# Markov Decision Processes

CSE 415: Introduction to Artificial Intelligence
University of Washington
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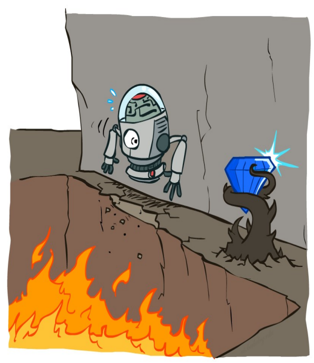
## Outline

- Grid World Example
- MDP definition
- Optimal Policies
- Auto Racing Example
- Utilities of Sequences
- Bellman Updates
- Value Iterations



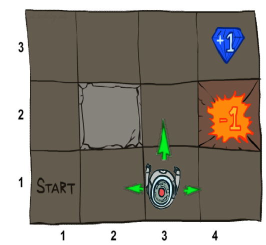
## Non-Deterministic Search





## Example: Grid World

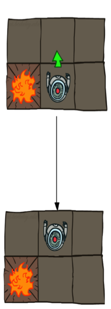
- A maze-like problem
  - The agent lives in a grid
  - Walls block the agent's path
- Noisy movement: actions do not always go as planned
  - 80% of the time, the action North takes the agent North (if there is no wall there)
  - 10% of the time, North takes the agent West; 10% East
  - If there is a wall in the direction the agent would have been taken, the agent stays put
- The agent receives rewards each time step
  - Small "living" reward each step (can be negative)
  - Big rewards come at the end (good or bad)
- Goal: maximize sum of rewards



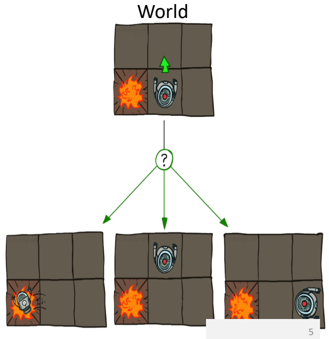



## Grid World Actions

Deterministic Grid World



Stochastic Grid World

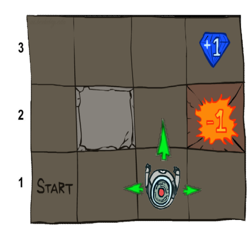





## Markov Decision Processes

- An MDP is defined by:
  - A set of states s in S
  - A set of actions a in A
  - A transition function T(s, a, s')
    - Probability that a from s leads to s', i.e., P(s' | s, a)
    - Also called the model or the dynamics

$T(s_{11}, E, \ldots$
…
$T(s_{31}, N, s_{11}) = 0$
…
$T(s_{31}, N, s_{32}) = 0.8$
$T(s_{31}, N, s_{21}) = 0.1$
$T(s_{31}, N, s_{41}) = 0.1$
…




*T is a Big Table!*
*11 X 4 x 11 = 484 entries*

**For now, we give this as input to the agent**

# Markov Decision Processes

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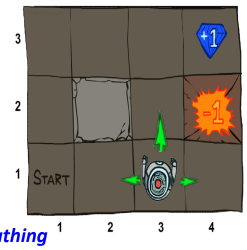
  - A reward function R(s, a, s')



...
$R(s_{32}, N, s_{33}) = -0.01$ ← ***Cost of breathing***
...
$R(s_{32}, N, s_{42}) = -1.01$ R is also a Big Table!
...
$R(s_{33}, E, s_{43}) = 0.99$ For now, we also give this to the agent



# Markov Decision Processes

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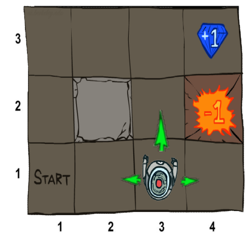

...
$R(s_{33}) = -0.01$
$R(s_{42}) = -1.01$
$R(s_{43}) = 0.99$



# Markov Decision Processes

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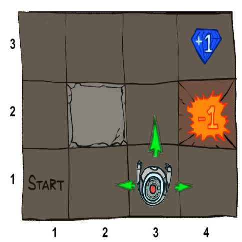
  - A transition function T(s, a, s')
    - Probability that a from s leads to s', i.e., P(s' | s, a)
    - Also called the model or the dynamics
  - A reward function R(s, a, s')
    - Sometimes just R(s) or R(s')
  - A start state
  - Maybe a terminal state



- MDPs are non-deterministic search problems
  - One way to solve them is with expectimax search
  - We'll have a new tool soon



# What is Markov about MDPs?

- "Markov" generally means that given the present state, the future and the past are independent
- For Markov decision processes, "Markov" means action outcomes depend only on the current state

$$P(S_{t+1} = s' | S_t = s_t, A_t = a_t, S_{t-1} = s_{t-1}, A_{t-1}, \ldots S_0 = s_0)$$

$$= P(S_{t+1} = s' | S_t = s_t, A_t = a_t)$$

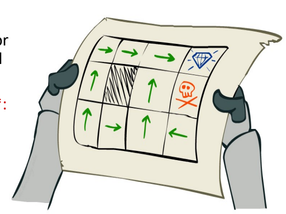
- This is just like search, where the successor function could only depend on the current state (not the history)

Andrey Markov (1856-1922)



# Policies

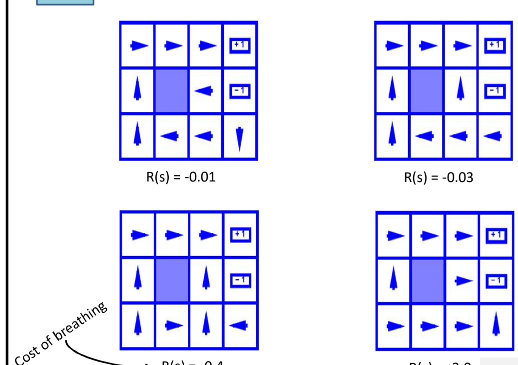
- In deterministic single-agent search problems, we wanted an optimal plan, or sequence of actions, from start to a goal
- For MDPs, we want an optimal policy $\pi^*$: S → A
  - A policy $\pi$ gives an action for each state
  - An optimal policy is one that maximizes expected utility if followed
  - An explicit policy defines a reflex agent
- Expectimax didn't compute entire policies
  - It computed the action for a single state only



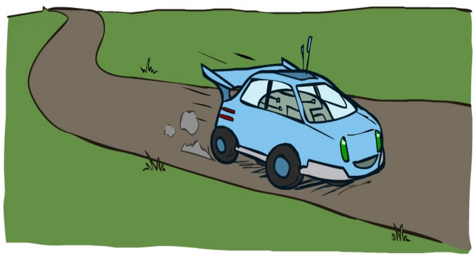
Optimal policy when R(s, a, s') = -0.03 for all non-terminals s



# Optimal Policies



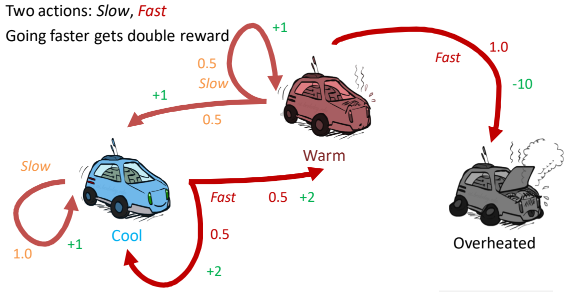
## Example: Racing





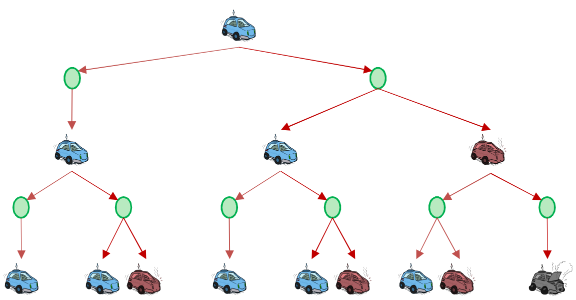
## Example: Racing

- A robot car wants to travel far, quickly
- Three states: Cool, Warm, Overheated
- Two actions: *Slow*, *Fast*
- Going faster gets double reward





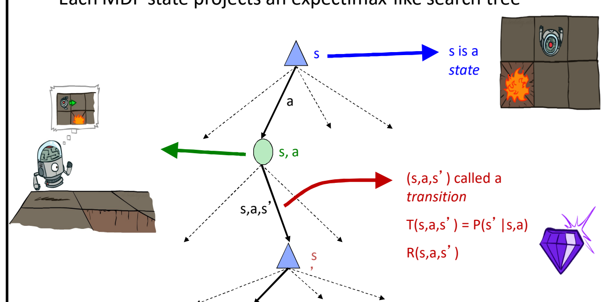

## Racing Search Tree





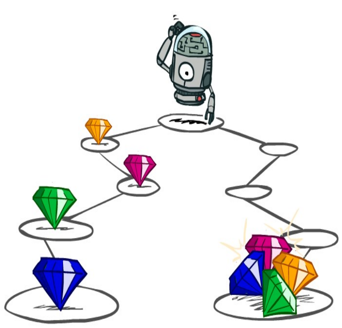
## MDP Search Trees

- Each MDP state projects an expectimax-like search tree





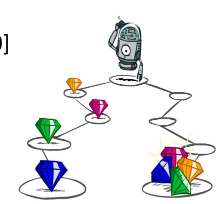

## Utilities of Sequences





## Utilities of Sequences

- What preferences should an agent have over reward sequences?
- More or less? [1, 2, 2] or [2, 3, 4]
- Now or later? [0, 0, 1] or [1, 0, 0]



## Discounting

- It's reasonable to maximize the sum of rewards
- It's also reasonable to prefer rewards now to rewards later
- One solution: values of rewards decay exponentially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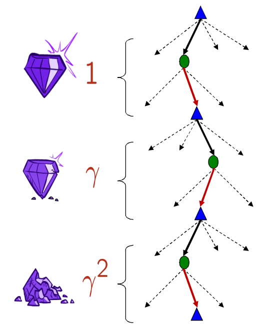
## Discounting

- How to discount?
  - Each time we descend a level, we multiply in the discount once
- Why discount?
  - Sooner rewards probably do have higher utility than later rewards
  - Also helps our algorithms converge
- Example: discount of 0.5
  - U([1,2,3]) = 1*1 + 0.5*2 + 0.25*3
  - U([1,2,3]) < U([3,2,1])

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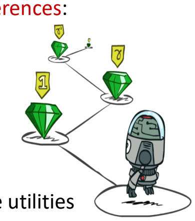
## Stationary Preferences

- Theorem: if we assume stationary preferences:

$$[a_1, a_2, \ldots] \succ [b_1, b_2, \ldots]$$
$$\Updownarrow$$
$$[r, a_1, a_2, \ldots] \succ [r, b_1, b_2, \ldots]$$



- Then: there are only two ways to define utilities
  - Additive utility: $U([r_0, r_1, r_2, \ldots]) = r_0 + r_1 + r_2 + \cdots$
  - Discounted utility: $U([r_0, r_1, r_2, \ldots]) = r_0 + \gamma r_1 + \gamma^2 r_2 \cdots$

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## Quiz: Discounting

$$10 * \gamma^3 = 1 * \gamma$$
$$\gamma^2 = \frac{1}{10}$$

- Given:

| a | b | c | d | e |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | | | | 1 |

  - Actions: East, West, and Exit (only available in exit states a, e)
  - Transitions: deterministic

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | | | | 1 |

- Quiz 1: For γ = 1, what is the optimal policy?
- Quiz 2: For γ = 0.1, what is the optimal policy?
- Quiz 3: For which γ are West and East equally good when in state d?

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | | | | 1 |

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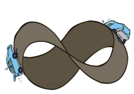
## Infinite Utilities?!

- Problem: What if the game lasts forever? Do we get infinite rewards?
- Solutions:
  - Finite horizon: (similar to depth-limited search)
    - Terminate episodes after a fixed T steps (e.g. life)
    - Gives nonstationary policies (γ depends on time left)
  - Discounting: use 0 < γ < 1

$$U([r_0, \ldots r_\infty]) = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^t r_t \leq R_{\max}/(1-\gamma)$$

    - Smaller γ means smaller "horizon" – shorter term focus
  - Absorbing state: guarantee that for every policy, a terminal state will eventually be reached (like "overheated" for racing)



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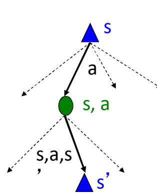
## Recap: Defining MDPs

- Markov decision processes:
  - Set of states S
  - Start state $s_0$
  - Set of actions A
  - Transitions P(s'|s,a) (or T(s,a,s'))
  - Rewards R(s,a,s') (and discount γ)




- MDP quantities so far:
  - Policy = Choice of action for each state
  - Utility = sum of (discounted) rewards

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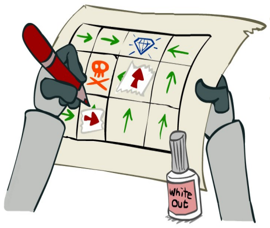
# Solving MDPs

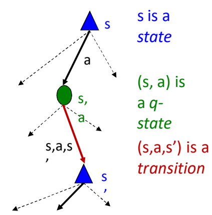



- Value Iteration
- Policy Iteration
- Reinforcement Learning



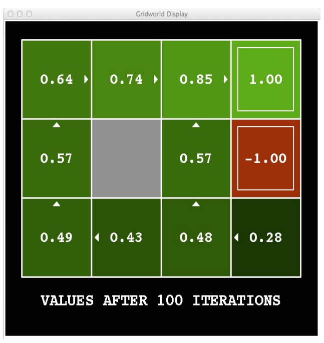
# Optimal Quantities

- The value (utility) of a state s:
  $V^*(s)$ = expected utility starting in s and acting optimally
- The value (utility) of a q-state (s,a):
  $Q^*(s,a)$ = expected utility starting out having taken action a from state s and (thereafter) acting optimally
- The optimal policy:
  $\pi^*(s)$ = optimal action from state s





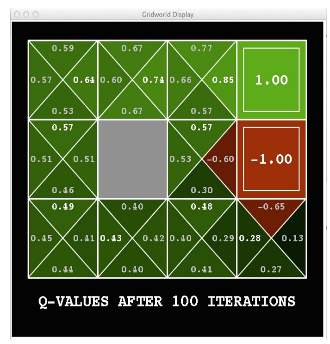

# Snapshot of Demo – Gridworld V Values




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



# Snapshot of Demo – Gridworld Q Values

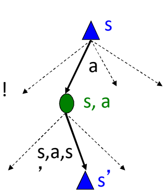



Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



# Values of States

- Fundamental operation: compute the (expectimax) value of a state
  - Expected utility under optimal action
  - Average sum of (discounted) rewards
  - This is just what expectimax computed!
- Recursive definition of value:



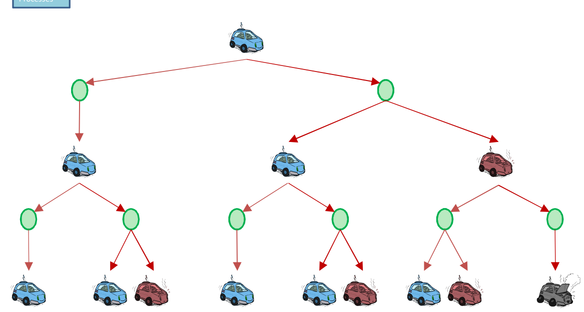

$$V^*(s) = \max_a Q^*(s,a)$$

$$Q^*(s,a) = \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[ R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s') \right]$$

$$V^*(s) = \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[ R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s') \right]$$

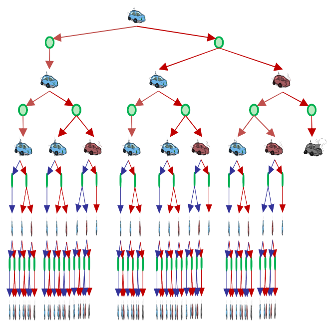


# Racing Search Tree



## Racing Search Tree

- We're doing way too much work with expectimax!
- Problem: States are repeated
  - Idea: Only compute needed quantities once
- Problem: Tree goes on forever
  - Idea: Do a depth-limited computation, but with increasing depths until change is small
  - Note: deep parts of the tree eventually don't matter if $\gamma < 1$



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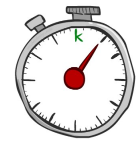
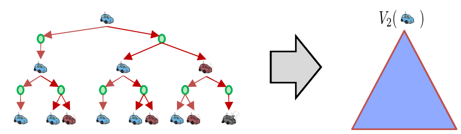
## Time-Limited Values

- Key idea: time-limited values
- Define $V_k(s)$ to be the optimal value of s if the game ends in k more time steps
  - Equivalently, it's what a depth-k expectimax would give from s

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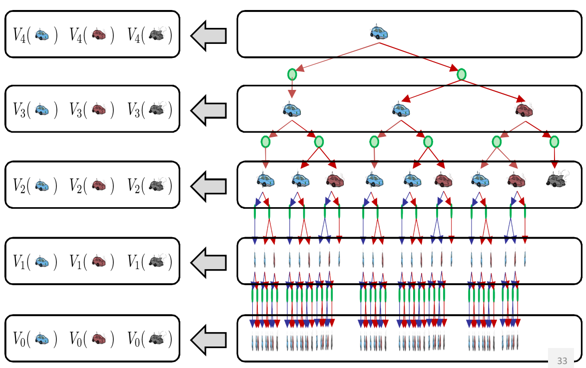
## Computing Time-Limited Values

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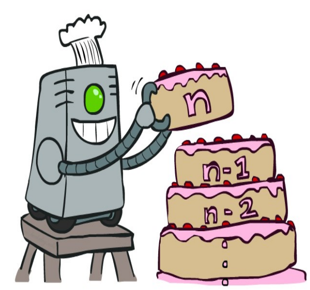
## Value Iteration

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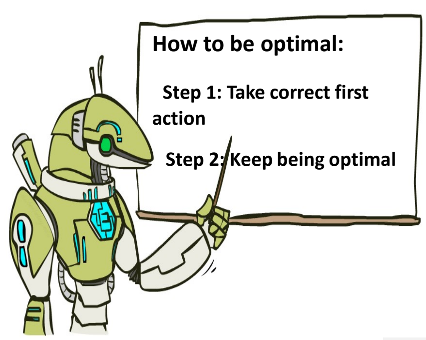
## The Bellman Equations

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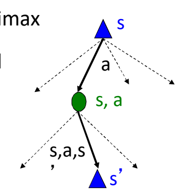
## The Bellman Equations

- Definition of "optimal utility" via expectimax recurrence gives a simple one-step lookahead relationship amongst optimal utility values

$$V^*(s) = \max_a Q^*(s,a)$$

$$Q^*(s,a) = \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s')\right]$$

$$V^*(s) = \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s')\right]$$




- These are the Bellman equations, and they characterize optimal values in a way we'll use over and over

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## Value Iteration

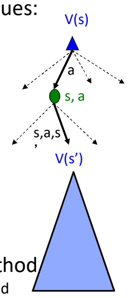
- Bellman equations characterize the optimal values:

$$V^*(s) = \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s')\right]$$

- Value iteration computes them:

$$V_{k+1}(s) \leftarrow \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V_k(s')\right]$$

- Value iteration is just a fixed point solution method
  - … though the $V_k$ vectors are also interpretable as time-limited values

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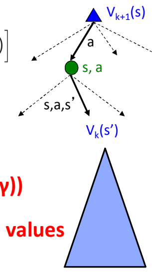
## Value Iteration Algorithm

- **Start with $V_0(s) = 0$:**
- **Given vector of $V_k(s)$ values, do one ply of expectimax from each state:**

$$V_{k+1}(s) \leftarrow \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V_k(s')\right]$$

- **Repeat until convergence**




- **Complexity of each iteration: O(S²A)**
  - **Number of iterations: poly(|S|, |A|, 1/(1-γ))**
- **Theorem: will converge to unique optimal values**

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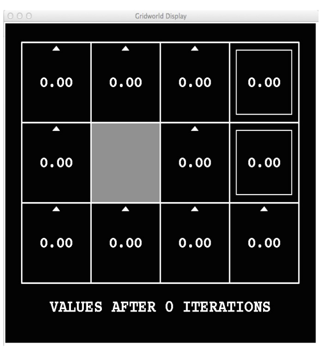
## k=0




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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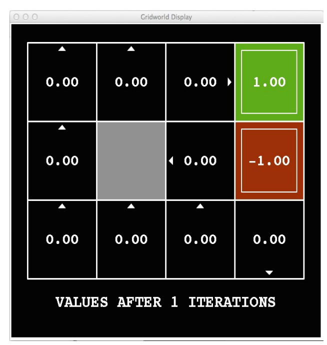
## k=1




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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## k=2


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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## k=3


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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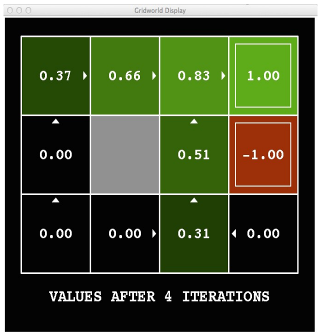
## k=4




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=5


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=6


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=7


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=8

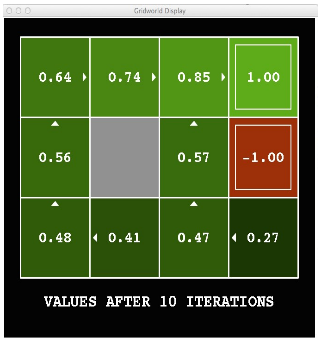

Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=9


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

## k=10




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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## k=11


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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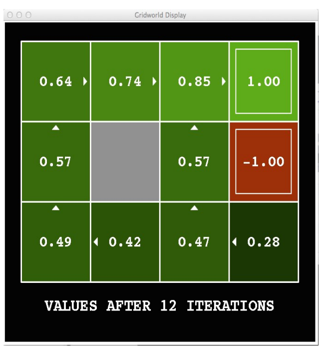
## k=12




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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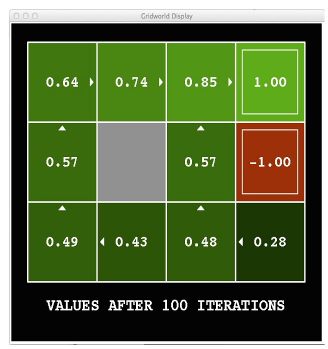
## k=100




Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

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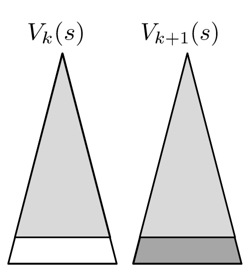
## Convergence*

- How do we know the $V_k$ vectors will converge?
- Case 1: If the tree has maximum depth M, then $V_M$ holds the actual untruncated values
- Case 2: If the discount is less than 1
  - Sketch: For any state $V_k$ and $V_{k+1}$ can be viewed as depth k+1 expectimax results in nearly identical search trees
  - The max difference happens if big reward at k+1 level
  - That last layer is at best all $R_{MAX}$
  - But everything is discounted by $\gamma^k$ that far out
  - So $V_k$ and $V_{k+1}$ are at most $\gamma^k$ max|R| different
  - So as k increases, the values converge

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## Computing Actions from Values

- Let's imagine we have the optimal values V*(s)
- How should we act?
  - It's not obvious!
- We need to do a mini-expectimax (one step)


$$\pi^*(s) = \arg\max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s')[R(s,a,s') + \gamma V^*(s')]$$

- This is called policy extraction, since it gets the policy implied by the values

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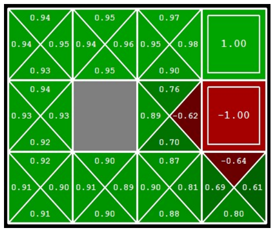
## Computing Actions from Q-Values

- Let's imagine we have the optimal q-values:




- How should we act?
  - Completely trivial to decide!

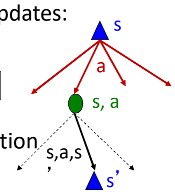
$$\pi^*(s) = \arg\max_a Q^*(s,a)$$

- Important lesson: actions are easier to select from q-values than values!



## Problems with Value Iteration

- Value iteration repeats the Bellman updates:




$$V_{k+1}(s) \leftarrow \max_a \sum_{s'} T(s,a,s') \left[ R(s,a,s') + \gamma V_k(s') \right]$$

- Problem 1: It's slow – O($S^2A$) per iteration
- Problem 2: The "max" at each state rarely changes
- Problem 3: The policy often converges long before the values



## VI → Asynchronous VI

- Is it essential to back up ***all*** states in each iteration?
  - No!
- States may be backed up
  - many times or not at all
  - in any order
- As long as no state gets starved…
  - convergence properties still hold!!



## k=1


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=2


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0



## k=3


Noise = 0.2
Discount = 0.9
Living reward = 0

Md
Markov
Decision
Processes

## Asynch VI: Prioritized Sweeping

- Why backup a state if values of successors same?
- Prefer backing a state
  - whose successors had most change
- Priority Queue of (state, expected change in value)
- Backup in the order of priority
- After backing a state update priority queue
  - for all predecessors

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