

# Complementary roles of basal ganglia and cerebellum in learning and motor control

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The classical notion that the basal ganglia and the cerebellum are dedicated to motor control has been challenged by the accumulation of evidence revealing their involvement in non-motor, cognitive functions. From a computational viewpoint, it has been suggested that the cerebellum, the basal ganglia, and the cerebral cortex are specialized for different types of learning: namely, supervised learning, reinforcement learning and unsupervised learning, respectively. This idea of learning-oriented specialization is helpful in understanding the complementary roles of the basal ganglia and the cerebellum in motor control and cognitive functions.

## Addresses

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## Abbreviations

<b>GP</b>	globus pallidus
<b>LTD</b>	long-term depression
<b>RL</b>	reinforcement learning
<b>SMA</b>	supplementary motor area
<b>SNc</b>	substantia nigra pars compacta
<b>SNr</b>	substantia nigra pars reticulata
<b>TD</b>	temporal difference
<b>VTA</b>	ventral tegmental area

## Introduction

The basal ganglia and the cerebellum have long been known to be involved in motor control because of the marked motor deficits associated with their damage. However, the exact aspects of motor control that they are involved in under normal conditions has not been clear. Traditionally, the cerebellum was supposed to be involved in real-time fine tuning of movement [1,2], whereas the basal ganglia were thought to be involved in the selection and inhibition of action commands [3]. However, these distinctions were by no means clear-cut [4]. Furthermore, an ever-increasing number of brain-imaging studies show that the basal ganglia and the cerebellum are involved in non-motor tasks, such as mental imagery [5,6], sensory processing [7–9], planning [10,11,12], attention [13], and language [14–17].

Both the basal ganglia and the cerebellum have recurrent connections with the cerebral cortex [1,3]. Anatomical studies using transneuronally transported viruses [18–20,21\*\*] have clearly shown that the projections from the basal ganglia and the cerebellum through the thalamus to the cortex constitute multiple ‘parallel’ channels. The

diversity of the target cortical areas — not only the motor and premotor cortices but also the prefrontal [18], temporal [22], and parietal cortices [19] — is in agreement with their involvement in diverse functions. However, the neural activity tuning and the lesion effects of a subsection of the basal ganglia or the cerebellum tend to be similar to those of the cortical area to which it projects [21\*\*]. This makes it difficult to distinguish the specific roles of the basal ganglia and the cerebellum simply from recording or lesion results.

Is it then impossible to characterize the specific information processing in the basal ganglia and the cerebellum? Despite their diverse, overlapping target cortical areas, the basal ganglia and the cerebellum have unique local circuit architectures and synaptic mechanisms. This strongly suggests that each structure is specialized for a particular type of information processing [23]. In this review, a novel view is introduced in which the basal ganglia and the cerebellum are specialized for different types of learning algorithms: reward-based learning in the basal ganglia and error-based learning in the cerebellum [24\*\*]. Recent experimental as well as modeling studies on the basal ganglia and the cerebellum are reviewed from this viewpoint of learning-oriented specialization.

## Learning-oriented specialization

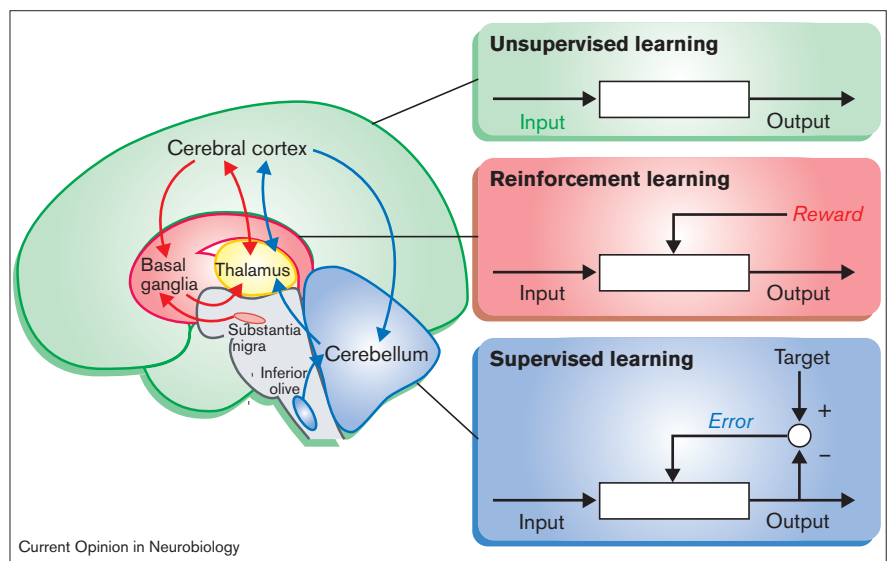
Theoretical models of learning in different parts of the brain suggest that the cerebellum, the basal ganglia, and the cerebral cortex are specialized for different types of learning [23,24\*\*], as summarized in Figure 1. The cerebellum is specialized for supervised learning based on the error signal encoded in the climbing fibers [2,25–27]. The basal ganglia are specialized for reinforcement learning (RL) based on the reward signal encoded in the dopaminergic fibers from the substantia nigra [28–30]. The cerebral cortex is specialized for unsupervised learning based on Hebbian plasticity and reciprocal connections within and between cortical areas [31–34].

## Reward-based learning in the basal ganglia

A breakthrough in elucidating the function of the basal ganglia came from a series of experiments by Schultz and colleagues on the activity of midbrain dopamine neurons in primates [35,36]. In a conditioned reaching task, dopamine neurons initially respond to the liquid reward after successful trials. However, as the animal learns the task, dopamine neurons start to respond to the conditioned visual stimulus and cease to respond to actual reward delivery. This means that the activity of dopamine neurons does not just encode present reward, but prediction of future reward. Incidentally, prediction of future reward has been

**Figure 1**

Specialization of the cerebellum, the basal ganglia, and the cerebral cortex for different types of learning [24\*\*]. The cerebellum is specialized for supervised learning, which is guided by the error signal encoded in the climbing fiber input from the inferior olive. The basal ganglia are specialized for reinforcement learning, which is guided by the reward signal encoded in the dopaminergic input from the substantia nigra. The cerebral cortex is specialized for unsupervised learning, which is guided by the statistical properties of the input signal itself, but may also be regulated by the ascending neuromodulatory inputs [80].



Current Opinion in Neurobiology

the main issue in the computational theory of RL [37,38]. In the RL theory, a policy (sensory–motor mapping) is sought so that the expected sum of future reward

$$V(t) = E[r(t+1) + r(t+2) + \dots]$$

is maximized. Here,  $r(t)$  denotes the reward acquired at time  $t$  and  $V(t)$  represents the ‘value’ of the present state. RL generally involves two issues: prediction of cumulative future reward and improvement of state–action mapping to maximize the cumulative future reward. A so-called ‘temporal difference’ (TD) signal  $\delta(t)$

$$\delta(t) = r(t) + V(t) - V(t-1),$$

takes dual roles as the error signal for reward prediction and the reinforcement signal for sensory–motor mapping [37].

The reward-predicting response of dopamine neurons was a big surprise because it was exactly how the TD signal would respond in reward-prediction learning — initially responding to the reward itself [ $\delta(t) = r(t)$ ], and later to the change in the predicted reward [ $\delta(t) = V(t) - V(t-1)$ ] even without a reward. Dopamine was also well known to have the role of behavioral reinforcer. Accordingly, a number of models of the basal ganglia as a RL system have been proposed in which the nigrostriatal dopamine neurons represent the TD signal [28–30,39,40,41\*].

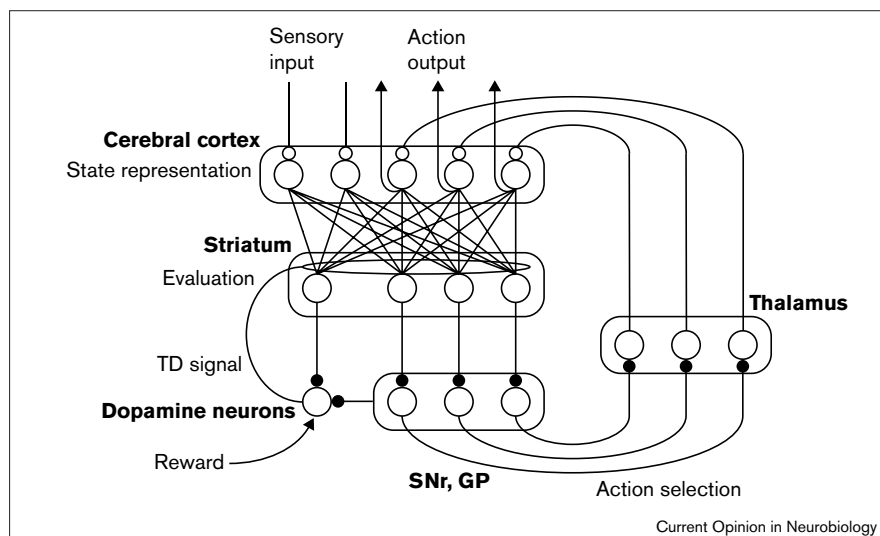
Figure 2 summarizes the outline of an RL-based model. The input site of the basal ganglia, the striatum, comprises two compartments: the striosome, which projects to the dopamine neurons in the substantia nigra pars compacta (SNc), and the matrix, which projects to the output site of the basal ganglia, the substantia nigra pars reticulata (SNr) and the globus pallidus (GP). In the RL model, the striosome is responsible for

predicting the future reward from the present sensory state whereas the matrix is responsible for predicting future rewards associated with different candidate actions.

Through a competition of the matrix outputs, the motor action with the highest expected future reward is selected in SNr/GP and sent to the motor nuclei in the brain stem as well as thalamo-cortical circuits. The TD error is computed in SNc, based on the limbic input coding the present reward and the striatal input coding the future reward. The nigrostriatal dopaminergic projection, which terminates at the cortico-striatal synaptic spines, modulates the synaptic plasticity and serves as the error signal in the striosome prediction network and the reinforcement signal for the matrix action network. Such models have successfully replicated the learning of conditioning tasks as well as sequence learning tasks [39,40,41\*].

However, there still remain several issues to be clarified in the RL hypothesis of the basal ganglia. First, it is not clear how the ‘temporal difference’ of expected future reward is calculated in the circuit leading to the substantia nigra, although a few possible mechanisms have been suggested [28,29,40,42]. A recent review by Joel and Weiner [43\*\*] provides a comprehensive picture of the connections to and from the dopaminergic neurons in SNc and the ventral tegmental area (VTA). According to their view, there are two major pathways from the striatum to the SNc dopamine neurons: direct inhibition by striosome neurons through slow GABA<sub>B</sub>-type synapses, and indirect disinhibition by matrix neurons through inhibition of GABA<sub>A</sub>-type synaptic inputs from SNr neurons [44]. Thus it is possible that the fast disinhibition by the matrix and the slow inhibition by the striosome provide the temporal difference component  $V(t) - V(t-1)$ .

Figure 2



A schematic diagram of the cortico-basal ganglia loop and the possible roles of its components in a reinforcement learning model. The neurons in the striatum predict the future reward for the current state and the candidate actions. The error in the prediction of future reward, the TD error, is encoded in the activity of dopamine neurons and is used for learning at the cortico-striatal synapses. One of the candidate actions is selected in SNr and GP as a result of competition of predicted future rewards. The direct and indirect pathways within the globus pallidus are omitted for simplicity. The filled and open circles denote inhibitory and excitatory synapses, respectively.

Another open issue in TD-based models is the plasticity of cortico-striatal synapses. The above RL model predicts that there should be different plastic mechanisms for the striosome and the matrix, which are respectively involved in the evaluation of current state and possible actions. Although it has been shown that cortico-striatal synaptic plasticity is strongly modulated by dopamine [45,46,47], it remains to be clarified whether there are different plastic mechanisms in different compartments.

Reward-related activities have also been found in frontal cortices, including dorsolateral prefrontal cortex [48], orbitofrontal cortex [49], and cingulate cortex [50]. Dopaminergic neurons in the VTA project to those cortical areas. What is the difference between reward processing in the cerebral cortex and that in the basal ganglia? A systematic comparison of the reward-related activities in the orbitofrontal cortex, the striatum, and the dopamine neurons revealed the following characteristics [51]: the cortical neurons retain more information about sensory input; the striatal neurons show a richer variety of activation in relation to task progress; and, the dopamine neurons respond mainly to unpredicted reward or sensory stimuli. This suggests that the cortex is responsible for analyzing sensory input, the striatum is involved in the production of actions, and the dopamine neurons are particularly responsible for learning new behaviors.

### Error-based learning in the cerebellum

The idea that the cerebellum is a supervised learning system dates back to the hypotheses of Marr [25] and Albus [26]. It was shown by Ito in vestibulo-ocular reflex (VOR) adaptation experiments [2,52] that long-term depression (LTD) of the Purkinje cell synapses dependent on the climbing fiber input is the neural substrate of such error-driven learning (Figure 3). Although it is still controversial whether the LTD

in Purkinje cells is the only locus of plasticity and memory storage for the VOR [53], recent results are in accordance with the cerebellar error-based learning hypothesis.

During ocular following response movements, Kobayashi and colleagues [54] showed that the response tuning of complex spikes is the mirror image of that of simple spikes [55]. This is in agreement with the hypothesis that the simple spike responses of Purkinje cells are shaped by LTD of parallel fiber synapses with the error signal provided by the climbing fibers. These authors also showed that the modulation of simple spikes by complex spikes is too weak to be useful for real-time motor control.

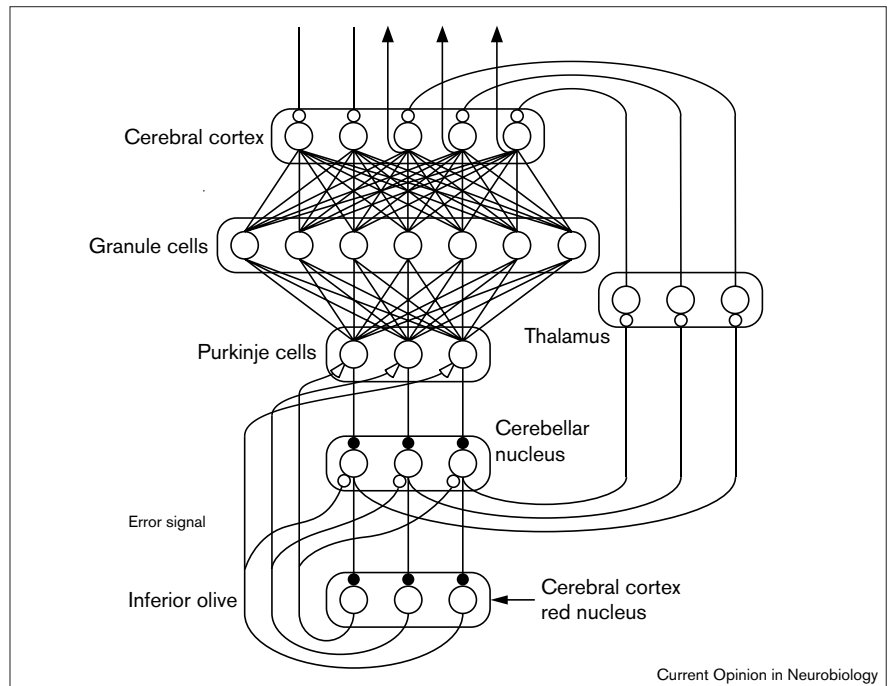
Kitazawa *et al.* [56] analyzed the information content of complex spikes in arm-reaching movement in monkeys. The results showed that complex spike firing carries information about the target direction in the early phase of the movement, whereas it carries information about the end-point error near the end of the movement. The coding of end-point error is consistent with the LTD hypothesis. What is the role of the target-related activity at the beginning of a movement? The low probability of firing of complex spikes near the beginning of a movement (less than one spike per trial) suggests that the signal may not be useful for on-line movement control. One possibility is that the spikes are potential error signals that could be used for further improvement of the performance should there be any preceding sensory cues that enable movement preparation.

### Collaboration of learning modules

In the above framework of learning-orientated specialization, each organization is not specialized in what to do, but in how to learn it. Specific behaviors or functions can be realized by a combination of multiple learning modules

**Figure 3**

A schematic diagram of the cortico-cerebellar loop. In a supervised learning model of the cerebellum, the climbing fibers from the inferior olive provide the error signal for the Purkinje cells. Coincident inputs from the inferior olive and the granule cells result in LTD of the granule-to-Purkinje synapses. The filled and open circles denote inhibitory and excitatory synapses, respectively.



Current Opinion in Neurobiology

distributed among the basal ganglia, the cerebellum, and the cerebral cortex [23,24\*\*].

The use of internal models of the body and the environment can improve the performance of motor control [57,58\*]. Such internal models could be acquired by supervised learning with the motor command as the input and the sensory outcome as the teacher signal. Furthermore, for supervised or reinforcement learning, it is often helpful to use unsupervised learning algorithms to extract the essential information in the raw sensory input. Such methods of combination of different learning modules could be helpful in exploring possible collaborations of the cerebellum, the basal ganglia, and the cerebral cortex [24\*\*]. Table 1 summarizes possible roles of the learning modules in these three areas.

In many brain-imaging experiments, different parts of the cerebellum, the basal ganglia and the cerebral cortex are activated simultaneously. The above hypotheses concerning the specialization of these areas for the different frameworks of learning can provide us with a helpful hint as to the different roles of simultaneously activated brain areas. Below, we review recent studies from the viewpoint of this learning-oriented specialization.

### Eye movements

Recent experiments on saccadic eye movements have shown separate gain adaptation for different types of saccades, such as visually guided and memory-guided [59,60]. Such input-dependent adaptation of eye movement is naturally expected from supervised learning models of the

cerebellum: only the synaptic weights for the inputs that are associated with the retinal error signal are modified [61].

Neurons in the caudate nucleus are known to be activated during memory-guided saccades toward a certain preferred direction [62,63\*]. Recently, Kawagoe and colleagues performed delayed-saccade experiments in which reward was given in only one of four possible saccade directions [64]. Surprisingly, the direction tuning of caudate neurons was strongly modulated by the reward condition. In some neurons, direction tuning was enhanced when the preferred direction coincided with the rewarded direction. In others, the preferred direction changed with the reward direction [64]. These data suggest that the striatal neurons do not simply represent motor action itself, but the reward associated with the state and actions. In reference to the above reinforcement learning model, it is tempting to speculate that the reward-following neurons are in the striosome and the reward-modulated neurons are in the matrix [65] and that the change in their behaviors is based on the dopamine-dependent plasticity of cortico-striatal synapses [63\*]. However, it remains to be tested if such a change in the striatal response tuning is solely due to the plasticity within the striatum or also due to the reward-dependent responses of the cortical neurons [48–50,51\*\*].

### Arm reaching

It has been shown in arm-reaching studies in monkeys that the cerebellum is involved in externally driven (e.g. visually guided) movement, whereas the basal ganglia are involved in internally generated (e.g. memory-guided) movement [66]. Recent recording and inactivation studies

Table 1

**Possible roles of different learning modules.****Cerebellum: supervised learning**

Internal models of the body and the environment.  
Replication of arbitrary input–output mapping that was learned elsewhere in the brain.

**Basal ganglia: reinforcement learning**

Evaluation of current situation by prediction of reward.  
Selection of appropriate action by evaluation of candidate actions.

**Cerebral cortex: unsupervised learning**

Concise representation of sensory state, context, and action.  
Finding appropriate modular architecture for a given task.

of motor thalamus [67\*,68\*] further confirmed this contrasting involvement. In the part of the thalamus that receives input from the cerebellum and projects to the ventral premotor cortex, the majority of neurons are selectively activated during visually triggered movements. On the other hand, in the part of the thalamus that receives input from the basal ganglia and projects to the prefrontal cortex, the majority of neurons are selective for internally generated movements.

What is the reason for such differential involvement? During visually guided movements, the most critical computation is the coordinate transformation of visual input to corresponding motor output. Such mapping could be learned in a form of supervised learning in the cerebellum. During memory-guided or internally generated movements, what is most critical is the selection of an appropriate action and the suppression of unnecessary actions, both of which require prediction of reward value.

**Sequence learning**

It has been shown by trial-and-error learning of sequential movement that cortico-basal ganglia loops are differentially involved in early and late stages of learning. Brain areas in the prefrontal loop (prefrontal cortex, preSMA [supplementary motor area], caudate head) are involved in the learning of new sequences, whereas those in the motor loop (SMA, putamen body) are involved in the execution of well-learned movements [69,70]. Why should the information about the sequence learned initially in the prefrontal loop be copied to the motor loop? We hypothesized that the two cortico-basal ganglia loops learn a sequence using different representations: visuospatial coordinates in the prefrontal loop and motor coordinates in the motor loop [41\*,71\*\*]. A RL model of sequence learning based on this hypothesis could replicate many experimental findings — for example, the time course of learning, the performance for modified sequences, and the results of lesion experiments [41\*]. In a recent psychophysical experiment motivated by this hypothesis, it was confirmed in a sequential key-press task that human subjects depend increasingly on body-specific representation than on visual representation with the progress of learning [72\*].

**Timing and rhythm**

In a series of imaging studies by Sakai and colleagues [73,74\*], it was shown that the memory of simple rhythms involves the anterior cerebellum, whereas the memory of complex rhythms and the adjustment of movement timing in response to irregular external triggers involve the posterior cerebellum. A possible reason for such differential involvement is the use of different representations [71\*\*]. The anterior cerebellum can provide internal models of body dynamics, which can be helpful in the prediction of regular timing as well as in the control of detailed movement parameters. The posterior cerebellum may provide internal models for prediction of sensory events, which may be useful in timing perception and adjustment.

**Cognitive processing**

Involvement of the basal ganglia and the cerebellum in cognitive functions was once a controversial issue [14,75]. However, there are now abundant brain-imaging data showing their involvement in mental imagery [5,6], sensory discrimination [7–9], planning [10,11\*,12], attention [13], and language [14–17]. Careful studies of patients with cerebellar and basal ganglia damage have also revealed that their impairments are not limited to motor control but also extend to cognitive functions [21\*\*,76,77]. Lesion studies in rodents also suggest the involvement of the basal ganglia in rule-based learning [78] and spatial navigation [79].

In a recent positron emission tomography (PET) study using the Tower of London task, Dagher and colleagues found that the activity of the caudate nucleus, as well as the premotor and prefrontal cortices, is correlated with the task complexity [11\*]. This suggests that the cortico-basal ganglia loops may be involved in multi-step planning of actions.

**Conclusion**

A new hypothesis concerning the specialization of brain structures for different learning paradigms provides helpful clues as to the differential roles of the basal ganglia and the cerebellum [24\*\*]. Whereas the use of different learning algorithms is associated with differential involvement of the cerebellum, the basal ganglia and the cerebral cortex, the use of different representations is associated with differential involvement of the channels in cortico-basal ganglia loops and cortico-cerebellar loops.

The frontal cortex has been regarded as the site of high-level information processing because of its activity related to working memory, action planning, and decision making. However, what has been found in the cerebral cortex could be just the tip of an iceberg. The activities of the cortical neurons could be the result of the recurrent dynamics of the cortico-basal ganglia and cortico-cerebellar loops. An important role of the cerebral cortex is to provide common representations upon which both the basal ganglia and the cerebellum can work together.

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