Lecture 7: Policy Gradient

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Outline

Policy-Based Reinforcement Learning

- In the last lecture we approximated the value or action-value function using parameters θ,

$$V_\theta(s) \approx V^\pi(s)$$
$$Q_\theta(s,a) \approx Q^\pi(s,a)$$

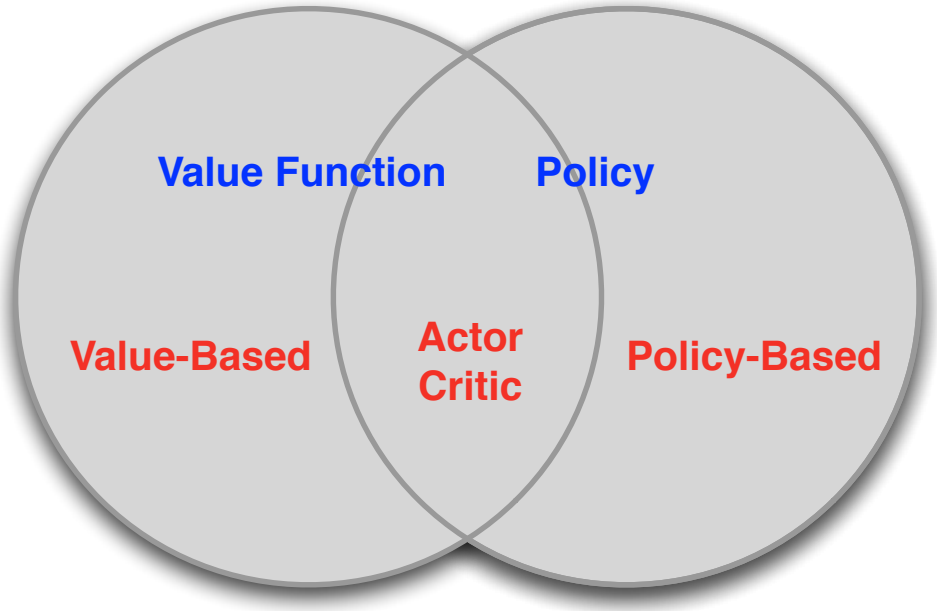
- A policy was generated directly from the value function
  - e.g. using ϵ-greedy
- In this lecture we will directly parametrise the policy

$$\pi_\theta(s,a) = \mathbb{P}[a \mid s, \theta]$$

- We will focus again on model-free reinforcement learning

Value-Based and Policy-Based RL

- Value Based
  - Learnt Value Function
  - Implicit policy (e.g. ϵ-greedy)
- Policy Based
  - No Value Function
  - Learnt Policy
- Actor-Critic
  - Learnt Value Function
  - Learnt Policy



maybe tricky to represent the value funct.

Advantages of Policy-Based RL

VB RL
+ oscillation

Advantages:

- Better convergence properties (at least to ↗ local max.)
- Effective in high-dimensional or continuous action spaces
- Can learn stochastic policies

Disadvantages:

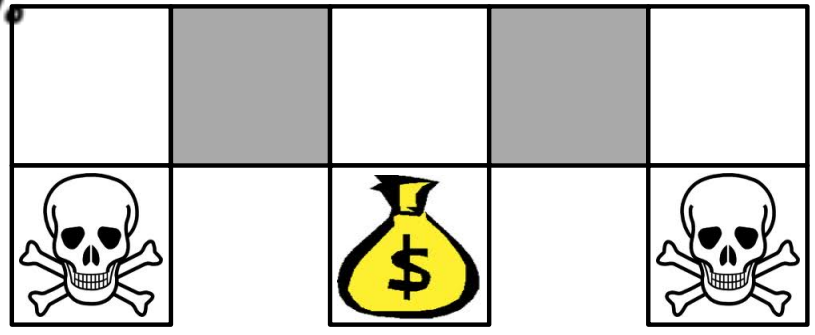
- Typically converge to a local (↗ naive PB RL) rather than global optimum
- Evaluating a policy is typically inefficient and high variance

Example: Rock-Paper-Scissors

- Two-player game of rock-paper-scissors
  - Scissors beats paper
  - Rock beats scissors
  - Paper beats rock
- Consider policies for *iterated* rock-paper-scissors
  - A deterministic policy is easily exploited
  - A uniform random policy is optimal (i.e. Nash equilibrium)

Example: Aliased Gridworld (1)

partially obt env



- The agent cannot differentiate the grey states
- Consider features of the following form (for all N, E, S, W)

$$\phi(s, a) = \mathbf{1}(\text{wall to N}, a = \text{move E})$$

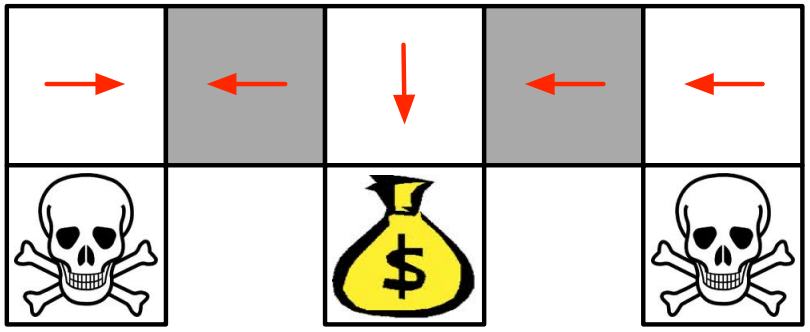
- Compare value-based RL, using an approximate value function

$$Q_\theta(s, a) = f(\phi(s, a), \theta)$$

- To policy-based RL, using a parametrised policy

$$\pi_\theta(s, a) = g(\phi(s, a), \theta)$$

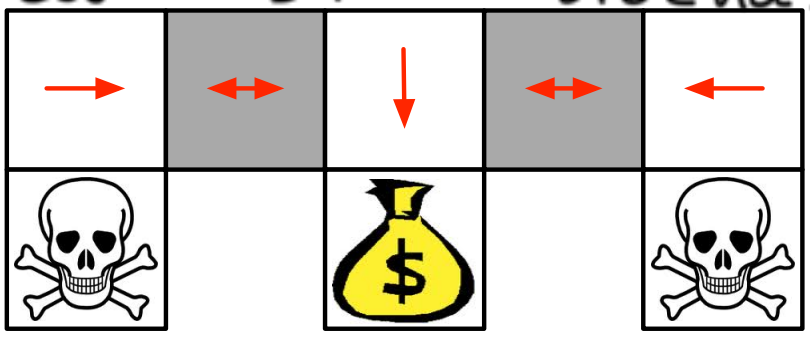
Example: Aliased Gridworld (2)



- Under aliasing, an optimal deterministic policy will either
  - move W in both grey states (shown by red arrows)
  - move E in both grey states
- Either way, it can get stuck and *never* reach the money
- Value-based RL learns a near-deterministic policy
  - e.g. greedy or ϵ-greedy
- So it will traverse the corridor for a long time

Example: Aliased Gridworld (3)

partially observed MDP → stochastic > determ..



- An optimal stochastic policy will randomly move E or W in grey states

$$\pi_\theta(\text{wall to N and S, move E}) = 0.5$$
$$\pi_\theta(\text{wall to N and S, move W}) = 0.5$$

- It will reach the goal state in a few steps with high probability
- Policy-based RL can learn the optimal stochastic policy

Policy Objective Functions

- Goal: given policy $\pi_\theta(s, a)$ with parameters θ, find best θ
- But how do we measure the quality of a policy π_θ?
- In episodic environments we can use the start value

$$J_1(\theta) = V^{\pi_\theta}(s_1) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}[v_1]$$

- In continuing environments we can use the average value

$$J_{avV}(\theta) = \sum_s d^{\pi_\theta}(s) V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$$

- Or the average reward per time-step

$$J_{avR}(\theta) = \sum_s d^{\pi_\theta}(s) \sum_a \pi_\theta(s, a) \mathcal{R}_s^a$$

- where $d^{\pi_\theta}(s)$ is stationary distribution of Markov chain for π_θ

to optimize this, the policy:
+ increase prob. for good state (high $v(s)$).
+ decrease prob. for bad state (low $v(s)$).

long-term visitation freq. of states.

s → over state space

prob. being in state s.

a → prob. of taking action a.

not change over time when we follow a fixed policy.

=) rescaling each other.

=) end up in the same optimal solution.

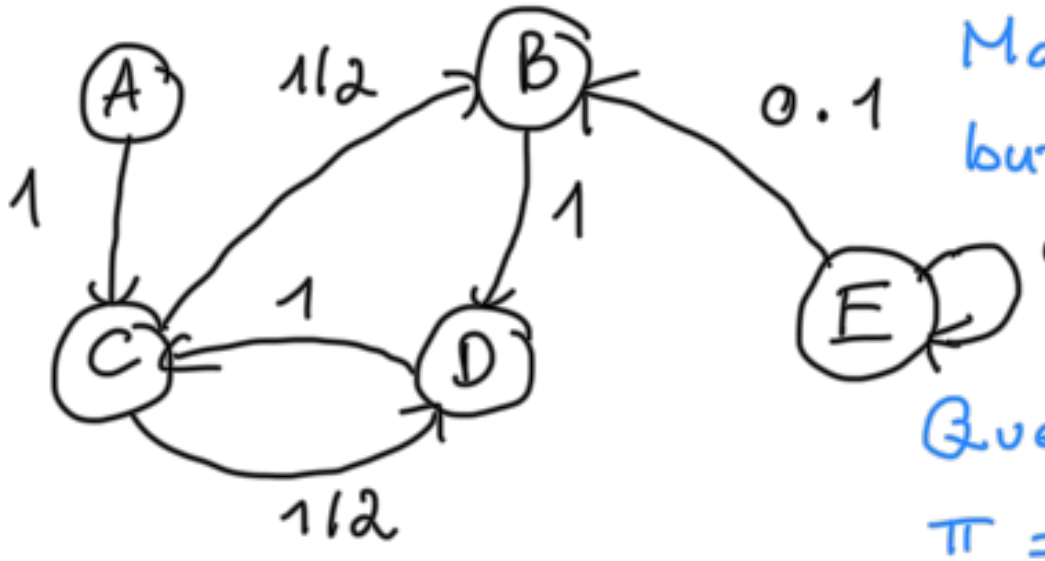
Measure quality of policy π?

to map an entire policy to an single scalar number that tells us how good that policy is.

Start value

+ Start in initial state s_1.
+ Run policy π_θ.
+ Compute expected total return.

Stationary Distribution of Markov Chain?



Transition matrix P

	A	B	C	D	E
A	0	0	1	0	0
B	0	0	0	1	0
C	0	1/2	0	1/2	0
D	0	0	1	0	0
E	0	.1	0	0	.9

Markov Chain as a distribution?

Question: is there a $\pi = [\pi_A \ \pi_B \ \pi_C \ \pi_D \ \pi_E]$? st. moving chain forward 1 step from π keeps probs at π?

$$P(X_{t+1} = S) = P(X_t = S)$$

$\pi_A = 0$ → 90% staying at E.

$\pi_E \frac{9}{10} = \pi_E \Rightarrow \pi_E = 0$

↳ prob. of E being in previous time step.

$$\pi_C \times \frac{1}{2} + \pi_E \times \frac{1}{10} = \pi_B \Rightarrow \pi_C = 2\pi_B$$

$$\pi_D \times 1 + \pi_A \times 1 = \pi_C \Rightarrow \pi_D = \pi_C$$

Require: $\sum \pi_i = 1 = 0 + \frac{1}{2}\pi_C + \pi_C + \pi_C + 0$

$\Rightarrow \pi_C = 0.4 \Rightarrow \pi_B = 0.2 \Rightarrow \pi_D = 0.4$

$\pi = [0 \quad 0.2 \quad 0.4 \quad 0.4 \quad 0]$ → remains unchanged.

OR solve: $\pi P = \pi$

If we start the Markov Chain dist. with π, it will stay the same at all time.

Average reward per time-step?

1 interaction with env.

" If agent follows this policy forever, how much reward per step does it get on average? "

Policy Optimisation

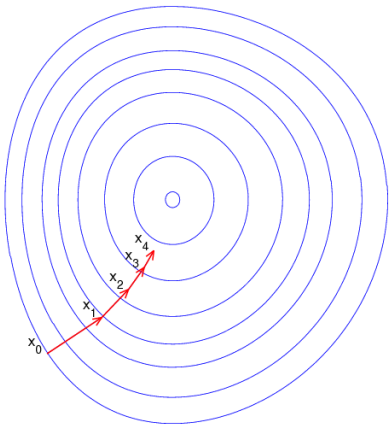
- Policy based reinforcement learning is an optimisation problem
- Find θ that maximises $J(\theta)$
- Some approaches do not use gradient → can't access to grad.
  - Hill climbing
  - Simplex / amoeba / Nelder Mead
  - Genetic algorithms
- Greater efficiency often possible using gradient → mostly considered.
  - Gradient descent
  - Conjugate gradient
  - Quasi-newton
- We focus on gradient descent, many extensions possible
- And on methods that exploit sequential structure

Policy Gradient

↳ gradient ascent.

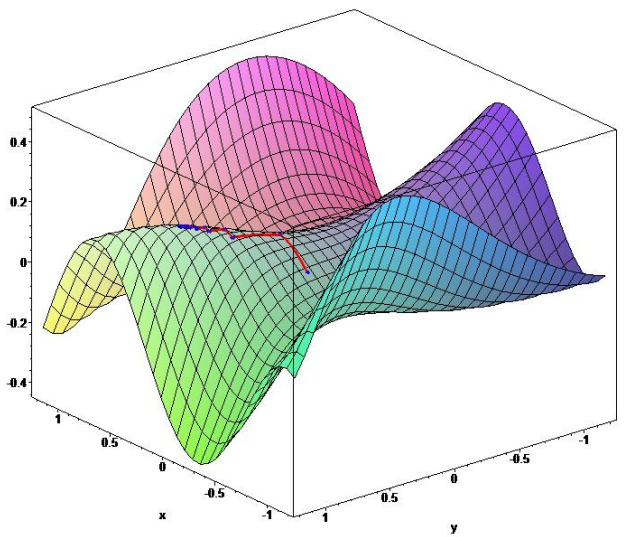
- Let $J(\theta)$ be any policy objective function
- Policy gradient algorithms search for a *local* maximum in $J(\theta)$ by ascending the gradient of the policy, w.r.t. parameters θ

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha \nabla_\theta J(\theta)$$



- Where $\nabla_\theta J(\theta)$ is the policy gradient

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \begin{pmatrix} \frac{\partial J(\theta)}{\partial \theta_1} \\ \vdots \\ \frac{\partial J(\theta)}{\partial \theta_n} \end{pmatrix}$$



- and α is a step-size parameter

Computing Gradients By Finite Differences

- To evaluate policy gradient of $\pi_\theta(s, a)$
- For each dimension $k \in [1, n]$
  - Estimate kth partial derivative of objective function w.r.t. θ
  - By perturbing θ by small amount ϵ in kth dimension

$$\frac{\partial J(\theta)}{\partial \theta_k} \approx \frac{J(\theta + \epsilon u_k) - J(\theta)}{\epsilon}$$

do seperately per dim.

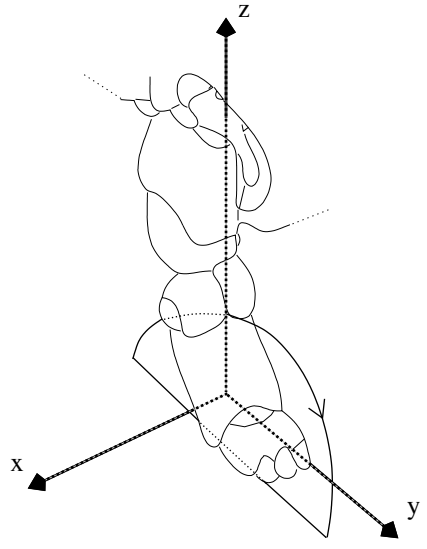
where u_k is unit vector with 1 in kth component, 0 elsewhere

- Uses n evaluations to compute policy gradient in n dimensions
- Simple, noisy, inefficient - but sometimes effective
- Works for arbitrary policies, even if policy is not differentiable

Big plus

Training AIBO to Walk by Finite Difference Policy Gradient

Robot soccer.



- Goal: learn a fast AIBO walk (useful for Robocup)
- AIBO walk policy is controlled by 12 numbers (elliptical loci)
- Adapt these parameters by finite difference policy gradient
- Evaluate performance of policy by field traversal time

AIBO Walk Policies

- Before training
- During training
- After training

higher dim for action
↳ finite diff is
collapsed.

Score Function

assumption.

- We now compute the policy gradient *analytically*
- Assume policy π_θ is differentiable whenever it is non-zero
- and we know the gradient $\nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s, a)$
- Likelihood ratios exploit the following identity

$$\begin{aligned}\nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s, a) &= \pi_\theta(s, a) \frac{\nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s, a)}{\pi_\theta(s, a)} \\ &= \pi_\theta(s, a) \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)\end{aligned}$$

- The score function is $\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)$

↳ guide to adjust policy in the direction to get more of sth.

Likelihood ratios

$$f'(\theta) = f'(\theta) \times \frac{f(\theta)}{f(\theta)}$$

and $$\frac{f'(\theta)}{f(\theta)} = \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \log f(\theta)$$

$$\Rightarrow f'(\theta) = f(\theta) \frac{\partial \log f(\theta)}{\partial \theta}$$

$$\Rightarrow \nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s,a) = \pi_\theta(s,a) \frac{\partial \log \pi_\theta(s,a)}{\partial \theta}$$

Why using log?

$\pi(a, s) = P[a \mid s, \theta]$ → more actions, smaller prob.

⇓

unstable.

⇓

well-behaved with log

$\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)$ = how much policy increases or decreases log-prob of action a when change θ.

Softmax Policy

smooth parameterized policy.

- We will use a softmax policy as a running example
- Weight actions using linear combination of features $\phi(s,a)^\top \theta$ ← feature
- Probability of action is proportional to exponentiated weight

linear softmax policy

$$\pi_\theta(s,a) \propto e^{\phi(s,a)^\top \theta}$$

↳ how much we desire to particular action.

- The score function is

$$\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) = \phi(s,a) - \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}[\phi(s,\cdot)]$$

↳ average features over all actions we've taken.

If a feature occurs more than usual & get good reward, then we adjust policy to do more on that things.

Gaussian Policy

- In continuous action spaces, a Gaussian policy is natural
- Mean is a linear combination of state features $\mu(s) = \phi(s)^\top \theta$
- Variance may be fixed σ^2, or can also parametrised
- Policy is Gaussian, $a \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu(s), \sigma^2)$ → most of the times we'll take the mean action.
- The score function is

$$\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) = \frac{(a - \mu(s))\phi(s)}{\sigma^2}$$

how much more than usual we take a particular action a.

mean action

feature.

scale factor (v)

action a.

Sometimes will take some deviation from the mean.

One-Step MDPs

- Consider a simple class of one-step MDPs
  - Starting in state $s \sim d(s)$
  - Terminating after one time-step with reward $r = \mathcal{R}_{s,a}$
- Use likelihood ratios to compute the policy gradient

$$
\begin{aligned}
J(\theta) &= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}[r] \\
&= \sum_{s \in \mathcal{S}} d(s) \sum_{a \in \mathcal{A}} \pi_\theta(s,a) \mathcal{R}_{s,a} \\
\nabla_\theta J(\theta) &= \sum_{s \in \mathcal{S}} d(s) \sum_{a \in \mathcal{A}} \pi_\theta(s,a) \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) \mathcal{R}_{s,a} \\
&= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) r]
\end{aligned}
$$

Policy Gradient Theorem

- The policy gradient theorem generalises the likelihood ratio approach to multi-step MDPs
- Replaces instantaneous reward r with long-term value $Q^{\pi}(s, a)$
- Policy gradient theorem applies to start state objective, average reward and average value objective

Theorem

For any differentiable policy $\pi_\theta(s, a)$,
for any of the policy objective functions $J = J_1, J_{avR}$, or $\frac{1}{1-\gamma} J_{avV}$,
the policy gradient is

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta} \left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a) \; Q^{\pi_\theta}(s, a) \right]$$

Monte-Carlo Policy Gradient (REINFORCE)

- Update parameters by stochastic gradient ascent
- Using policy gradient theorem
- Using return v_t as an unbiased sample of $Q^{\pi_\theta}(s_t, a_t)$

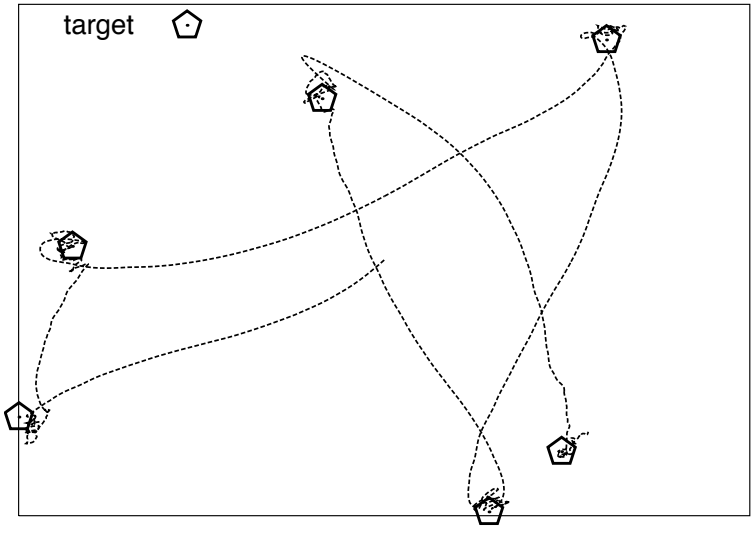
$$\Delta\theta_t = \alpha \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s_t, a_t) v_t$$

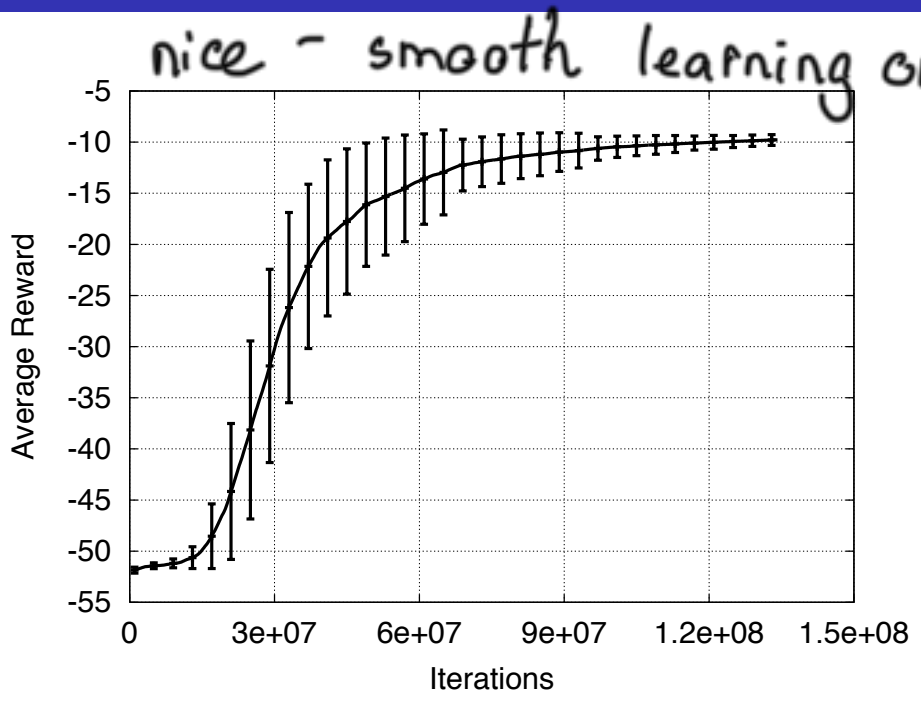
function REINFORCE
  Initialise θ arbitrarily
  for each episode $\{s_1, a_1, r_2, ..., s_{T-1}, a_{T-1}, r_T\} \sim \pi_\theta$ **do**
    for $t = 1$ to $T - 1$ **do**
      $\theta \leftarrow \theta + \alpha \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s_t, a_t) v_t$
    end for
  end for
  return θ
end function

generate reward

cumulative reward

Puck World Example





- Continuous actions exert small force on puck
- Puck is rewarded for getting close to target
- Target location is reset every 30 seconds
- Policy is trained using variant of Monte-Carlo policy gradient

Reducing Variance Using a Critic

- Monte-Carlo policy gradient still has high variance
- We use a critic to estimate the action-value function,

$$Q_w(s, a) \approx Q^{\pi_\theta}(s, a)$$

- Actor-critic algorithms maintain *two* sets of parameters
  - Critic: Updates action-value function parameters w
  - Actor: Updates policy parameters θ, in direction suggested by critic
- Actor-critic algorithms follow an *approximate* policy gradient

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) \approx \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)\ Q_w(s, a)\right]$$
$$\Delta\theta = \alpha \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)\ Q_w(s, a)$$

Estimating the Action-Value Function

- The critic is solving a familiar problem: policy evaluation
- How good is policy π_θ for current parameters θ?
- This problem was explored in previous two lectures, e.g.
  - Monte-Carlo policy evaluation
  - Temporal-Difference learning
  - TD(λ)

→ get estimate of action-state value function used to improve policy (actor).

- Could also use e.g. least-squares policy evaluation

Action-Value Actor-Critic

- Simple actor-critic algorithm based on action-value critic
- Using linear value fn approx. $Q_w(s,a) = \phi(s,a)^\top w$

  Critic Updates w by linear TD(0)

  Actor Updates θ by policy gradient

v for critic

v for actor

function QAC

Initialise s, θ

Sample $a \sim \pi_\theta$

for each step **do**

Sample reward $r = \mathcal{R}_s^a$; sample transition $s' \sim \mathcal{P}_{s,\cdot}^a$

Sample action $a' \sim \pi_\theta(s', a')$

$\delta = r + \gamma Q_w(s', a') - Q_w(s, a)$ → TD error ← use

$\theta = \theta + \alpha \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a) Q_w(s, a)$ → update critic

$w \leftarrow w + \beta \delta \phi(s, a)$ → update critic

$a \leftarrow a', s \leftarrow s'$

end for

end function

no greedy only picking action determined by Q.

Learn directly how to pick action.

Parameterize the policy.

Bias in Actor-Critic Algorithms

Bias = systematic error in an estimator.

Variance = how much estimator fluctuates due to randomness.

- Approximating the policy gradient introduces bias
- A biased policy gradient may not find the right solution
  - e.g. if $Q_w(s, a)$ uses aliased features, can we solve gridworld example?
- Luckily, if we choose value function approximation carefully
- Then we can avoid introducing any bias
- i.e. We can still follow the *exact* policy gradient

In actor-critic, the critic estimates $Q^{\pi}(s,a)$ and the actor update policy based on $Q(s,a)$.

But if the critic is incorrect, the actor is biased.

$\Rightarrow$ The theorem tells us how to design the critic so that the policy gradient remains exact, even with approximation func.

Compatible Function Approximation

Theorem (Compatible Function Approximation Theorem)

If the following two conditions are satisfied:

1. *Value function approximator is compatible to the policy*

$$\nabla_w Q_w(s,a) = \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) \quad (1)$$

2. *Value function parameters w minimise the mean-squared error*

only Q^{π_θ} must be estimated. ← the actual action-value func of policy π_θ.

$$\varepsilon = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[(Q^{\pi_\theta}(s,a) - Q_w(s,a))^2\right] \quad (2)$$

↳ approx. func learn to approx. Q^{π_θ}

Then the policy gradient is exact,

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ Q_w(s,a)\right] \quad (3)$$

Proof of Compatible Function Approximation Theorem

If w is chosen to minimise mean-squared error, gradient of ε w.r.t. w must be zero,

$$\nabla_w \varepsilon = 0$$
$$\mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[(Q^\theta(s,a) - Q_w(s,a))\nabla_w Q_w(s,a)\right] = 0$$
$$\mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[(Q^\theta(s,a) - Q_w(s,a))\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\right] = 0 \quad \rightarrow \text{use (1)}$$
$$\mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[Q^\theta(s,a)\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\right] = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[Q_w(s,a)\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\right]$$

$\rightarrow J(\theta)$

So $Q_w(s,a)$ can be substituted directly into the policy gradient,

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) Q_w(s,a)\right]$$

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) Q_w(s,a)]$$

could have high variance?

+ Return from different eps or states can be very different.

+ $Q(s,a)$ could be large even when action is not good.

+ $Q(s,a)$ and $Q(s,a')$ are close, the update should be small.

=> causes policy update jumps around.

Reducing Variance Using a Baseline

- We subtract a baseline function $B(s)$ from the policy gradient
- This can reduce variance, without changing expectation

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) B(s)\right] &= \sum_{s\in\mathcal{S}} d^{\pi_\theta}(s) \sum_a \nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s,a) B(s) \\ &= \sum_{s\in\mathcal{S}} d^{\pi_\theta} B(s) \nabla_\theta \left(\sum_{a\in\mathcal{A}} \pi_\theta(s,a)\right) = 0 \\ &= 0\end{aligned}$$

- A good baseline is the state value function $B(s) = V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$
- So we can rewrite the policy gradient using the advantage function $A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a)$

how much better action a is than the average action in s.

$$A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a) = Q^{\pi_\theta}(s,a) - V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$$

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a)\right]$$

Estimating the Advantage Function (1)

- The advantage function can significantly reduce variance of policy gradient
- So the critic should really estimate the advantage function
- For example, by estimating *both* $V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$ *and* $Q^{\pi_\theta}(s, a)$
- Using two function approximators and two parameter vectors,

$$V_v(s) \approx V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$$
$$Q_w(s, a) \approx Q^{\pi_\theta}(s, a)$$
$$A(s, a) = Q_w(s, a) - V_v(s)$$

- And updating *both* value functions by e.g. TD learning

Estimating the Advantage Function (2)

- For the true value function $V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$, the TD error δ^{π_θ}

$$\delta^{\pi_\theta} = r + \gamma V^{\pi_\theta}(s') - V^{\pi_\theta}(s)$$

- is an unbiased estimate of the advantage function

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\delta^{\pi_\theta}|s,a\right] &= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[r + \gamma V^{\pi_\theta}(s')|s,a\right] - V^{\pi_\theta}(s) \\ &= Q^{\pi_\theta}(s,a) - V^{\pi_\theta}(s) \\ &= A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a)\end{aligned}$$

iterate through set of next s'

- So we can use the TD error to compute the policy gradient

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ \delta^{\pi_\theta}\right]$$

- In practice we can use an approximate TD error

$$\delta_v = r + \gamma V_v(s') - V_v(s)$$

- This approach only requires one set of critic parameters v

Critics at Different Time-Scales

- Critic can estimate value function $V_\theta(s)$ from many targets at different time-scales From last lecture...
  - For MC, the target is the return v_t

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(v_t - V_\theta(s))\phi(s)$$

  - For TD(0), the target is the TD target $r + \gamma V(s')$

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(r + \gamma V(s') - V_\theta(s))\phi(s)$$

  - For forward-view TD(λ), the target is the λ-return v_t^λ

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(v_t^\lambda - V_\theta(s))\phi(s)$$

  - For backward-view TD(λ), we use eligibility traces

$$\begin{aligned}\delta_t &= r_{t+1} + \gamma V(s_{t+1}) - V(s_t)\\ e_t &= \gamma\lambda e_{t-1} + \phi(s_t)\\ \Delta\theta &= \alpha\delta_t e_t\end{aligned}$$

Actors at Different Time-Scales

- The policy gradient can also be estimated at many time-scales

$$\nabla_\theta J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a)\right]$$

- Monte-Carlo policy gradient uses error from complete return

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(v_t - V_v(s_t))\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s_t,a_t)$$

- Actor-critic policy gradient uses the one-step TD error

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(r + \gamma V_v(s_{t+1}) - V_v(s_t))\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s_t,a_t)$$

Policy Gradient with Eligibility Traces

- Just like forward-view TD(λ), we can mix over time-scales

$$\Delta\theta = \alpha(v_t^\lambda - V_v(s_t))\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s_t, a_t)$$

- where $v_t^\lambda - V_v(s_t)$ is a biased estimate of advantage fn
- Like backward-view TD(λ), we can also use eligibility traces
  - By equivalence with TD(λ), substituting $\phi(s) = \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a)$

$$\begin{aligned}
\delta &= r_{t+1} + \gamma V_v(s_{t+1}) - V_v(s_t) \\
e_{t+1} &= \lambda e_t + \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s, a) \\
\Delta\theta &= \alpha\delta e_t
\end{aligned}$$

- This update can be applied online, to incomplete sequences

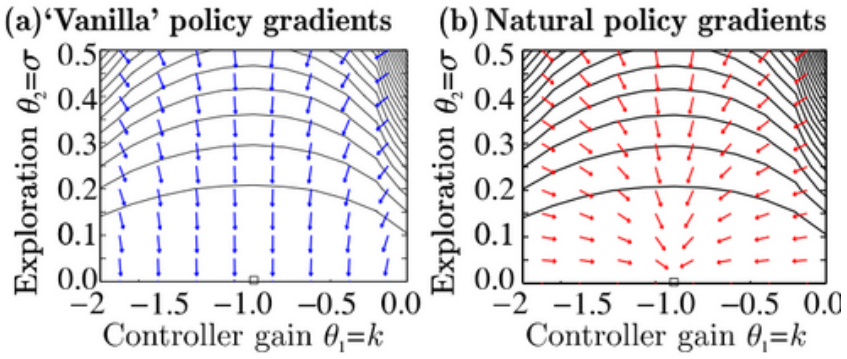
Alternative Policy Gradient Directions

compatible func approx.

- Gradient ascent algorithms can follow *any* ascent direction
- A good ascent direction can significantly speed convergence
- Also, a policy can often be reparametrised without changing action probabilities
- For example, increasing score of all actions in a softmax policy
- The vanilla gradient is sensitive to these reparametrisations

follow the right direction if use compat-ible feature.

Natural Policy Gradient



- The natural policy gradient is parametrisation independent
- It finds ascent direction that is closest to vanilla gradient, when changing policy by a small, fixed amount

$$\nabla_\theta^{nat} \pi_\theta(s,a) = G_\theta^{-1} \nabla_\theta \pi_\theta(s,a)$$

- where G_θ is the Fisher information matrix

$$G_\theta = \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)^T\right]$$

Natural Actor-Critic

- Using compatible function approximation,

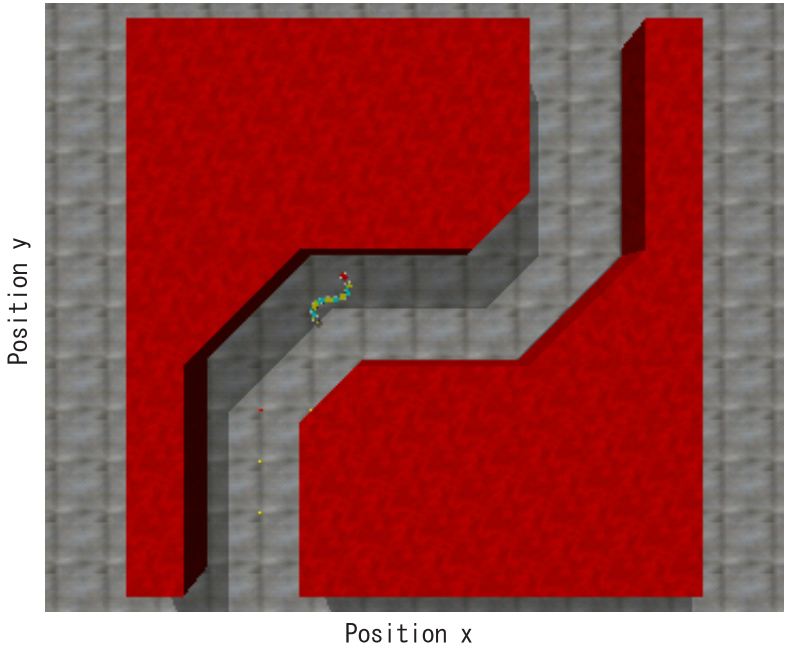
$$\nabla_w A_w(s,a) = \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)$$

- So the natural policy gradient simplifies,

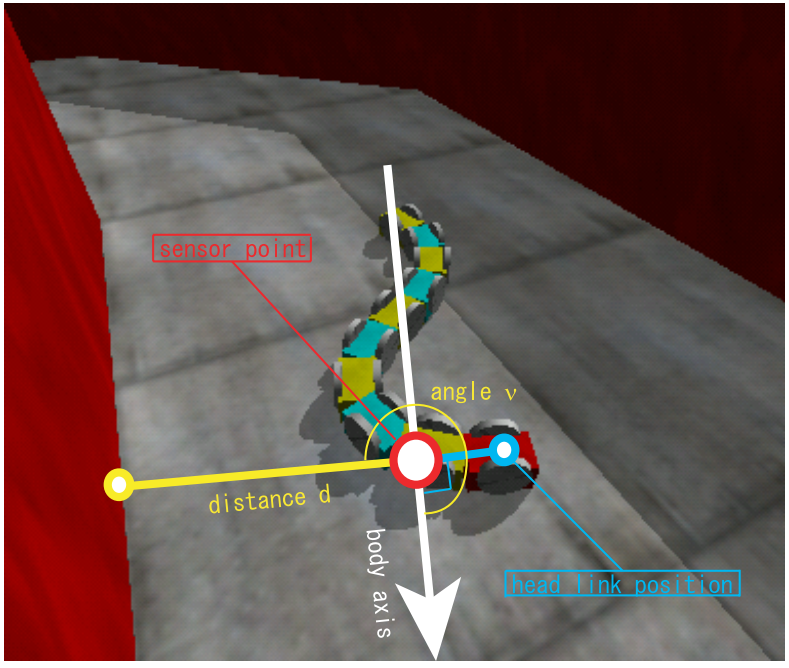
$$\begin{aligned}\nabla_\theta J(\theta) &= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) A^{\pi_\theta}(s,a)\right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a) \nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)^T w\right] \\ &= G_\theta w \\ \nabla_\theta^{nat} J(\theta) &= w\end{aligned}$$

- i.e. update actor parameters in direction of critic parameters

Natural Actor Critic in Snake Domain

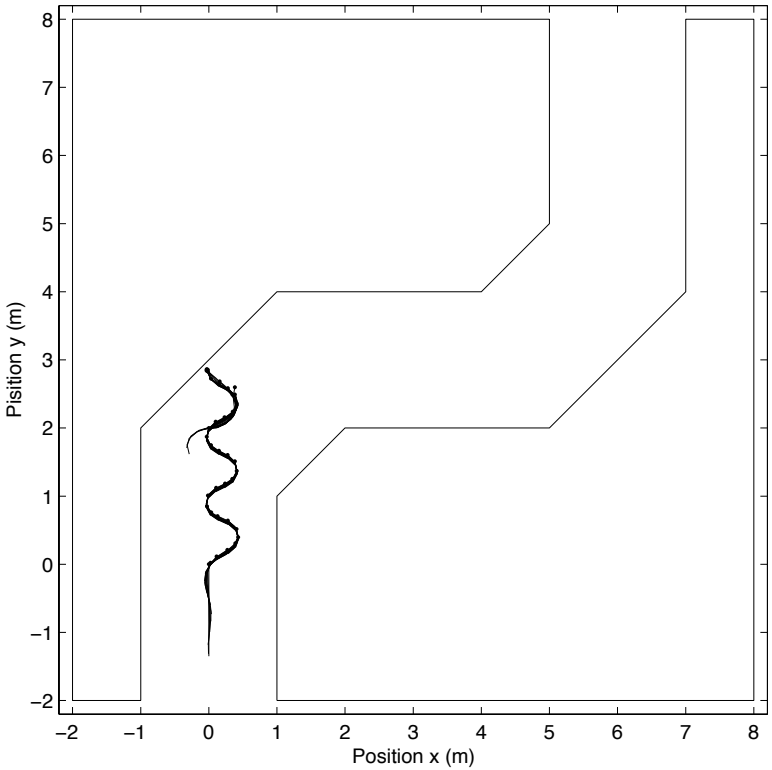


(a) Crank course

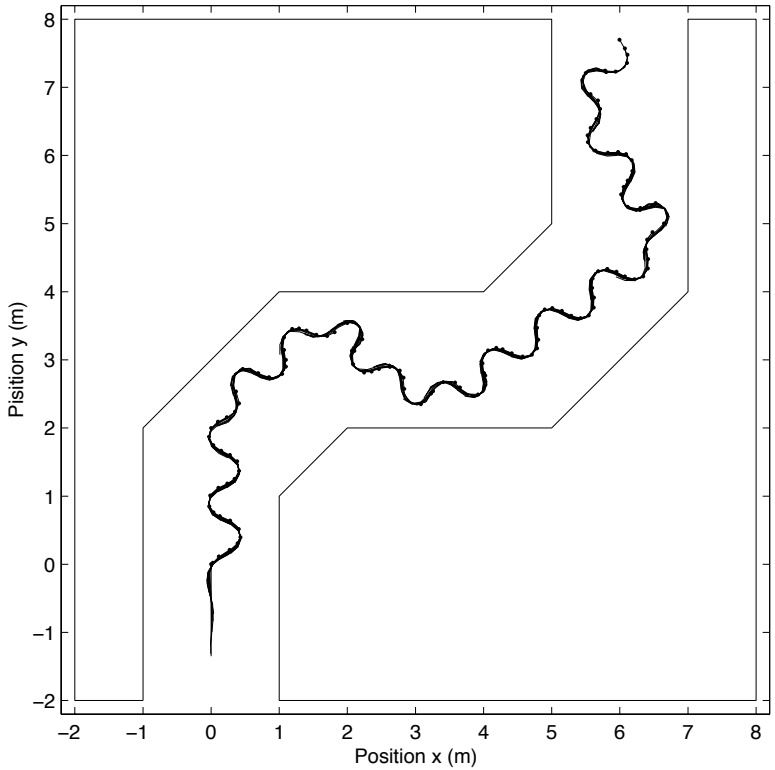


(b) Sensor setting

Natural Actor Critic in Snake Domain (2)

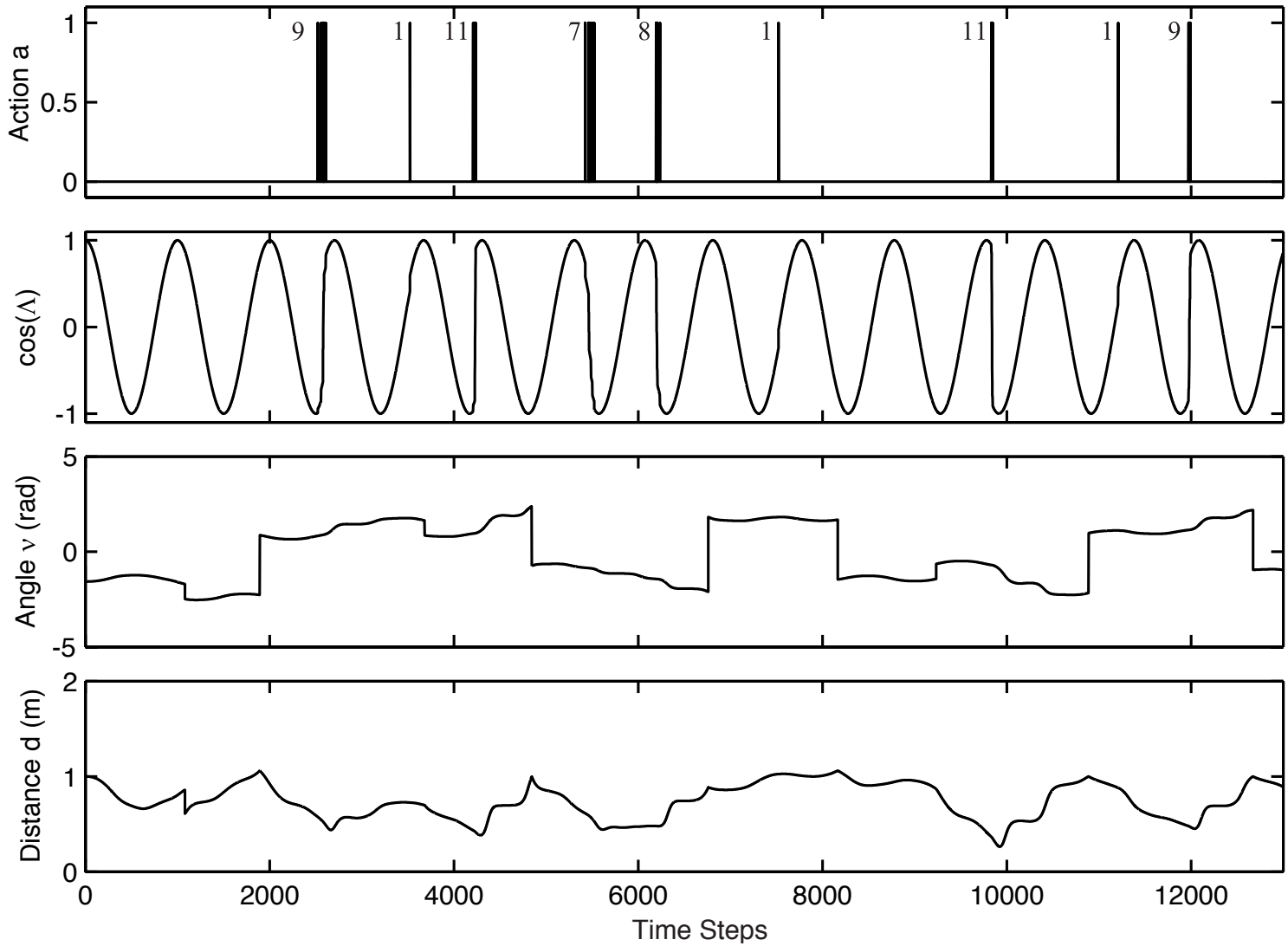


(a) Before learning



(b) After learning

Natural Actor Critic in Snake Domain (3)



Summary of Policy Gradient Algorithms

- The policy gradient has many equivalent forms

$$
\begin{aligned}
\nabla_\theta J(\theta) &= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ v_t\right] && \text{REINFORCE} \\
&= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ Q^w(s,a)\right] && \text{Q Actor-Critic} \\
&= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ A^w(s,a)\right] && \text{Advantage Actor-Critic} \\
&= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ \delta\right] && \text{TD Actor-Critic} \\
&= \mathbb{E}_{\pi_\theta}\left[\nabla_\theta \log \pi_\theta(s,a)\ \delta e\right] && \text{TD}(\lambda)\text{ Actor-Critic} \\
G_\theta^{-1}\nabla_\theta J(\theta) &= w && \text{Natural Actor-Critic}
\end{aligned}
$$

- Each leads a stochastic gradient ascent algorithm
- Critic uses policy evaluation (e.g. MC or TD learning) to estimate $Q^\pi(s,a)$, $A^\pi(s,a)$ or $V^\pi(s)$