



#### Deep Reinforcement Learning and Heuristic Search

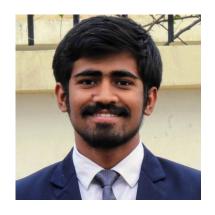
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## Students

Ph.D. Students



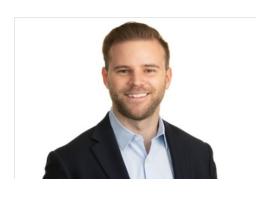
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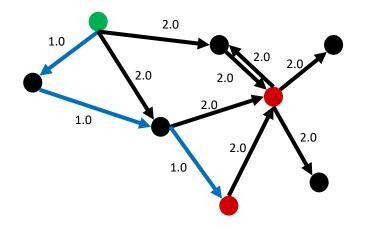
William Edwards

#### Outline

- Background and overview
- Learned heuristic functions and heuristic search
  - Approximate value iteration
  - Batch weighted A\* search
  - Generalizing over goals
  - Applications to reaction mechanism pathway prediction
- Learned action-heuristic functions and heuristic search
  - Q-learning
  - Batch weighted Q\* search
  - Applications to quantum computing
- Learned discrete world models and heuristic search

## Pathfinding

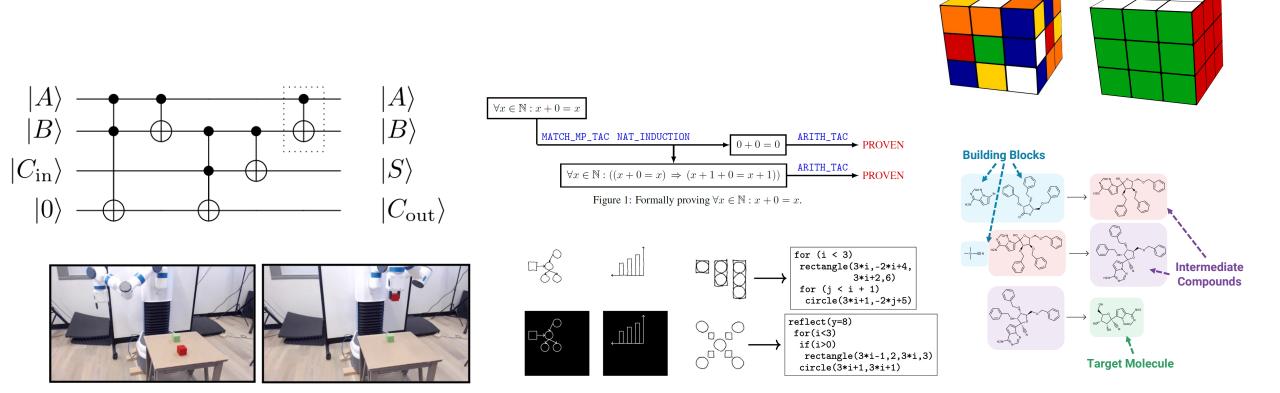
- The objective of pathfinding is to find a sequence of actions that forms a path between a given start state and a given goal
  - A goal is a set of states
  - Preference for minimum cost paths
- A pathfinding problem can be represented as a weighted directed graph where nodes represent states, edges represent actions that transition between states, and edge weights represent transition costs
  - The cost of a path is the sum of transition costs





## Pathfinding Domains

- Pathfinding problems can be found throughout mathematics, computing, and the natural sciences
  - Puzzle solving, chemical synthesis, quantum circuit synthesis, theorem proving, program synthesis, robotics



## Pathfinding Domain Definition

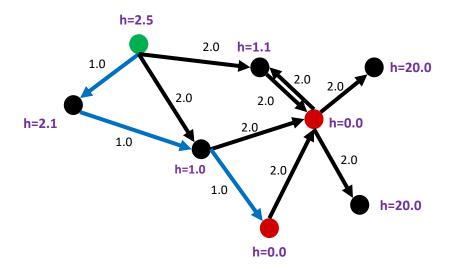
- The entire state space graph cannot be given to a pathfinding problem solver because the number of states in a pathfinding problem can be very large.
  - Rubik's cube:  $\sim 10^{19}$
  - 48-puzzle:  $\sim 10^{62}$
  - Organic chemistry:  $\sim 10^{60}$  (exact number unknown)
- Assumptions on what is given
  - Action space
  - State transition function
  - Transition cost function
  - Goal specification language
  - Goal test function
- Objective: Create a domain independent algorithm
  - Input: Pathfinding domain definition, start state, goal specification
  - Output: Path to a goal state

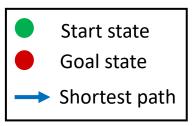
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#### Learned Heuristic Functions

• Heuristic function maps a state to an estimate of the cost of a shortest path from that state, also known as the cost-to-go



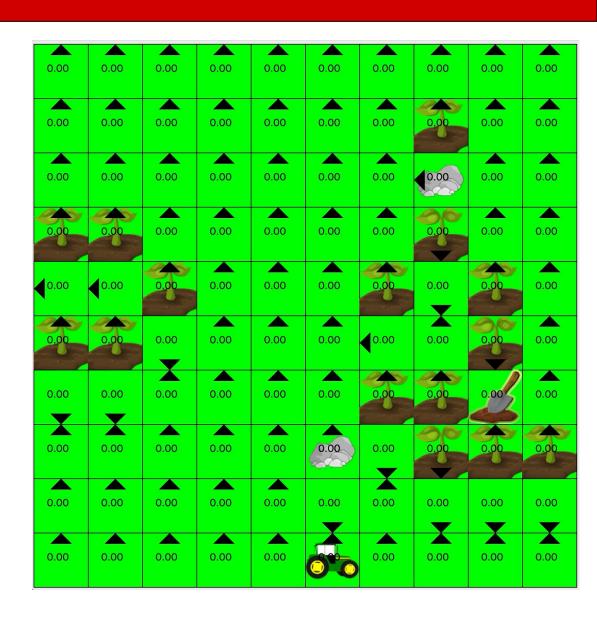


#### Value Iteration

- Value iteration is a dynamic programming algorithm and is a foundational algorithm in reinforcement learning
- In the context of pathfinding, value iteration is an algorithm for computing the cost-to-go of finding a shortest path for each state in the state space
- Tabular value iteration loops over all states and applies the following update until convergence (h stops changing)
  - $h(s) = \min_{a} (c^a(s) + h(T(s, a)))$
  - Guaranteed to converge to  $h^*$  in the tabular setting
- *s*: state
- *a*: action
- T: state transition function
- c<sup>a</sup>: transition cost function

#### Value Iteration: Visualization

- Actions: up, down, left, right
- Transition costs
  - 1 if square is blank
  - 10 if square has a rock
  - 50 if square has a plant
- Goal: shovel
- Updates propagate outwards from the goal



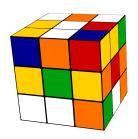
#### Approximate Value Iteration

- As the state space grows, tabular value iteration becomes infeasible
- Approximate value iteration uses an approximation architecture to approximate the value iteration update
- When using a deep neural network as the approximation architecture, we refer to this as deep approximate value iteration (DAVI)
- The update is approximated using the following loss function

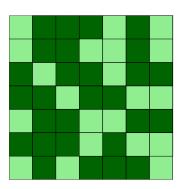
• 
$$L(\theta) = \left(\min_{a}(c^{a}(s) + h_{\theta^{-}}(T(s,a))) - h_{\theta}(s)\right)^{2}$$

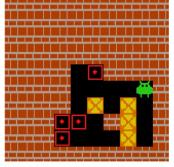
- Target is set to zero if s is a terminal state
- *s*: state
- a: action
- *T*: state transition function
- c<sup>a</sup>: transition cost function
- $\theta$ : parameters
- $\theta^-$ : parameters for target network
  - Is periodically updated to  $\theta$  throughout training

## Application to Puzzle Solving

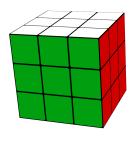


22	12	4 2		5
17	16	3	6	9
20	19	18	18 11	
23	1		24	13
21	14	10	8	15





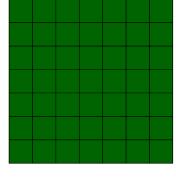
- 1. Rubik's Cube
- 2. 15-puzzle
- 3. 24-puzzle
- 4. 35-puzzle
- 5. 48-puzzle
- 6. Lights Out
- 7. Sokoban



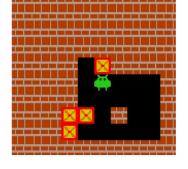
Rubik's cube

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	

24 puzzle



Lights Out (7×7)

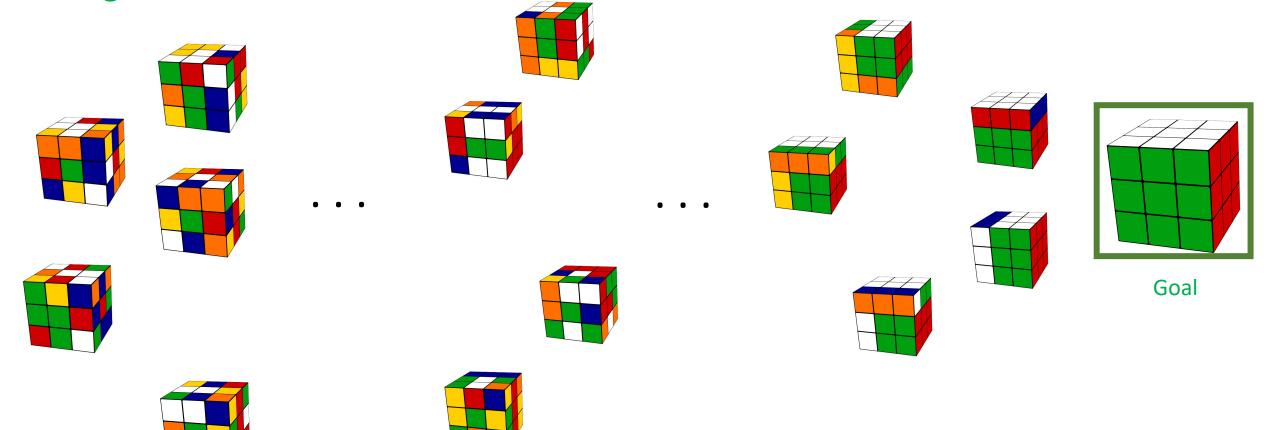


Sokoban

Largest state space is 3.0 x 10<sup>62</sup> (48-puzzle)

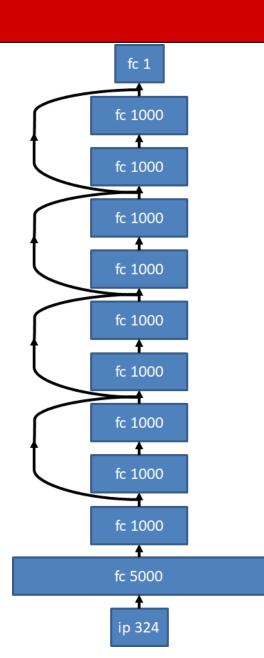
## **Generating States**

• Prioritized sweeping: Generate training data by taking moves in reverse from the goal



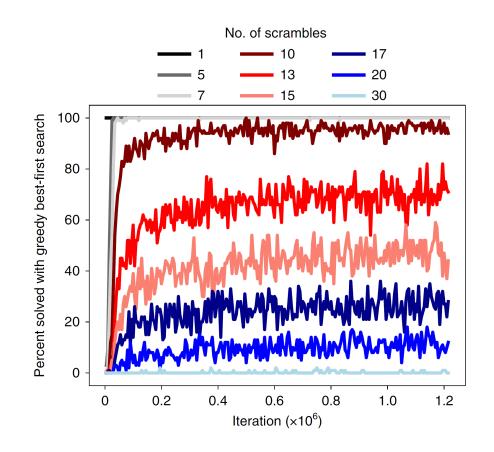
## Training

- Deep neural network
  - Input layer -> Two fully connected layers -> Four residual blocks -> Linear output layer
  - Same type of architecture used for all puzzles
    - 24-puzzle has two more residual blocks
- Training
  - Batch size of 5,000
  - ~1,000,000 training iterations
  - Parameters for target network updated when loss goes below some target threshold
    - Future work updates based on greedy policy performance



## **Greedy Policy Performance**

- Behave greedily with respect to the heuristic function
- $\pi(s) = \underset{a}{\operatorname{argmin}}(c^{a}(s) + h_{\theta}(T(s, a)))$
- Does not solve all states



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#### Integration with A\* Search

- Learned heuristic function can be used as a heuristic in A\* search
- A\* Search
  - Maintains a search tree where nodes are states and edges are actions
  - Initialized with a start node representing the start state
  - Expands nodes according to the priority
    - f(n) = g(n) + h(n.s)
    - f(n): cost
    - g(n): path cost (cost to get from start node to n)
    - h(n.s): heuristic (estimated cost-to-go from n.s to a closest goal state)
  - Terminates when a node associated with a goal state is selected for expansion
- Weighted A\* Search
  - Decreasing the weight on the path cost may result in expanding fewer nodes while possibly increasing the length of paths found
  - $f(n) = \lambda * g(n) + h(n.s)$

## Batch Weighted A\* Search

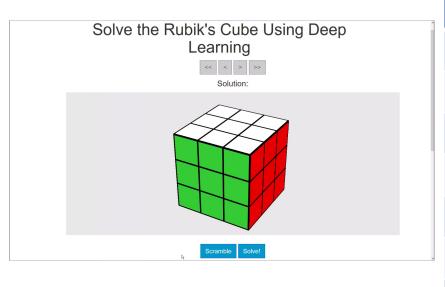
- To take advantage of parallelism provided by GPUs, we can expand multiple nodes at once
- Guaranteed to be bounded suboptimal if
  - The heuristic function is admissible
  - If we terminate when
    - A node we expand from OPEN has a cost greater than or equal to the shortest path we have found so far
    - The number of children generated for that iteration is zero

# Algorithm 1 Batch Weighted A\* Search (BWAS) Input: start, DNN $v_{\theta}$ , batch size B, weight $\lambda$ OPEN $\leftarrow$ priority queue of nodes based on minimal fCLOSED $\leftarrow$ maps states to their shortest discovered path costs

```
CLOSED ← maps states to their shortest discovered path costs
UB, n_{UB} \leftarrow \infty, NIL
LB \leftarrow 0
n_{start} \leftarrow \text{NODE}(s = start, g = 0, p = \text{NIL}, f = v_{\theta}(start))
PUSH n_{start} to OPEN
while not IS_EMPTY(OPEN) do
   generated ← []
   while not IS_EMPTY(OPEN) and SIZE(generated) < B do
      n = (s, q, p, f) \leftarrow POP(OPEN)
      if IS_EMPTY (generated) then
         LB \leftarrow \max(f, LB)
      if IS\_GOAL(s) then
         if UB > q then
            UB, n_{UB} \leftarrow g, n
         continue loop
      for a in |\mathcal{A}| do
         s' \leftarrow A(s,a)
          g(s') \leftarrow g(s) + c^a(s)
         if s' not in CLOSED or g(s') < \text{CLOSED}[s'] then
            CLOSED[s'] \leftarrow g(s')
            APPEND(generated, (s', g(s'), n))
   if LB \geqslant \lambda \cdot UB then
      return PATH_TO_GOAL(n_{UB})
   generated\_states \leftarrow GET\_STATES(generated)
   heuristics \leftarrow v_{\theta} (generated_states)
   for 0 \le i \le SIZE(generated) do
      s, q, p \leftarrow \text{generated}[i]
      h \leftarrow \text{heuristics}[i]
      n_s \leftarrow \text{NODE}(s, q, p, f = \lambda \cdot q + h)
      PUSH n_s to OPEN
return PATH_TO_GOAL(n_{UB})
                                               // failure if n_{UB} is NIL
```

#### DeepCubeA: Results

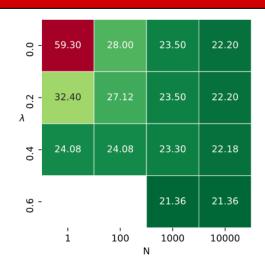
- When applied to seven different puzzles, it was able to solve all test instances and found a shortest path in the majority of verifiable cases
- http://deepcube.igb.uci.edu/



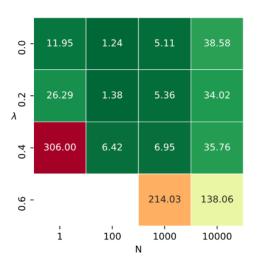
Puzzle	Solution Length	Percent Optimal	Time (seconds)
Rubik's Cube	21.50	60.3%	24.22
15-puzzle	52.03	99.4%	10.28
24-puzzle	89.49	96.98%	19.33
35-puzzle	124.64	N/A	28.45
48-puzzle	253.35	N/A	74.46
Lights Out	24.26	100.0%	3.27
Sokoban	32.88	N/A	2.35

## Effect of Batch and Weight

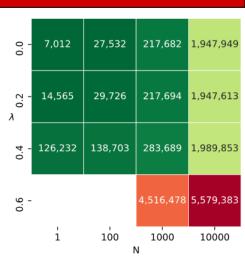
- Increasing the batch size decreases the path cost, increases the nodes/second
- Decreasing the weight generally leads to longer solutions but faster run times



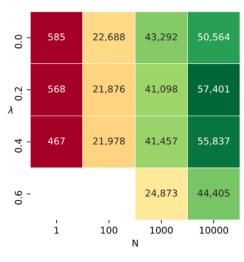
(a) Solution Length



(c) Solve Time



(b) Nodes Generated



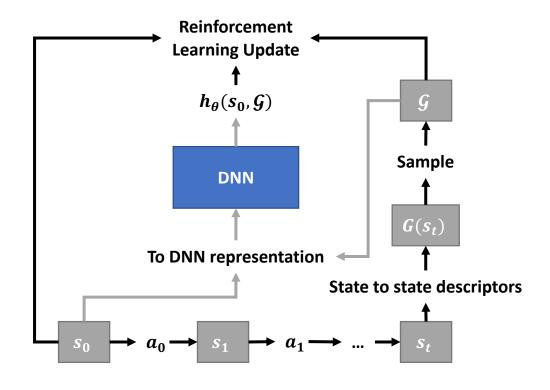
(d) Nodes/Second

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## Generalizing Over Goals

- In the previous work, the goal is predetermined
- Building on hindsight experience replay, we can generalize over goal states or sets of goal states
  - Generate a start state
  - Take a random walk whose length is somewhere between 0 and T
    - Future work could use artificial curiosity
  - Convert terminal state to a set of descriptors
  - Subsample to obtain a goal
  - Convert this representation into one suitable for the DNN
    - One-hot representation
    - Graph
    - Etc.
  - RL Update



## Generalizing Over Goals: Training

• 
$$L(\theta) = \left(\min_{a}(c^{a}(s) + h_{\theta} - (T(s, a), \mathcal{G})) - h_{\theta}(s, \mathcal{G})\right)^{2}$$

- Given randomly generated start and goal pairs, additional data generated by following an epsilon-greedy policy
  - Can help identify depression regions
- Parameters for target network updated when the greedy policy improves
  - Tested every ~5,000 iterations

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#### Reaction Mechanisms

- Chemical reactions are composed of smaller steps called reaction mechanisms
- Knowledge of the reaction mechanisms that compose a chemical reaction allows practitioners to
  - Validate reaction feasibility
  - Improve reaction efficiency
  - Predict reaction outcome under different conditions
- Most chemical reaction prediction methods skip reaction mechanisms and predict products directly from reactants

10=20;20,21=21 Major Product

#### Reaction Mechanism Domain

- We create the state transition function using OrbChain, a model for reaction mechanism steps
  - Can take over a second to expand a state, limiting training data
- For simplicity, we assume all transition costs are 1
  - Future work will use negative log probabilities of reaction mechanism steps as transition costs
- We use extended-connectivity fingerprints to represent a molecule to the heuristic function
  - Future work will use a learned representation using graph neural networks
- We generate data using small molecules from the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) dataset of chemical reactions
  - Using random walks, we generate new molecules
- The heuristic function also takes a goal state as input

• 
$$L(\theta) = \left(\min_{a} \left(c^{a}(s) + h_{\theta} - \left(T(s, a), s_{g}\right)\right) - h_{\theta}(s, s_{g})\right)^{2}$$

#### Results

- Generate test data by performing a random walk between 0 and 6 steps
- The learned heuristic function outperforms uniform cost search and A\* search with the Tanimoto similarity metric

Step/s	Solver	Path Cost	% Solved	Nodes	Secs	Nodes/Sec
Steps=0	DeepCubeA	0.00	100.00%	3.09E+2	3.87	79.97
	Uniform Cost Search	0.00	100.00%	3.09E+2	4.61	67.13
	Tanimoto Similarity	0.00	100.00%	3.09E+2	3.71	83.42
Steps=1	DeepCubeA	1.00	100.00%	7.49E+2	9.70	77.26
	Uniform Cost Search	1.00	100.00%	4.26E+4	553.33	76.95
	Tanimoto Similarity	1.00	100.00%	3.13E+4	429.29	72.97
Steps=2	DeepCubeA	2.07	100.00%	1.63E+4	267.16	60.87
	Uniform Cost Search	1.67	20.00%	1.32E+5	1497.77	87.96
	Tanimoto Similarity	1.75	26.67%	1.10E+5	1229.10	89.13
Steps=3	DeepCubeA	2.77	86.67%	4.14E+4	578.88	71.54
	Uniform Cost Search	-	0.00%	-	-	-
	Tanimoto Similarity	-	0.00%	-	-	-
Steps=4	DeepCubeA	3.33	60.00%	6.36E+4	821.64	77.36
	Uniform Cost Search	3.00	6.67%	1.43E+5	1962.28	73.01
	Tanimoto Similarity	3.00	6.67%	2.47E+4	272.15	90.64
Steps=5	DeepCubeA	3.40	33.33%	8.40E+4	968.49	86.69
	Uniform Cost Search	-	0.00%	-	-	-
	Tanimoto Similarity	-	0.00%	-	-	-
Steps=6	DeepCubeA	3.20	33.33%	6.14E+4	933.86	65.73
	Uniform Cost Search	-	0.00%	-	-	-
	Tanimoto Similarity	-	0.00%	-	-	-

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## Q-learning

- In the context of pathfinding, Q-learning is used to compute the cost of a path when in a given state, taking a given action, and taking a shortest path from the next state
  - $Q(s,a) = Q(s,a) = c^a(s) + h(T(s,a))$
  - $h(s) = \min_{a} Q(s, a)$
- Tabular Q-learning applies the following update to each state seen in an episode
  - $Q(s,a) = Q(s,a) + \alpha[c^a(s) + \min_{a'} Q(T(s,a),a') Q(s,a)]$
  - $\alpha$  is the learning rate
  - Guaranteed to converge to  $q^*$  in the tabular setting if certain conditions are met

## Approximate Q-learning

Q-learning loss

• 
$$L(\theta) = \left(c^{a}(s) + \min_{a'} q_{\theta^{-}}(T(s, a), a') - q_{\theta}(s, a)\right)^{2}$$

- *s*: state
- a: action
- T: state transition function
- c<sup>a</sup>: transition cost function
- $\theta$ : parameters
- $\theta^-$ : parameters for target network
  - Is periodically updated to  $\theta$  throughout training

### Approximate Q-learning

Q-learning loss

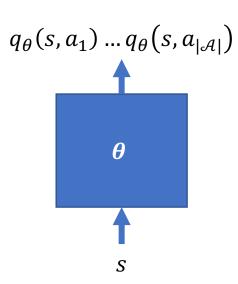
• 
$$L(\theta) = \left(c^{a}(s) + \min_{a'} q_{\theta^{-}}(T(s, a), a') - q_{\theta}(s, a)\right)^{2}$$

- For each training iteration, an action to update is sampled randomly
- Since it is possible most actions are not part of a shortest path, this could bias the estimator to overestimate the cost-to-go
- Therefore, we sample actions according to a Boltzmann distribution

• 
$$\pi(a|s) = \frac{e^{(-\frac{h_{\theta}(s,a)}{T})}}{\sum_{a'=1}^{|\mathcal{A}|} e^{(-\frac{h_{\theta}(s,a')}{T})}}$$

### Deep Q-Networks

- Deep Q-networks (DQNs) can compute the estimated cost of taking all actions with a single forward pass
- We create a search algorithm that exploits this to find paths more efficiently and with less memory



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## A\* Search and Large Action Spaces

- Computation and memory grows linearly with the size of the action space
- Node expansion requires applying every action
- For all child nodes, the heuristic function must be applied
  - Particularly expensive for DNNs with many parameters
- Child nodes are then pushed to OPEN

#### Batch Weighted Q\* Search

- Given a node, compute the transition cost and heuristic value for all child nodes with a single pass through a DQN
- Store tuples of nodes and actions in OPEN
  - Only part that grows linearly with action space
- Apply one action to one node each iteration
- Batch weighted version can also be used
- Guaranteed to be bounded suboptimal if
  - The heuristic function never overestimates
    - $c^{a}(s) + \min_{a'} q^{*}(T(s,a),a')$
  - If we terminate when
    - A node we expand from OPEN has a cost greater than or equal to the shortest path we have found so far
    - The number of children generated for that iteration is zero

```
Algorithm 2 Batch Weighted Q* Search (BWQS)
  Input: start, DNN q_{\phi}, batch size B, weight \lambda
  OPEN \leftarrow priority queue of nodes based on minimal f
  CLOSED ← maps states to their shortest discovered path costs
  U, n_U \leftarrow \infty, \text{NIL}
  LB \leftarrow 0
  n_{start} \leftarrow \text{NODE}(s = start, g = 0, p = \text{NIL}, a = 0)
  NO_{-}OP, f = 0
  PUSH n_{start} to OPEN
  while not IS_EMPTY(OPEN) do
     generated \leftarrow []
     while not IS_EMPTY(OPEN) and SIZE(generated) < B \, do
        n = (s, a, g, p, f) \leftarrow POP(OPEN)
        if IS_EMPTY (generated) then
            LB \leftarrow \max(f, LB)
        s' \leftarrow A(s,a)
        g(s') \leftarrow g(s) + c^a(s)
        if IS\_GOAL(s') then
            if U > g + c^a(s) then
               U, n_U \leftarrow g + c^a(s), n
            continue loop
        if s' not in CLOSED or g(s') < \text{CLOSED}[s'] then
            CLOSED[s'] \leftarrow g(s')
            for a' in |\mathcal{A}| do
               APPEND(generated, (s', q(s'), a', n))
     if LB \geqslant \lambda \cdot U then
        return PATH_TO_GOAL(n_U)
     generated_states_actions ← GET_STATES(generated)
     transition_costs, heuristics \leftarrow q_{\phi} (generated_states_actions)
     for 0 \le i \le SIZE(generated) do
        s, a, g, p \leftarrow \text{generated}[i]
        g' \leftarrow g + \text{transition\_costs}[i]
         h \leftarrow \text{heuristics}[i]
        n_{(s,a)} \leftarrow \text{NODE}(s, a, g, p, f = \lambda \cdot g' + h)
        PUSH n_{(s,a)} to OPEN
  return PATH_TO_GOAL(n_U)
                                                  // failure if n_U is NIL
```

### Experiments

- Domains: Rubik's cube, Lights Out, 35-pancake puzzle
- Case study: Adding combinations of actions to the Rubik's cube: 12 actions, 156 actions, 1884 actions
- Comparisons
  - A\* search
  - Deferred heuristic evaluation: assign heuristic of parent to children
- Did batch weighted search for all search methods
  - Weight in {0.0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0}
  - Batch size in {100, 1000, 10000}

#### Results

- Each point is a different search parameter setting
- Dashed line: Best path cost
- Solid line: Best of all parameter settings at that path cost
- Q\* search often outperforms A\* and deferred A\* by orders of magnitude
- Best average path cost is either the same or slightly longer

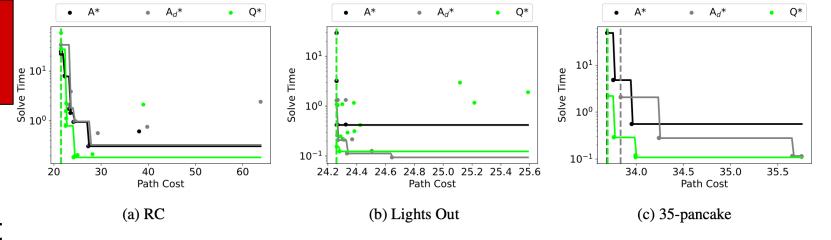


Figure 1: Relationship between the average path cost and the average time to find a solution.

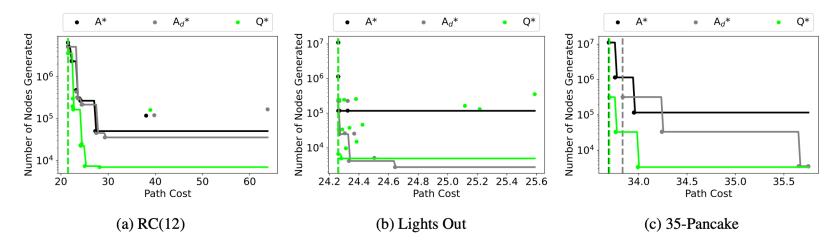


Figure 2: Relationship between the average path cost and the average node generations.

#### Results

 With 157 times more actions, Q\* is only 3.7 times slower and uses 2.3 times more memory

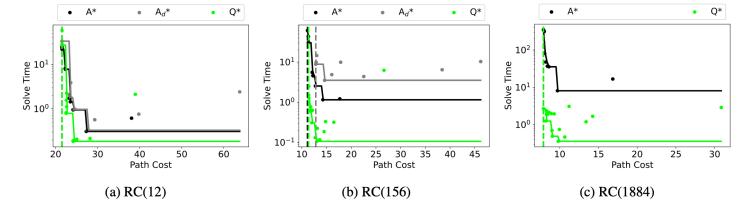


Figure 3: Action space size ablation study on Rubik's cube: average path cost vs average time to find a solution.

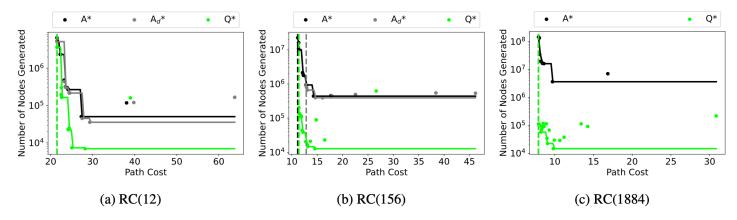


Figure 4: Action space size ablation study on Rubik's cube: average path cost vs average node generations.

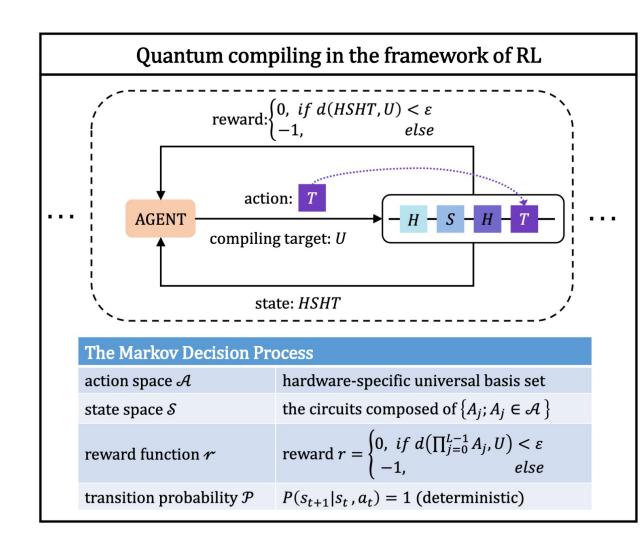
Puzzle	Actions	Method	Time	Nodes Gen
RC(156)	x13	A* Q*	3.5(1.6) <b>0.9(0.7</b> )	8.7(2.2) <b>1.4(1.3)</b>
RC(1884)	x157	A* Q*	37.0(6.5) <b>3.7(4.0)</b>	62.7(5.2) <b>2.3(3.6</b> )

#### Outline

- Background and overview
- Learned heuristic functions and heuristic search
  - Approximate value iteration
  - Batch weighted A\* search
  - Generalizing over goals
  - Applications to reaction mechanism pathway prediction
- Learned action-heuristic functions and heuristic search
  - Q-learning
  - Batch weighted Q\* search
  - Applications to quantum computing
- Learned discrete world models and heuristic search

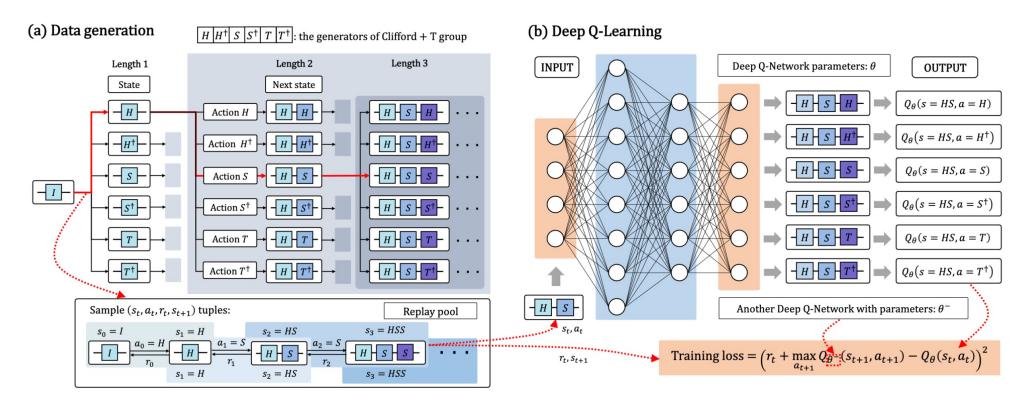
# Quantum Algorithm Compilation

- Given a quantum algorithm, a compiler must synthesize a quantum circuit for this algorithm from a given set of quantum gates
- If a given circuit is below an error threshold, then the problem is considered solved



## Quantum Algorithm Compilation

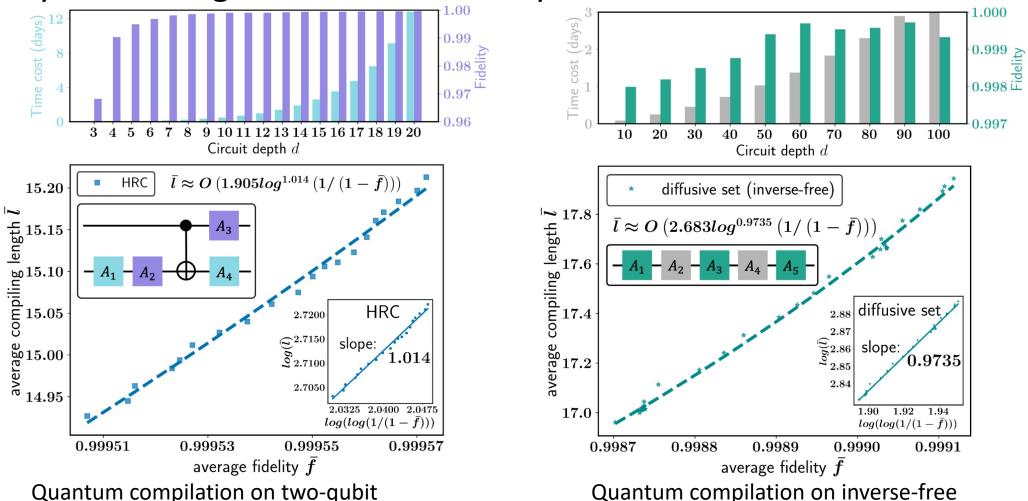
- Training data can be generated from a given gate set and a DQN trained to predict the distance of the current quantum circuit to the identity function
- Given a trained DQN, Q\* search can be used to search for a circuit for a given algorithm



# Q-learning and Q\* Search

Accuracy increases given more time for synthesis

universal basis set

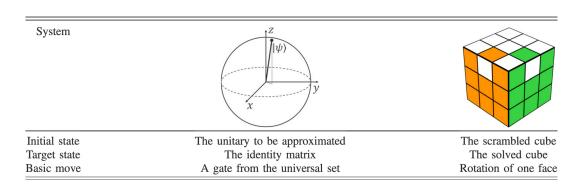


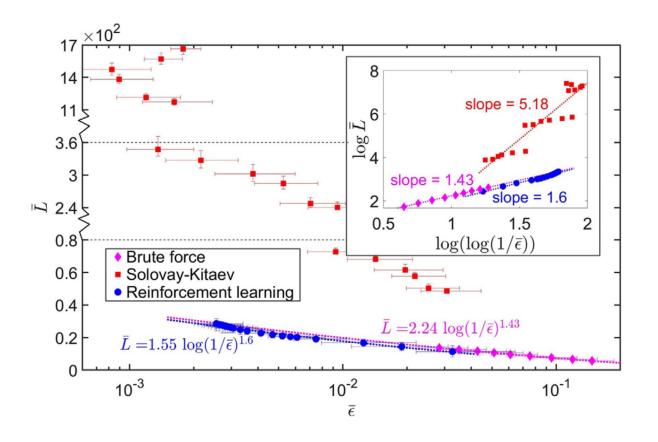
Qiuhao, Chen, et al. "Efficient and practical quantum compiler towards multi-qubit systems with deep reinforcement learning." Quantum Science and Technology (2024).

universal basis set

## Other Applications to Quantum Algorithm Compilation

- Topological quantum compiling
- Clifford synthesis
- Can produce near-optimal solutions



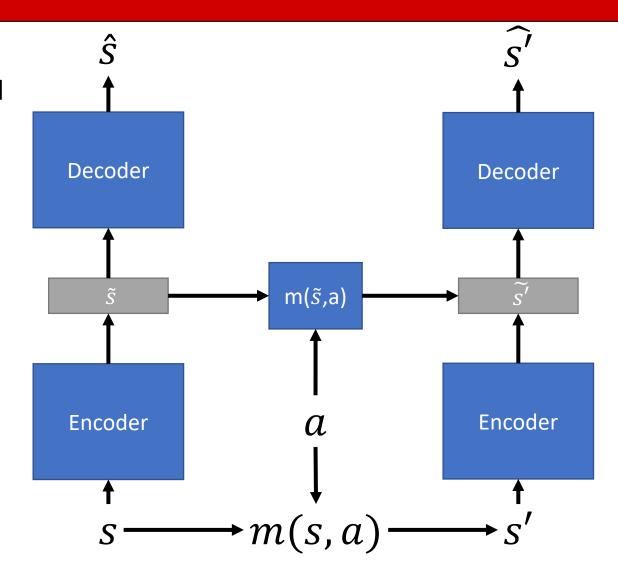


#### Outline

- Background and overview
- Learned heuristic functions and heuristic search
  - Approximate value iteration
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- Learned action-heuristic functions and heuristic search
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  - Batch weighted Q\* search
  - Applications to quantum computing
- Learned discrete world models and heuristic search

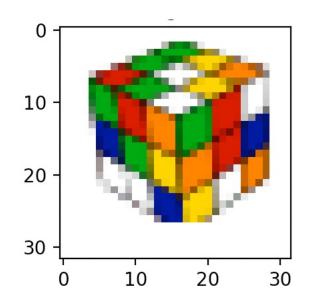
## Learning Discrete World Models

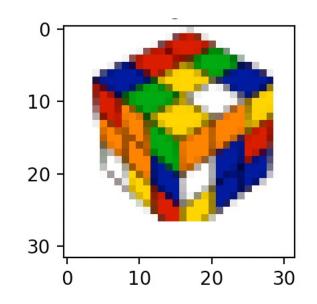
- Addressing previous shortcomings
  - Small errors in prediction can be corrected by simply rounding
  - Can reidentify states by comparing two vectors
- Encoder
  - Maps the state to a discrete representation
  - To allow training with gradient descent, use a straight through estimator
- Decoder
  - Maps the discrete representation to the state
  - Ensures the discrete representation is meaningful
- Environment model
  - Maps discrete states and actions to next discrete state

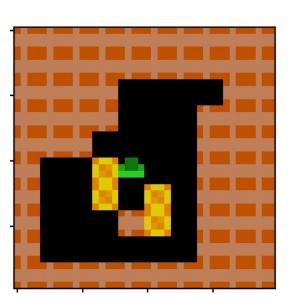


# Experiments

- Rubik's cube
  - Two 32x32 RGB images showing both sides of the cube
- Sokoban
  - One 40x40 RGB image
- Generate offline dataset of 300,000 episodes of 30 random steps, each

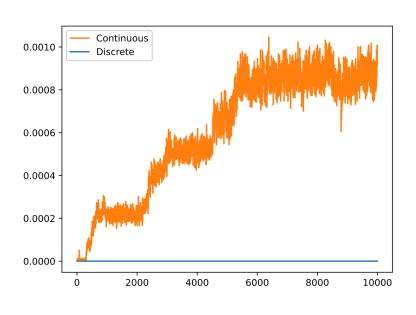


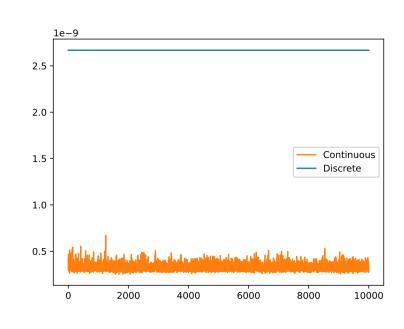




#### Discrete vs Continuous Model Performance

• The continuous model eventually accumulates error for the Rubik's cube

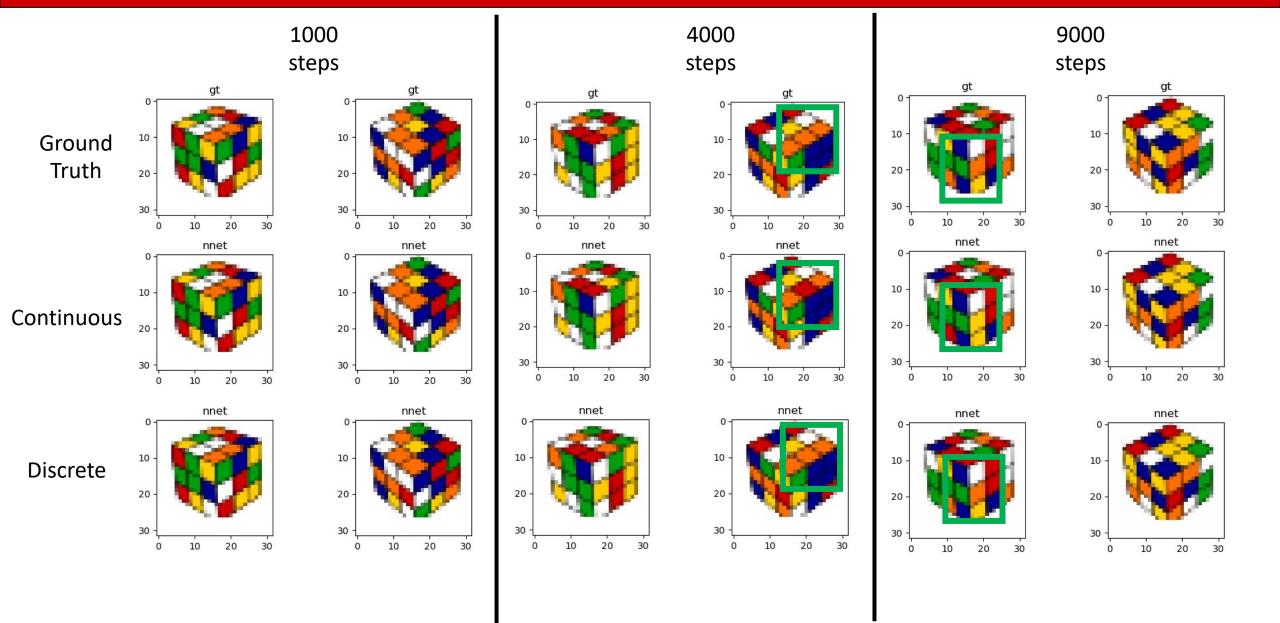




(a) Rubik's Cube

(b) Sokoban

### Discrete vs Continuous Model Performance



## Heuristic Learning and Search with Discrete Model

- DeepCubeAI DeepCubeA + "Imagination"
  - Learn discrete world model with offline data
  - Use offline data and the learned world model to generate training data
  - Heuristic learning: Q-learning with hindsight experience replay
    - Generalize over goal states
  - Heuristic search: Q\* search
    - Helps when model uses computationally expensive DNN

Domain	Solver	Len	Opt	Nodes	Secs	Nodes/Sec	Solved
	PDBs <sup>+</sup>	20.67	100.0%	2.05E+06	2.20	1.79E + 06	100%
RC	DeepCubeA	21.50	60.3%	6.62E + 06	24.22	2.90E + 05	100%
	Greedy (ours)	_	0%	-	_	-	0%
	DeepCubeAI (ours)	22.85	19.5%	2.00E+05	6.21	3.22E+04	100%
$RC_{rev}$	Greedy (ours)	_	0%	-	_	-	0%
	DeepCubeAI (ours)	22.81	21.92%	2.00E+05	6.30	3.18+04	99.9%
Sokoban	LevinTS	39.80	-	6.60E + 03	_	-	100%
	LevinTS (*)	39.50	-	5.03E+03	_	-	100%
	LAMA	51.60	-	3.15E + 03	_	-	100%
	DeepCubeA	32.88	-	1.05E+03	2.35	5.60E + 01	100%
	Greedy (ours)	29.55	-	-	1.68	-	41.9%
	DeepCubeAI (ours)	33.12	-	3.30E+03	2.62	1.38E+03	100%

### Questions?

#### Papers

- Agostinelli, Forest, et al. "Solving the Rubik's cube with deep reinforcement learning and search." Nature Machine Intelligence 1.8 (2019): 356-363.
- Agostinelli, Forest, Rojina Panta, and Vedant Khandelwal. "Specifying Goals to Deep Neural Networks with Answer Set Programming." ICAPS 2024
- Panta, Rojina, et al. "Finding Reaction Mechanism Pathways with Deep Reinforcement Learning and Heuristic Search." ICAPS PRL Workshop 2024
- Agostinelli, Forest, et al. "Q\* Search: Heuristic Search with Deep Q-Networks." ICAPS PRL Workshop 2024
- Agostinelli, Forest and Soltani, Misagh "Learning Discrete World Models for Heuristic Search." Reinforcement Learning Conference 2024
- Agostinelli, Forest. "A Conflict-Driven Approach for Reaching Goals Specified with Negation as Failure." ICAPS 2024 HAXP Workshop

#### Code

- Many of these algorithms are publicly available on GitHub
- https://github.com/forestagostinelli/deepxube

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Website: https://cse.sc.edu/~foresta/

