

# Lecture 10: Classic Games

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# Outline

- 1 State of the Art
- 2 Game Theory
- 3 Minimax Search
- 4 Self-Play Reinforcement Learning  
→ play them selves and then beat humans.
- 5 Combining Reinforcement Learning and Minimax Search
- 6 Reinforcement Learning in Imperfect-Information Games
- 7 Conclusions  
↳ hidden state (poker)

# Why Study Classic Games?

- Simple rules, deep concepts
- Studied for hundreds or thousands of years
- Meaningful IQ test
- *Drosophila* of artificial intelligence
- Microcosms encapsulating real world issues
- Games are fun!

# AI in Games: State of the Art

Program	Level of Play	Program to Achieve Level
Checkers	Perfect	<i>Chinook</i>
Chess	Superhuman	<i>Deep Blue</i>
Othello	Superhuman	<i>Logistello</i>
Backgammon	Superhuman	<i>TD-Gammon</i>
Scrabble	Superhuman	<i>Maven</i>
Go	Grandmaster	<i>MoGo</i> <sup>1</sup> , <i>Crazy Stone</i> <sup>2</sup> , <i>Zen</i> <sup>3</sup>
Poker <sup>4</sup>	Superhuman	<i>Polaris</i>

↳ defeat humans

<sup>1</sup>9 × 9<sup>2</sup>9 × 9 and 19 × 19<sup>3</sup>19 × 19<sup>4</sup>Heads-up Limit Texas Hold'em

# RL in Games: State of the Art

Program	Level of Play	RL Program to Achieve Level
Checkers	Perfect	<i>Chinook</i>
Chess	International Master	<i>KnightCap / Meep</i>
Othello	Superhuman	<i>Logistello</i>
Backgammon	Superhuman	<i>TD-Gammon</i>
Scrabble	Superhuman	<i>Maven</i>
Go	Grandmaster	<i>MoGo<sup>1</sup>, Crazy Stone<sup>2</sup>, Zen<sup>3</sup></i>
Poker <sup>4</sup>	Superhuman	<i>SmooCT</i>

what common in these games?

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<sup>1</sup>9 × 9

<sup>2</sup>9 × 9 and 19 × 19

<sup>3</sup>19 × 19

<sup>4</sup>Heads-up Limit Texas Hold'em

# Optimality in Games

- depends on how other players play.
- What is the optimal policy  $\pi^i$  for  $i$ th player?
  - If all other players fix their policies  $\pi^{-i}$
  - Best response  $\pi_*^i(\pi^{-i})$  is optimal policy against those policies
  - Nash equilibrium is a joint policy for all players

$$\pi^i = \pi_*^i(\pi^{-i})$$

- such that every player's policy is a best response
- i.e. no player would choose to deviate from Nash

# Single-Agent and Self-Play Reinforcement Learning

- Best response is solution to single-agent RL problem
  - Other players become part of the environment
  - Game is reduced to an MDP
  - Best response is optimal policy for this MDP
- Nash equilibrium is fixed-point of self-play RL
  - Experience is generated by playing games between agents

exists a unique  
solution

$$a_1 \sim \pi^1, a_2 \sim \pi^2, \dots$$

adapt policy to opponent

- Each agent learns best response to other players
- One player's policy determines another player's environment
- All players are adapting to each other

↳ net sure to converge!!!

## Two-Player Zero-Sum Games

We will focus on a special class of games:

- A two-player game has two (alternating) players
  - We will name player 1 white and player 2 black
- A zero sum game has equal and opposite rewards for black and white

$$R^1 + R^2 = 0$$

We consider methods for finding Nash equilibria in these games

- Game tree search (i.e. planning) → build big search tree  
to find equilibria.
- Self-play reinforcement learning  
└ e.g. TD

# Perfect and Imperfect Information Games

- A perfect information or Markov game is fully observed
  - Chess
  - Checkers
  - Othello
  - Backgammon
  - Go
- An imperfect information game is partially observed
  - Scrabble
  - Poker
- We focus first on perfect information games

# Minimax

- A **value function** defines the expected total reward given joint policies  $\pi = \langle \pi^1, \pi^2 \rangle$ 

↗ only need one  $v_\pi(s)$  due to zero sum.

$$v_\pi(s) = \mathbb{E}_\pi [G_t \mid S_t = s]$$

- A **minimax** value function maximizes white's expected return while minimizing black's expected return

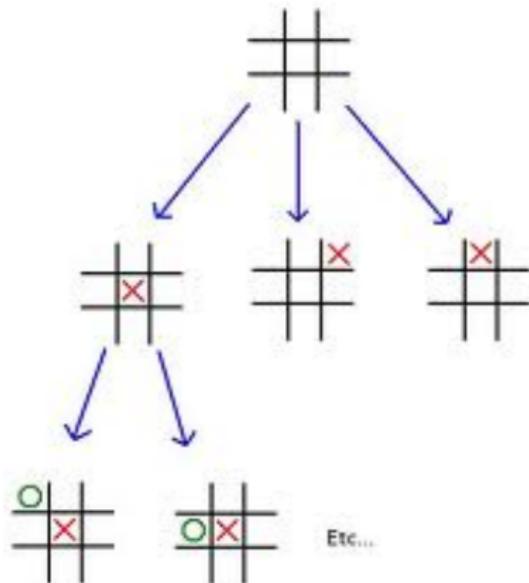
↗ have  $v_*(s) \Rightarrow$  know how to play.

$$v_*(s) = \max_{\pi^1} \min_{\pi^2} v_\pi(s)$$

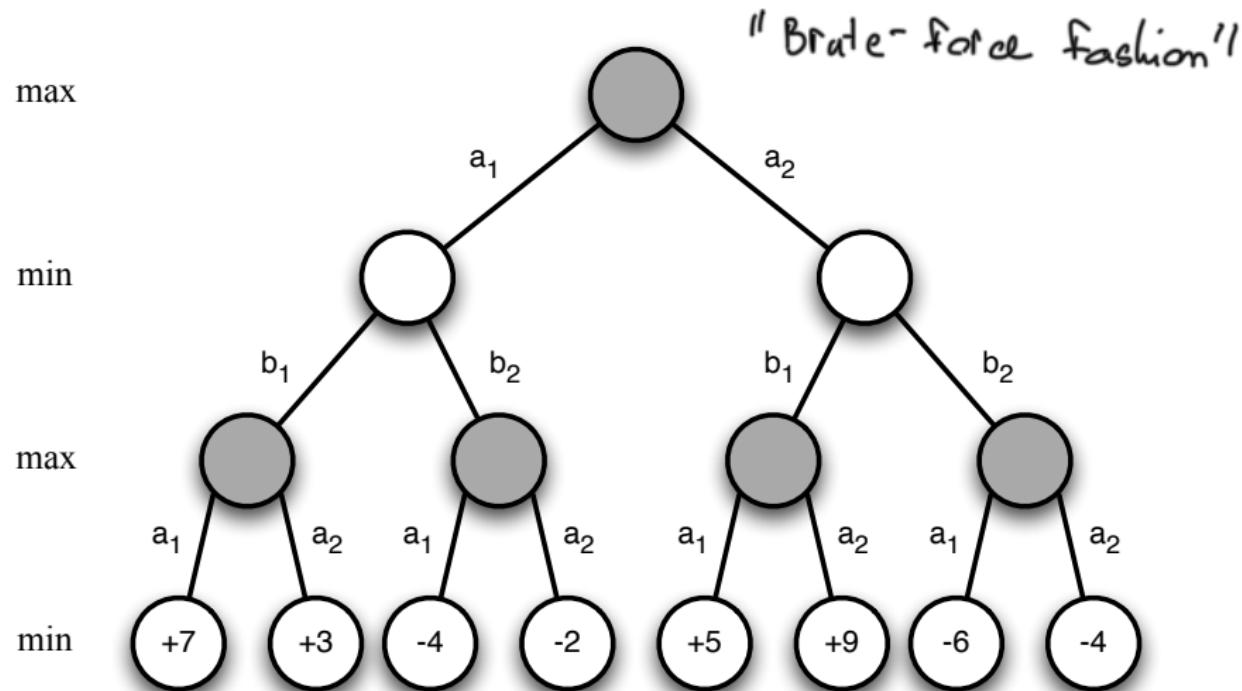
- A **minimax** policy is a joint policy  $\pi = \langle \pi^1, \pi^2 \rangle$  that achieves the minimax values
- There is a unique minimax value function
- A minimax policy is a Nash equilibrium

# Minimax Search

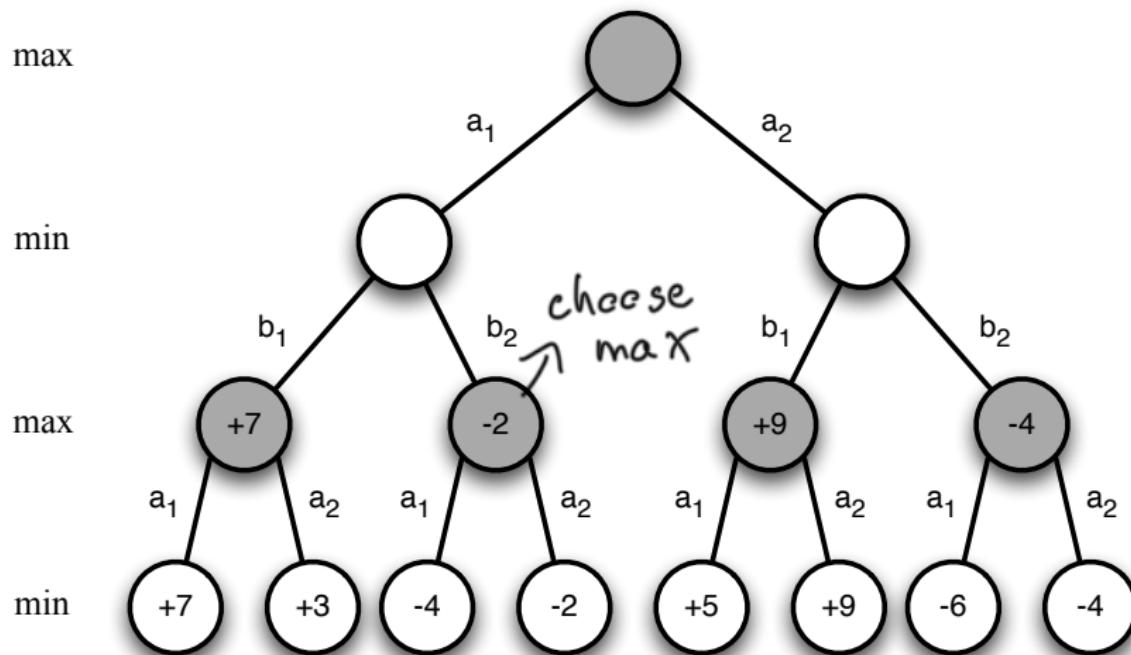
- Minimax values can be found by depth-first game-tree search
- Introduced by Claude Shannon: *Programming a Computer for Playing Chess*
- Ran on paper!



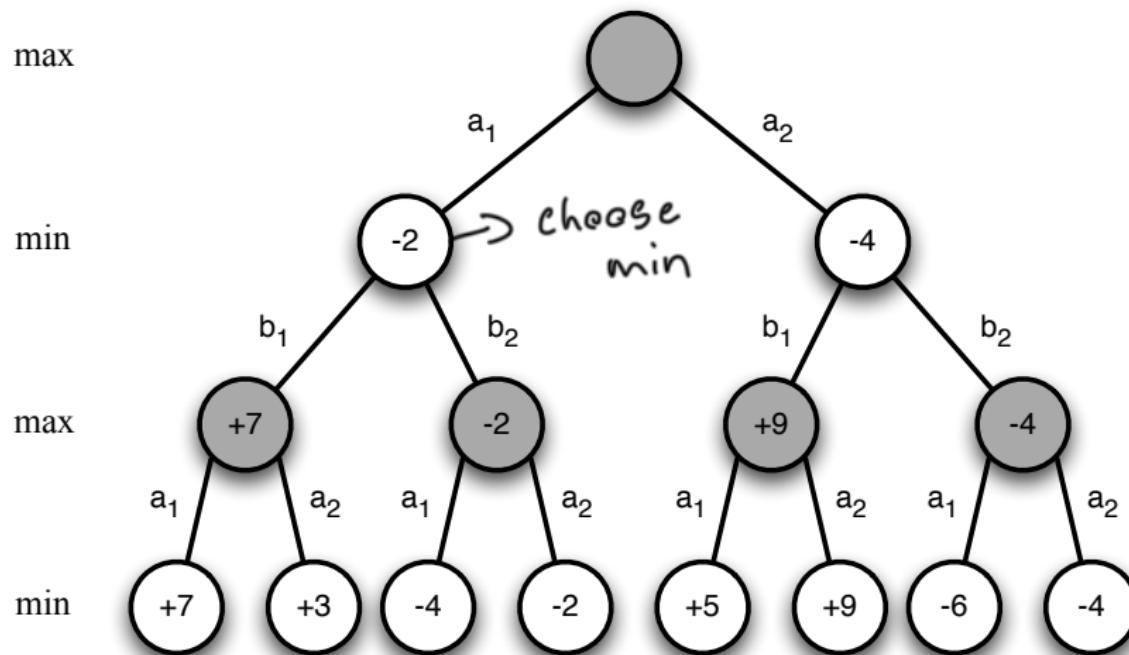
## Minimax Search Example



# Minimax Search Example

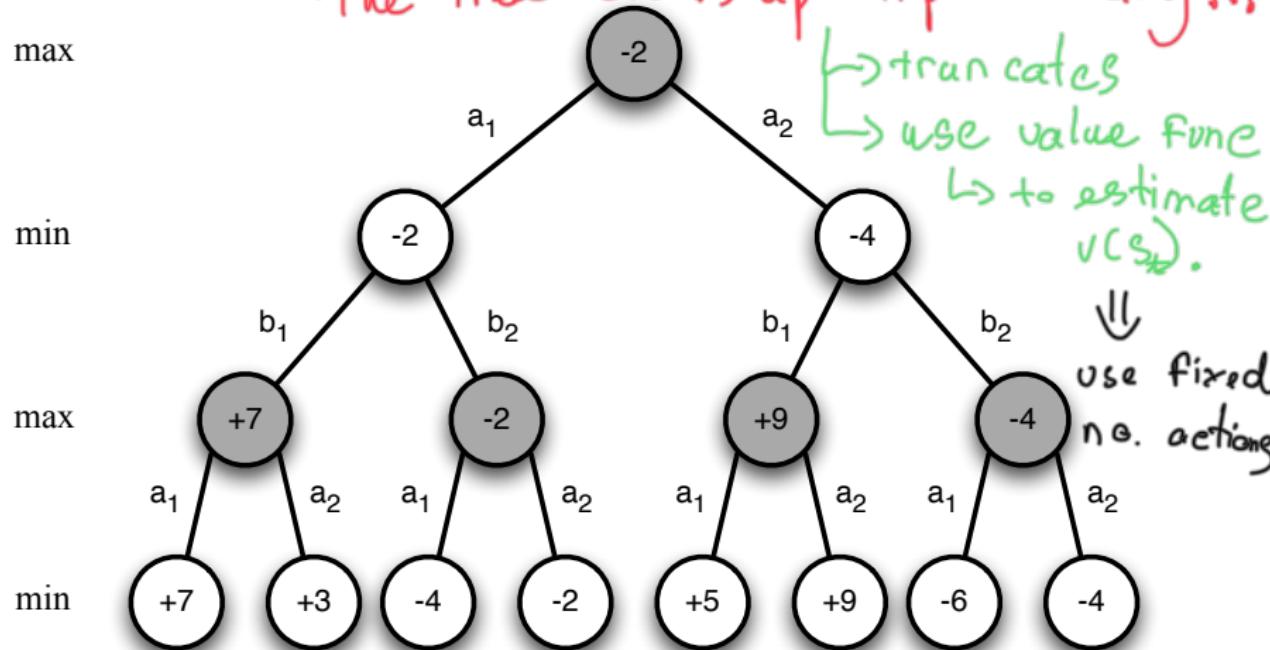


## Minimax Search Example



## Minimax Search Example

the tree blows up exponentially !!!

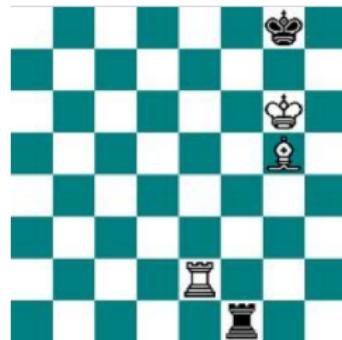


# Value Function in Minimax Search

- Search tree **grows exponentially**
- Impractical to search to the end of the game
- Instead use value function approximator  $v(s, w) \approx v_*(s)$ 
  - aka *evaluation function, heuristic function*
- Use value function to **estimate minimax value at leaf nodes**
- Minimax search run to **fixed depth with respect to leaf values**

# Binary-Linear Value Function

- Binary feature vector  $\mathbf{x}(s)$ : e.g. one feature per piece
- Weight vector  $\mathbf{w}$ : e.g. value of each piece
- Position is evaluated by summing weights of active features



$$v(s, \mathbf{w}) = \mathbf{x}(s) \cdot \mathbf{w} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ \vdots \end{bmatrix} \cdot \begin{bmatrix} +5 \\ +3 \\ +1 \\ -5 \\ -3 \\ -1 \\ \vdots \end{bmatrix}$$

*binary f1. vector*

$v(s, \mathbf{w}) = 5 + 3 - 5 = 3$

# Deep Blue

- Knowledge → prepared by experts.
  - 8000 handcrafted chess features
  - Binary-linear value function
  - Weights largely hand-tuned by human experts
- Search
  - High performance parallel alpha-beta search
  - 480 special-purpose VLSI chess processors
  - Searched 200 million positions/second
  - Looked ahead 16-40 ply
- Results
  - Defeated human champion Garry Kasparov 4-2 (1997)
  - Most watched event in internet history

# Chinook

- Knowledge
  - Binary-linear value function
  - 21 knowledge-based features (position, mobility, ...)
  - x4 phases of the game
- Search
  - High performance alpha-beta search
  - Retrograde analysis
    - Search backward from won positions
    - Store all winning positions in lookup tables
    - Plays perfectly from last n checkers
- Results
  - Defeated Marion Tinsley in world championship 1994
    - won 2 games but Tinsley withdrew for health reasons
  - Chinook solved Checkers in 2007
    - perfect play against God

# Self-Play Temporal-Difference Learning

- Apply value-based RL algorithms to games of self-play
- MC: update value function towards the return  $G_t$ 

$$\Delta \mathbf{w} = \alpha(G_t - v(S_t, \mathbf{w})) \nabla_{\mathbf{w}} v(S_t, \mathbf{w})$$

prob. of whom  
gonna win the  
game.
- TD(0): update value function towards successor value  $v(S_{t+1})$

$$\Delta \mathbf{w} = \alpha(v(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}) - v(S_t, \mathbf{w})) \nabla_{\mathbf{w}} v(S_t, \mathbf{w})$$

- TD( $\lambda$ ): update value function towards the  $\lambda$ -return  $G_t^\lambda$

$$\Delta \mathbf{w} = \alpha(G_t^\lambda - v(S_t, \mathbf{w})) \nabla_{\mathbf{w}} v(S_t, \mathbf{w})$$

↳ improve the policy for 2 players.

## Policy Improvement with Afterstates

- For deterministic games it is sufficient to estimate  $v_*(s)$
- This is because we can efficiently evaluate the afterstate

$$q_*(s, a) = v_*(\text{succ}(s, a))$$

- Rules of the game define the successor state  $\text{succ}(s, a)$
- Actions are selected e.g. by min/maximising afterstate value

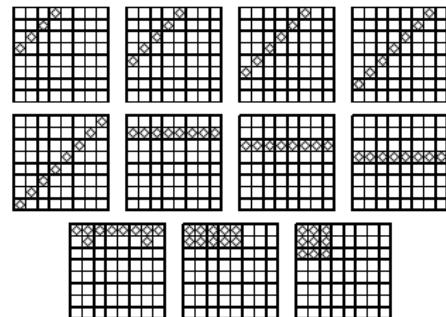
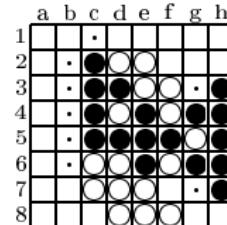
$$A_t = \operatorname{argmax}_a v_*(\text{succ}(S_t, a)) \quad \text{for white}$$

$$A_t = \operatorname{argmin}_a v_*(\text{succ}(S_t, a)) \quad \text{for black}$$

- This improves joint policy for both players

## Self-Play TD in Othello: *Logistello*

- Logistello created its own features
- Start with raw input features, e.g.  
“black stone at C1?”
- Construct new features by  
conjunction/disjunction
- Created 1.5 million features in  
different configurations
- Binary-linear value function using  
these features



# Reinforcement Learning in Logistello

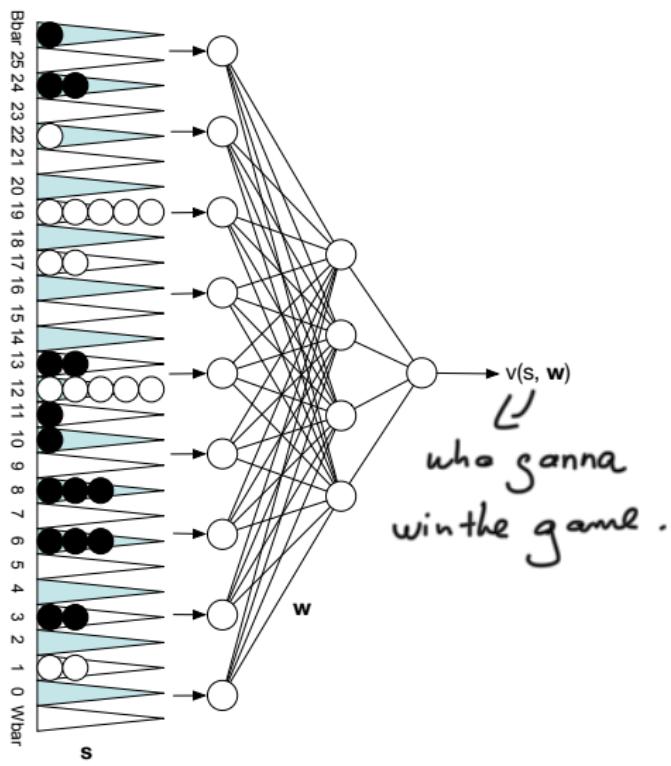
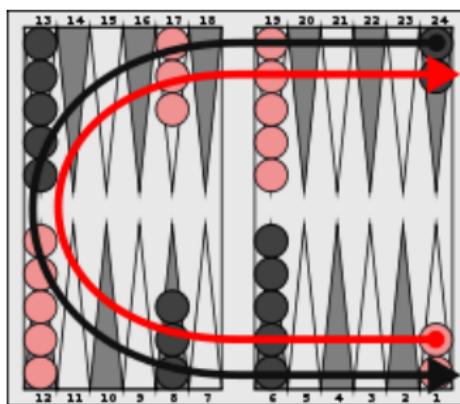
Logistello used generalised policy iteration

- Generate batch of self-play games from current policy
- Evaluate policies using Monte-Carlo (regress to outcomes)
- Greedy policy improvement to generate new players

## Results

- Defeated World Champion Takeshi Murukami 6-0

# TD Gammon: Non-Linear Value Function Approximation



## Self-Play TD in Backgammon: *TD-Gammon*

- Initialised with random weights
- Trained by games of self-play
- Using non-linear temporal-difference learning

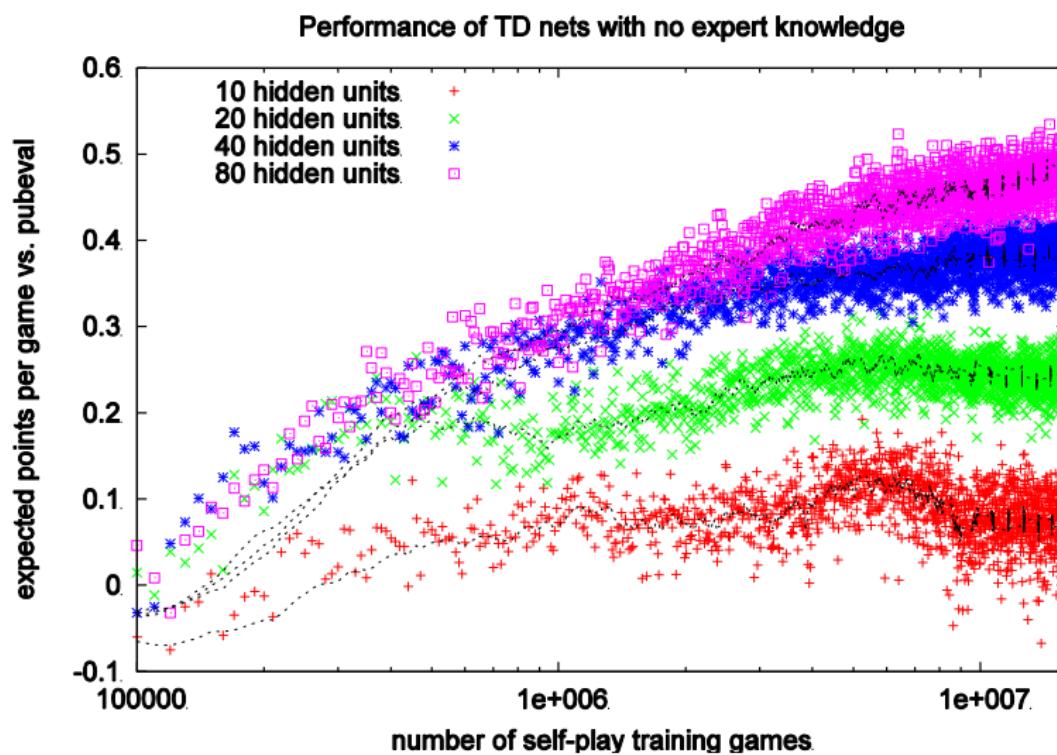
$$\delta_t = v(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}) - v(S_t, \mathbf{w})$$
$$\Delta \mathbf{w} = \alpha \delta_t \nabla_{\mathbf{w}} v(S_t, \mathbf{w})$$

- Greedy policy improvement (no exploration)
- Algorithm always converged in practice
- Not true for other games

## TD Gammon: Results

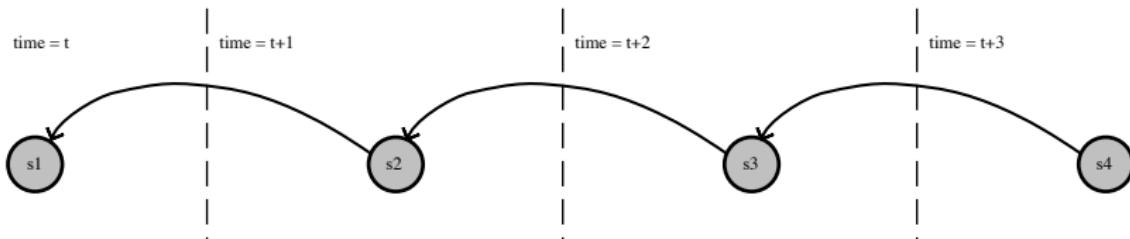
- Zero expert knowledge  $\implies$  strong intermediate play
- Hand-crafted features  $\implies$  advanced level of play (1991)
- 2-ply search  $\implies$  strong master play (1993)
- 3-ply search  $\implies$  superhuman play (1998)
- Defeated world champion Luigi Villa 7-1 (1992)

# New TD-Gammon Results



# Simple TD

- TD: update value towards successor value



- Value function approximator  $v(s, \mathbf{w})$  with parameters  $\mathbf{w}$
- Value function backed up from raw value at next state

$$v(S_t, \mathbf{w}) \leftarrow v(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w})$$

- First learn value function by TD learning
- Then use value function in minimax search (no learning)

$$v_+(S_t, \mathbf{w}) = \underset{s \in \text{leaves}(S_t)}{\text{minimax}} v(s, \mathbf{w})$$

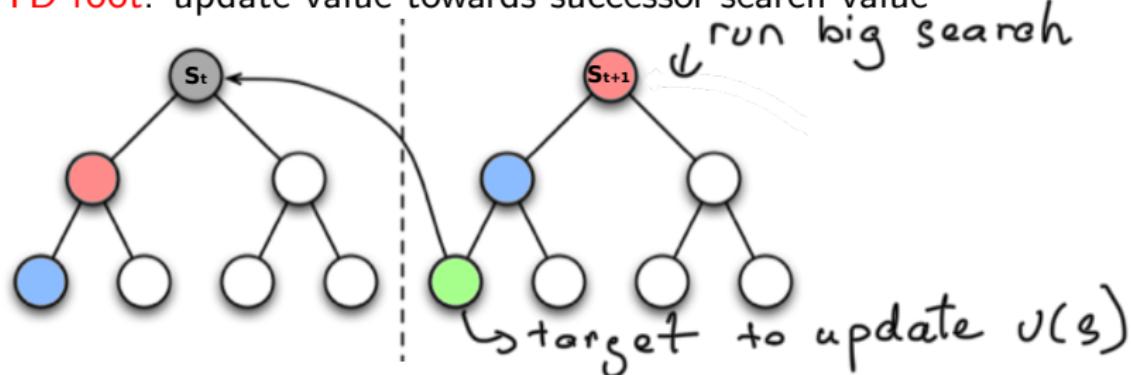
## Simple TD: Results

- Othello: superhuman performance in *Logistello*
- Backgammon: superhuman performance in *TD-Gammon*
- Chess: poor performance
- Checkers: poor performance
- In chess tactics seem necessary to find signal in position
- e.g. hard to find checkmates without search
- Can we learn directly from minimax search values?

↳ need search to est. more correctly

## TD Root

- TD root: update value towards successor search value



- Search value is computed at root position  $S_t$

$$v_+(S_t, \mathbf{w}) = \underset{s \in \text{leaves}(S_t)}{\text{minimax}} v(s, \mathbf{w})$$

- Value function backed up from *search value* at next state

$$v(S_t, \mathbf{w}) \leftarrow v_+(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}) = v(l_+(S_{t+1}), \mathbf{w})$$

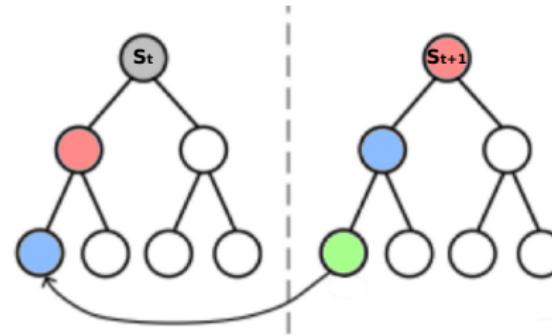
- Where  $l_+(s)$  is the leaf node achieving minimax value from  $s$

## TD Root in Checkers: *Samuel's Player*

- First ever TD learning algorithm (*Samuel 1959*)
- Applied to a Checkers program that learned by self-play
- Defeated an amateur human player
- Also used other ideas we might now consider strange

## TD Leaf

- TD leaf: update search value towards successor search value



- Search value computed at current and next step

$$v_+(S_t, \mathbf{w}) = \underset{s \in \text{leaves}(S_t)}{\text{minimax}} v(s, \mathbf{w}), \quad v_+(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}) = \underset{s \in \text{leaves}(S_{t+1})}{\text{minimax}} v(s, \mathbf{w})$$

- Search value at step \$t\$ backed up from *search value* at \$t + 1\$

$$\begin{aligned} v_+(S_t, \mathbf{w}) &\leftarrow v_+(S_{t+1}, \mathbf{w}) \\ \implies v(I_+(S_t), \mathbf{w}) &\leftarrow v(I_+(S_{t+1}), \mathbf{w}) \end{aligned}$$

# TD leaf in Chess: *Knightcap*

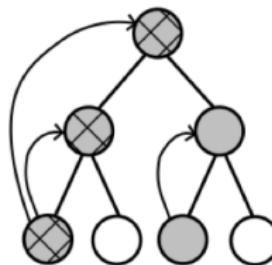
- Learning
  - *Knightcap* trained against expert opponent
  - Starting from standard piece values only
  - Learnt weights using TD leaf
- Search
  - Alpha-beta search with standard enhancements
- Results
  - Achieved master level play after a small number of games
  - Was not effective in self-play
  - Was not effective without starting from good weights

## TD leaf in Checkers: *Chinook*

- Original Chinook used hand-tuned weights
- Later version was trained by self-play
- Using TD leaf to adjust weights
  - Except material weights which were kept fixed
- Self-play weights performed  $\geq$  hand-tuned weights
- i.e. learning to play at superhuman level

# Treestrap

- Treestrap: update search values towards deeper search values



- Minimax search value computed at *all* nodes  $s \in \text{nodes}(S_t)$
- Value backed up from search value, at same step, for all nodes

$$\begin{aligned} v(s, \mathbf{w}) &\leftarrow v_+(s, \mathbf{w}) \\ \implies v(s, \mathbf{w}) &\leftarrow v(l_+(s), \mathbf{w}) \end{aligned}$$

## Treestrap in Chess: *Meep*

- Binary linear value function with 2000 features
- Starting from random initial weights (no prior knowledge)
- Weights adjusted by TreeStrap
- Won 13/15 vs. international masters
- Effective in self-play
- Effective from random initial weights

# Simulation-Based Search

- Self-play reinforcement learning can replace search
- Simulate games of self-play from root state  $S_t$
- Apply RL to simulated experience
  - Monte-Carlo Control  $\implies$  Monte-Carlo Tree Search
  - Most effective variant is UCT algorithm
    - Balance exploration/exploitation in each node using UCB
  - Self-play UCT converges on minimax values
  - Perfect information, zero-sum, 2-player games
  - Imperfect information: see next section

## Performance of MCTS in Games

- MCTS is best performing method in many challenging games
  - Go (last lecture)
  - Hex
  - Lines of Action
  - Amazons
- In many games simple Monte-Carlo search is enough
  - Scrabble
  - Backgammon

# Simple Monte-Carlo Search in Maven

## ■ Learning

- Maven evaluates moves by  $score + v(rack)$
- Binary-linear value function of rack
- Using one, two and three letter features
- Q???????, QU??????, III????
- Learnt by Monte-Carlo policy iteration (cf. Logistello)

## ■ Search

- Roll-out moves by imagining n steps of self-play
- Evaluate resulting position by  $score + v(rack)$
- Score move by average evaluation in rollouts
- Select and play highest scoring move
- Specialised endgame search using B\*

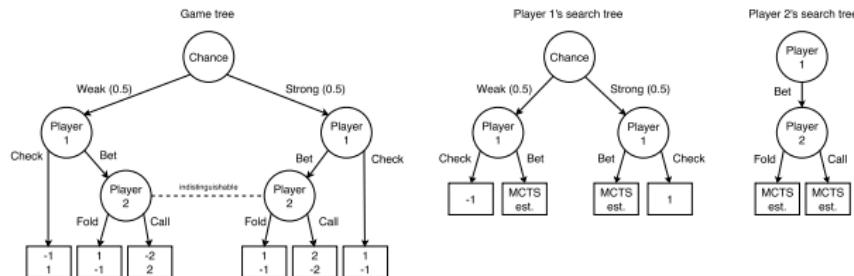
# Maven: Results

- Maven beat world champion Adam Logan 9-5
- Here Maven predicted endgame to finish with MOUTHPART
- Analysis showed Maven had error rate of 3 points per game

M <sub>3</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	U <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>4</sub>		R <sub>1</sub>	R <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>		2L		3W	
R <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>				3L				Q <sub>10</sub>			2W	
T <sub>1</sub>		2W				2L		2L	U <sub>1</sub>		G <sub>2</sub>		
H <sub>4</sub>	U <sub>1</sub>	R <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>			2L			R <sub>1</sub>	2W	R <sub>1</sub>	2L	
H <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>1</sub>						I <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	
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2W			H <sub>1</sub>	3L	F <sub>4</sub>		3L				2W		
P <sub>3</sub>	I <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	I <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>		T <sub>1</sub>	U <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	R <sub>1</sub>	I <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>

# Game-Tree Search in Imperfect Information Games

- Players have different information states and therefore separate search trees



- There is one node for each information state
  - summarising what a player knows
  - e.g. the cards they have seen
- Many real states may share the same information state
- May also aggregate states e.g. with similar value

# Solution Methods for Imperfect Information Games

Information-state game tree may be solved by:

- Iterative forward-search methods
  - e.g. Counterfactual regret minimization
  - “Perfect” play in Poker (heads-up limit Hold'em)
- Self-play reinforcement learning
- e.g. Smooth UCT
  - 3 silver medals in two- and three-player Poker (limit Hold'em)
  - Outperformed massive-scale forward-search agents

## Smooth UCT Search

- Apply MCTS to information-state game tree
- Variant of UCT, inspired by game-theoretic Fictitious Play
  - Agents learn against and respond to opponents' average behaviour
- Extract average strategy from nodes' action counts,  
$$\pi_{avg}(a|s) = \frac{N(s,a)}{N(s)}$$
.
- At each node, pick actions according to

$$A \sim \begin{cases} \text{UCT}(S), & \text{with probability } \eta \\ \pi_{avg}(\cdot|S), & \text{with probability } 1 - \eta \end{cases}$$

- Empirically, in variants of Poker:
  - Naive MCTS diverged
  - Smooth UCT converged to Nash equilibrium

# RL in Games: A Successful Recipe

Program	Input features	Value Fn	RL	Training	Search
Chess <i>Meep</i>	Binary <i>Pieces, pawns, ...</i>	Linear	TreeStrap	Self-Play / Expert	$\alpha\beta$
Checkers <i>Chinook</i>	Binary <i>Pieces, ...</i>	Linear	TD leaf	Self-Play	$\alpha\beta$
Othello <i>Logistello</i>	Binary <i>Disc configs</i>	Linear	MC	Self-Play	$\alpha\beta$
Backgammon <i>TD Gammon</i>	Binary <i>Num checkers</i>	Neural network	TD( $\lambda$ )	Self-Play	$\alpha\beta / MC$
Go <i>MoGo</i>	Binary <i>Stone patterns</i>	Linear	TD	Self-Play	MCTS
Scrabble <i>Maven</i>	Binary <i>Letters on rack</i>	Linear	MC	Self-Play	MC search
Limit Hold'em <i>SmooCT</i>	Binary <i>Card abstraction</i>	Linear	MCTS	Self-Play	-