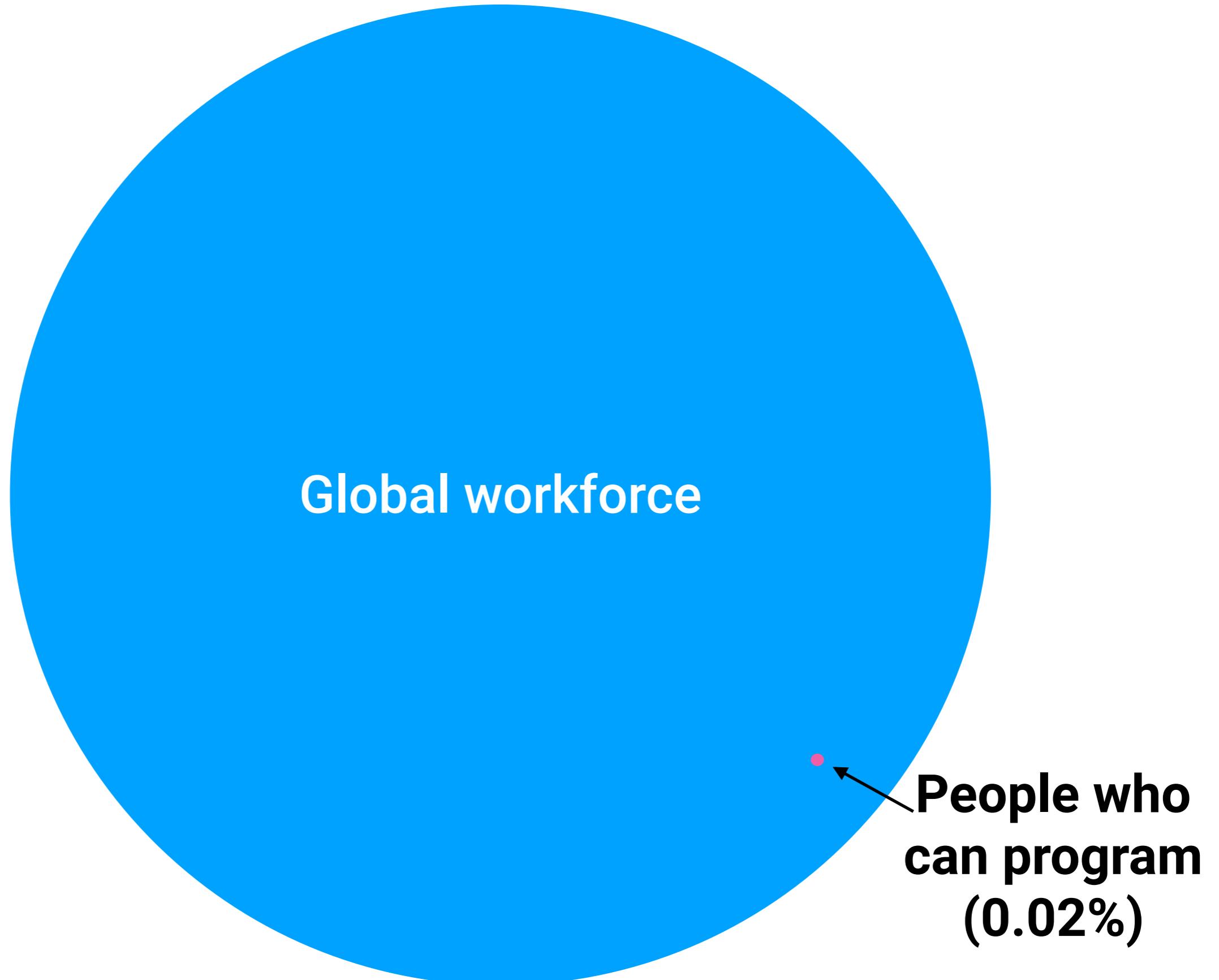


*I understand that these algorithms are not used in practice because of large hidden constants

Problem 2: few people can program

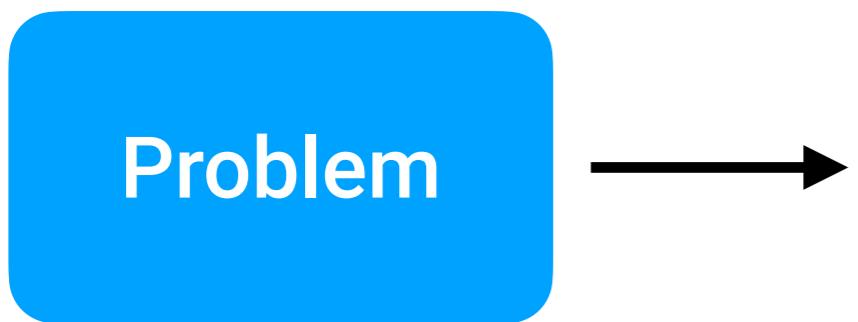


Problem 2: few people can program



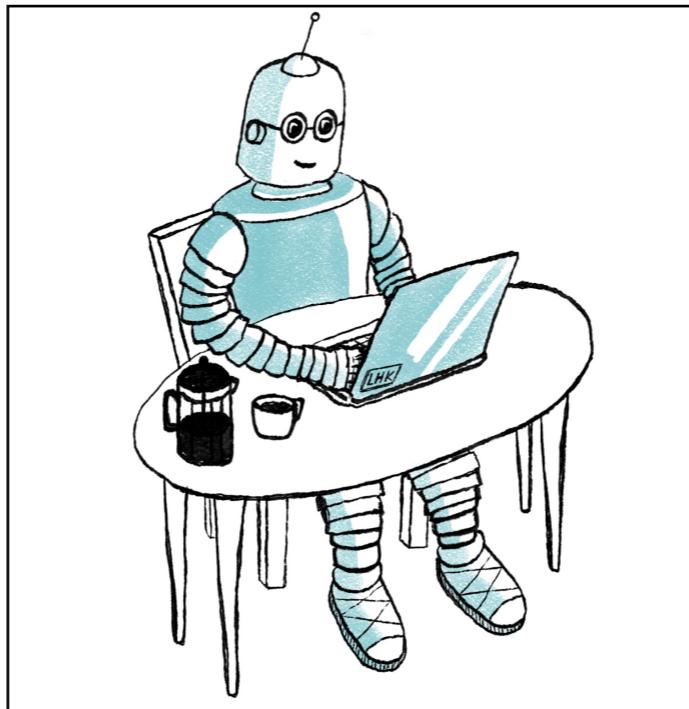
My research

My research



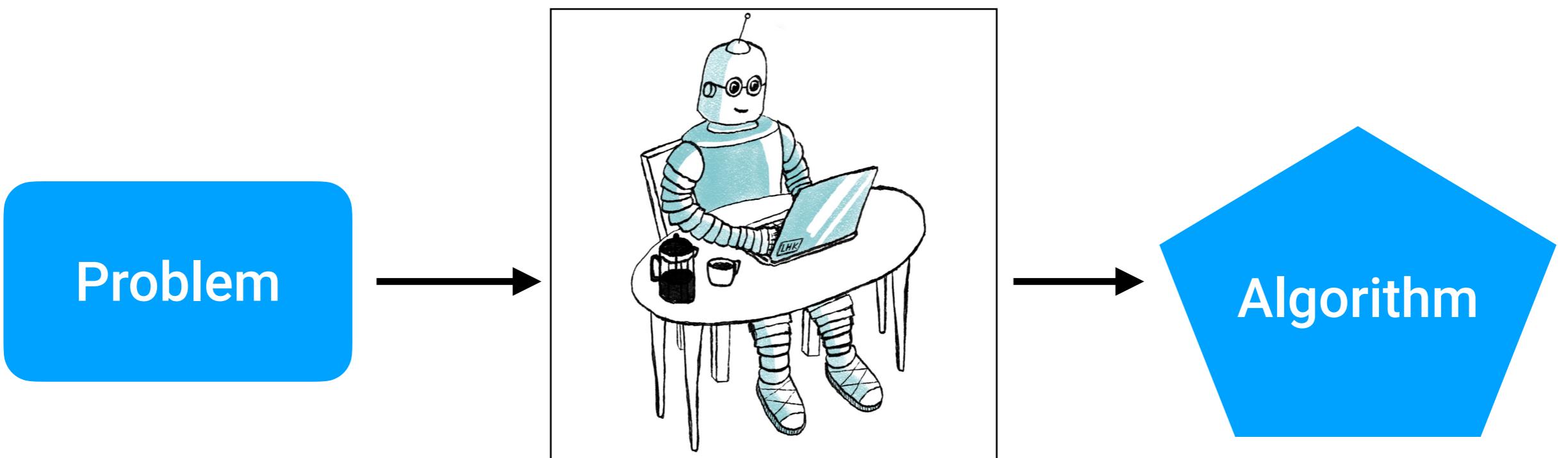
My research

Problem



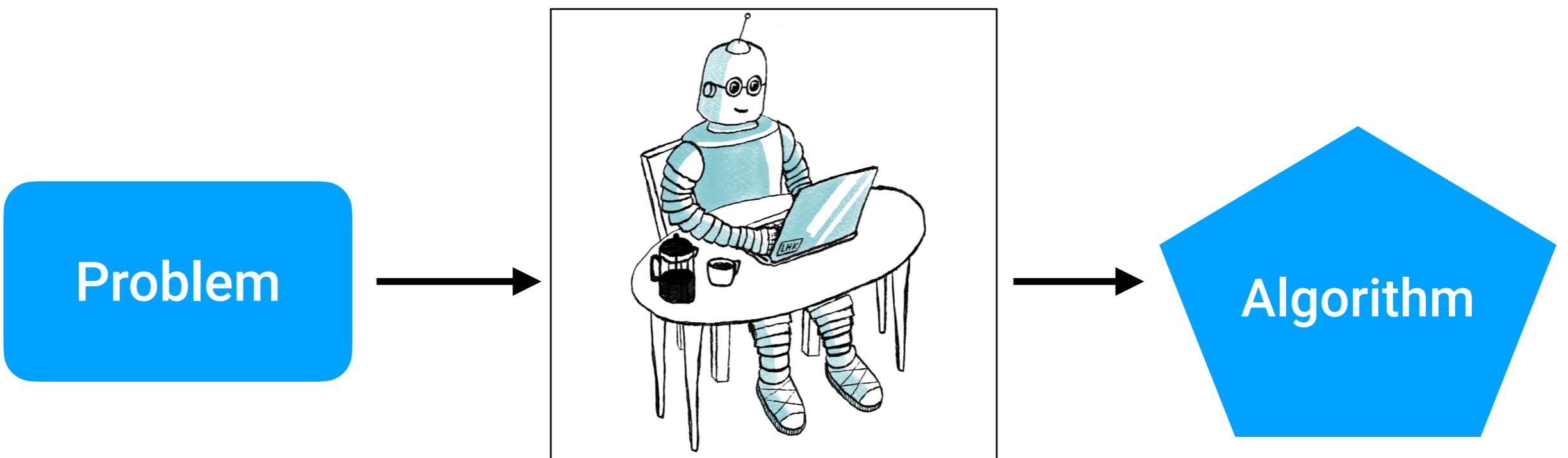
AutoCS

My research



AutoCS

My research



AutoCS

I design machine learning algorithms that learn algorithms

Algorithm discovery

Algorithm discovery

nature

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Journal information ▾

nature > articles > article

Article | Published: 20 January 2026

Machine-discovered fastest matrix multiplication algorithm

M.L. Algorithm & A. Cropper

Nature 589, 386–390 (2026) Cite this article

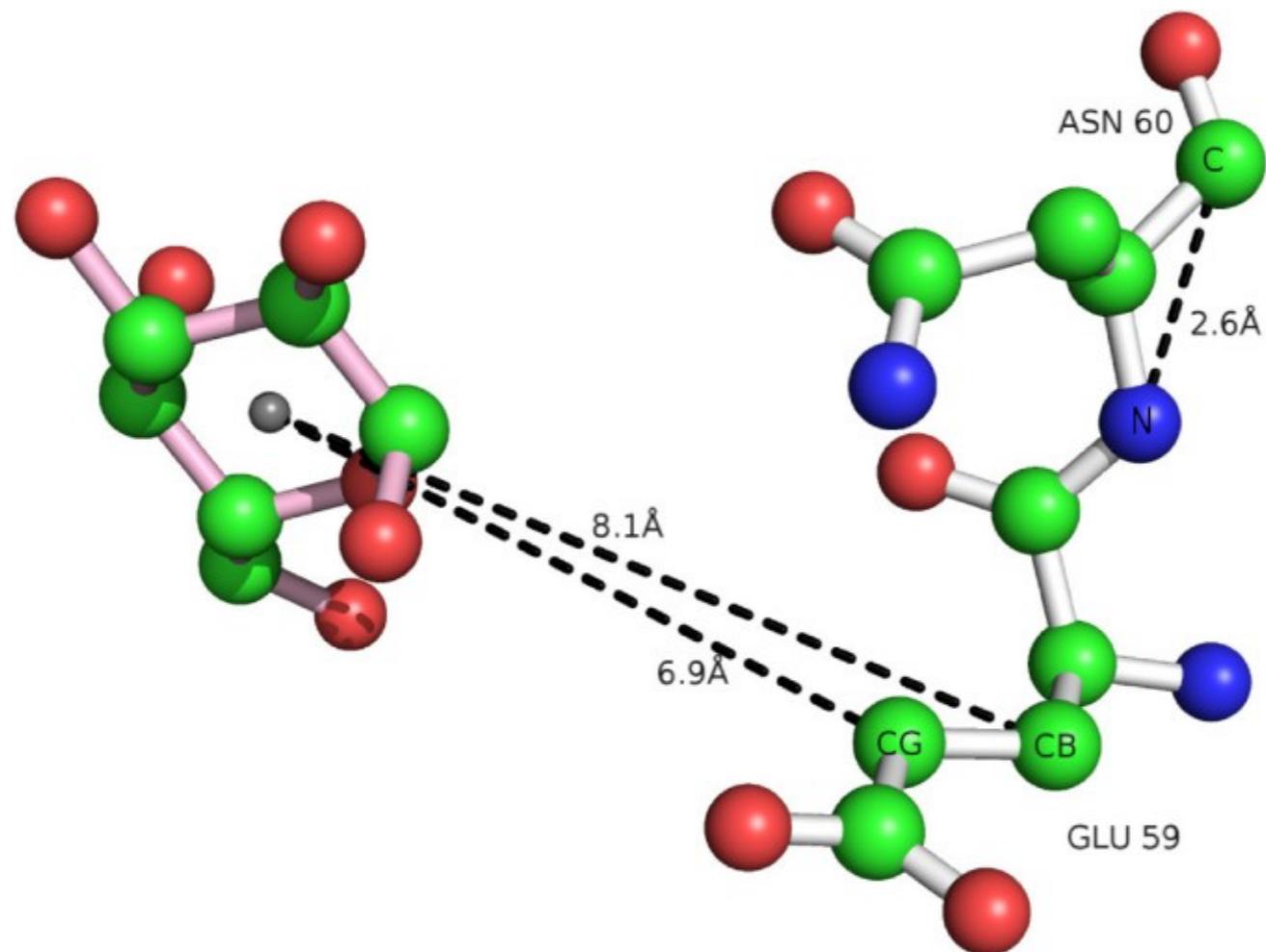
Automate programming

Automate programming

	A	B	C
1	Participants	Country	
2	Ronnie Anderson, UK	UK	
3	Tom Boone, Canada	Canada	
4	Sally Brook, USA	USA	
5	Jeremy Hill, Australia	Australia	
6	Mattias Waldau, USA	USA	
7	Robert Furlan, France	France	
8	David White, UK	UK	

Scientific discovery

Scientific discovery



What features do we want from an AutoCS?

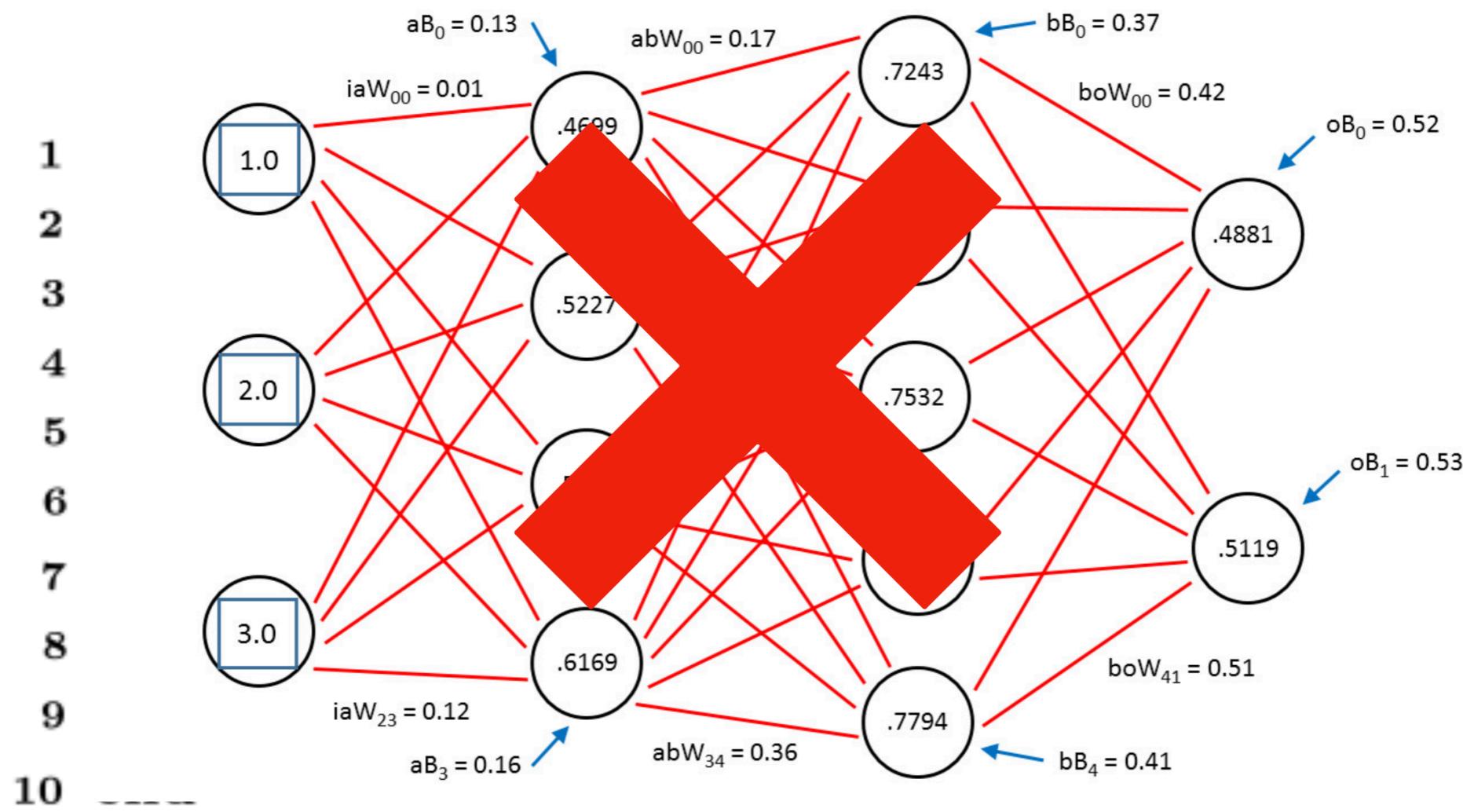
Explainability

To publish an algorithm or scientific discovery, we must
explain it to others!

Explainability

To publish an algorithm or scientific discovery, we must **explain** it to others!

Algorithm 1: How to write algorithms



Efficiency

Efficiency

	A	B	C
1	Participants	Country	
2	Ronnie Anderson, UK	UK	
3	Tom Boone, Canada	Canada	
4	Sally Brook, USA	USA	
5	Jeremy Hill, Australia	Australia	
6	Mattias Waldau, USA	USA	
7	Robert Furlan, France	France	
8	David White, UK	UK	

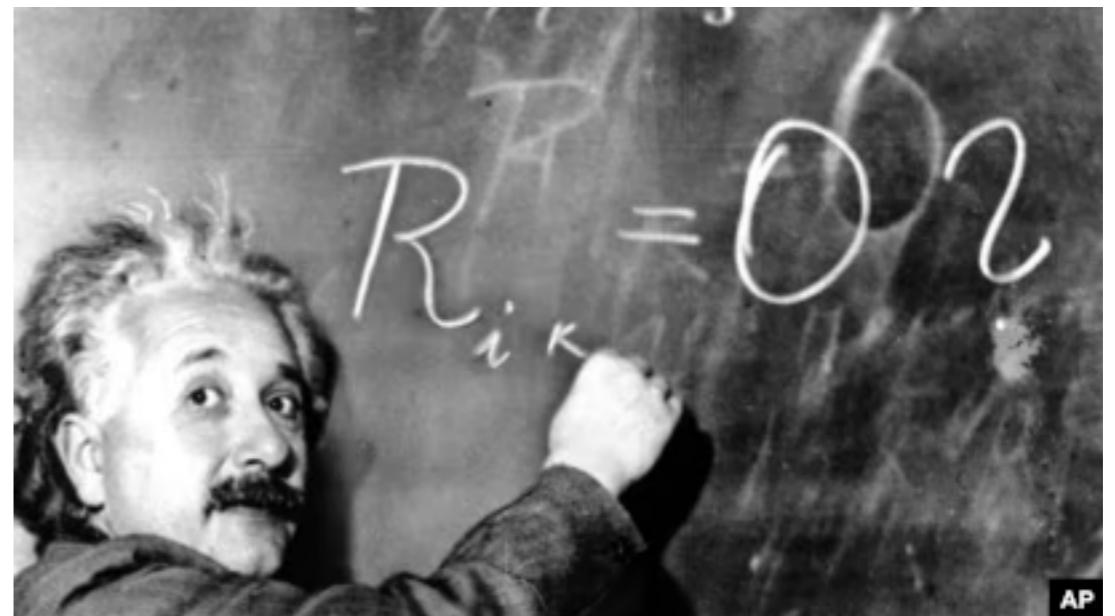
Users do not want to provide 100+ examples ...

Efficiency



Experiments can be expensive!

Expert prior knowledge



How?

Inductive logic programming

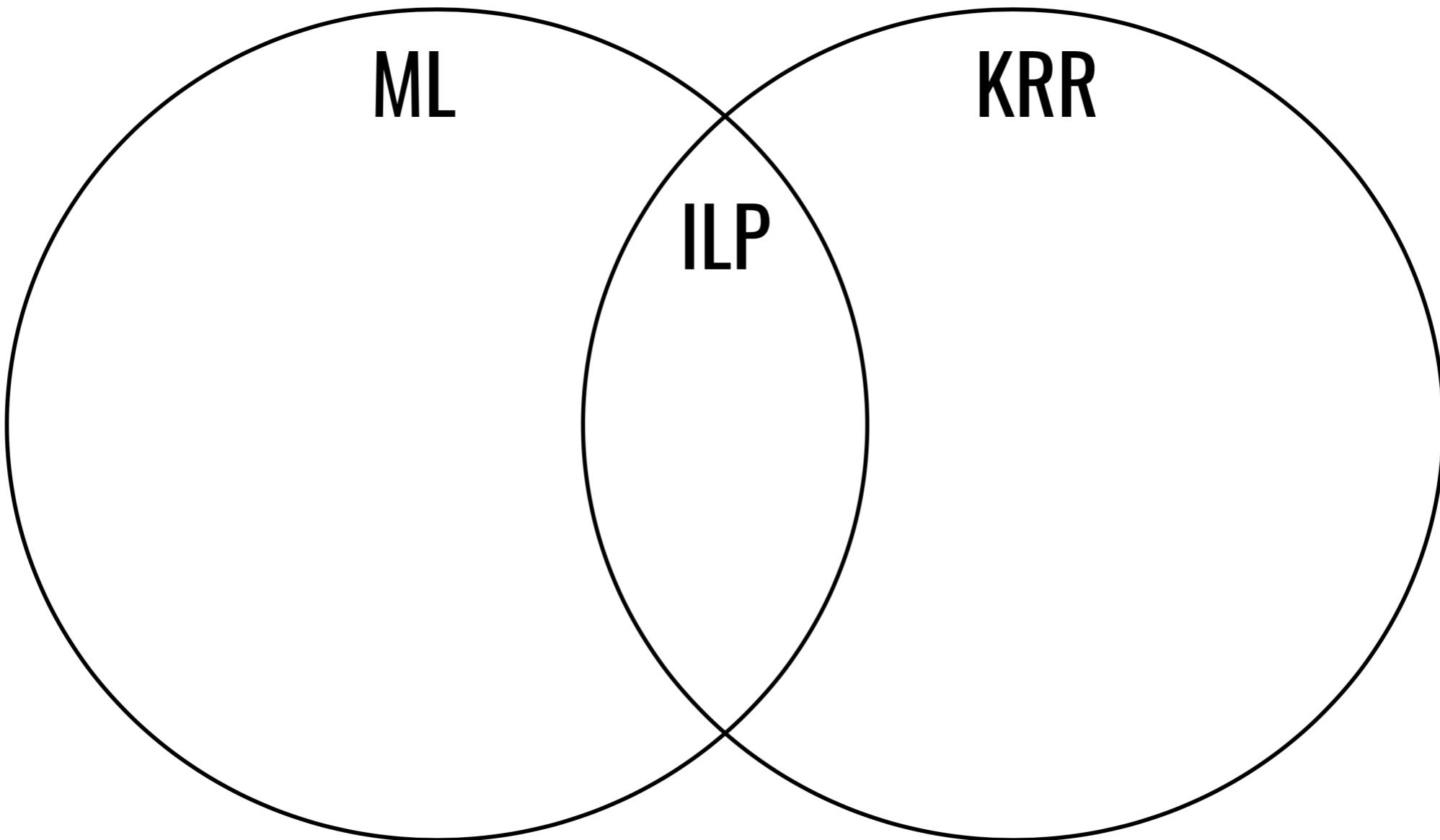
Logic-based machine learning

Inductive logic programming

Combines machine learning and logical reasoning

Inductive logic programming

Combines machine learning and logical reasoning



Inductive logic programming

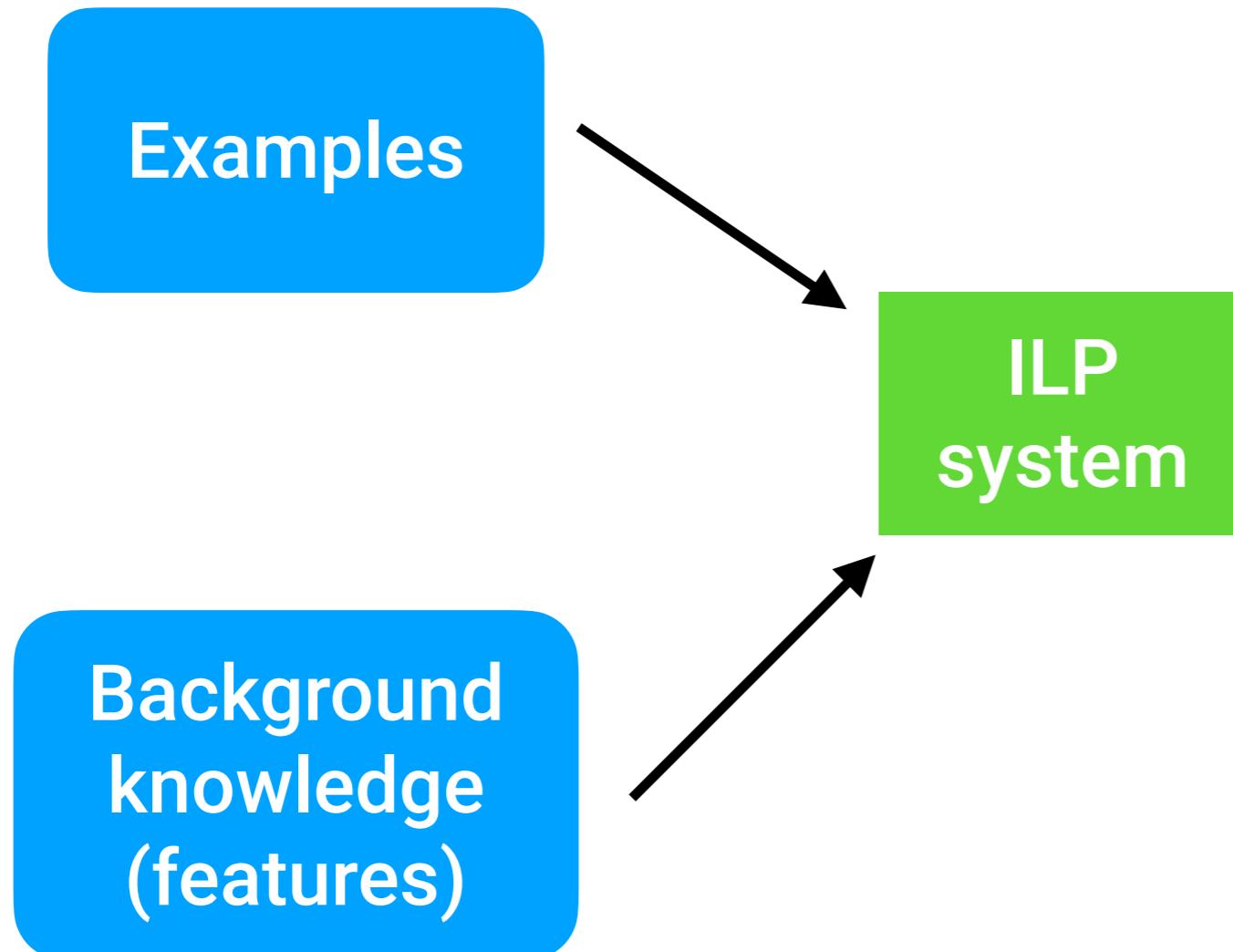
Examples

Inductive logic programming

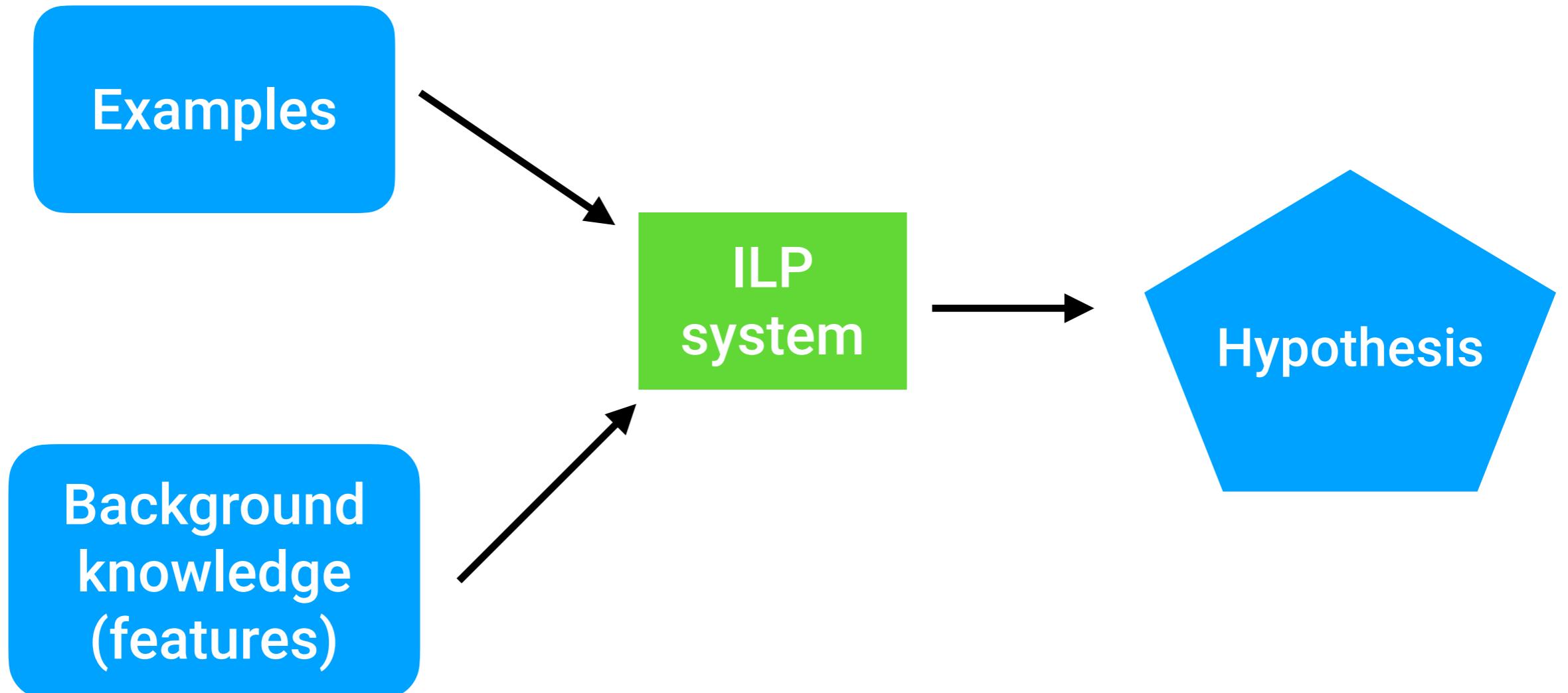
Examples

Background
knowledge
(features)

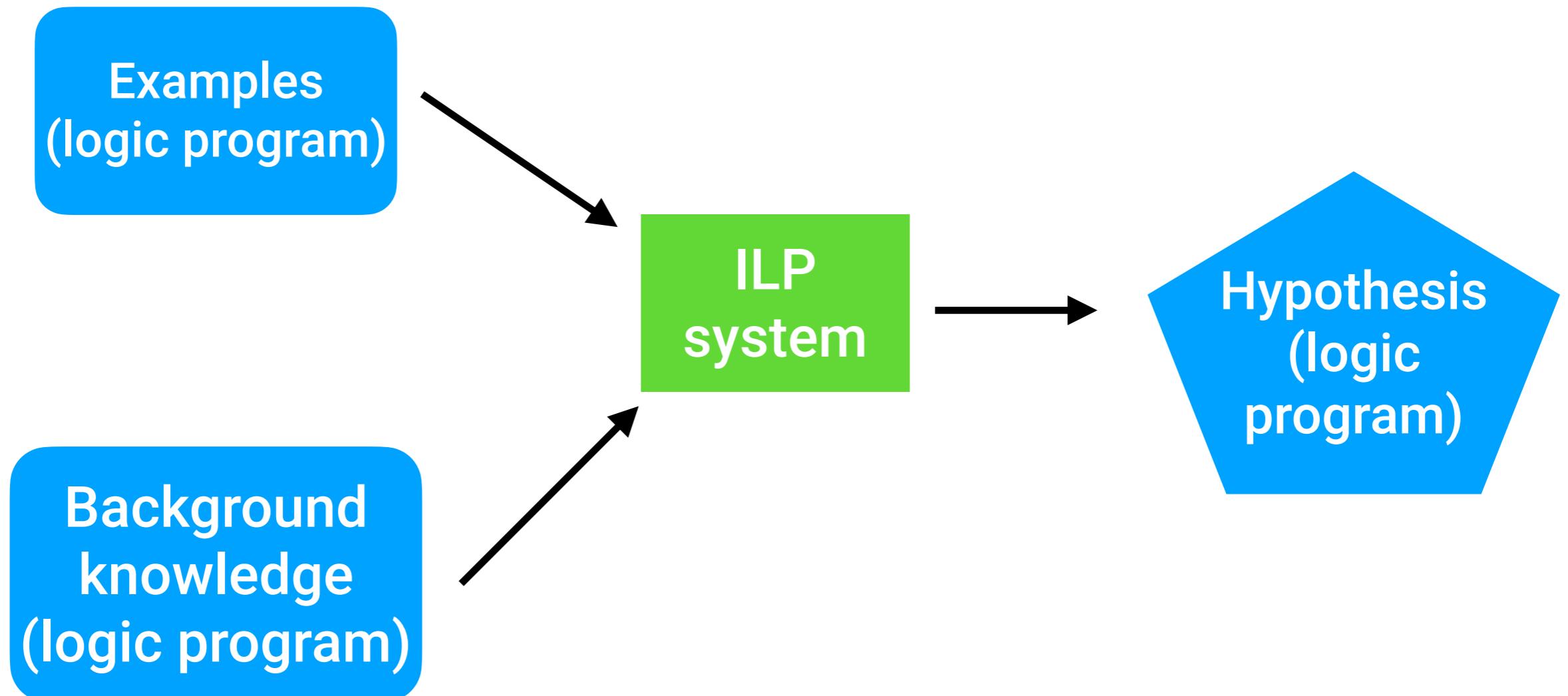
Inductive logic programming



Inductive logic programming



Inductive logic programming



Data are programs rather than tables/vectors



Why ILP?

- Data efficient ✓
- Interpretable hypotheses ✓
- Complex prior knowledge ✓

FCAI

Key objectives: data efficiency, trust & ethics, understandability

To create Real AI, we have set up three grand scientific objectives: data efficiency, trust & ethics, and understandability.

Present-day AI solutions work well only in a very small subset of simple domains. In order to expand the deployment of AI further, we need new AI tools that overcome the key shortcomings of current AI systems.



DATA EFFICIENCY

Current AI solutions can be very successful in domains where tasks are relatively simple and well-defined and an abundance of high-quality, properly annotated data are available. Existing AI methods do not, however, easily extend to domains where such data are not available or are difficult or expensive to acquire. Real AIs will be able to work with real-world scarce data – ill-defined, hard to acquire or unavailable.

TRUST & ETHICS

We will create AIs that are secure, give trustworthy results, preserve privacy, are fair, and whose use is ethically sustainable. We will develop the required privacy-preserving and secure methods to address challenges related to susceptibility to manipulation, information stealing and unethical approaches. We will provide new resilient deep learning approaches for the currently popular and successful deep neural networks.



UNDERSTANDABILITY

AI does not yet understand users. We need to open the “black box” of many AI methods: to understand how methods such as neural networks operate and what are the uncertainties inherent to their outputs. Modeling the user and the interaction will help the AI understand the user and vice versa. The outcome is AIs that are able to augment human capabilities in a multitude of tasks.

Why logic programs?

Please ask me in the Q&A section

A very very quick overview of logic programs ...

$$\forall A. \text{works_in}(A, \text{finland}) \rightarrow \text{happy}(A)$$

If A works in Finland then A is happy

$$\forall A. \text{works_at}(A, \text{finland}) \wedge \neg \text{winter} \rightarrow \text{happy}(A)$$

If A works in Finland and it is not winter then A is happy

$$\forall A. \text{happy}(A) \leftarrow \text{works_in}(A, \text{finland}) \wedge \neg \text{winter}$$

A is happy if A works at Finland and it is not winter

`happy(A) ← works_in(A,finland) ∧ ¬winter`

A is happy if A works in Finland and it is not winter

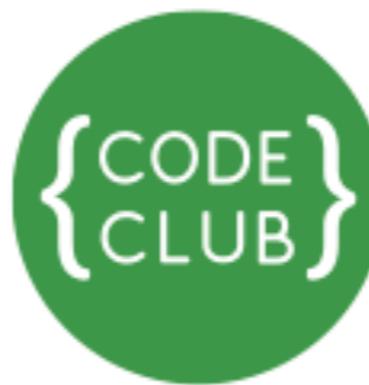
```
happy(A):- works_in(A,finland), not winter.
```

```
happy(A):- works_in(A,finland), not winter.  
happy(A):- works_at(A,finland), owns_sad_light(A).
```

A is happy if A works in Finland and it is not winter

or

A is happy if A works in Finland and owns a SAD light

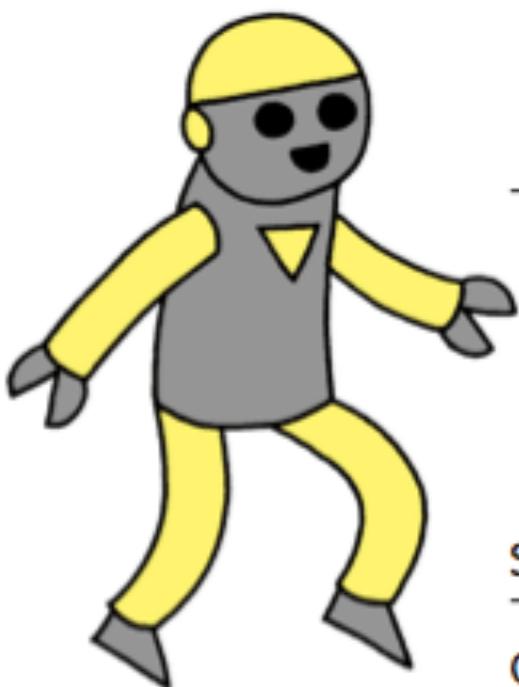


CONGRATULATIONS!

This is to certify that

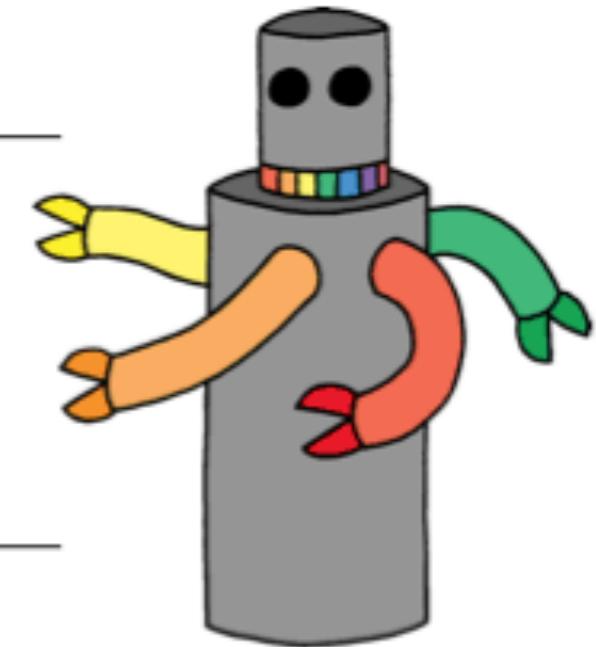
FCAI

has completed **level 1** of Logic Club



Signed: A. Cropper

Club Leader



Two toy examples

input	output
Häkkinen	ä
Rosberg	o
Räikkönen	?

input	output
Häkkinen	ä
Rosberg	o
Räikkönen	ä

input	output
Häkkinen	ä
Rosberg	o
Räikkönen	ä

```
def f(A):
    C = tail(A)
    B = head(C)
    return B
```

everything after the first element of A

the first element of C

Functions to relations

input	output
Häkkinen	ä
Rosberg	o
Räikkönen	ä

Functions to relations

input	output	logical representation
Häkkinen	ä	$f(\text{Häkkinen}, \ddot{a})$
Rosberg	o	$f(\text{Rosberg}, o)$
Räikkönen	ä	$f(\text{Räikkönen}, \ddot{a})$

Examples

f(Häkkinen,n)

f(Rosberg,g)

f(Räikkönen,n)

Examples

f(Häkkinen,n)

f(Rosberg,g)

f(Räikkönen,n)

BK

head(fcai,f).

head(cai,c).

head(ai,a).

...

tail(fcai,cai).

tail(cai,ca).

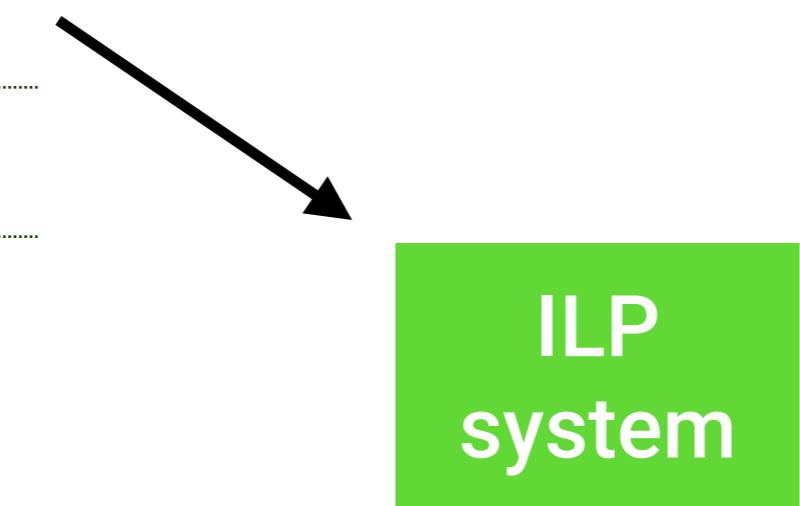
...

Examples

$f(\text{Häkkinen}, n)$

$f(\text{Rosberg}, g)$

$f(\text{Räikkönen}, n)$



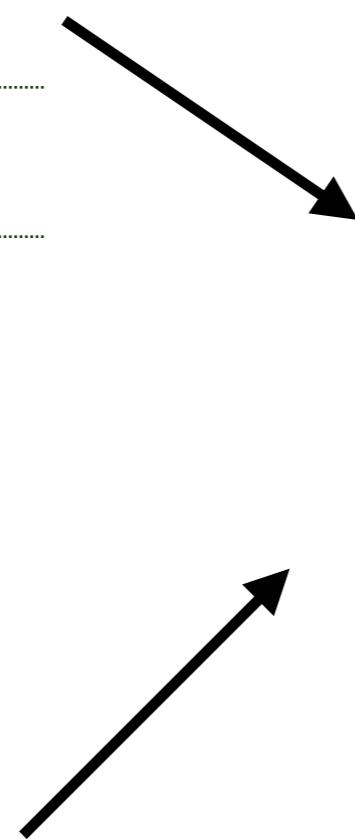
BK

Examples

$f(\text{Häkkinen}, n)$

$f(\text{Rosberg}, g)$

$f(\text{Räikkönen}, n)$



Hypothesis

$f(A, B) :-$
tail(A, C),
head(C, B).

BK

Hypothesis

`f(A,B):- tail(A,C), head(C,B).`

*“B is the second element of A if
it is the head of the tail of A”*

input	output
Jyväskylä	ää
Helsinki	i
Espoo	?

input	output
Jyväskylä	ää
Helsinki	i
Espoo	o

examples

f(Jyväskylä,ä)

f(Helsinki,i)

f(Espoo,o)

examples

f(Jyväskylä,ä)

f(Helsinki,i)

f(Espoo,o)

f(A,B):- head(A,B), tail(A,C), empty(C).

f(A,B):- tail(A,C), f(C,B).  *recursion*

```
f(A,B) :- head(A,B), tail(A,C), empty(C).  
f(A,B) :- tail(A,C), f(C,B).
```

B is the last element of A if

B is the head of A and the tail of A is empty

or

C is the tail of A and B is the last element of C

```
f(A,B) :- head(A,B), tail(A,C), empty(C).  
f(A,B) :- tail(A,C), f(C,B).
```

B is the last element of A if

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```

B is the last element of A if

B is the head of A and the tail of A is empty

or

C is the tail of A and B is the last element of C

How do we do it?

Inductive Logic Programming At 30: A New Introduction

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Sebastijan Dumančić

*TU Delft, Van Mourik Broekmanweg 6, 2628 XE Delft,
The Netherlands*

S.DUMANCIC@TUDELFT.NL

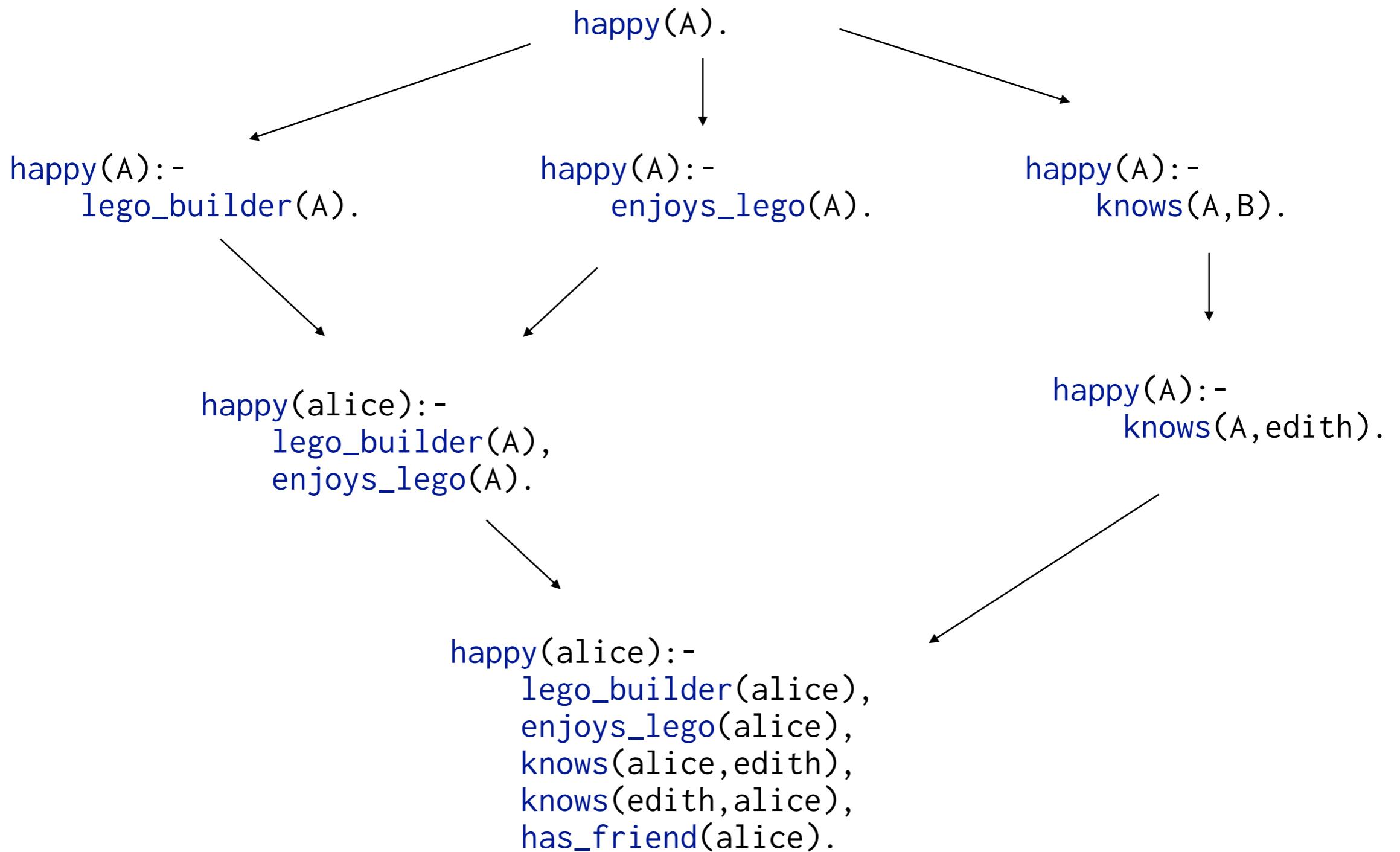
Abstract

Inductive logic programming (ILP) is a form of machine learning. The goal of ILP is to induce a hypothesis (a set of logical rules) that generalises training examples. As ILP turns 30, we provide a new introduction to the field. We introduce the necessary logical notation and the main learning settings; describe the building blocks of an ILP system; compare several systems on several dimensions; describe four systems (Aleph, TILDE, ASPAL, and Metagol); highlight key application areas; and, finally, summarise current limitations and directions for future research.

Subsumption lattice

happy(A):- ?

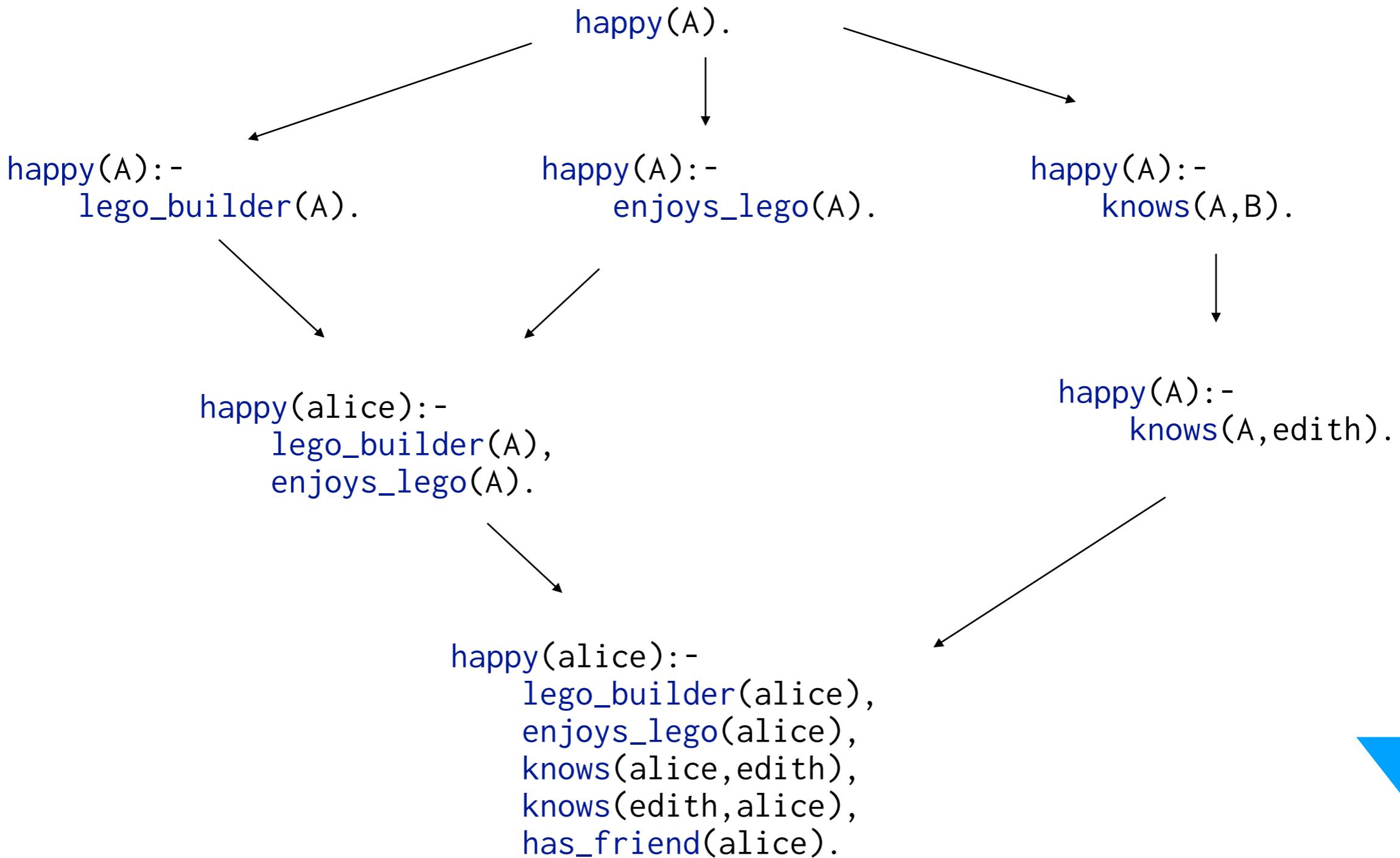
Subsumption lattice



Top-down

Start with a general hypothesis and iteratively specialise it

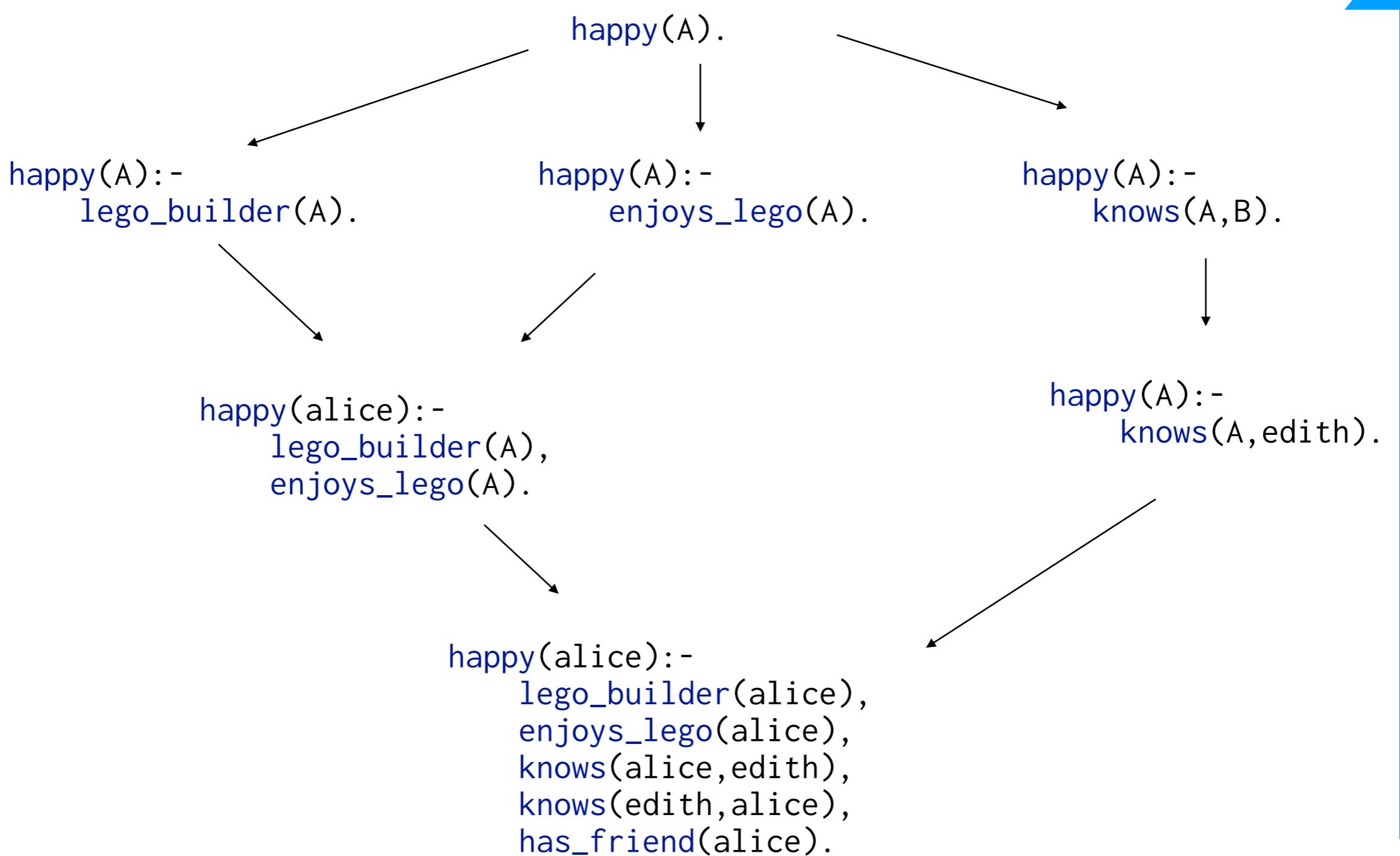
Top-down



Bottom up

Start with a specific hypothesis and iteratively generalise it

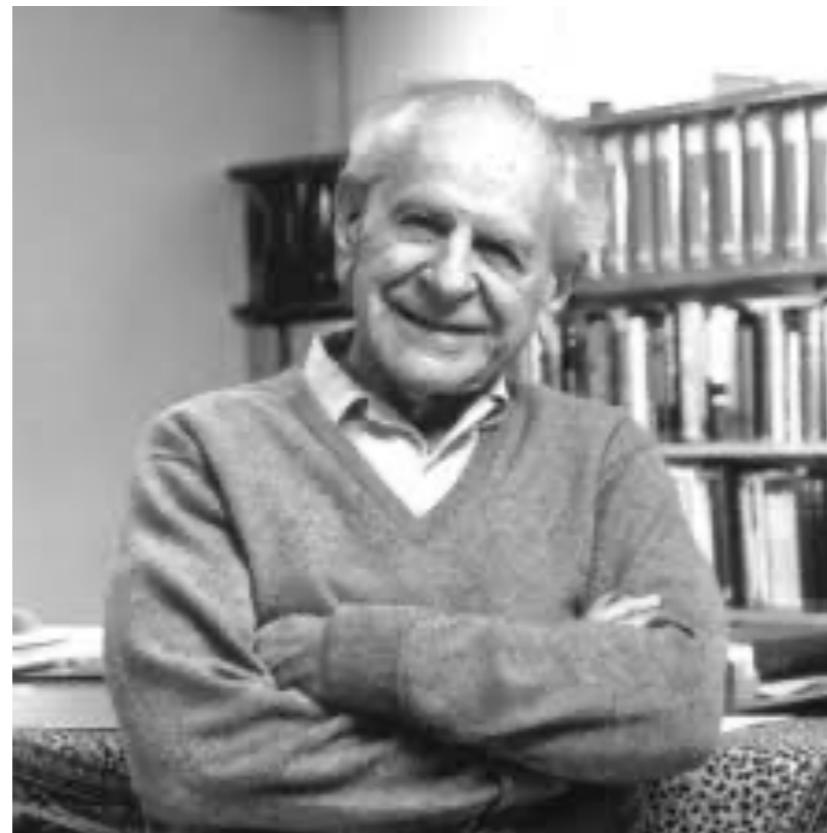
Bottom up



How does my group do it?

Popper

Automates Karl Popper's idea of falsification:



Popper

Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

Popper

Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

1. Form a hypothesis

Popper

Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

1. Form a hypothesis
2. Empirically try to refute it

Popper

Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

1. Form a hypothesis
2. Empirically try to refute it
3. If the hypothesis fails, **determine why**

Popper

Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

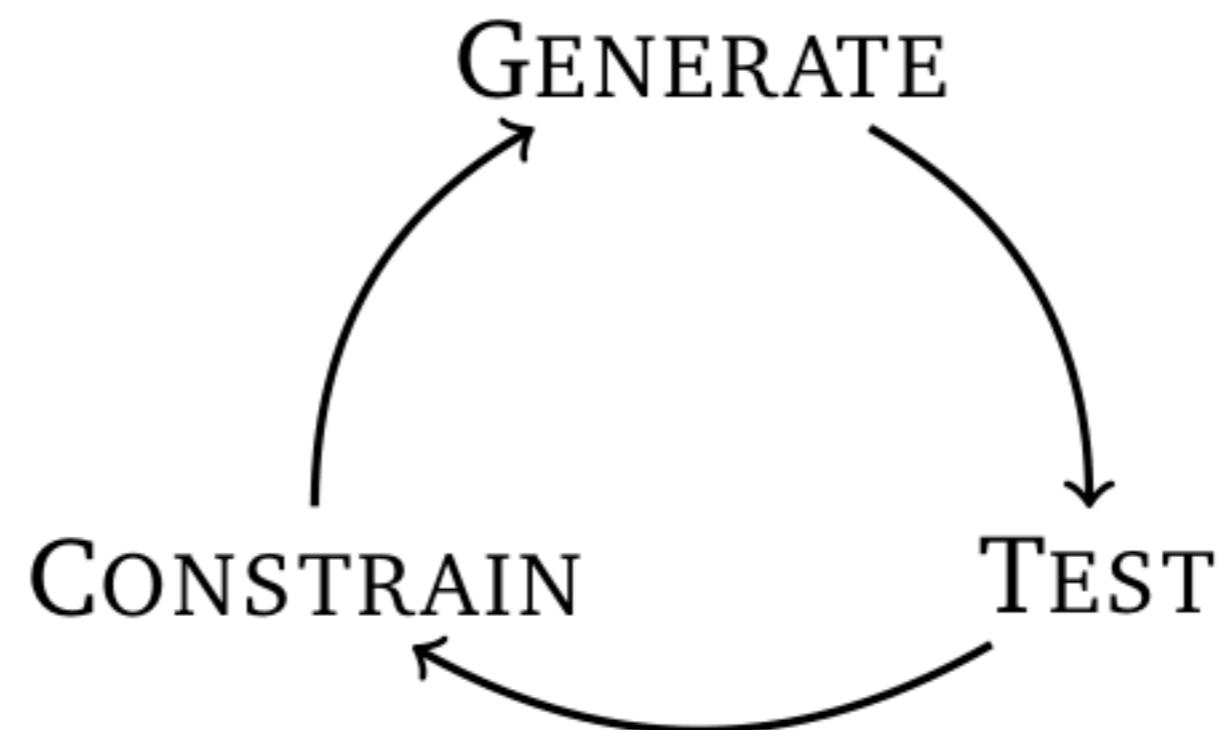
1. Form a hypothesis
2. Empirically try to refute it
3. If the hypothesis fails, **determine why**
4. Use the **explanation** to rule out other hypotheses

Popper

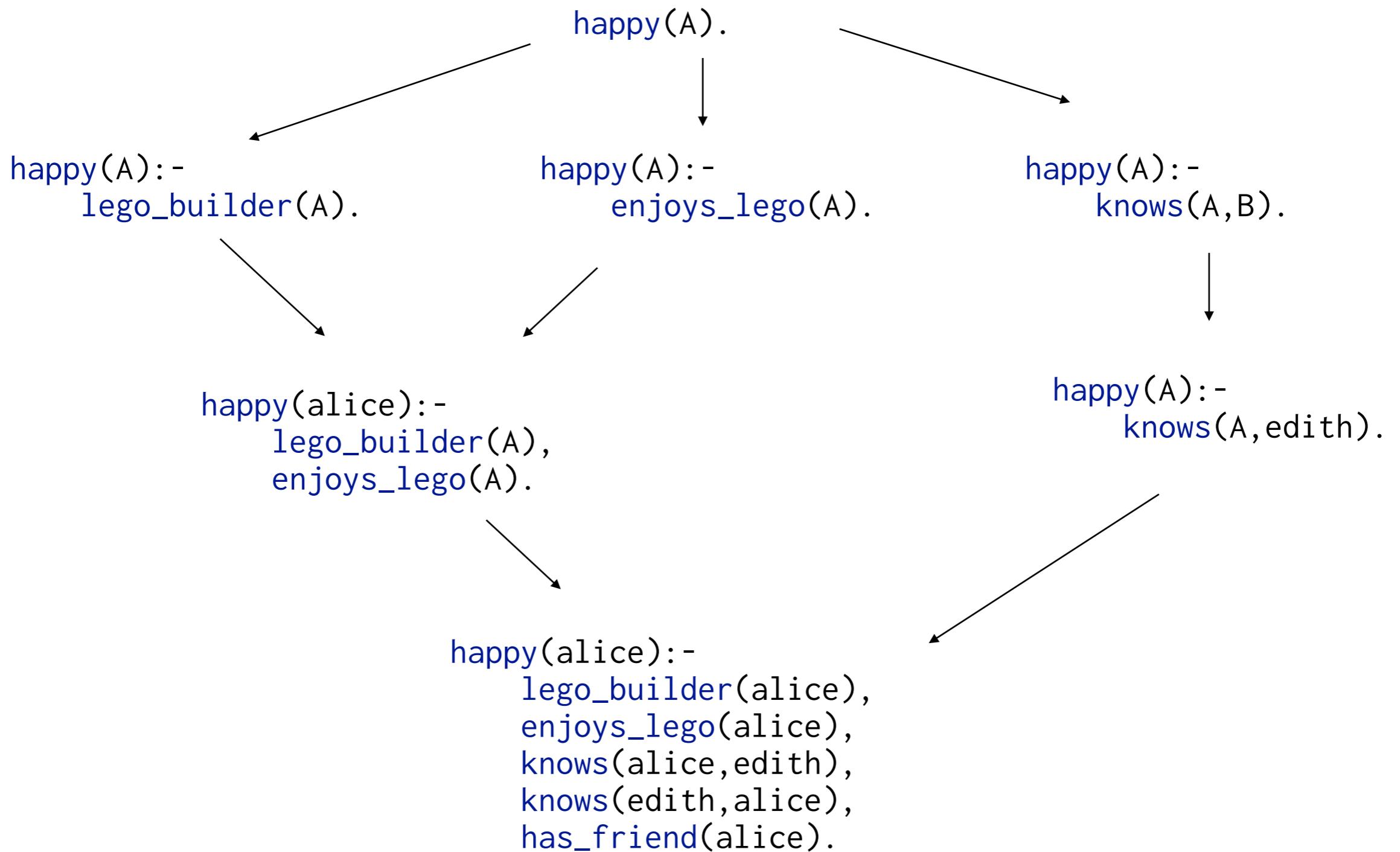
Automate Karl Popper's falsifiability:

1. Form a hypothesis
2. Empirically try to refute it
3. If the hypothesis fails, **determine why**
4. Use the **explanation** to rule out other hypotheses
5. Go to 1

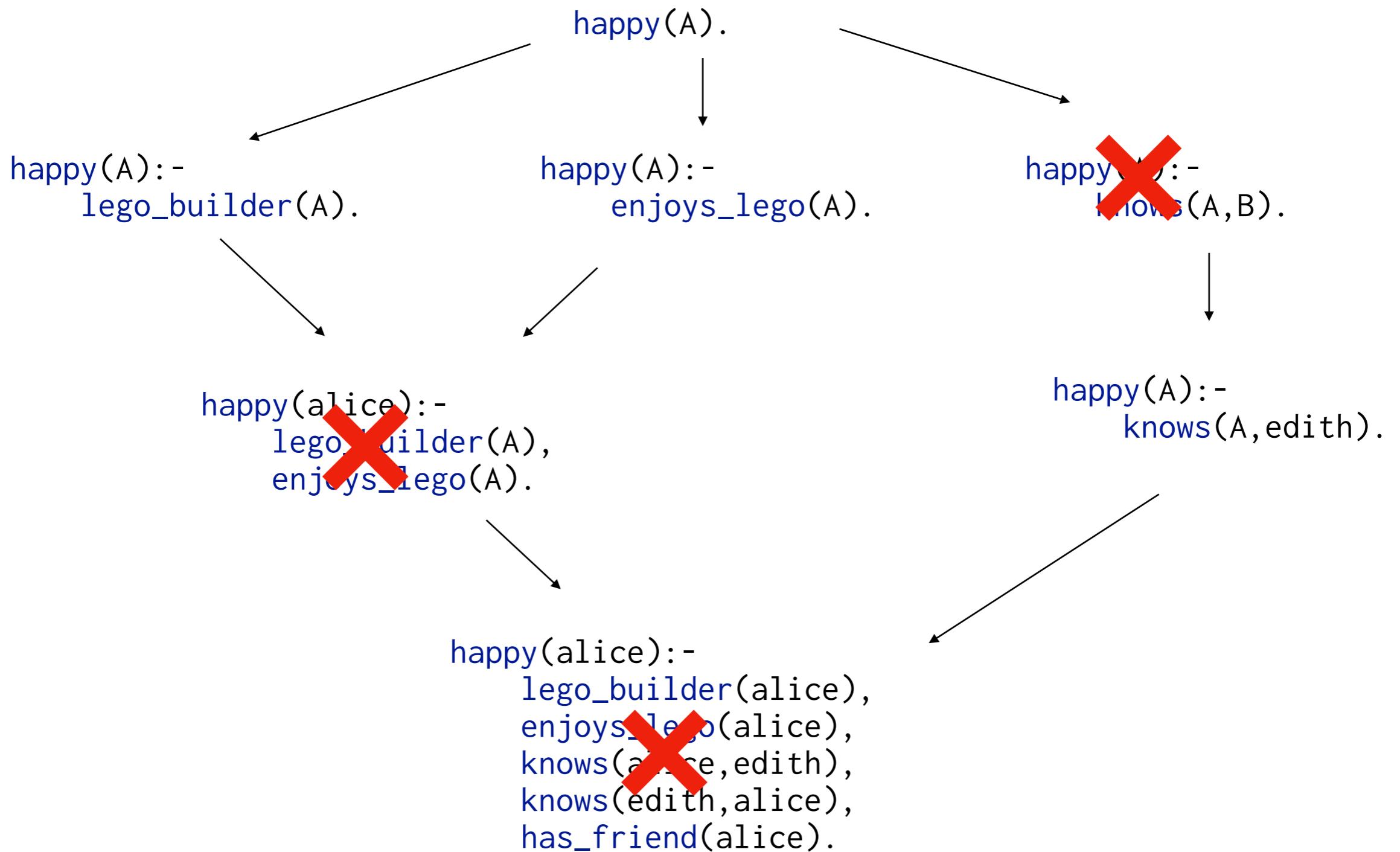
Popper



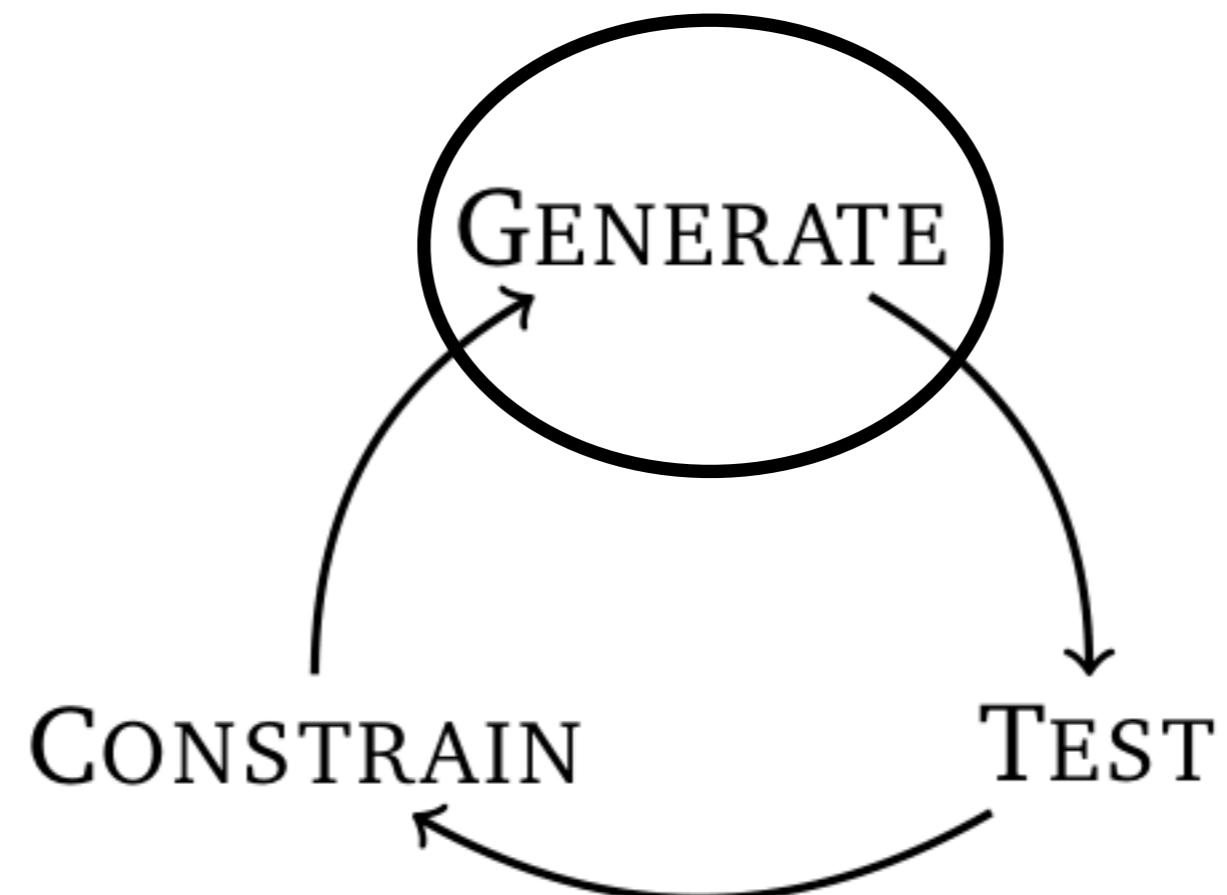
Popper



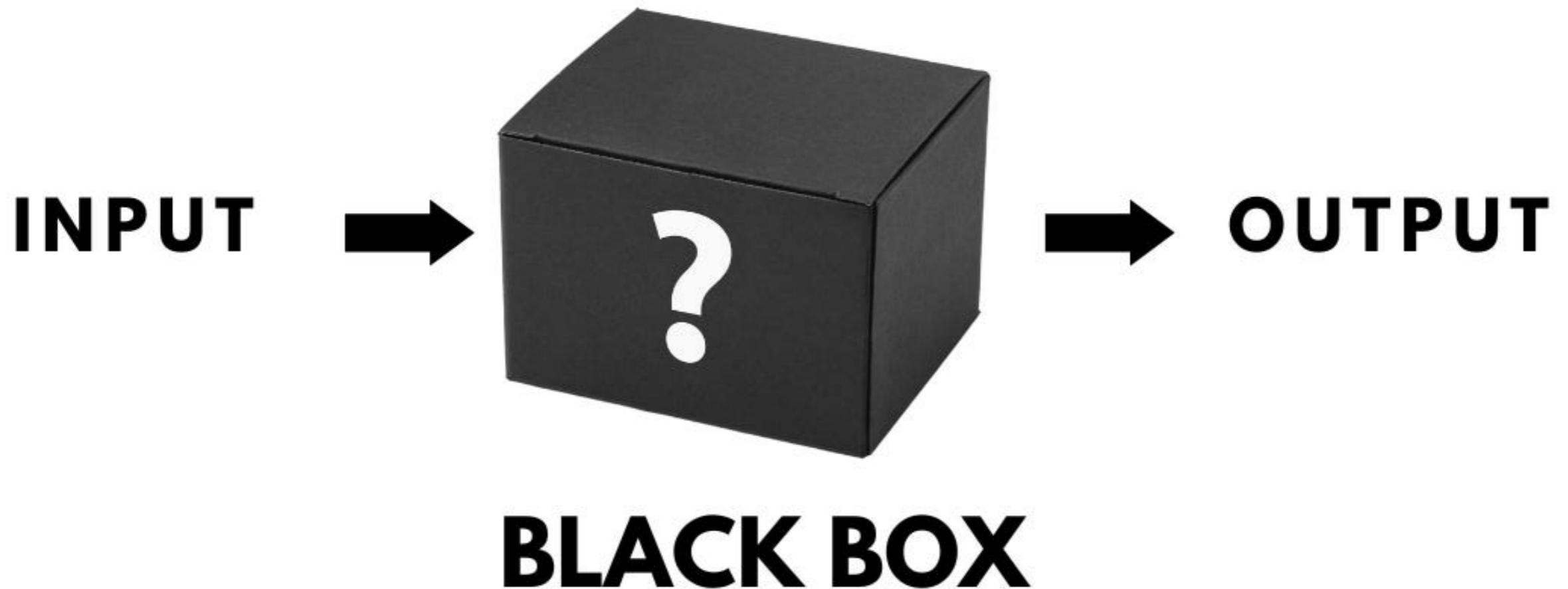
Popper



Popper



How to generate a hypothesis?



Black box

SAT problem: a formula where every model
represents a different hypothesis

Black box

happy(A) :- ???

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

...

happy(A) : - ???

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

...

F = L1 ∨ L2 ∨ L3 ∨ L4 ∨ L5 ∨ L6

happy(A) :- ???

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

...

{L1}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(A)

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

...

{L2}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(B)

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

...

F = L1 v L2 v L3 v L4 v L5 v L6

{L2}

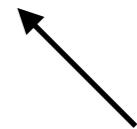
happy(A) :- ~~lego_builder(B)~~

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)
L2 = lego_builder(B)
L3 = enjoys_lego(A)
L4 = enjoys_lego(B)
L5 = knows(A,B)
L6 = knows(B,A)

...

$$F = (L1 \vee L2 \vee L3 \vee L4 \vee L5 \vee L6) \wedge (L1 \vee L3 \vee L5 \vee L6)$$



The variable **A** must be in the body

{L2}

happy(A) :- ~~lego_builder(B)~~

Black box

L1 = lego_builder(A)

L2 = lego_builder(B)

L3 = enjoys_lego(A)

L4 = enjoys_lego(B)

L5 = knows(A,B)

L6 = knows(B,A)

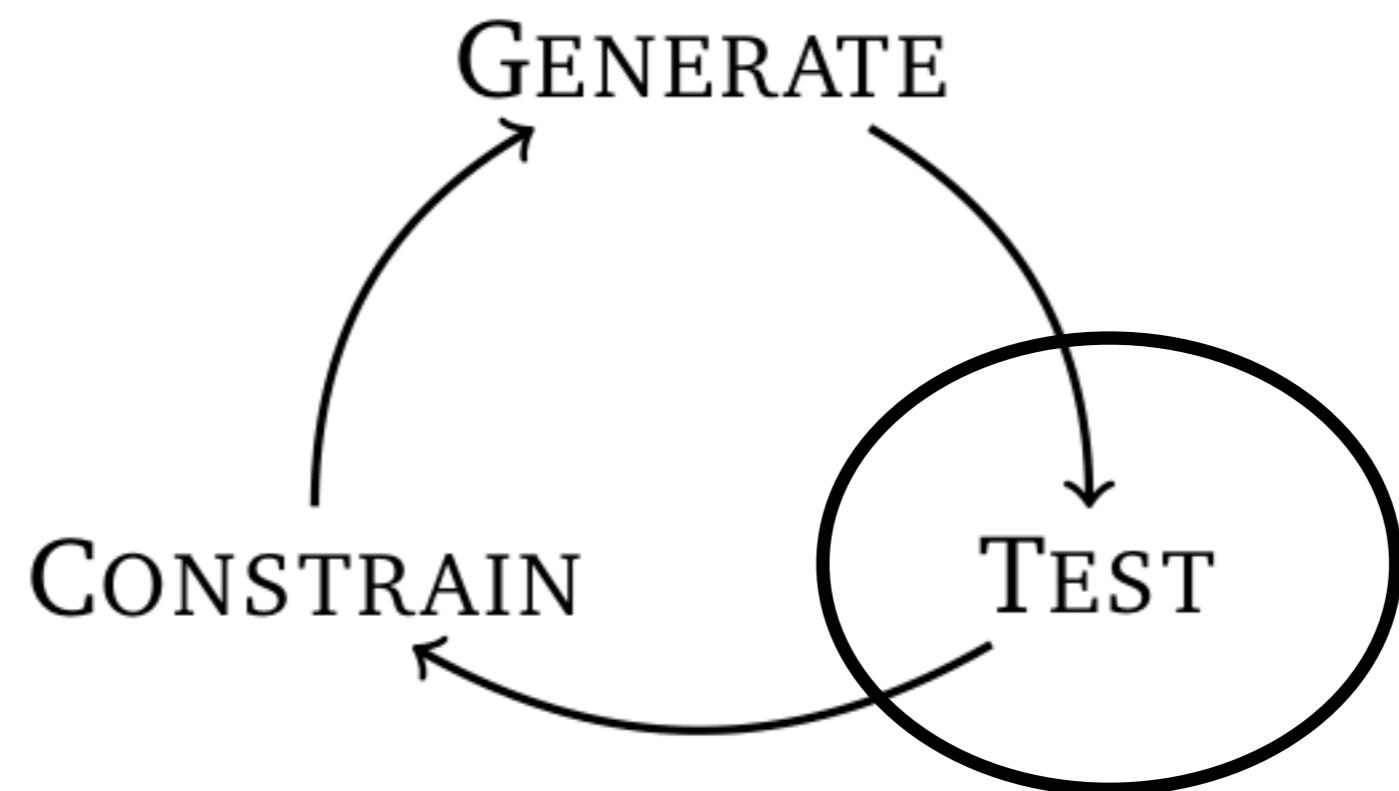
...

$$\begin{aligned} F = \\ (L1 \vee L2 \vee L3 \vee L4 \vee L5 \vee L6) \\ \wedge \\ (L1 \vee L3 \vee L5 \vee L6) \end{aligned}$$

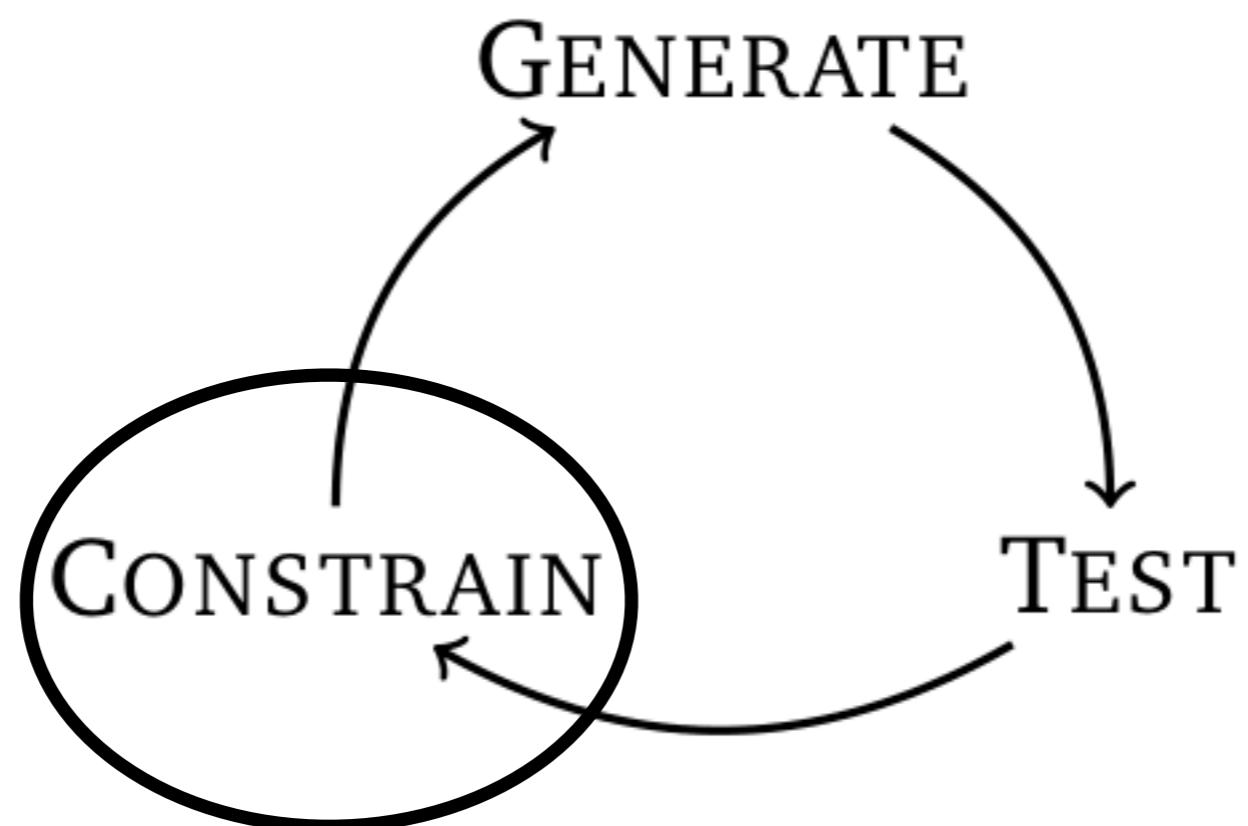
{L1, L5, L4}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(A), knows(A,B), enjoys_lego(B)

Popper



Popper



Constrain

Adding a clause/constraint prunes at least one model/
hypothesis

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too specific we prune all hypotheses that syntactically specialise it

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too specific we prune all hypotheses that syntactically specialise it

{L1, L2, L4}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(A), lego_builder(B), knows(A,B)

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too specific we prune all hypotheses that syntactically specialise it

{L1, L2, L4}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(A), lego_builder(B), knows(A,B)

not (L1 ^ L2 ^ L4)

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too specific we prune all hypotheses that syntactically specialise it

{L1, L2, L4}

happy(A) :- lego_builder(A), lego_builder(B), knows(A,B)

(not L1 v not L2 v not L4)

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too specific we prune all hypotheses that syntactically specialise it

$$\begin{aligned} F = & \\ (L_1 \vee L_2 \vee L_3 \vee L_4 \vee L_5 \vee L_6) & \\ \wedge & \\ (L_1 \vee L_3 \vee L_5 \vee L_6) & \\ \wedge & \\ (\text{not } L_1 \vee \text{not } L_2 \vee \text{not } L_4) & \end{aligned}$$

Failure explanation

If a hypothesis is too general we prune all hypotheses that syntactically generalise it

Failure explanation

```
f(A,B):-
    tail(A,C).
    head(C,B),
    odd(B),
    even(B).
```

Failure explanation

Explanation

```
f(A,B) :-  
    tail(A,C).  
    head(C,B),  
    odd(B),  
    even(B).  
        :-  
            odd(B),  
            even(B).
```

Failure explanation

Explanation

```
f(A,B) :-  
    tail(A,C).  
    head(C,B),  
    odd(B),  
    even(B).  
        :-  
            odd(B),  
            even(B).
```

Prune all hypotheses that contain this pair of literals

Popper

Recursion [MLJ21]

Predicate invention [IJCAI16, AAAI24]

MDL programs [AAAI24]

Many rules [ECAI23]

Big rules [IJCAI24]

Numerical reasoning [MLJ23, AAAI23]

Popper

Recursion [MLJ21]

Predicate invention [IJCAI16, AAAI24]

MDL programs [AAAI24]

Many rules [ECAI23]

Big rules [IJCAI24]

Numerical reasoning [MLJ23, AAAI23]

Recursion



[MLJ21]





```
edge(oxford_circus, bond_street).  
edge(oxford_circus, piccadilly_circus).  
edge(south_kensington, gloucester_road).
```

Recursion

connected(A,B) :- ?

Recursion

```
connected(A,B) :- edge(A,B).
```

Recursion

```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,B).
```

Recursion

```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,D),edge(D,B).
```

Recursion

```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,D),edge(D,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C),edge(C,D),edge(D,E),edge(E,B).
```

Recursion

```
connected(A,B) :- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B) :- edge(A,C), edge(C,B).  
connected(A,B) :- edge(A,C), edge(C,D), edge(D,B).  
connected(A,B) :- edge(A,C), edge(C,D), edge(D,E), edge(E,B).
```

Cannot generalise to arbitrary depth

Difficult to learn because of its size

Recursion

```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).
```

Recursion

```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C), connected(C,B).
```

Recursion

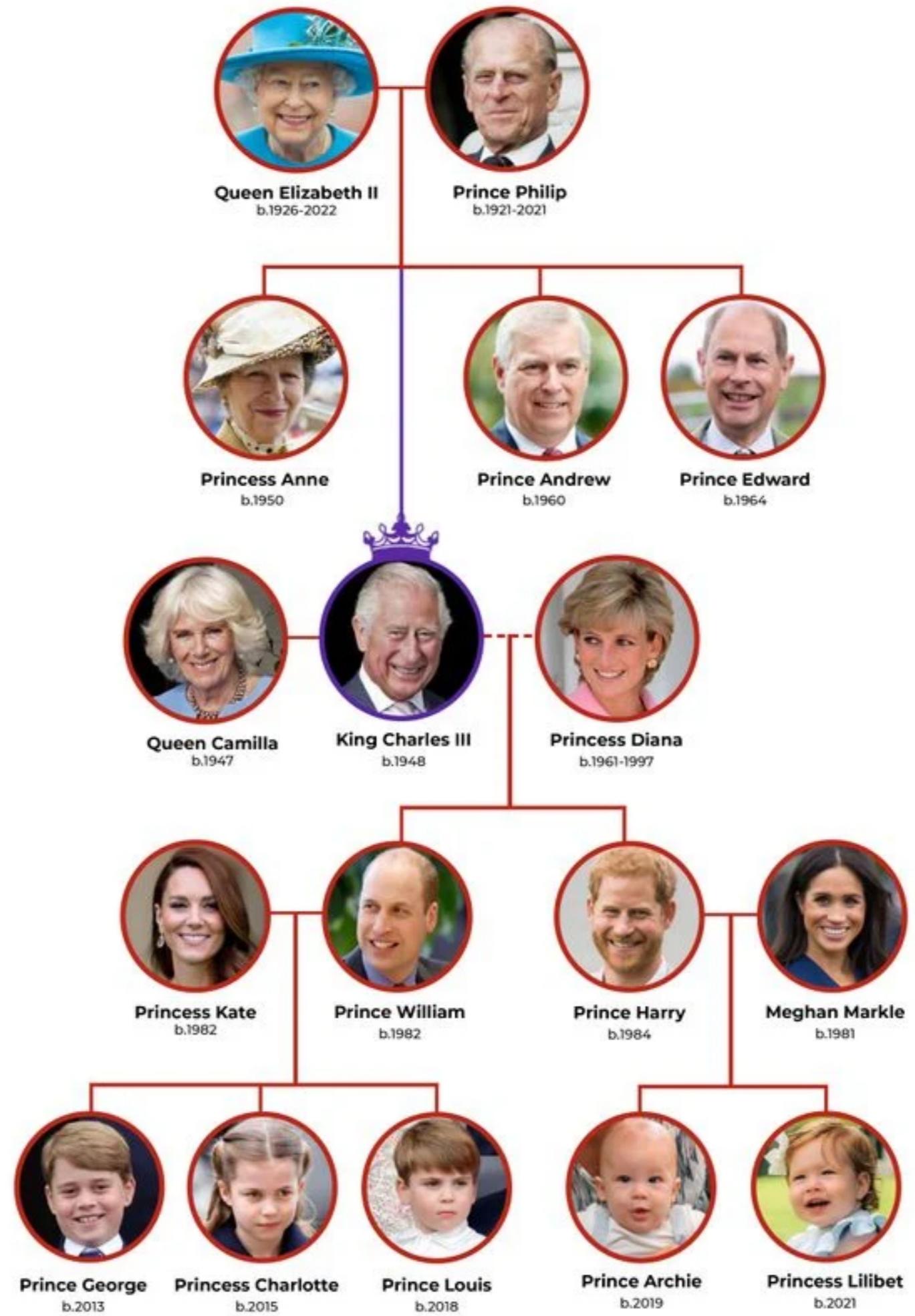
```
connected(A,B):- edge(A,B).  
connected(A,B):- edge(A,C), connected(C,B).
```

Easier to learn because of its size

Need fewer examples

Predicate invention

Automatically invent new symbols



Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),mother(C,D),mother(D,B).
```

Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),mother(C,D),mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),mother(C,D),father(D,B).
```

Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),mother(C,D),mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),mother(C,D),father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B):- mother(A,C),father(C,D),mother(D,B).
```

Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), mother(C,D), mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), mother(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), father(C,D), mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), father(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), father(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), father(C,D), mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), mother(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), mother(C,D), mother(D,B).
```

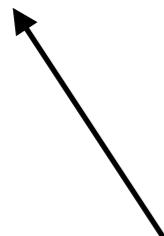
Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), mother(C,D), mother(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), mother(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- mother(A,C), father(C,D), mother(D,B).  
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greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), mother(C,D), father(D,B).  
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- father(A,C), mother(C,D), mother(D,B).
```

Difficult to learn because of its size
Need many examples

Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- inv(A,C), inv(C,D), inv(D,B).  
inv(A,B) :- mother(A,B).  
inv(A,B) :- father(A,B).
```



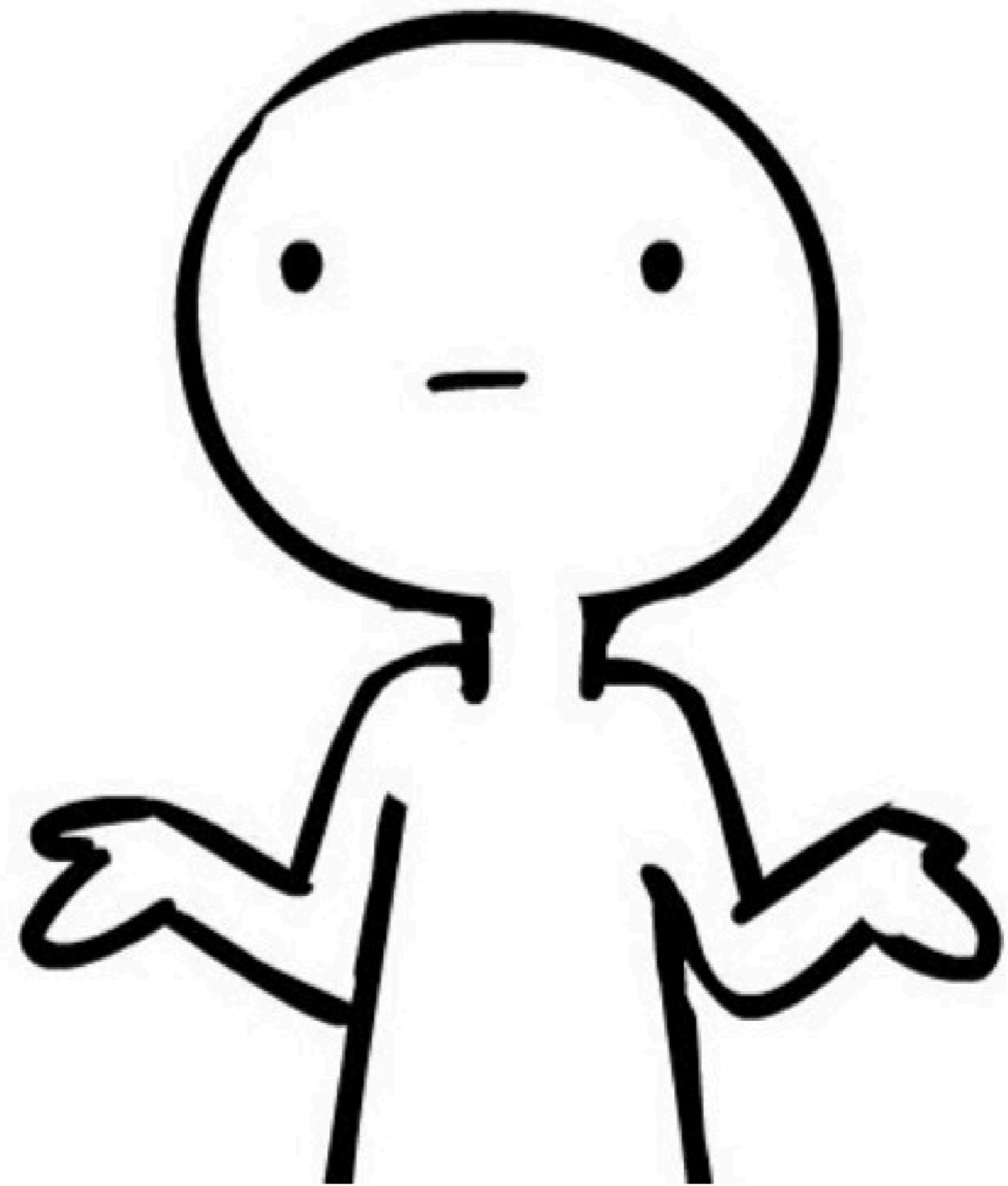
parent

Predicate invention

```
greatgrandparent(A,B) :- inv(A,C), inv(C,D), inv(D,B).  
inv(A,B) :- mother(A,B).  
inv(A,B) :- father(A,B).
```

Easier to learn because of its size
Need fewer examples

So what?

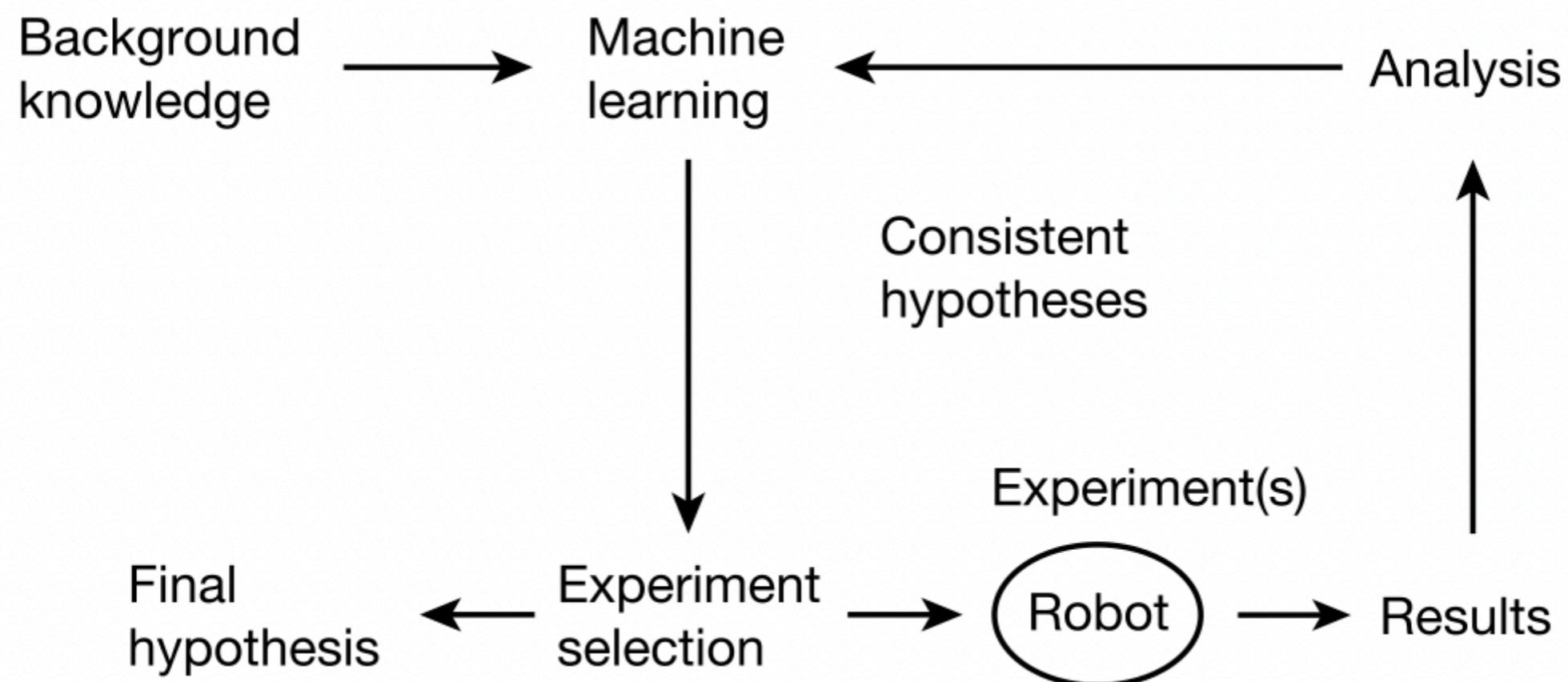


Robot scientist



King et al. Nature, 2004

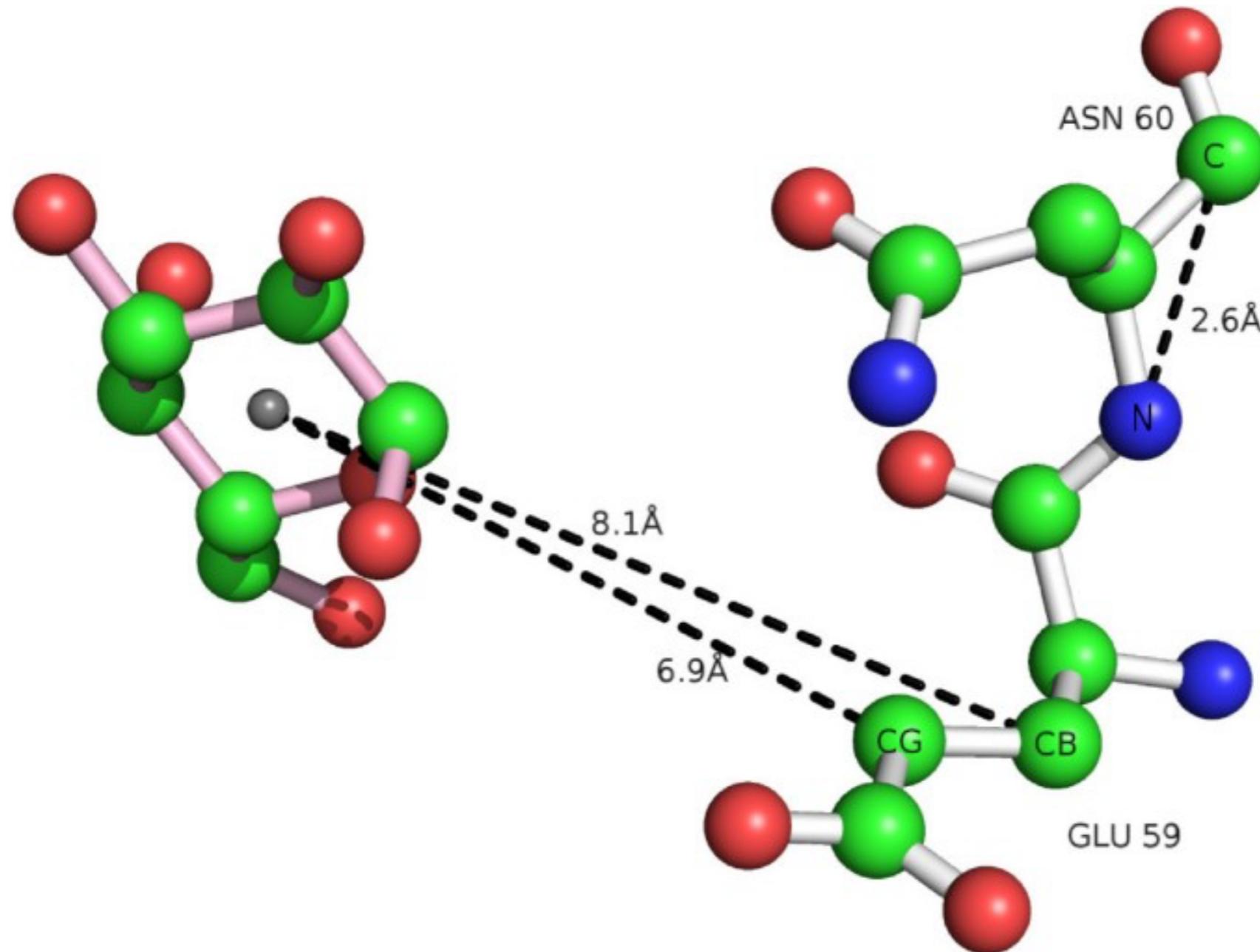
Robot scientist



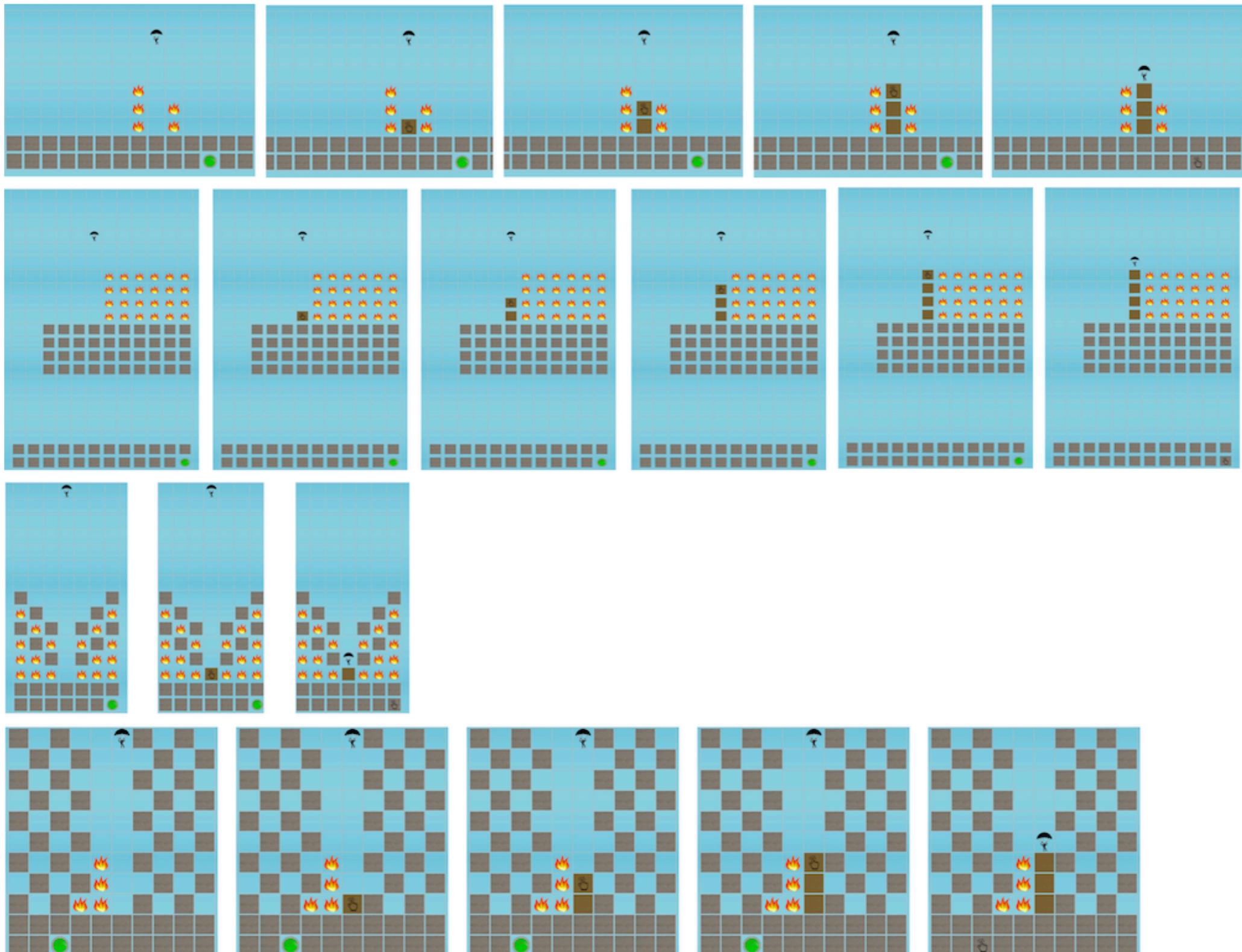
Robot scientist

The first machine to discover new scientific knowledge independently of its human creators

Scientific discovery

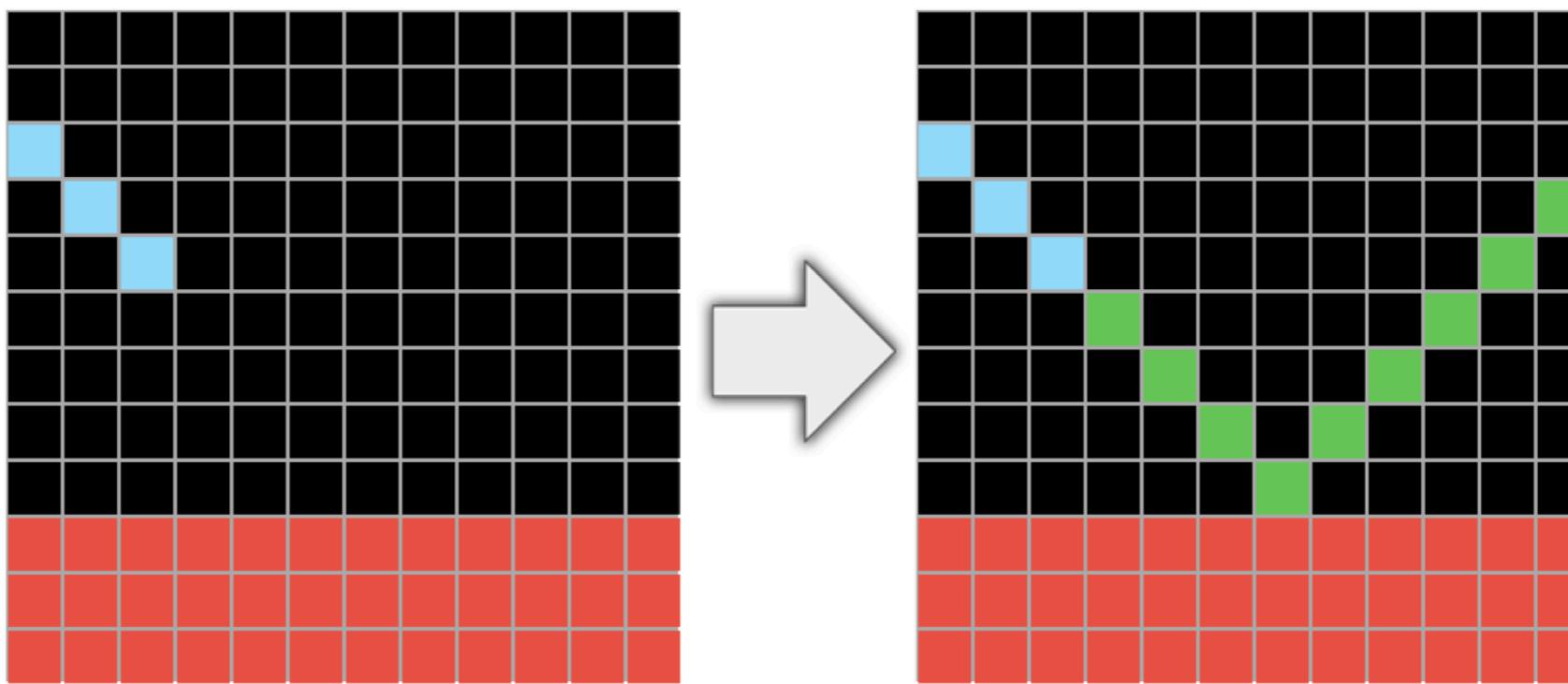
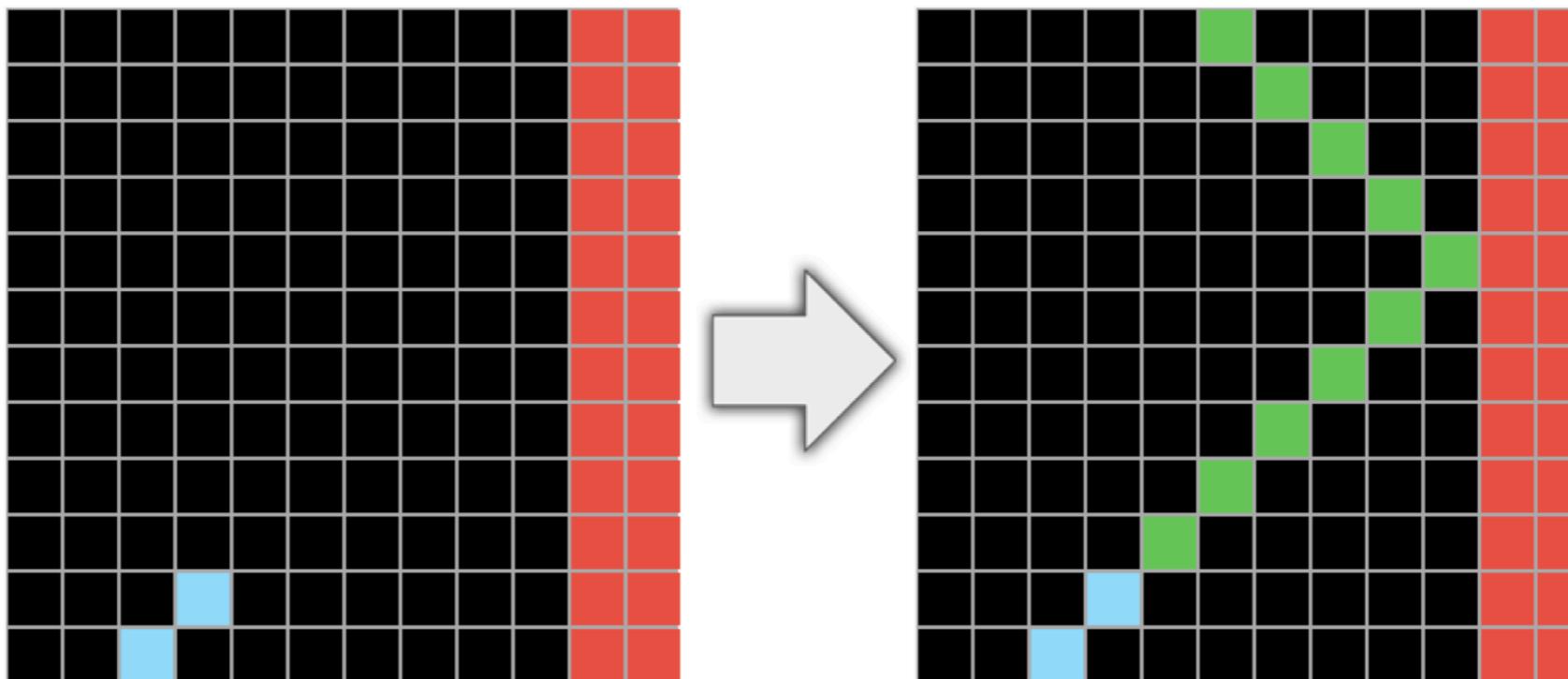


Game playing

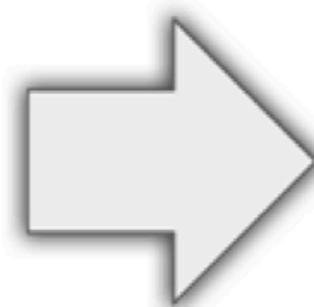
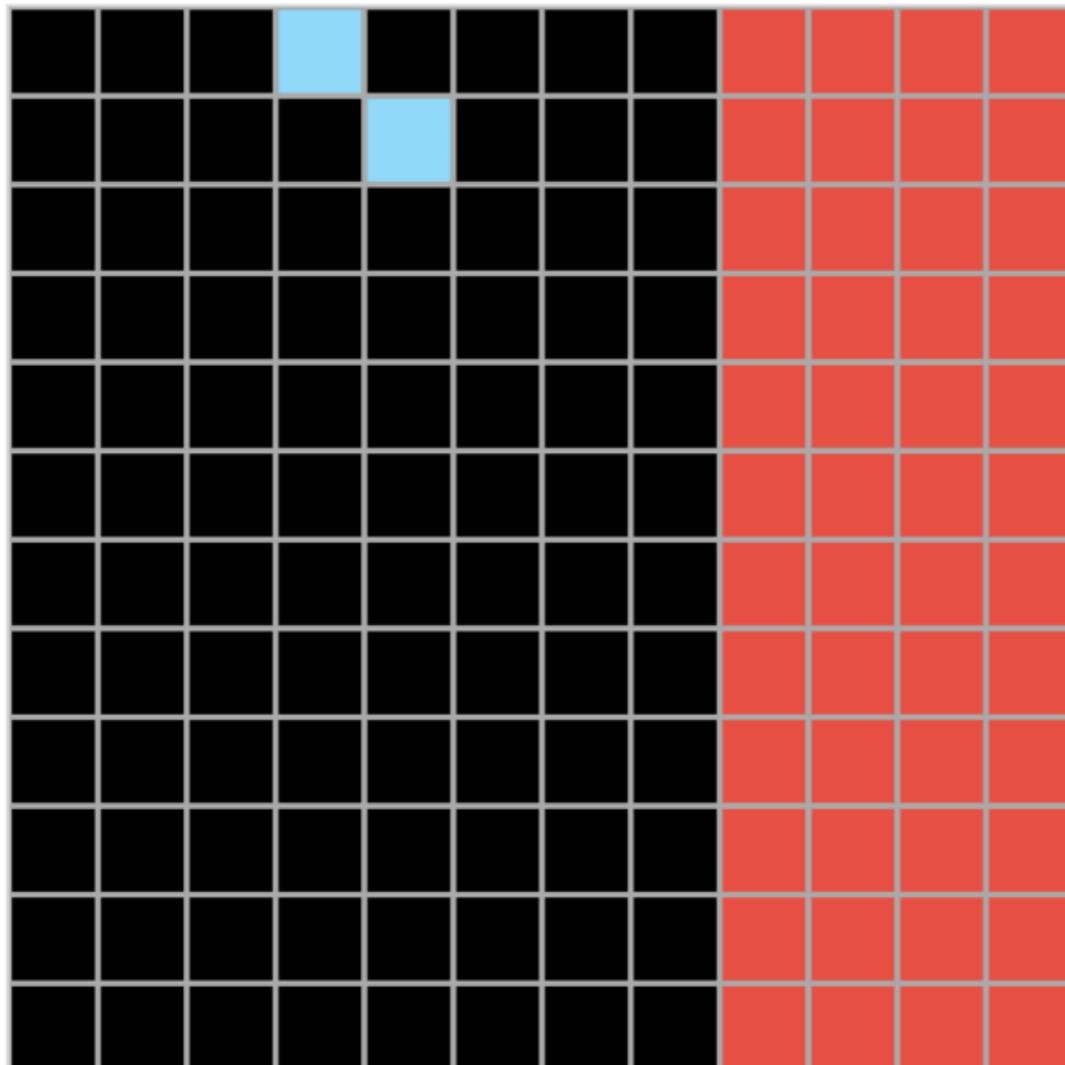


Abstraction and reasoning corpus

Abstraction and reasoning corpus

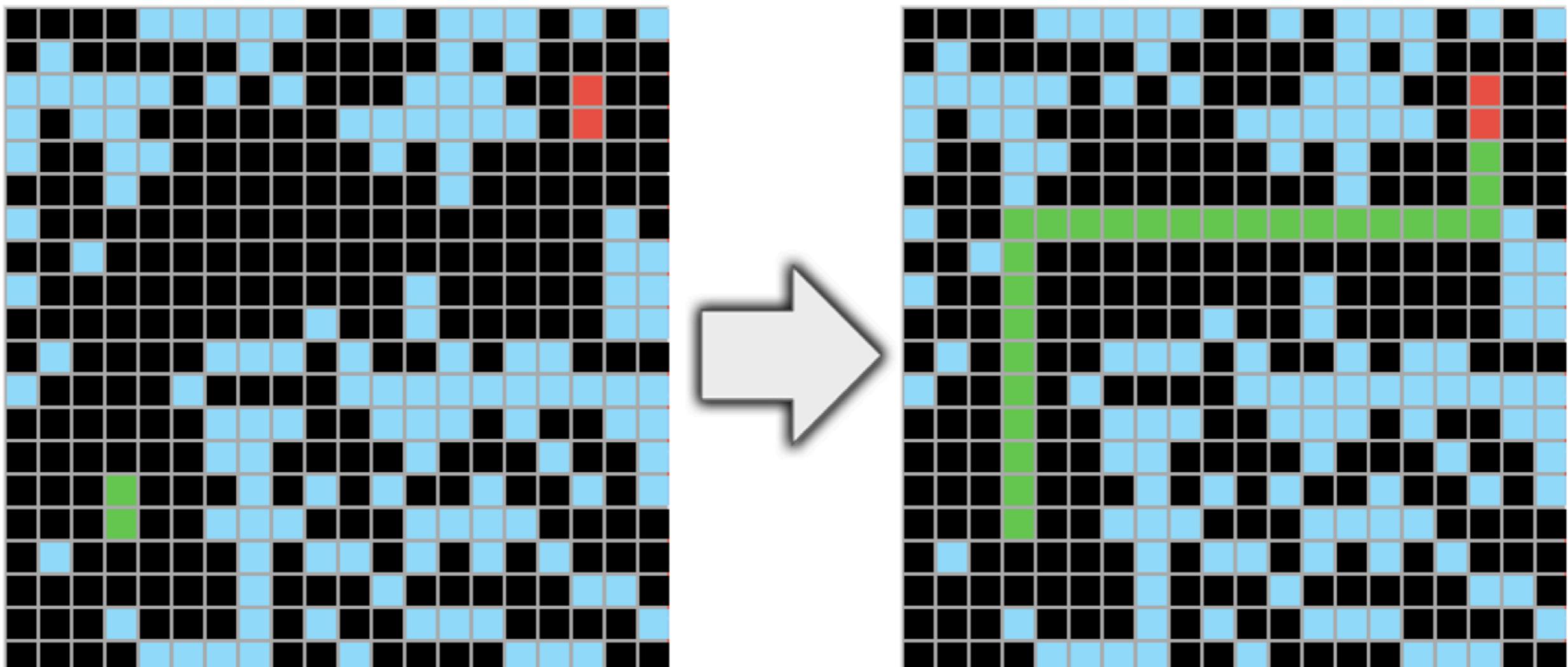


Abstraction and reasoning corpus



?

Abstraction and reasoning corpus



Abstraction and reasoning corpus

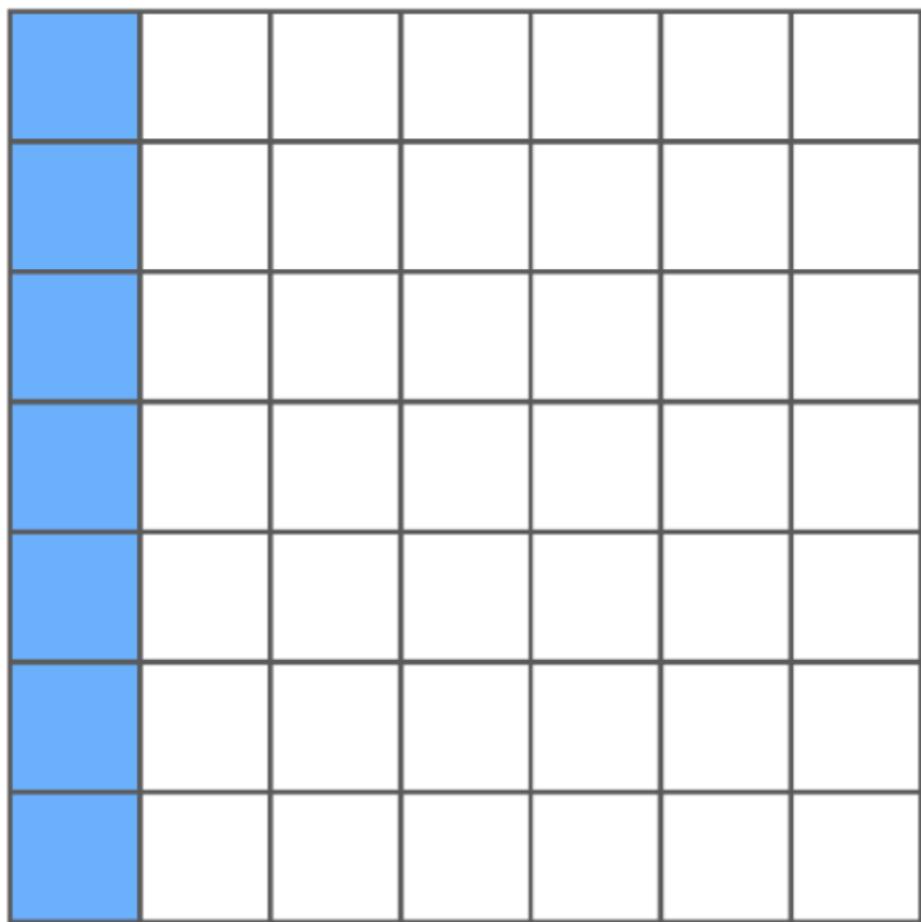
Only a few examples of every task

Solutions are programs

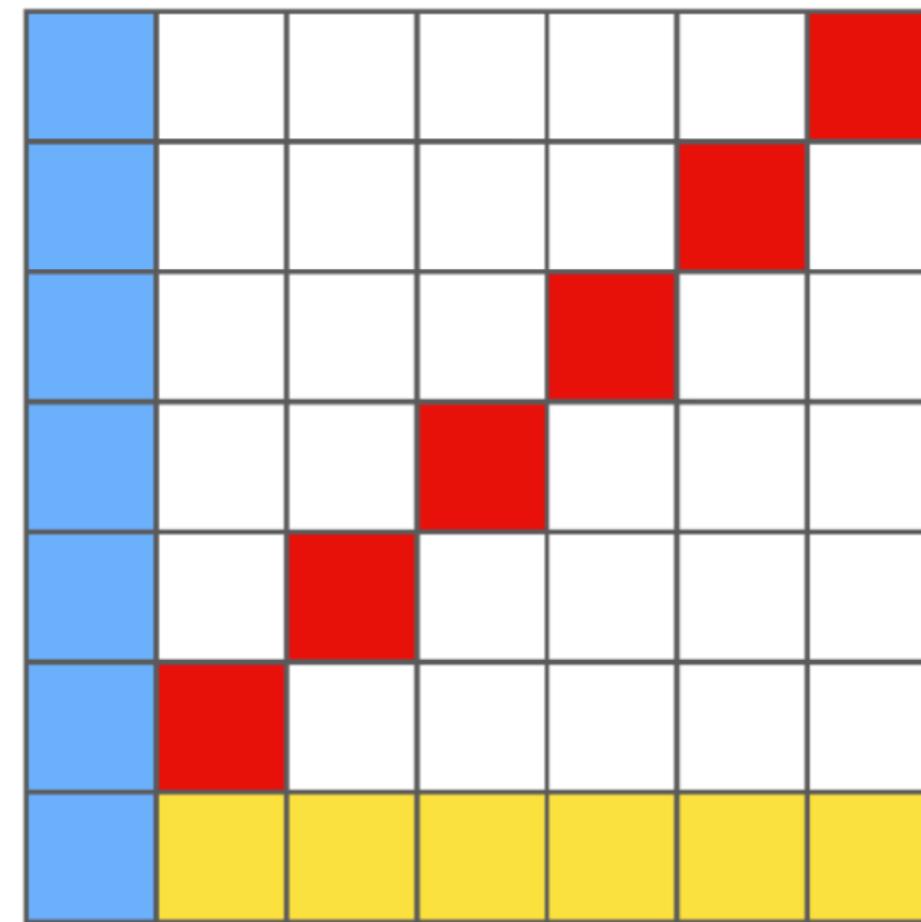
Need recursive concepts (draw line)

Abstraction and reasoning corpus

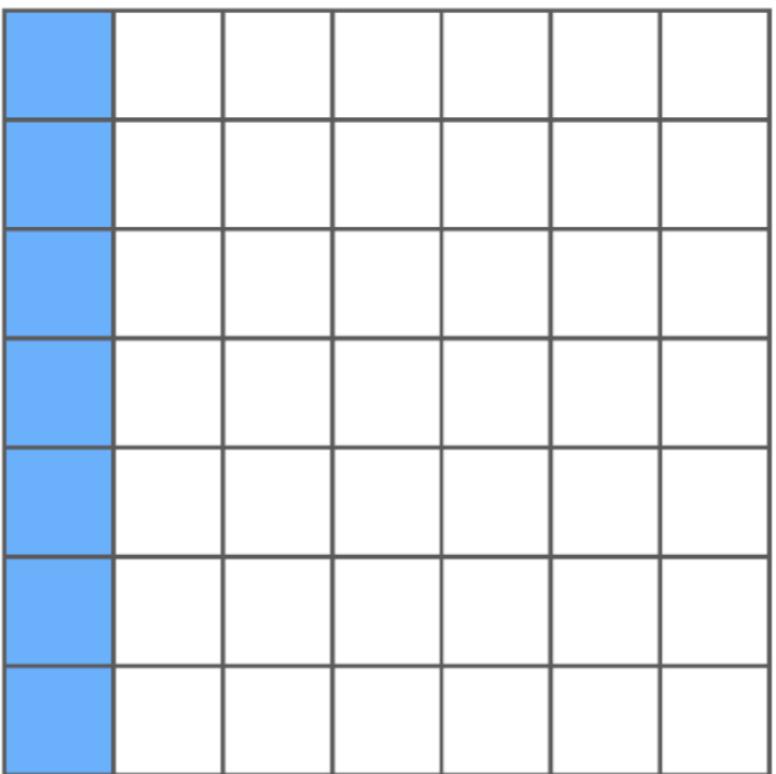
Input



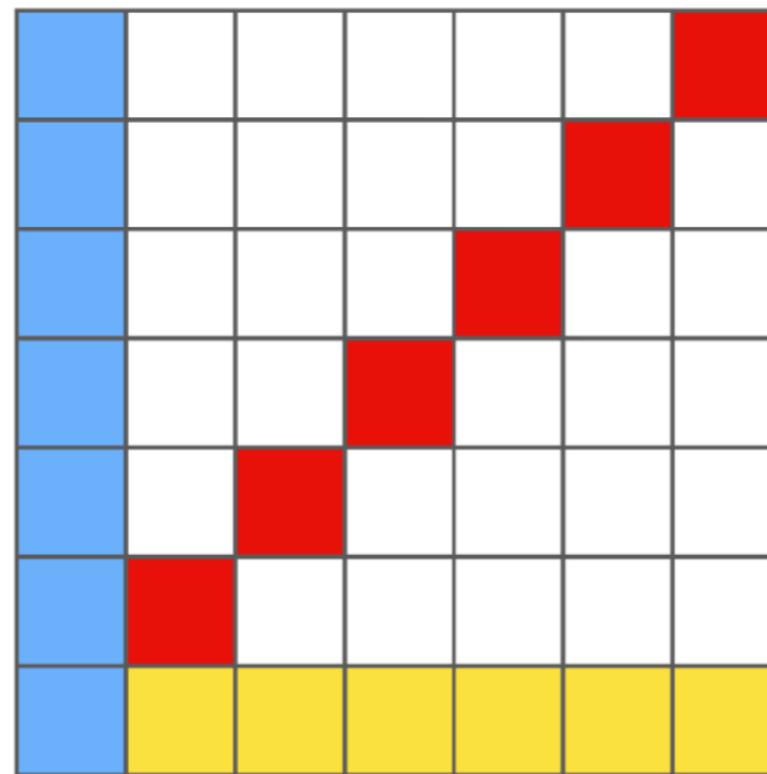
Output



Input

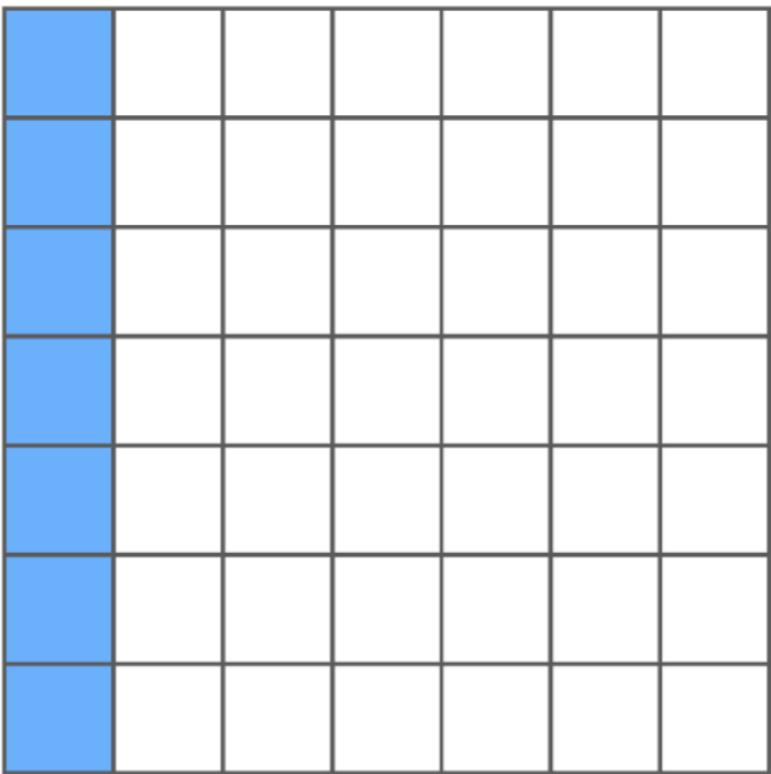


Output

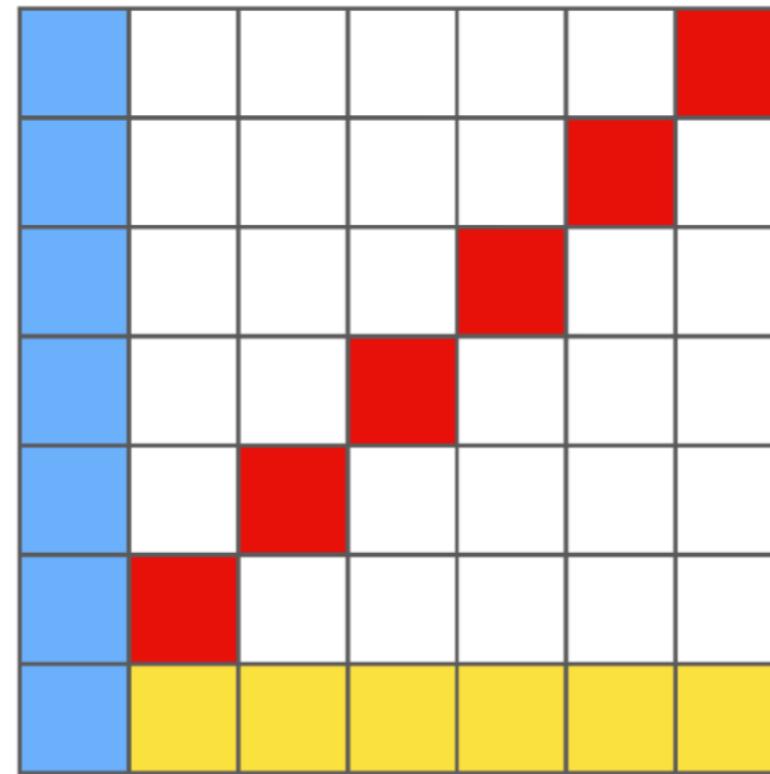


```
out(X,Y,C) :- in(X,Y,C).  
out(X,Y,yellow) :- empty(X,Y), height(X).  
out(X,Y,red) :- empty(X,Y), height(X+Y-1).
```

Input



Output

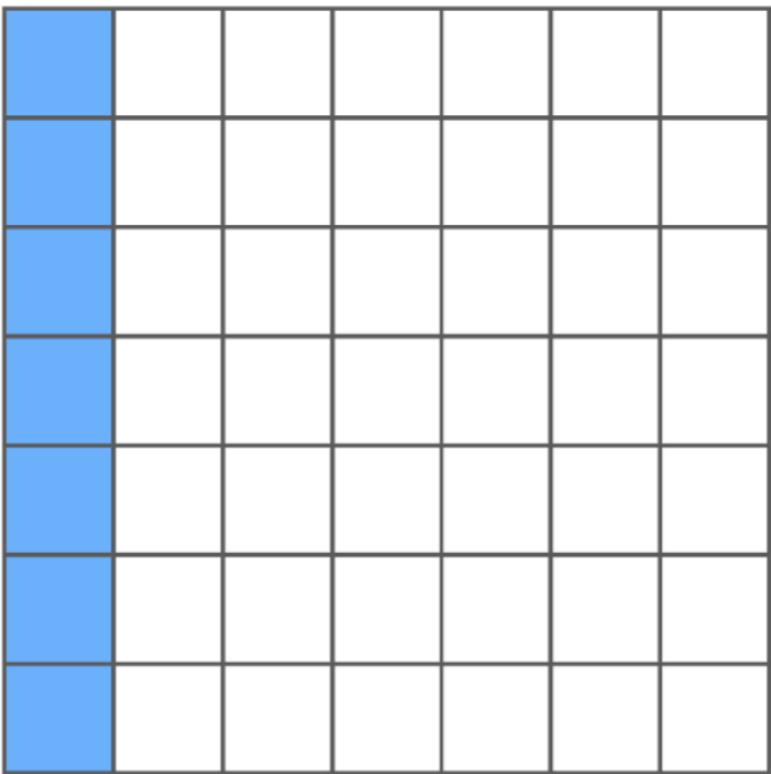


An output pixel is colour C if it is colour C in the input.

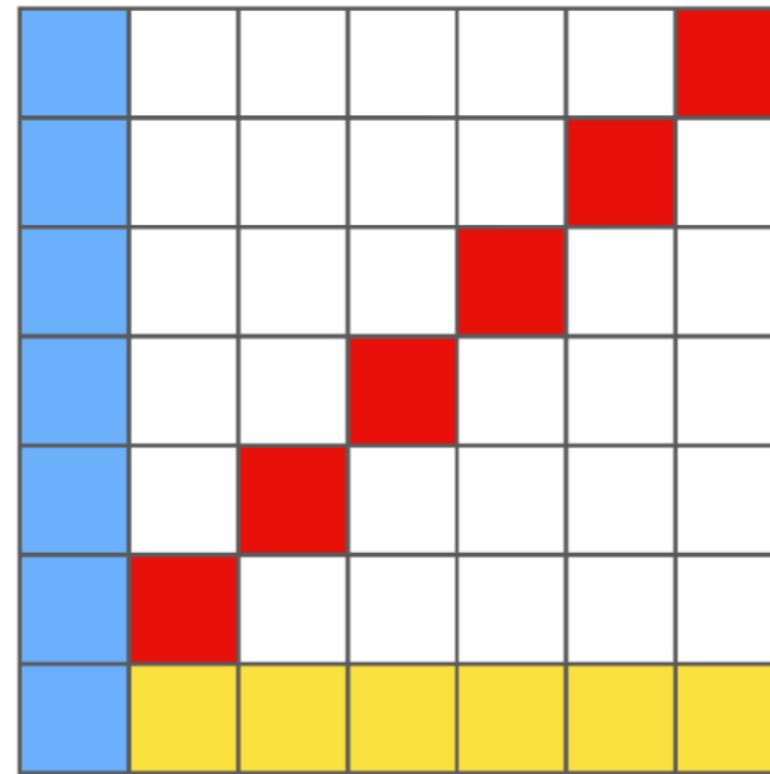
An output pixel is yellow if it is in the bottom row and empty in the input.

An output pixel is red if it is empty in the input and the sum of its coordinates X and Y equals $H + 1$, i.e. it is on the diagonal.

Input



Output

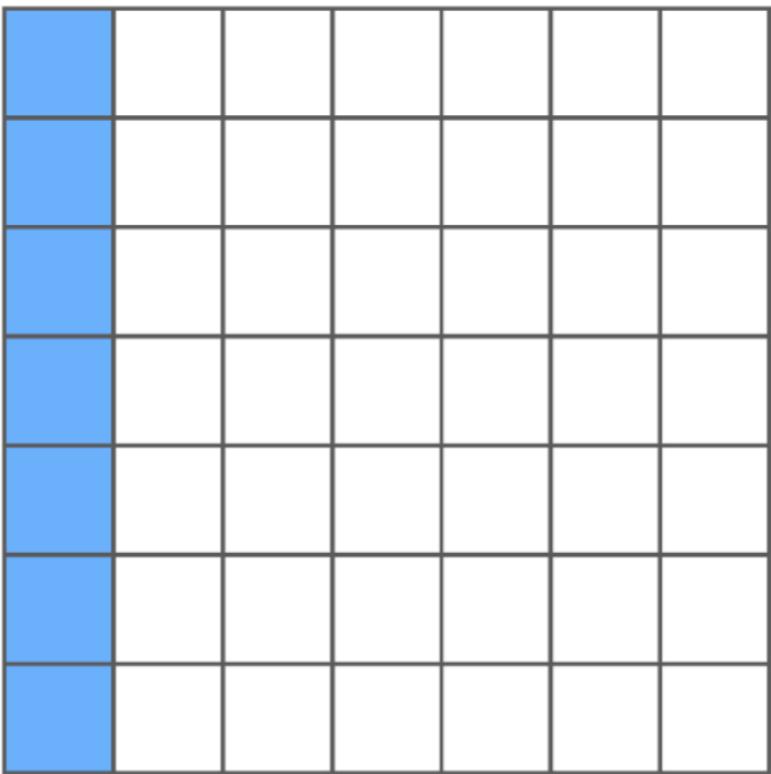


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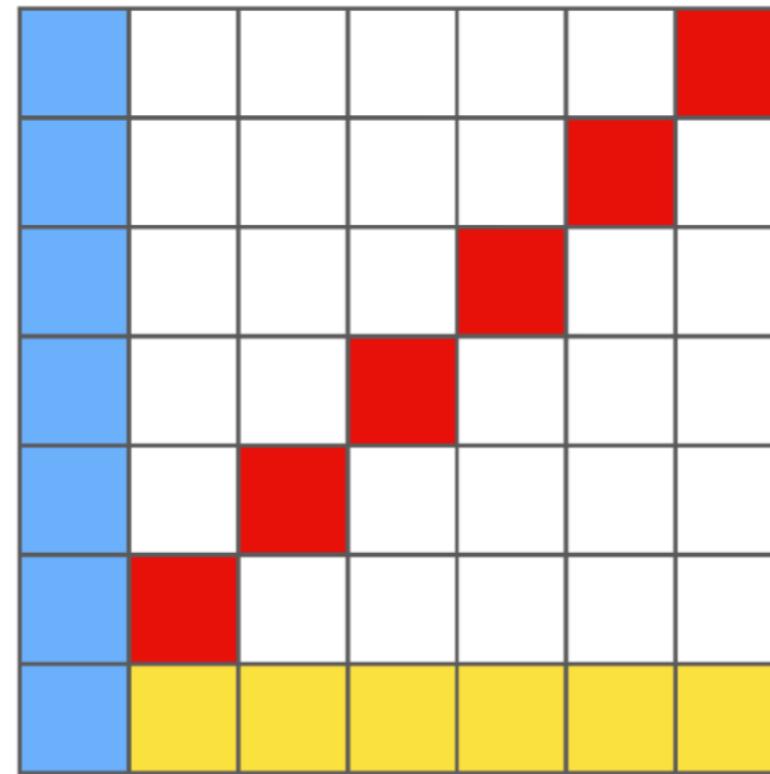
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Input



Output

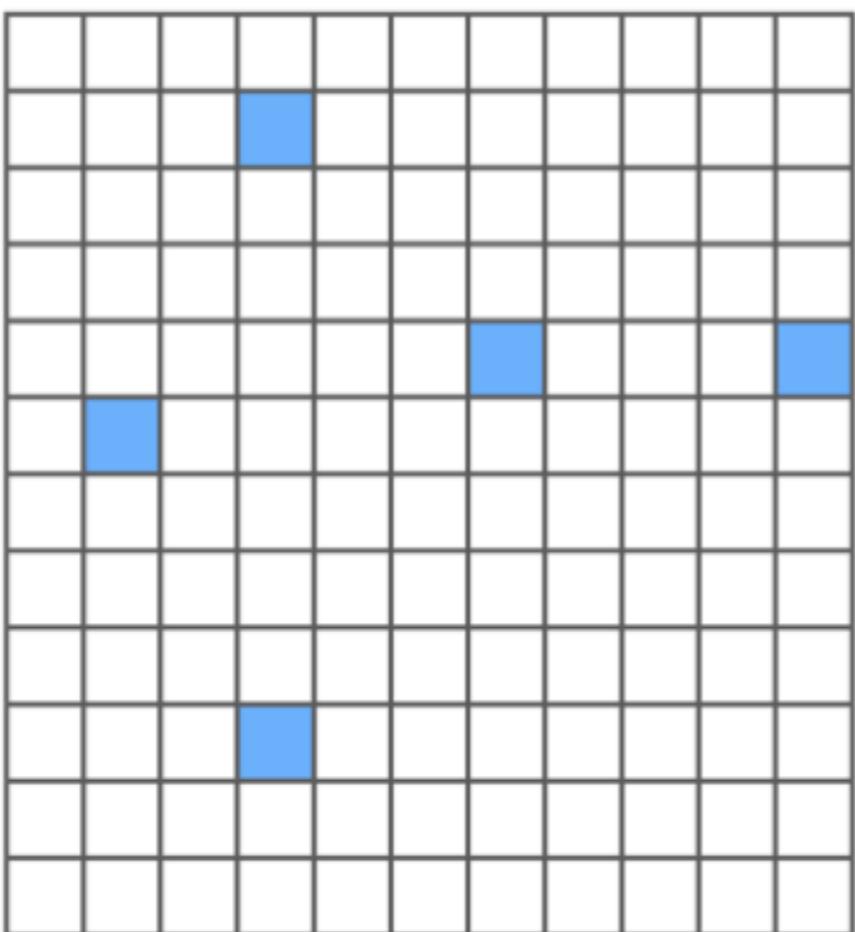


An output pixel is colour C if it is colour C in the input.

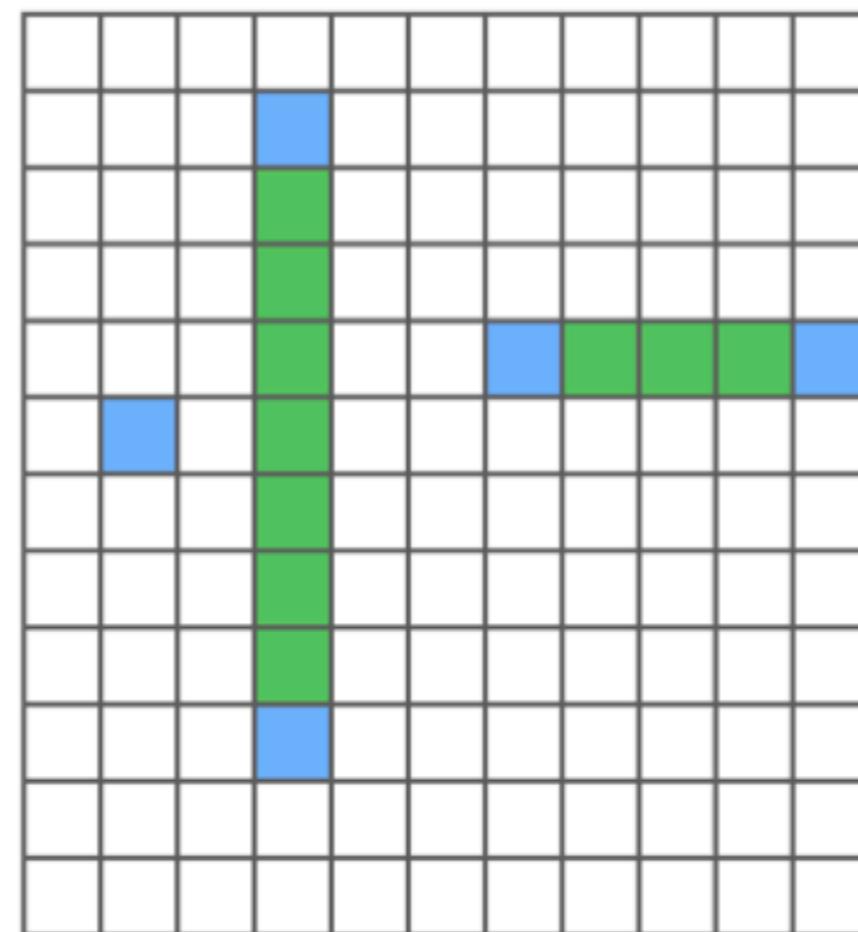
An output pixel is yellow if it is in the bottom row and empty in the input.

An output pixel is red if it is empty in the input and the sum of its coordinates X and Y equals $H + 1$, i.e. it is on the diagonal.

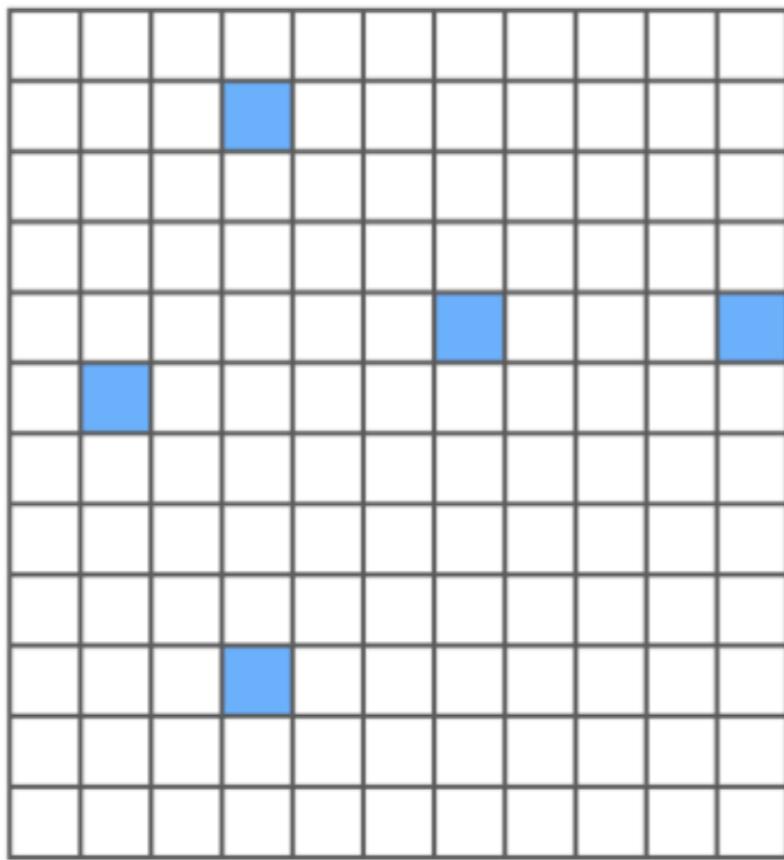
Input



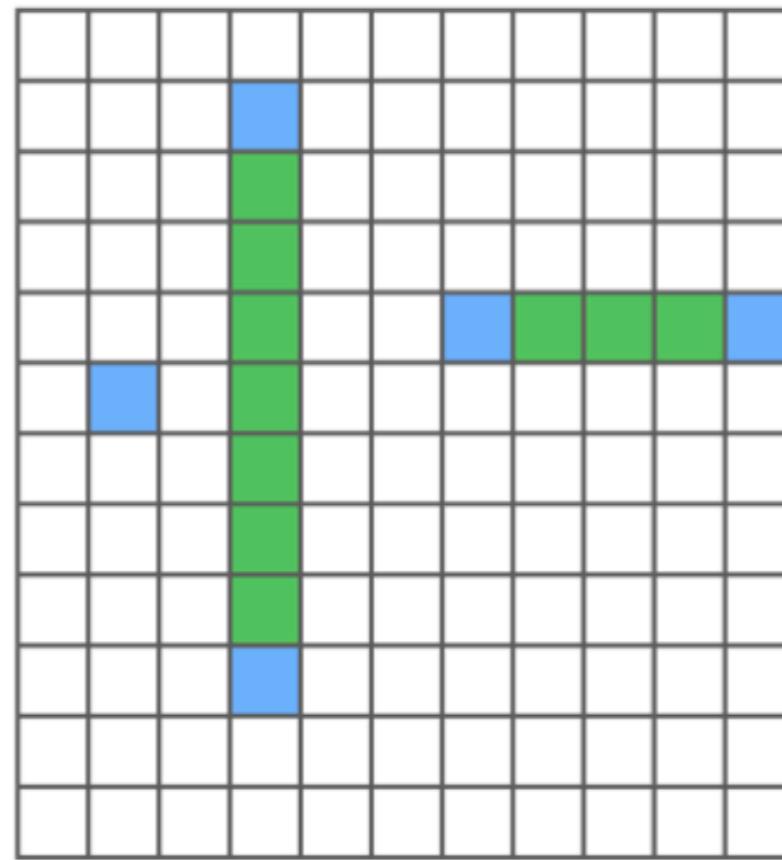
Output



Input



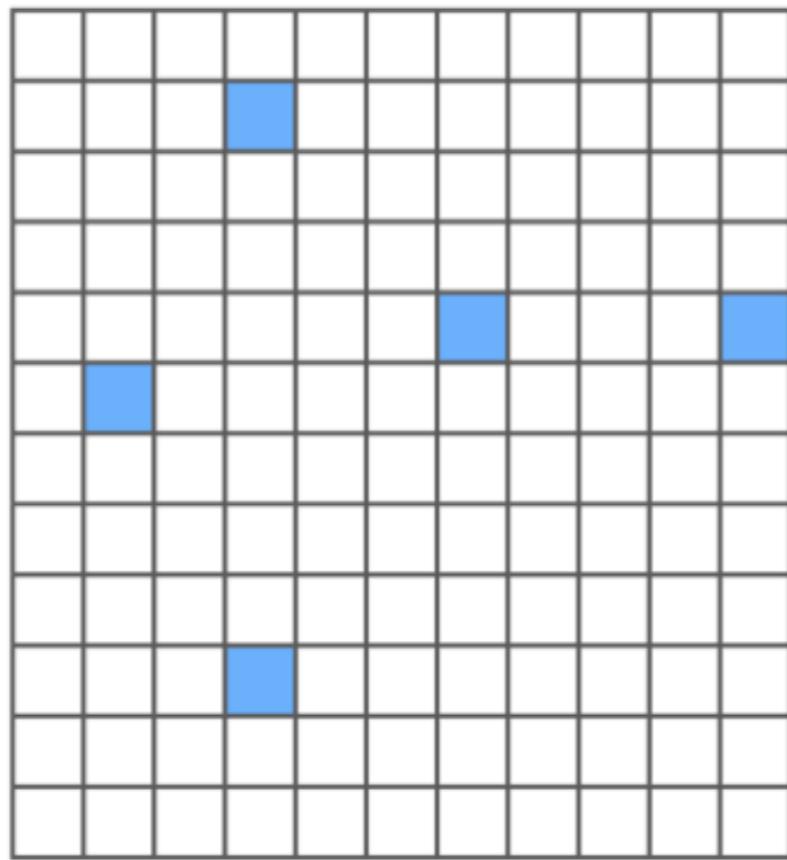
Output



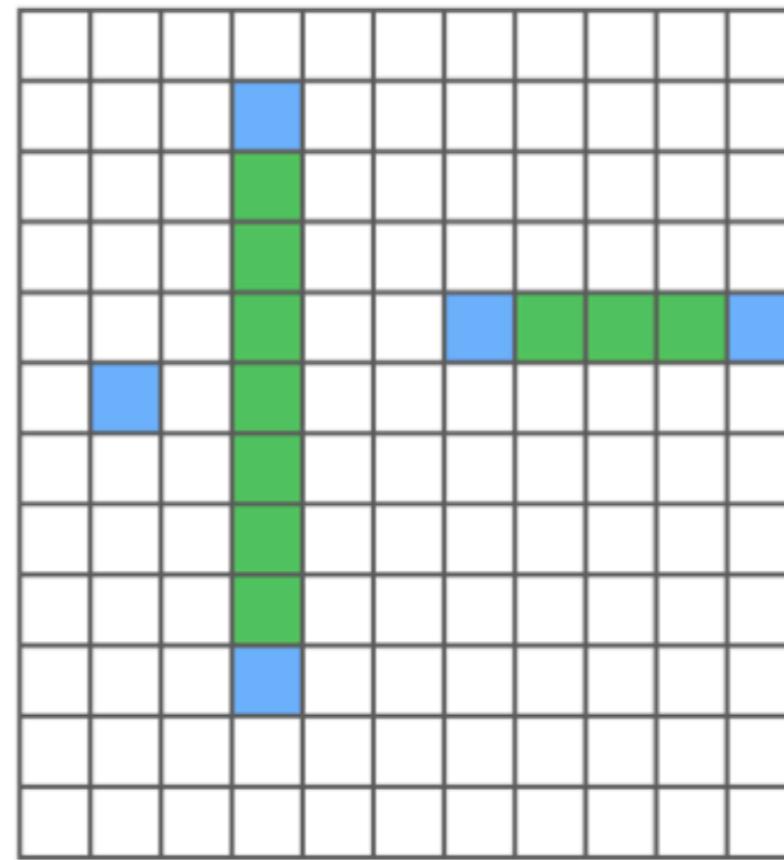
An out pixel has colour C if it is colour C in the input.

An out pixel is red if it is empty in the input and there is a pixel in the same row (X) and a pixel in the same column (Y) with the same colour (C) in the input.

Input



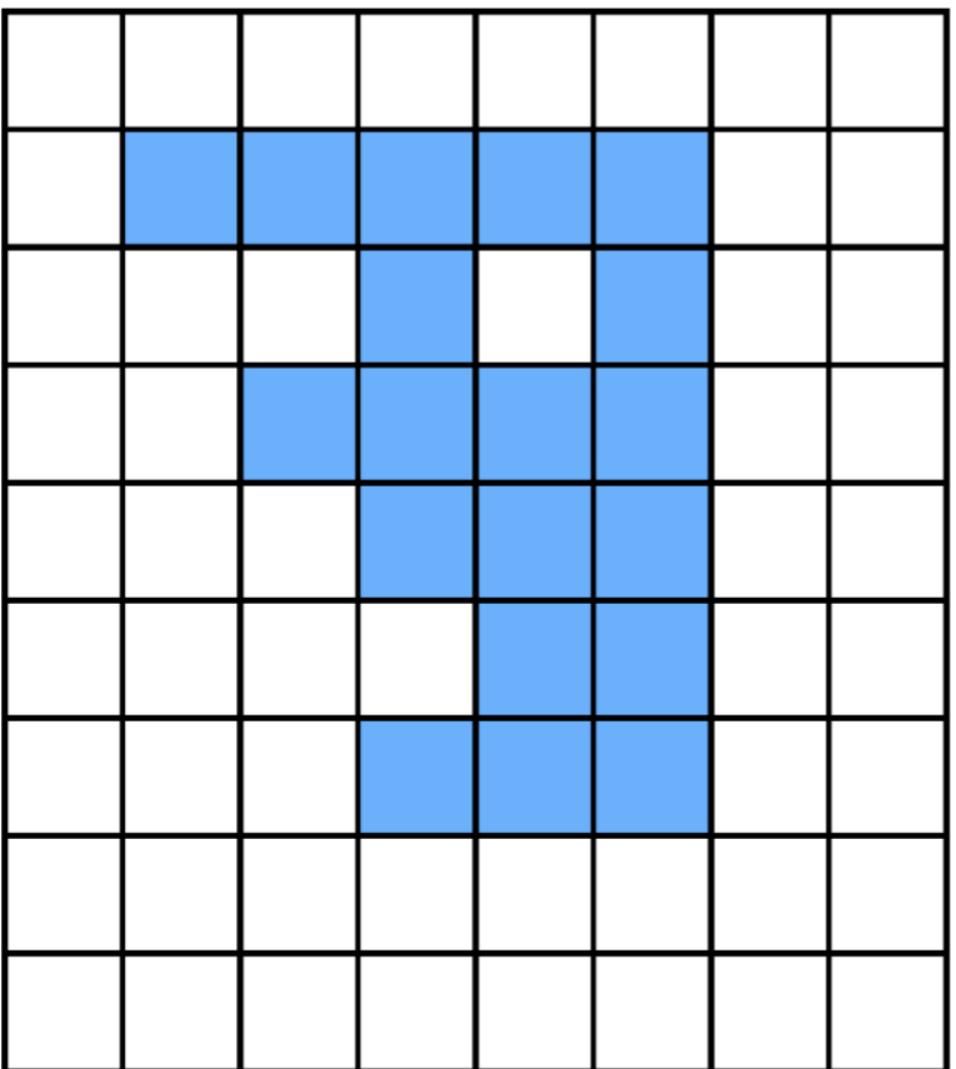
Output



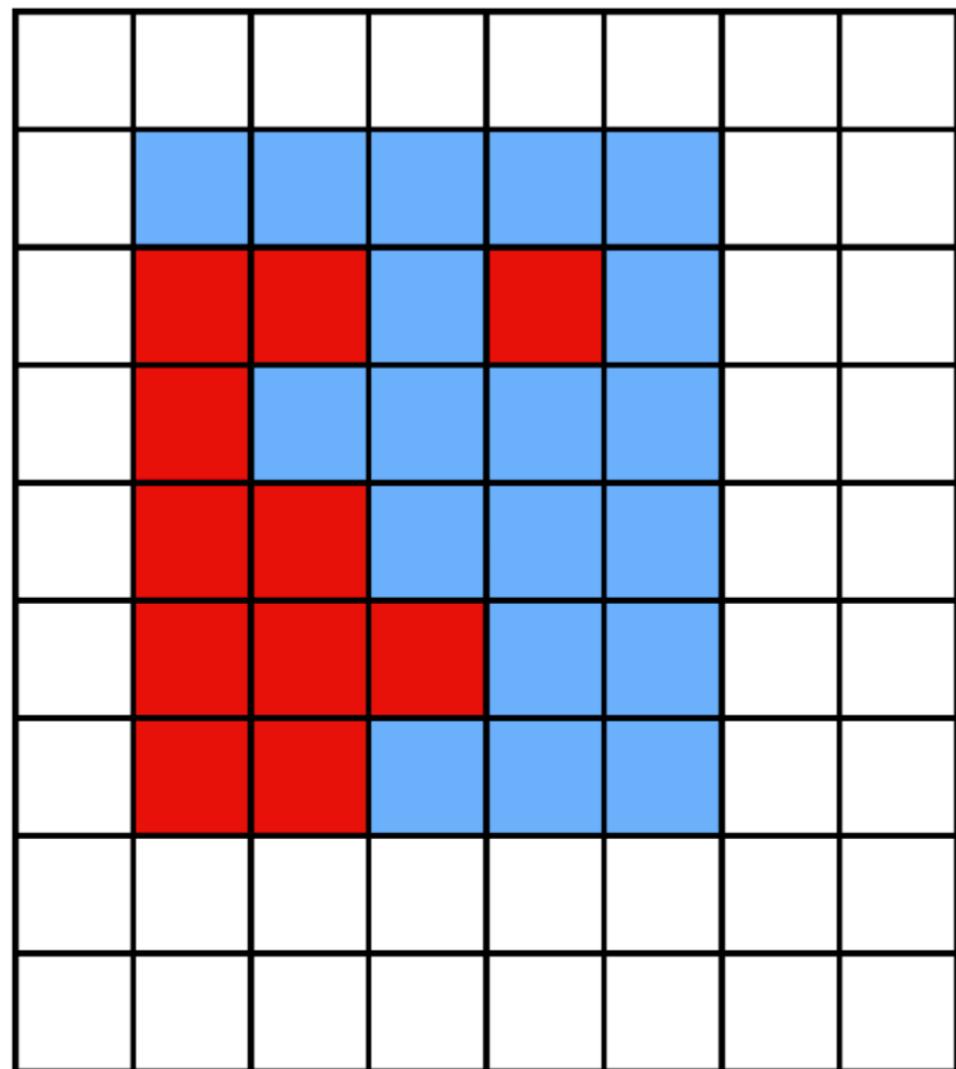
An out pixel has colour C if it is colour C in the input.

An out pixel is red if it is empty in the input and there is a pixel in the same row (X) and a pixel in the same column (Y) with the same colour (C) in the input.

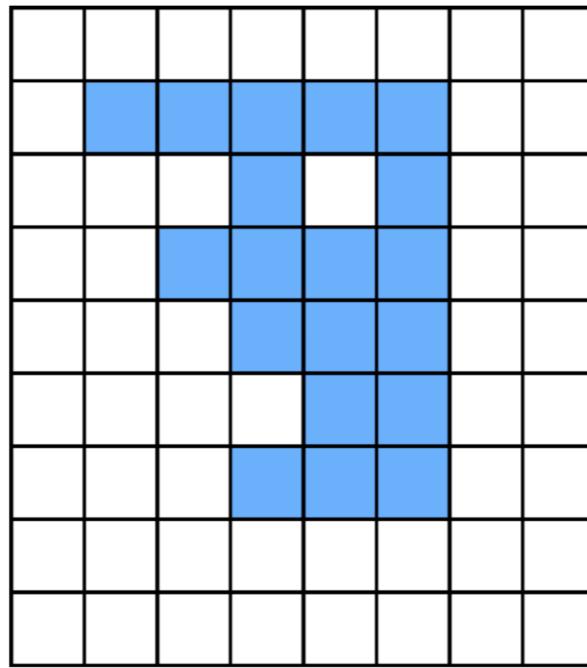
Input



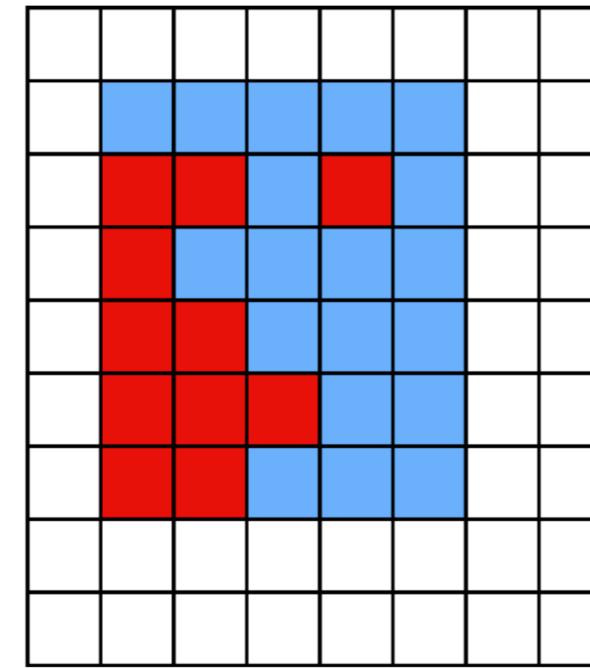
Output



Input



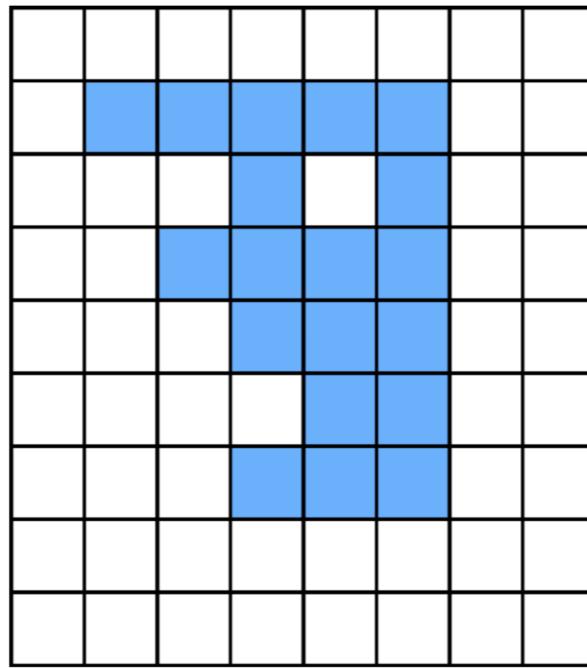
Output



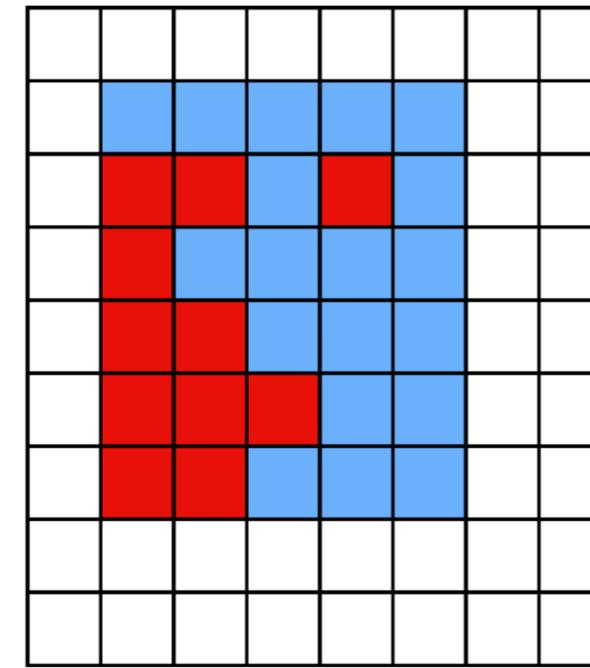
An output pixel is colour C if it is colour C in the input.

An output pixel is red if it is empty in the input and an input pixel in the row X has colour C, and an input pixel in the column Y has colour C.

Input



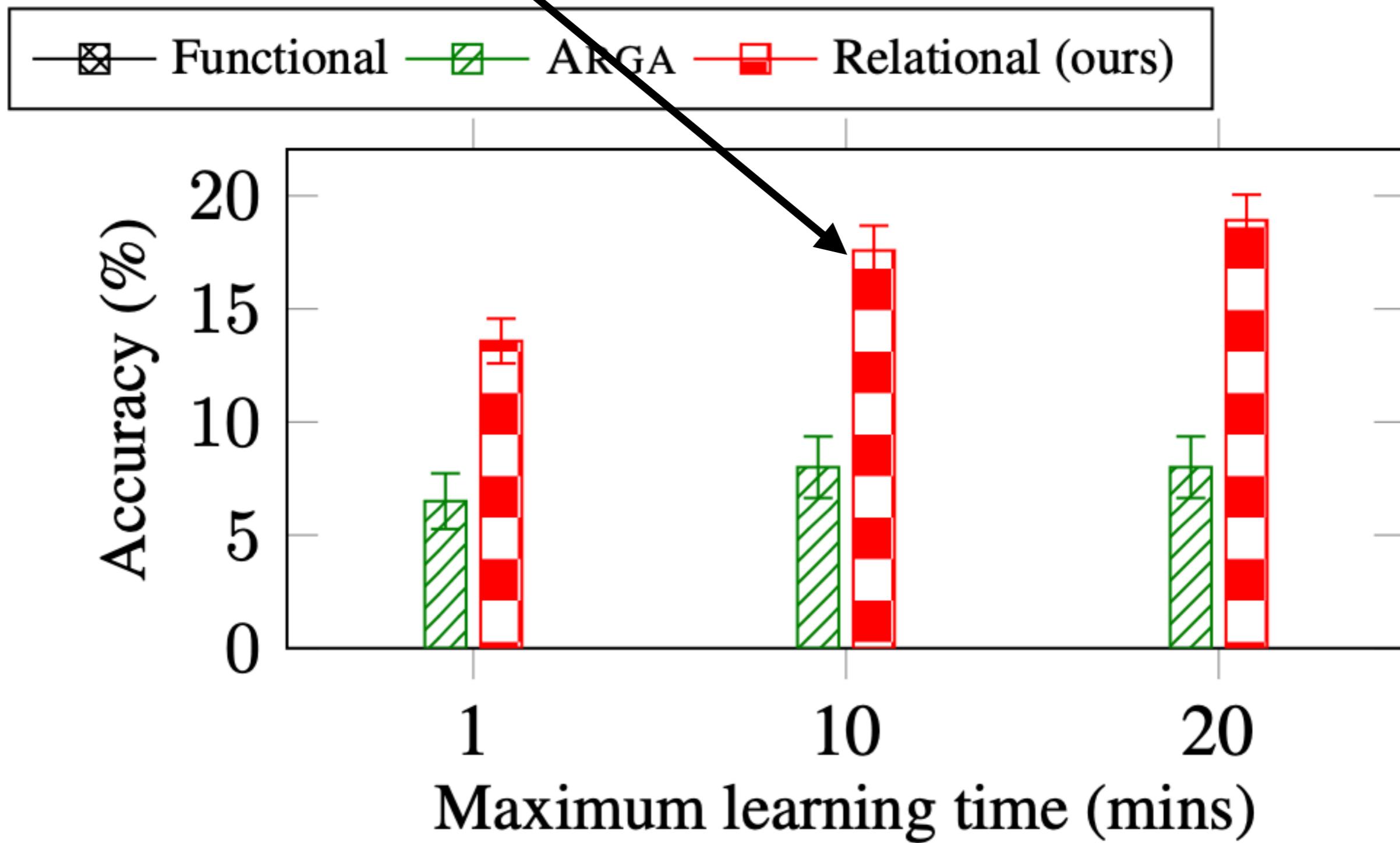
Output



An output pixel is colour C if it is colour C in the input.

An output pixel is red if it is empty in the input and an input pixel in the row X has colour C, and an input pixel in the column Y has colour C.

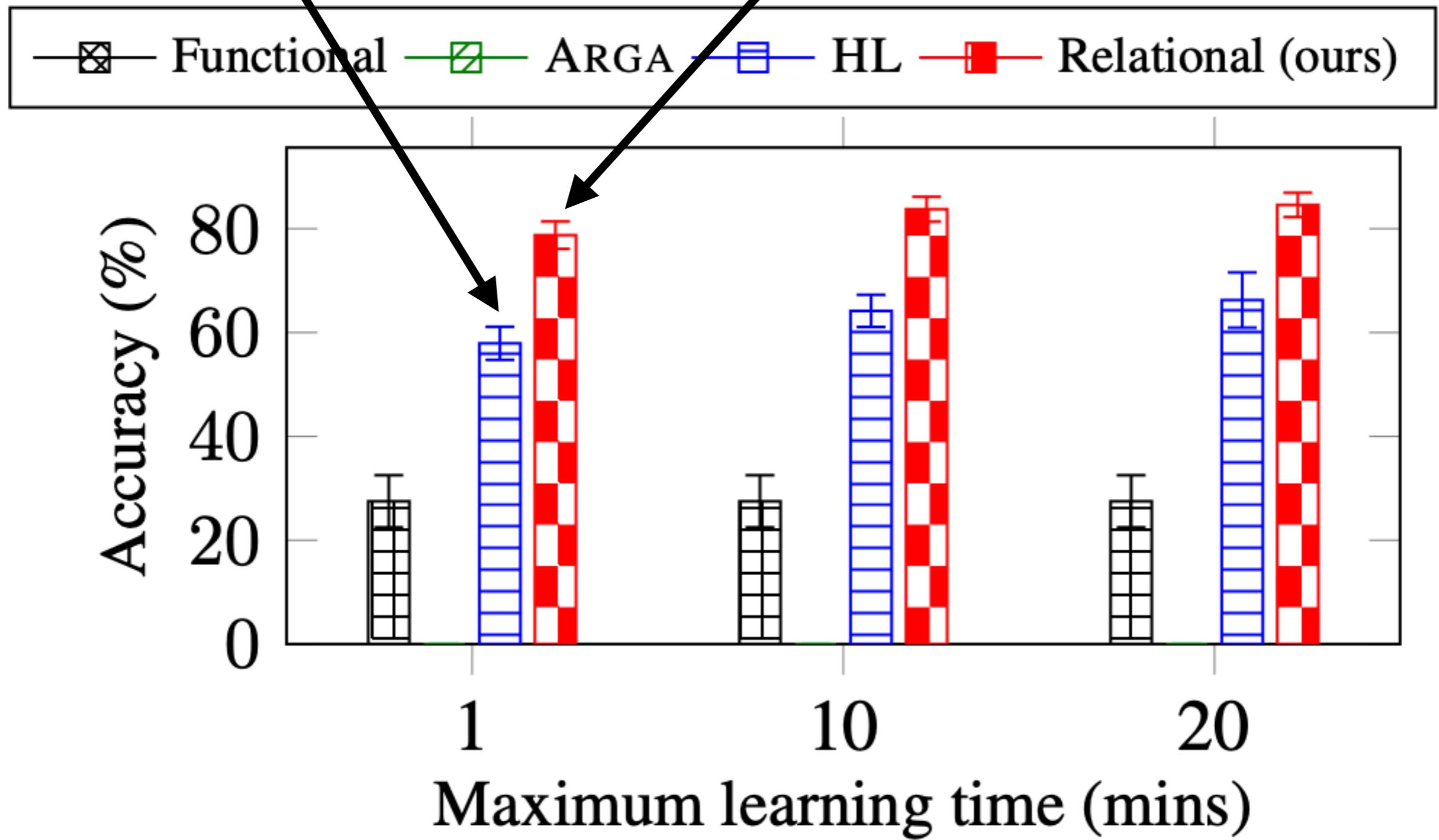
Popper



$$[6, 9, 2, 8, 0, 5] \xrightarrow{\mathcal{F}} [6, 6, 9, 9, 2, 2, 8, 8, 0, 0, 5, 5]$$

SOTA

Popper



Why is ILP not taking over the world?

It is not very good when there is no clear rule

It is not very good when there is no clear rule



It is not very good when there is no clear rule

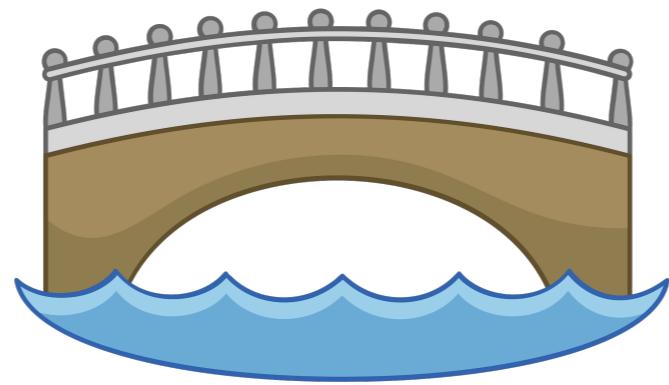


The tools are a nightmare to use

You need a PhD in ILP to use ILP

Load of opportunities

ML



ILP

CP
KR
PL

Summary

ILP is a form of logic-based machine learning

Tremendous progress in the past 10 years

Nice applications in algorithm/scientific discovery

Many opportunities to bridge AI communities

Questions?

Inductive logic programming at 30: a new introduction.
Cropper and Dumančić. JAIR 2022

<https://github.com/logic-and-learning-lab/Popper>

Why logic programs?

- Compactness
- Declarative nature
- Similarity to natural language
- Easy to reuse techniques from CP/SAT/ASP