

Foundations of Artificial Intelligence

42. Board Games: Alpha-Beta Search

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42.1 Alpha-Beta Search

42.2 Move Ordering

42.3 Summary

Board Games: Overview

chapter overview:

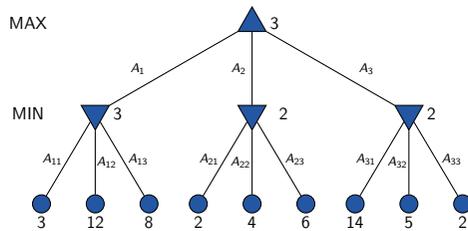
- ▶ 40. Introduction and State of the Art
- ▶ 41. Minimax Search and Evaluation Functions
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42. Board Games: Alpha-Beta Search

Alpha-Beta Search

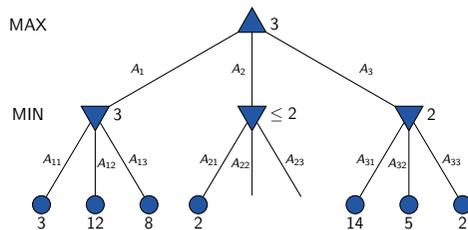
42.1 Alpha-Beta Search

Alpha-Beta Search

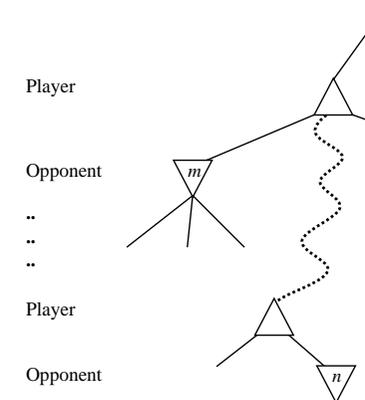


Can we save search effort?

We do not need to consider all the nodes!



Alpha-Beta Search: Generally



If $m > n$, then node with utility n will never be reached when playing perfectly!

Alpha-Beta Search: Idea

idea: Use two values α and β during minimax depth-first search, such that the following holds for every recursive call:

- ▶ If the utility value in the current subtree is $\leq \alpha$, then the subtree **is not interesting** because MAX will never enter it when playing perfectly.
- ▶ If the utility value in the current subtree is $\geq \beta$, then the subtree **is not interesting** because MIN will never enter it when playing perfectly.

If $\alpha \geq \beta$ in the subtree, then the subtree is not interesting and does not have to be searched further (**α - β pruning**).

Starting with $\alpha = -\infty$ and $\beta = +\infty$, alpha-beta search produces the **identical** result as minimax, with lower search effort.

Alpha-Beta Search: Pseudo Code

- ▶ algorithm skeleton the same as minimax
- ▶ function signature extended by two variables α and β

```
function alpha-beta-main( $p$ )
   $\langle v, move \rangle := \text{alpha-beta}(p, -\infty, +\infty)$ 
  return move
```

Alpha-Beta Search: Pseudo-Code

```
function alpha-beta( $p, \alpha, \beta$ )
```

```
if  $p$  is terminal position:
```

```
  return  $\langle u(p), \text{none} \rangle$ 
```

```
initialize  $v$  and  $best\_move$ 
```

```
[as in minimax]
```

```
for each  $\langle move, p' \rangle \in succ(p)$ :
```

```
   $\langle v', best\_move' \rangle := \text{alpha-beta}(p', \alpha, \beta)$ 
```

```
  update  $v$  and  $best\_move$ 
```

```
[as in minimax]
```

```
  if  $player(p) = \text{MAX}$ :
```

```
    if  $v \geq \beta$ :
```

```
      return  $\langle v, \text{none} \rangle$ 
```

```
       $\alpha := \max\{\alpha, v\}$ 
```

```
  if  $player(p) = \text{MIN}$ :
```

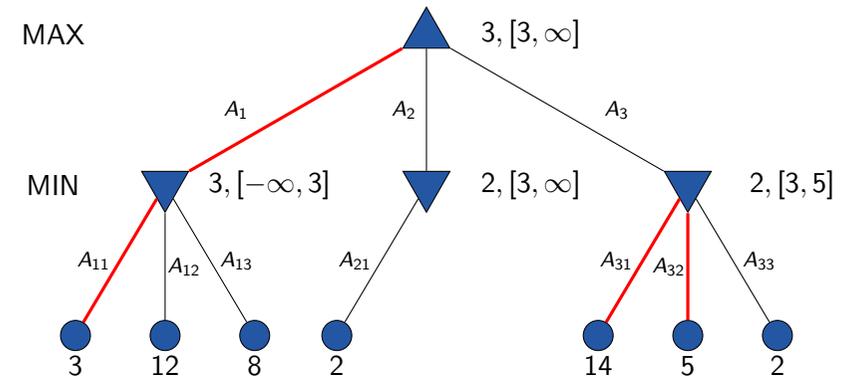
```
    if  $v \leq \alpha$ :
```

```
      return  $\langle v, \text{none} \rangle$ 
```

```
       $\beta := \min\{\beta, v\}$ 
```

```
return  $\langle v, best\_move \rangle$ 
```

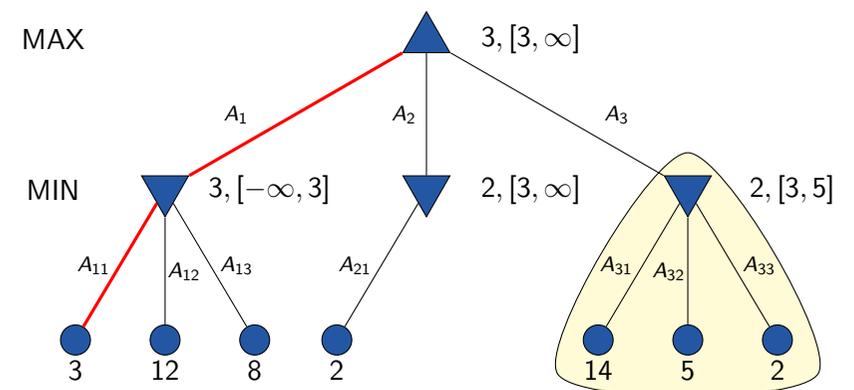
Alpha-Beta Search: Example



Cf. screen slides for detailed steps.

42.2 Move Ordering

Alpha-Beta Search: Example



If the last successor had been first, the rest of the subtree would have been pruned.

Move Ordering

idea: consider first the successors that are likely to be best.

- ▶ **Domain-specific ordering function**
e.g. chess: captures < threats < forward moves < backward moves
- ▶ **Dynamic move-ordering**
 - ▶ try first moves that have been good in the past
 - ▶ e.g. in iterative deepening search:
best moves from previous iteration

How Much Do We Gain with Alpha-Beta Search?

assumption: uniform game tree, depth d , branching factor $b \geq 2$;
MAX and MIN positions alternating

- ▶ **perfect move ordering**
 - ▶ best move at every position is considered first
(this cannot be done in practice – *Why?*)
 - ▶ maximizing move for MAX, minimizing move for MIN
 - ▶ effort reduced from $O(b^d)$ (minimax) to $O(b^{d/2})$
 - ▶ doubles the search depth that can be achieved in same time
- ▶ **random move ordering**
 - ▶ effort still reduced to $O(b^{3d/4})$ (for moderate b)

In practice, it is often possible to get close to the optimum.

42.3 Summary

Summary

alpha-beta search

- ▶ stores which utility both players can force
somewhere else in the game tree
- ▶ exploits this information to **avoid unnecessary computations**
- ▶ can have significantly **lower search effort than minimax**
- ▶ best case: search **twice as deep** in the same time