Periodic Skill Discovery

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NEURAL INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEMS

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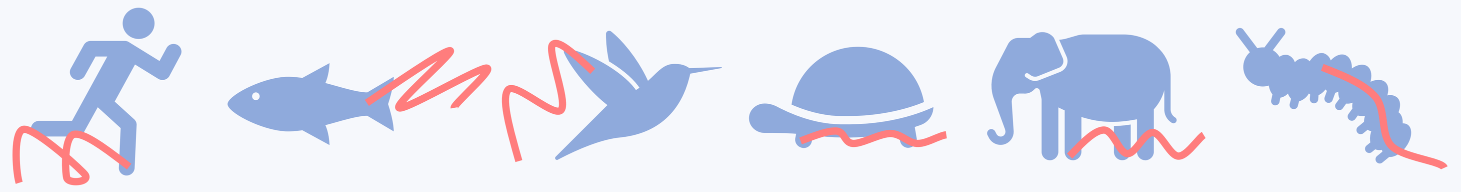
Project Page
(Demos & Code)

Why Periodic Skills Matter?

A fundamental observation in nature is that nearly all forms of locomotion are inherently periodic.

However, existing unsupervised skill discovery methods have rarely addressed **the role of periodicity.**

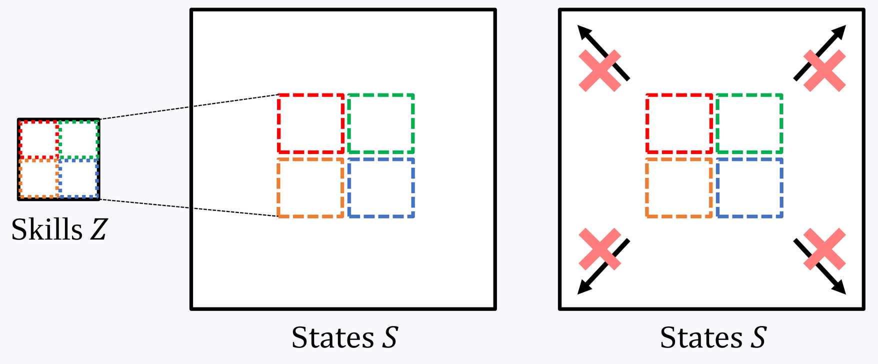


Prior works often fail to learn *multi-timescale* behaviors

(1) Mutual Information (MI) - based skill discovery

$$I(S;Z) = -H(Z|S) + H(Z) = \mathbb{E}_{z,\tau}[\log p(z|s)] - \mathbb{E}_z[\log p(z)]$$

$$\geq \mathbb{E}_{z,\tau}[\log q_\theta(z|s)] + (\text{constant}) \simeq \mathbb{E}_{z,\tau}\left[-\frac{1}{2\sigma^2}\|z-\mu_\theta(s)\|_2^2\right] + (\text{constant})$$

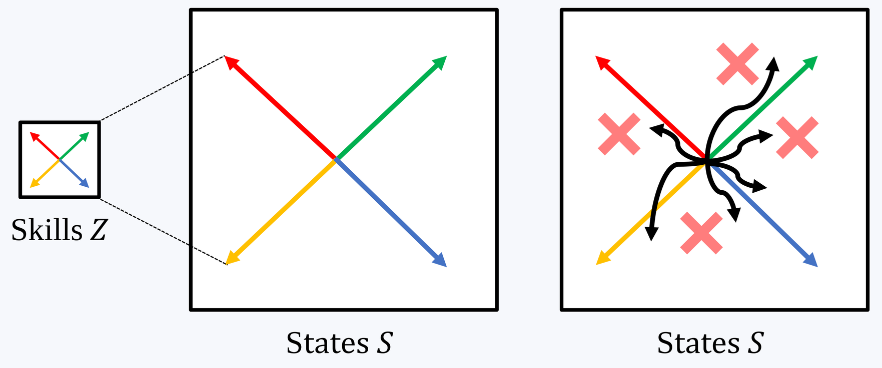


(−) No additional motivation for exploration

(−) Do not consider temporal aspects of skills

(2) **Distance - maximizing** skill discovery

$$\mathcal{J}_{\text{DSD}} := \mathbb{E}_{(z,\tau)\sim\mathcal{D}}\left[(\phi(s_{t+1}) - \phi(s_t))^\top z\right] \quad \text{s.t.} \quad \|\phi(x) - \phi(y)\| \leq d(x,y) \quad \forall x,y \in \mathcal{D}$$

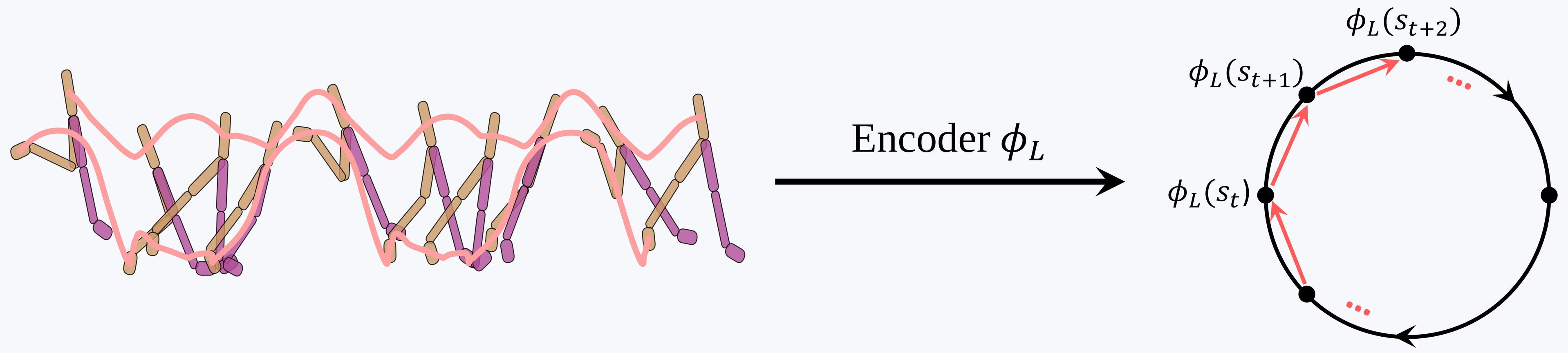


(−) Prefers *hard-to-achieve* behaviors

(−) Little incentive to adjust the temporal patterns of skills

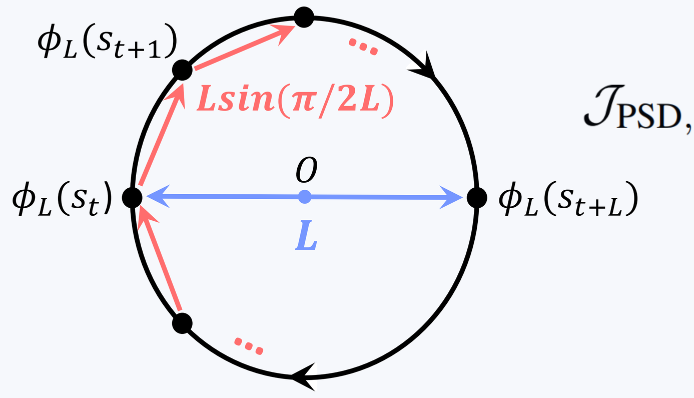
Intuition

- We introduce **Periodic Skill Discovery (PSD)**
- Key intuition: Construct a **circular latent space** for periodic behavior.



Representations for Periodicity

- Construct a **regular 2L-gon** inscribed in a circle of diameter L.



$$\mathcal{J}_{\text{PSD},\phi} := \mathbb{E}_{p(\tau,L)}\left[\|\phi_L(s_{t+L}) - \phi_L(s_t)\|_2 - k\,\|\phi_L(s_{t+L}) + \phi_L(s_t)\|_2\right]$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad \|\phi_L(s_{t+L}) - \phi_L(s_t)\|_2 \leq L,$$

$$\|\phi_L(s_{t+1}) - \phi_L(s_t)\|_2 \leq L\sin(\pi/2L)$$

Single-step Intrinsic Reward for the policy $\pi(a \mid s, L)$.

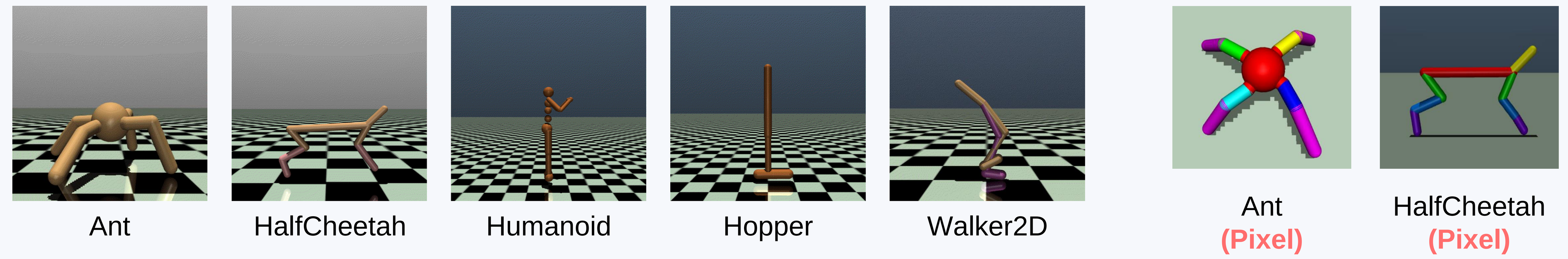
- Define a single-step intrinsic reward encouraging **2L-periodicity.**

$$\Delta := \|\phi_L(s_{t+1}) - \phi_L(s_t)\|_2 - L\sin(\pi/2L) \qquad r_{\text{PSD}}(s_t, s_{t+1}, L) := \exp(-\kappa\Delta^2)$$

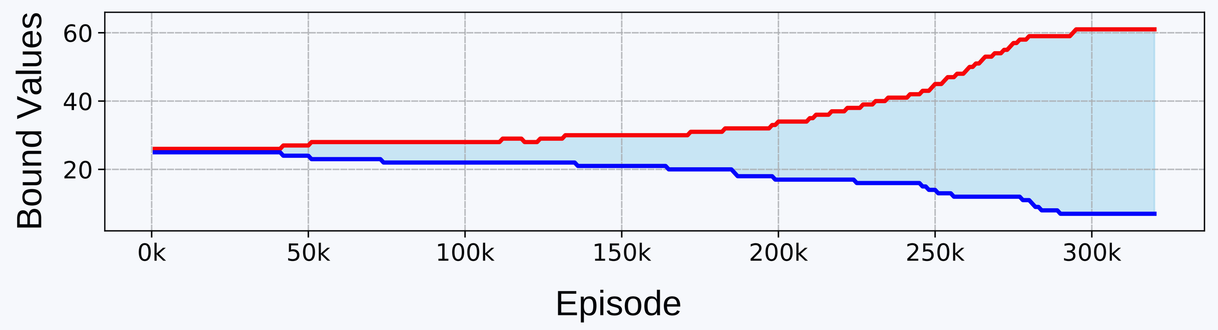
Adaptive Sampling Method

- To enable the agent to discover a **maximally diverse** range of periods without **any prior knowledge** of its inherent period ranges, we introduce an adaptive sampling method that dynamically adjusts the sampling range during training.
- Key idea: Evaluate the policy's **performance on the boundary of the current sampling range,** using $\sum_{t=0}^{T-1} r_{\text{PSD}}(L_{bound})$ as the evaluation criterion.

Benchmark Environments

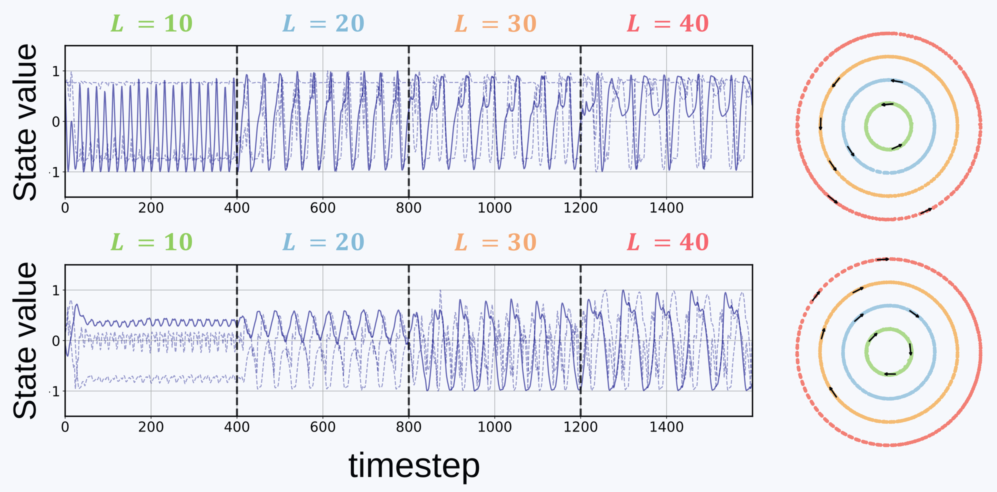


Learned Sampling Bounds Over Time



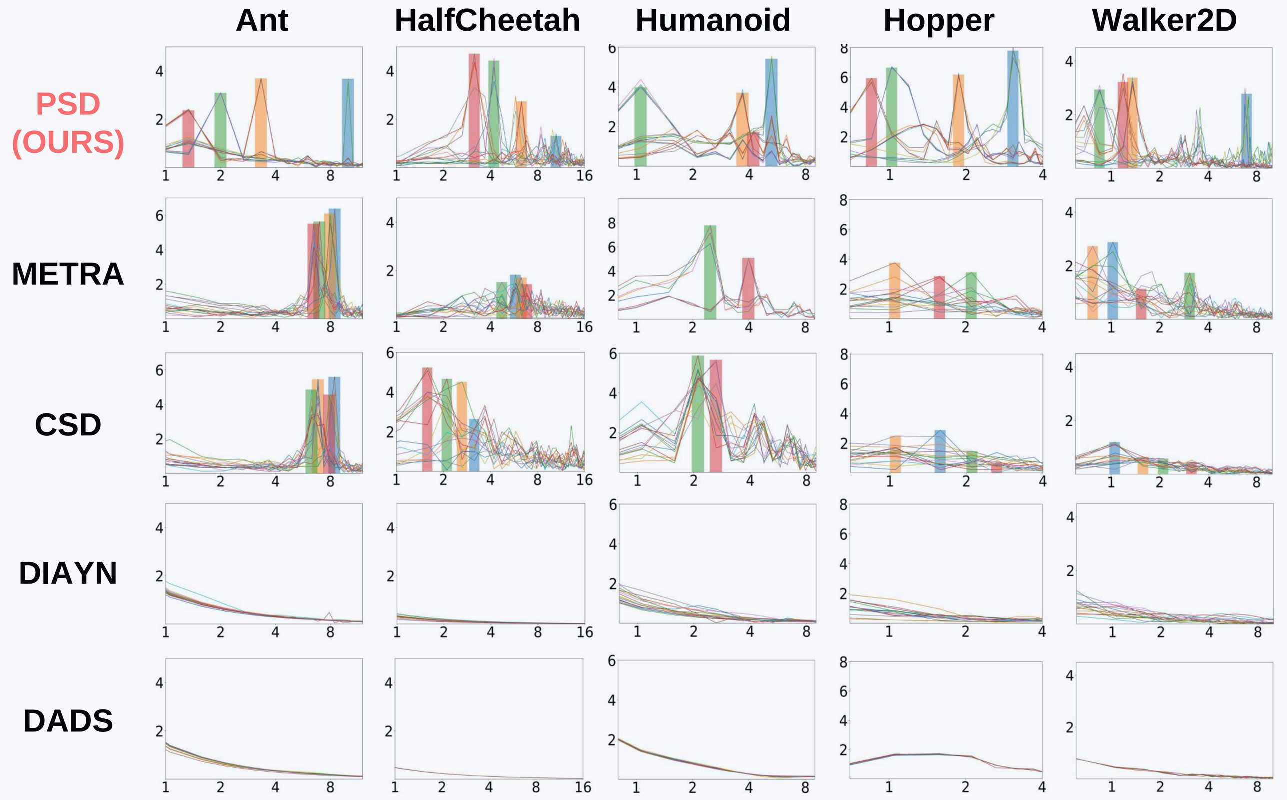
As training progresses, **increasingly challenging periods are proposed** to the agent, enabling the discovery of a wider range of periodic behaviors.

State Trajectories & Latents (PCA)



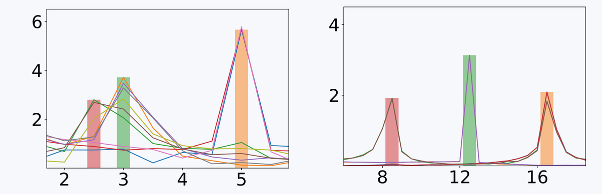
For varying values of L, PSD successfully **constructs a circular latent space** whose diameter is L, and **learns behaviors with the desired period of 2L.**

Frequency-Domain Skill Comparison



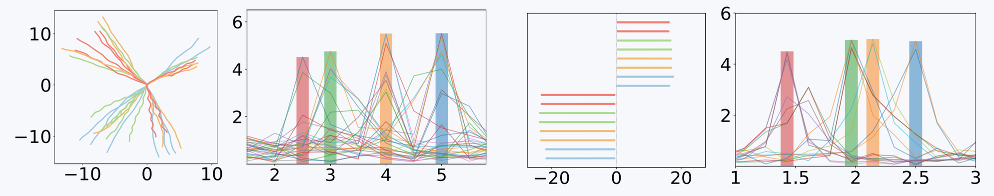
We apply a **Fourier transform** to the skill trajectories (frequency on the x-axis, amplitude on the y-axis).
PSD consistently discovers a wider range of frequencies than the baselines.

PSD with Pixel-based observation



PSD can discover periodic skills even in **pixel-based observation. (see our demo)**

PSD combined with METRA (Park et al., 2023)



PSD naturally aligns with METRA, **as both methods capture temporal structure of skills.**
(see our paper for details)