Pants Documentation

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Contents

A Python3 implementation of the Ant Colony Optimization Meta-Heuristic.

Pants provides you with the ability to quickly determine how to visit a collection of interconnected nodes such that the work done is minimized. Nodes can be any arbitrary collection of data while the edges represent the amount of "work" required to travel between two nodes. Thus, **Pants** is a tool for solving traveling salesman problems.

The world is built from a list of nodes and a function responsible for returning the length of the edge between any two given nodes. The length function need not return actual length. Instead, "length" refers to that the amount of "work" involved in moving from the first node to the second node - whatever that "work" may be. For a silly, random example, it could even be the number of dishes one must wash before moving to the next station at a least dish-washing dish washer competition.

Solutions are found through an iterative process. In each iteration, several ants are allowed to find a solution that "visits" every node of the world. The amount of pheromone on each edge is updated according to the length of the solutions in which it was used. The ant that traveled the least distance is considered to be the local best solution. If the local solution has a shorter distance than the best from any previous iteration, it then becomes the global best solution. The elite ant(s) then deposit their pheromone along the path of the global best solution to strengthen it further, and the process repeats.

You can read more about Ant Colony Optimization on Wikipedia.

CHAPTER 1

World module

class `pants.world.`**`Edge`**(*start*, *end*, *length=None*, *pheromone=None*)

This class represents the link between starting and ending nodes.

In addition to *start* and *end* nodes, every `Edge` has *length* and *pheromone* properties. *length* represents the static, *a priori* information, whereas *pheromone* level represents the dynamic, *a posteriori* information.

Parameters

- **`start`** (`node`) – the node at the start of the `Edge`
- **`end`** (`node`) – the node at the end of the `Edge`
- **`length`** (*`float`*) – the length of the `Edge` (default=1)
- **`pheromone`** (*`float`*) – the amount of pheromone on the `Edge` (default=0.1)

class `pants.world.`**`World`**(*nodes*, *lfunc*, ***kwargs*)

The nodes and edges of a particular problem.

Each `World` is created from a list of nodes, a length function, and optionally, a name and a description. Additionally, each `World` has a UID. The length function must accept nodes as its first two parameters, and is responsible for returning the distance between them. It is the responsibility of the `create_edges()` to generate the required `Edges` and initialize them with the correct *length* as returned by the length function.

Once created, `World` objects convert the actual nodes into node IDs, since solving does not rely on the actual data in the nodes. These are accessible via the `nodes` property. To access the actual nodes, simply pass an ID obtained from `nodes` to the `data()` method, which will return the node associated with the specified ID.

`Edges` are accessible in much the same way, except two node IDs must be passed to the `data()` method to indicate which nodes start and end the `Edge`. For example:

```
ids = world.nodes
assert len(ids) > 1
node0 = world.data(ids[0])
node1 = world.data(ids[1])
edge01 = world.data(ids[0], ids[1])
assert edge01.start == node0
assert edge01.end == node1
```

The `reset_pheromone()` method provides an easy way to reset the pheromone levels of every `Edge` contained in a `World` to a given *level*. It should be invoked before attempting to solve a `World` unless a "blank slate" is not desired. Also note that it should *not* be called between iterations of the `Solver` because it effectively erases the memory of the `Ant` colony solving it.

Parameters

- **`nodes`** (*`list`*) – a list of nodes
- **`lfunc`** (*`callable`*) – a function that calculates the distance between two nodes
- **`name`** (*`str`*) – the name of the world (default is "world#", where "#" is the `uid` of the world)
- **`description`** (*`str`*) – a description of the world (default is None)

`create_edges``()`

Create edges from the nodes.

The job of this method is to map node ID pairs to `Edge` instances that describe the edge between the nodes at the given indices. Note that all of the `Edges` are created within this method.

Returns a mapping of node ID pairs to `Edge` instances.

Return type `dict`

`data`(*idx*, *idy=None*)

Return the node data of a single id or the edge data of two ids.

If only *idx* is specified, return the node with the ID *idx*. If *idy* is also specified, return the `Edge` between nodes with indices *idx* and *idy*.

Parameters

- **`idx`** (*`int`*) – the id of the first node
- **`idy`** (*`int`*) – the id of the second node (default is None)

Returns the node with ID *idx* or the `Edge` between nodes with IDs *idx* and *idy*.

Return type node or `Edge`

`nodes`

Node IDs.

`reset_pheromone`(*level=0.01*)

Reset the amount of pheromone on every edge to some base *level*.

Each time a new set of solutions is to be found, the amount of pheromone on every edge should be equalized to ensure un-biased initial conditions.

Parameters **`level`** (*`float`*) – amount of pheromone to set on each edge (default=0.01)

CHAPTER 2

Ant module

class `pants.ant.`**`Ant`**(*alpha=1*, *beta=3*)

A single independent finder of solutions to a `World`.

Each `Ant` finds a solution to a world one move at a time. They also represent the solution they find, and are capable of reporting which nodes and edges they visited, in what order they were visited, and the total length of the solution.

Two properties govern the decisions each `Ant` makes while finding a solution: *alpha* and *beta*. *alpha* controls the importance placed on pheromone while *beta* controls the importance placed on distance. In general, *beta* should be greater than *alpha* for best results. `Ants` also have a *uid* property that can be used to identify a particular instance.

Using the `initialize()` method, each `Ant` *must be initialized* to a particular `World`, and optionally may be given an initial node from which to start finding a solution. If a starting node is not given, one is chosen at random. Thus a few examples of instantiation and initialization might look like:

```
ant = Ant()
ant.initialize(world)
```

```
ant = Ant().initialize(world)
```

```
ant = Ant(alpha=0.5, beta=2.25)
ant.initialize(world, start=world.nodes[0])
```

Note: The examples above assume the world has already been created!

Once an `Ant` has found a solution (or at any time), the solution may be obtained and inspected by accessing its `tour` property, which returns the nodes visited in order, or its `path` property, which returns the edges visited in order. Also, the total distance of the solution can be accessed through its `distance` property. `Ants` are even sortable by their distance:

```
ants = [Ant() for ...]
# ... have each ant in the list solve a world
ants = sorted(ants)
for i in range(1, len(ants)):
    assert ants[i - 1].distance < ants[i].distance
```

`Ants` may be cloned, which will return a shallow copy while not preserving the *uid* property. If this behavior is not desired, simply use the `copy.copy()` or `copy.deepcopy()` methods as necessary.

The remaining methods mainly govern the mechanics of making each move. `can_move()` determines whether all possible moves have been made, `remaining_moves()` returns the moves not yet made, `choose_move()` returns a single move from a list of moves, `make_move()` actually performs the move, and `weigh()` returns the weight of a given move. The `move()` method governs the move-making process by gathering the remaining moves, choosing one of them, making the chosen move, and returning the move that was made.

`can_move``()`
Return `True` if there are moves that have not yet been made.

Return type bool

`choose_move``(`*choices*`)`
Choose a move from all possible moves.

Parameters **`choices`** (*`list`*) – a list of all possible moves

Returns the chosen element from *choices*

Return type *node*

`clone``()`
Return a shallow copy with a new UID.

If an exact copy (including the uid) is desired, use the `copy.copy()` method.

Returns a clone

Return type `Ant`

`initialize``(`*world*, *start=None*`)`
Reset everything so that a new solution can be found.

Parameters

- **`world`** (`World`) – the world to solve
- **`start`** (*`Node`*) – the starting node (default is chosen randomly)

Returns *self*

Return type `Ant`

`make_move``(`*dest*`)`
Move to the *dest* node and return the edge traveled.

When *dest* is `None`, an attempt to take the final move back to the starting node is made. If that is not possible (because it has previously been done), then `None` is returned.

Parameters **`dest`** (`node`) – the destination node for the move

Returns the edge taken to get to *dest*

Return type `Edge`

move()
Choose, make, and return a move from the remaining moves.

Returns the `Edge` taken to make the move chosen

Return type `Edge`

node
Most recently visited node.

path
Edges traveled by the `Ant` in order.

remaining_moves()
Return the moves that remain to be made.

Return type list

tour
Nodes visited by the `Ant` in order.

weigh(*edge*)
Calculate the weight of the given *edge*.

The weight of an edge is simply a representation of its perceived value in finding a shorter solution. Larger weights increase the odds of the edge being taken, whereas smaller weights decrease those odds.

Parameters **edge** (`Edge`) – the edge to weigh

Returns the weight of *edge*

Return type float

CHAPTER 3

Solver module

class `pants.solver.`**`Solver`**`(`***kwargs*`)`

This class contains the functionality for finding one or more solutions for a given `World`.

Parameters

- **`alpha`** (*`float`*) – relative importance of pheromone (default=1)
- **`beta`** (*`float`*) – relative importance of distance (default=3)
- **`rho`** (*`float`*) – percent evaporation of pheromone (0..1, default=0.8)
- **`q`** (*`float`*) – total pheromone deposited by each `Ant` after each iteration is complete (>0, default=1)
- **`t0`** (*`float`*) – initial pheromone level along each `Edge` of the `World` (>0, default=0.01)
- **`limit`** (*`int`*) – number of iterations to perform (default=100)
- **`ant_count`** (*`float`*) – how many `Ant`s will be used (default=10)
- **`elite`** (*`float`*) – multiplier of the pheromone deposited by the elite `Ant` (default=0.5)

`aco``(`*colony*`)`

Return the best solution by performing the ACO meta-heuristic.

This method lets every `Ant` in the colony find a solution, updates the pheromone levels according to the solutions found, and returns the *Ant* with the best solution.

This method is not meant to be called directly. Instead, call either `solve()` or `solutions()`.

Parameters **`colony`** (*`list`*) – the *Ant*s to use in finding a solution

Returns the best solution found

Return type `Ant`

`create_colony``(`*world*`)`

Create a set of `Ant`s and initialize them to the given *world*.

If the *ant_count* is less than *1*, `round_robin_ants()` are used and the number of `Ants` will be equal to the number of nodes. Otherwise, `random_ants()` are created instead, and the number of `Ants` will be equal to the *ant_count*.

Parameters **`world`** (`World`) – the world from which the `Ants` will be given starting nodes.

Returns list of `Ants`

Return type list

`find_solutions`(*ants*)

Let each `Ant` find a solution.

Makes each `Ant` move until each can no longer move.

Parameters **`ants`** (*`list`*) – the ants to use for solving

`global_update`(*ants*)

Update the amount of pheromone on each edge according to the fitness of solutions that use it.

This accomplishes the global update performed at the end of each solving iteration.

Note: This method should never let the pheromone on an edge decrease to less than its initial level.

Parameters **`ants`** (*`list`*) – the ants to use for solving

`local_update`(*edge*)

Evaporate some of the pheromone on the given *edge*.

Note: This method should never let the pheromone on an edge decrease to less than its initial level.

Parameters **`edge`** (`Edge`) – the `Edge` to be updated

`random_ants`(*world*, *count*, *even=False*)

Returns a list of `Ants` distributed to the nodes of the world in a random fashion.

Note that this does not ensure at least one `Ant` begins at each node unless there are exactly as many `Ants` as there are nodes. This method is used to create the `Ants` before solving if *ant_count* is **not** `0`.

Parameters

- **`world`** (`World`) – the `World` in which to create the ants.
- **`count`** (*`int`*) – the number of `Ants` to create
- **`even`** (*`bool`*) – `True` if `random.random()` should avoid choosing the same starting node multiple times (default is `False`)

Returns the `Ants` initialized to nodes in the `World`

Return type list

`reset_colony`(*colony*)

Reset the *colony* of `Ants` such that each `Ant` is ready to find a new solution.

Essentially, this method re-initializes all `Ants` in the colony to the `World` that they were initialized to last. Internally, this method is called after each iteration of the `Solver`.

Parameters **`colony`** (*`list`*) – the `Ants` to reset

round_robin_ants (*world*, *count*)

Returns a list of `Ants` distributed to the nodes of the world in a round-robin fashion.

Note that this does not ensure at least one `Ant` begins at each node unless there are exactly as many `Ants` as there are nodes. However, if *ant_count* is `0` then *ant_count* is set to the number of nodes in the `World` and this method is used to create the `Ants` before solving.

Parameters

- **world** (`World`) – the `World` in which to create the `Ants`
- **count** (*int*) – the number of `Ants` to create

Returns the `Ants` initialized to nodes in the `World`

Return type list

solutions (*world*)

Return successively shorter paths through the given *world*.

Unlike `solve()`, this method returns one solution for each improvement of the best solution found thus far.

Parameters **world** (`World`) – the `World` to solve

Returns successively shorter solutions as `Ants`

Return type list

solve (*world*)

Return the single shortest path found through the given *world*.

Parameters **world** (`World`) – the `World` to solve

Returns the single best solution found

Return type `Ant`

trace_elite (*ant*)

Deposit pheromone along the path of a particular ant.

This method is used to deposit the pheromone of the elite `Ant` at the end of each iteration.

Note: This method should never let the pheromone on an edge decrease to less than its initial level.

Parameters **ant** (`Ant`) – the elite `Ant`

CHAPTER 4

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