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Genetic Algorithms Are NOT Function Optimizers

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Abstract

Genetic Algorithms (GAs) have received a great deal of attention regarding their potential as optimization techniques for complex functions. The level of interest and success in this area has led to a number of improvements to GA-based function optimizers and a good deal of progress in characterizing the kinds of functions that are easy/hard for GAs to optimize. With all this activity, there has been a natural tendency to equate GAs with function optimization. However, the motivating context of Holland's initial GA work was the design and implementation of robust adaptive systems. In this paper we argue that a proper understanding of GAs in this broader adaptive systems context is a necessary prerequisite for understanding their potential application to any problem domain. We then use these insights to better understand the strengths and limitations of GAs as function optimizers.



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