Multi-Agent Systems

Overview and Research Directions (Ch. 17.5–17.6)

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Bookkeeping

- HW 3 out; project description out
- Last time: Decision making under uncertainty
  - Reasoning over time: The world as a series of sequential snapshots
  - Decision theory and Expected Value/Maximum Expected Value
- Today: Multi-Agent Systems
  - What's a MAS?
  - Reasoning in MAS contexts
  - Games
- Today: Team formation – **send me team info by COB 10/7**
- 10/8 and 10/10: Homework review, midterm review, intro to ML

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www.simplilearn.com/tutorials/artificial-intelligence-tutorial/ai-project-ideas
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Ideas to Start Conversations

- Non-biase[…] evaluator
- Fake news[…]
- SMS spam[…]
- Pneumoni[…]
- Fake produ[…] spotter
- Gesture re[…]
- Face mask detector

[…]detector

- Stock buying/selling

[…]detection
[…]etection
[…]rediction
[…]commender
[…]ased calendar […]t
[…]g based on an […]ing Kaggle dataset: www.kaggle.com/datasets

Spend 2 minutes and try to come up with 2-3 ideas you're interested in. We'll circulate and discuss ideas for possible teams.

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Ideas to Start Conversations

- Non-biased resume evaluator
- Fake news detector
- SMS spam detection
- Pneumonia detection
- Fake product review spotter
- Gesture recognition
- Face mask detector

- Making a chatbot
- Playing a game
- Creating game boards
- AirBNB/lodging recommender
- Product review sentiment analysis
- Ethical face detector
- Stock buying/selling

- Object detection
- Fraud detection
- Traffic prediction
- Class recommender
- Voice-based calendar assistant
- Anything based on an interesting Kaggle dataset: www.kaggle.com/datasets

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Ideas to Start Conversations

Please email your team info (members' first name, lastname, email addresses) to me and the TA
by COB ~~10/3~~ 10/7

- Non-biase
  evaluator
- Fake news
- SMS spam
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www.kaggle.com/datasets

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Multi-Agent Systems: Overview

- What's an agent?
- Multi-Agent Systems
  - Cooperative multi-agent systems
  - Competitive multi-agent systems
    - Game time!
- MAS Research Directions
  - Organizational structures
  - Communication limitations
  - Learning in multi-agent systems

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What’s an Agent?

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What’s An Agent? (Redux)

- Weiss, p. 29 [after Wooldridge and Jennings]:
  - “An **agent** is a computer system that is **situated** in some **environment**, and that is capable of **autonomous action** in this environment in order to meet its design objectives.”
- Russell and Norvig, p. 7:
  - “An agent is just something that perceives and acts.”

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What's An Agent? II

- Ferber, p. 9: "An agent is a physical or virtual entity [which]
  - Is capable of **acting** in an **environment**,
  - Can **communicate** directly with other agents,
  - Is driven by a set of **tendencies**…,
  - Possesses **resources** of its own,
  - Is capable of **perceiving** its environment…,
  - Has only a **partial representation** of this environment…,
  - Possesses **skills** and can offer **services**,
  - May be able to **reproduce** itself,
  - Whose behavior tends towards **satisfying its objectives**, taking account of the resources and skills available to it and depending on its perception, its representations and the communications it receives."

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What's Autonomy?

- Jennings and Wooldridge, p. 4:
  - "[In contrast with objects] … **agents encapsulate *behavior***, in addition to state.
  - An **object** does not encapsulate behavior: it has no control over the execution of methods – if an object *A* invokes a method *m* on an object *B*, then *B* has no control over whether *m* is executed or not – it just is.
    - In this sense, object *B* is not autonomous, as it has no control over its own actions.
  - Because of this …, we do not think of agents as invoking methods (actions) on agents – rather, we tend to think of them **requesting** actions to be performed."
- Is an if-then-else statement autonomous?

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So Now What?

- If those definitions aren't useful, is there a useful definition?
- Should we bother trying to create "agents" at all?

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A Pause to Vote… (more on which later)

- For Tic-Tacs, Skittles, licorice, gummi bears:

- Do you **prefer** Skittles or gummi bears?
- Do you **prefer** licorice or Tic-Tacs?
- Sort the candy from **best to worst (1 = best; no ties)**

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Multi-Agent Systems

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Multi-Agent Systems

- Jennings et al.'s key properties:
  - Situated [existing in relation to some environment]
  - Autonomous
  - Flexible:
    - Responsive to dynamic environment
    - Pro-active / goal-directed
    - **Social interactions with other agents and humans**
- Research questions: How do we design agents to:
  - **Interact effectively…**
  - …To solve a wide range of problems…
  - …In many different environments?

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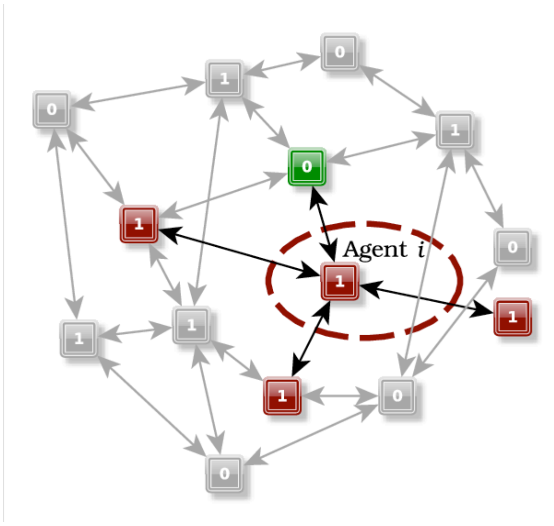
What are Multi-Agent Systems?



- A multiagent system contains a number of agents that:
  - Interact through communication;
  - Are able to act in an environment;
  - Have different "spheres of influence" (which may coincide)
  - And may be linked by other relationships

Slide: M. J. Wooldridge & S. Parsons
Image: www3.diism.unisi.it/~control/MAS

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Why Multi-Agent Systems?

- Some of the trends in computing:
  - Ubiquity, interconnection, intelligence, delegation
  - The Internet of Things, self-steering cars, home automation devices
- What advantages does are they offer over the alternatives?
- In what circumstances are they useful?

Slide: Matthew E. Taylor, with thanks

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Possible Motivations for MAS

- Task is too complex for one agent
- Task is inherently distributed
  - Ex. soccer (goalie, striker, defenders…)
- Several resource-bounded agents are cheaper or more feasible to build or faster than a single, more capable agent
- Multiple agents are more robust because they offer redundancy
  - Ex. one fails, others take its place; **graceful degradation**

Slide adapted from Introduction to AI Robotics, R. Murphy (MIT Press 2000) for 2nd edition

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Aspects of Multi-Agent Systems

- Cooperative vs. competitive
- Homogeneous vs. heterogeneous agents
- Interaction protocols and languages
- Organizational structure
- Mechanism design / market economics
- Learning

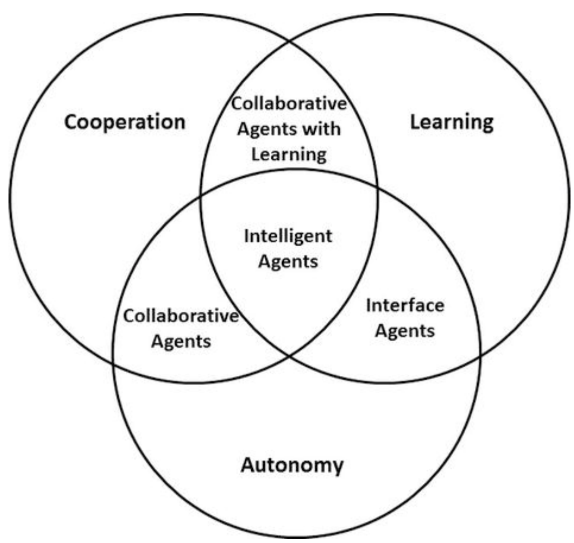

Image: Nwana, H. S. (1996). Software agents: An overview. The knowledge engineering review, 11(3), 205-244.

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Topics in MAS

- Cooperative MAS:
  - Distributed problem solving: Less autonomy
    - (At least in a certain sense)
  - Distributed planning: Models for cooperation and teamwork
- Competitive or self-interested MAS:
  - Distributed rationality: Voting, auctions
  - Negotiation: Contract nets
  - Strictly adversarial interactions ← least complex
    - Games: mostly adversarial

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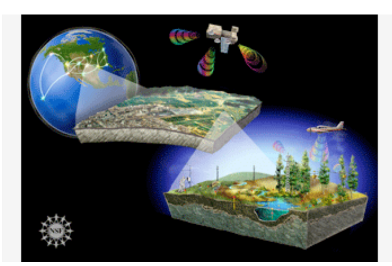
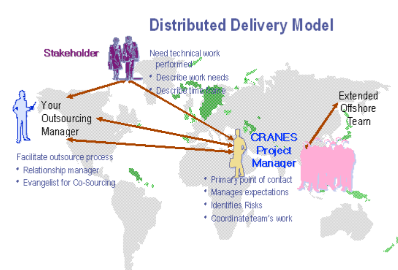
Some Cooperative MAS Domains

- Distributed sensor network establishment
- Distributed vehicle monitoring
- Distributed delivery





NSF; www.linkedin.com/pulse/3g4g-gps-vehicle-cctv-systems-taxi-bus-truck-kinds-ellies-w; www.cranessoftware.com/alliances/fluid/offshore-dev.php

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Distributed Sensing & Monitoring

- Distributed sensing:
  - Distributed sensor network establishment:
    - Locate sensors to provide the best coverage
    - Centralized vs. distributed solutions
  - Track vehicle/other movements using multiple sensors
- Distributed vehicle monitoring:
  - Control sensors and integrate results to track vehicles as they move from one sensor's "region" to another's
  - Centralized vs. distributed solutions

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Distributed Delivery

- Logistics problem: move goods from original locations to destination locations using multiple delivery resources (agents)
- Dynamic, partially accessible, nondeterministic environment (goals, situation, agent status)
- Centralized vs. distributed solution

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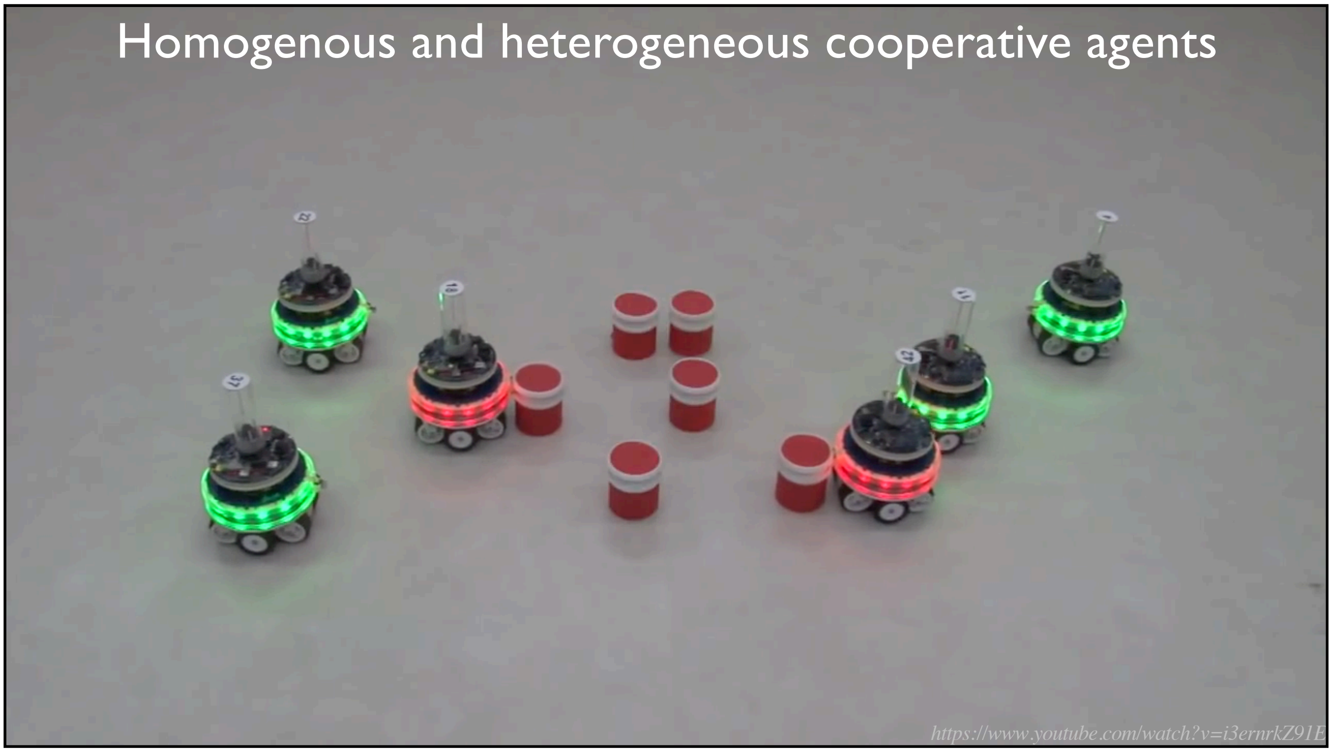

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Competitive Multi-Agent Systems

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Games and Game Theory

- Much effort on developing programs for artificial games like chess or poker, played for entertainment
- Larger issue: account for, model, and predict how agents (human or artificial) **interact with other agents**
- **Game theory** accounts for a mixture of cooperative and competitive behavior
- Applies to zero-sum and non-zero-sum games

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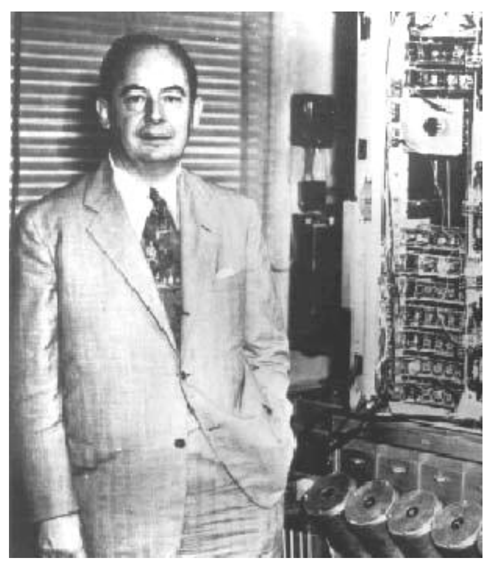
Game Theory

- Defined by von Neumann & Morgenstern
  - von Neumann, J., and Morgenstern, O., (1947).
    The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior.
- Covers both cooperative and non-cooperative situations
- Developed and used in economics, now used to model artificial agents
- Provides a powerful model and practical tools to think about interactions among a set of autonomous agents



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Basic Ideas of Game Theory

- **Game theory** studies how strategic interactions among rational players produce outcomes with respect to the players' preferences (**utilities**)
  - Outcomes might not have been intended
- Offers a **general** theory of strategic behavior
- Generally depicted in mathematical form
- Plays important role in economics, decision theory and multi-agent systems

So how do we describe the utility of states across many agents?
Social welfare;
Pareto optimality;
Nash equilibria;
other equilibria

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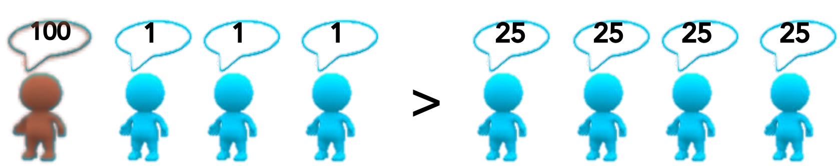
Social Welfare

- **Social welfare**, or global utility:
  - Sum of all agents' utility
  - If state *s* maximizes social welfare, it is also Pareto-optimal (but not vice versa)
- Somewhat poorly named
  - Sum ≠ average
  - Allocation of resources typically affects influence
    - e.g., you get to take 1 turn per point accrued



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Pareto Optimality, Intuitively

- An outcome is **Pareto optimal** if there is **no other outcome that all players would prefer.**
  - "a state … from which it is impossible to [change] so as to make any one individual better off without making at least one individual worse off." – *Wikipedia*
  - There can be multiple Pareto optimal solutions.
- If 2 students on a project both have Bs, would they **both agree** to switch to an A and a C?
  - No – if those are the choices, B/B is Pareto optimal
  - If A/A is an option, B/B is no longer Pareto optimal

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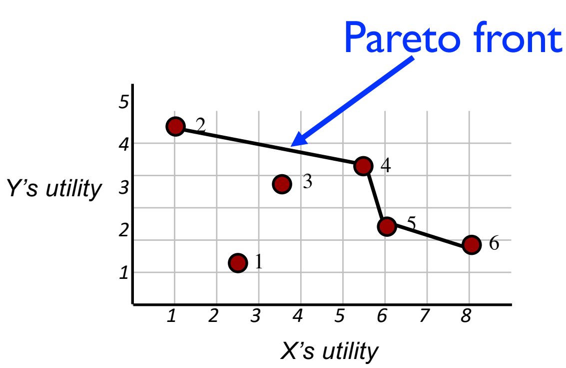
Pareto Optimality

- s is a Pareto-optimal solution iff
  - $\forall s' \, (\exists x \; U_x(s') > U_x(s) \rightarrow \exists y \; U_y(s') < U_y(s))$
  - I.e., if X is better off in s', then some Y must be worse off
  - There is no other outcome that **all** players would prefer



Which solutions are Pareto-optimal?

Which solution(s) maximize global utility (social welfare)?

X + Y

State 1 = 1.25+2.5 = 3.75
State 2 = 1+4.25 = 5.25
State 3 = 3.5+3.75 = 7.25
State 4 = 5.5+3.25 = 8.75
State 5 = 6+2.25 = 8.25
State 6 = 8+1.75=9.75

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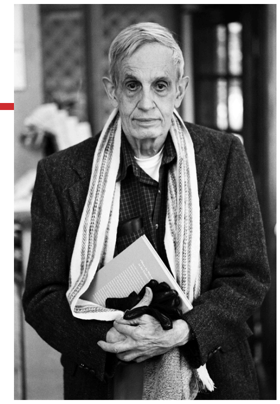
Nash Equilibrium



John Forbes Nash Jr.
Image:Wikipedia

- Occurs when each player's strategy is optimal, **given** strategies of the other players
- No player benefits by **unilaterally** changing strategy while others stay fixed
- Every finite game has at least one Nash equilibrium in either pure or mixed strategies (proved by John Nash)
  - J. F. Nash. 1950. Equilibrium Points in *n*-person Games. Proc. National Academy of Science, 36
  - Nash won 1994 Nobel Prize in economics for this work
  - Read *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasar (1998) and/or see the 2001 film

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Nash Equilibrium

- It's a Nash equilibrium if no player has an incentive to change strategies, assuming the other player doesn't change strategies.
  - I'm doing the best I can, given what you are doing
  - You're doing the best you can, given what I am doing
- A Nash Equilibrium occurs when each player chooses a strategy that gives the highest payoff, **given** the strategy chosen by the other player(s)

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First Date Game

What is the outcome of this game?
Payoff format is (Left, Top)

Me

Mr/Ms/Mx Right

	Coffee	Waterpark
Coffee	10,10	0,-5
Waterpark	-5,0	20,20

Both choose C: everyone scores +10
Both choose W: everyone scores +20
I choose C, MR chooses W: I get 0, you get -5
I choose W, MR chooses C: I get -5, you get 0

Slide: sites.ualberta.ca/~priemaza/Econ%20384/Econ%20384%20Notes/Econ%20384%20Chapter14a.ppt

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Waterpark	-5,0	→ 20,20

Both choose C: everyone scores +10
Both choose W: everyone scores +20
I choose C, MR chooses W: I get 0, you get -5
I choose W, MR chooses C: I get -5, you get 0

If you know your date will pick coffee, you should pick coffee, since 10 > -5

If you know your date will pick waterpark, you should pick waterpark, since 20 > 0

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Both choose C: everyone scores +10
Both choose W: everyone scores +20
I choose C, MR chooses W: I get 0, you get -5
I choose W, MR chooses C: I get -5, you get 0

If your date knows you will pick coffee, they should pick coffee, since 10 > -5

If your date knows you will pick waterpark, they should pick waterpark, since 20 > 0

This game is symmetrical

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First Date Game

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I choose C, MR chooses W: I get 0, you get -5
I choose W, MR chooses C: I get -5, you get 0

These are the Nash equilibria

Assuming you stick with W, I should stick with W

Assuming you stick with C, I should stick with C

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Best Responses / Dominance

- Unfortunately, in game theory games, players choose strategies without knowing with certainty what the opposing player will do
- Players construct **best responses**: optimal actions given **all** possible actions of other players
- A special kind of best response: **dominant strategies**

➢ Strategy that is best no matter what the other player does

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Dominant Strategies

- If an agent can always maximize its own utility with a particular strategy (regardless of other agents' behavior) then that strategy is **dominant**
    - Strategy *s* **dominates** *s'* iff:
    - Outcome (for player *p*) of *s* is better than the outcome of *s'* **in every case**
- A dominant strategy will always have the best outcome for a player, regardless of how their opponent plays
- A dominant strategy is the optimal move for a player
- Not all games have dominant strategies

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Prisoner's Dilemma

- Famous example of game theory
- Will two prisoners cooperate to minimize total loss of liberty or will one of them betray the other so as to go free?
- Strategies must be undertaken without full knowledge of what other players will do
- Players adopt dominant strategies, but they don't necessarily lead to the best outcome
- Rational behavior leads to a situation where everyone is worse off

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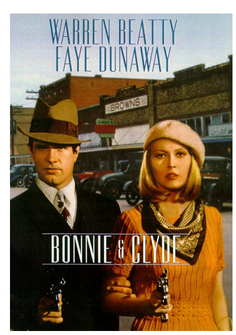
Bonnie & Clyde

- Bonnie and Clyde are arrested. They're questioned separately, unable to communicate. They know the deal:
  - If **both** proclaim innocence (deny involvement), they will both get short sentences
  - If **one confesses** and the **other doesn't**, the confessor gets a heavy sentence and the denier gets a light sentence
  - If **both confess**, both get moderate sentences
- What should Bonnie do?
- What should Clyde do?



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Exercise: Prisoner's Dilemma

- <Bonnie's sentence, Clyde's sentence>

B \ *C*	Confesses	Denies
Confesses	(4, 4)	(8, 1)
Denies	(1, 8)	(3, 3)

- Play 1 round – what are results?
- Switch partners
- Play 5 rounds, keeping track of total years

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Prisoner's Dilemma: Analysis

- Pareto-optimal and social welfare maximizing solution: **Both agents deny**
- Dominant strategy and Nash equilibrium: **Both agents confess**
- **Why?**

B \ *C*	Confesses	Denies
Confesses	(4, 4)	(8, 1)
Denies	(1, 8)	(3, 3)

- Because if you deny and the other confesses, it's the worst case
  - No agent has incentive to change strategies, **given that others do not change**

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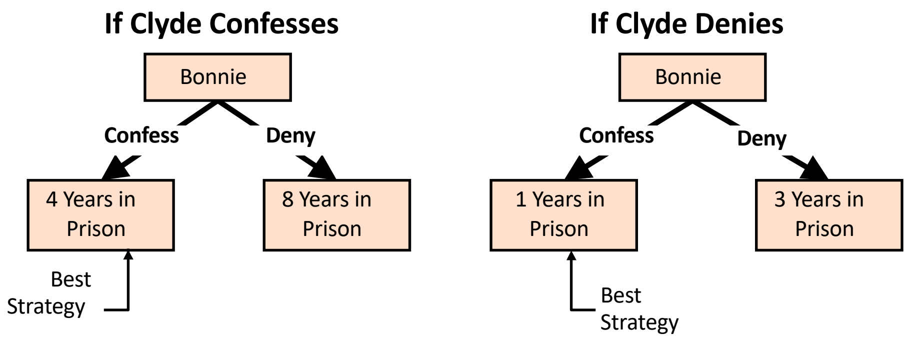
Bonnie's Decision Tree

No wonder Economics is called "the dismal science"

There are two cases to consider:



Dominant strategy **for Bonnie** is to confess because no matter what Clyde does she is better off confessing.

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Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma

- Rational players should always confess in a PD situation
- In real situations, people don't always do this
- Why not? Possible explanations:
  - People aren't rational
  - Morality
  - Social pressure
  - Fear of consequences
  - Evolution of species-favoring genes
- Which make sense? How can we formalize?

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Iterated PD

- **Key idea**: We often play more than one "game" with someone
- Players have complete knowledge of past games, including their choices **and other players' choices**
- Can choose based on whether they've been cooperative in past
- Simulation was first done by Robert Axelrod (Michigan) where programs played in a round-robin tournament

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Strategies

- Simple single-agent strategies:
  - Always deny
  - Always cooperate
  - Randomly choose
  - Pavlovian (win-stay, lose-switch): Start by always cooperating, switch to always denying when "punished" by other's denial, switch back and forth at every such punishment
  - Tit-for-tat (TFT): "Be nice, but punish any defections": Starts by cooperating and after that always does what the other player did on the previous round
  - Joss: A sneaky TFT that defects 10% of the time
- In an idealized (noise free) environment, TFT is both a very simple and a very good strategy
- In the IPD tournament, one winner used an initial pattern of choices to identify other players with the same programming, and then switched to all denying

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Distributed Rationality

How can we encourage/coax/force self-interested agents to play *fairly* in the sandbox?

- **Voting**: Everybody's opinion counts (but how much?)
- **Auctions**: Everybody gets a chance to earn value (but fairly?)
- **Contract nets**: Work goes to the highest bidder
- **Issues**:
  - Global utility
  - Stability
  - Fairness
  - Cheating and lying

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Voting: It's Not Easy

- How should we **rank** the possible outcomes, given individual agents' preferences (votes)?
- Six desirable properties which can't all be satisfied:
  - Every **combination of votes** should lead to a **ranking**
  - Every **pair of outcomes** should have a **relative ranking**
  - The ranking should be **asymmetric** and **transitive**
  - The ranking should be **Pareto-optimal**
  - **Irrelevant alternatives** shouldn't influence the outcome
  - **Share the wealth**: No agent should always get their way

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Voting Protocols

- **Plurality voting:**
  - The outcome with the highest number of votes wins
  - Irrelevant alternatives can change the outcome (e.g., third-party candidates "splitting" the vote)
- **Binary voting**:
  - Agents rank sequential pairs of choices ("elimination voting")
  - Irrelevant alternatives can still change the outcome
  - Very order-dependent
- **Borda voting**:
  - Agents' rankings are used as weights, which are summed across all agents
  - Agents can "spend" high rankings on losing choices, making their remaining votes less influential

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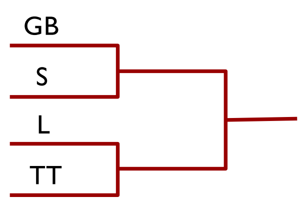
Voting…

- Plurality results:
  - Most #1 votes: ____
- Elimination (bracket) results:



- Borda results:
  - Score(candy) = [4 × (# 1st place votes)] + [3 × (# 2nd)] + [2 × (# 3rd)] + [1 × (# 4th)]
  - TT = ____, S ____, L ____, GB ____

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Voting game

Discuss… did we achieve global social welfare? Fairness? Were there interesting dynamics?

- Using *plurality (1/0)* voting to select a winner:
  - The winner is the candidate with the most votes
  - The naive strategy is to vote for your top choice – is that best?
- Using *elimination* to select a winner:
  - 1st and 2nd choices can compete, so 3rd or 4th choice comes in 2nd
    - Different people use different strategies – how does that change it?
- Using *Borda (1..k)* voting:
  - Everybody ranks the k candidates that are running in that round
  - Your top choice receives k votes; your second choice, k-1, etc.
  - The winner is the candidate with the most votes
  - Borda voting is often used in combination with a runoff
    - Eliminate the lowest-ranked candidates and try again – how does that change it?

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Auctions

- Many different types and protocols
- All of the common protocols yield Pareto-optimal outcomes
- **But**… bidders can agree to artificially lower prices in order to cheat the auctioneer
- What about when the colluders cheat each other?
  - (Now that's really not playing nicely in the sandbox!)

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Learning in MAS

- Emerging field: How can teams of agents learn? Individually? As groups?
- **Genetic algorithms**:
  - Evolve a society of “fittest” agents
  - In practice: a cool idea that is very hard to make work
- **Strategy learning**:
  - In market environments, learn other agents’ strategies
- **Distributed Reinforcement Learning** (next slide)

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MAS RL

- **Distributed Reinforcement Learning**
  - Behave as an individual
  - Receive team feedback
  - Learn to individually contribute to team performance
- How?
  - Iteratively allocate “credit” for group performance to individual decisions

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Conclusions and Directions

- Different types of “multi-agent systems”:
  - Cooperative vs. competitive
  - Heterogeneous vs. homogeneous
- Lots of interesting/open research directions:
  - Effective cooperation strategies
  - “Fair” coordination strategies and protocols
  - Learning in MAS
  - Resource-limited MAS (communication, …)
- Economics: agents are human players with resources

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