

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0893-6080(18)30226-0
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neunet.2018.08.006>
Reference: NN 4010

To appear in: *Neural Networks*

Received date: 26 April 2018
Revised date: 12 July 2018
Accepted date: 2 August 2018

Please cite this article as: Wei, T., Webb, B., A model of operant learning based on chaotically varying synaptic strength. *Neural Networks* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neunet.2018.08.006>

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A model of operant learning based on chaotically varying synaptic strength[☆]

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Abstract

Operant learning is learning based on reinforcement of behaviours. We propose a new hypothesis for operant learning at the single neuron level based on spontaneous fluctuations of synaptic strength caused by receptor dynamics. These fluctuations allow the neural system to explore a space of outputs. If the receptor dynamics are altered by a reinforcement signal the neural system settles to better states, i.e., to match the environmental dynamics that determine reward. Simulations show that this mechanism can support operant learning in a feed-forward neural circuit, a recurrent neural circuit, and a spiking neural circuit controlling an agent learning in a dynamic reward and punishment situation. We discuss how the new principle relates to existing learning rules and observed phenomena of short and long-term potentiation.

Keywords: Dynamic Synapse, Operant learning, Chaos, Receptor Trafficking

1. Introduction

Operant learning (also called operant conditioning or instrumental conditioning) is a type of learning in which a new behaviour is increased, or an existing behaviour is suppressed, by pairing it with reward or punishment. For example: (a) In a Skinner box, when a rat occasionally presses a lever, it

[☆]The work is funded by European Commission under FP7-ICT (Project ID: 618045).

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