Constraint Satisfaction Problems

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What is Search For?

- Assumptions about the world: a single agent, deterministic actions, fully observed state, discrete state space

- Planning: sequences of actions
  - The path to the goal is the important thing
  - Paths have various costs, depths
  - Heuristics give problem-specific guidance

- Identification: assignments to variables
  - The goal itself is important, not the path
  - All paths at the same depth (for some formulations)
  - CSPs are specialized for identification problems
Constraint Satisfaction Problems
Constraint Satisfaction Problems

- **Standard search problems:**
  - State is a “black box”: arbitrary data structure
  - Goal test can be any function over states
  - Successor function can also be anything

- **Constraint satisfaction problems (CSPs):**
  - A special subset of search problems
  - State is defined by variables $X_i$ with values from a domain $D$ (sometimes $D$ depends on $i$)
  - Goal test is a set of constraints specifying allowable combinations of values for subsets of variables

- Allows useful general-purpose algorithms with more power than standard search algorithms
CSP Examples
Example: Map Coloring

- **Variables:** WA, NT, Q, NSW, V, SA, T

- **Domains:** $D = \{\text{red, green, blue}\}$

- **Constraints:** adjacent regions must have different colors
  
  *Implicit:* WA $\neq$ NT

  *Explicit:* $(WA, NT) \in \{(\text{red, green}), (\text{red, blue}), \ldots\}$

- **Solutions** are assignments satisfying all constraints, e.g.:
  
  $\{WA=\text{red, NT=green, Q=red, NSW=green, V=red, SA=blue, T=green}\}$
Example: N-Queens

- **Formulation 1:**
  - **Variables:** \( X_{ij} \)
  - **Domains:** \( \{0, 1\} \)
  - **Constraints**

\[
\forall i, j, k \quad (X_{ij}, X_{ik}) \in \{(0, 0), (0, 1), (1, 0)\} \\
\forall i, j, k \quad (X_{ij}, X_{kj}) \in \{(0, 0), (0, 1), (1, 0)\} \\
\forall i, j, k \quad (X_{ij}, X_{i+k,j+k}) \in \{(0, 0), (0, 1), (1, 0)\} \\
\forall i, j, k \quad (X_{ij}, X_{i+k,j-k}) \in \{(0, 0), (0, 1), (1, 0)\}
\]

\[
\sum_{i,j} X_{ij} = N
\]
Example: N-Queens

- **Formulation 2:**
  - **Variables:** \( Q_k \)
  - **Domains:** \( \{1, 2, 3, \ldots N\} \)
  - **Constraints:**
    - **Implicit:** \( \forall i, j \text{ non-threatening}(Q_i, Q_j) \)
    - **Explicit:** \( (Q_1, Q_2) \in \{(1, 3), (1, 4), \ldots\} \)
      
      \[ \ldots \]
Constraint Graphs
- Binary CSP: each constraint relates (at most) two variables
- Binary constraint graph: nodes are variables, arcs show constraints
- General-purpose CSP algorithms use the graph structure to speed up search. E.g., Tasmania is an independent subproblem!
Example: Cryptarithmetic

- **Variables:**
  \[ F \ T \ U \ W \ R \ O \ X_1 \ X_2 \ X_3 \]

- **Domains:**
  \[ \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9\} \]

- **Constraints:**
  \[ \text{alldiff}(F, T, U, W, R, O) \]
  \[ O + O = R + 10 \cdot X_1 \]
  \[ \ldots \]
Example: Sudoku

- Variables:
  - Each (open) square
- Domains:
  - \{1,2,\ldots,9\}
- Constraints:
  - 9-way alldiff for each column
  - 9-way alldiff for each row
  - 9-way alldiff for each region
  (or can have a bunch of pairwise inequality constraints)
Varieties of CSPs

- **Discrete Variables**
  - Finite domains
    - Size $d$ means $O(d^n)$ complete assignments
    - E.g., Boolean CSPs, including Boolean satisfiability (NP-complete)
  - Infinite domains (integers, strings, etc.)
    - E.g., job scheduling, variables are start/end times for each job
    - Linear constraints solvable, nonlinear undecidable

- **Continuous variables**
  - E.g., start/end times for Hubble Telescope observations
  - Linear constraints solvable in polynomial time by LP methods
Varieties of Constraints

- **Varieties of Constraints**
  - Unary constraints involve a single variable (equivalent to reducing domains), e.g.:
    
    \[ SA \neq \text{green} \]
  - Binary constraints involve pairs of variables, e.g.:
    
    \[ SA \neq WA \]
  - Higher-order constraints involve 3 or more variables: e.g., cryptarithmetic column constraints

- **Preferences (soft constraints):**
  - E.g., red is better than green
  - Often representable by a cost for each variable assignment
  - Gives constrained optimization problems
  - (We’ll ignore these until we get to Bayes’ nets)
Real-World CSPs

- Assignment problems: e.g., who teaches what class
- Timetabling problems: e.g., which class is offered when and where?
- Hardware configuration
- Transportation scheduling
- Factory scheduling
- Circuit layout
- Fault diagnosis
- ... lots more!

- Many real-world problems involve real-valued variables...
Solving CSPs
Standard Search Formulation

- Standard search formulation of CSPs

- States defined by the values assigned so far (partial assignments)
  - Initial state: the empty assignment, {}
  - Successor function: assign a value to an unassigned variable
  - Goal test: the current assignment is complete and satisfies all constraints

- We’ll start with the straightforward, naïve approach, then improve it
Search Methods

- What would BFS do?
- What would DFS do?
Demo: DFS CSP
Search Methods

- What would BFS do?
- What would DFS do?
- What problems does naïve search have?
Backtracking Search
Backtracking Search

- Backtracking search is the basic uninformed algorithm for solving CSPs

- Idea 1: One variable at a time
  - Variable assignments are commutative, so fix ordering
  - I.e., [WA = red then NT = green] same as [NT = green then WA = red]
  - Only need to consider assignments to a single variable at each step

- Idea 2: Check constraints as you go
  - I.e. consider only values which do not conflict previous assignments
  - Might have to do some computation to check the constraints
  - “Incremental goal test”

- Depth-first search with these two improvements is called backtracking search (not the best name)

- Can solve n-queens for $n \approx 25$
Backtracking Example
Backtracking Search

function BACKTRACKING-SEARCH\( (csp) \) returns solution/failure
    return RECURSIVE-BACKTRACKING(\{ \}, csp)

function RECURSIVE-BACKTRACKING\( (assignment, csp) \) returns soln/failure
    if assignment is complete then return assignment
    var ← SELECT-UNASSIGNED-VARIABLE(VARIABLES[csp], assignment, csp)
    for each value in ORDER-DOMAIN-VALUES(var, assignment, csp) do
        if value is consistent with assignment given CONSTRAINTS[csp] then
            add \{var = value\} to assignment
            result ← RECURSIVE-BACKTRACKING(assignment, csp)
            if result ≠ failure then return result
        remove \{var = value\} from assignment
    return failure

- Backtracking = DFS + variable-ordering + fail-on-violation
Demo: Backtracking
Improving Backtracking

- General-purpose ideas give huge gains in speed

- Ordering:
  - Which variable should be assigned next?
  - In what order should its values be tried?

- Filtering: Can we detect inevitable failure early?

- Structure: Can we exploit the problem structure?
Filtering: Forward Checking

- Filtering: Keep track of domains for unassigned variables and cross off bad options
- Forward checking: Cross off values that violate a constraint when added to the existing assignment
Demo: Backtracking with Forward Checking
Filtering: Constraint Propagation

- Forward checking propagates information from assigned to unassigned variables, but doesn't provide early detection for all failures:

- NT and SA cannot both be blue!
- Why didn’t we detect this yet?
- *Constraint propagation*: reason from constraint to constraint
An arc $X \rightarrow Y$ is consistent iff for every $x$ in the tail there is some $y$ in the head which could be assigned without violating a constraint.

Forward checking: Enforcing consistency of arcs pointing to each new assignment.

Delete from the tail!
Arc Consistency of an Entire CSP

- A simple form of propagation makes sure all arcs are consistent:

- Important: If X loses a value, neighbors of X need to be rechecked!
- Arc consistency detects failure earlier than forward checking
- Can be run as a preprocessor or after each assignment
- What’s the downside of enforcing arc consistency?

Remember: Delete from the tail!
Enforcing Arc Consistency in a CSP

- Runtime: $O(n^2d^3)$, can be reduced to $O(n^2d^2)$
- ... but detecting all possible future problems is NP-hard – why?
Demo: Arc consistency
Limitations of Arc Consistency

- After enforcing arc consistency:
  - Can have one solution left
  - Can have multiple solutions left
  - Can have no solutions left (and not know it)

- Arc consistency still runs inside a backtracking search!
Ordering: Minimum Remaining Values

- Variable Ordering: Minimum remaining values (MRV):
  - Choose the variable with the fewest legal left values in its domain

- Why min rather than max?
- Also called “most constrained variable”
- “Fail-fast” ordering
Value Ordering: Least Constraining Value
- Given a choice of variable, choose the least constraining value
- I.e., the one that rules out the fewest values in the remaining variables
- Note that it may take some computation to determine this! (E.g., rerunning filtering)

Why least rather than most?

Combining these ordering ideas makes 1000 queens feasible
Demo: Backtracking + Forward Checking + Ordering