Artificial Intelligence

13. Planning, Part I: Framework

How to Describe Arbitrary Search Problems

Jana Koehler Álvaro Torralba

SAARLAND UNIVERSITY
COMPUTER SCIENCE

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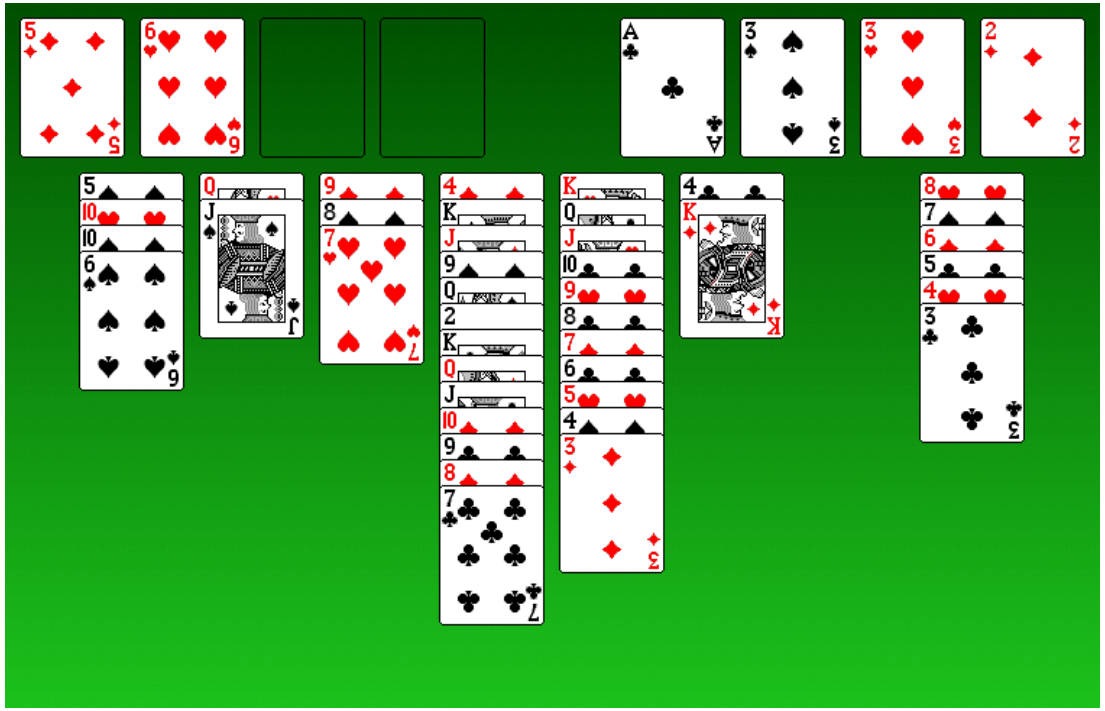
Agenda

1. Introduction
2. The History of Planning
3. The STRIPS Planning Formalism
4. The PDDL Language
5. Why Complexity Analysis?
6. Planning Complexity
7. Conclusion

Reminder: Classical Search Problems (Chapters 4 and 5)



- States: Card positions (*position_Jspades=Qhearts*).
- Actions: Card moves (*move_Jspades_Qhearts_freecell4*).
- Initial state: Start configuration.
- Goal states: All cards "home".
- Solution: Card moves solving this game.

Planning

Ambition:

Write one program that can solve all classical search problems.

Reminder: **(Chapter 4)**

- The **blackbox description** of a problem Π is an API (a programming interface) providing functionality allowing to construct the state space: InitialState(), GoalTest(s), ...

  $\rightarrow$ "Specifying the problem" = programming the API.

- The **declarative description** of Π comes in a problem description language. This allows to implement the API, and much more.

  $\rightarrow$ "Specifying the problem" = writing a problem description.

$\rightarrow$ Here, "problem description language" = planning language.

"Planning Language"?

How does a planning language describe a problem?

- A *logical description* of the possible states (vs. Blackbox: data structures). E.g.: predicate $Eq(.,.)$.
- A *logical description* of the initial state I (vs. data structures). E.g.: $Eq(x,1)$.
- A *logical description* of the goal condition G (vs. a goal-test function). E.g.: $Eq(x,2)$.
- A *logical description* of the set A of actions in terms of preconditions and effects (vs. functions returning applicable actions and successor states).
  E.g.: "increment x: pre $Eq(x,1)$, eff $Eq(x,2) \wedge \neg Eq(x,1)$".

$\rightarrow$ Solution (plan) $=$ sequence of actions from A, transforming I into a state that satisfies G. E.g.: "increment x".

"Planning Language"?

Disclaimer:

→ Planning languages go way beyond classical search problems. There are variants for inaccessible, stochastic, dynamic, continuous, and multi-agent settings.

- We focus on classical search for simplicity (combined with practical relevance).
- For a comprehensive overview, see [Ghallab *et al.* (2004)].

Algorithmic Problems in Planning

Satisficing Planning

Input: A planning task Π.
Output: A plan for Π, or "unsolvable" if no plan for Π exists.

Optimal Planning

Input: A planning task Π.
Output: An *optimal* plan for Π, or "unsolvable" if no plan for Π exists.

$\rightarrow$ The techniques successful for either one of these are almost disjoint. And satisficing planning is *much* more effective in practice.

$\rightarrow$ Programs solving these problems are called (optimal) planners, planning systems, or planning tools.

Our Agenda for This Topic

→ Our treatment of the topic "Planning" consists of Chapters 13 and 14.

- **This Chapter:** Background, planning languages, complexity.

  → Sets up the framework. Computational complexity is essential to distinguish different algorithmic problems, and for the design of heuristic functions (see next).

- **Chapter 14:** How to automatically generate a heuristic function, given planning language input?

  → Focussing on heuristic search as the solution method, this is the main question that needs to be answered.

Our Agenda for This Chapter

- **The History of Planning:** How did this come about?

  → Gives you some background, and motivates our choice to focus on heuristic search.

- **The STRIPS Planning Formalism:** Which concrete planning formalism will we be using?

  → Lays the framework we'll be looking at.

- **The PDDL Language:** What do the input files for off-the-shelf planning software look like?

  → So you can actually play around with such software. (Exercises!)

- **Why Complexity Analysis?** Why do we bother?

  → I'll try to convince you that this is USEFUL.

- **Planning Complexity:** How complex is planning?

  → The price of generality is complexity, and here's what that "price" is, exactly.

In the Beginning . . .

. . . Man invented Robots:

"Planning" as in "the making of plans by an autonomous robot".

In a little more detail:

- Newell and Simon (1963) introduced general problem solving.
- . . .
- Stanford Research Institute developed a robot named "Shakey".
- They needed a "planning" component taking decisions.
- They took inspiration from general problem solving and theorem proving, and called the resulting algorithm "STRIPS".

And then:

History of Planning Algorithms

Compilation into Logics/Theorem Proving:

- **Popular when:** Stone Age – 1990.
- **Approach:** *From planning task description, generate PL1 formula φ that is satisfiable iff there exists a plan; use a theorem prover on φ.*
- **Keywords/cites:** Situation calculus, frame problem, ...

Partial-Order Planning:

- **Popular when:** 1990 – 1995.
- **Approach:** *Starting at goal, extend partially ordered set of actions by inserting achievers for open sub-goals, or by adding ordering constraints to avoid conflicts.*
- **Keywords/cites:** UCPOP [Penberthy and Weld (1992)], causal links, flaw-selection strategies, ...

History of Planning Algorithms, ctd.

GraphPlan:

- **Popular when:** 1995 – 2000.
- **Approach:** *In a forward phase, build a layered "planning graph" whose "time steps" capture which pairs of actions can achieve which pairs of facts; in a backward phase, search this graph starting at goals and excluding options proved to not be feasible.*
- **Keywords/cites:** [Blum and Furst (1995, 1997); Koehler *et al.* (1997)], action/fact mutexes, step-optimal plans, ...

Planning as SAT:

- **Popular when:** 1996 – today.
- **Approach:** *From planning task description, generate propositional CNF formula φ_k that is satisfiable iff there exists a plan with k steps; use a SAT solver on φ_k, for different values of k.*
- **Keywords/cites:** [Kautz and Selman (1992, 1996); Rintanen *et al.* (2006); Rintanen (2010)], SAT encoding schemes, BlackBox, ...

History of Planning Algorithms, ctd.

Planning as Heuristic Search:

- **Popular when:** 1999 – today.
- **Approach:** Devise a method $\mathcal{R}$ to simplify ("relax") any planning task Π; given Π, solve $\mathcal{R}(\Pi)$ to generate a heuristic function h for informed search.
- **Keywords/cites:** [Bonet and Geffner (1999); Haslum and Geffner (2000); Bonet and Geffner (2001); Hoffmann and Nebel (2001); Edelkamp (2001); Gerevini *et al.* (2003); Helmert (2006); Helmert *et al.* (2007); Helmert and Geffner (2008); Karpas and Domshlak (2009); Helmert and Domshlak (2009); Richter and Westphal (2010); Nissim *et al.* (2011); Katz *et al.* (2012); Keyder *et al.* (2012); Katz *et al.* (2013); Domshlak *et al.* (2015)], critical path heuristics, ignoring delete lists, relaxed plans, landmark heuristics, abstractions, partial delete relaxation, ...

The International Planning Competition (IPC)

Competition?

"Run competing planners on a set of benchmarks devised by the IPC organizers. Give awards to the most effective planners."

- 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2018
- PDDL [McDermott *et al.* (1998); Fox and Long (2003); Hoffmann and Edelkamp (2005); Gerevini *et al.* (2009)]
- ≈ 50 domains, $\gg 1000$ instances, 74 (!!) planners in 2011
- Optimal track vs. satisficing track
- Various others: uncertainty, learning, ...

`http://ipc.icaps-conference.org/`

IPC 2000: Competitors

- BlackBox: Compilation to SAT [Kautz and Selman (1999)].
- HSP: Heuristic search [Bonet and Geffner (2001)].
- IPP: GraphPlan variant [Koehler *et al.* (1997)].
- STAN: Heuristic search.
- GRT: Heuristic search.
- Mips: Heuristic search.
- FF: Heuristic search [Hoffmann and Nebel (2001)].
- ... (13 altogether)

IPC 2000: Benchmark Domains

- Blocksworld: Move around blocks on a table (yeah, I know).
- Freecell: The card game.
- Logistics: Transport packages using trucks and airplanes.
- Miconic-ADL: A complex elevator-control problem (see slide 61).
- Schedule: A simple scheduling problem where objects must be processed with various machines.

IPC'00 Results, Fully Automatic Track

And Since Then?

Questionnaire

Question!

If planners x, y both compete in IPC'YY, and x wins, is x "better than" y?

(A): Yes.

(B): No.

"STRIPS" Planning

- STRIPS = Stanford Research Institute Problem Solver.

  STRIPS is the simplest possible (reasonably expressive) logics-based planning language.

- STRIPS has only Boolean variables: propositional logic atoms.
- Its preconditions/effects/goals are as canonical as imaginable:
  - Preconditions, goals: conjunctions of positive atoms.
  - Effects: conjunctions of literals (positive or negated atoms).
- We use the common special-case notation for this simple formalism.
- I'll outline some extensions beyond STRIPS later on, when we discuss PDDL.

→ **Historical note:** STRIPS [Fikes and Nilsson (1971)] was originally a planner (cf. Shakey), whose language actually wasn't quite that simple.

STRIPS Planning: Syntax

Definition (STRIPS Planning Task). *A STRIPS planning task, short planning task, is a 4-tuple $\Pi = (P, A, I, G)$ where:*

- *P is a finite set of facts (aka propositions).*
- *A is a finite set of actions; each $a \in A$ is a triple $a = (pre_a, add_a, del_a)$ of subsets of P referred to as the action's precondition, add list, and delete list respectively; we require that $add_a \cap del_a = \emptyset$.*
- *$I \subseteq P$ is the initial state.*
- *$G \subseteq P$ is the goal.*

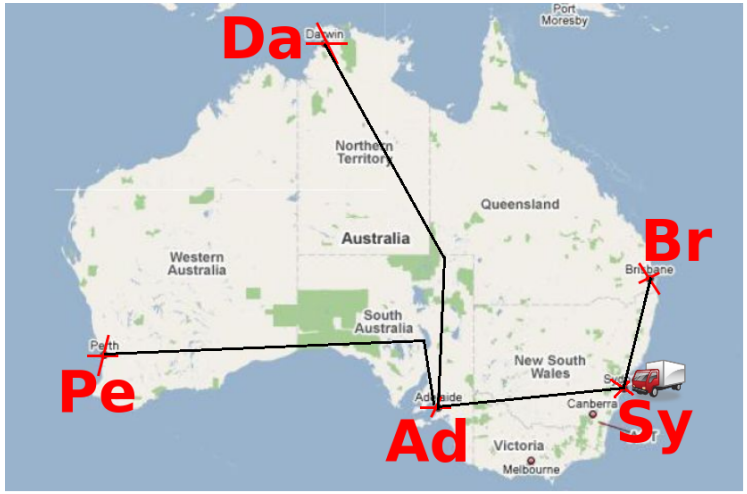
We will often give each action $a \in A$ a name (a string), and identify a with that name.

Note: We assume, for simplicity, that every action has cost 1. (Unit costs, cf. **Chapter 4**.)

"TSP" in Australia

[→ Strictly speaking, this is not actually a **TSP** problem instance; simplified/adapted for illustration.]

STRIPS Encoding of "TSP"



- Facts P: $\{at(x), visited(x) \mid x \in \{Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Darwin\}\}$.
- Initial state I:
- Goal G:

- Actions $a \in A$: $drive(x, y)$ where x, y have a road.
  Precondition pre_a:
  Add list add_a:
  Delete list del_a:
- Plan:

STRIPS Planning: Semantics

Definition (STRIPS State Space). *Let $\Pi = (P, A, c, I, G)$ be a STRIPS planning task. The state space of Π is $\Theta_\Pi = (S, A, T, I, S^G)$ where:*

- *The states (also world states) $S = 2^P$ are the subsets of P.*
- *A is Π's action set.*
- *The transitions are $T = \{s \xrightarrow{a} s' \mid pre_a \subseteq s, s' = appl(s, a)\}$.*

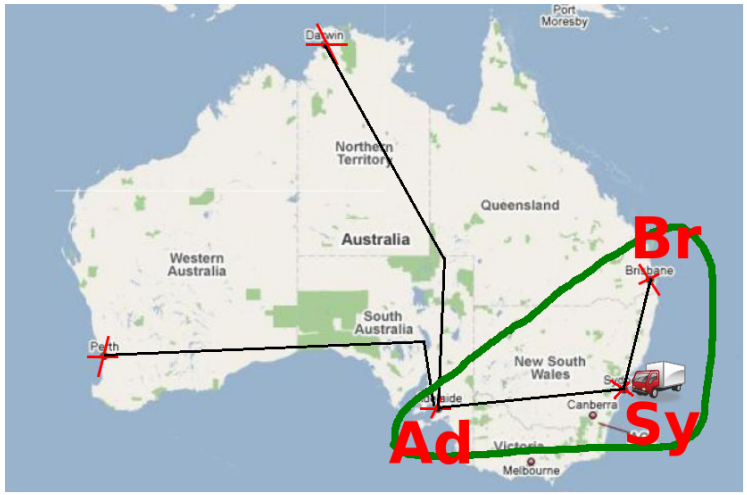
  If $pre_a \subseteq s$, then a is applicable in s and $appl(s, a) := (s \cup add_a) \setminus del_a$.
  If $pre_a \not\subseteq s$, then $appl(s, a)$ is undefined.
- *I is Π's initial state.*
- *The goal states $S^G = \{s \in S \mid G \subseteq s\}$ are those that satisfy Π's goal.*

An (optimal) plan for $s \in S$ is an (optimal) solution for s in Θ_Π, i.e., a path from s to some $s' \in S^G$. A solution for I is called a plan for Π. Π is solvable if a plan for Π exists.

For $\vec{a} = \langle a_1, \dots, a_n \rangle$, $appl(s, \vec{a}) := appl(\dots appl(appl(s, a_1), a_2) \dots, a_n)$ if each a_i is applicable in the respective state; else, $appl(s, \vec{a})$ is undefined.

Note: This is exactly like the state spaces of **Chapter 4**, without a cost function. Solutions are defined as before (paths from I to a state in S^G).

STRIPS Encoding of Simplified "TSP"

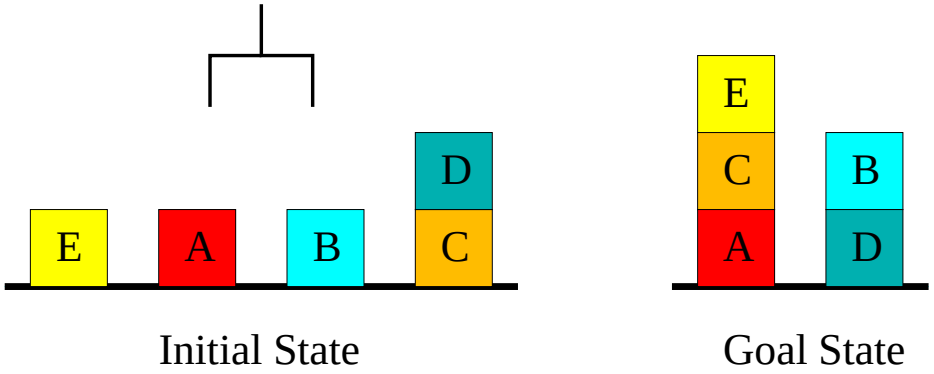


- Facts P: $\{at(x), visited(x) \mid x \in \{Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane\}\}$.
- Initial state I:
- Goal G: $\{visited(x) \mid x \in \{Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane\}\}$. (Note: no "$at(Sydney)$".)
- Actions $a \in A$: $drive(x, y)$ where x, y have a road.
  - Precondition pre_a:
  - Add list add_a:
  - Delete list del_a:

STRIPS Encoding of Simplified "TSP": State Space

→ Is this actually the state space?

(Oh no it's) The Blocksworld



- Facts: $on(x, y)$, $onTable(x)$, $clear(x)$, $holding(x)$, $armEmpty()$.
- Initial state: $\{onTable(E), clear(E), \ldots, onTable(C), on(D, C), clear(D), armEmpty()\}$.
- Goal: $\{on(E, C), on(C, A), on(B, D)\}$.
- Actions: $stack(x, y)$, $unstack(x, y)$, $putdown(x)$, $pickup(x)$.
- $stack(x, y)$?

Questionnaire

Question!

Which are correct encodings (ones that are part of <u>some</u> correct overall model) of the STRIPS Blocksworld $pickup(x)$ action schema?

(A): $(\{onTable(x), clear(x), armEmpty()\}, \{holding(x)\}, \{onTable(x)\})$.

(B): $(\{onTable(x), clear(x), armEmpty()\}, \{holding(x)\}, \{armEmpty()\})$.

(C): $(\{onTable(x), clear(x), armEmpty()\}, \{holding(x)\}, \{onTable(x), armEmpty(), clear(x)\})$.

(D): $(\{onTable(x), clear(x), armEmpty()\}, \{holding(x)\}, \{onTable(x), armEmpty()\})$.

PDDL History

Planning Domain Description Language:

- A description language for planning in the STRIPS formalism and various extensions.
- Used in the International Planning Competition (IPC).

- 1998: PDDL [McDermott *et al.* (1998)].
- 2000: "PDDL subset for the 2000 competition" [Bacchus (2000)].
- 2002: PDDL2.1, Levels 1-3 [Fox and Long (2003)].
- 2004: PDDL2.2 [Hoffmann and Edelkamp (2005)].
- 2006: PDDL3 [Gerevini *et al.* (2009)].

PDDL Quick Facts

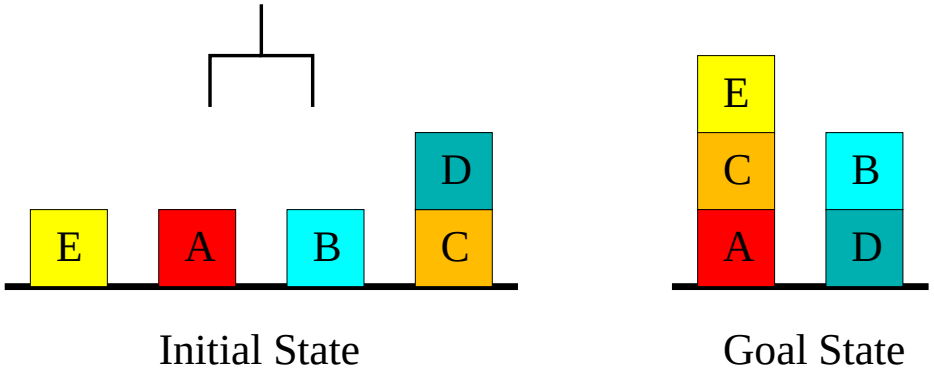
PDDL is not a propositional language:

- Representation is lifted, using object variables to be instantiated from a finite set of objects. (Similar to predicate logic)
- Action schemas parameterized by objects.
- Predicates to be instantiated with objects.

A PDDL planning task comes in two pieces:

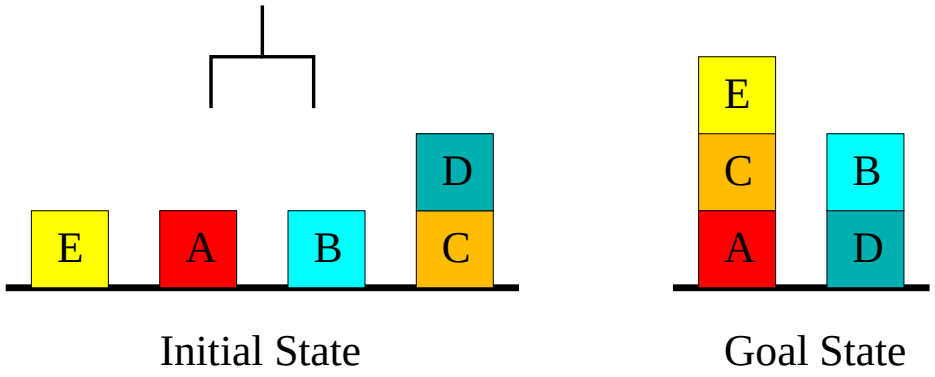
- The domain file and the problem file.
- The problem file gives the objects, the initial state, and the goal state.
- The domain file gives the predicates and the operators; each benchmark domain has *one* domain file.

The Blocksworld in PDDL: Domain File




```
(define (domain blocksworld)
(:predicates (clear ?x) (holding ?x) (on ?x ?y)
             (on-table ?x) (arm-empty))
(:action stack
 :parameters (?x ?y)
 :precondition (and (clear ?y) (holding ?x))
 :effect (and (arm-empty) (on ?x ?y)
              (not (clear ?y)) (not (holding ?x)))
)
...
```

The Blocksworld in PDDL: Problem File




```
(define (problem bw-abcde)
(:domain blocksworld)
(:objects a b c d e)
(:init (on-table a) (clear a)
       (on-table b) (clear b)
       (on-table e) (clear e)
       (on-table c) (on d c) (clear d)
       (arm-empty))
(:goal (and (on e c) (on c a) (on b d))))
```

PDDL in 1998

STRIPS + ADL (Action Description Language):

- Arbitrary first-order logic formulas in action preconditions and the goal.
- Conditional effects, i.e., effects that occur only if their separate effect condition holds.

ADL is a real headache to implement:

- The systems that do handle ADL *compile* it down to simpler formats [Gazen and Knoblock (1997)]. (Typically, STRIPS with conditional effects.)
- Example FF: 7000 C lines for compilation, 2000 lines core planner.

Miconic-ADL "Stop" Action Schema in PDDL

PDDL in 2000

Fahiem Bacchus selected a subset of the ADL subset of McDermott's PDDL for the 2000 competition.

PDDL in 2002

Maria Fox and Derek Long promoted **numeric and temporal planning:**

- **PDDL 2.1 level 1**: Bacchus's PDDL.
- **PDDL 2.1 level 2**: Level 1 extended with numeric state variables. Comparisons between numeric expressions are allowed as logical atoms ("$fuel(v) \geq dist(x, y) * consumption(v)$"). Effects can assign the value of an expression to a numeric variable ("$fuel(v) := fuel(v) - dist(x, y) * consumption(v)$").
- **PDDL 2.1 level 3**: Level 2 extended with action durations. Actions take an amount of time given by the value of a numeric expression ("$dist(x, y)/speed(v)$"). Conditions and effects are evaluated at either the start or the end of the action, and several actions can be executed in parallel.

PDDL After 2002

Questionnaire

Question!

What is PDDL good for?

(A): Nothing.

(B): Free beer.

(C): Those AI planning guys.

(D): Being lazy at work.

Why Complexity Analysis?

Reminder (?): **NP** and **PSPACE**

Def Turing machine: Works on a tape consisting of tape cells, across which its R/W head moves. The machine has internal states. There are transition rules specifying, given the current cell content and internal state, what the subsequent internal state will be, how what the R/W head does (write a symbol and/or move). Some internal states are accepting.

Def NP: Decision problems for which there exists a *non-deterministic* Turing machine that runs in *time* polynomial in the size of its input. Accepts if *at least one* of the possible runs accepts.

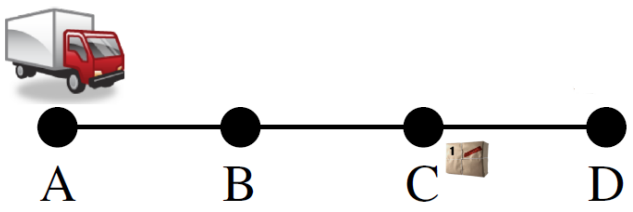
Def PSPACE: Decision problems for which there exists a *deterministic* Turing machine that runs in *space* polynomial in the size of its input.

Relation: Non-deterministic polynomial space can be simulated in deterministic polynomial space. Thus **PSPACE** = **NPSPACE**, and hence (trivially) **NP** $\subseteq$ **PSPACE**. It is commonly believed that **NP** $\not\supseteq$ **PSPACE** (similar to **P** $\subseteq$ **NP**).

$\rightarrow$ For comprehensive details, please see a text book. My personal favorite is [Garey and Johnson (1979)].

The "Only-Adds" Relaxation

Example: "Logistics"



- Facts P: $\{truck(x) \mid x \in \{A, B, C, D\}\} \cup \{pack(x) \mid x \in \{A, B, C, D, T\}\}$.
- Initial state I: $\{truck(A),\ pack(C)\}$.
- Goal G: $\{truck(A),\ pack(D)\}$.
- Actions A: (Notated as "precondition $\Rightarrow$ adds, $\neg$ deletes")
  - $drive(x, y)$, where x, y have a road: "$truck(x) \Rightarrow truck(y), \neg truck(x)$".
  - $load(x)$: "$truck(x), pack(x) \Rightarrow pack(T), \neg pack(x)$".
  - $unload(x)$: "$truck(x), pack(T) \Rightarrow pack(x), \neg pack(T)$".

Only-Adds Relaxation: Drop the preconditions and deletes.

"$drive(x, y)$: $\Rightarrow truck(y)$"; "$load(x)$: $\Rightarrow pack(T)$"; "$unload(x)$: $\Rightarrow pack(x)$".

$\rightarrow$ Say we want to use this for generating a heuristic function.

Solving Only-Adds STRIPS Tasks

Solving Only-Adds STRIPS Tasks, ctd.

Solving Only-Adds STRIPS Tasks, ctd.

Questionnaire

Assume: In 3 years from now, you have finished your studies and are working in your first industry job. Your boss Mr. X gives you a problem and says "Solve It!". By which he means, "write a program that solves it efficiently".

Question!

How could knowing about NP-hardness help?

Reminder: Algorithmic Problems in Planning

Satisficing Planning

Input: A planning task Π.
Output: A plan for Π, or "unsolvable" if no plan for Π exists.

Optimal Planning

Input: A planning task Π.
Output: An *optimal* plan for Π, or "unsolvable" if no plan for Π exists.

Decision Problems in (STRIPS) Planning

Definition (PlanEx). *By PlanEx, we denote the problem of deciding, given a STRIPS planning task Π, whether or not there exists a plan for Π.*

→ Corresponds to satisficing planning.

Definition (PlanLen). *By PlanLen, we denote the problem of deciding, given a STRIPS planning task Π and an integer B, whether or not there exists a plan for Π of length at most B.*

→ Corresponds to optimal planning.

Definition (PolyPlanLen). *By PolyPlanLen, we denote the problem of deciding, given a STRIPS planning task Π and an integer B bounded by a polynomial in the size of Π, whether or not there exists a plan for Π of length at most B.*

→ Corresponds to optimal planning with "small" plans. Example of a planning domain with exponentially long plans?

Complexity of PlanEx [Bylander (1994)]

Lemma. PlanEx is **PSPACE**-hard.

→ "*At least* as hard as any other problem contained in **PSPACE**."

Proof Sketch. Given a Turing machine with space bounded by polynomial $p(|w|)$, we can in polynomial time (in the size of the machine) generate an equivalent STRIPS planning task. Say the possible symbols in tape cells are $x_1, \ldots, x_m$ and the internal states are $s_1, \ldots, s_n$, accepting state s_{acc}.

- The contents of the tape cells: $in(1, x_1), \ldots, in(p(|w|), x_1), \ldots, in(1, x_m), \ldots, in(p(|w|), x_m)$.
- The position of the R/W head: $at(1), \ldots, at(p(|w|))$.
- The internal state of the machine: $state(s_1), \ldots, state(s_n)$.
- Transitions rules $\mapsto$ STRIPS actions; accepting state $\mapsto$ STRIPS goal $\{state(s_{acc})\}$; initial state obvious.
- This reduction to STRIPS runs in polynomial-time because we need only polynomially many facts.

Complexity of PlanEx, ctd. [Bylander (1994)]

Lemma. *PlanEx is a member of* **PSPACE**.

→ "*At most* as hard as any other problem contained in **PSPACE**."

Proof. Because **PSPACE** = **NPSPACE**, it suffices to show that PlanEx is a member of **NPSPACE**:

1. $s := I$; $l := 0$;
2. Guess an applicable action a, compute the outcome state s', set $l := l + 1$;
3. If s' contains the goal then succeed;
4. If $l \geq 2^{|P|}$ then fail else goto 2;

→ Remembering the actual action *sequence* would take exponential space in case of exponentially long plans (cf. slide 55). But, to decide PlanEx, we only need to remember its length.

Theorem (Complexity of PlanEx). *PlanEx is* **PSPACE**-*complete.*
(Immediate from previous two lemmas)

Complexity of PlanLen [Bylander (1994)]

PlanLen isn't any easier than PlanEx:

Corollary. *PlanLen is* **PSPACE***-complete.*

Proof. Membership: Same as before but failing at $l \geq B$. Hardness?

PolyPlanLen is easier than PlanEx:

Theorem. *PolyPlanLen is* **NP***-complete.*

Proof. Membership?

$\rightarrow$ Bounding plan length does not help in the general case as we can set the bound to a trivial (exponential) upper bound on plan length. If we restrict plan length to be "short" (polynomial), planning becomes easier.

Domain-Specific PlanEx vs. PlanLen . . .

. . . is more interesting than the general case.

- *In general*, both have the same complexity.
- *Within particular applications*, bounded length plan existence is often harder than plan existence.
- This happens in many IPC benchmark domains: PlanLen is **NP**-complete while PlanEx is in **P**.
- For example: Blocksworld and Logistics.

→ PlanEx ≈ satisficing planning, PlanLen ≈ optimal planning. In practice, optimal planning is (almost) never "easy".

The Blocksworld is Hard?

The Blocksworld is Hard!

Miconic-ADL: PlanEx is Hard

Summary

- General problem solving attempts to develop solvers that perform well across a large class of problems.
- Planning, as considered here, is a form of general problem solving dedicated to the class of classical search problems. (Actually, we also address inaccessible, stochastic, dynamic, continuous, and multi-agent settings.)
- Heuristic search planning has dominated the International Planning Competition (IPC). We focus on it here.
- STRIPS is the simplest possible, while reasonably expressive, language for our purposes. It uses Boolean variables (facts), and defines actions in terms of precondition, add list, and delete list.
- PDDL is the de-facto standard language for describing planning problems.
- Plan existence (bounded or not) is **PSPACE**-complete to decide for STRIPS. If we bound plans polynomially, we get down to **NP**-completeness.

Reading

- *Chapters 10: Classical Planning and 11: Planning and Acting in the Real World* [Russell and Norvig (2010)].

  Content: Although the book is named "A Modern Approach", the planning section was written long before the IPC was even dreamt of, before PDDL was conceived, and several years before heuristic search hit the scene. As such, what we have right now is the attempt of two outsiders trying in vain to catch up with the dramatic changes in planning since 1995.

  Chapter 10 is Ok as a background read. Some issues are, imho, misrepresented, and it's far from being an up-to-date account. But it's Ok to get some additional intuitions in words different from my own.

  Chapter 11 is annoyingly named (I've seen lots of classical planning in the "real world"), but is useful in our context here because I don't cover any of it. If you're interested in extended/alternative planning paradigms, do read it.

Reading, ctd.

- *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Planning (But Were Afraid to Ask)* [Hoffmann (2011)].

  Available at:

  `http://fai.cs.uni-saarland.de/hoffmann/papers/ki11.pdf`

  Content: My personal perspective on planning. Very modern indeed. Excerpt from the abstract:

  The area has long had an affinity towards playful illustrative examples, imprinting it on the mind of many a student as an area concerned with the rearrangement of blocks, and with the order in which to put on socks and shoes (not to mention the disposal of bombs in toilets). Working on the assumption that this "student" is you – the readers in earlier stages of their careers – I herein aim to answer three questions that you surely desired to ask back then already:

  What is it good for? Does it work? Is it interesting to do research in?

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