



UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
IN THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE
CHEMNITZ

Deep Reinforcement Learning

Introduction

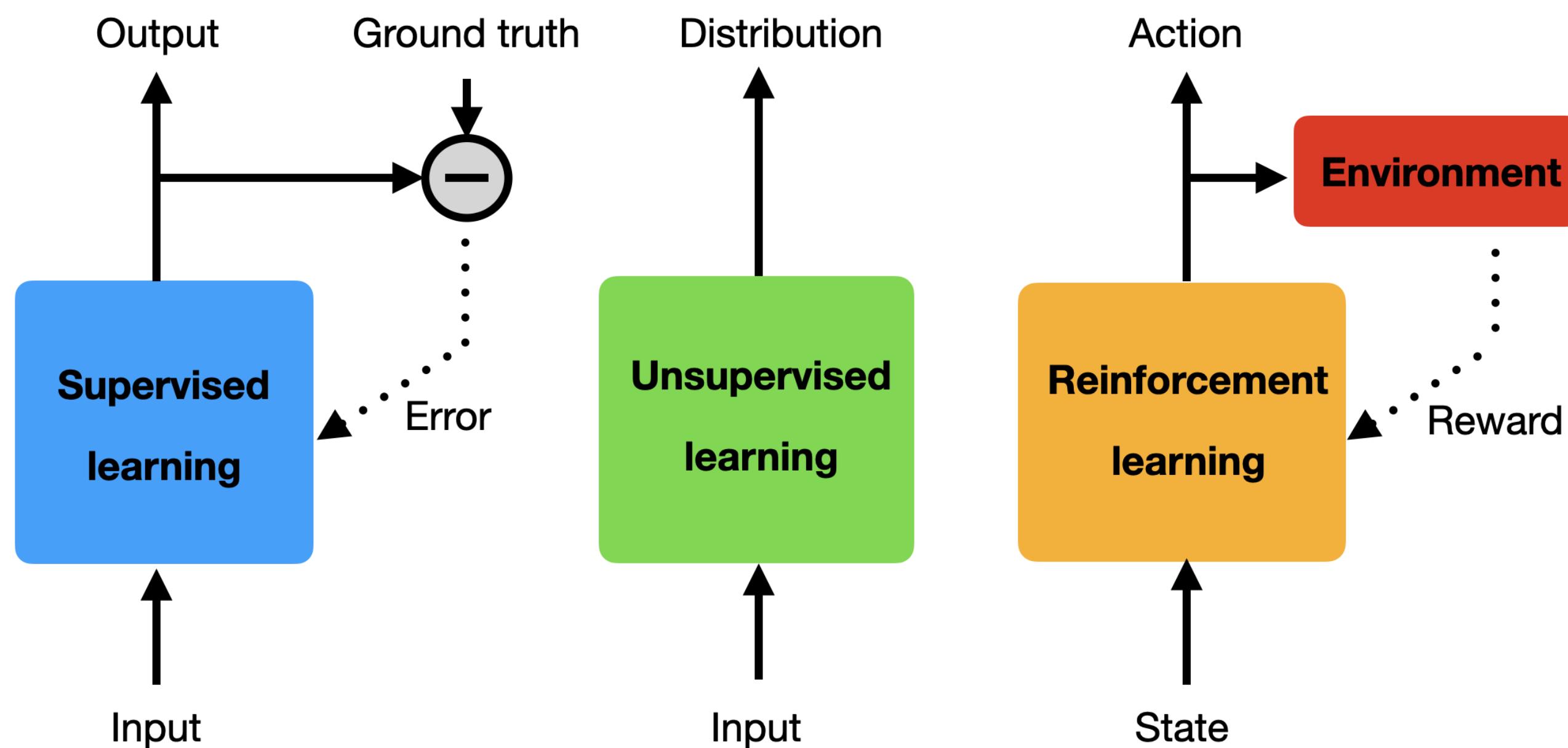
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1 - What is reinforcement learning?

Different types of machine learning depending on the feedback

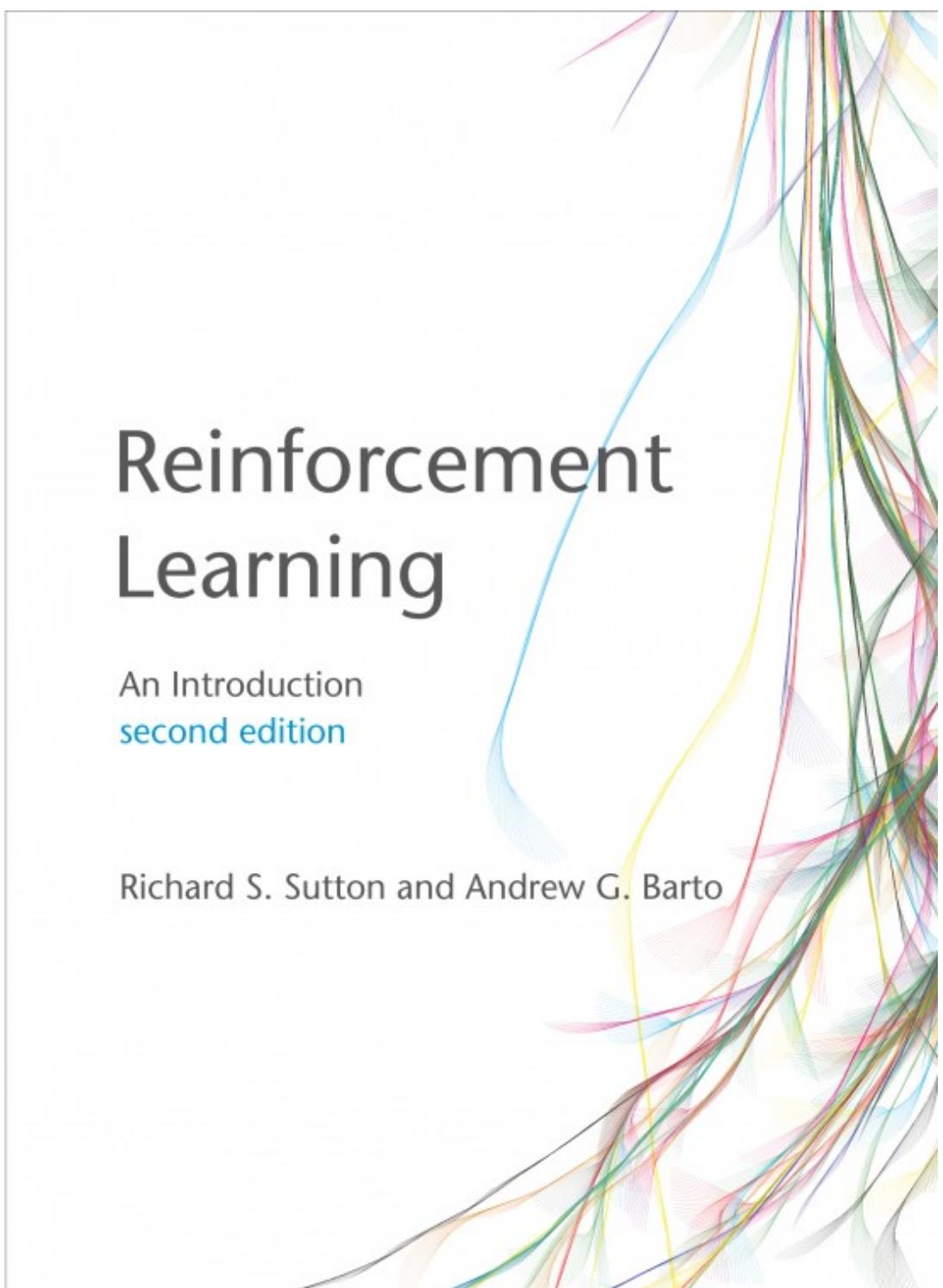
- **Supervised learning:** the correct answer (ground truth) is provided to the algorithm, the prediction error drives learning directly.
- **Unsupervised learning:** no answer is given to the system, the learning algorithm extracts a statistical model from raw inputs.
- **Reinforcement learning:** an estimation of the correctness of the answer is provided by the environment through the reward function.



A brief history of reinforcement learning

- **Early 20th century:** Animal behavior, psychology, operant conditioning
 - Ivan Pavlov, Edward Thorndike, B.F. Skinner
- **1950s:** Optimal control, Markov Decision Process, dynamic programming
 - Richard Bellman, Ronald Howard
- **1970s:** Trial-and-error learning
 - Marvin Minsky, Harry Klopf, Robert Rescorla, Allan Wagner
- **1980s:** Temporal difference learning, Q-learning
 - Richard Sutton, Andrew Barto, Christopher Watkins, Peter Dayan
- **2013-now:** Deep reinforcement learning
 - Deepmind (Mnih, Silver, Graves, Hassabis...)
 - OpenAI (Sutskever, Schulman...)
 - Berkeley (Sergey Levine)

The RL bible



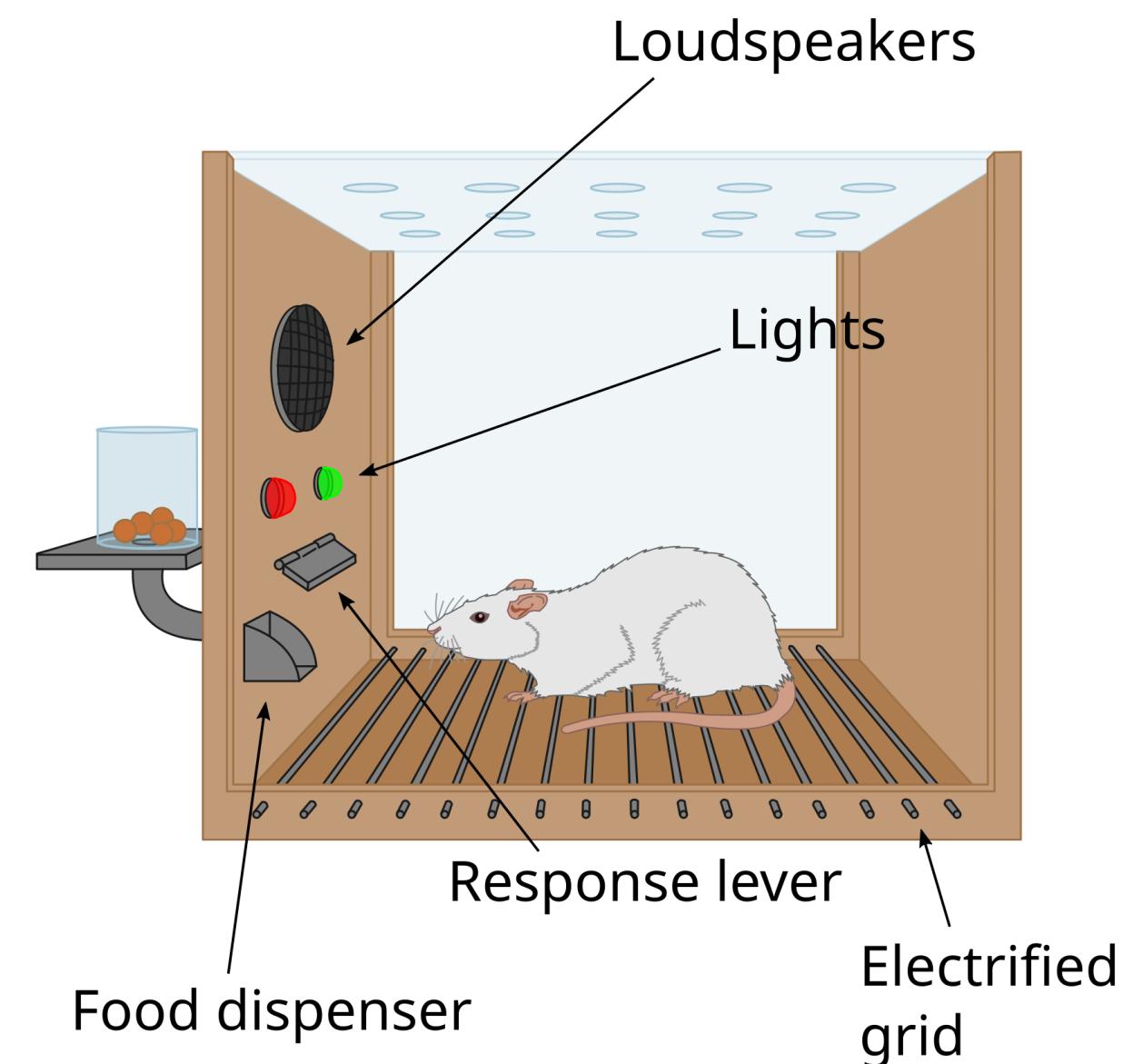
Sutton and Barto (1998) . Reinforcement Learning: An Introduction. MIT Press.

Sutton and Barto (2017) . Reinforcement Learning: An Introduction. MIT Press. 2nd edition.

<http://incompleteideas.net/sutton/book/the-book.html>

Operant conditioning

- Reinforcement learning comes from animal behavior studies, especially **operant conditioning / instrumental learning**.
- **Thorndike's Law of Effect** (1874–1949) suggested that behaviors followed by satisfying consequences tend to be repeated and those that produce unpleasant consequences are less likely to be repeated.
- Positive reinforcements (**rewards**) or negative reinforcements (**punishments**) can be used to modify behavior (**Skinner's box, 1936**).
- This form of learning applies to all animals, including humans:
 - Training (animals, children...)
 - Addiction, economics, gambling, psychological manipulation...
- **Behaviorism:** only behavior matters, not mental states.



Source: AndreasJS, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=99322433>

Operant conditioning

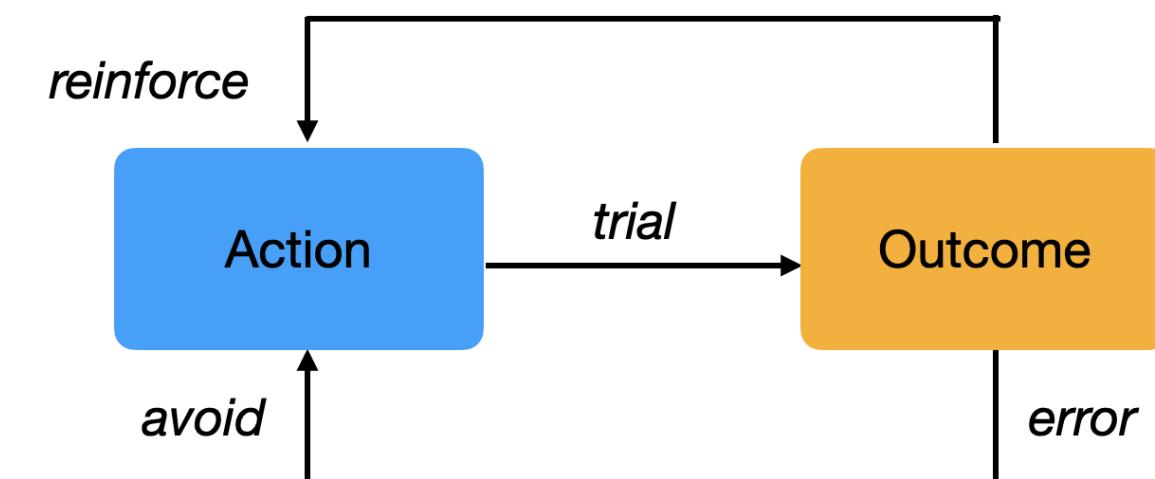
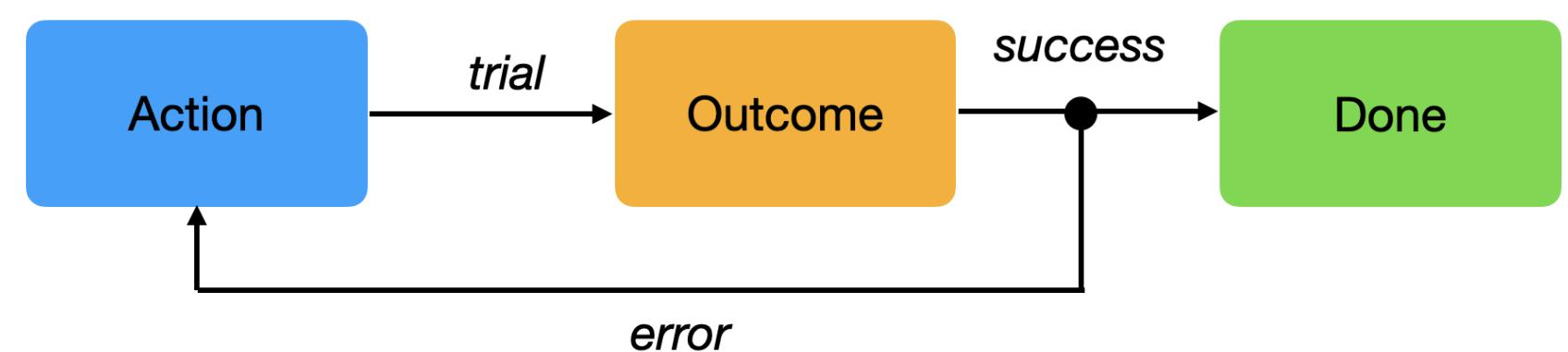


Video unavailable
[Watch on YouTube](#)



Trial and error learning

- The key concept of RL is **trial and error** learning: trying actions until the outcome is good.
- The agent (rat, robot, algorithm) tries out an **action** and observes the **outcome**.
 - If the outcome is positive (reward), the action is reinforced (more likely to occur again).
 - If the outcome is negative (punishment), the action will be avoided.
- After enough interactions, the agent has **learned** which action to perform in a given situation.



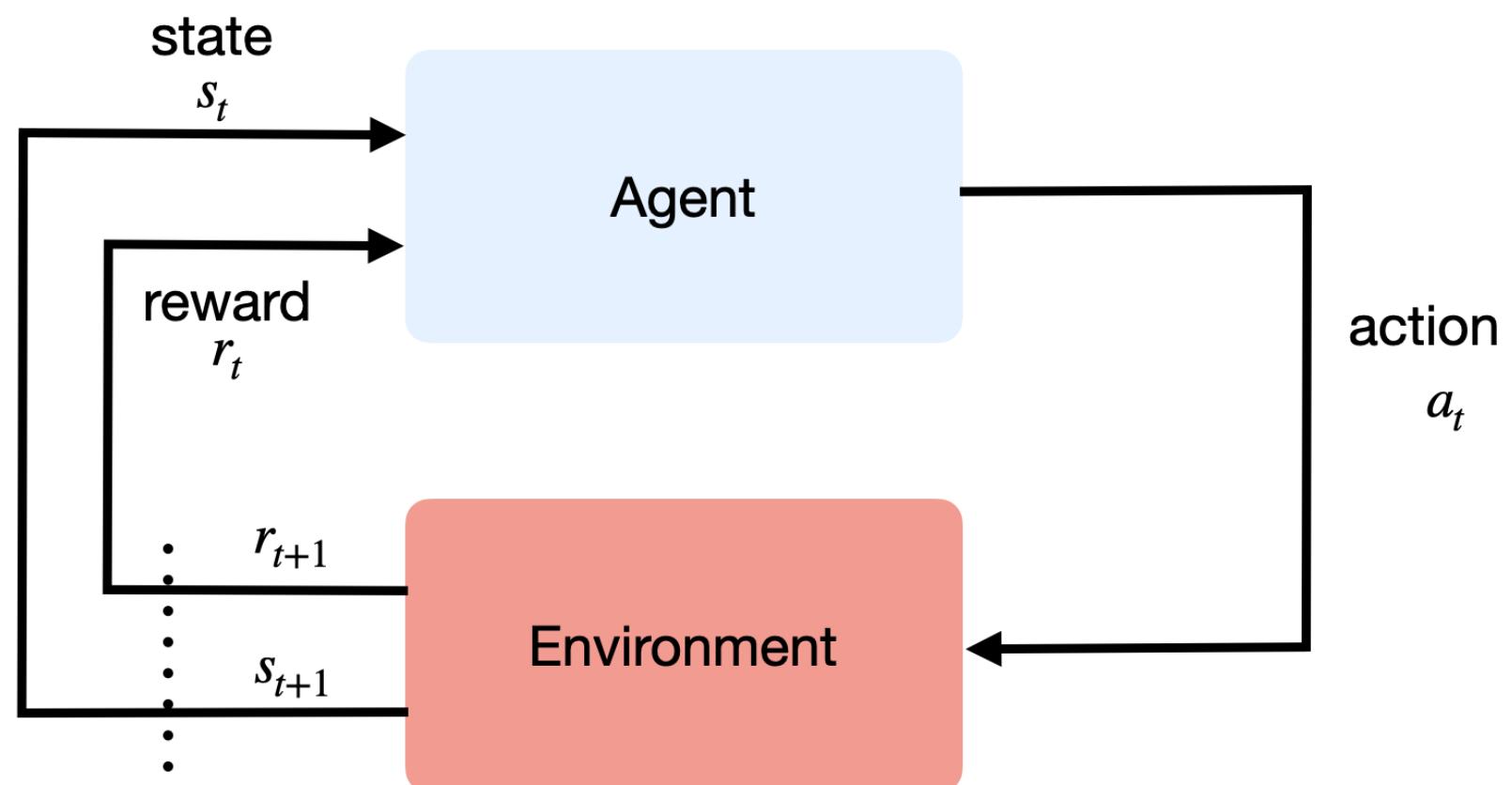
Trial and error learning

- The agent has to **explore** its environment via trial-and-error in order to gain knowledge.
- The agent's behavior is roughly divided into two phases:
 - The **exploration** phase, where it gathers knowledge about its environment.
 - The **exploitation** phase, where this knowledge is used to collect as many rewards as possible.
- The biggest issue with this approach is that exploring large action spaces might necessitate a **lot of trials (sample complexity)**.
- The modern techniques we will see in this course try to reduce the sample complexity.



Generated by ChatGPT.

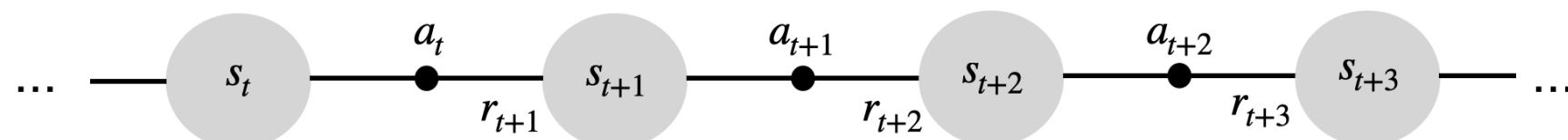
The agent-environment interface



- The agent and the environment interact at discrete time steps: $t=0, 1, \dots$
- The agent observes its state at time t : $s_t \in \mathcal{S}$
- It produces an action at time t , depending on the available actions in the current state: $a_t \in \mathcal{A}(s_t)$
- It receives a reward according to this action at time $t+1$: $r_{t+1} \in \mathcal{R}$
- It updates its state: $s_{t+1} \in \mathcal{S}$

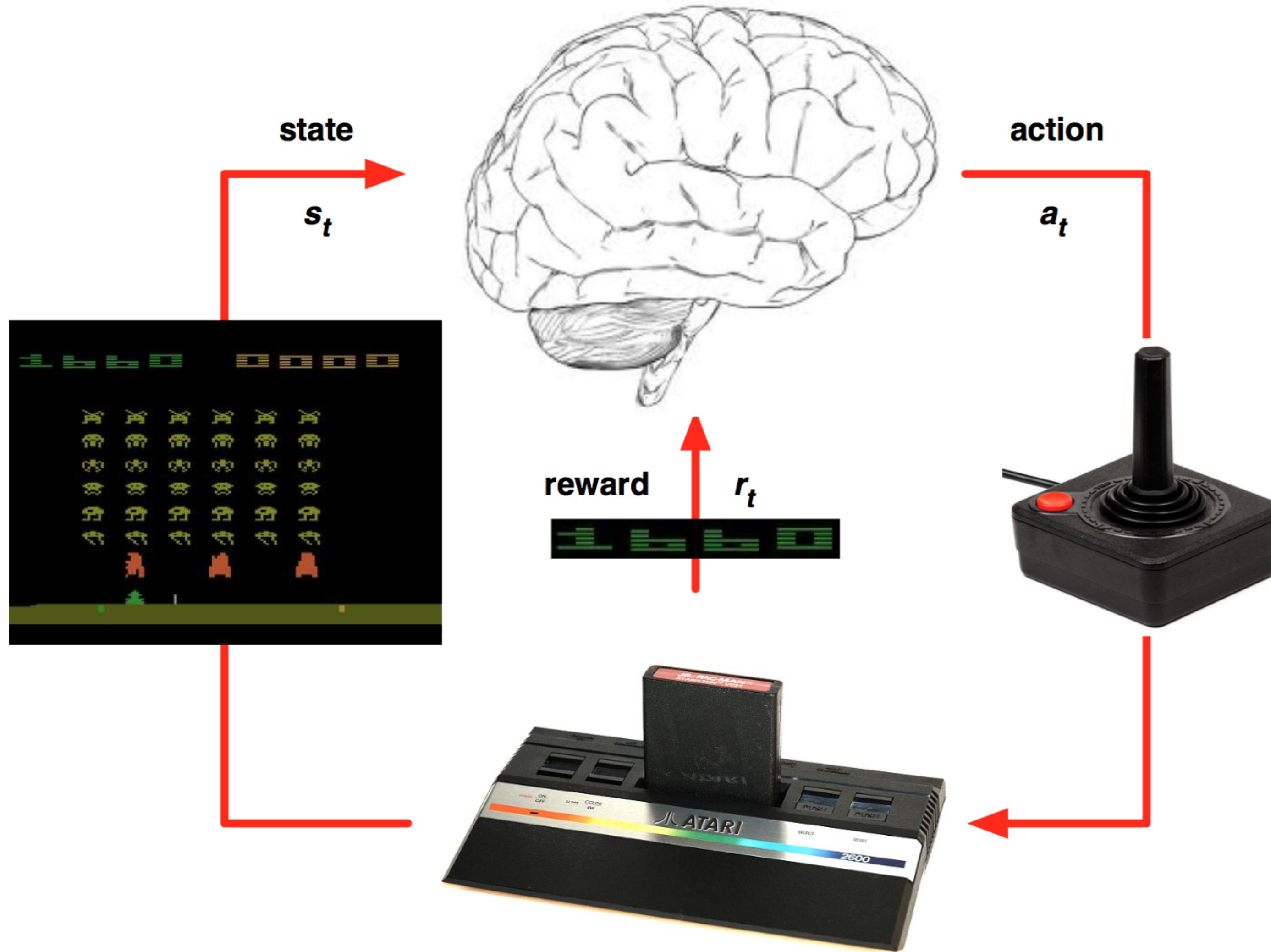
Source: Sutton and Barto (1998).

- The behavior of the agent is therefore a sequence of **state-action-reward-state** (s, a, r, s') transitions.



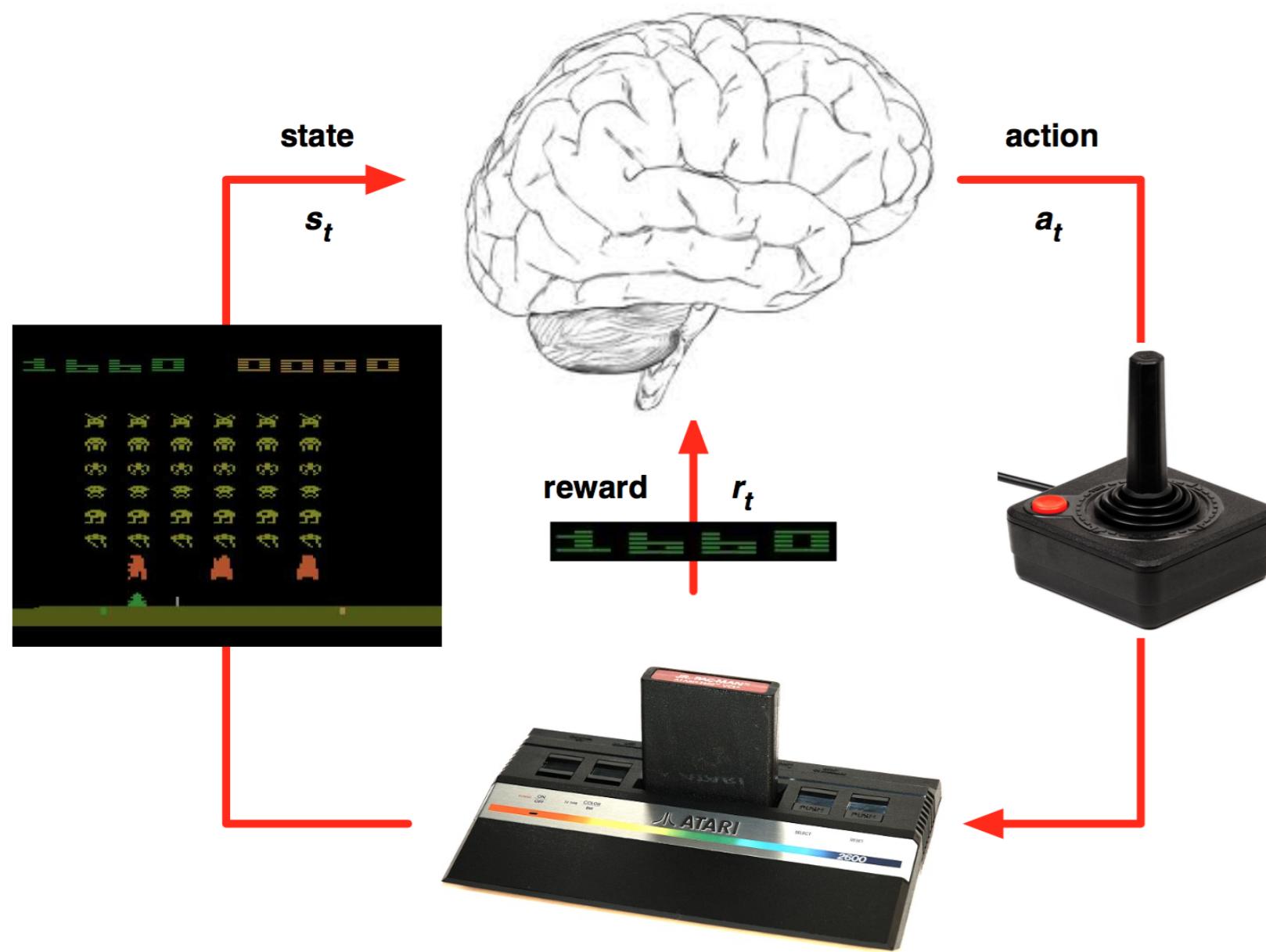
- Sequences $\tau = (s_0, a_0, r_1, s_1, a_1, \dots, s_T)$ are called **episodes, trajectories, histories or rollouts**.

The agent-environment interface



Source: David Silver. <http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

Environment and agent states



- The state s_t can relate to:
 - the **environment state**, i.e. all information external to the agent (position of objects, other agents, etc).
 - the **internal state**, information about the agent itself (needs, joint positions, etc).
- Generally, the state represents all the information necessary to solve the task.
- The agent generally has no access to the states directly, but to **observations** o_t :

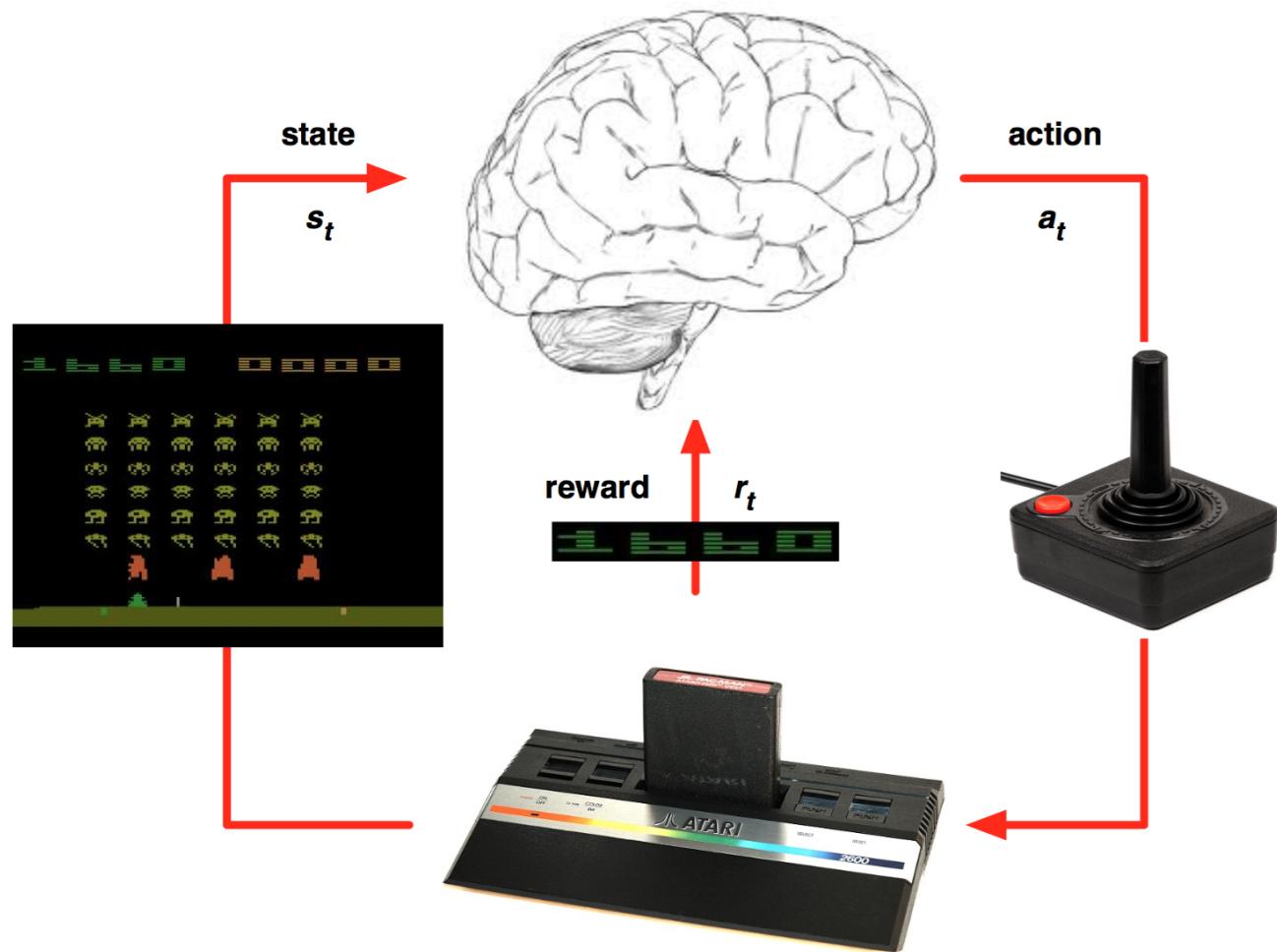
Source: David Silver.
<http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

$$o_t = f(s_t)$$

- Example: camera inputs do not contain all the necessary information such as the agent's position.
- Imperfect information define **partially observable problems**.

Policy

- What we search in RL is the optimal **policy**: which action a should the agent perform in a state s ?
- The policy π maps states into actions.



- It is defined as a **probability distribution** over states and actions:

$$\pi : \mathcal{S} \times \mathcal{A} \rightarrow P(\mathcal{S})$$

$$(s, a) \rightarrow \pi(s, a) = P(a_t = a | s_t = s)$$

- $\pi(s, a)$ is the probability of selecting the action a in s . We have of course:

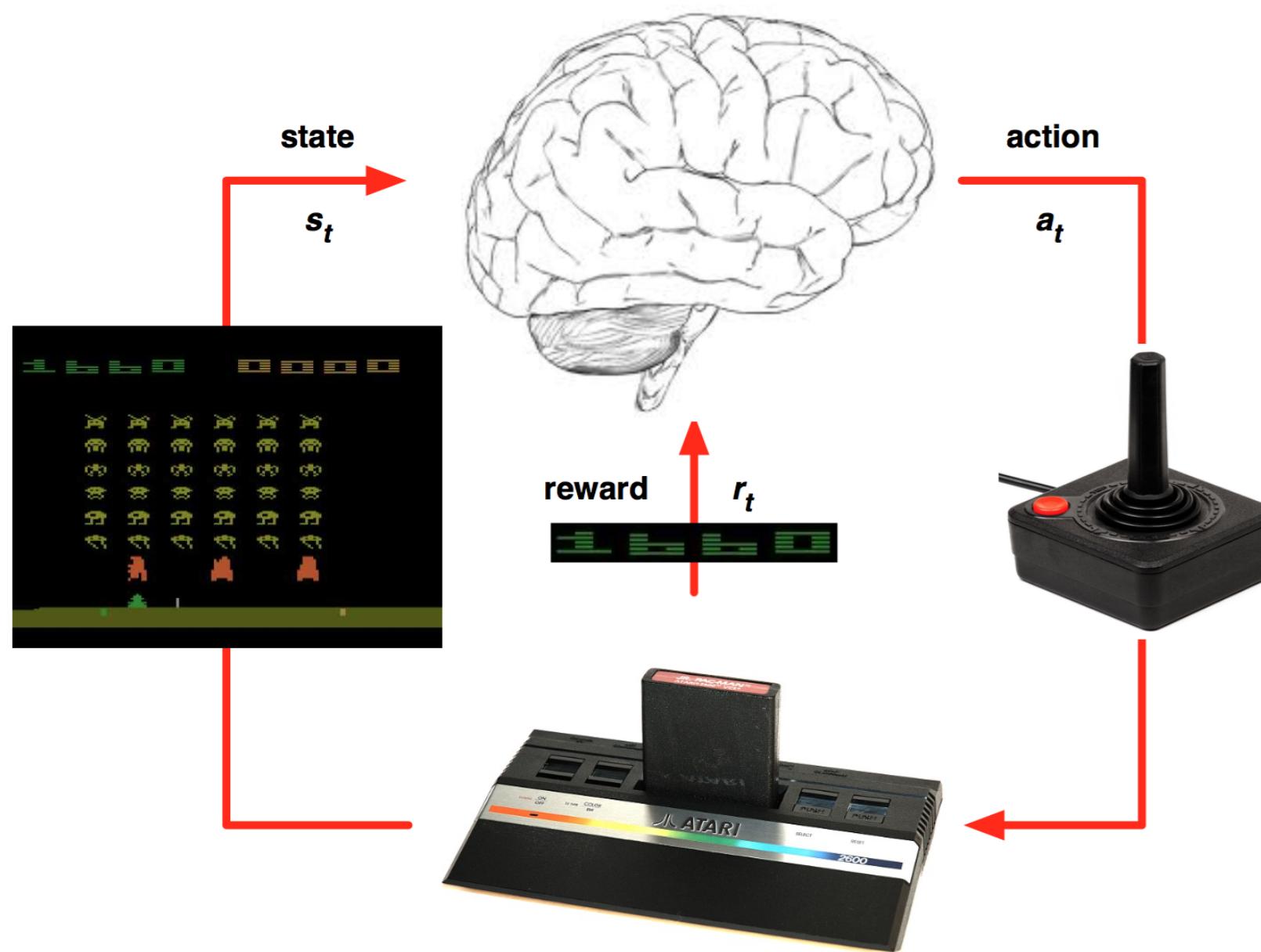
Source: David Silver.
<http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

$$\sum_{a \in \mathcal{A}(s)} \pi(s, a) = 1$$

- Policies can be **probabilistic / stochastic**. **Deterministic policies** select a single action a^* in s :

$$\pi(s, a) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } a = a^* \\ 0 & \text{if } a \neq a^* \end{cases}$$

Reward function



- The only teaching signal in RL is the **reward function**.
- The reward is a scalar value r_{t+1} provided to the system after each transition (s_t, a_t, s_{t+1}) .
- Rewards can also be probabilistic (casino).
- The mathematical expectation of these rewards defines the **expected reward** of a transition:

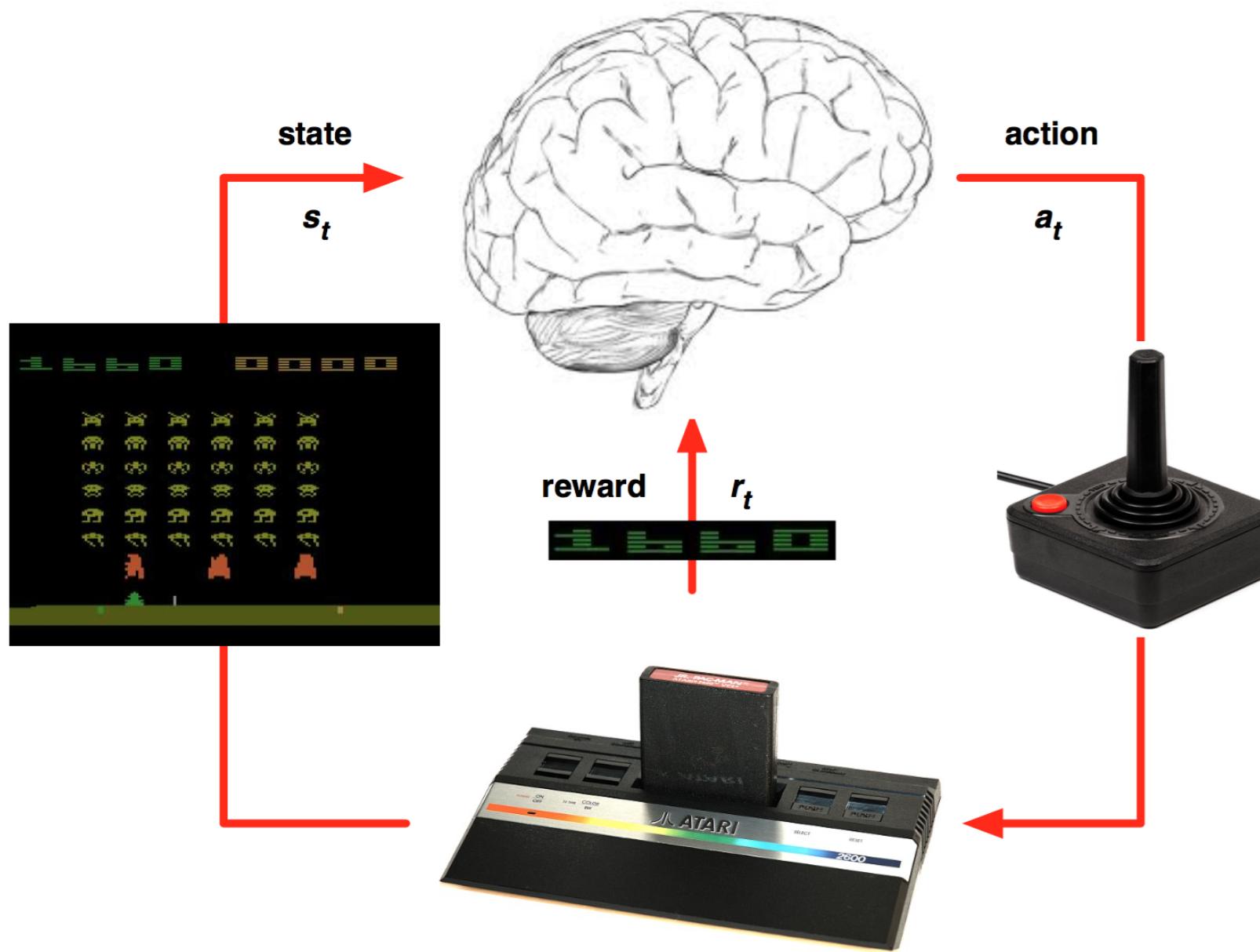
$$r(s, a, s') = \mathbb{E}_t[r_{t+1} | s_t = s, a_t = a, s_{t+1} = s']$$

- Rewards can be:
 - **dense**: a non-zero value is provided after each time step (easy).
 - **sparse**: non-zero rewards are given very seldom (difficult).

Source: David Silver.

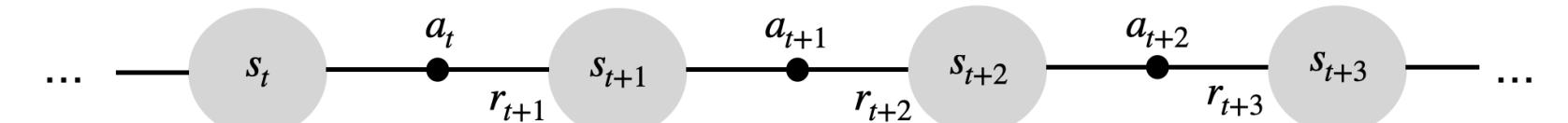
<http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

Returns



- The goal of the agent is to find a policy that **maximizes** the sum of future rewards at each timestep.
- The discounted sum of future rewards is called the **return**:

$$R_t = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \gamma^k r_{t+k+1}$$



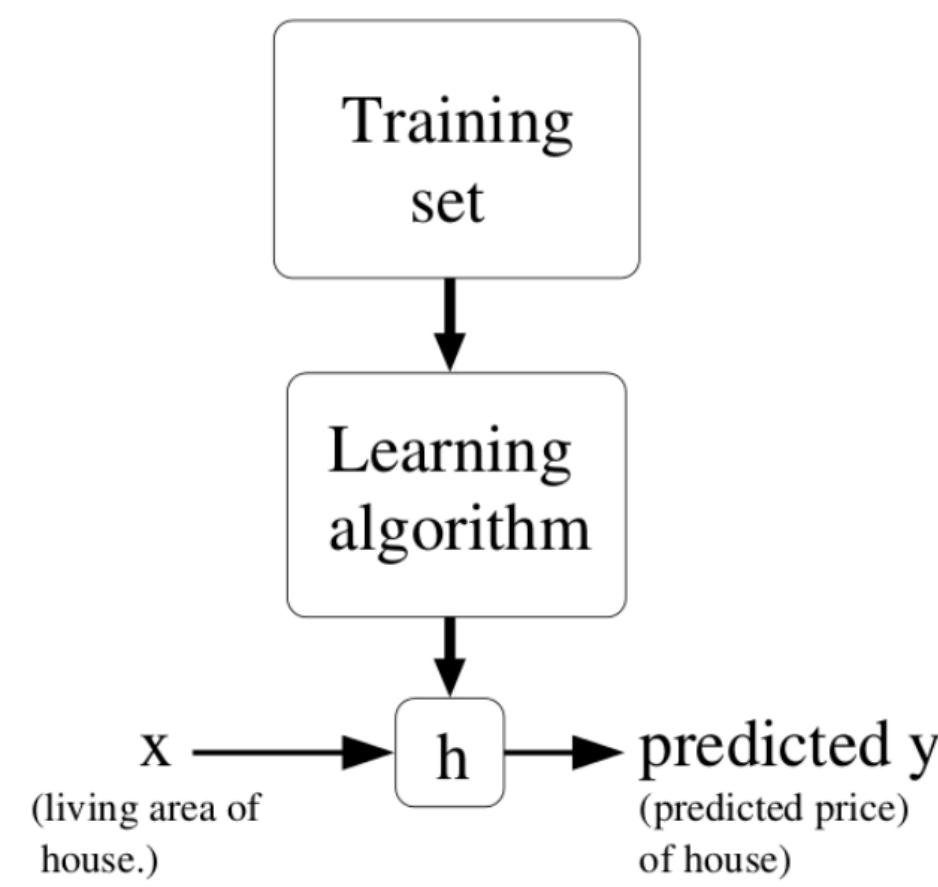
Source: David Silver.

<http://www.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

- Rewards can be delayed w.r.t to an action: we care about all future rewards to select an action, not only the immediate ones.
- Example: in chess, the first moves are as important as the last ones in order to win, but they do not receive reward.

Supervised learning

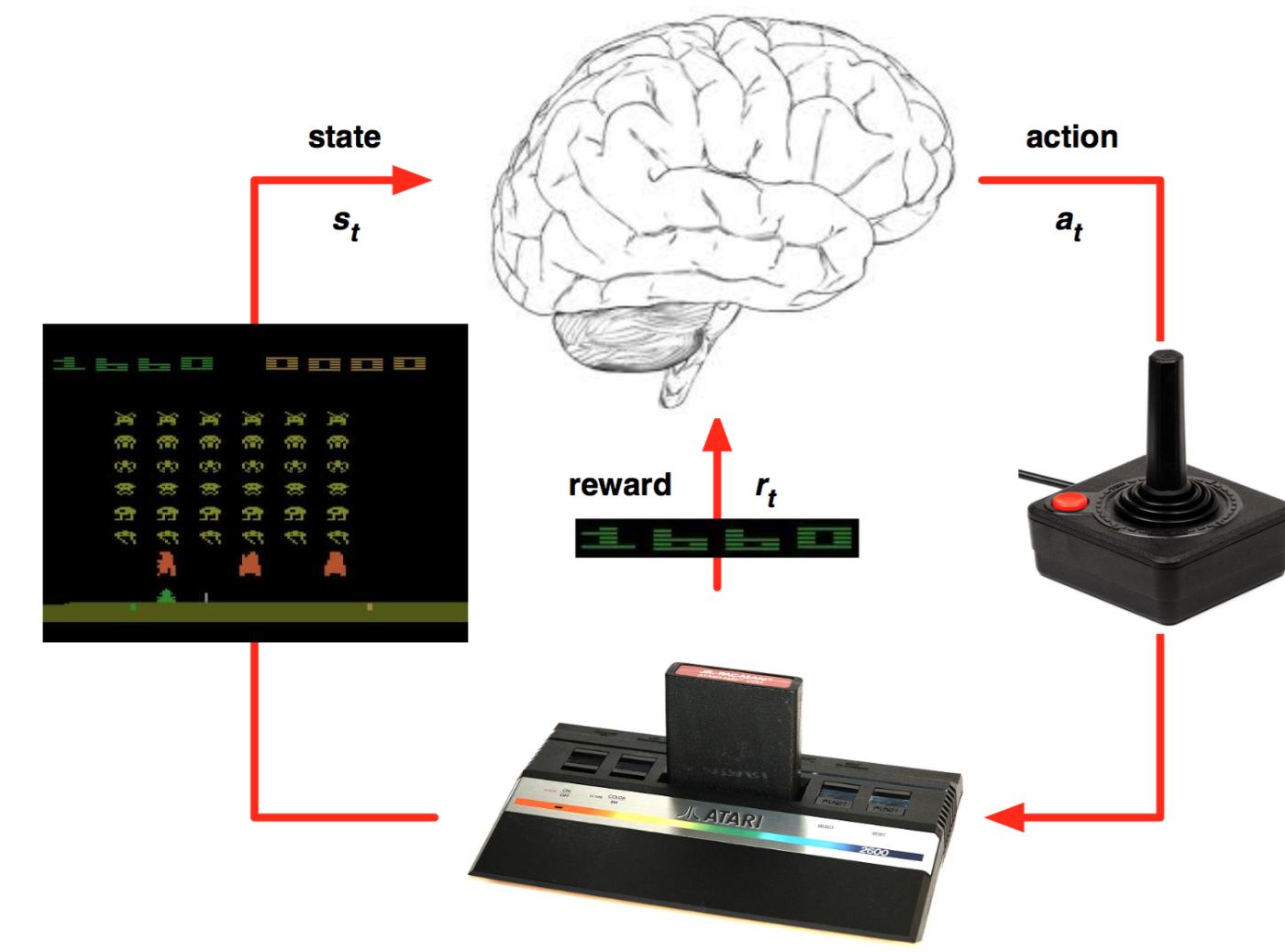
- Correct input/output samples are provided by a **supervisor** (training set).
- Learning is driven by **prediction errors**, the difference between the prediction and the target.
- Feedback is **instantaneous**: the target is immediately known.
- **Time** does not matter: training samples are randomly sampled from the training set.



Source: Andrew Ng, Stanford CS229,
<https://see.stanford.edu/materials/aimlcs229/cs229-notes1.pdf>

Reinforcement learning

- Behavior is acquired through **trial and error**, no supervision.
- **Reinforcements** (rewards or punishments) change the probability of selecting particular actions.
- Feedback is **delayed**: which action caused the reward? Credit assignment.
- **Time** matters: as behavior gets better, the observed data changes.



Source: David Silver.
<http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

2 - Applications of RL

Optimal control

Pendulum

Goal: maintaining the pendulum vertical.



- **States:** angle and velocity of the pendulum.
- **Actions:** left and right torques.
- **Rewards:** cosine distance to the vertical.

Optimal control

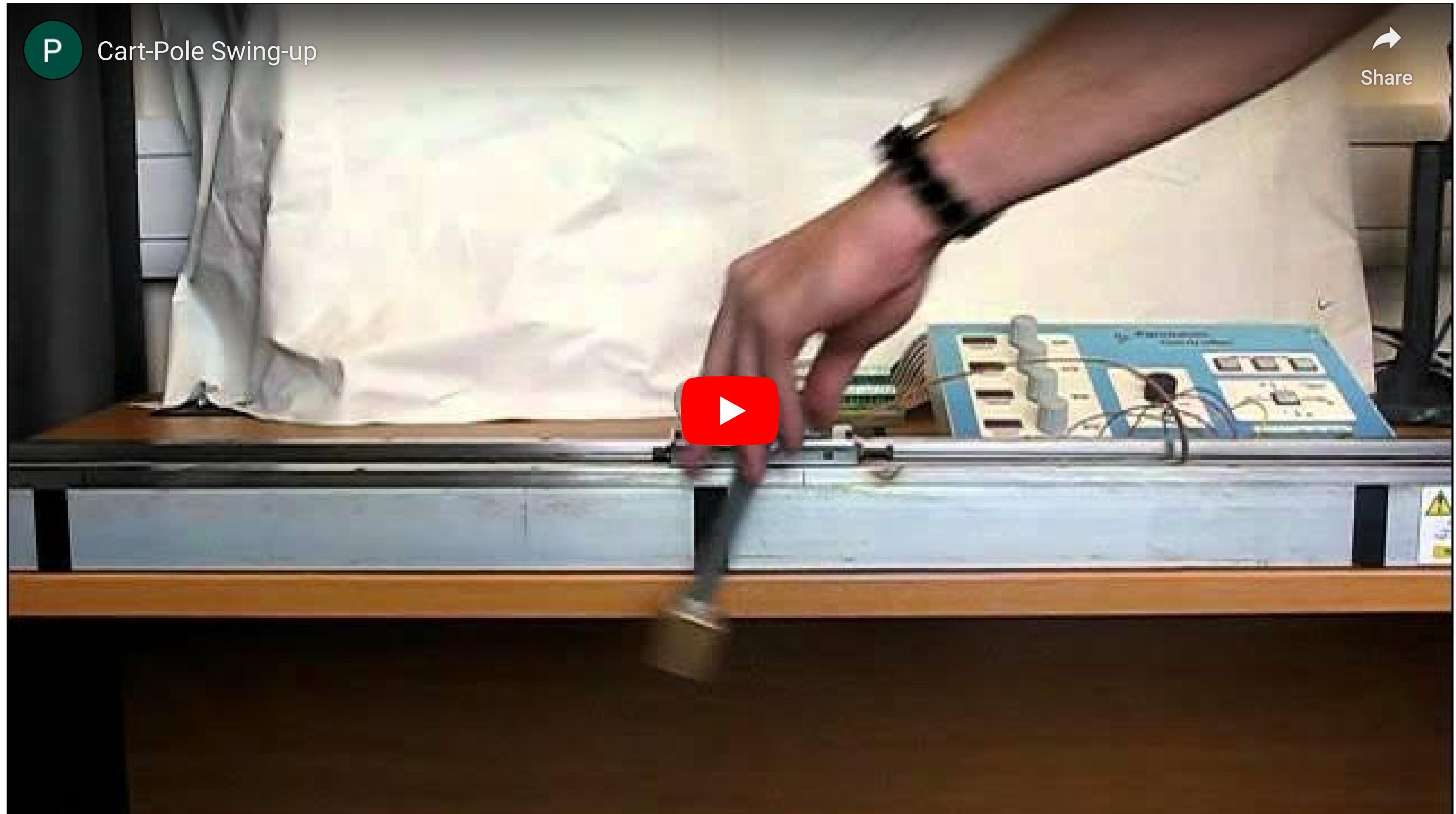
Cartpole

Goal: maintaining the pole vertical by moving the cart left or right.

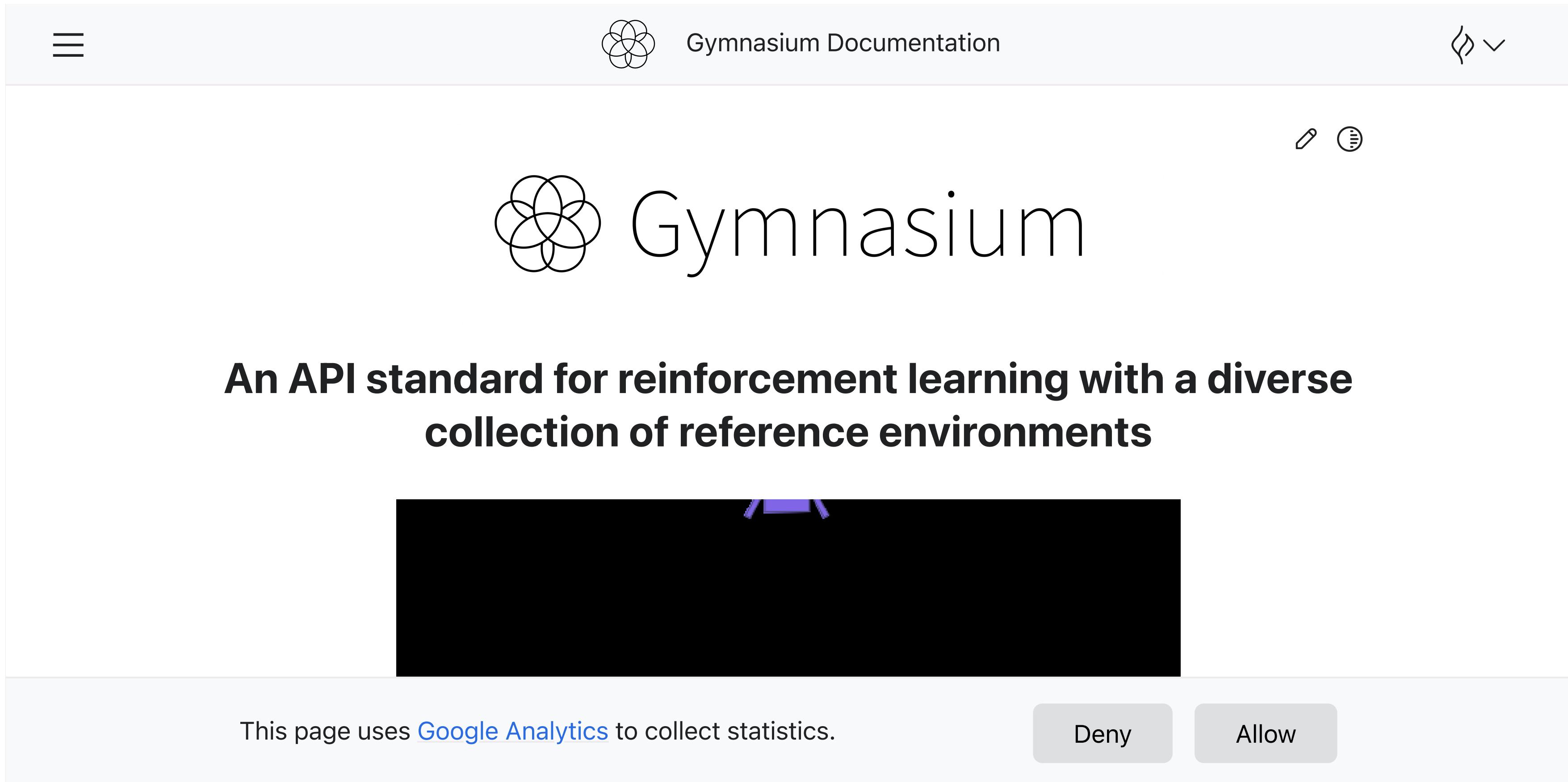


- **States:** position and speed of the cart, angle and velocity of the pole.
- **Actions:** left and right movements.
- **Rewards:** +1 for each step until failure.

Optimal control



gymnasium library for RL environments



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Gymnasium Documentation website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a menu icon, the Gymnasium logo (a stylized knot of three circles), the text "Gymnasium Documentation", and a search icon. Below the header, the word "Gymnasium" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font next to its logo. Underneath this, a bold, centered text reads: "An API standard for reinforcement learning with a diverse collection of reference environments". A large black rectangular area is positioned below this text, likely a placeholder for an image or a redacted section. At the bottom of the page, a footer bar contains the text "This page uses Google Analytics to collect statistics." followed by two buttons: "Deny" and "Allow".

Gymnasium Documentation

Gymnasium

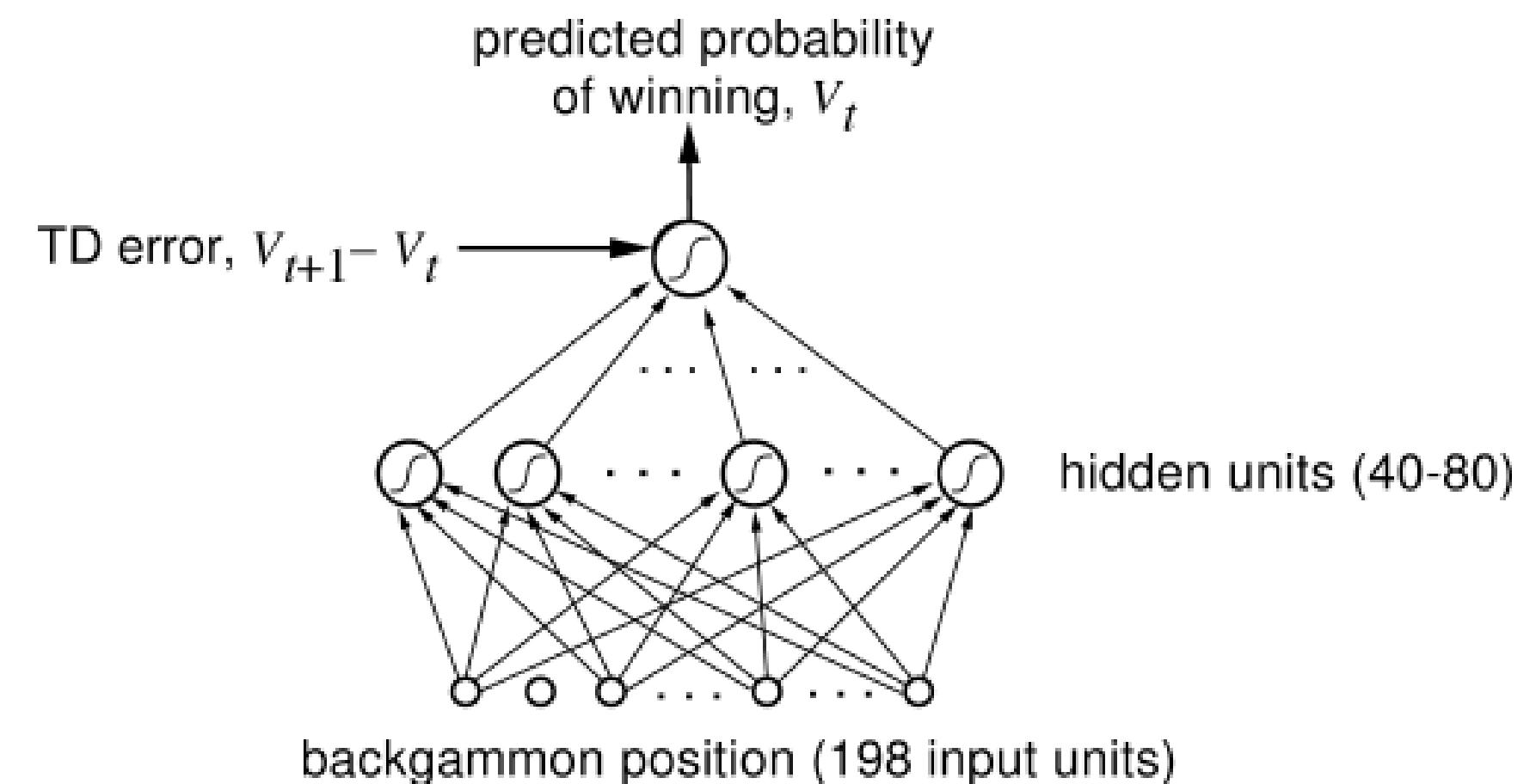
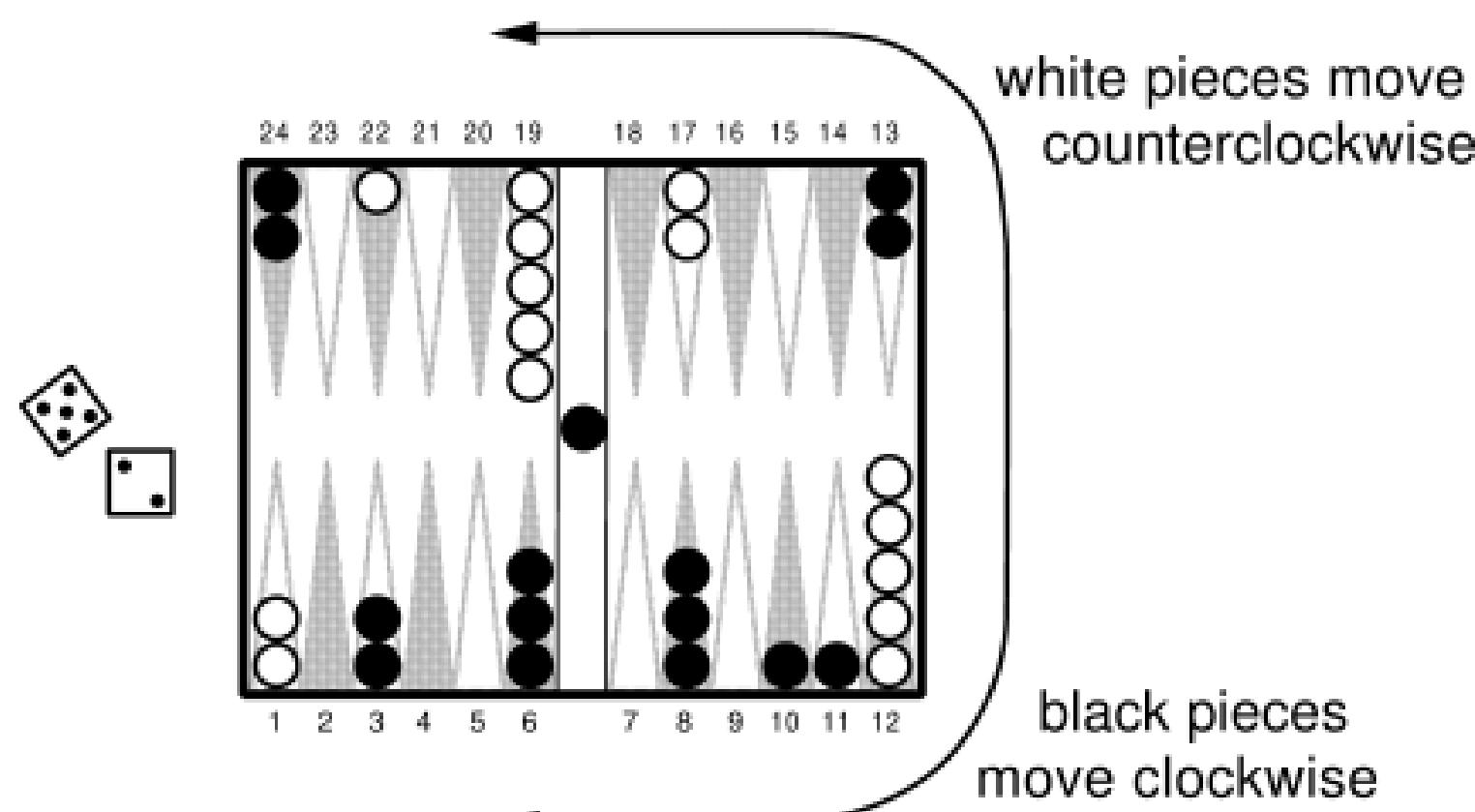
An API standard for reinforcement learning with a diverse collection of reference environments

This page uses [Google Analytics](#) to collect statistics.

Deny Allow

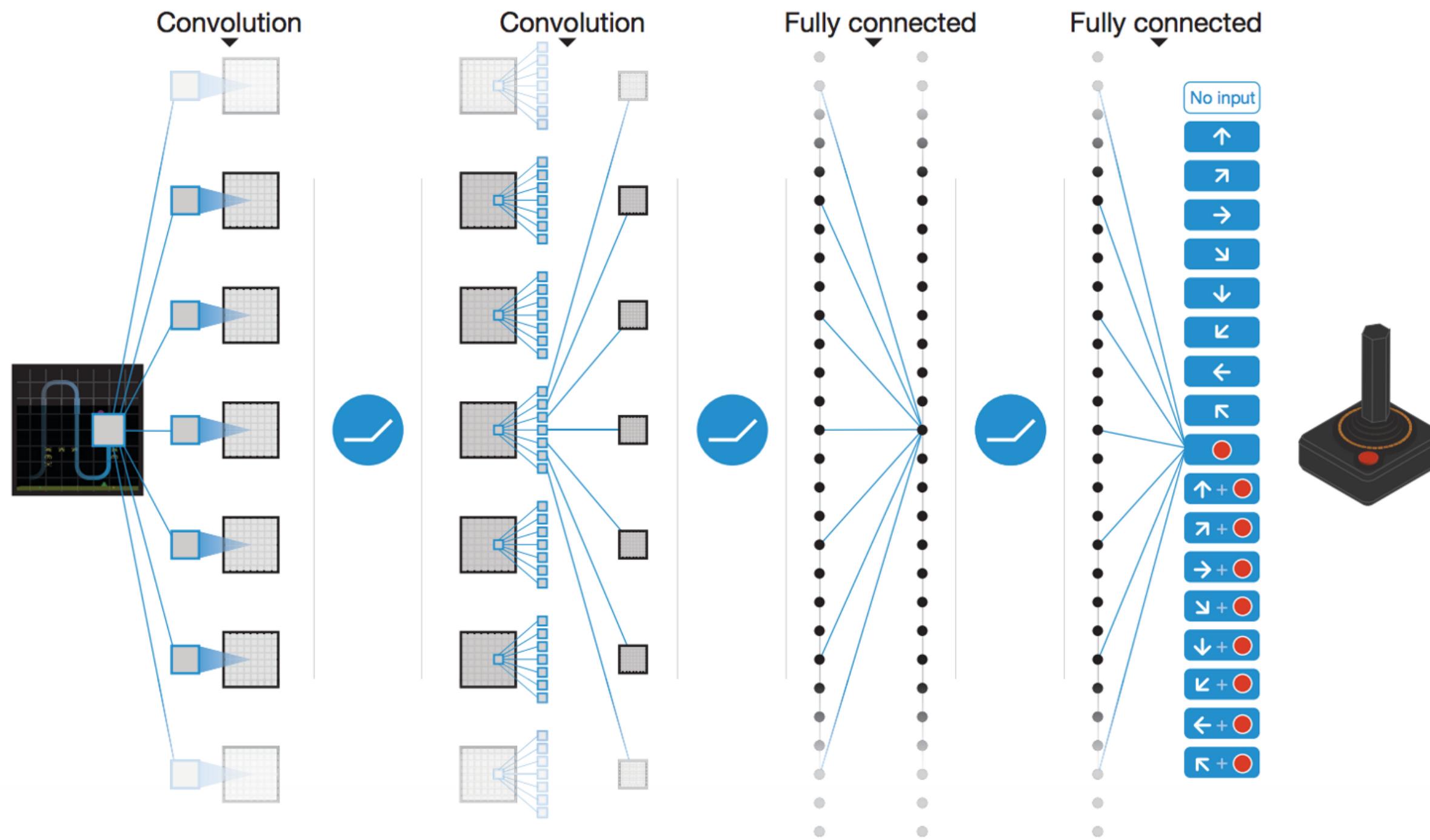
Board games (Backgammon, Chess, Go, etc)

TD-Gammon (Tesauro, 1992) was one of the first AI to beat human experts at a complex game, Backgammon.



- **States:** board configurations.
- **Actions:** piece displacements.
- **Rewards:** +1 for game won, -1 for game lost, 0 otherwise. **sparse rewards**

Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL)



- Classical tabular RL was limited to toy problems, with few states and actions.
- It is only when coupled with **deep neural networks** that interesting applications of RL became possible.
- Deepmind (now Google) started the deep RL hype in 2013 by learning to solve 50+ Atari games with a CNN.

Atari games

- States:

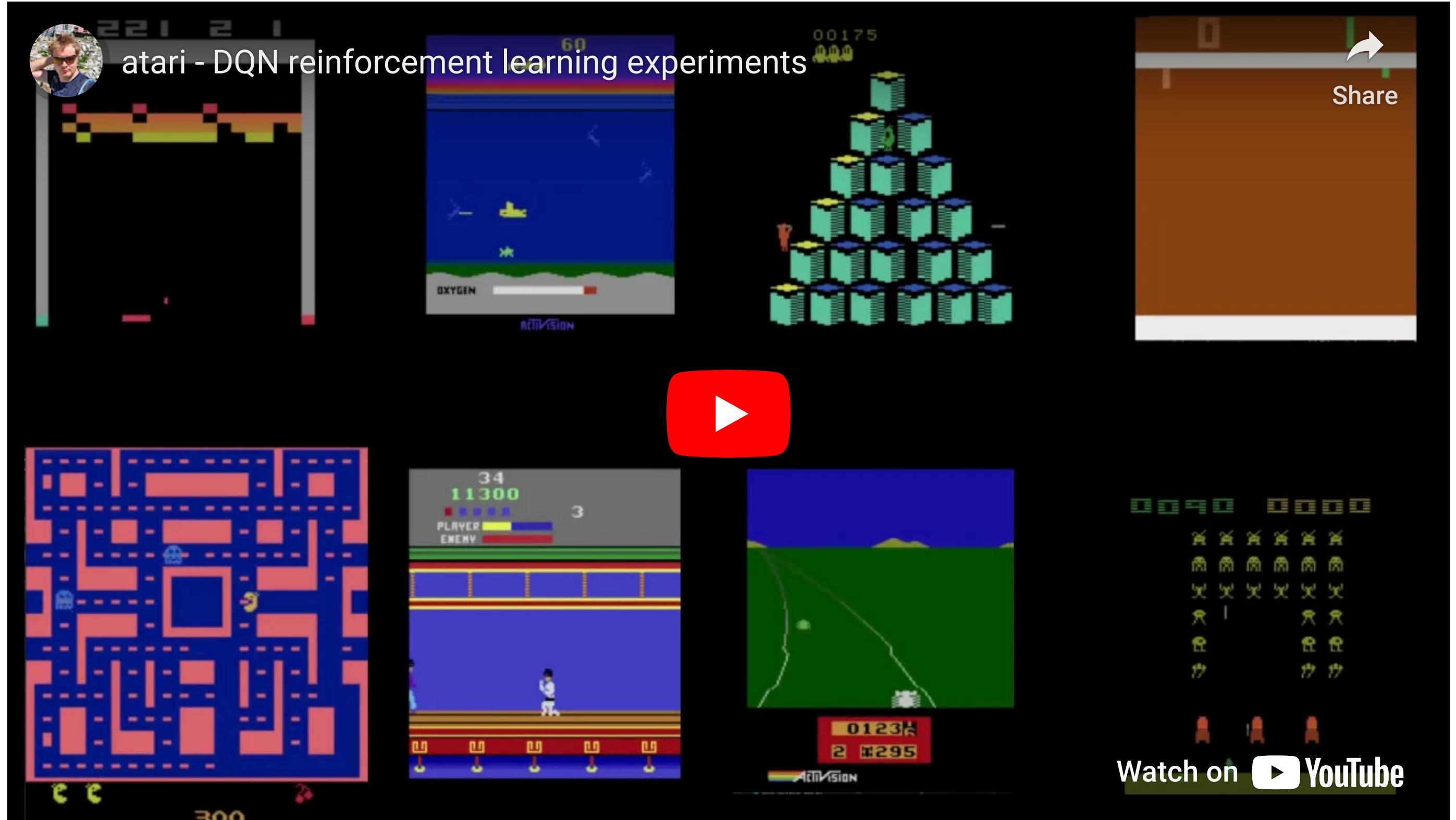
pixel frames.

- Actions:

button presses.

- Rewards:

score increases.



Simulated cars

- **States:**

pixel frames.

- **Actions:**

direction, speed.

- **Rewards:**

linear velocity (+),
crashes (-)



Parkour

- **States:**

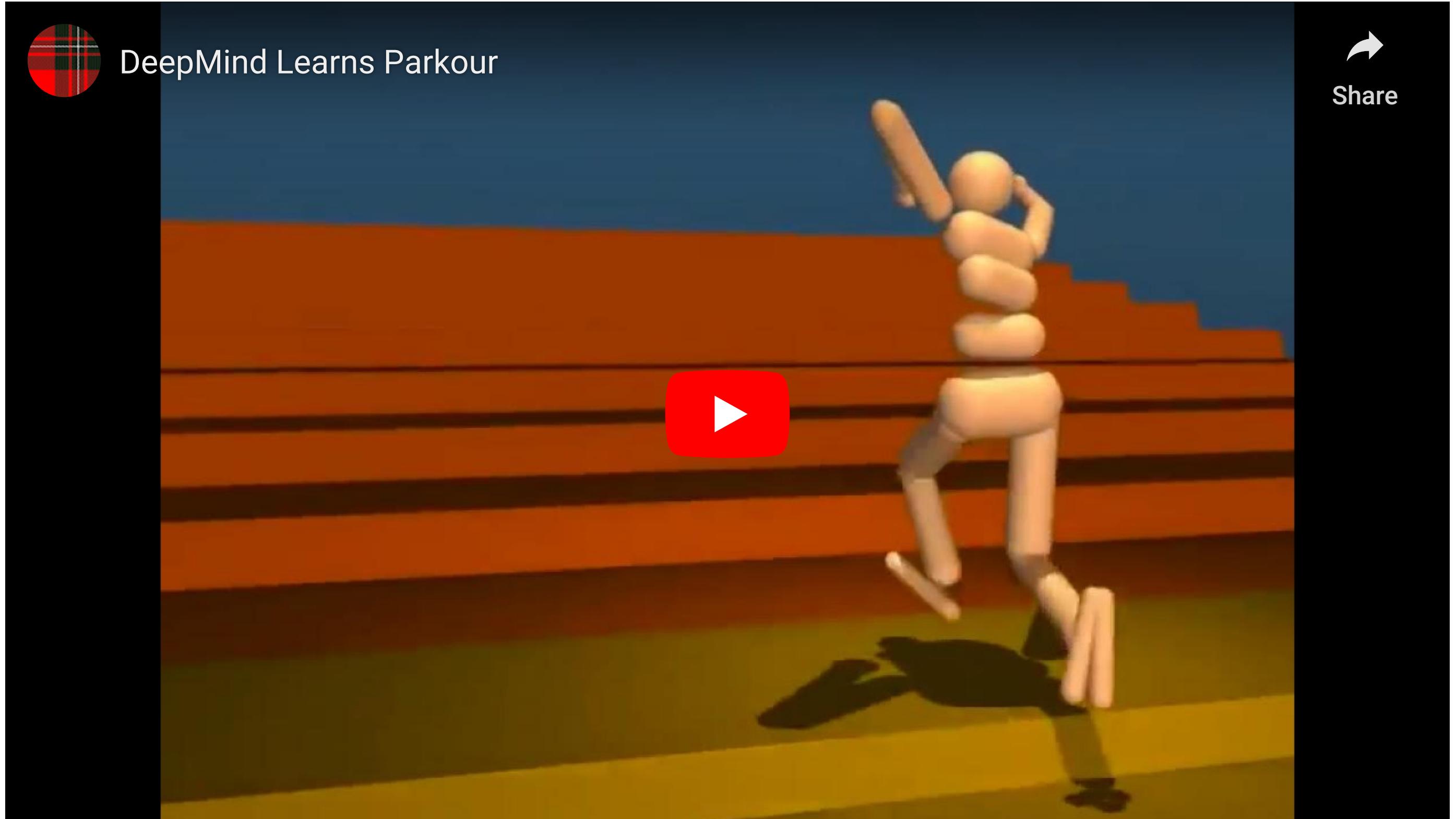
joint positions.

- **Actions:**

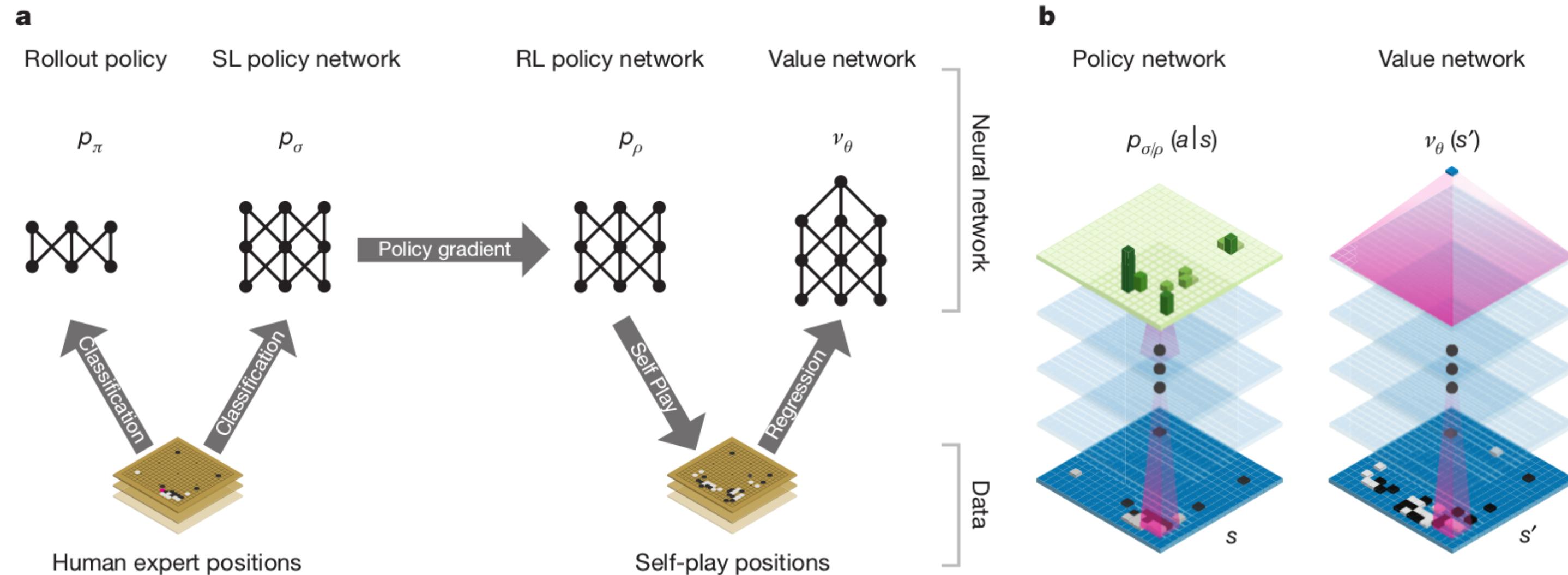
joint displacements.

- **Rewards:**

linear velocity (+),
crashes (-)



AlphaGo

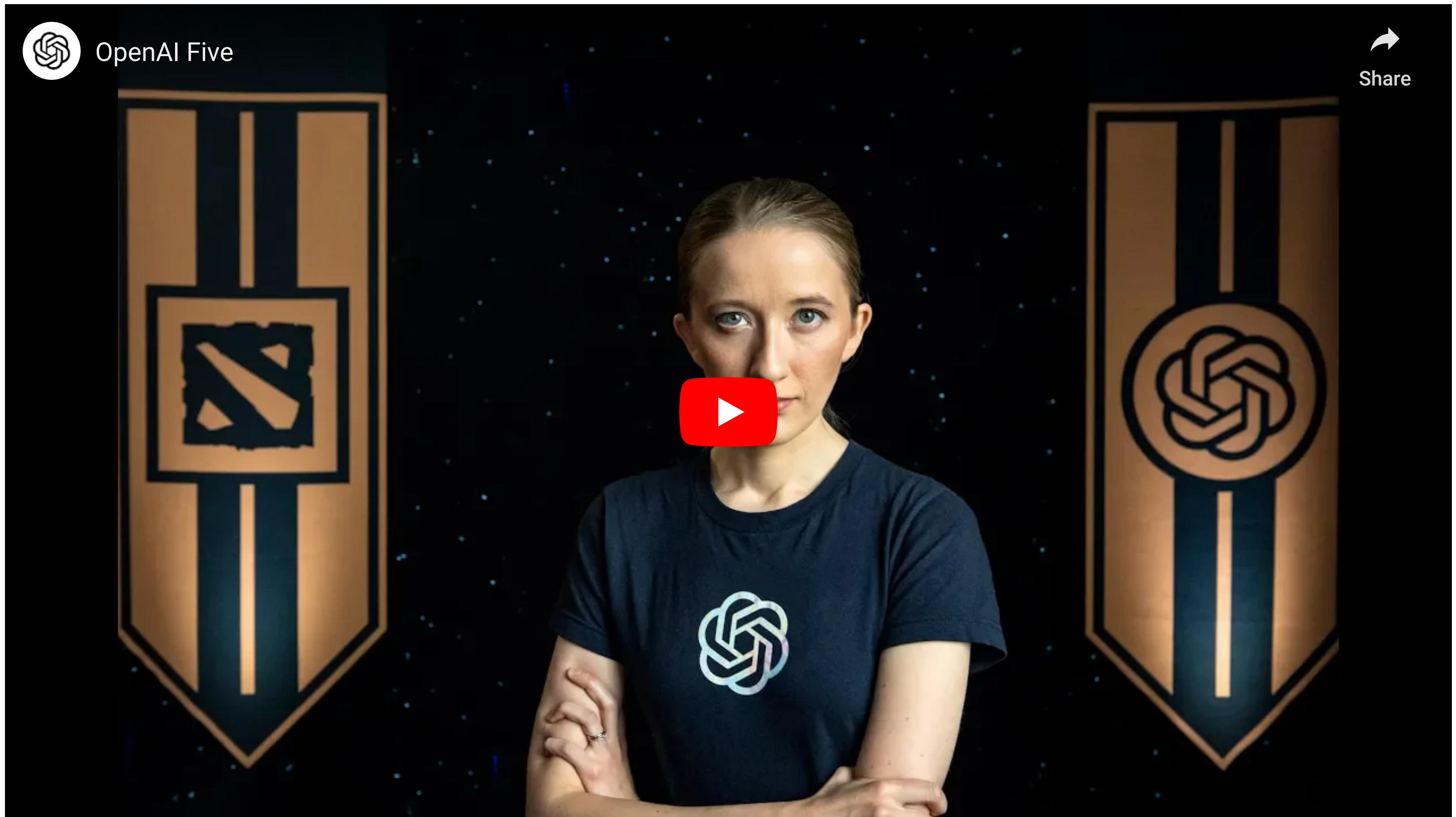


- AlphaGo was able to beat Lee Sedol in 2016, 19 times World champion.
- It relies on human knowledge to **bootstrap** a RL agent (supervised learning).
- The RL agent discovers new strategies by using self-play: during the games against Lee Sedol, it was able to use **novel** moves which were never played before and surprised its opponent.
- Training took several weeks on 1202 CPUs and 176 GPUs.

AlphaGo

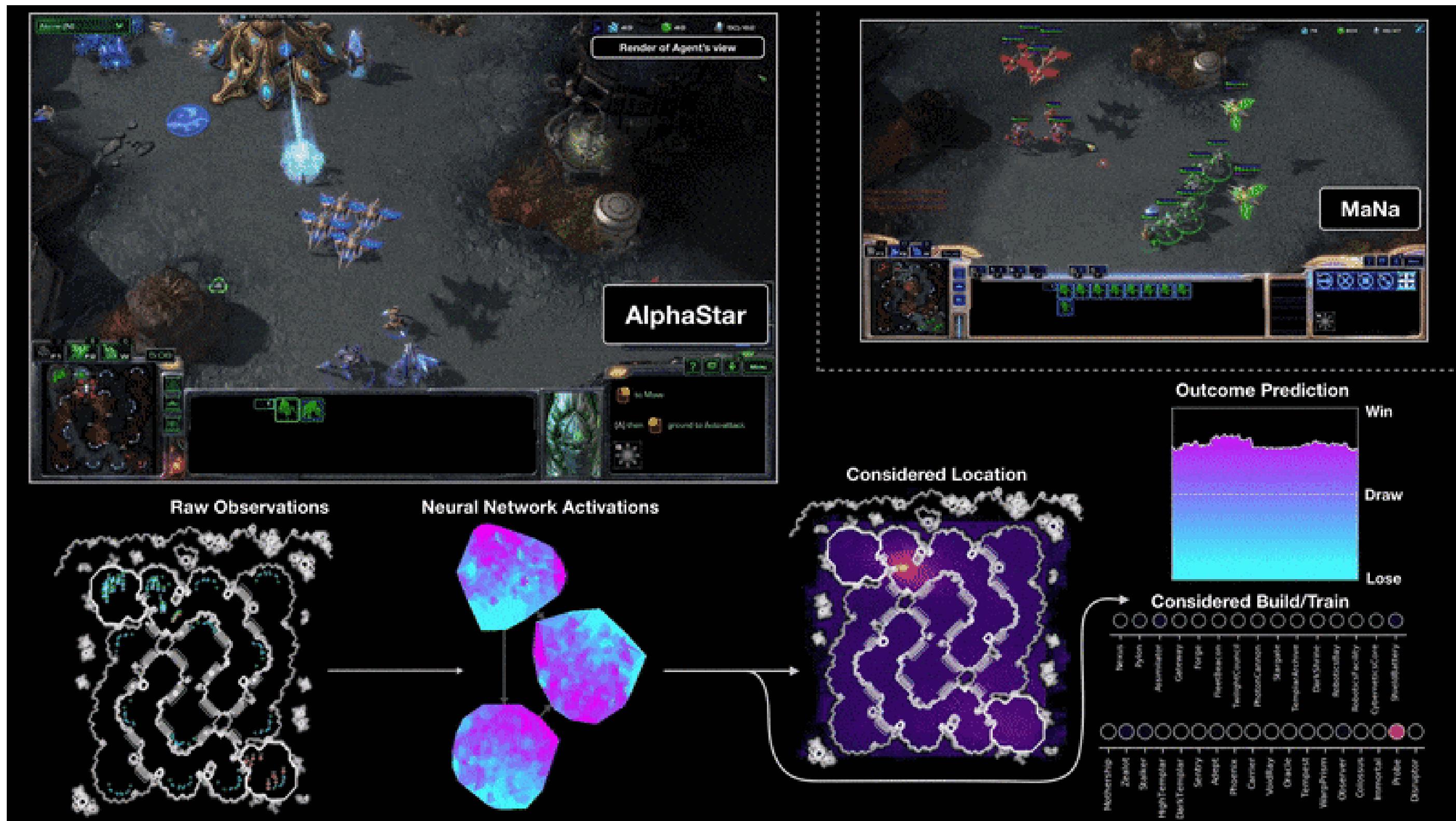


Dota2 (OpenAI)



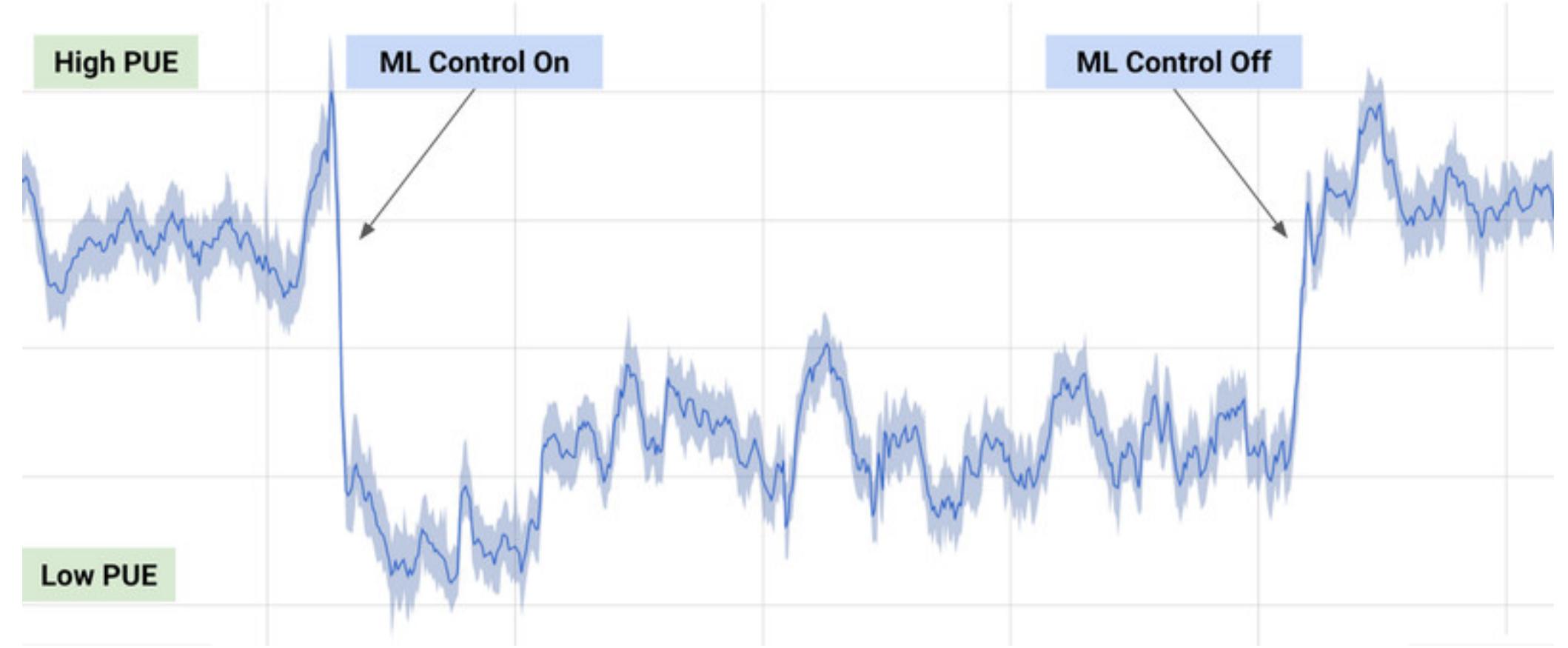
- 128,000 CPU cores and 256 Nvidia P100 GPUs on Google Cloud for 10 months (\$25,000 per day)...

Starcraft II (AlphaStar)



Source: <https://deepmind.com/blog/article/alphastar-mastering-real-time-strategy-game-starcraft-ii>

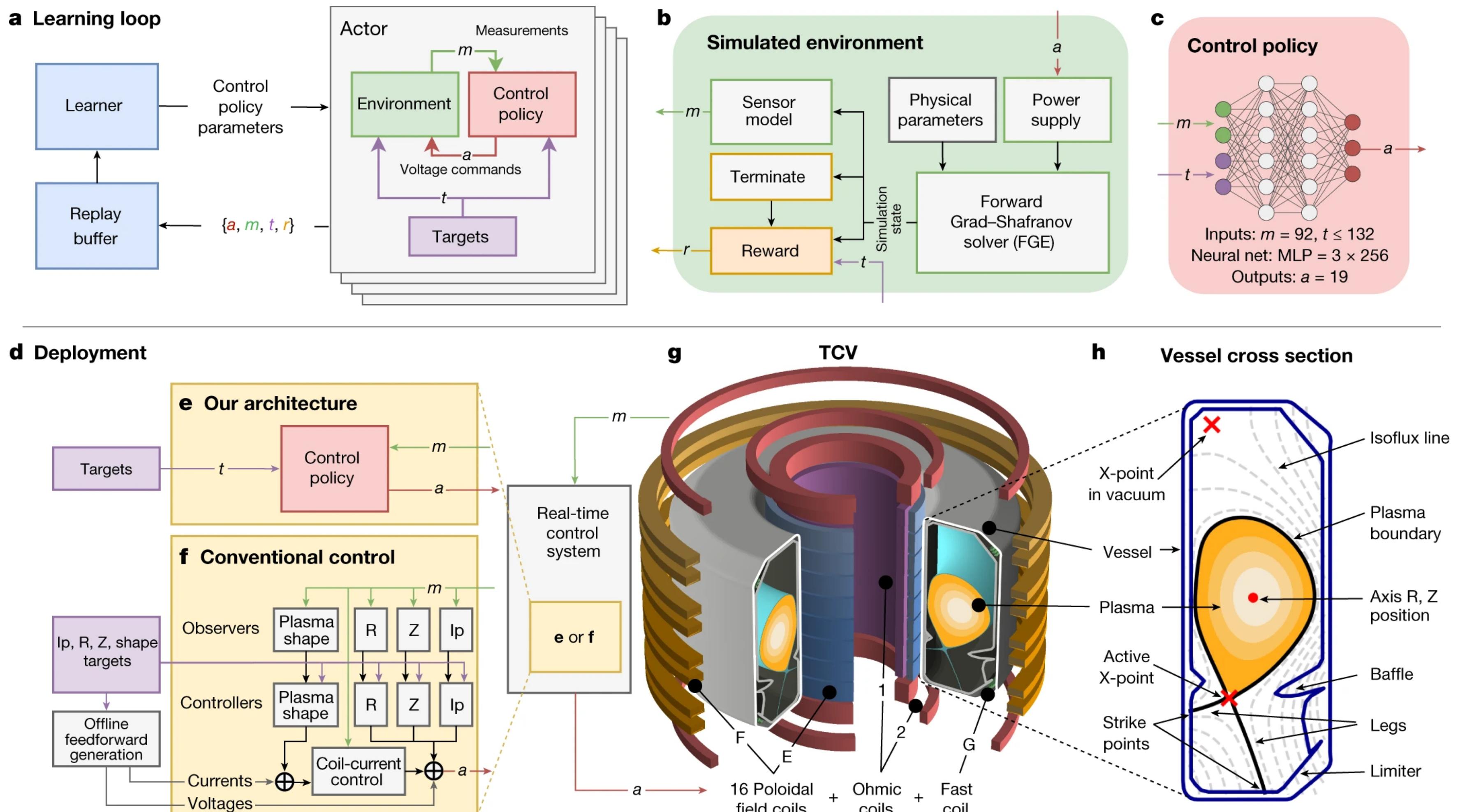
Process control



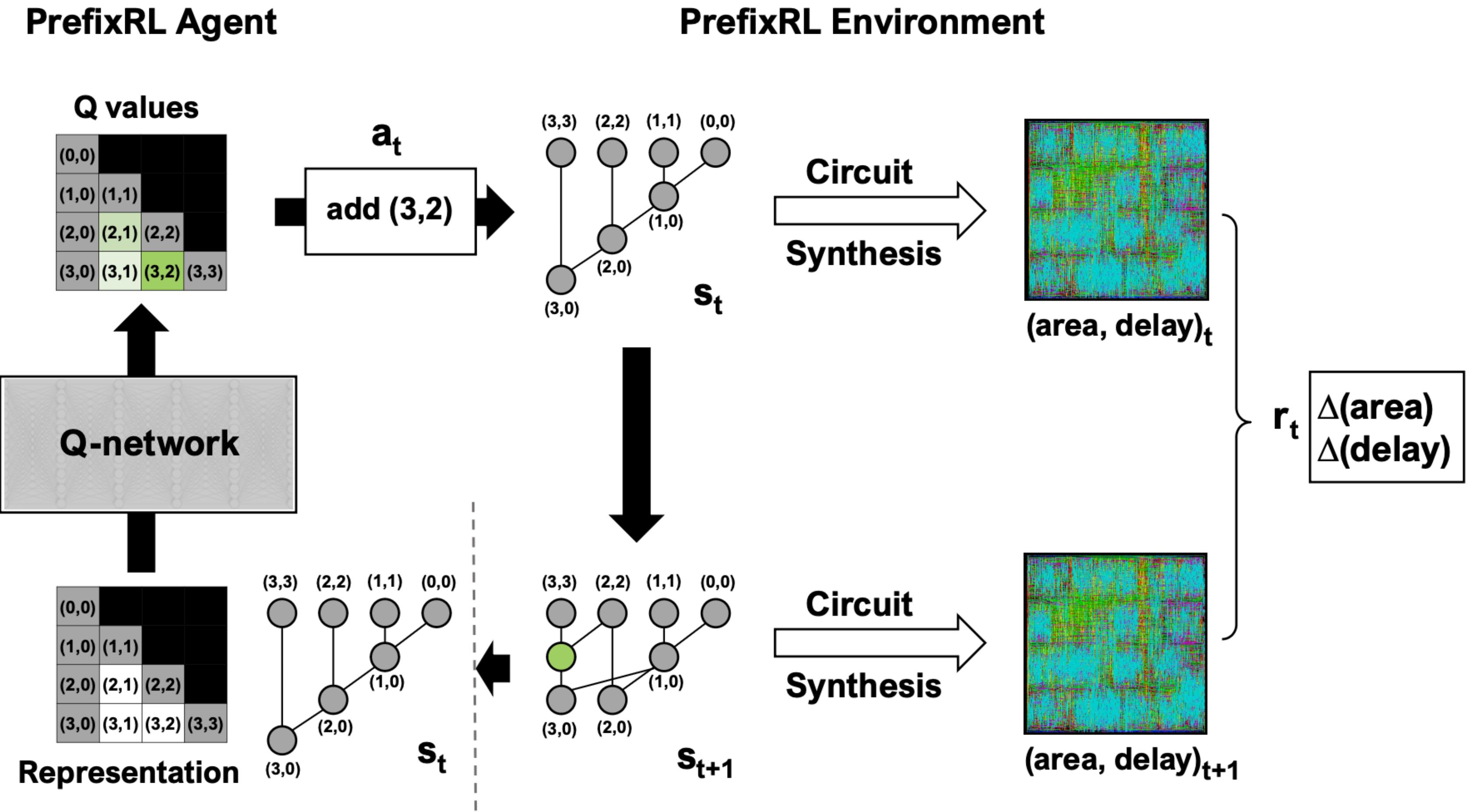
Source: <https://deepmind.com/blog/deepmind-ai-reduces-google-data-centre-cooling-bill-40/>

- 40% reduction of energy consumption when using deep RL to control the cooling of Google's datacenters.
- **States:** sensors (temperature, pump speeds).
- **Actions:** 120 output variables (fans, windows).
- **Rewards:** decrease in energy consumption

Magnetic control of tokamak plasmas



Chip design



Real robotics

- **States:**

pixel frames.

- **Actions:**

joint movements.

- **Rewards:**

successful
grasping.



Learning dexterity

- **States:**

pixel frames, joint position.

- **Actions:**

joint movements.

- **Rewards:**

shape obtained.



Autonomous driving

- **States:**

pixel frames.

- **Actions:**

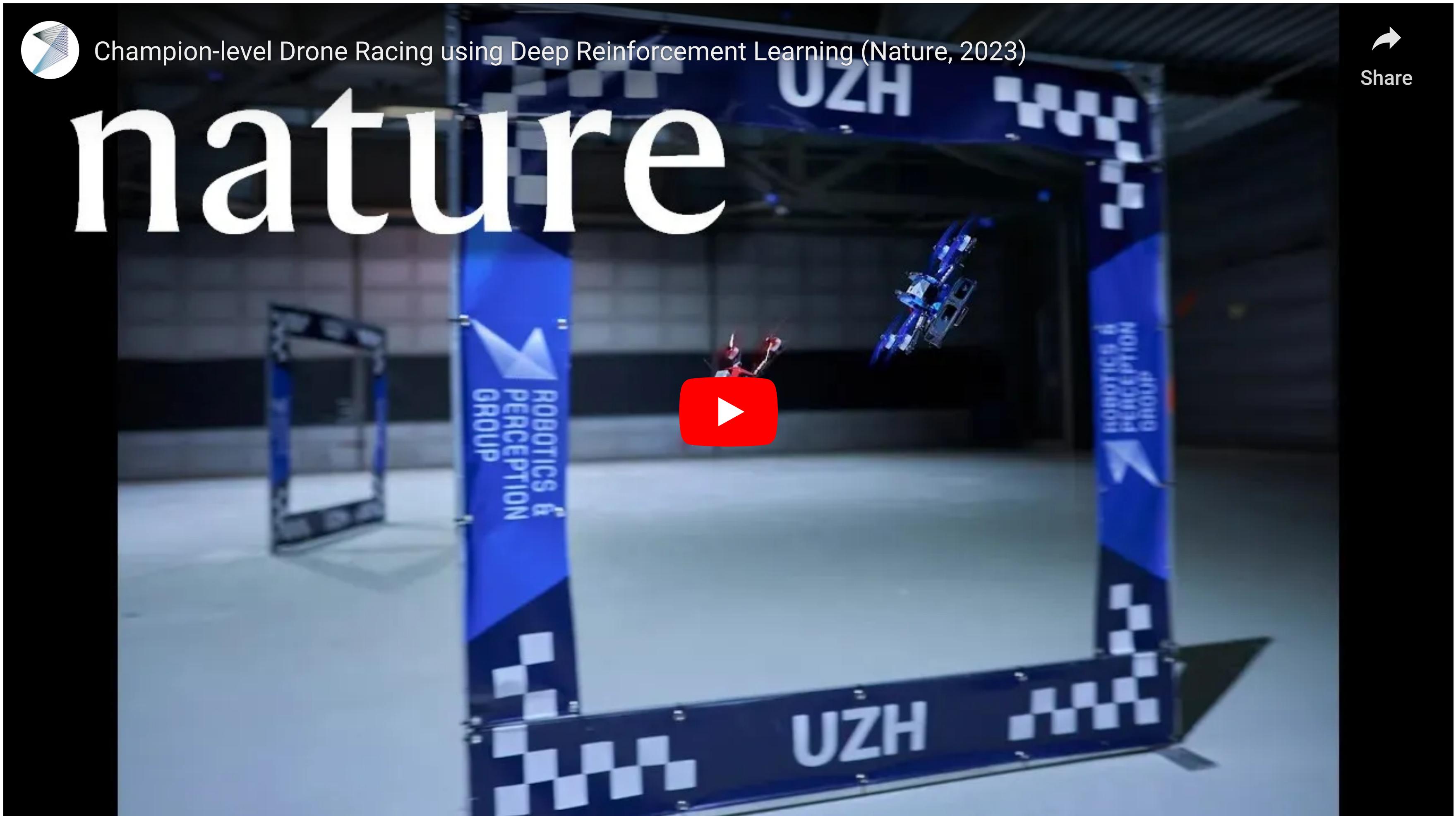
direction, speed.

- **Rewards:**

time before humans take control.



Drone racing

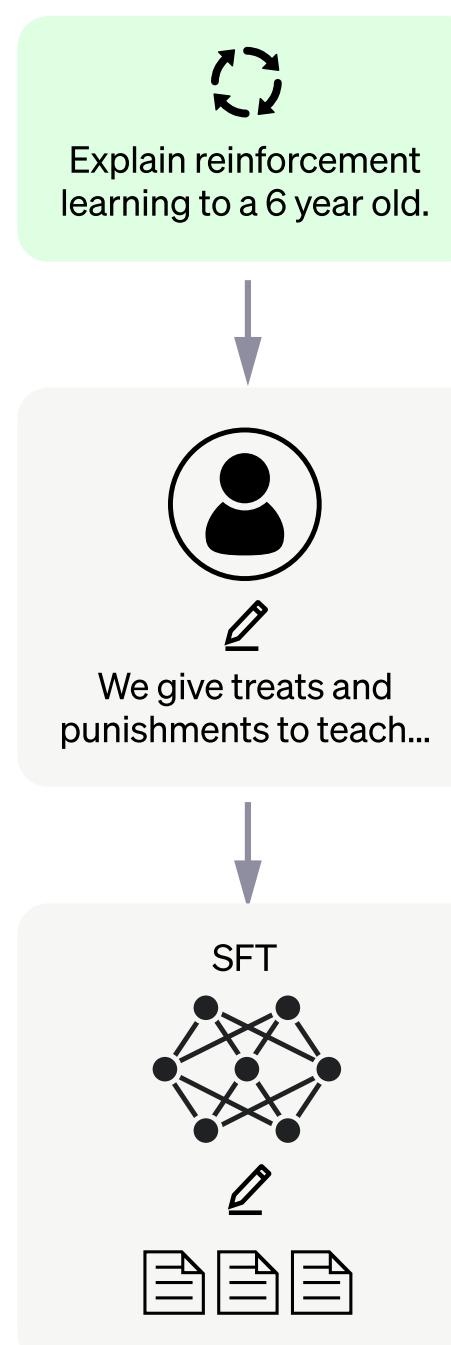


ChatGPT

Step 1

Collect demonstration data and train a supervised policy.

A prompt is sampled from our prompt dataset.

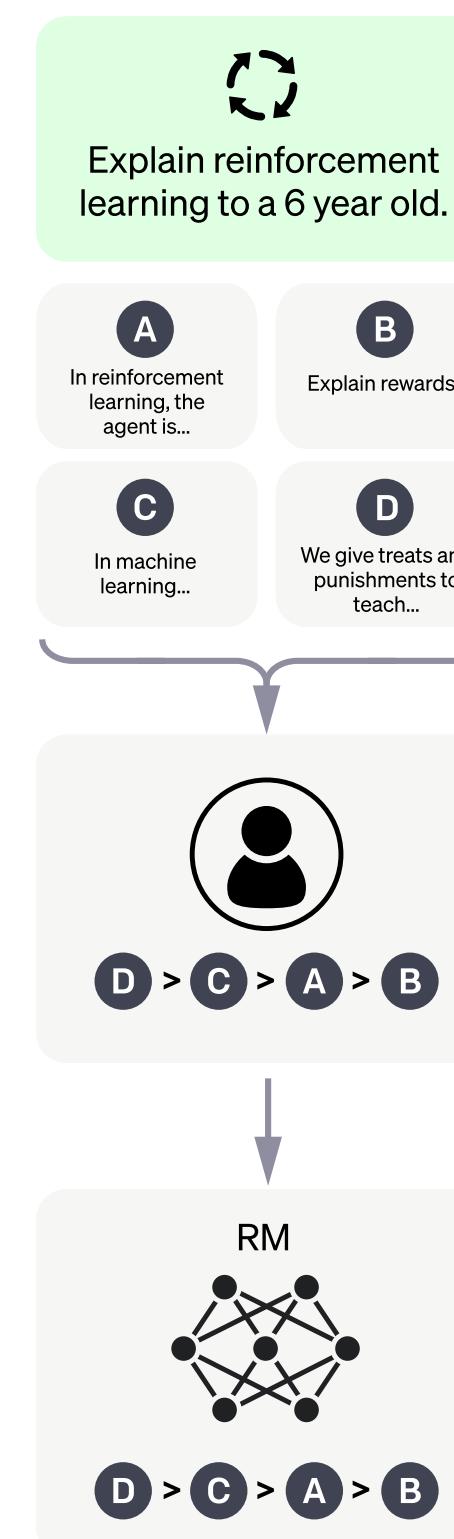


A labeler demonstrates the desired output behavior.

Step 2

Collect comparison data and train a reward model.

A prompt and several model outputs are sampled.



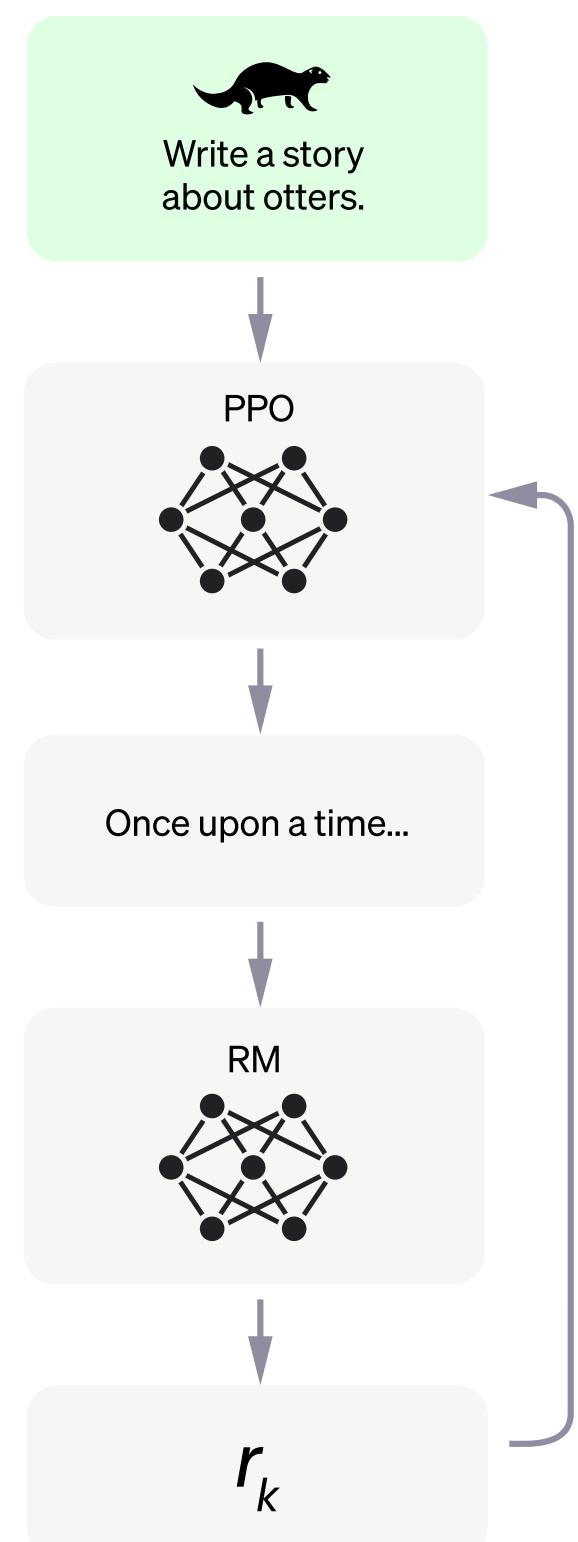
A labeler ranks the outputs from best to worst.

This data is used to train our reward model.

Step 3

Optimize a policy against the reward model using the PPO reinforcement learning algorithm.

A new prompt is sampled from the dataset.



The PPO model is initialized from the supervised policy.

The policy generates an output.

The reward model calculates a reward for the output.

The reward is used to update the policy using PPO.

Take home messages

- Deep RL is gaining a lot of importance in AI research.
 - Lots of applications in control: video games, robotics, industrial applications...
 - It may be AI's best shot at producing intelligent behavior, as it does not rely on annotated data.
- A lot of problems have to be solved before becoming as mainstream as deep learning.
 - Sample complexity is often prohibitive.
 - Energy consumption and computing power simply crazy (AlphaGo: 1 MW, Dota2: 800 petaflop/s-days)
 - The correct reward function is hard to design, ethical aspects. (*inverse RL*)
 - Hard to incorporate expert knowledge. (*model-based RL*)
 - Learns single tasks, does not generalize (*hierarchical RL, meta-learning*)

Plan of the course

1. Introduction

- 1. Applications
- 2. Crash course in statistics

2. Basic RL

- 1. Bandits
- 2. Markov Decision Process
- 3. Dynamic programming
- 4. Monte Carlo control
- 5. Temporal difference,
Eligibility traces
- 6. Function approximation
- 7. Deep learning

3. Model-free RL

- 1. Deep Q-networks
- 2. Beyond DQN
- 3. Policy gradient,
REINFORCE
- 4. Advantage Actor-critic
(A3C)
- 5. Deterministic policy
gradient (DDPG)
- 6. Natural gradients (TRPO,
PPO)
- 7. Maximum Entropy RL
(SAC)

4. Model-based RL

- 1. Principle, Dyna-Q, MPC
 - 2. Learned World models
 - 3. AlphaGo
 - 4. Successor representations
- ## 5. Outlook
- 1. Hierarchical RL
 - 2. Inverse RL
 - 3. Meta RL
 - 4. Offline RL

Suggested reading

- Sutton and Barto (1998, 2017). Reinforcement Learning: An Introduction. MIT Press.

<http://incompleteideas.net/sutton/book/the-book.html>

- Szepesvari (2010). Algorithms for Reinforcement Learning. Morgan and Claypool.

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~szepesva/papers/RLAlgsInMDPs.pdf>

- CS294 course of Sergey Levine at Berkeley.

<http://rll.berkeley.edu/deeprlcourse/>

- Reinforcement Learning course by David Silver at UCL.

<http://www0.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/d.silver/web/Teaching.html>

References

- Degrave, J., Felici, F., Buchli, J., Neunert, M., Tracey, B., Carpanese, F., et al. (2022). Magnetic control of tokamak plasmas through deep reinforcement learning. *Nature* 602, 414–419. doi:10.1038/s41586-021-04301-9.
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- Sutton, R. S., and Barto, A. G. (1998). *Reinforcement Learning: An introduction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
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