Search, Planning, & CSPs
Making Sense Of It All

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CPS 170

How Do Search, Planning & CSPs fit together?

• Keep in mind these are all very general frameworks
• We typically think of search as the most general:
  – Start
  – Goal
  – Actions
  – Costs
• We can formulate almost anything as search, even in a not entirely unnatural way:
  – Shortest path
  – Sorting
  – Planning
  – CSPs
• Not everything that can be solved as search should be solved as search. The fact that you are holding a hammer doesn’t make everything a nail.
Algorithm vs. Concept

• There are times when we will talk about search as a specific algorithm, i.e., something maintains a queue, pops things off the queue, expands them, etc.

• Other times we will talk about search as a more abstract concept, e.g., finding a minimum of a function by gradient descent can be thought of as a kind of search, even though we don’t maintain a queue

CSPs

• Can formulate CSPs as search
  – Goal = satisfying assignment
  – States = partial assignments
  – Actions = assigning values to variables

• Using a generic search may not be a good idea:
  – We don’t care about the path
  – We don’t care about costs
  – We have a largish branching factor
  – We may miss opportunities to exploit structure in the problem, e.g., noticing the structure of the constraint graph
Planning

• We can formulate planning as search
  – Goal = plan goal
  – States = Situations reachable from start state
  – Actions = plan actions
• This seems like a better fit for search than CSPs (and it is), but
  – The branching factor is huge
  – The goal is usually a state set
  – Difficult to come up with good heuristics
• We need to do something more clever than simply applying generic search techniques

Notional View of Problem Classes

CSPs
Planning
Search

NB: To make this rigorous we would need to be a bit more precise and rigorous in our definitions than what is expected/required for this class.