Canonical Gravity, Diffeomorphisms and Objective Histories

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Abstract

This paper discusses the implementation of diffeomorphism invariance in purely Hamiltonian formulations of General Relativity. We observe that, if a constrained Hamiltonian formulation derives from a manifestly covariant Lagrangian, the diffeomorphism invariance of the Lagrangian results in the following properties of the constrained Hamiltonian theory: the diffeomorphisms are generated by constraints on the phase space so that a) The algebra of the generators reflects the algebra of the diffeomorphism group. b) The Poisson brackets of the basic fields with the generators reflects the space-time transformation properties of these basic fields. This suggests that in a purely Hamiltonian approach the requirement of diffeomorphism invariance should be interpreted to include b) and not just a) as one might naively suppose. Giving up b) amounts to giving up objective histories, even at the classical level. This observation has implications for Loop Quantum Gravity which are spelled out in a companion paper. We also describe an analogy between canonical gravity and Relativistic particle dynamics to illustrate our main point.
1 Introduction

The diffeomorphism invariance of General Relativity presents both conceptual and technical problems for quantisation. At the conceptual level, it leads to deep questions about the nature of time, observables and the interpretation of quantum theory. At the technical level, diffeomorphism invariance leads to constraints on the classical phase space, which in a quantum theory, must be imposed on physical states. Solving these constraints has occupied much of the effort in the canonical approach to quantum gravity. Several constrained Hamiltonian formulations (CHFs) of General Relativity exist today, each with its own following. It remains to be seen which of these formulations will be the most advantageous in the approach to quantum General Relativity.

This paper seeks to clarify the meaning of diffeomorphism invariance in a classical, constrained Hamiltonian Theory. Given a constrained theory, how does one test for diffeomorphism invariance? The answer to this question involves a subtlety, on which we focus in this paper. There is a substantial literature on the constrained Hamiltonian formulation of diffeomorphism invariant theories. The point we wish to emphasise here is perhaps implicit in these earlier works, but we wish to make it explicit in order to use it in \textit{[9]}. Our strategy in addressing this question will be to start with CHF’s which we know are diffeomorphism invariant: those that are derived by a Legendre transformation from a manifestly covariant Lagrangian. We will then notice that the resulting constrained Hamiltonian formulation satisfies certain conditions as a consequence of the diffeomorphism invariance of the Lagrangian starting point. We will explicitly spell out these conditions and use these as a criterion for testing for diffeomorphism invariance even when a Lagrangian starting point is not available. For example many currently popular CHFs of General Relativity \textit{[10, 11]} are derived by making canonical transformations on the phase space; they are entirely Hamiltonian in spirit and are often presented and discussed without any Lagrangian starting point. One would like to discuss the diffeomorphism invariance of such formulations in a purely Hamiltonian framework. The purpose of this paper is to clarify how this can be done.

The paper is organised as follows: In section II, we recapitulate some known results about the gauge symmetries of Lagrangian systems and show how these symmetries manifest themselves in a Hamiltonian framework. In section III we illustrate these general results using familiar examples like the ADM formalism, gravity in 2+1 dimensions and
Ashtekar’s extended phase space construction (EPS). In section IV, we distinguish between strong and weak diffeomorphism invariance of a CHF and bring out an analogy with a much simpler situation: relativistic particle dynamics. Section V is a concluding discussion.

2 Symmetries of Singular Lagrangian systems

Consider a dynamical system with configuration manifold $\mathcal{Q}$ on which local co-ordinates are $q^r, r = 1..n$. The tangent bundle over $\mathcal{Q}$ is $T\mathcal{Q}$ and the Lagrangian $L(q, \dot{q})$ is a real valued function on $T\mathcal{Q}$. The Lagrangian $L$ defines a map from $T\mathcal{Q}$ to the cotangent bundle $T^*\mathcal{Q}$ defined locally by $p_r = \frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}^r}$. In the cases of interest in this paper, the Lagrangian $L$ is singular, i.e., the Legendre map $\Phi : T\mathcal{Q} \to T^*\mathcal{Q}$ is not onto. Its image $\Sigma$ is a proper subset of $T^*\mathcal{Q}$: $\Phi(T\mathcal{Q}) = \Sigma \subset T^*\mathcal{Q}$ and there are constraints on the phase space. Such situations are dealt with in Dirac’s theory of constrained systems [1]. One iteratively demands preservation of the constraints and this leads, in general, to more constraints. The algorithm terminates when no new constraints emerge. The total set of constraints are divided into first and second class and we suppose that the second class constraints are eliminated by passage to the Dirac bracket. An elegant way to do this is to use the Bergmann-Komar starring procedure[12]. One simply replaces all phase space functions by their starred counterparts. After the Dirac constraint analysis ends, one has a constrained Hamiltonian formulation which has the following ingredients: i) the basic variables (or fields, in a field theory) are $(q^r, p_r)$ which span the phase space obeying commutation relations [1]. ii) a physical interpretation for $q^r$ and $p_r$ that derives from their definitions as functions of $q$ and $\dot{q}$. iii) a set of constraints which emerge from the constraint analysis. iv) A Hamiltonian function on the phase space, which generates the dynamics and preserves the constraints. The Hamiltonian is arbitrary to the extent of a primary first class constraint[1].

Let us recapitulate a few known results [13, 14, 15] about the continuous symmetries of singular Lagrangian systems. Let $S'(q, \dot{q}, t)$ be a symmetry transformation. By this

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1 These may not be canonical if some second class constraints have been eliminated.
2 We do not follow Dirac’s suggestion of “extending” the Hamiltonian by adding arbitrary combinations of the secondary first class constraints to it, since we wish to stick with the Lagrangian starting point. This equally means that we do not “extend” the symmetry vector field in a similar manner.
we mean that the change $\delta S$ in the Lagrangian under the changes $\delta q^r = \epsilon S^r(q, \dot{q}, t)$, $\delta \dot{q}^r = \epsilon \dot{S}^r$ in $(q^r, \dot{q}^r)$ is given by a total divergence:

$$\delta S = \epsilon \frac{dF(q, \dot{q}, t)}{dt}. \tag{1}$$

(Note that in (1) we do not use the Euler-Lagrange equations, the accelerations are unrestricted.) From (1) it follows that on solutions to the equations of motion, the quantity $G_L(q, \dot{q}, t) := \frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}^r} S^r - F$ is conserved as a result of Noether’s theorem. (1) also implies that $G_L(q, \dot{q}, t)$ is projectable [14, 15] under the Legendre map and therefore can be expressed as the pull back of a function on $\Sigma : G_L = \Phi^* G$. In general, the symmetry vector field $X_S := S^r \partial \overline{q}^r + \dot{S}^r \partial \overline{\dot{q}}^r$ (which is defined on $TQ$ by using the equations of motion, or more briefly, the dynamics $\Delta$) is not $\Phi$ projectable. The vertical part of $X_S$ projects down to zero, and the horizontal part can be expressed in the form

$$\begin{align*}
\delta S q^r &= \epsilon \left( \frac{\partial G}{\partial p^r} + u^p \frac{\partial \phi_p}{\partial p^r} \right) \\
\delta S p^r &= -\epsilon \left( \frac{\partial G}{\partial q^r} + u^q \frac{\partial \phi_q}{\partial q^r} \right) \tag{2}
\end{align*}$$

where $\phi_p(q, p)$ are the primary constraints. The functions $u^p$ are functions on $TQ$, which are not in general projectable under $\Phi$. The non-projectability of $X_S$ has been isolated in the functions $u^p$, which depend not only on the phase space variables $(q^r, p^r)$, but also the “unsolved velocities” $\nu^p$. As the Dirac analysis proceeds, the dynamics, and with it the symmetry vector field (which depends on the dynamics), gets more sharply determined [15]. From the basic identity (1) it follows that the symmetry is “compatible” with the dynamics throughout the constraint analysis: if the dynamics preserves constraints, so does the symmetry. The symmetry generator of $X_S$ is $\mathcal{G}_S = G + w^q \phi_q$, which Kamimura [14] refers to as a Generalised Canonical Quantity because the $u(q, p, v)$ are not strictly phase space functions. (They depend on the unsolved velocities $v$). Symmetries of the Lagrangian translate into the following properties of the constrained Hamiltonian formulation, which hold on shell, (i.e, modulo the equations of motion):

a) The Lie algebra of the symmetry group is reflected in the bracket relations of the symmetry generators $\mathcal{G}$. 

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The non-projectability of a symmetry transformation has also been recently remarked in [16]. While these papers too address the question of interplay between gauge symmetries and diffeomorphism invariance, their motivation is different from ours: they seek to find combinations of diffeos and gauge which are $\Phi$ projectable. Our interest here is in pure diffeo’s, which in general are not projectable.
b) The basic variables $q^r$ and $p_r$ are functions on $TQ$ and transform in a definite manner under the symmetry transformation $S$. This transformation property is reflected in the bracket relations between these basic variables and $G_S$.

$$\delta_S q^r = \epsilon\{q^r, G_S\}$$

$$\delta_S p_r = \epsilon\{p_r, G_S\},$$

(3)

where $\{,\}$ refers to the Dirac bracket resulting from elimination of second class constraints (if any).

In the rest of this paper we apply these general considerations to the case of interest to us. We consider constrained Hamiltonian formulations of General Relativity and the symmetry of interest is diffeomorphism invariance. In this case, as is well known, the generators $G_S$ are a linear combination of constraints. The criteria listed above can be used to test for invariance even in a purely Hamiltonian framework i.e, even when a Lagrangian is absent. Below, we will slightly weaken them to allow for the possibility that they are satisfied modulo gauge transformations.

### 3 Diffeomorphism Invariant Formulations

We now examine some constrained Hamiltonian formulations of diffeomorphism invariant theories to see that they do indeed satisfy the conditions listed above. All of these formulations are derived from diffeomorphism invariant Lagrangians. Let $(\mathcal{M}, g_{\mu\nu}), \mu = 0, 1, 2, 3$ be a space-time manifold, topologically $S \times \mathbb{R}$. To simplify matters, we will assume that $S$ has no boundary so that we don’t need to keep track of spatial boundary terms. We are also interested only in infinitesimal diffeomorphisms and deal entirely with the Lie Algebra rather than the Lie Group of diffeomorphisms. These infinitesimal diffeomorphisms are generated by constraints. The constraint algebra ensures that a) is satisfied. The property a) is discussed extensively in the canonical gravity literature as “path independence” of evolution and we do not dwell on it any further. We wish to concentrate on the condition b), which is perhaps implicitly assumed to be true in the above references.

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4 In this paper, we reserve the word ‘gauge’ to mean “internal” gauge. Diffeomorphisms will not be referred to as ‘gauge’ transformations.

5 In this case the diffeomorphism group is twisted with the internal gauge group. This point is discussed further in the concluding section.
From the general discussion of the last section, we expect that the CHF’s will satisfy the conditions a) and b) above. We write down condition b) explicitly in a few concrete cases and note that it is satisfied.

**ADM formulation:** The ADM formulation consists of the following ingredients: the basic variables are \((q_{ab}, \tilde{\pi}^{ab})\), which are canonically conjugate. \(q_{ab}\) is the pullback of the space-time metric to a spatial slice \(S\) and \(\tilde{\pi}^{ab}\) is its conjugate momentum. The basic variables \((q_{ab}, \tilde{\pi}^{ab})\) are subject to the Hamiltonian constraint

\[
\tilde{H} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{q}} (\tilde{\pi}^{ab} \tilde{\pi}_{ab} - \frac{1}{2} \tilde{\pi}^2) - \sqrt{q} R \approx 0
\]

and the spatial diffeomorphism constraint

\[
\tilde{H}^b = D_a \tilde{\pi}^{ab} \approx 0
\]

where \(D\) is the covariant derivative compatible with the three-metric \(q_{ab}\).

The condition (b) holds in the ADM formalism, as one would expect from the general analysis of the last section. The basic variables of the theory are \((q_{ab}, \tilde{\pi}^{ab})\) and they have definite space-time meaning: \(q_{ab}\) is the pull-back of the space-time metric to a spatial slice \(S\). By using Hamilton’s equations of motion we see that \(\tilde{\pi}^{ab}\) is algebraically related to the extrinsic curvature of \(S\). Since the basic fields have a clear space-time meaning, they have a definite transformation property under space-time diffeomorphisms. For example, under an infinitesimal diffeomorphism generated by a vector field \(\xi^a\) tangent to \(S\) \((a = 1, 2, 3\) is a spatial index), we expect

\[
\delta q_{ab} \text{ (space-time)} = (D_a \xi_b + D_b \xi_a).
\]

If \(\xi\) is normal to \(S\), \(\xi^\mu = N \hat{n}^\mu\) we expect

\[
\delta q_{ab} \text{ (space-time)} = \mathcal{L}_\xi q_{ab} = NK_{ab},
\]

where \(K_{ab}\) is the extrinsic curvature of \(S\).

One can also compute the change in the basic variables by taking their Poisson brackets with the diffeomorphism generator \(C(\xi)\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\delta_{\xi} q_{ab} \text{ (canonical)} &= \{q_{ab}, C(\xi)\}, \\
\delta_{\xi} \tilde{\pi}^{ab} \text{ (canonical)} &= \{\tilde{\pi}^{ab}, C(\xi)\}.
\end{align*}
\]
The condition (b) is satisfied in the ADM formalism since [17] as follows from Hamilton’s equations

\[ \delta \xi g_{ab} \text{(space – time)} = \delta \xi g_{ab} \text{(canonical)} \]
\[ \delta \tilde{\pi}^{ab} \text{(space – time)} = \delta \tilde{\pi}^{ab} \text{(canonical)} \].

2+1 Palatini gravity: The next example we consider is gravity in 2+1 dimensions in its Palatini formulation. The basic fields are \( e^I_\mu \) and \( A^{IJ}_\mu ; \mu = 0,1,2 \) is a tangent space index and \( I = 0,1,2 \) is an internal Minkowski index. \( e^I_\mu \) is a triad and \( A^{IJ}_\mu \) an \( \text{SO}(2,1) \) connection. The action is given by
\[ I = \frac{1}{2} \int e_I \wedge F^I, \]
where \( F = dA + A \wedge A \) in the notation of differential forms. A standard constraint analysis leads to the following Hamiltonian formulation: The basic variables are the canonically conjugate pair \( (\tilde{e}^I_a := \tilde{\eta}^{ab} e^I_b, A^I_a) \), where \( a \) is a spatial index. The constraints of the theory are
\[ F^I = 0 \]
\[ G^I = D \wedge e^I = 0, \]
where it is understood that these two-forms are pulled back to a spatial slice \( \mathcal{S} \). Diffeomorphism are generated by combinations of constraints. If \( \xi^\mu \) is a vector field on \( \mathcal{M} \),
\[ C(\xi) = \int_{\mathcal{S}} (\xi^\mu e^I_\mu F^I + \xi^\mu A^I_\mu G^I) \]
generates a pure diffeomorphism on the basic variables. It is easily checked, using the \( \text{ISO}(2,1) \) algebra satisfied by the constraints that the condition (b) above is satisfied on shell (using the equations of motion).

Extended phase space construction (EPS): As a last example, we consider the extended phase space of Ashtekar. This CHF was originally arrived at by Ashtekar [18] by extending the ADM phase space to incorporate triads. This example is instructive because it can also be derived [18, 19, 20] from a manifestly covariant Lagrangian by fixing the “time gauge”. This example will illustrate how internal gauge fixing interacts with diffeomorphism invariance. As we will see, because of the gauge fixing a) and b) are not satisfied as they stand but they are satisfied modulo \( \text{SO}(3) \) gauge.
Let us start with the following action principle. The basic fields are \( e^I_\mu \), \( A^{IJ}_\mu \), where \( e^I_\mu \) is a tetrad field and \( A^{IJ}_\mu \) an \( SO(3,1) \) connection field. The action is

\[
I = \frac{1}{2} \int e^I \wedge e^J \wedge F^{KL} \epsilon_{IJKL},
\]

where we use differential form notation and \( F = dA + A \wedge A \). A straightforward Legendre transformation \([18]\) results in the following CHF. The basic conjugate variables are \((A_a, \tilde{\alpha}^a)\) where

\[
\tilde{\alpha}^a_{IJ} = \tilde{\eta}^{abc} e^b_I e^c_J.
\]

These variables are subject to the constraints

\[
G_{IJ} = D_a \tilde{\alpha}^a_{IJ} \approx 0
\]

\[
V_a = Tr \tilde{\alpha}^b F_{ab} \approx 0
\]

\[
S = Tr \tilde{\alpha}^a \tilde{\alpha}^b F_{ab} \approx 0
\]

\[
\phi^{ab} := \epsilon^{IJKL} \tilde{\alpha}^a_{IJ} \tilde{\alpha}^b_{KL} \approx 0
\]

\[
\chi^{ab} := \epsilon^{IJKL} \tilde{\alpha}^a_{IJ} (\tilde{\alpha}^a_{M} (D_c \tilde{\alpha}^b) )_{KL} \approx 0.
\]

Of these the last two \((10, 11)\) are second class. Let us suppose these second class constraints to be formally eliminated by passing to the Dirac bracket. No gauge fixing has been done so far and it follows from the general theory summarised in the last section that the Hamiltonian formulation above satisfies a) as well as b).

\([10]\) implies \([18]\) that \(\tilde{\alpha}_{IJ}\) is of the form \(\tilde{E}^a_{[IJ]} n_J\) for some internal vector \(n_J\). Let us now impose the “time” gauge, i.e., pick \(n_I\) to have the standard form \(\tilde{n}_I = (1, 0, 0, 0)\). This corresponds to choosing \(e^0\) to be normal to the spatial slice \(S\). One is, of course, at liberty to make this gauge choice. In order to enforce this gauge choice, we need to impose a constraint

\[
\chi^I = n^I - \tilde{n}^I \approx 0.
\]

This constraint breaks the \(SO(3,1)\) gauge generated by the Gauss law constraint \((7)\) down to \(SO(3)\). The “Boost part”

\[
B_I = G_{IJ} \tilde{n}^J
\]

of \((8)\) does not commute with \((12)\) and in fact \((B_I, \chi^I)\) form a second class set. If one eliminates this second class set one arrives at EPS. Writing \(i, j\) instead of \(I, J\) for indices.
orthogonal to $\hat{n}^I$, we find that basic variables of EPS are $(\tilde{E}^a_i, K_a^i)$ which are canonically conjugate and have the space-time interpretation of densitised triad and extrinsic curvature respectively. The constraints of the theory are:

$$
c_{ijk}K^j_a\tilde{E}^{ak} \approx 0
$$
$$
D_a[\tilde{E}^a_iK^b_i - \delta^a_i\tilde{E}^c_iK^b_c] \approx 0
$$
$$
\sqrt{q}R + \frac{2}{\sqrt{q}}\tilde{E}^{[a}_i\tilde{E}^{b]}_jK^i_aK^j_b \approx 0,
$$

where $D_a$ is the covariant derivative associated with $q_{ab}$ and $R$, its scalar curvature.

Are conditions a) and b) satisfied in the gauge fixed theory? Diffeomorphisms that displace $S$ normal to itself will in general, spoil the “time gauge”. In order to restore the “time gauge” (and this is the BK starring procedure of passing to Dirac brackets) one has to add some definite linear combination of $B_I$ to the diffeomorphism generator. As a result, (since the commutator of two boosts is a rotation) the diffeomorphism algebra closes only up to $SO(3)$ gauge rotations. In the same way, (b) is only satisfied up to $SO(3)$ gauge rotations. We describe this theory as satisfying a) and b) (mod $SO(3)$ gauge). The lesson to be learned from this example is that if one derives a Hamiltonian formulation from a Lagrangian and fixes gauge in the derivation, the resulting Hamiltonian formulation is diffeomorphism invariant (modulo gauge).

4 Strong and Weak Diffeomorphism Invariance

It is clear from these examples that diffeomorphism invariance in the Hamiltonian framework means more than getting the constraint algebra right. It is also necessary that under the action of the diffeomorphism generators, the basic variables must transform as expected from their space-time interpretation. We will refer to a CHF which satisfies the first condition (a) as weakly diffeomorphism invariant. A theory that also satisfies (b) is called strongly diffeomorphism invariant. It is clear that before we can test a CHF for diffeomorphism invariance, the space-time meaning of the basic variables has to be declared, since condition (b) explicitly needs this knowledge.

To better understand the meaning of Strong Diffeomorphism invariance, it is useful to consider a simpler but analogous situation: classical relativistic particle dynamics [21, 23, 25]. Direct interactions between $N$ relativistic particles in Minkowski space can be
described by mathematical models which are constrained Hamiltonian formulations. The 
models are defined as follows: the basic variables are \((x_a^{\mu}, p_{a\mu})\), \((a = 1..N, \mu = 0, 1, 2, 3)\), 
where \(a\) is particle index (for the duration of this section) and \(\mu\) a Minkowski 
space-time index. One can define the system by imposing \(2N\) second class constraints. The constraints 
are needed to reduce the phase space degrees of freedom from \(8N\) to \(6N\), which is the 
right number for \(N\) particles. The symmetry of interest here is the Poincaré group. We 
will say that a model is Poincaré invariant if the following conditions hold:

a) There exist 10 functions (one for each of the Poincaré generators) on the phase space 
whose Dirac brackets reflect the Lie Algebra of the Poincaré group.

b) The Dirac brackets between the basic variables \((x^{\mu}_a, p_{a\mu})\) and the Poincaré generators 
reflect the space-time transformation properties of the basic variables.

As was first pointed out by Pryce [29], Poincaré invariance means both a) and b) and not 
just a). Bakamjian and Thomas[30] were able to construct interacting models, but at the 
cost of giving up condition b). In these models [30], particle world lines would depend on 
the Lorentz frame of the observer. (To clarify this point, it is not just the same world 
line viewed from different Lorentz frames, but different world lines.) This amounts to 
giving up the objectivity of world lines, or particle histories, which is unacceptable, since 
classically, particle world lines can be experimentally measured.

To clarify the meaning of the conditions a) and b) above, we discuss two models which 
are in the literature [23, 25, 26, 27]. Both models describe two interacting particles and 
are defined by imposing 4 constraints on the sixteen dimensional phase space spanned by 
\((x_a^{\mu}, p_{a\mu})\), the position and momentum four vectors of the particles.

\textit{model 1} The constraints that define this model are

\[
K_1 = p_1^2 + m_1^2 + V((x_1 - x_2)^2) \tag{14}
\]
\[
K_2 = p_2^2 + m_2^2 + V((x_1 - x_2)^2) \tag{15}
\]
\[
\chi_1 = p \cdot (x_1 - x_2) \tag{16}
\]
\[
\chi_2 = P \cdot x_1 - \tau. \tag{17}
\]

\[\text{There are models (see model 1 of this paper) in which these conditions are satisfied modulo}
\text{reparametrisation gauge. This is quite acceptable since, it does not compromise the objectivity of particle}
\text{World lines. All that happens is that the World line is reparametrised under a Poincaré transformation.}\]
where \( P = p_1 + p_2 \) is the total momentum four-vector of the two particles, \( V((x_1 - x_2)^2) \) is a potential function which depends only on the invariant interval \((x_1 - x_2)^2\) between the two particle position four vectors and \( \tau \) is an evolution parameter, which plays the role of “time”. The constraints reduce the dimension of the phase space to 12 and do this in a Poincare invariant manner: both a) and b) above are satisfied. To see this, note that \( P_\mu \) and \( M_{\mu \nu} = \sum_{a=1,2}(x_{a \mu} p_{a \nu} - x_{a \nu} p_{a \mu}) \), the ten generators of the Poincare group commute with \( K_1, K_2 \) and \( \chi_1 \) (with all but one of the constraints). It follows from this (and the definition of the Dirac bracket) that a) above is satisfied. It also follows that b) is satisfied modulo reparametrisation, since the Dirac bracket of the basic variables \((x_{a \mu}, p_{a \mu})\) with the Poincare generators agrees with the Poisson bracket (which in turn agrees with the four-vector space-time transformation property of \((x_{a \mu}, p_{a \mu}))\) apart from a term representing the reparametrisation of the world line. Writing \( G \) for any one of the ten generators of the Poincare group,

\[
\{x_{a \mu}, G\}^\ast = \{x_{a \mu}, G\} + \frac{dx_{a \mu}}{d\tau} \delta_a \tau
\]  

for some \( \delta_a \tau \).

**model 2** The second model is defined by the constraints

\[
K_1 = p_1^2 + m_1^2 + V(x_1, x_2, p_1, p_2) \tag{20}
\]

\[
K_2 = p_2^2 + m_2^2 + V(x_1, x_2, p_1, p_2) \tag{21}
\]

\[
\chi_1 = (x_1 - x_2)^0 \tag{22}
\]

\[
\chi_2 = (x_1)^0 - \tau, \tag{23}
\]

\[
K_1 \text{ and } K_2 \text{ are required to commute with each other and with all the Poincare generators. From the definition of the Dirac bracket it follows that this model satisfies a). However, it does not satisfy b). It must therefore be rejected as a description of two relativistic particles.}

The analogy between the models described above and canonical gravity is as follows: The symmetry group of interest in the first case is the Poincare group and in the second case the diffeomorphism group. The classical histories of the first system describe the world lines of \( N \) particles and in the second case a space–time. In both cases, the problem is one of realising a symmetry group in a purely Hamiltonian framework. Our main point
here is that it is possible to get the symmetry algebra right but still violate the symmetry by giving up b). Model 2 is an example of this.

Returning to our problem in canonical gravity, a CHF which is only weakly diffeomorphism invariant suffers from the following feature: Given a space-time history (a solution of the field equations), one can slice it up in many ways in a 3+1 formalism. Conversely, given initial data and particular slicing one can evolve the initial data and produce a “history” by “stacking” the spatial slices in temporal order[31]. In theories where b) is given up the “history” which is produced depends on the slicing. This means that the history has no objective reality. One would of course like measurable quantities to have an objective meaning (independent of slicing). One should therefore be aware of which fields in a theory are objectively real. For example, in the EPS, the fields $q_{ab}$ and $K_{ab}$ (which are $SO(3)$ gauge invariant) do have objective reality. But the basic fields in the formulation $(\tilde{E}^a, K^a)$ do not. They are only defined modulo $SO(3)$ gauge.

5 Conclusion

We have shown that for a constrained Hamiltonian formulation of gravity to be diffeomorphism invariant there must be diffeomorphism generators on the phase space so that a) the generators reflect the algebra of the diffeomorphism group in their brackets and b) the space-time interpretation of the basic fields is reflected in their brackets with the diffeomorphism generators. These conditions are automatically satisfied by CHFs which derive from a covariant Lagrangian. In the absence of a Lagrangian these conditions can be used to test for diffeomorphism invariance. Condition a) has been emphasised in the literature, but it appears that condition b) is usually left implicit. In this paper we point out what goes wrong if one gives up condition b): one loses the objectivity of history.

Notice that a covariant Lagrangian automatically gives us space-time interpretations for all the phase space variables appearing in the Hamiltonian formulation. In a purely Hamiltonian approach one has to not only prescribe the basic variables, their brackets, and the constraints, but also give a space-time interpretation for the basic variables. Unless this is done, it is not possible to physically interpret the Hamiltonian system. If the PB of the diffeomorphism generator with a phase space variable does not reflect its space-time interpretation, one loses a space-time interpretation for that variable even at the classical level.
The Diffeomorphism invariance of the theory can only be decided after the space-time interpretation of the basic variables has been declared (since condition b) explicitly needs this knowledge). Indeed, unless the space-time interpretation of the basic variables is declared, the CHF is not even fully defined. A CHF may be diffeomorphism invariant with one interpretation and not invariant with another space-time interpretation of the basic variables. An example of this phenomenon is discussed in \[9\]. Barbero’s Hamiltonian formulation of General Relativity is strongly diffeomorphism invariant with another space–time interpretation of the basic variables, but not with the space–time “gauge field interpretation” that one might prefer. In contrast, Ashtekar’s Hamiltonian formulation is SDI with both interpretations for the connection variable: that deriving from the canonical transformation as well as for the space–time gauge field interpretation.

In the EPS model, the Lie Algebra of the Diffeomorphism group is not a subalgebra of the constraint generators, but appears as a quotient. We arrived at conditions a) and b) by assuming that the symmetry group of interest was a subgroup of the total Lagrangian symmetry group. The known Lagrangian formulations of General Relativity all have the property that the diffeomorphism group is a subgroup. One can slightly relax this assumption and allow for “twisted products”, where the diffeomorphism group only appears as a quotient. The situation then is very similar to the EPS formulation, where the diffeomorphism Lie Algebra only closes modulo gauge.

One may object that one should not demand that the basic variables be objectively defined in space-time, since they are not “observables” in the Dirac sense. This objection is easily met: it is easy to construct “observables” from the basic variables by using a device explained in \[32\]. Although $q_{ab}$ is not an “observable”, the distance between invariantly specified events is an “observable”. E.g, one can locate an event as the intersection of two particle world lines or (in the absence of matter) as a point where four scalars constructed from the gravitational field \[33\] vanish. If a CHF is strongly diffeomorphism invariant in the sense of this paper, such “observables” do have an objective meaning. Otherwise, the answer predicted by the CHF could depend on slicing. A CHF which violates strong diffeomorphism invariance classically should be rejected as an unsuitable starting point for building a quantum theory.

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