

# CS 260: Foundations of Data Science

Prof. Thao Nguyen

Fall 2025



HAVERFORD  
COLLEGE

# Outline for today

- Go over Midterm 2
- Neural Networks

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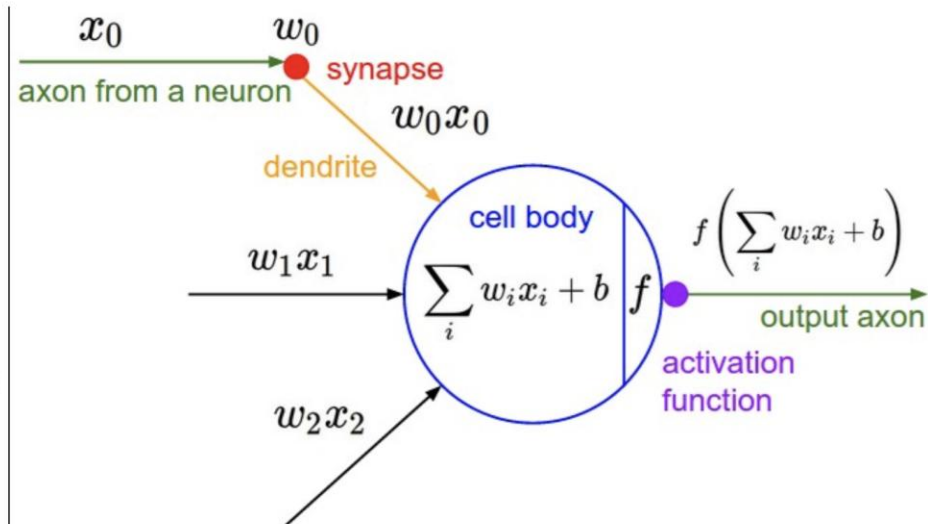
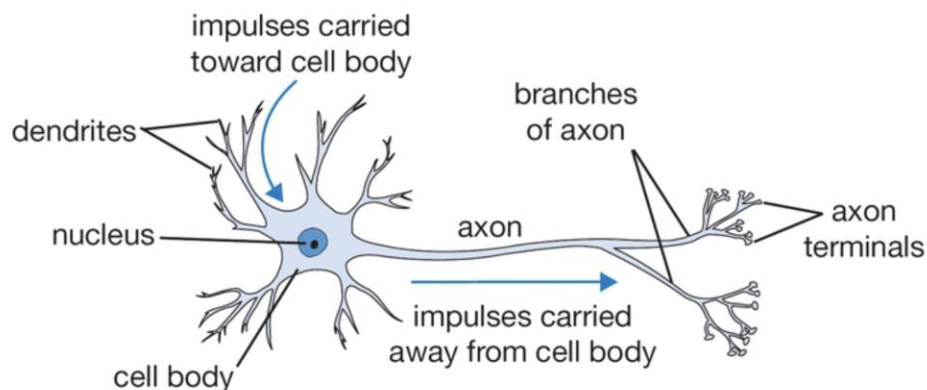
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Midterm solutions  
not posted online

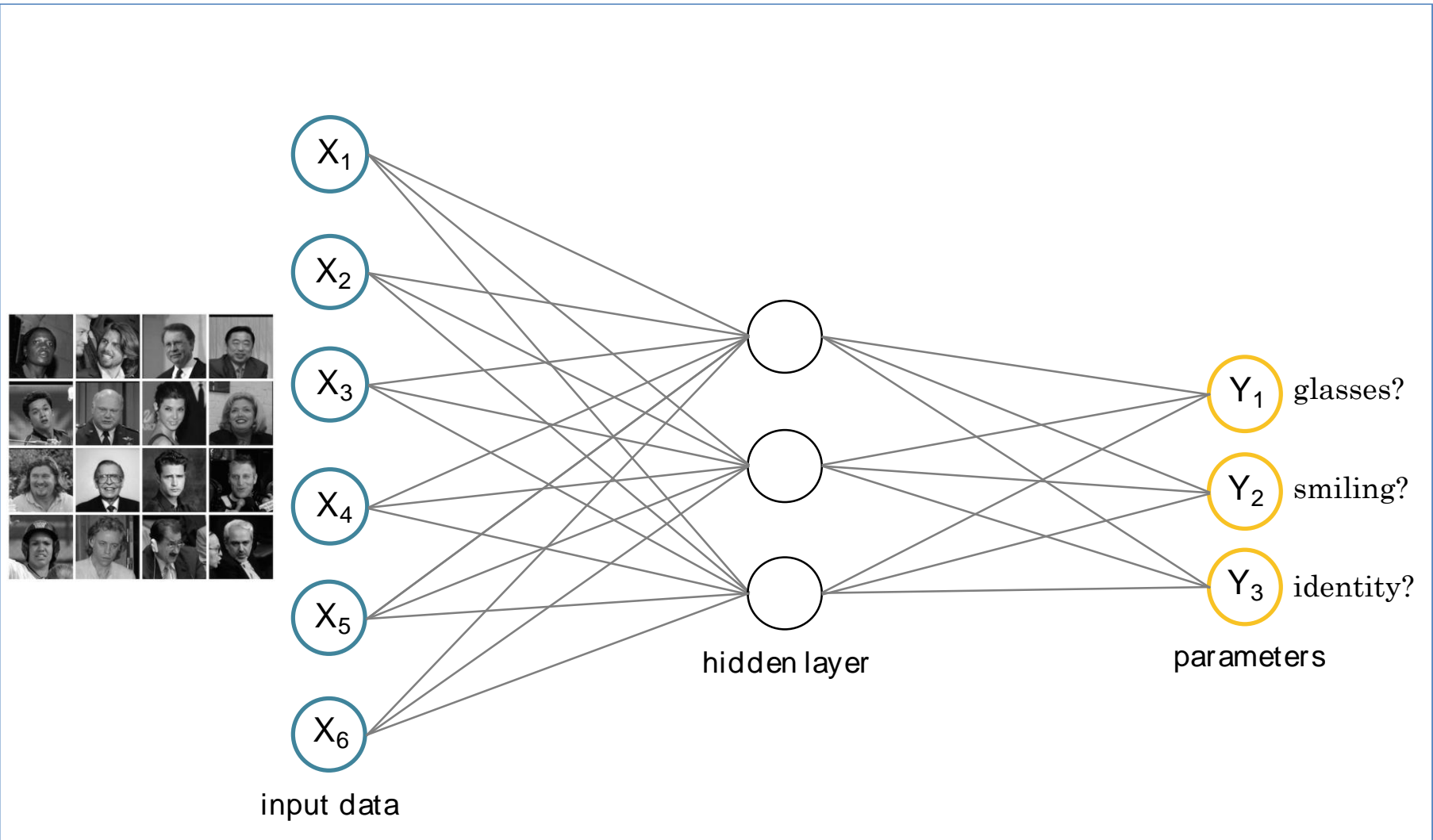
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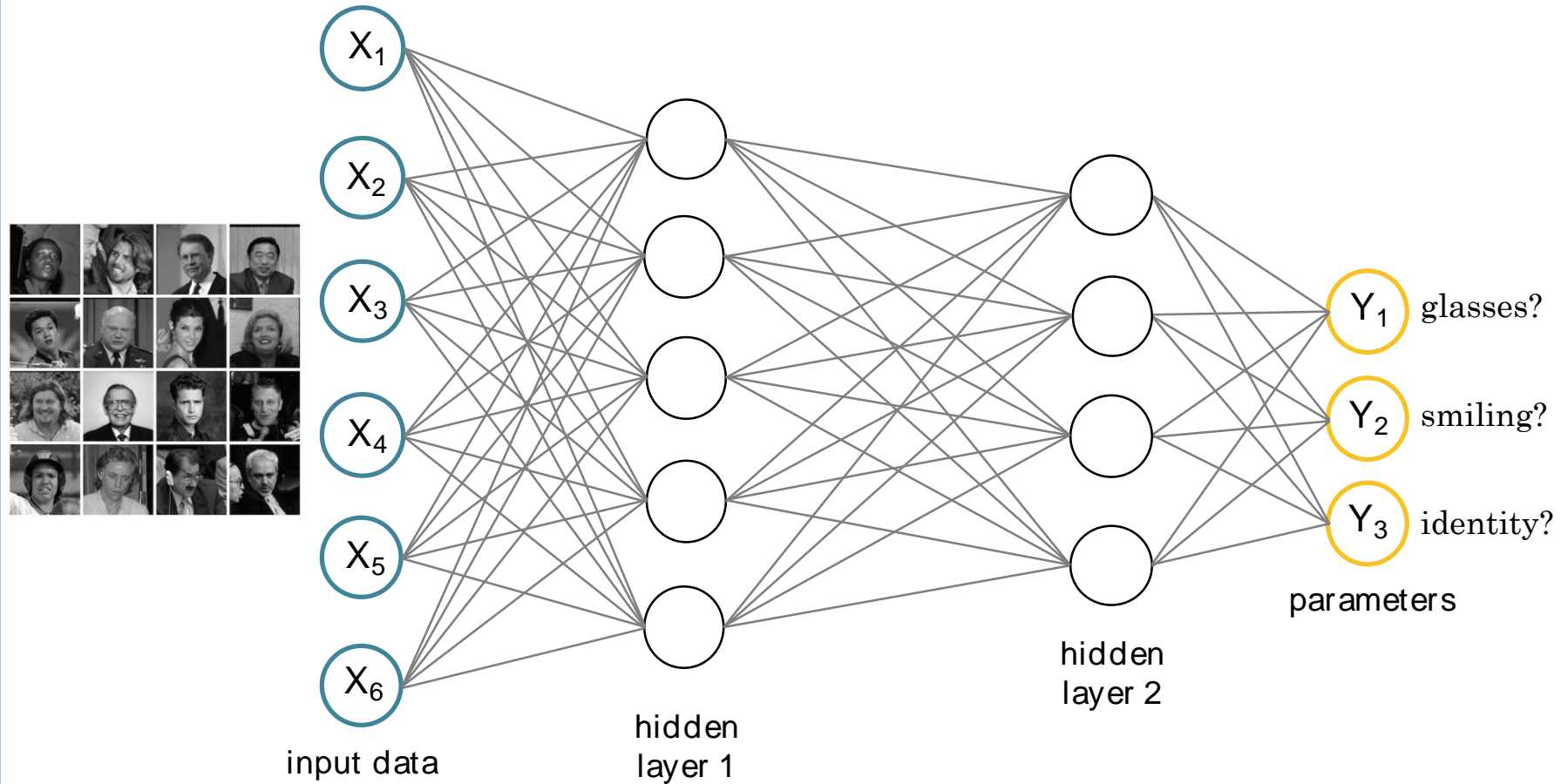
# Biological Inspiration for Neural Networks



# Idea: transform data into lower dimension



# Multi-layer networks = “deep learning”

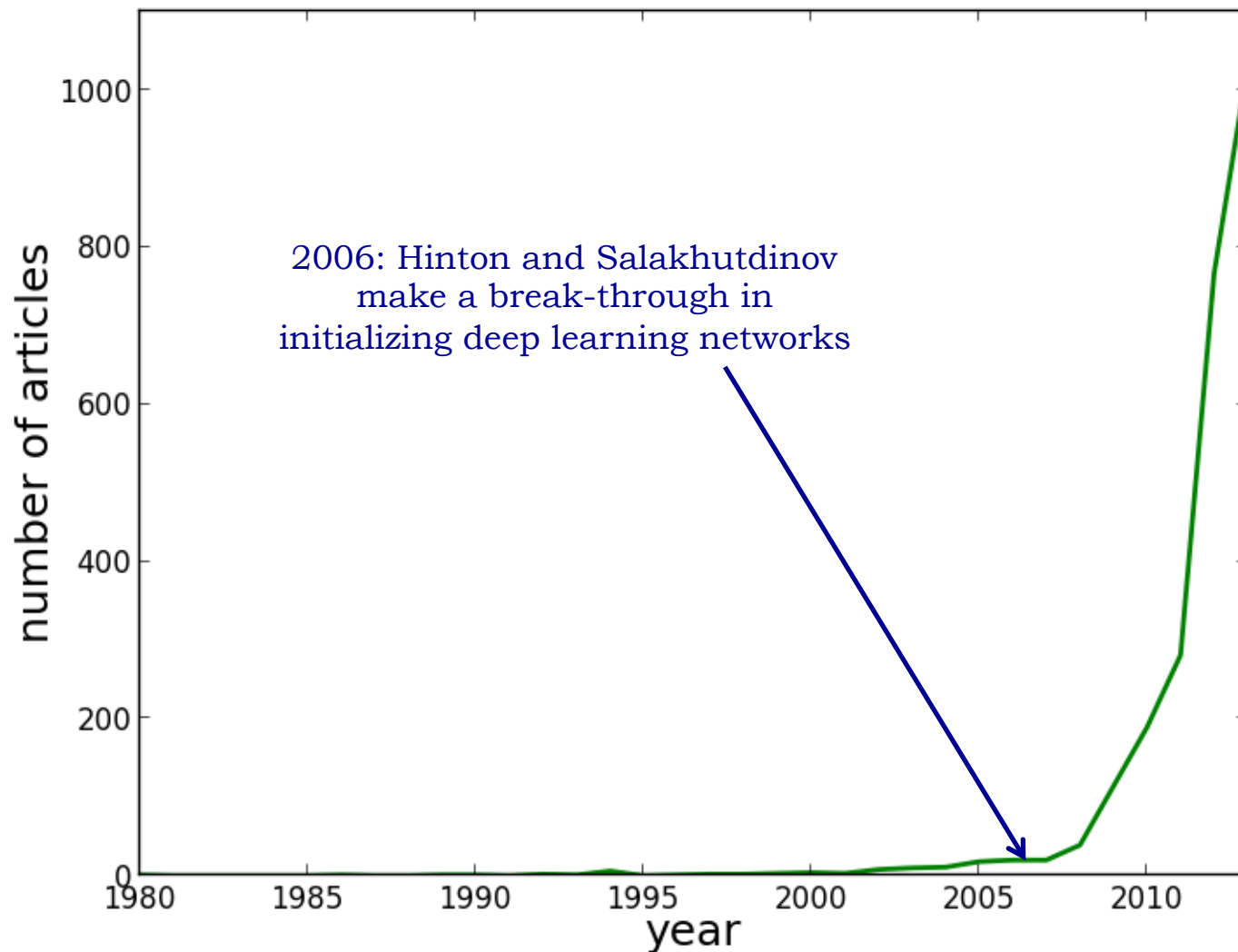




# History of Neural Networks

- Perceptron can be interpreted as a simple neural network
- Misconceptions about the weaknesses of perceptrons contributed to declining funding for NN research
- Difficulty of training multi-layer NNs contributed to second setback
- Mid 2000's: breakthroughs in NN training contribute to rise of “deep learning”

# Number of papers that mention “deep learning” over time



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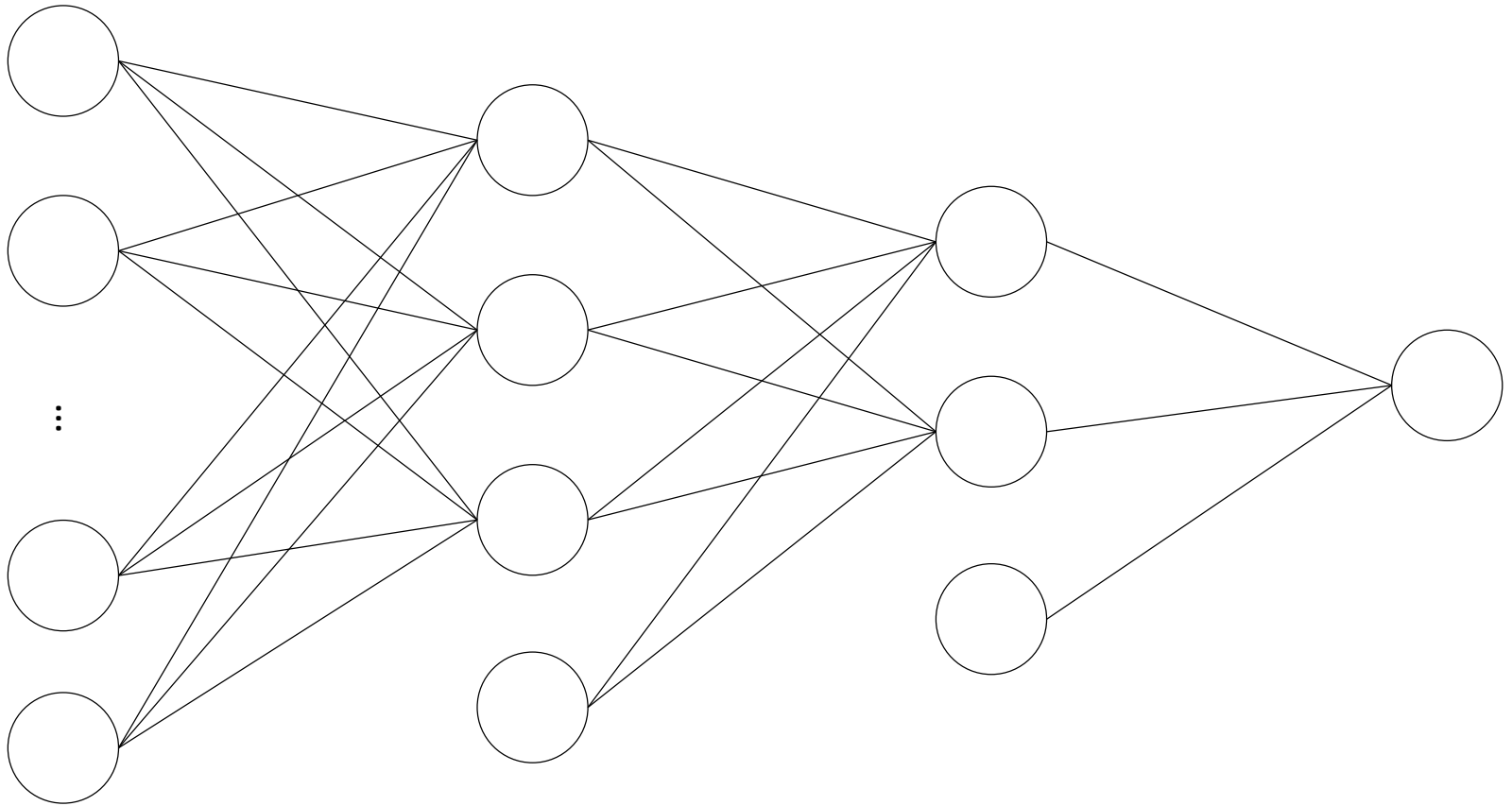
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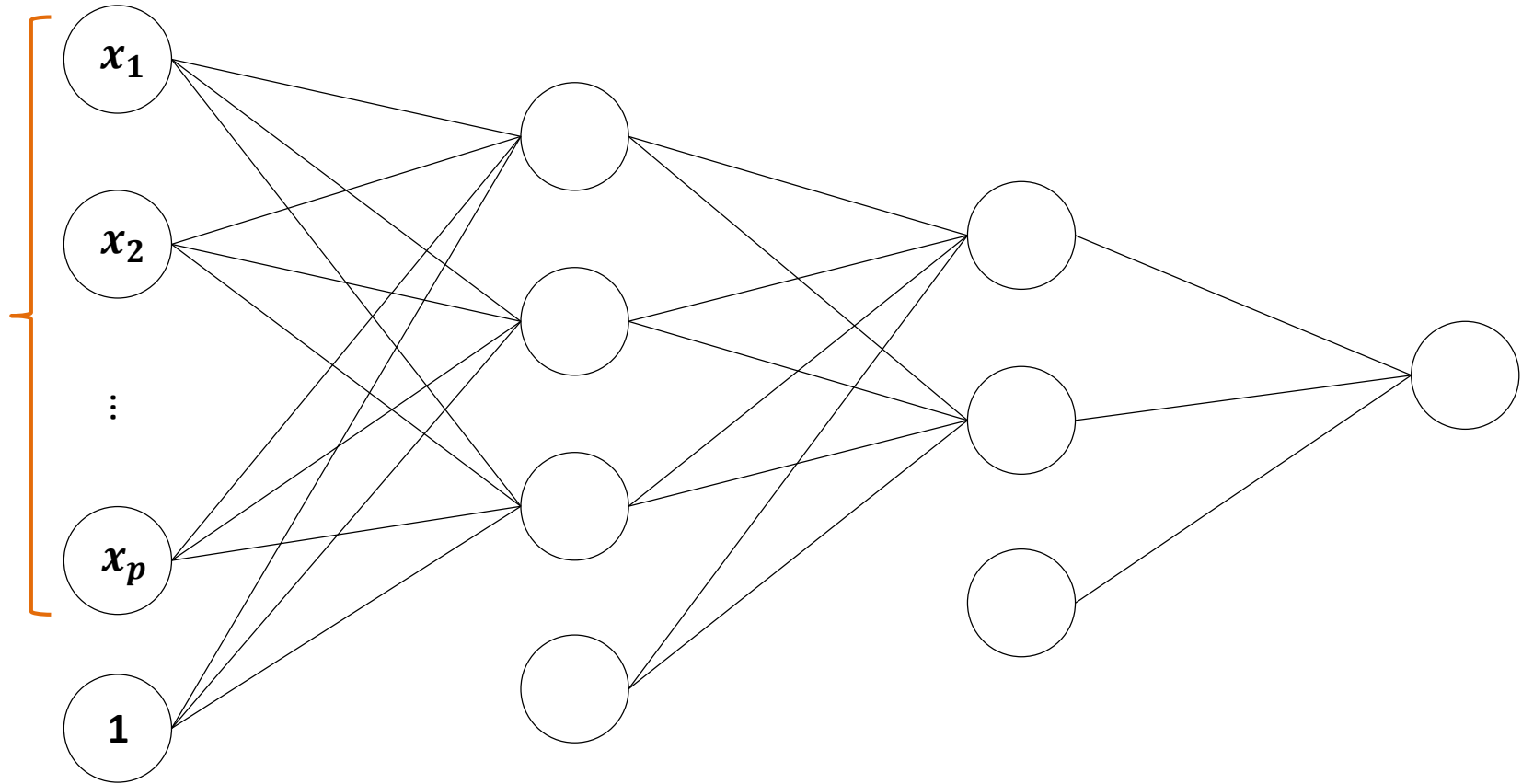
- Neural networks can approximate any function!
- For our purposes in ML, we want to use them to approximate a function from our inputs to our outputs
- We will train our network by asking it to minimize the loss between its output and the true output
- We will use SGD-like approaches to minimize loss

# Fully Connected Neural Network Architecture



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one training example

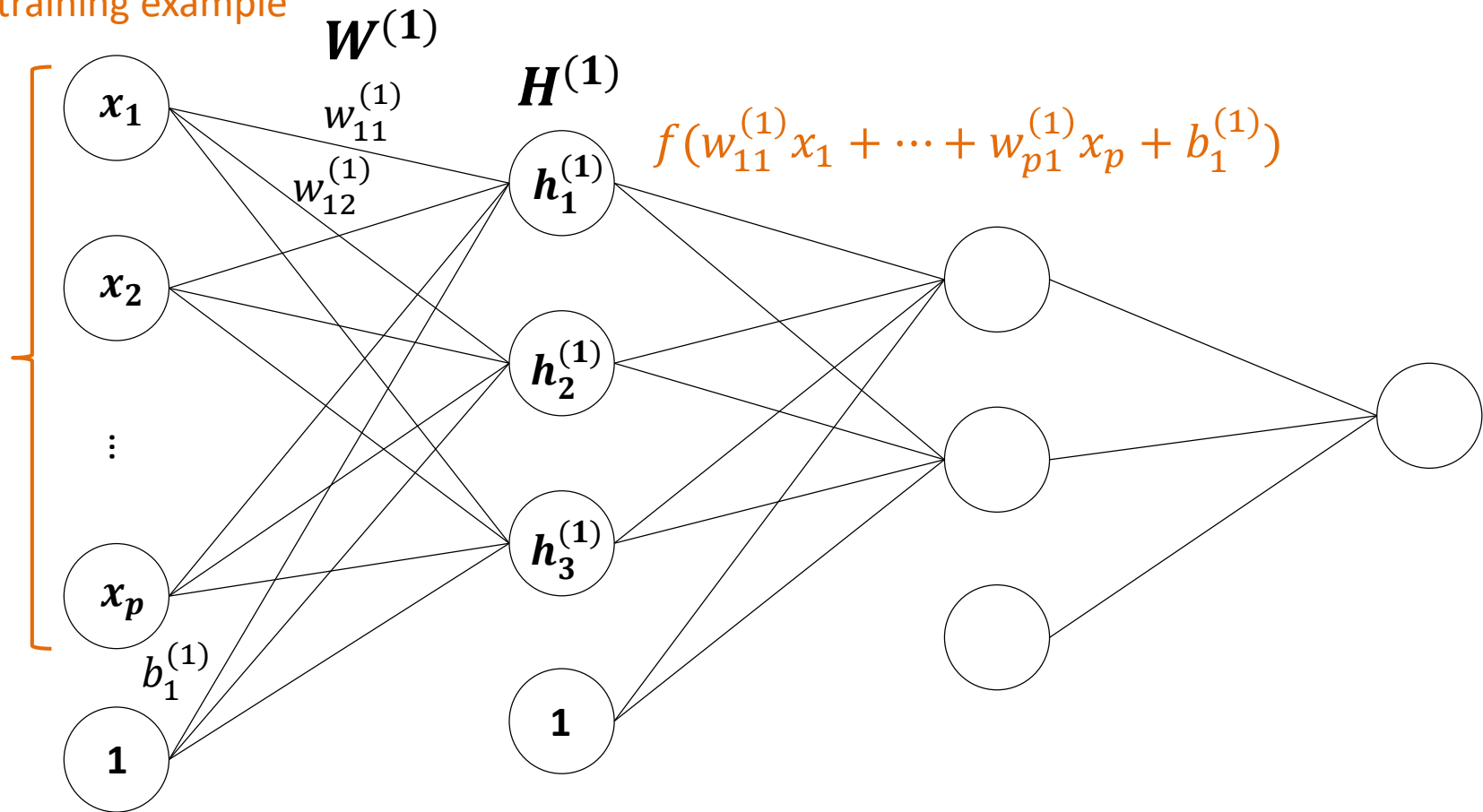


"fake" one



# Fully Connected Neural Network Architecture

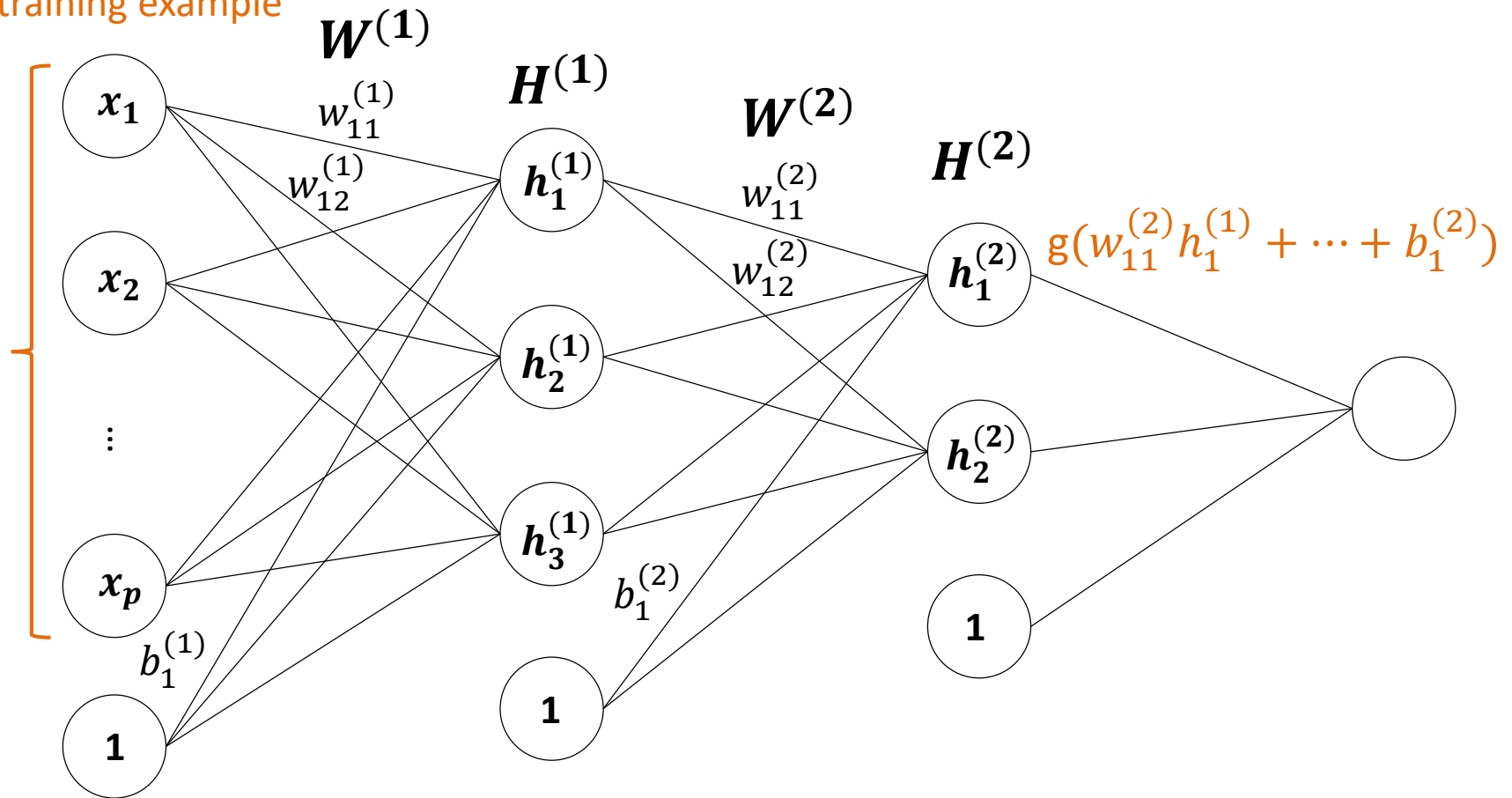
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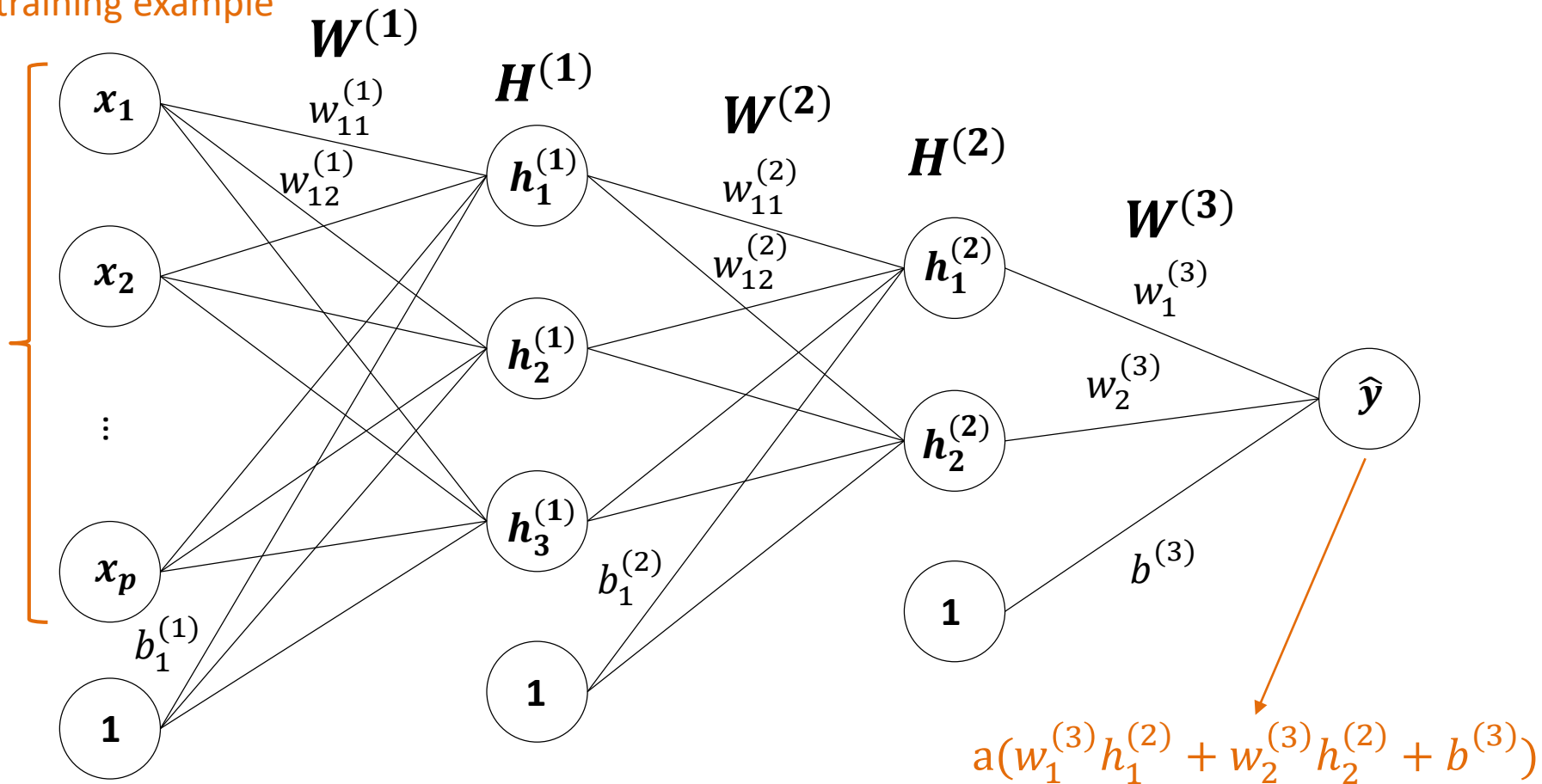
one training example



"fake" one

# Fully Connected Neural Network Architecture

one training example



"fake" one

# Layer Output

- $H^{(1)} = a(W^{(1)}X^T + B^{(1)})$   $p_1 = \#$  of nodes in layer 1

activation function

$p_1 \times p$     $p \times n$     $p_1 \times n$

$p_1 \times n$

- $H^{(2)} = a(W^{(2)}H^{(1)} + B^{(2)})$

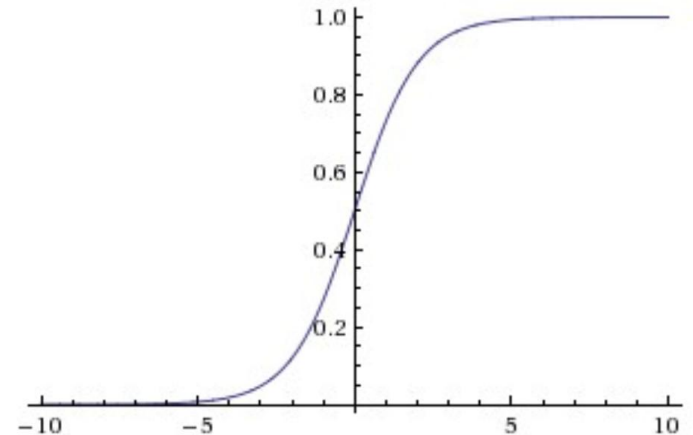
- $\hat{y} = a(W^{(3)}H^{(2)} + \vec{b}^{(3)})$

# Activation Functions

# Option 1: sigmoid function

- Input: all real numbers, output:  $[0, 1]$

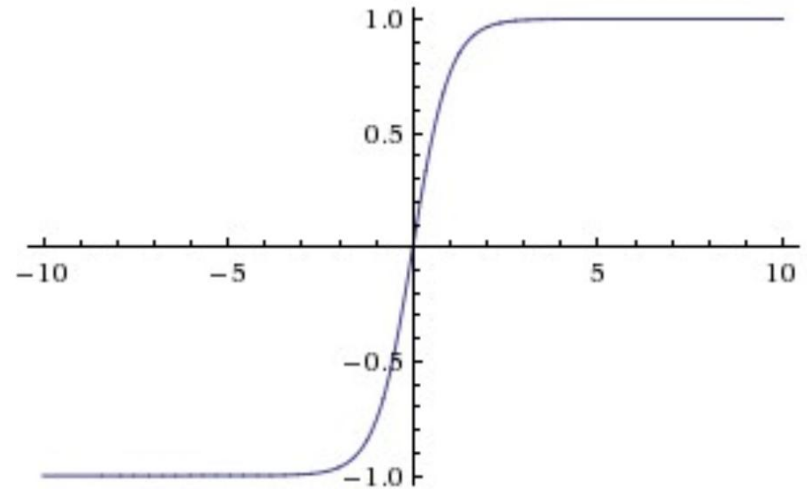
$$\sigma(x) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-x}}$$



## Option 2: hyperbolic tangent

- Input: all real numbers, output:  $[-1, 1]$

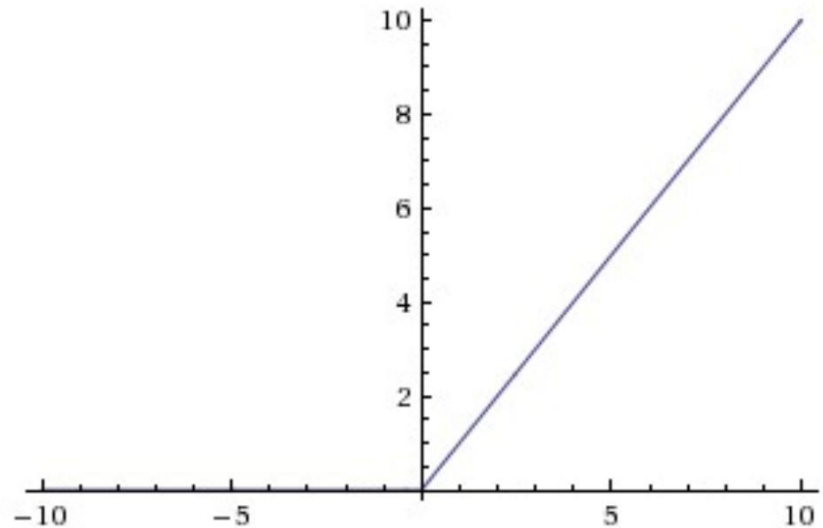
$$\tanh(x) = \frac{e^x - e^{-x}}{e^x + e^{-x}}$$



# Option 3: Rectified Linear Unit (ReLU)

- Return  $x$  if  $x$  is positive (i.e. threshold at 0)

$$f(x) = \max(0, x)$$





# Pros and Cons of Activation Functions

## 1) Sigmoid

- (-) When input becomes very positive or very negative, gradient approaches 0 (saturates and stops gradient descent)
- (-) Not zero-centered, so gradient on weights can end up all positive or all negative (zig-zag in gradient descent)
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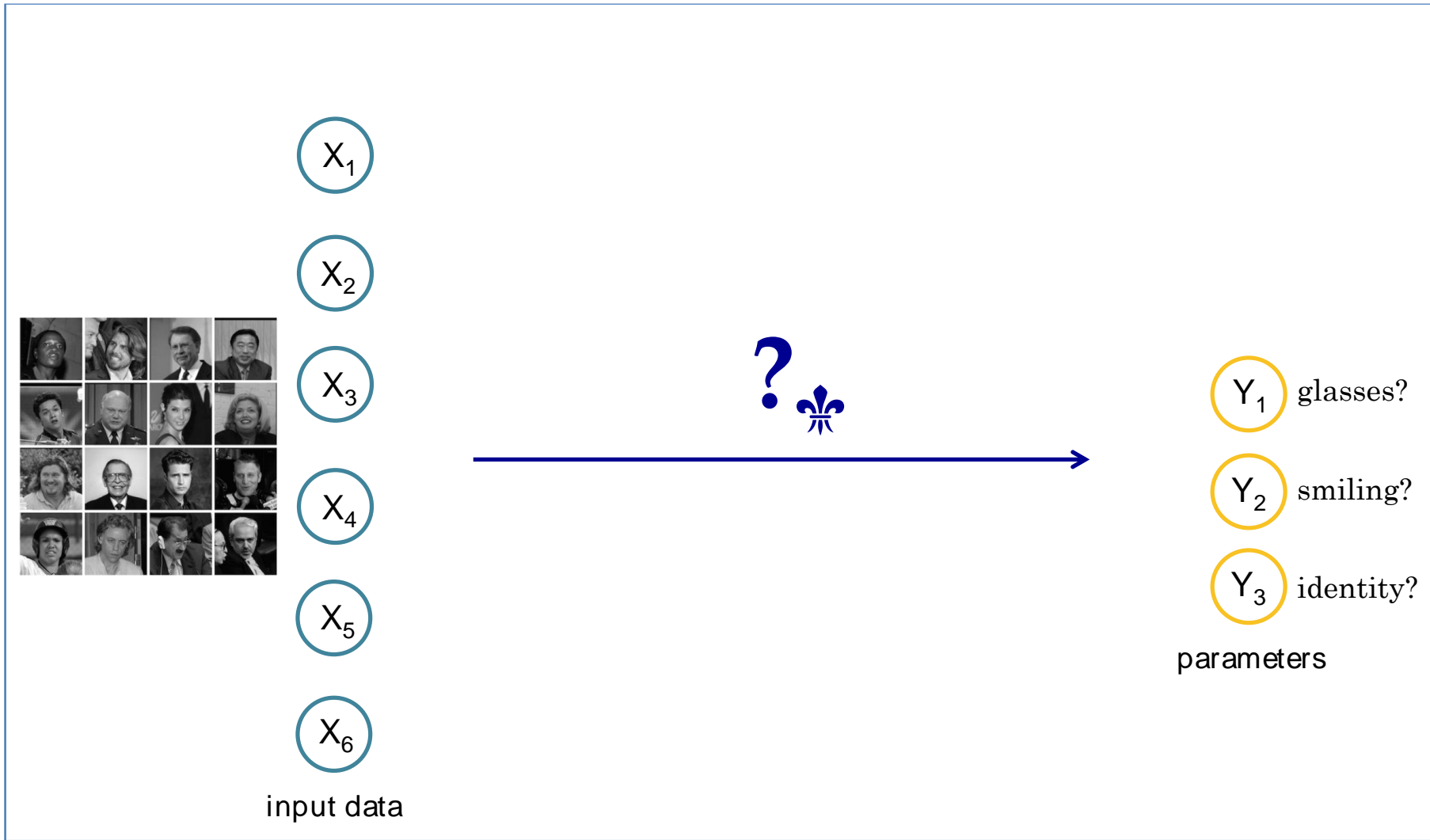
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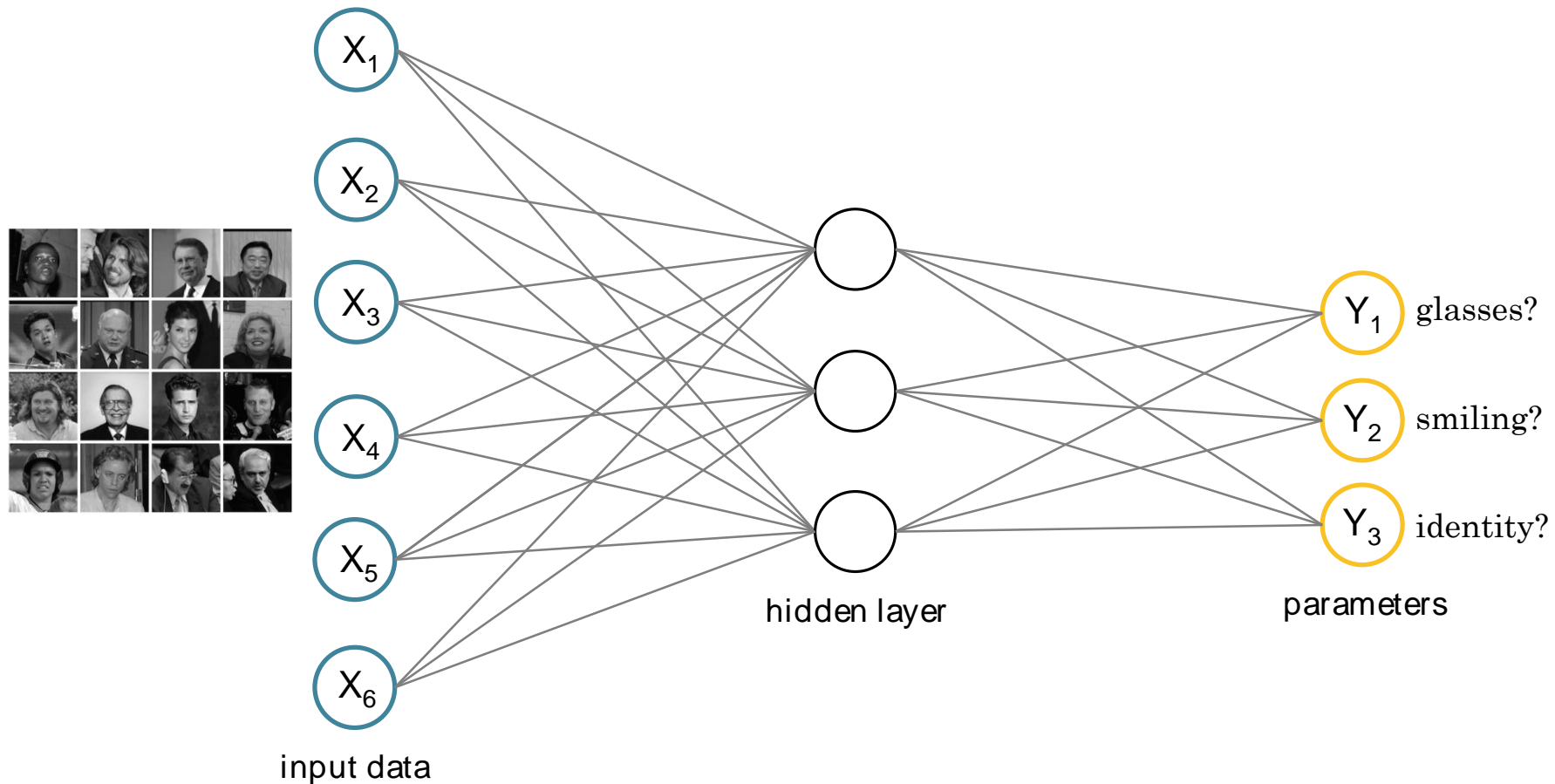
## 3) ReLU

- (+) Works well in practice (accelerates convergence)
- (+) Function value very easy to compute! (no exponentials)
- (-) Units can have no signal if input becomes too negative throughout gradient descent

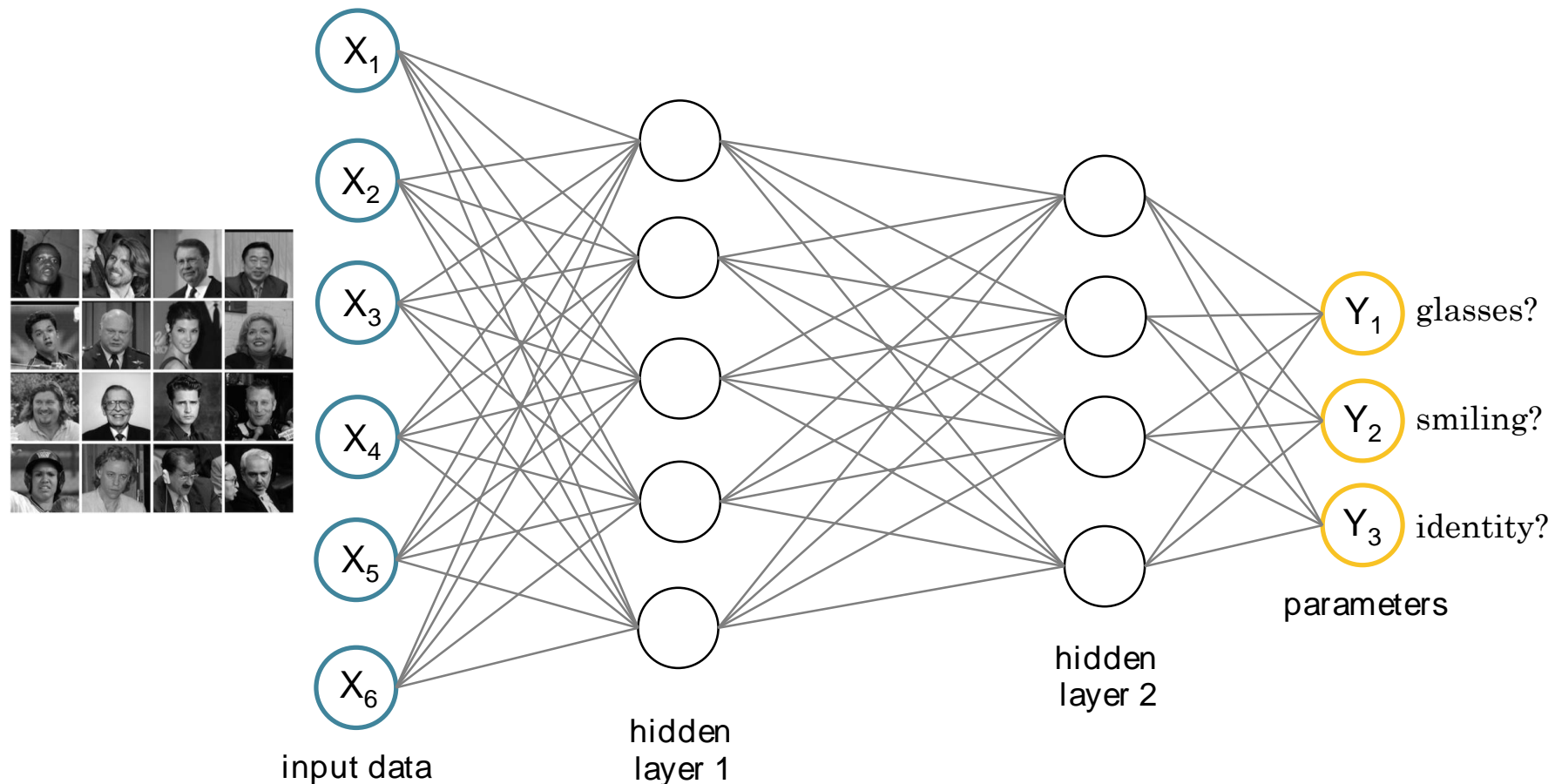
# Goal: find a function between input and output



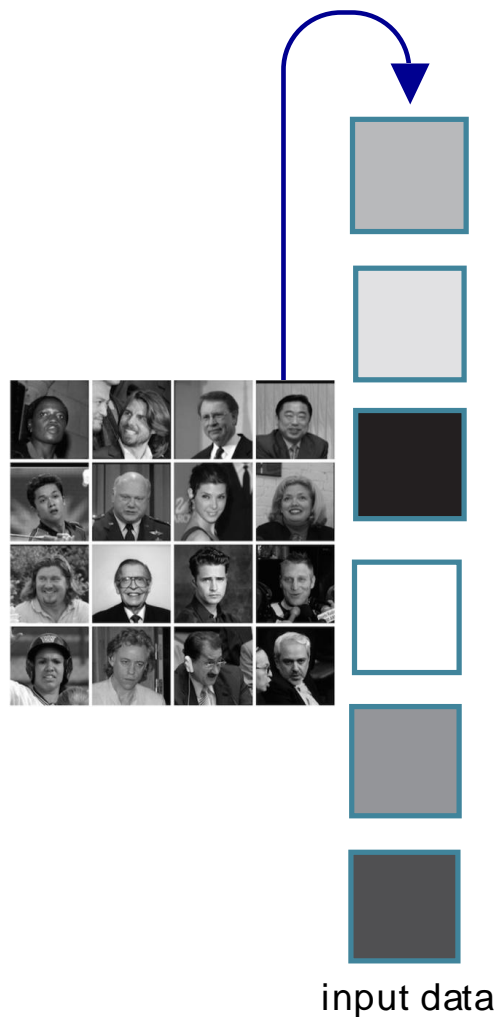
# First idea: one hidden layer



## Second idea: more hidden layers (“deep” learning)



Another idea: Flatten pixels of image  
into a single vector



# Detour to autoencoders



$X_{1\#}$

$X_{2\#}$

$X_{3\#}$

$X_{4\#}$

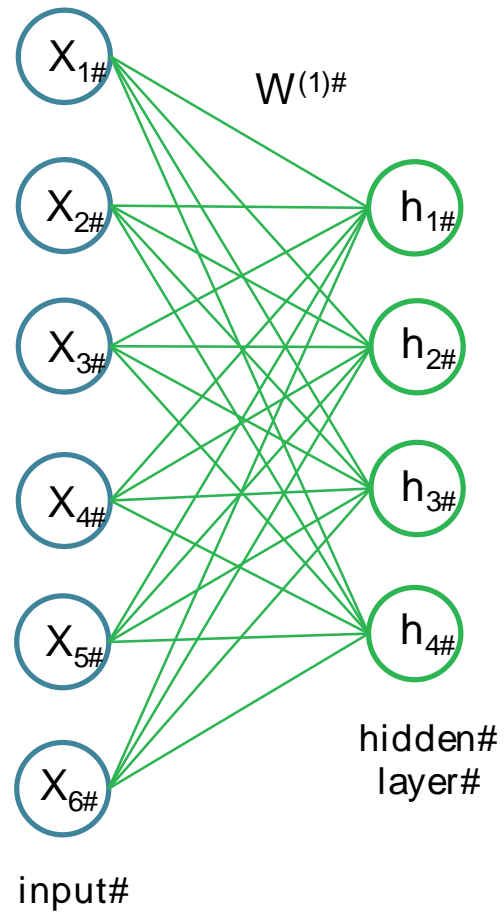
$X_{5\#}$

$X_{6\#}$

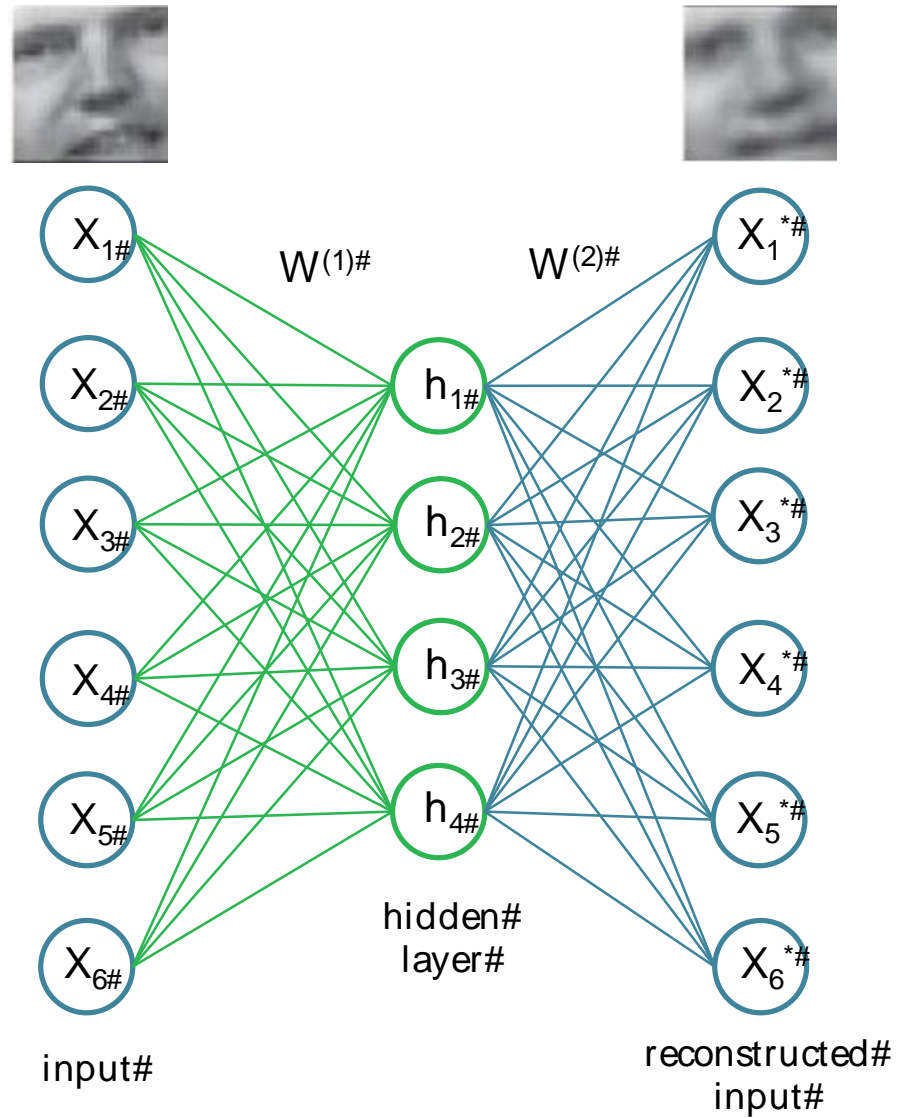
input#



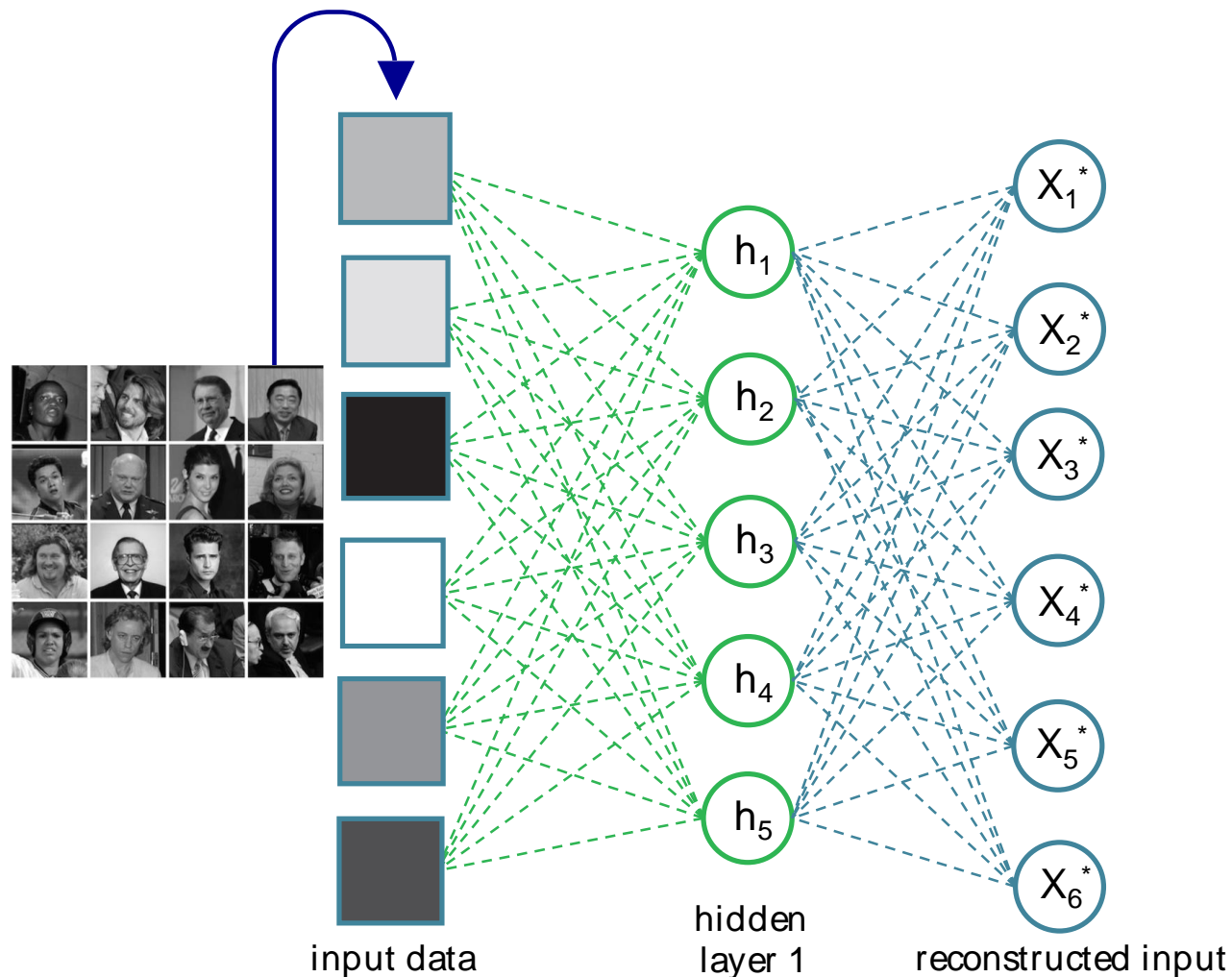
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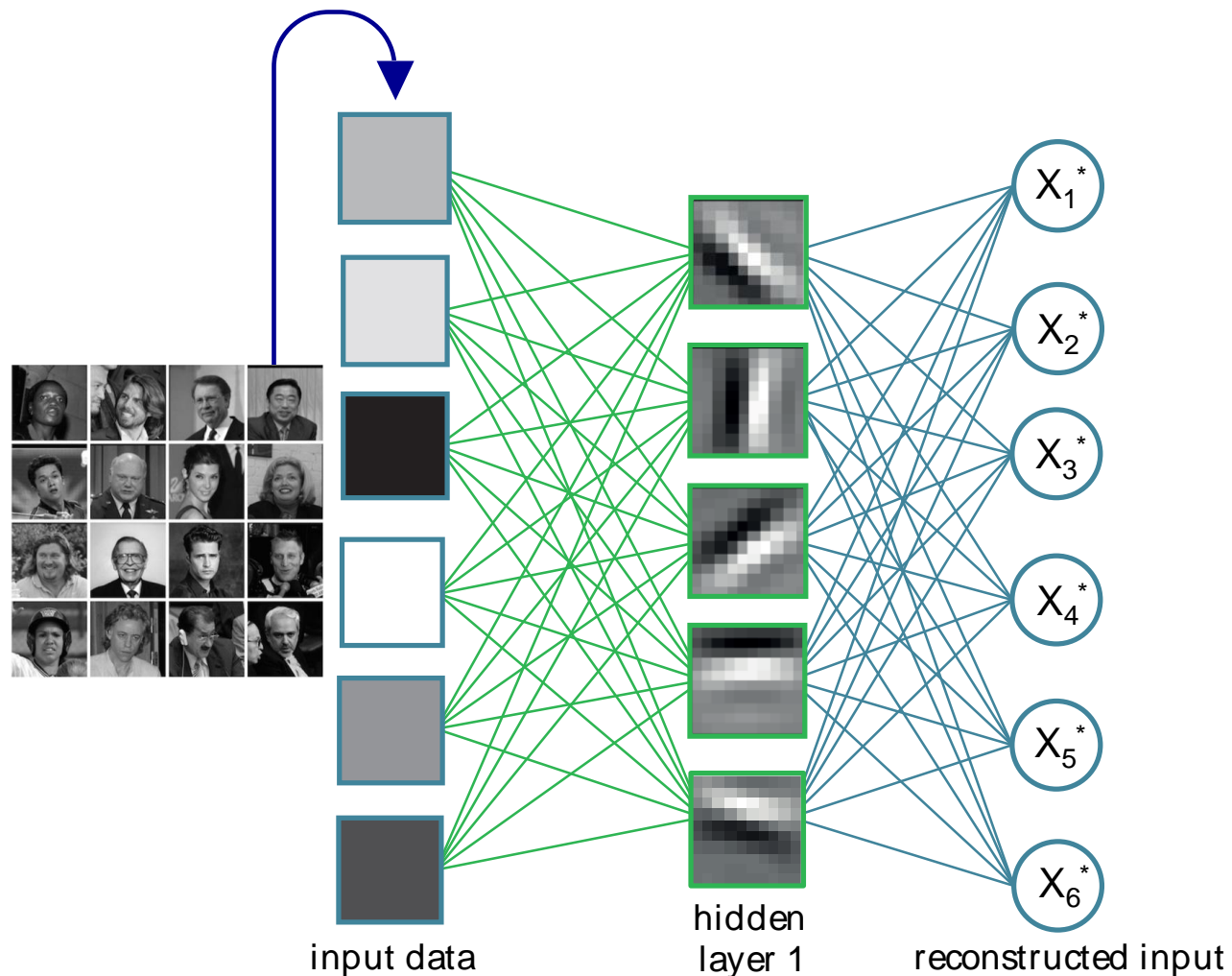
# Detour to autoencoders



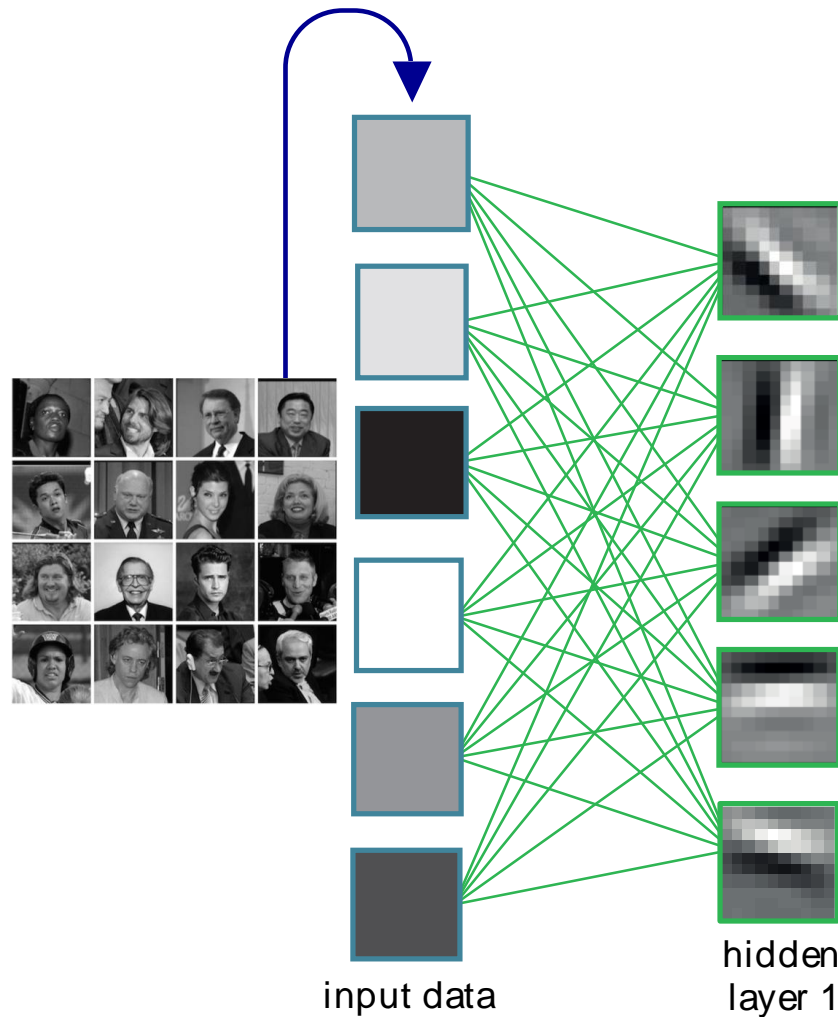
Use unsupervised pre-training to find a function from the input to itself



# Hidden units can be interpreted as edges



Now: throw away reconstruction and input

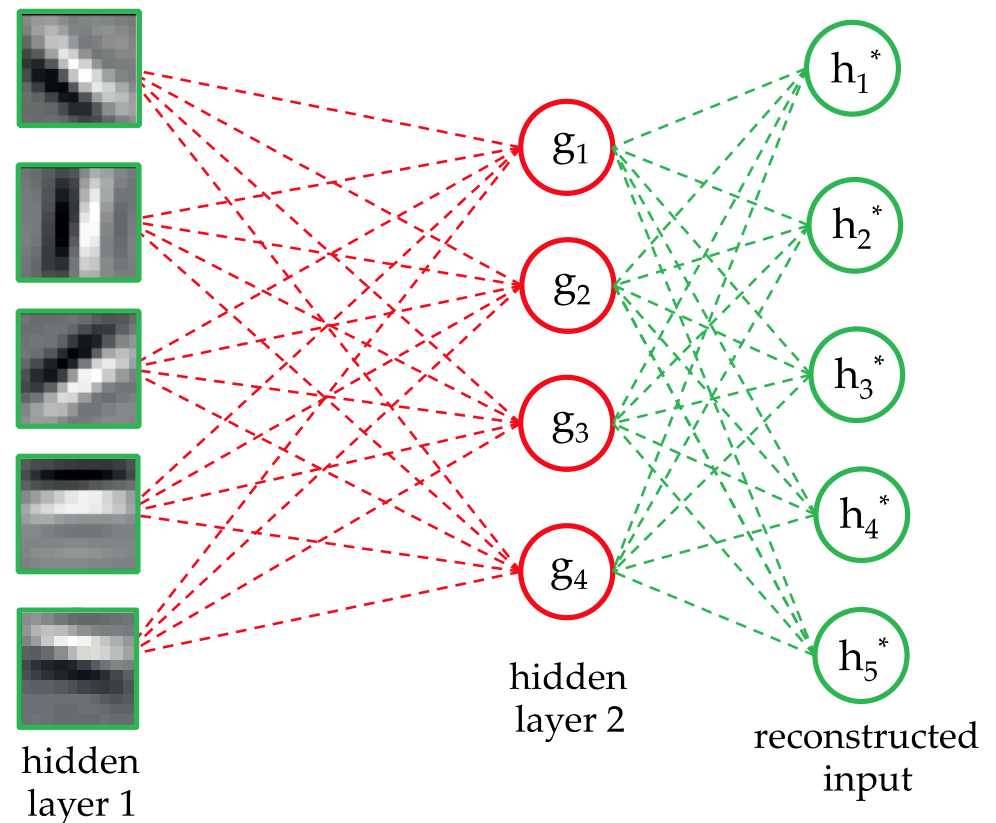


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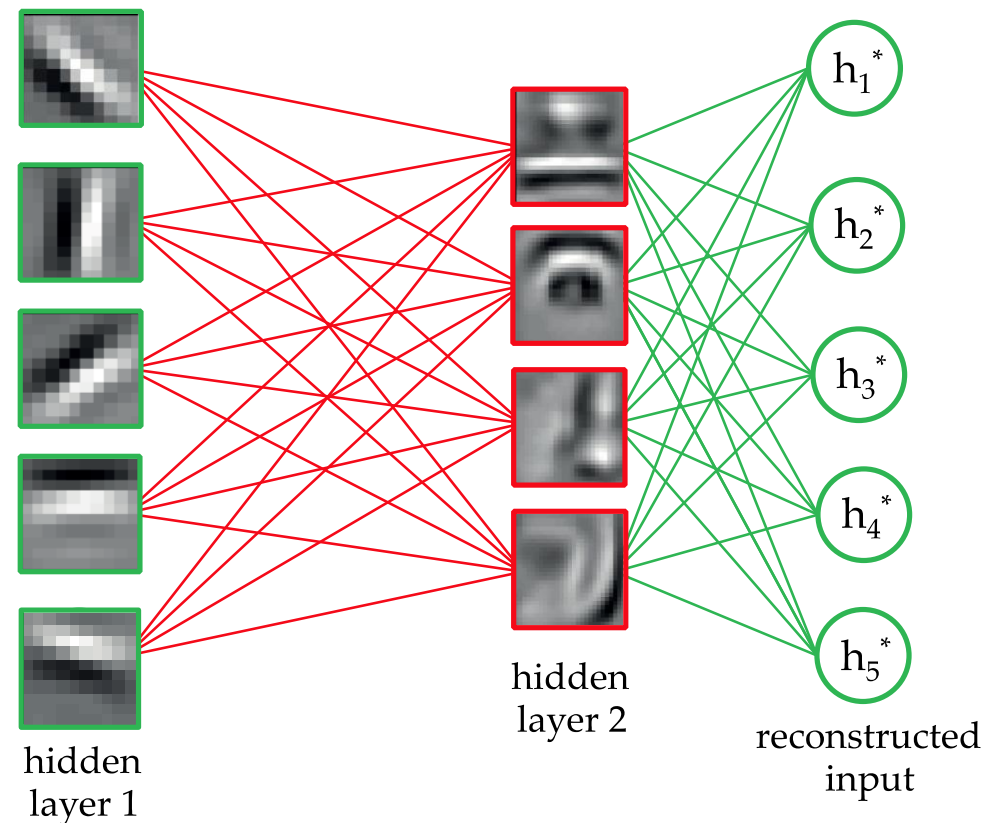


hidden  
layer 1

Then repeat the entire process for each layer

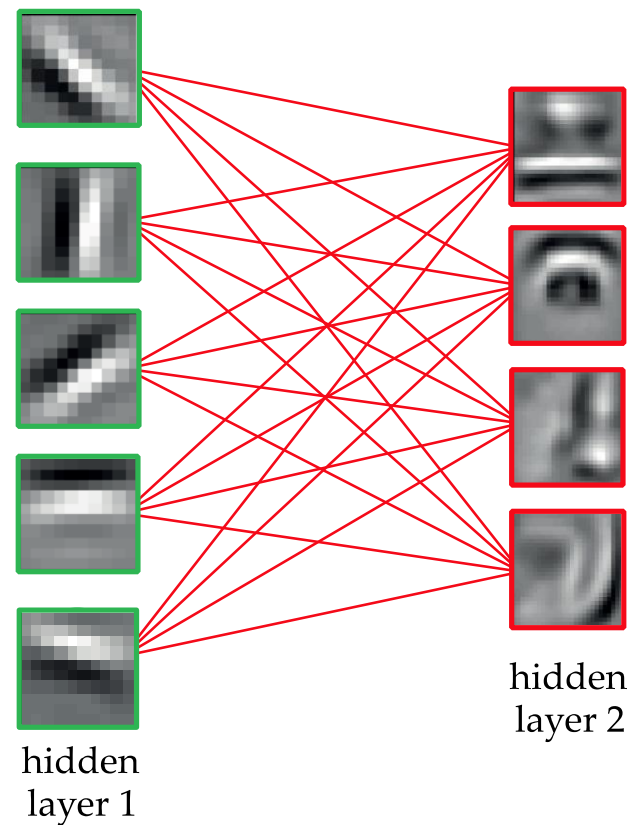


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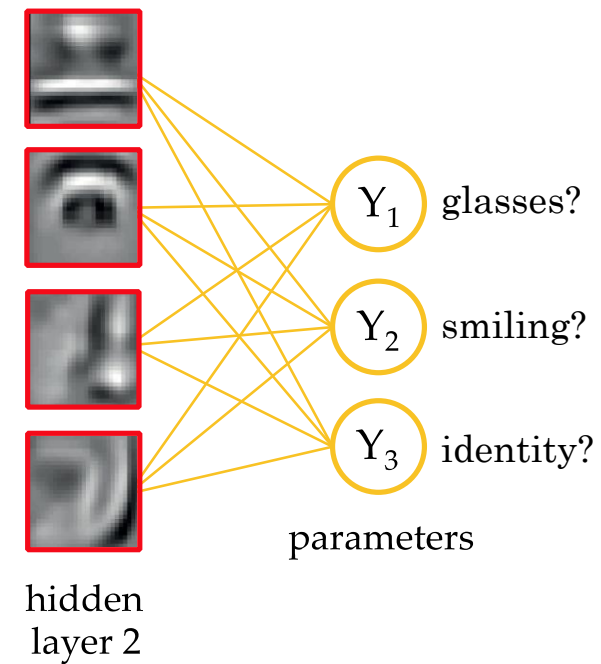


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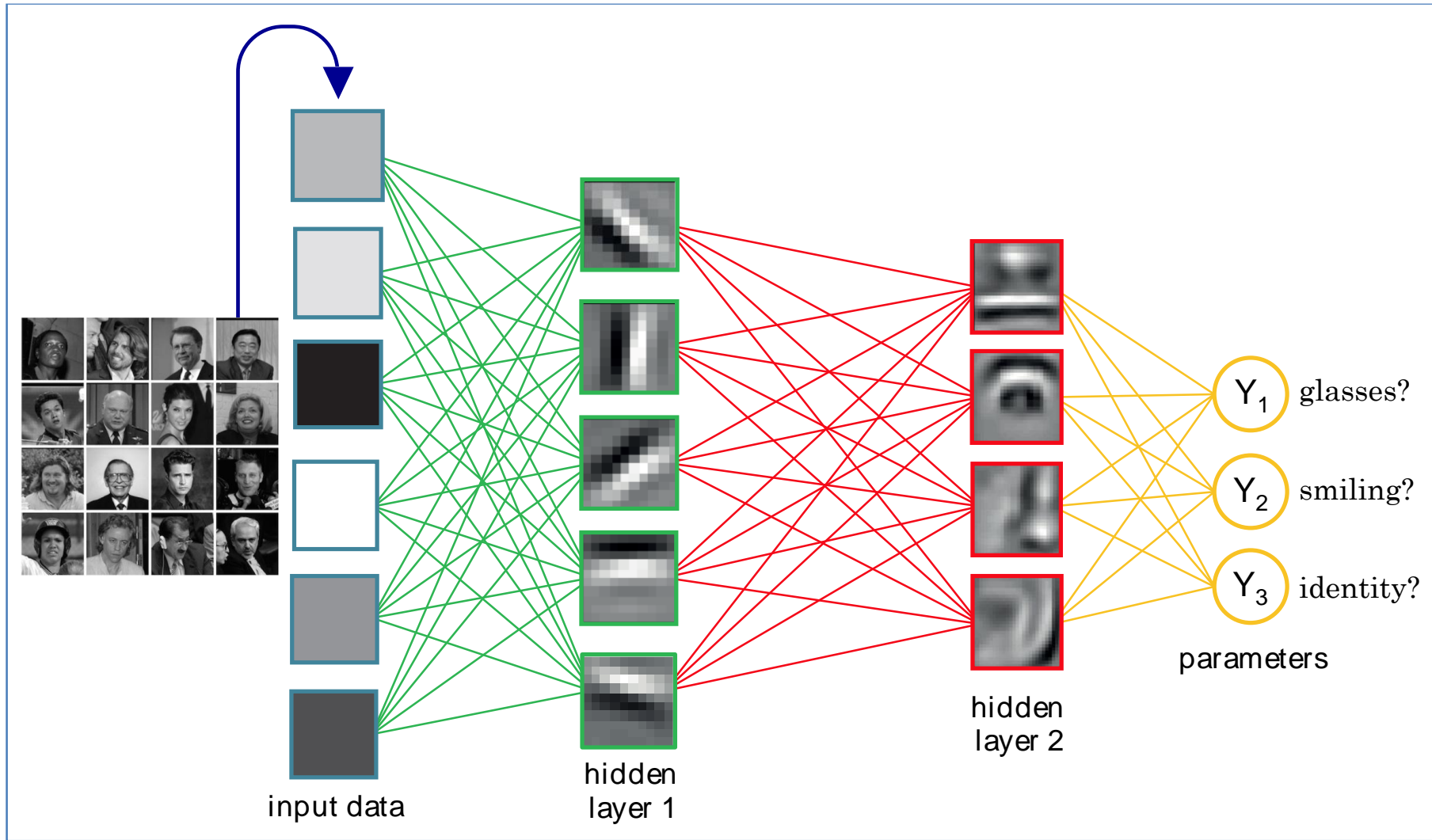


hidden  
layer 2

In the last layer, use the outputs (supervised)

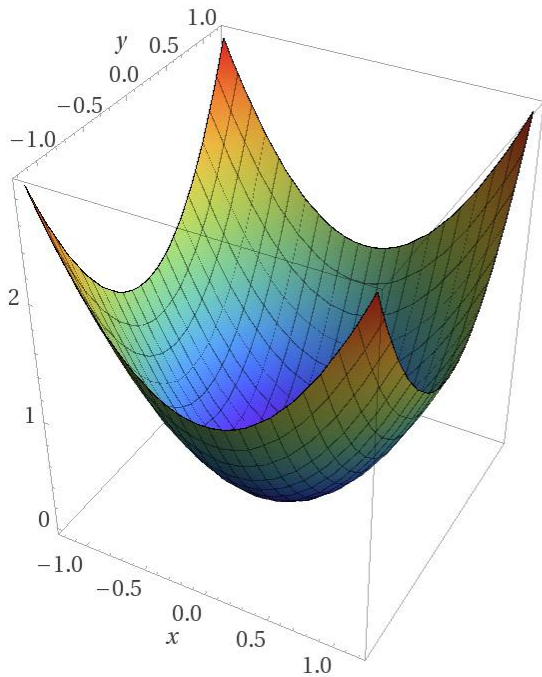


Finally, “fine-tune” the entire network!



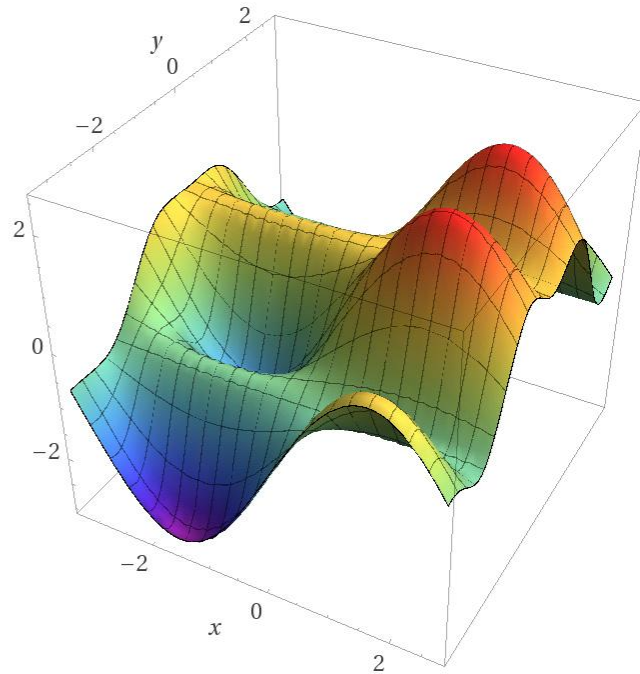
# Takeaways

- As the number of parameters grows, a non-convex function often has more and more local minima
- Starting at a “good” point is crucial!



Computed by Wolfram|Alpha

Convex



Computed by Wolfram|Alpha

Non-convex

# Takeaways

- Unsupervised pre-training uses latent structure in the data as a starting point for weight initialization
- After this process, the network is “fine-tuned”
- In practice this has been found to increase accuracy on specific tasks (which could be specified after feature learning)

# Weight initialization

- We still have to initialize the pre-training
- All 0's initialization is bad! Causes nodes to compute the same outputs, so then the weights go through the same updates during gradient descent
- Need asymmetry! => usually use small random values

# Mini-batches

- So far in this class, we have considered *stochastic gradient descent*, where one data point is used to compute the gradient and update the weights
- On the flipside is *batch gradient descent*, where we compute the gradient with respect to all the data, and then update the weights
- A middle ground uses *mini-batches* of examples before updating the weights



# Notes about scores and softmax

- The output of the final fully connected layer is a vector of length  $K$  (number of classes)

# Notes about scores and softmax

- The output of the final fully connected layer is a vector of length  $K$  (number of classes)
- The raw scores are transformed into probabilities using the *softmax function*: (let  $s_k$  be the score for class  $k$ )

$$\hat{y}_k = \frac{e^{s_k}}{\sum_{j=1}^K e^{s_j}}$$

- Then we apply *cross-entropy loss* to these probabilities

# Motivation for moving away from FC architectures

- For a  $32 \times 32 \times 3$  image (very small!) we have  $p=3072$  features in the input layer
- For a  $200 \times 200 \times 3$  image, we would have  $p=120,000$ ! *doesn't scale*

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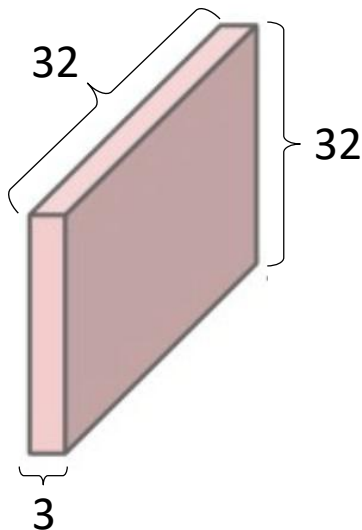
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- For a  $200 \times 200 \times 3$  image, we would have  $p=120,000$ ! *doesn't scale*
- Fully connected networks do not explicitly account for the structure of an image and the correlations/ relationships between nearby pixels

# Idea: 3D volumes of neurons

- Do not “flatten” image, keep it as a volume with *width*, *height*, and *depth*

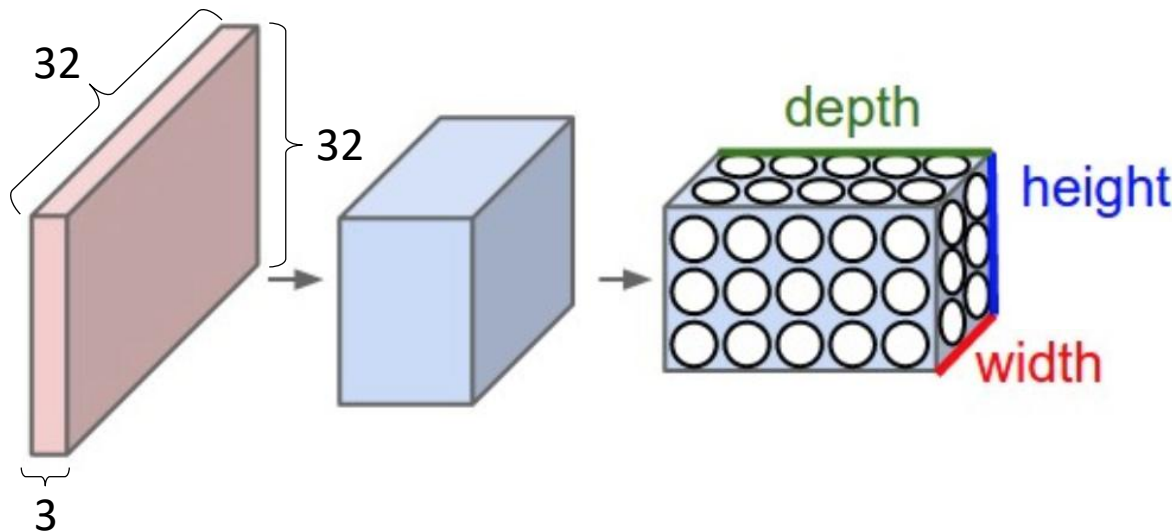
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- For **CIFAR-10**, we would have:
  - Width=32, Height=32, Depth=3
- Each layer is also a 3 dimensional volume
- The output layer is  $1 \times 1 \times C$ , where  $C$  is the number of classes (10 for CIFAR-10)

