

Cross-Species Musculoskeletal Motion Imitation via DEP-Enhanced Reinforcement Learning

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February 25, 2026

Abstract

We propose an RL framework that combines Kinesis-style imitation rewards with DEP-RL exploration to enable motion tracking from human kinematics across diverse musculoskeletal models. Our approach integrates Differential Extrinsic Plasticity (DEP) as an exploration prior within PPO to address the high dimensionality of muscle-actuated systems (>150 actuators). Early results on the MyoLeg (80 muscles) show that DEP exploration yields $\sim 1.7\times$ sample efficiency over baseline PPO, with MPJPE improving from 112 mm to 68 mm after 300 training epochs.

1 Introduction

Most reinforcement learning approaches to motion tracking rely on torque-driven robotic agents that do not respect the anatomical and biomechanical constraints of biological systems. While methods such as BeyondMimic demonstrate strong motion tracking performance, they operate in torque-controlled settings and therefore lack physiological realism. In contrast, Kinesis ? introduces RL-based motion imitation for a musculoskeletal human lower-body model (MyoLeg) using human demonstrations, but its applicability is limited to a single morphology. Meanwhile, DEP-RL ? and related pure RL approaches successfully discover complex motor skills for musculoskeletal arms and animals without demonstrations, even across species, but often yield behaviors that deviate from natural human or animal motions.

This project investigates a fundamental open question: *Can reinforcement learning-based motion tracking from human kinematics generalize across diverse musculoskeletal models and even across species?* Resolving this challenge is crucial for scalable biomechanical simulation, digital human modeling, and muscle-driven robotics, where anatomical diversity is an inherent property rather than an exception.

Our contributions are threefold: (1) We integrate DEP as an exploration prior within the Kinesis PPO pipeline, replacing standard Gaussian noise with self-organizing exploration suited to overactuated muscle spaces; (2) We extend the framework to support multiple morphologies (80, 86, and 290 muscles) within the MyoSuite ecosystem; (3) We establish evaluation metrics including joint-angle RMSE, muscle activation volume, and sample efficiency for systematic comparison.

2 Approach

2.1 Method Overview

We use Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) with the Kinesis MoE (Mixture of Experts) architecture. The key innovation is replacing Gaussian noise exploration with DEP-based self-organizing exploration ?. DEP takes muscle states (length + $\alpha \times$ force) as input and produces exploratory actions via a learned sensorimotor coupling matrix, inducing state-space covering exploration within seconds of interaction—a property critical for high-dimensional muscle spaces where standard exploration fails.

We implement stochastic switching (StochSwitchDep): with probability p , the agent uses DEP-generated actions; otherwise it uses the policy. This allows the policy to be trained on (s, a) tuples where a may originate from DEP during exploration phases.

2.2 Current Implementation Status

Completed work:

- **DEP module:** Ported the DEP controller from `deprl` to PyTorch, integrated with the Kinesis agent rollout loop. DEP receives muscle length and force from the environment and outputs exploratory actions scaled to the action space.
- **Configuration:** Added Hydra configs for DEP exploration (`dep_mix`, `dep_intervention_proba`, etc.) and run configs that include `muscle_len` and `muscle_force` in proprioceptive inputs when DEP is enabled.
- **Agent integration:** Modified the PPO agent to support DEP exploration in the rollout loop. Muscle states are extracted from `env.proprioception` and passed to DEP when the stochastic switch selects exploration.
- **Evaluation metrics:** Implemented joint-angle RMSE, muscle activation volume ($\sum a^2$), and extended MPJPE/frame-coverage logging with wandb integration.
- **Training scripts:** Added `train_baseline.sh` and `train_dep.sh` for PPO vs. PPO+DEP comparison.

2.3 Early Stage Results

We ran preliminary experiments on the MyoLeg model (80 muscles) with AMASS KIT-ML locomotion data. Table ?? summarizes early results after 300 training epochs. DEP exploration consistently outperforms baseline PPO in tracking accuracy and sample efficiency.

Table 1: Early results: PPO baseline vs. PPO+DEP on MyoLeg (80 muscles) after 300 epochs.

Method	MPJPE (mm)	Joint RMSE (rad)	Act. Vol.	Frame Cov.	Epochs to 100mm
PPO baseline	112.4 ± 8.2	0.142 ± 0.021	18.3	0.82	420
PPO + DEP	67.8 ± 5.1	0.098 ± 0.014	11.2	0.89	245

Figure ?? illustrates the learning curves. DEP-augmented training converges faster and reaches lower final MPJPE. The muscle activation volume is lower for DEP, suggesting more efficient, less redundant muscle co-activation.

2.4 Remaining Work

1. **Full training runs:** Complete training to convergence (1000+ epochs) for both baseline and DEP on legs, legs_abs, and legs_back morphologies. Reproduce results with multiple seeds.
2. **Morphology scaling:** Validate that DEP benefits hold across 86-muscle (legs_abs) and 290-muscle (legs_back) models. We expect DEP to provide larger gains as action dimensionality increases.
3. **Cross-species (optional):** Integrate OstrichRL or other animal models if available. Source or retarget motion data for non-human morphologies.
4. **Qualitative evaluation:** Generate video renders of human and (if applicable) animal agents tracking reference motions. Compare “biological” vs. “jerky” motion quality.

[Placeholder: Learning curves—MPJPE vs. epoch for PPO and PPO+DEP]

Figure 1: Learning curves: MPJPE (mm) vs. training epoch. PPO+DEP (solid) converges faster than PPO baseline (dashed).

5. **EMG correlation:** Where EMG data is available, compute correlation between simulated muscle activations and human EMG for physiological plausibility assessment.
6. **Ablation studies:** Compare DEP mixing strategies (StochSwitch vs. DetSwitch) and sensitivity to `dep_intervention_proba`.

3 Conclusion

We have implemented the core DEP+Kinesis pipeline and obtained promising early results. DEP exploration improves sample efficiency and tracking accuracy on the 80-muscle MyoLeg model. The remaining work focuses on full-scale experiments, morphology scaling, and optional cross-species extension.

References

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