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Autonomy in Stratified Structures

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Abstract:
This article proposes a minimalist concept of autonomy that is consistent with determinism, but negates fatalism. Drawing on Nicolai Hartmann's stratified ontology, it argues that autonomy is achieved not by suspending physical laws, but by introducing new, higher-level determinations unique to individual entities. The tension between general laws and individual autonomy is resolved by emphasizing the unique properties and individual laws that apply to each entity. The article also explains how this minimal autonomy makes sense of setting goals and attempting to achieve them, demonstrating that even within a deterministic framework, individuals can have meaningful influence over their actions and outcomes.
Keywords: autonomy, stratified ontology, determinism, individuality, philosophy of mind

1. Introduction

In this article, I posit and defend a minimal concept of autonomy, consistent with a variety of determinisms. I argue that autonomy is consistent with and requires:

(1) A special form of determinism, called *axiological determinism*,

(2) The notion of an *individual law*, which I will introduce later.

This autonomy is supposed to be minimalistic in that, it simply negates fatalism – the idea that our actions and decisions cannot make a difference in the world, while foregoing any attempts to defend any specifically moral notions, like being blameworthy, being morally obliged etc. To illustrate this, consider two contrasting scenarios: the first about a completely fatalistic event and the second

about a less fatalistic but still not perfectly autonomous one. Firstly, assume the heat death theory of the far future of the universe is true. In this scenario, nothing that happens between now and the heat death, including our actions, changes the final outcome. All physically possible futures converge at the same end point, rendering individual actions inconsequential. This represents a purely fatalistic view where autonomy is utterly negated. In a less fatalistic scenario, consider a government official whose job is to stamp official documents. The outcome – stamped documents – is influenced by the official's properties such as work ethic, intellect, and even physical attributes like having hands. Unlike the heat death scenario, his specific actions do make a difference. For example, his work ethic determines the quantity of work completed, his intellect ensures the understanding of documents, and his hands enable the stamping process. However, this autonomy is limited. The official would likely just be replaced by another person with similar attributes if he did not do the job, suggesting that while more individual properties matter, perfect autonomy is not achieved.

The question arises: are there scenarios where complete non-fatalism obtains? I will argue that such scenarios exist by drawing on Nicolai Hartmann's stratified ontology and extending it with the notion of individual laws – laws that apply uniquely to a single entity. Stratified ontology can also be used to give classical problems a sort of new dimension, by discussing non-physical forms of determinism. The issue of fatalism comes to light in the context of, what we will call "performative inconsistency objection to determinism". I would like to bring the reader's attention to two forms of the argument. The most basic one is described by Boyle, Grizez and Tollefsen as such:

> If determinism is true, then its assertion, like every other human act, is a determined effect; thus determinism comes to be held on account of the same sort of factors that account for the holding by others of the opposite position. The conclusion drawn is that determinism undercuts the legitimacy of the determinisms claim that his position ought to be preferred to its opposite. By means of an argument of this sort, determinism is rejected, not because it contradicts a thesis which its opponents hold, but because it defeats itself. (Boyle et al., 2008)

> And so one's assent to whichever position he holds has no necessary relationship to the fact that one position is true and its contradictory false. (Boyle et al., 2008)

Therefore, it could be argued that determinism and fatalism collapse the distinction between rationally justified and unjustified beliefs, hence if determinism is true, then there cannot be any arguments for determinism. Our aim in this article is to show determinism in itself does not collapse the distinction. Rather, to be rationally justified is to be under a special form of determinism.

The other form is to be found in Searle's writings.

> If you believe you are determined you will find that you cannot live your life on the presupposition of determinism. For example, if asked by the waiter in a restaurant to choose which item from the menu you want to order you cannot say, 'look, I am a determinist. I will just wait and see what happens. Che sara´ sara´.' Why not? Because that remark is only intelligible to you if you assume that its making was a free, intentional, voluntary performance on your part. The refusal to exercise freedom is intelligible to you only under the presupposition that it is a free action. (Searle 2007, p.70)

In light of this argument the action of "justifying rationally" is simply a special case of a broader performative inconsistency inherent to human actions such as choosing a meal. The crucial insight of Stratified Ontology, that enables us to make progress in addressing this inconsistency is to seek autonomy from physical laws not by suspending them but by the addition of new forms of determination, that are to be found in the higher strata. The proposed concept of autonomy is minimalist because it dispenses with the following theses:

(1) That humans are, in some aspect, exempt from determinism,

(2) That it is possible, in the otherwise identical world, for a person to be in state *x*, as well as for it to be possible for them to be in a state other than *x*. (This state could be, for example, a judgment or a decision.) In other words, the world may differ only concerning the state of the subject.

Regarding (1), the proposed concept of autonomy states that determinism should be accepted, and regarding (2), that autonomy is a partial, not complete independence.

2. Autonomy and Determinism

Physical determinism, states that a complete description of a moment t and the laws of physics, logically implies the complete description of any moment t' following t. However, for the purposes of this article, we need a broader deterministic scheme that may refer to other descriptions and laws of different domains. For instance, theological determinism posits that the description of a human subject logically follows from the complete description of God and the laws of theology. Axiological determinism asserts that the description of the subject's decisions logically follows from the description of the subject's knowledge and the laws of axiology.

Physical determinism: Let $\phi(t)$ be the proposition fully describing t, then a deterministic theory in the physical sense is any theory that asserts:

$$\phi(t), Laws\ of\ Physics\ \vDash \phi(t')$$

One can generalize this scheme to other kinds of determinism.

$$\phi(x), Laws \vDash \phi(y)$$

Where $\phi(x)$ is a full description of arbitrary *x*, and $Laws$ any class of laws.

Axiological determinism is characterized by the following schema:

$$\phi(s), Laws\ of\ Axiology \vDash \phi(d)$$

$\phi(s)$ fully describes information available to subject *s*, including what axiological information s possesses, and $\phi(d)$ decisions made by s. The danger people see in such a view is that knowledge of values turns subjects into value-realizing automata.

2.1 Auto Determination

Let us start by arguing that at least some kind of determinism in the form of auto-determinism is necessary for autonomy. Auto-determinism is simply a limit case of the deterministic schema $\phi(x), Laws \vDash \phi(y)$ for $x = s$ at t and $y = s$ at t' for arbitrary t, t'. Sartre seems to deny the compatibility of auto-determinism with freedom and autonomy.

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. (Sartre 1946)

I take it that the driving intuition behind the thought that a general human essence is anathema to individual freedom is based on the belief that essential properties are immutable by the human subject. Therefore, they form a rigid schema to which one is bound. However, this intuition leads to even more radical conclusions for the following reasons. If we take this thought seriously, there is no reason to stop at essential properties. Accidental properties also come with a rigid schema. For instance, if you want to know physics, there are criteria for what it means to know physics and what physics can truly say. Similarly, if you want to orbit around Jupiter, there are criteria for orbiting and being around Jupiter that are as unresponsive to individual will as any essence. One can choose or reject accidental properties without ceasing to exist, but they do come with a rigid structure, and they limit the subject in his self-conceptions by forming the background. Even if there were a man without essence, he would have to have accidental properties before "conceiving" his identity, and as such, they would limit him. *One is a victim of his times*. Hence, if you follow this line of reasoning, a subject could not exemplify any properties; they would have to be an indeterminate magma. However, this leads to absurd conclusions for the following reasons:

(1) **Lack of Individuation**: If all subjects were indeterminate, there would be nothing to individuate them. Without distinct properties, no subject could be different from another.
(2) **Incoherence**: Indeterminate beings could not be coherently said to be subjects because this would involve ascribing properties such as thought and subjecthood, which contradicts the idea of being indeterminate.

2.2 From the Consequence Argument to Axiological Determinism

I will use the updated version (Huemer 2000) of the original Consequence Argument. (Van Inwagen 1975) I'll change it to fit the notation used earlier.

$\mathrm{N}sp = \text{No matter what } S \text{ does}, p$. It is an update on Van Inwagen's

$\mathrm{N}p = \text{No one has any choice about the fact that } p.$

$\mathrm{N}sp$ therefore, expresses what, I mean by "fatalism".

P_0 is a full describtion of the state of the Universe in some distant past, while P is at or after the moment described by P_0

Rule $\alpha *$: From $\mathrm{N}p$ and $p \Rightarrow q$, deduce $\mathrm{N}q$.

Rule $\beta *$: From $\mathrm{N}p$ and $\mathrm{N}q$, deduce $\mathrm{N}(p\&q)$

1. $(P_0 \& Laws\ of\ Physics) \Rightarrow P$ assumption

2. NsP_0 premise

3. $Ns(Laws\ of\ Physics)$	premise
4. Ns(P_0&$Laws\ of\ Physics$)	2, 3; rule β $*$
5. NsP	1, 4; rule α $*$

Since the Consequence Argument purports to say something about free will and I am purposefully trying to stay away from big notions like that, I will not comment on the Consequence Argument in relation to free will. I am only interested in premise 3, as this is the one most relevant to the minimal autonomy I aim to argue for.

2.2.1 What Are Laws?

In this article, I can only offer a sketch of a view on this matter. Nevertheless, I claim that whatever a law is, it is something such that its content is representable or translatable into a class of logical implications. The arguments of those implications might be about all sorts of things, such as probabilities of something obtaining, properties, relations, etc. Logical implications are material implications that are a logical consequence of the empty set. Connecting laws with logical implications has some clear benefits:

> (1) Logical implications are necessary truths or necessary falsehoods; therefore, this view accounts for the problem of accidental generalizations.
>
> (2) The truth value of a logical implication is not dependent on both of its arguments being true; therefore, we can have laws about counterfactual scenarios.

On this view, we can generalize premise 3 to Ns($Laws$).

2.2.2 Axiological Determinism

Before continuing with the discussion of premise 3, let me introduce the problem of axiological determinism that arises in stratified ontology. Hartmann highlights this issue while discussing what he calls the antinomy of the Ought and teleological determinism.

> In the nature of the "moral free will" are two elements: the "moral will," that which is determined by the principle, and the "free will" which is such that it can decide either for or against the principle. (Hartmann 1932, p.214)

Here, a problem is revealed. Free will, and even the minimalist concept of autonomy, are not mere randomness. As I have argued, autonomy requires auto-determination. On the other hand, given the view of laws as sketched above, Axiology, if it formulates any laws about what can and cannot be good, then the truth values of these laws are fatalistic, not dependent on any subject. We can demonstrate this by slightly modifying the Consequence Argument.

1. $(\phi(s)\&Laws\ of\ Axiology) \Rightarrow \phi(d)$	assumption
2. Ns($\phi(s)$)	premise

3. Ns$(Laws\ of\ Axiology)$	Ontology of Laws
4. Ns$(\phi(s)\&Laws\ of\ Axiology)$	2, 3; rule β $*$
5. Ns$(\phi(d))$	1, 4; rule α $*$

Premise 2 should be read as stating that, no matter what information is available to s at the present time t, it cannot be changed at t. s can, of course, change in the future, but that will change the future state, which is not what $\phi(s)$ is about. Should this kind of fatalism of laws in general and axiological determinism specifically be rejected to save autonomy? I claim, no. Otherwise, we would end up back with the existentialists. I can make no sense of the proposition *object x is subject to the laws of physics* except as being equivalent to *x exemplifies physicality*. In a similar vein, I interpret the statement that *decision x is subject to the laws of axiology* as being equivalent to *x exemplifying rationality,* or *being rationally justified*. In this way, every property corresponds to its own class of laws, and laws to properties. What laws x obeys is a function of its identity; as such, despite the truth value of the laws being fatalistic, obeying them is nevertheless an expression of auto-determination, not unique to rational subjects but common to every being. Hence, if being subject to laws is incompatible with autonomy, then in order to keep autonomy, we go straight back to being indeterminate magma.

2.2.3 Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP) in light of Axiological Determinism

Frankfurt's seminal paper defines PAP as:

> A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise (Frankfurt 1969)

In it, he makes a powerful case against PAP as a necessary condition of moral responsibility. The concept of minimal autonomy is much more modest than that of a moral subject, but we can still define PAP for it and notice a few interesting properties.

PAP for autonomy: x does something autonomously, if and only if, x could have done otherwise. In the light of axiological determinism, a subject's reasons are simply part of her description, therefore the phrase "could have done otherwise" is simply unintelligible except as ascribing randomness to the subject's action. However, there is a danger looming if we use the usual meaning of determinism, restricted to physical determinism. If their action is determined solely by physicality, then they can be substituted by any physical being. An example of such a fatalistic action could be not being able to escape the black hole.

2.2.4 Where the Conflict Really Lies

The tension between *obeying a law* and autonomy is not in the law itself, but rather in the generality of the law. Continuing with our example, a less fatalistic action is foraging for food. That action is not completely determined by the laws of physics but by the laws of biology. Still, she can be substituted by any living organism. We can go up the ladder to axiology. In doing so, we find she will create the most beautiful thing available, and while she has achieved some relative autonomy from the physical and biological, she still has not reached full autonomy because she can be substituted by any rational subject. Here we part ways with Hartmann. His solution to the issue is to turn axiological determination into a non-determination. The laws, into laws that can be suspended.

> The person must carry within himself, besides the natural determination and that of the Ought, still a third determinant, different from both. And it must be this, through whose intervention the Ought for the first time becomes a determinant. Hence personal freedom does not encounter a determination already completed through the Ought, but one incompleted, the mere claim, the pure demand as such. And in so far as the claim is fulfilled, it is fulfilled only through the freedom. (Hartmann 1932, p.214)

This solution, however, is not a good one, for the following reasons:

(1) It makes no sense to say a law is a "pure demand." A logical implication fulfilled through freedom (something contingent) is not a logical implication. A contingent being cannot be the truth-maker of a necessary truth.
(2) It completely contradicts the whole idea of stratified ontology, the appeal of which is not to undermine the determinism of the lower strata, as that negates their autonomy, but to find autonomy from the lower in novel determinations of the higher. German idealists are criticized for this in many places, and so should he. (Hartmann 1953, p.96-97). It seems like, when Hartmann run out of higher strata to give autonomy from the lower, he abandoned the whole project.
(3) The addition of higher strata that determines whether axiological laws determine the subject, simply pushes the issue one stratum higher. (It is in the vein of Scotus' *will* being above *reason*. Check section 5.2 for comparison Williams 2022, section 5.2)

There is a classic argument against free will indeterminism, that is applicable to the issue at hand. One, very clear version of it, is due to Ayer.

> But now we must ask how it is that I come to make my choice. Either it is an accident that I choose to act as I do or it is not. If it is an accident, then it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise; and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism.(Ayer 1954, p.275)

Lack of determination means also lack of auto-determination; therefore, randomness or any cognitive faculty that works indeterministcally is incompatible with autonomy as well. Hence, we will not reject axiological determinism and instead make changes to stratified ontology.

3. Stratified Ontology and The Two Perspectives

Stratified ontology offers hope for respecting and reconciling two perspectives on the subject. On one hand, we have the perspective in which we think about the goals worth pursuing, the ways of achieving them, and finally, their realization. From this perspective, we believe that these deliberations, goals, and efforts make a difference, that they are not mere epiphenomena, and that we possess an agency that brings about change. On the other hand, there is a perspective that views the subject, and more broadly mental phenomena, as elements of a structure. Here, we see that we are subject to determinations, often unknown to us. This perspective is most vividly utilized in psychiatric pharmacotherapy but also in other fields such as evolutionary psychology.

If one is not convinced of the necessity to reconcile these perspectives without removing the subject from the order of natural determinations, they should consider the depth of the interaction problem caused by substance dualism. An analogous problem arises here because, in light of what has been said about laws, an agent not subject to the laws of nature could not be part of nature. On

the other hand, as Searle notes (Snell 2009), the fact of complete determination of actions and their outcomes by factors external to us would be difficult to reconcile with the requirements of natural history. That is, it is unclear why a costly trait like the cognitive resources needed for planning goals, etc., would arise and persist through natural selection, if they made no difference. Stratified ontology offers hope for solving this problem without inviting the interaction problem because its idea is not to suspend determinations for the sake of autonomy but to add further determinations to achieve autonomy from the previous.

3.1 What are the Strata

I will not fully address the views of relevant ontologists (Hartmann, Chmielecki) here; instead, I will select only the fragments particularly useful for the current discussion. I will briefly present how they understand what a stratified structure is, as there are significant changes I wish to propose. In the simplest terms, strata are distinguished by the laws that apply within them and the categories that differentiate them. One such categorization is:

- Physical Categories: Space, Time, Causality, Substance, Quantity, Quality
- Biologic: Life, Organism, Growth, Reproduction, Adaptation.
- Psychic (Mental): Consciousness, Perception, Emotion, Will, Intentionality.
- Spiritual (Cultural, Axiological): Spirit, Culture, Values, Norms, Freedom, Responsibility.

Strata are also distinct from ”levels.” A single entity can exist in multiple strata, while a ”level“ measures the quantity of these strata. The following strata are distinguished: physical, biological, psychic, and spiritual (Chmielecki additionally distinguishes the strata of intelligible beings). Bacteria exist in both the physical and biological strata, while planets exist only in the physical stratum. Bacteria are at a higher level than planets. It is important to note that the autonomy of a higher stratum relative to a lower one is not a matter of suspending the laws of the lower in relation to an entity from a higher level, but rather adding additional laws specific to the higher layer. In this sense, entities at a higher level have greater autonomy concerning physicality than those at a lower level. Chmielecki, on the other hand, describes the relationship between strata in terms of form and matter. He writes about it as follows:

> The principle of the higher stratum is a certain structure whose building elements – material, substrate, carrier – are ontic entities that serve as determinative principles of the lower stratum. These principles are thus a combination of the "matter" provided by the principle of the lower stratum and the "form" added by the new stratum. The emergence of a new principle involves the formation of a higher-order structure relative to the previously existing structures, meaning a structure whose elements are the structures of the lower stratum; it is therefore a structure of structures. (my translation, Chmielecki 2001, p.28)

In other words, the form of the lower stratum is the matter of the higher stratum. The form reduces the potentialities of the matter to a single realized actuality. I prefer to describe the same concept without using the notions of form and matter, but instead using modal concepts:

1. The ”matter“ or range of possibilities of the lowest stratum consists of all logical possibilities.
2. Properties that are elements of the lowest stratum narrow this range to those possibilities that are consistent with exemplification of the properties by a given object.
3. This narrowed range of possibilities then determines what is consistent with it, and this becomes the ”matter“ or range of possibilities for the higher stratum.

4. Properties that are elements of the higher stratum further narrow this range to those possibilities that are consistent with their exemplification by a given object. And so on.

3.2 Distinguishing Strata

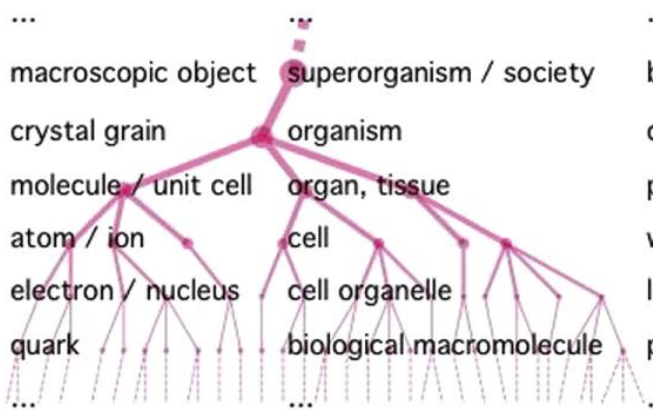
I mentioned that Hartmann distinguishes the strata of physical, organic, psychic, and spiritual being. But why these specific strata and not others? To answer this question, one must note that these strata have specific laws and categories unique to them. However, this answer is not entirely satisfactory. It is easy to see that these strata correspond to various fields of study (physics, biology, psychology, humanities and axiology). But why not create strata based on their subdisciplines and speak, for example, of a stratum of photosynthetic beings built upon the biological stratum? After all, it has specific laws of photosynthesis. What about black holes, or the early Universe? These seem no less distinct from the rest of the physical reality, than a human is to a chimp. By raising this question, I want to point out that radical differences can exist within a single stratum, and yet for some reason, these differences have not been deemed significant enough to warrant the creation of a new stratum based on them.

There are three objections to this way of distinguishing strata:

(1) Just as correctly as one can construct strata from scientific disciplines, one can construct strata from subdisciplines.
(2) One can construct strata from fields of knowledge concerning types of objects other than humans, such as celestial bodies, resulting in a different division of strata in which humans have fewer strata than other objects.
(3) The very distinction between differences that warrant distinguishing strata and those that do not is a manifestation of the researcher's interests – what they consider important–rather than something inherent in the objects of study.

This division is arbitrary and anthropocentric, clearly tailored to the stratified structure of humans, making humans appear as the pinnacle of the real world, occupying its highest tier. This anthropocentrism, however, is unwarranted. Hartmann himself repeatedly emphasizes that the autonomy of the organic stratum relative to the physical is no less noteworthy than the autonomy of the spirit. (Dittrich 2015) captures the issue more accurately, by distinguishing further stratified complexity within the physical, biological, and cultural domains.

Level	Information	Physics	Biology	Literature
$n-1$	I_{n-1}	...	...	...
n	I_n	macroscopic object	superorganism / society	book
$n+1$	I_{n+1}	crystal grain	organism	chapter
$n+2$	I_{n+2}	molecule / unit cell	organ, tissue	phrase
$n+3$	I_{n+3}	atom / ion	cell	word
$n+4$	I_{n+4}	electron / nucleus	cell organelle	letter
$n+5$	I_{n+5}	quark	biological macromolecule	pixel
$n+6$	I_{n+6}	...	...	...
total	$I_{tot} = \Sigma_n I_n$			



Resolution

3.3 Tree of Strata

I propose to distinguish strata and levels in a different way. Instead of considering whether a given property is sufficient to distinguish a stratum, I suggest focusing on the stratified structures of an object's properties. If an object is physical, its extension in time means that for each temporal part of the object, its stratified structure must be determined separately.

Let Γ be the class of properties of object x, and Γ with subscripts represent its subclasses. Let i, j, k be ordinal numbers. I will use the symbol $(x\varepsilon P)$ as shorthand for "object x exemplifies property P." The expression P_j^i denotes the j-th property of the i-th stratum. In equations, I use the symbol ":" as shorthand for "such that." The stratified structure of the properties of object x is defined as follows:

$$\text{Stratum 0:} \qquad \Gamma_0 = \{P_j^0 : \left(x\varepsilon P_j^0 \Rightarrow x\varepsilon P_{j'}^i\right) \Rightarrow (i = 0)\}$$

$$\text{Stratum } i+1: \Gamma_{i+1} = \{P_j^{i+1} : \left(x\varepsilon P_j^{i+1} \Rightarrow x\varepsilon P_{j'}^{i'}\right) \wedge \left(\exists P_k^i : x\varepsilon P_j^{i+1} \Rightarrow x\varepsilon P_k^i\right)\} \text{ for } (i' \leq i+1)$$

In Stratum 0, there are properties such that if $(x\varepsilon P_j^0 \Rightarrow x\varepsilon P_{j'}^i)$, then $(P_{j'}^i) \in \Gamma_0$.

Stratum $i+1$ contains properties such that if $(x\varepsilon P_j^{i+1} \Rightarrow x\varepsilon P_{j'}^{i'})$, then property $(P_{j'}^{i'})$ is not an element of a stratum higher than $i+1$.

The concept of individual property is necessary to distinguish the highest stratum. The exact definition of an individual property is part of my more extensive work, that is not yet published. Here, it needs to be specified only that the unique individual property of x, denoted as "x" describes x fully and uniquely among all possible objects and is not more general than any property. For the purposes on this article in can be considered a conjunctive property of all of the universals exemplified by x.

The Highest Stratum: $\sup(\Gamma) = \{\text{“}x\text{”}\}$

The elements of Stratum 0 are the properties whose exemplification does not logically imply the exemplification of properties from higher strata. In Stratum $i+1$, there are properties whose exemplification does not logically imply the exemplification of properties from higher strata, and in the The Stratum i, there exists a property whose exemplification is logically implied by the exemplification of some property from The Stratum $i+1$. The highest stratum consists of the object's individual property.

The characteristic of this stratified structure is that it begins with the most general properties in Stratum 0 and ends with the least general property in the highest stratum, corresponding to the classical structure of physical-biological-psychic-spiritual as progressing from broader to narrower categories. However, in the proposed theory, a more abstract structure is presented: Stratum 0, Stratum 1, ..., Stratum sup. The exemplification of properties from a lower stratum is not a necessary condition for the exemplification of properties from a higher stratum, whereas the exemplification of properties from a higher stratum is a sufficient condition for the exemplification of properties from a lower stratum.

The autonomy of higher strata relative to lower strata is manifested in the fact that, although a lower stratum must always exist for there to be a higher stratum, it can contain various elements, so higher strata are not dependent on any specific element of the lower stratum. This is a straightforward consequence of the relationship between the more general and the less general properties. Now, let us compare the images of stratified structures according to Hartmann with the proposal presented here. Classically a "real being" (spatiotemporal object) consists of between 1 to 4 strata. 1 stratum objects consist of physical stratum, 2 strata objects consist of physical and biological strata etc. In order to avoid anthropocentrism and arbitrary valuations of some differences as warranting the introduction of new strata, I propose significantly simplifying this structure.

$$\sup(\Gamma) = \{\text{“}x\text{”}\}$$

$$\sup(\Gamma) \neq \Gamma_i = \{P_1^i, P_2^i, \dots\}$$

Laws can be associated with each stratum:

$$Laws\ of\ \sup(\Gamma) = \{\phi \Rightarrow \psi: \phi = x\varepsilon\text{"}x\text{”}\}$$

$$Laws\ of\ \Gamma_i = \{\phi \Rightarrow \psi: (\phi = x\varepsilon P_1^i) \vee (\phi = x\varepsilon P_2^i) \vee \dots\}$$

While ψ can be any proposition. It can be about properties, relations, probabilities, etc. This abstract structure can be concretized by incorporating the results of any science. For example, physical stratified structure is the structure associated with the following laws:

$$Laws\ of\ sup(\Gamma) = \{\phi \wedge Laws\ of\ Physics \Rightarrow \psi: \phi = x\varepsilon\text{"}x\text{"}\}$$

$$Laws\ \text{of}\ \Gamma_i = \{\phi \wedge Laws\ of\ Physics \Rightarrow \psi: \left(\phi = x\varepsilon P_1^i\right) \vee \left(\phi = x\varepsilon P_2^i\right) \vee \dots\}$$

3.4 Levels in the Modified Stratified Structure

An important difference is that in the proposed theory, every object possesses the same number of strata. Perhaps in one entity, the nth stratum contains psychic properties, while in another, it contains photosynthetic properties. However, this does not indicate a more complex structure of properties of the first entity. Equality in the number of strata is a consequence of the law of excluded middle. For any property, an entity either exemplifies this property or its inverse. (We will leave cases to do with Russell Paradox and properties for another time) Another important issue is the distribution of properties of a certain type among the strata. In classical stratified ontology, everything physical is found in the physical stratum, etc. In the proposed modification, it is not the case that a given type of property, e.g., physical properties, is found only in one stratum. Furthermore, it is also not the case that all physical properties are found in lower strata than psychic or spiritual properties. Here are a few examples that support the greater accuracy of such an approach.

Consider the relationship between the psychic and the biological. On one hand, we know of nothing that possesses a psyche and is not a biological organism. This indicates that the property of being biological is in a lower stratum than the property of having a mind. On the other hand, we treat both the mind itself and specific mental states (e.g., pleasure, sadness, hunger, etc.) as common to various biological organisms, such as birds and mammals. This indicates that in this case, the mentioned mental properties are found in strata lower than the biological properties of being a bird and being a mammal. In summary, there is no physical, biological, etc., strata; there are strata 0, 1, 2, … and everything has these strata.

I noted at the beginning the element of physicality brings additional complexity in stratified ontology. The point is to emphasize that in the case of spatiotemporal entities, an additional element of dynamism is introduced. From what we have said, it is already clear that if we look, for example, at the issue of the mind-body relationship, we will see a much more complex structure. Rather than a pyramid where the bodily is lower and the mental higher, there are intertwined cords of bodily and mental properties that pass through many strata and create various entanglements. Additionally, one must consider the greater entanglement created by the stratified structures of different moments.

How a given stratum looks at a given moment is not only related to other strata of the same moment but also to the stratified structure that the entity will have in the past and future.

3.5 The Highest Stratum

In previous sections, I supplemented the stratified structure with the highest stratum, which is the individual property of an object, unique to each object. Based on this, there are individual laws. These are laws in the sense that they describe necessary dependencies and conditionals, but they are individual because they refer to a single object. In other words, the generality to which they refer is the possible worlds in which the given object exists. This connection resolves the tension between generality and autonomy without invoking some undefined metaphysical magma. The tension between generality and autonomy lies in the fact that in the case of general law, the individuality of the object is omitted, and the generality is emphasized. For example, in the case of a physical law, the manifold it refers to is the class of physical objects, where the individuality of these objects is ignored, and their general property of physicality, which establishes exceptionless regularity for the entire class, is emphasized. In this, we see a threat to auto-determination or its insignificance.

In the case of the law of the highest stratum, we have the opposite dynamic. The generality from which we start is the class of possibilities concerning a given object, and what is ignored are the individual differences between these possibilities. However, since what is common to these possibilities is x, the result of this omission is the individual property of x and laws that come with it. This is the crux of resolving the tension between generality and autonomy. Namely, it lies in finding such a multiplicity, in this case, a specified class of possibilities, whose common denominator is something unique.

Individual laws include those that speak about dependencies between strata and those that relate the stratified structures of multiple temporal parts to a single object. For example, for humans, there are laws that specify under what conditions the biological substrate permits the formation of spiritual properties, only psychic properties, or neither. These laws given by the content of the individual property are not elements of any stratum because they are not properties. However, they are what make for the stratified structure, not just a bunch of strata.

Being subject to these laws is a prime example of auto-determinism and autonomy because, in matters requiring determination by the individual stratum, we are absolutely irreplaceable. In this sense, we matter fully in them; we make a difference, we are determined by ourselves, and the world is determined by us.

What might these laws specifically pertain to for humans? I will allow myself a few speculations. One candidate might be some very abstract quale that defines the first-person qualities of being a particular human and influences probability of occurrence of certain mental states. Another aspect that this unique property of a human might pertain to, I suspect, are acts of self-knowledge.

We have established that autonomy is a general feature of beings and in virtue of relations between strata. There is always some degree of autonomy. However, note that this foundation of autonomy, the individual property, can confer different types of autonomy. For example, it might be the case that the lowest stratum of the stratified structure at t fully determines the higher strata at the following t'. This seems to be what reductionist physicalists think. Nevertheless, for example, self-knowledge shows how a higher stratum at t can determine lower ones at t'. For instance, someone noticed that they suffer when they don't drink enough water, so they always drink 2 liters a day. In this case, their observation determines their subsequent biological states.

4. Conclusion

The minimalist concept of autonomy presented here demonstrates how setting goals and attempting to achieve them makes sense. This is achieved by referring to individuality, which establishes that for everything, there is a novelty that only that particular thing can produce. This novelty is the condition for answering the question of why it makes sense for me specifically to make the effort. It remains in line with traditional stratified ontology in the sense that it finds answers to questions about autonomy in the consideration of general ontological issues; the autonomy of the human being is merely one example the closest to us. However, this traditional ontology has been stripped of remnants of anthropocentrism and a lack of consistency in advocating the thesis of the non-contradiction of autonomy with determinism.

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