Unit V

Backtracking Problems

Tackling Difficult Combinatorial Problems

- *exhaustive search* (brute force)
  - useful only for small instances
- *dynamic programming*
  - applicable to some problems (e.g., the knapsack problem)
- *backtracking*
  - eliminates some unnecessary cases from consideration
  - yields solutions in reasonable time for many instances but worst case is still exponential
- *branch-and-bound*
  - further refines the backtracking idea for optimization problems

Backtracking

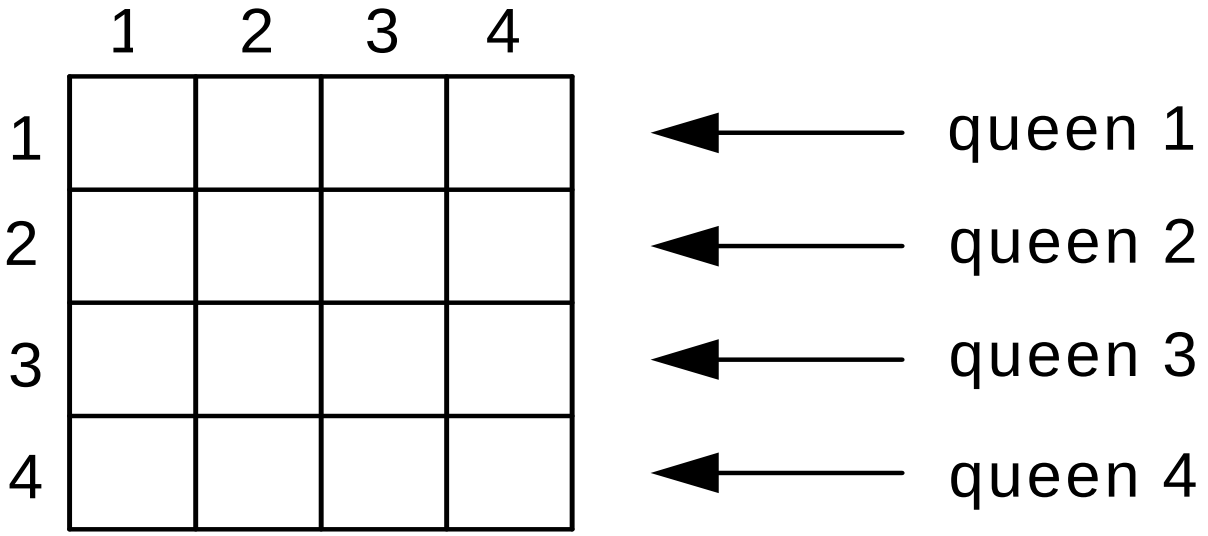
- Construct the *state-space tree*
  - nodes: partial solutions
  - edges: choices in extending partial solutions

- Explore the state space tree using depth-first search

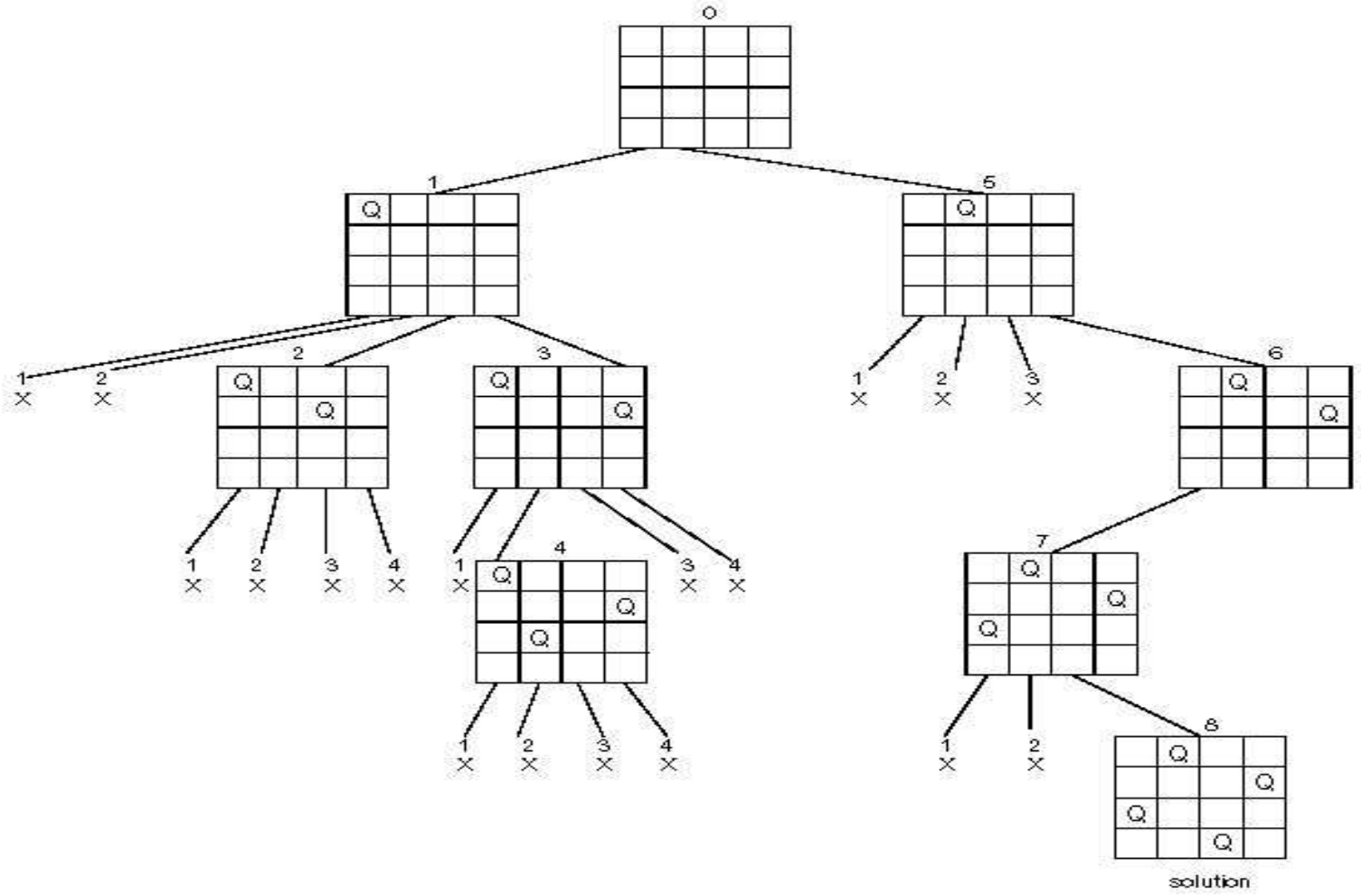
- "Prune" *nonpromising nodes*
  - dfs stops exploring subtrees rooted at nodes that cannot lead to a solution and backtracks to such a node's parent to continue the search

Example: *n*-Queens Problem

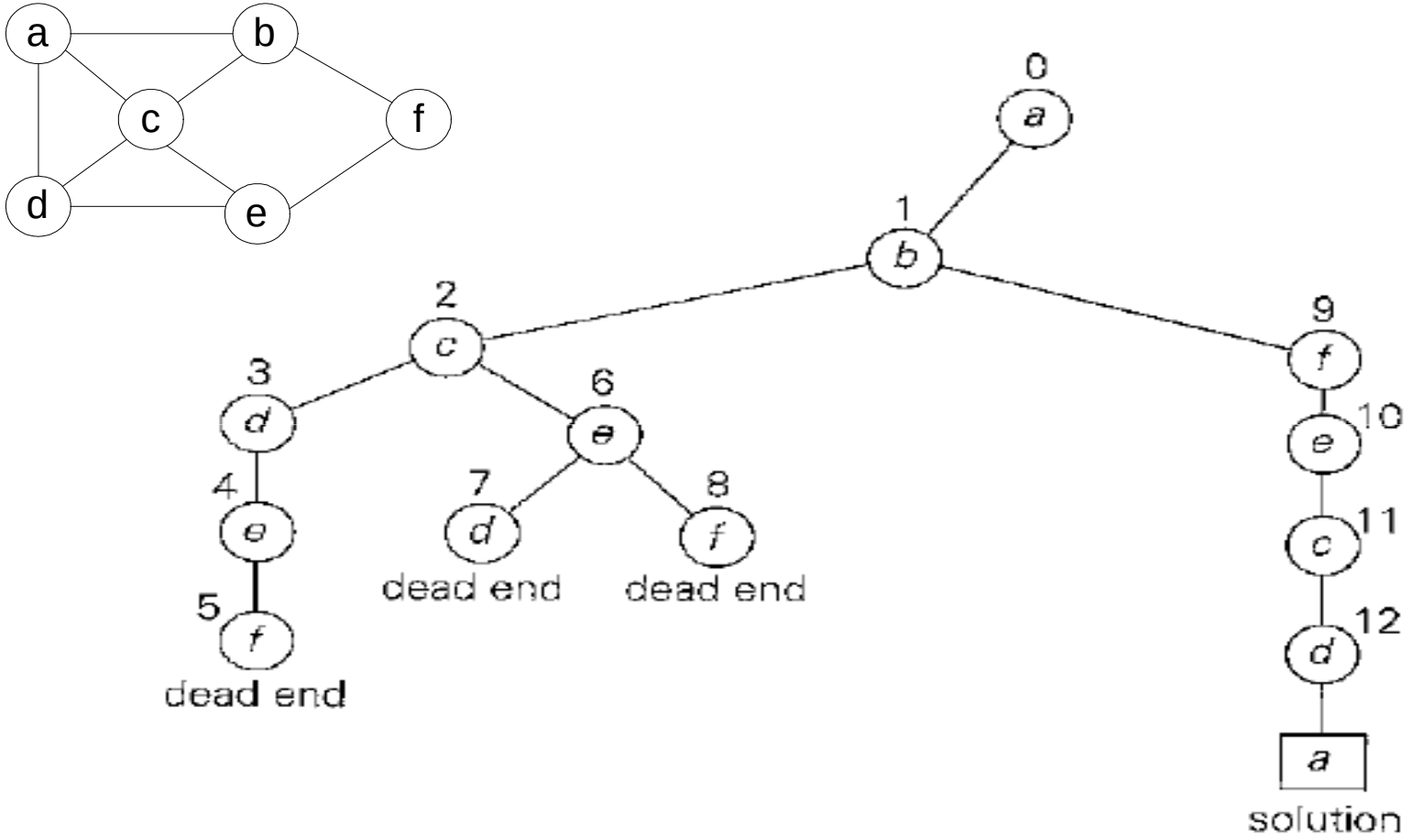
Place *n* queens on an *n*-by-*n* chess board so that no two of them are in the same row, column, or diagonal



State-Space Tree of the 4-Queens Problem

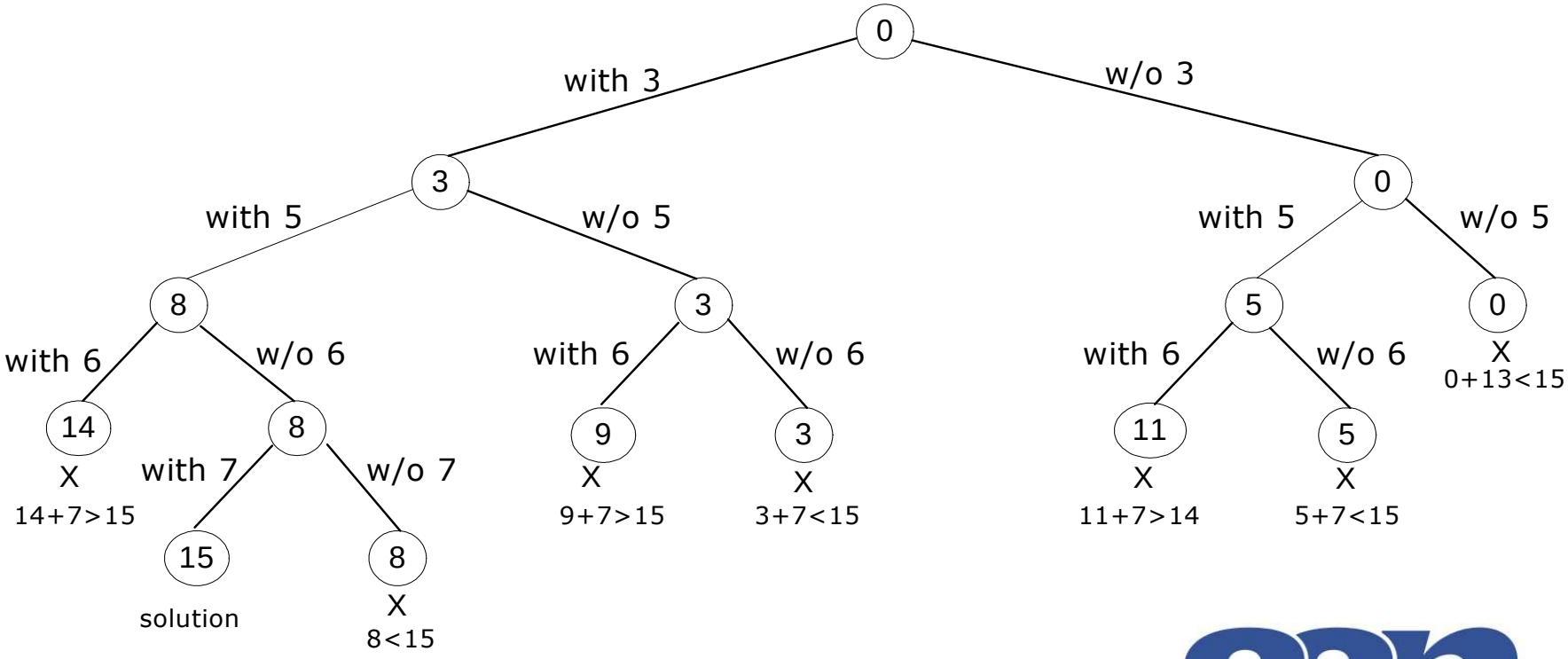


Example: Hamiltonian Circuit Problem



Example: Subset Sum Problem

$A = \{3, 5, 6, 7\}$ and $d = 15$



Backtracking – Generic Algorithm

ALGORITHM *Backtrack*$(X[1..i])$

//Gives a template of a generic backtracking algorithm
//Input: $X[1..i]$ specifies first i promising components of a solution
//Output: All the tuples representing the problem's solutions
if $X[1..i]$ is a solution **write** $X[1..i]$
else //see Problem 9 in this section's exercises
  for each element $x \in S_{i+1}$ consistent with $X[1..i]$ and the constraints **do**
    $X[i+1] \leftarrow x$
    Backtrack$(X[1..i+1])$