

# **Approximate Policy Iteration and Variants**

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# Policy Iteration

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

Calculate  $Q^{\pi_k}(s, a) \quad \forall s, a$

$$\pi_{k+1}(s) = \underset{a}{\operatorname{argmax}} Q^{\pi_k}(s, a) \quad \forall s$$

# Asynchronous Policy Iteration

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

Pick any state  $\hat{s}$

Calculate  $Q^{\pi_k}(\hat{s}, a) \quad \forall a$

$\pi_{k+1}(\hat{s}) = \operatorname{argmax}_a Q^{\pi_k}(\hat{s}, a)$

and  $\pi_{k+1}(s) = \pi_k(s) \quad \forall s \neq \hat{s}$

$$\underline{Q^{\pi_{k+1}}(s, a) \geq Q^{\pi_k}(s, a) \quad \forall s, a}$$

$$\mathbb{E}_{s \sim \rho} [V^{\pi_{k+1}}(s)] - \mathbb{E}_{s \sim \rho} [V^{\pi_k}(s)]$$

$$= \sum_{s, a} d^{\pi_{k+1}}(s) \left( \underline{\pi_{k+1}(a|s) - \pi_k(a|s)} \right) Q^{\pi_k}(s, a)$$

$$= \sum_a d^{\pi_{k+1}}(\hat{s}) \left( \underline{\pi_{k+1}(a|\hat{s}) - \pi_k(a|\hat{s})} \right) Q^{\pi_k}(\hat{s}, a)$$

$$\geq 0$$

[ If we want this to be positive & large ]

# Asynchronous Policy Iteration

- To improve policy, we may just evaluate  $Q^{\pi_k}$  on a particular state  $s$ .
- Of course, a **real improvement** is made only when  $\exists a$  s.t.  $Q^{\pi_k}(s, a) - V^{\pi_k}(s)$  is large.
- This is **different from Value Iteration**, where ideally, we would like to find  $Q_{k+1}$  such that  $Q_{k+1}(s, a) \approx R(s, a) + \gamma \mathbb{E}_{s' \sim P(\cdot|s, a)} \left[ \max_{a'} Q_k(s', a') \right] \quad \forall s, a$
- VI-based algorithm like DQN usually requires **stronger function approximation** that can generalize to unseen state.

# Policy Iteration with Samples

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

✱ Evaluate  $Z_k(s, a) \approx Q^{\pi_{\theta_k}}(s, a)$  for  $s = s_1, \dots, s_N$  and all  $a$   
or  $Z_k(s, a) \approx Q^{\pi_{\theta_k}}(s, a) - b_k(s)$  for  $s = s_1, \dots, s_N$  and all  $a$

✓ Update  $\theta_{k+1}$  from  $\theta_k$  using the estimators  $\{Z_k(s_i, a)\}_{i=1}^N$   
Using any technique we introduced for policy-based contextual bandits

$$s \rightarrow \pi(a|s)$$

$$Z_k(s, a) = \frac{r(s, a) - b(s)}{\pi_k(a|s)} \mathbb{1}(a_t = a)$$

$$\mathbb{E}[Z_k(s, a)] \approx \bar{R}(s, a)$$

Data collection

Policy Evaluation

Policy Improvement

# Why can we independently optimize the policy on each state?

Essentially treating **states** as **contexts**, but replacing  $R(x, a)$  by  $Q^{\pi_{\theta_k}}(s, a)$

# **Policy Evaluation**

# Policy Evaluation

Given: a policy  $\pi$

Evaluate  $V^\pi(s)$  or  $Q^\pi(s, a)$

On-policy policy evaluation: the learner can execute  $\pi$  to evaluate  $\pi$

Off-policy/offline policy evaluation: the learner can only execute some  $\pi_h \neq \pi$ , or can only access some existing dataset to evaluate  $\pi$

## Use cases:

- Approximate policy iteration:  $\pi_k(s) = \operatorname{argmax}_a Q^{\pi_{k-1}}(s, a)$
- Estimate the value of a policy before deploying it in the real world, e.g., COVID-related border measures, economic recovery policies, or policy changes in recommendation systems.



# Value Iteration for $V^\pi / Q^\pi$

*Assuming  $P, R$  are known*

**Input:**  $\pi$

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

$$\forall s, \quad V_k(s) \leftarrow \sum_a \pi(a|s) \left( R(s, a) + \gamma \sum_{s'} P(s'|s, a) V_{k-1}(s') \right)$$

**Input:**  $\pi$

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

$$\forall s, a, \quad Q_k(s, a) \leftarrow R(s, a) + \gamma \sum_{s', a'} P(s'|s, a) \pi(a'|s') Q_{k-1}(s', a')$$

*$Q_k \rightarrow Q^\pi$*

# **On-Policy Policy Evaluation**

Value Iterate for PE (given  $\pi$ )

# Temporal Difference (TD) Learning for $V^\pi$

correct  $\pi$ : achieved

max  
a'

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

Collect  $\{(s_i, a_i, r_i, s'_i)\}_{i=1}^N$  using policy  $\pi$

$s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$$\theta_k \leftarrow \theta_{k-1} - \alpha \nabla_{\theta} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\theta}(s_i) - r_i - \gamma V_{\theta_{k-1}}(s'_i) \right)^2 \Big|_{\theta = \theta_{k-1}}$$

No target network needed because this is an **on-policy** problem.

Know  $P, R$

This algorithm is also called TD(0)

with sample:

collect  $(s_i, a_i, r_i, s'_i)$  from  $\pi$

$$V_k(s) \leftarrow \sum_a \pi(a|s) \left( R(s,a) + \gamma \sum_{s'} P(s'|s,a) V_{k-1}(s') \right)$$

$$= \sum_a \pi(a|s) R(s,a) + \gamma \sum_a \pi(a|s) \sum_{s'} P(s'|s,a) V_{k-1}(s')$$

$$\min_{\theta} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\theta}(s_i) - (r_i + \gamma V_{\theta_{k-1}}(s'_i)) \right)^2$$

# Temporal Difference (TD) Learning for $Q^\pi$

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

Collect  $\{(s_i, a_i, r_i, s'_i)\}_{i=1}^N$  using policy  $\pi$

$$\theta_k \leftarrow \theta_{k-1} - \alpha \nabla_{\theta} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( Q_{\theta}(s_i, a_i) - r_i - \gamma \sum_a \pi(a|s'_i) Q_{\theta_{k-1}}(s'_i, a') \right)^2 \Big|_{\theta = \theta_{k-1}}$$

No target network needed because this is an on-policy problem.

# Monte Carlo Estimation

Start from  $(s_1, a_1) = (\hat{s}, \hat{a})$  and execute policy  $\pi$  until the episode ends and obtain trajectory

$$s_1 = \hat{s}, a_1 = \hat{a}, r_1, s_2, a_2, r_2, \dots, s_T, a_T, r_T$$

Let  $G = \sum_{h=1}^T \gamma^{h-1} r_h$

$$E[G] = Q^\pi(\hat{s}, \hat{a})$$

$G$  is an unbiased estimator for  $Q^\pi(\hat{s}, \hat{a})$

**MC estimator:** unbiased, higher variance

**TD estimator:** biased, lower variance

$$Q^{\pi_{\theta_k}}(s, a) = Q^{\pi}(s, a)$$

$$E \left[ \sum_{h=1}^{\infty} \gamma^{h-1} R(s_h, a_h) \mid (s_1, a_1) = (s, a) \right]$$

$$Z(\hat{s}, a) = \frac{G \mathbb{I}\{a=\hat{a}\}}{\pi(\hat{a}|\hat{s})}$$

$$\text{band. z}$$

$$r$$

$$E[r] = R(x_t, a_t)$$

$$\hat{R}(x_t, a_t)$$

$$r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \dots$$

$$\hat{Q}(s, a)$$

# A Family of Estimators

TD(0) for  $V^\pi$

- Suppose we have a **state-value function estimation**  $V_\phi(s) \approx V^\pi(s)$
- Suppose we also have a **trajectory**  $(s_1, a_1, r_1, \dots, s_\tau, a_\tau, r_\tau)$  generated by  $\pi$  where  $s_{\tau+1}$  is a terminal state

The following are all valid estimators of  $Q^\pi(s_1, a_1)$ :

$$G_{1:1} = r_1 + \gamma V_\phi(s_2)$$

$$G_{1:2} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 V_\phi(s_3)$$

$$G_{1:\tau-1} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} V_\phi(s_\tau)$$

$$G_{1:\tau} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} r_\tau + \gamma^\tau V_\phi(s_{\tau+1})$$

$$G_{1:\tau+1} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} r_\tau + \gamma^\tau 0$$

$$\dots$$

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{E}[r_1 + \gamma V_\phi(s_2)] &= \mathbb{E}[r_1 + \gamma \sum_{s'} P(s'|s_1, a_1) V_\phi(s')] \\ &\approx R(s_1, a_1) + \sum_{s'} P(s'|s_1, a_1) \underline{V^\pi(s')} = \underline{Q^\pi(s_1, a_1)} \\ R(s_1, a_1) + \gamma R(s_2, a_2) + \gamma^2 \sum_{s'} P(s'|s_1, a_1) \underline{V^\pi(s')} \\ &\approx R(s_1, a_1) + \gamma R(s_2, a_2) + \gamma^2 \sum_{s'} P(s'|s_1, a_1) \underline{V^\pi(s')} \\ &\approx \underline{Q^\pi(s_1, a_1)} \end{aligned}$$

# A Family of Estimators

$$Q^{\pi}(s_1, a_1) - V^{\pi}(s_1) = \text{advantage}$$

And the following are estimators of  $Q^{\pi}(s_1, a_1) - V_{\phi}(s_1)$  (baseline)

$$A_{1:1} = r_1 + \gamma V_{\phi}(s_2) - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

...

$$A_{1:\tau-1} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} V_{\phi}(s_{\tau}) - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

$$A_{1:\tau} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} r_{\tau} - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

$$A_{1:\tau+1} = r_1 + \gamma r_2 + \gamma^2 r_3 + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-1} r_{\tau} + \gamma^{\tau} 0 - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

...

Below, we will introduce a way to combine these estimators.

# Balancing Bias and Variance

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} G_{1:1} \\ G_{1:2} \\ \vdots \\ G_{1:\tau} \\ G_{1:\tau+1} \\ \vdots \\ G_{1:\infty} \end{array} \right\} = \text{estimators of } Q^{\pi}(s_1, a_1)$   
 $\lambda \in [0, 1)$   
*same*

$$G_1(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda) \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \lambda^{i-1} G_{1:i}$$

$$= (1 - \lambda) (G_{1:1} + \lambda G_{1:2} + \lambda^2 G_{1:3} + \dots + \lambda^{\tau-1} G_{1:\tau} + \lambda^{\tau} G_{1:\tau+1} + \lambda^{\tau+1} G_{1:\tau+2} + \dots)$$

$$(1 - \lambda) (1 + \lambda + \lambda^2 + \dots) = 1$$

$$\underline{A_1(\lambda)} = (1 - \lambda) \sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \lambda^{i-1} A_{1:i}$$

$$A_{1:i} = G_{1:i} - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

$$= (1 - \lambda) (A_{1:1} + \lambda A_{1:2} + \lambda^2 A_{1:3} + \dots + \lambda^{\tau-1} A_{1:\tau} + \lambda^{\tau} A_{1:\tau+1} + \lambda^{\tau+1} A_{1:\tau+2} + \dots)$$

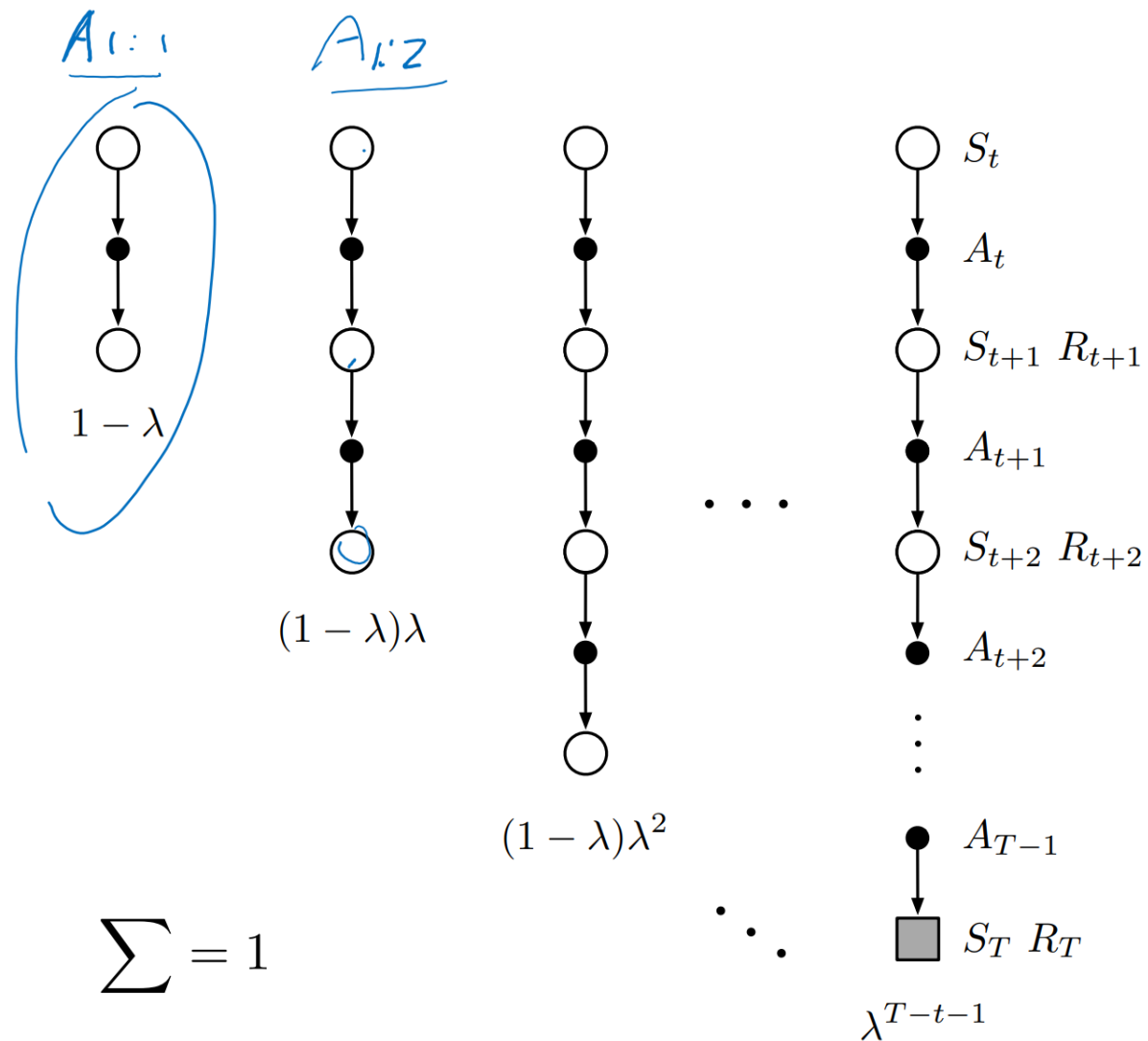
$$A_1(\lambda) = G_1(\lambda) - V_{\phi}(s_1)$$

**(Generalized Advantage Estimation)**

An estimation of  $Q^{\pi}(s_1, a_1) - V^{\pi}(s_1)$



# Balancing Bias and Variance



# Computing Generalized Advantage Estimator (GAE)

We also need to calculate

$$A_2(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda) \sum_{i=2}^{\infty} \lambda^{i-2} A_{2:i} = (1 - \lambda) (A_{2:2} + \lambda A_{2:3} + \lambda^2 A_{2:4} + \dots + \lambda^{\tau-2} A_{2:\tau} + \underbrace{\lambda^{\tau-1} A_{2:\tau+1} + \lambda^{\tau} A_{2:\tau+2} + \dots}_{\text{same}})$$

$$A_3(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda) \sum_{i=3}^{\infty} \lambda^{i-3} A_{3:i}$$

...

To compute  $A_1(\lambda), A_2(\lambda), \dots, A_{\tau}(\lambda)$ , naïve implementation takes  $\tau \times \tau \times \tau$  time.

*Handwritten annotations:*

- A box around  $A_1(\lambda), A_2(\lambda), \dots, A_{\tau}(\lambda)$  has an arrow pointing to  $Q^{\pi}(s_i, a_i) - V^{\pi}(s_i)$  below it.
- An arrow from  $Q^{\pi}(s_2, a_2) - V^{\pi}(s_2)$  points to the box.
- An arrow from  $\tau \times \tau \times \tau$  points to  $A_1(\lambda), \dots, A_{\tau}(\lambda)$ .
- Two arrows point to the  $\tau$  in  $\tau \times \tau \times \tau$ , labeled "compute  $A_{i:j}$ " and "compute  $A_i(\lambda)$ ".

# Efficient Computation of GAE (1/2)


$$i \in [1, \tau]$$

Define  $\delta_i = r_i + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+1}) - V_\phi(s_i)$

$$A_{i:j} = r_i + \gamma r_{i+1} + \gamma^2 r_{i+2} + \dots + \gamma^{j-i} r_j + \gamma^{j-i+1} V_\phi(s_{j+1}) - V_\phi(s_i)$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= r_i + \gamma r_{i+1} + \gamma^2 r_{i+2} + \dots + \gamma^{j-i} r_j + \gamma^{j-i+1} V_\phi(s_{j+1}) - V_\phi(s_i) \\
 &= \delta_i + \gamma \delta_{i+1} + \gamma^2 \delta_{i+2} + \dots + \gamma^{j-i} \delta_j \\
 &= \underbrace{(r_i + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+1}) - V_\phi(s_i))}_{\boxed{\phantom{r_i + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+1}) - V_\phi(s_i)}}} + \gamma \underbrace{(r_{i+1} + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+2}) - V_\phi(s_{i+1}))}_{\boxed{\phantom{r_{i+1} + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+2}) - V_\phi(s_{i+1})}}} + \gamma^2 \underbrace{(r_{i+2} + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+3}) - V_\phi(s_{i+2}))}_{\boxed{\phantom{r_{i+2} + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+3}) - V_\phi(s_{i+2})}}} \\
 &\quad + \dots + \gamma^{j-i} \underbrace{(r_j + \gamma V_\phi(s_{j+1}) - V_\phi(s_j))}_{\boxed{\phantom{r_j + \gamma V_\phi(s_{j+1}) - V_\phi(s_j)}}}
 \end{aligned}$$

# Efficient Computation of GAE (2/2)

$$A_{\tau}(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda)(A_{\tau:\tau} + \lambda A_{\tau:\tau+1} + \lambda^2 A_{\tau:\tau+2} + \dots) = A_{\tau\tau} = \underline{\delta_{\tau}} = r_{\tau} + \gamma \cancel{V_{\phi}(s_{\tau+1})} - V_{\phi}(s_{\tau})$$


$$A_{\tau-1}(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda)(A_{\tau-1:\tau-1} + \lambda A_{\tau-1:\tau} + \lambda^2 A_{\tau-1:\tau+1} + \dots)$$

$$A_1(\lambda) = (1 - \lambda)(A_{1:1} + \lambda A_{1:2} + \lambda^2 A_{1:3} + \dots)$$

$A_i(\lambda) = \delta_i + \gamma A_{i+1}(\lambda)$

# GAE (Generalized Advantage Estimation)

Let  $(s_1, a_1, r_1, s'_1, s_2, a_2, r_2, s'_2, \dots, s_N, a_N, r_N, s'_N)$  be a trajectory collected with policy  $\pi$ , where  $s'_i = s_{i+1}$  if  $s'_i$  is not a terminal state, and  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  otherwise.

Also, let  $V_\phi$  be a given state-value estimation.

Then the following procedure can estimate  $A_i \approx Q^\pi(s_i, a_i) - V_\phi(s_i)$

**Parameter:**  $\lambda$  (controlling variance-bias tradeoff)

For  $i = N, N - 1, \dots, 1$ :

If  $s'_i$  is a terminal state:

$$\delta_i = r_i - V_\phi(s_i)$$

$$A_i = \delta_i$$

Else:

$$\delta_i = r_i + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+1}) - V_\phi(s_i)$$

$$A_i = \delta_i + \lambda \gamma A_{i+1}$$

# Using GAE in the Policy Iteration Framework

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

Evaluate  $Z_k(s, a) \approx Q^{\pi_{\theta_k}}(s, a) - V_{\phi}(s)$  for  $s = s_1, \dots, s_N$  and all  $a$

$$\Rightarrow Z_k(s_i, a) = \frac{\mathbb{I}\{a_i = a\}}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a | s_i)} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$$

Update  $\theta_{k+1}$  from  $\theta_k$  using the estimator  $\{Z_k(s_i, a)\}_{i=1}^N$

Using any technique we introduced for policy-based contextual bandits

Data collection

Policy Evaluation

Policy Improvement

# Training the Baseline $V_\phi$ (in iteration $k$ )

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

$$\phi_{k+1} \leftarrow \phi_k - \alpha \nabla_\phi \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\phi}(s_i) - r_i - \gamma V_{\phi_k}(s'_i) \right)^2 \Bigg|_{\phi=\phi_k} \quad \text{TD}(0)$$

$$\phi_{k+1} \leftarrow \phi_k - \alpha \nabla_\phi \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\phi}(s_i) - G_i(\lambda; \phi_k) \right)^2 \Bigg|_{\phi=\phi_k} \quad \text{where } G_i(\lambda; \phi_k) = A_i(\lambda; \phi_k) + V_{\phi_k}(s_i) \quad \text{TD}(\lambda)$$

$$\phi_{k+1} \leftarrow \phi_k - \alpha \nabla_\phi \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\phi}(s_i) - \sum_{h=i}^{\tau(i)} \gamma^{h-i} r_i \right)^2 \Bigg|_{\phi=\phi_k} \quad \text{TD}(1)$$

# **Approximate Policy Iteration and Variants**



# PPO

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

Define  $Z_k(s_i, a) = \frac{\mathbb{I}\{a_i=a\}}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a|s_i)} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$

Requires training a separate  $V_\phi$

Use another inner for-loop to solve the argmax with gradient ascent

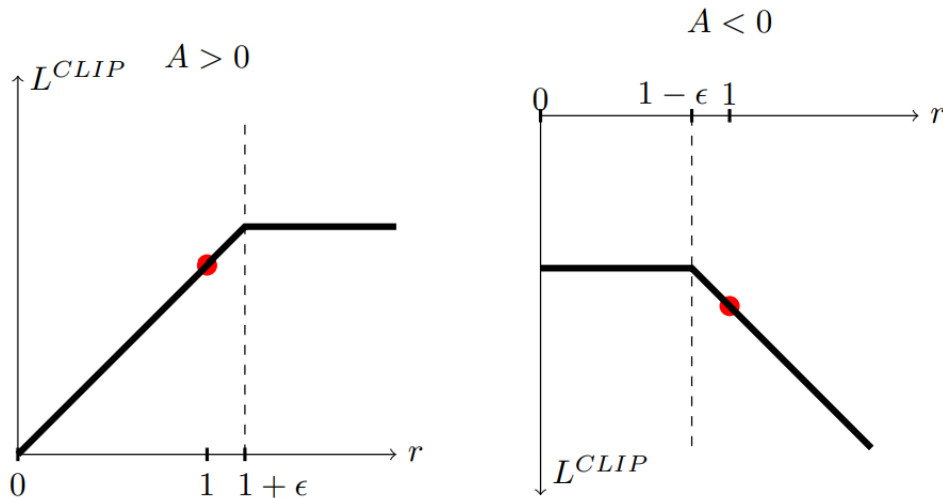
$$\begin{aligned} \theta_{k+1} &= \operatorname{argmax}_{\theta} \left\{ \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \sum_a \pi_{\theta}(a|s_i) Z_k(s_i, a) - \frac{1}{\eta} \operatorname{KL}(\pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i), \pi_{\theta}(\cdot | s_i)) \right) \right\} \\ &\approx \operatorname{argmax}_{\theta} \left\{ \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i) - \frac{1}{\eta} \left( \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} - 1 - \log \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \right) \right) \right\} \end{aligned}$$

# PPO with Clipping

Schulman et al. Proximal Policy Optimization Algorithms. 2017.

$$\theta_{k+1} = \operatorname{argmax}_{\theta} \left\{ \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \boxed{\phantom{\frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)}}} - \frac{1}{\eta} \left( \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} - 1 - \log \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \right) \right) \right\}$$

$$\min \left\{ \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i), \quad \operatorname{clip}_{[1-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon]} \left( \frac{\pi_{\theta}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \right) \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i) \right\}$$



Preventing  $\frac{\pi_{\theta_{k+1}}(a_i|s_i)}{\pi_{\theta_k}(a_i|s_i)} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$  from being too high

# A2C (Advantage Actor Critic) / PG

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

$$\theta_{k+1} = \theta_k - \eta \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \nabla_{\theta} \log \pi_{\theta}(a_i | s_i) \right) \Big|_{\theta=\theta_k} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$$

In standard A2C,  $\hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i) = r_i + \gamma V_{\phi_k}(s'_i) - V_{\phi_k}(s_i)$  (GAE estimator with  $\lambda = 0$ )  
and  $\phi_k$  is trained with TD(0):

$$\phi_{k+1} \leftarrow \phi_k - \alpha \nabla_{\phi} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\phi}(s_i) - r_i - \gamma V_{\phi}(s'_i) \right)^2 \Big|_{\phi=\phi_k}$$

# A2C (Advantage Actor Critic) / PG

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

$$\theta_{k+1} = \theta_k - \eta \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \nabla_{\theta} \log \pi_{\theta}(a_i | s_i) \right) \Big|_{\theta=\theta_k} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$$

In standard PG,  $\hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i) = \sum_{h=i}^{\tau(i)} \gamma^{h-i} r_h - V_{\phi_k}(s_i)$  (GAE estimator with  $\lambda = 1$ )

# A2C (Advantage Actor Critic) / PG

For  $k = 1, 2, \dots$

For  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ :

Choose action  $a_i \sim \pi_{\theta_k}(\cdot | s_i)$

Receive reward  $r_i \sim R(s_i, a_i)$  and  $s'_i \sim P(\cdot | s_i, a_i)$

$s_{i+1} = s'_i$  if episode continues,  $s_{i+1} \sim \rho$  if episode ends

$$\theta_{k+1} = \theta_k - \eta \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( \nabla_{\theta} \log \pi_{\theta}(a_i | s_i) \right) \Big|_{\theta=\theta_k} \hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$$

In general, one can use GAE with any  $\lambda$  to calculate  $\hat{A}_k(s_i, a_i)$ , with  $V_{\phi}$  calculated from TD( $\lambda'$ ) with any  $\lambda'$ .

# Summary: Algorithms based on Policy Iteration

- The algorithms are almost the same as those we introduced for contextual bandits
  - PPO / NPG
  - A2C / PG
- The only change is replacing  $r(x_i, a_i) - b(x_i)$  by Advantage Estimator:
  - $\lambda = 0$ :  $r(s_i, a_i) + \gamma V_\phi(s_{i+1}) - V_\phi(s_i)$
  - $\lambda = 1$ :  $r(s_i, a_i) + \gamma r(s_{i+1}, a_{i+1}) + \gamma^2 r(s_{i+2}, a_{i+2}) + \dots + \gamma^{\tau-i} r(s_\tau, a_\tau) - V_\phi(s_i)$
  - Any  $\lambda \in [0,1]$ : calculated by the GAE procedure
- The baseline  $V_\phi(s)$  tries to track  $V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$  where  $\pi_\theta$  is the current policy
  - It is trained with a separate procedure  $\text{TD}(\lambda')$

$$\phi_{k+1} \leftarrow \phi_k - \alpha \nabla_\phi \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \left( V_{\phi}(s_i) - r_1 - \gamma V_{\phi_k}(s'_i) \right)^2 \bigg|_{\phi=\phi_k} \quad \text{TD}(0)$$