Social positioning and the pursuit of power

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Abstract

Tony Lawson has recently advanced a theory of social positioning, in terms of which various aspects of social reality are conceptualised. A central idea of the theory of social positioning is that social relations are ultimately power relationships, which structure how social phenomena are organised. This article further explores this idea by conceptualising various forms of power, such as coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification, drawing on the theory of social positioning. In so doing, the theory of social positioning is also used to explain how institutionalisation influences the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment, and its implications for human development and dehumanisation.

Keywords: Social positioning, power, embodied dispositions, institutionalisation, organisation.

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1. Introduction

Cambridge Social Ontology (Faulkner, Pratten and Runde 2017; Lawson 2019; Pratten 2015; Slade-Caffarel 2020) is the product of several decades of work by the members of the Cambridge Social Ontology Group, the most prominent of whom is Tony Lawson (2003; 2019). More recently, Cambridge Social Ontology has been developed in terms of a theory of social positioning (Lawson 2012, 2019), which has been employed to conceptualise several entities such as corporations (Lawson 2012, 2019), money (Lawson 2016, 2018, 2019; Pratten 2020), technology (Faulkner and Runde 2013; C. Lawson 2017) and social classes (Martins 2013, 2015).

The present article constitutes a further contribution to this expanding literature by providing a conceptualisation of various forms of power drawing on the theory of social positioning, and on the categorisation of the four faces of power provided by Peter Fleming and André Spicer (2007, 2014), which usefully summarises various conceptions of power existing in the literature (Foucault 2001; Lukes 2005). The four faces of power identified by Fleming and Spicer (2007, 2014) can be explained in terms of the theory of social positioning once we distinguish social positions on the one hand, and the human dispositions that enable successful functioning in a given social position on the other hand. This distinction also allows for conceptualising the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment, which takes place through institutionalisation, a notion which is developed here drawing on the notion of embodied dispositions. It also helps conceptualising processes of human development, and dehumanisation.

The next section presents the theory of social positioning. It is followed by a section that explains the role of human agency, and the way in which human agents are multiply positioned in social systems. The subsequent section uses Lawson's (2012, 2019) theory of social positioning for conceptualising various forms of power. The ensuing section uses the elements and theory

presented in the previous sections in order to address the role of institutionalisation and routines in the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment. The final section before the conclusion explains the interaction between rationalisation on the one hand, and the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment on the other hand. Some concluding remarks follow, focusing on the implications of the preceding analysis for the conceptualisation of human development and dehumanisation.

2. The theory of social positioning

Before presenting the theory of social positioning advanced by Lawson (2019), it is useful to explain first what is meant here by social ontology. *Social ontology* is the systematic study of the nature and structure of *social phenomena* (Lawson 2019), where a *social phenomenon* is any phenomenon that depends necessarily upon human beings (Lawson 2019). Social phenomena are reproduced and/or transformed through collective practices, where a collective practice is "a specific way of going on that 1) is recognised, over an interval in time and within some specific community, as the *accepted* way of proceeding with regard to achieving a particular outcome; and 2) involves the *participation* of all members of the community", even if participation means merely "avoiding intentionally impeding the action of those more directly participating." (Lawson 2019, p. 47, original emphasis).

When collective practices become recurrent, they allow for a degree of predictability in human interaction (Lawson 2012). Normativity arises when collective practices start to be seen as *obligations* or *duties* for those who are *expected* to perform them. Conversely, others feel entitled to see such an expectation fulfilled, giving rise to the associated notion of "*rights*" (Lawson, 2012, p. 362). Rights and obligations are associated with "social positions" (Bhaskar 2015, pp. 40-41;

Lawson 2012, p. 367). A social position is an accepted *status* that confers a *social identity* to the occupant of the social position (Lawson 2003, 2012), together with positional rights and obligations.

Rights and obligations are *positional powers* that enable certain collective practices. Thus, the establishment of power relations takes place through the creation or transformation of rights and obligations attached to social positions. As Lawson (2019, p. 15) notes, rights and obligations "work as power relations in that the exercising of a position right by one party leads to another, with a corresponding or matched obligation, doing what is requested or expected, even if the latter party feels it is the last thing he or she wants to do."

A network of social positions connected through rights and obligations constitutes a *social system*. Occupying a social position means to have a function in the social system, becoming thus a component of a larger totality. The word *organisation* is used here to capture the *structured* nature of social systems, comprising *differentiated* social positions interconnected through differentiated rights and obligations. Differentiated social positions associated with different rights and obligations are a condition of possibility of the differentiated human practices that different individuals undertake, performing a *function* in the social system. It is important to note, however, that the fact that a social process is functional does not imply a "functionalist *explanatory* orientation" (Lawson 2019, p. 49, original emphasis), as if the function were the reason why a given social process, for example a system of social positions, came into being.

We can distinguish two "elements or principles" for the positioning process (Lawson 2019, p. 12):

(i) the creation of a social position, or the transformation of an existing social position (by changing the associated rights and obligations), or an occasion in which a social position becomes available, oriented so as to fulfil a function in the social system;
(ii) a situation where a person, community or an object occupies the social position, thus becoming a component of the system, and oriented to serve a given function in the system.

Like human beings (individually or as a community), material objects can be positioned in various ways (Faulkner and Runde 2013; C. Lawson 2017; Lawson 2012). But it is important to note that despite the analogies between the positioning of human beings and the positioning of objects, there are also important differences. When an object is positioned, it is not the occupant of the position that engages in collective practices, as it is the case when human beings are positioned (Faulkner and Runde, 2013). The approach taken here stands thus in contrast to approaches where objects are also actors or somehow endowed with agency (Latour 2005).

In order to successfully occupy the social position, it is also necessary that the occupant of the position possesses a certain set of *capacities* or *dispositions* harnessed to serve the function of the social system (Lawson 2019). *Capacities* or *dispositions* are properties that arise in virtue of the intrinsic structure of an occupant of the position which, when triggered under appropriate contexts, lead to the actualization of a given potential or possibility. It can happen, of course, that the occupant of the position (be it a person, community or object) does not possess the capacities or dispositions necessary for it to function as a component of the social system. In that case, the occupant of the position will malfunction within the social system.

Capacities and dispositions are often understood in terms of the more general category of *causal power* (Lawson 2019; Searle 1995), where power is interpreted as a transformative capacity

with causal impact. But once an occupant with its causal powers is positioned as a component of a system, those causal powers are then interpreted as a system function. Lawson (2019, p. 73) uses the category *causal power* in a broader sense that encompasses both: (i) the intrinsic (for example, physical or biological) causal powers of the *occupant* of a position, which are termed here *capacities or dispositions*; and (ii) the "social causal powers that exist at the level of structure", that is, at the level of a social structure of positional rights and obligations, which are termed here *positional powers*. Positional power is a central aspect for social science in Lawson's (2019) view. As Lawson (2019, p. 73, original emphasis) writes: "social science is found to be, amongst other things, a discipline significantly concerned with the production, reproduction, distribution and redistribution of *positional powers* in all their numerous (monetary, industrial/corporate, financial, educational, legal, gendered, age, interregional, communicative, familial, religious, tribal, cultural, ethnic etc) forms."

As noted above, social positions are associated with rights and obligations that are connected through matching obligations and rights to other social positions within the social system. The "accepted set of rights and obligations holding between, and connecting, two or more positions or occupants of positions" is a *social relation* (Lawson 2012, p. 368). Social relations are constitutive of social positions. A given social position only exists as such because it is associated with a set of rights and obligations towards other positions, that is, because it stands in a social relation to other social positions.

This means that social relations in a social system are *internal* relations, where internal relations can be defined as relations that are constitutive of the related entities. Internal relations stand in contrast to external relations, in which the related entities are not mutually constitutive. For example, the social position of employer is internally related to the social position of employee,

because the social position of employer is constituted by its relation to the social position of employee (through the associated rights and obligations), and vice-versa. Since social identity is conferred through social positioning, internal relations are also constitutive of the social identity of the occupants of social positions. Human beings, communities and material objects are what they are, at least in what their social identity is concerned, in virtue of the relations in which they stand to one another.

3. Multiple social positioning and human agency

A *social group* or *collectivity* consists of a set of specific individuals who happen to be positioned in a social system (Lawson 1997, 2015). A social system, and the associated collectivity of individuals, can also be itself positioned, for example when occupying the position of a corporation (Lawson 2019). And human beings, collectivities or objects can be positioned in multiple communities, such as when a person is a member of a university, a country, a sports team, and so on. This leads to cases of *multiple social positioning*, which can be divided into:

(i) vertical multiple (social) positioning, when a social position occupied is part of a social system or community that is itself positioned, or nested, in another social system, which in turn may be positioned or nested in yet another social system, and so on;

(ii) horizontal multiple (social) positioning, when the social positions occupied correspond to social systems that are merely different, that is, they are not nested or positioned within other social systems.

A multiply positioned occupant accumulates additional "characteristic functions" (Lawson 2019, p. 101) as its intrinsic capacities are interpreted as a part of various social systems.

Organisation and stability are essential elements for understanding the emergence of higher levels of analysis, and also for a phenomenon to qualify as an *entity*. An *entity* can be defined as "a *relatively stable* actualization" of an "organisation or system of underlying processes" (Lawson 2019, p. 44, original emphasis). In this sense, we can accept that entities emerge at a higher level of analysis (Lawson 2012), even if by emergent entities we mean only the entities at a lower level of analysis, such as human agents, *and* a relatively stable actualization of their mode of *organisation* (Lawson 2012). But the *organisation* of the components of a social system is not necessarily *reducible* to, or even inferable from, the (properties of the) components that are positioned in the social system (Lawson 2019). Nevertheless, the active entities are always the human agents who are positioned, rather than the entities that emerge at a higher level of analysis (Harré 2009), or material objects (Latour 2005).

Since human agents are always the active entities in social processes, it is important, and indeed necessary, to explain in more detail the human agent. As noted above, successful positioning occurs when the occupant of the position possesses certain capacities or dispositions that can be harnessed for the social system to function adequately. When the occupant of a social position is a human individual, those capacities and dispositions constitute what Lawson (2003, p. 45-46) calls, following Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990), the "*habitus*". The *habitus* is a set of (typically non-conscious) capacities or dispositions that enable conscious states and human activity in general (Lawson 2003). Human dispositions become physically embodied in our organism, as embodied dispositions (Al-Amoudi and Latsis, 2014) through which "social conditioning" (Archer 2007, p. 18) takes place.

The capacities and dispositions of the habitus are "durable", albeit "transposable", and reflect the conditions of their acquisition (Lawson 2003, p. 45). Capacities and dispositions can be acquired, and are typically transformed through collective practices undertaken when occupying social positions. Furthermore, human projects (Archer 2007) or plans (Lawson 2015), an essential aspect of human subjectivity (Archer 2007), also depend on how embodied dispositions are harnessed in order to achieve successful positioning in future situations.

We can distinguish "social identity", which depends on (or maybe just is) the social position occupied in a social system, from "embodied personality" (Lawson 2003, p. 50), which constitutes a development of our "*sense of self*" (Bhaskar 2016, p. 67, original emphasis) that depends upon the embodied dispositions acquired through social positions occupied in the past, and is also connected to the possibilities that embodied dispositions bring for future or projected social positions. Expectations, for example, depend upon the possibilities provided by embodied dispositions.

But the process of social conditioning is not a deterministic process, otherwise we would find stereotyped and identical responses of different individuals to social conditioning (Archer 2007). The same set of embodied dispositions, or habitus, may lead to different responses in different contexts. Furthermore, it is always a unique individual, with a unique embodied personality, that acquires embodied dispositions for being (multiply) positioned in (various) social systems. Finally, human subjectivity, which is different across individuals, has a role to play when it comes to social interaction (Archer 2007).

4. Forms of power

As noted above, the rights and obligations that connect social positions lead to a given distribution of power between social positions in the social system. Drawing on the two principles of the positioning process, we can identify three different forms of pursuing positional power (Lawson 2012, 2019):

(i) acquiring occupancy of existing social positions with the associated rights and obligations;
(ii) transforming or defending the rights and obligations associated with existing positions already occupied;
(iii) to create and occupy new social positions with the associated rights and obligations.

While the first case involves only what Lawson (2019, p. 12) calls the second "principle" of the positioning process (occupying an existing position), the second and third case involve the first principle of the positioning process, that is, the constitution of a new position, as it is clear in the third case, but also implicit in the second case, since it requires the reconstitution of the positional powers (rights and obligations) associated with the position.

Positional powers already possessed can be used to perpetuate power by occupying already existing powerful positions (the first case above), or even to transform or create existing social positions (the second and third case above, respectively), which means that the system of social positions can be itself a consequence of a prior distribution of positional power. The occupation of powerful positions (understood as social positions which give access to, or are indeed constituted by, a particularly numerous or important set of rights) provides thus the means for perpetuating power.

In order to occupy powerful positions in a social system, it is necessary to possess adequate capacities and dispositions. Empowerment can be defined as a case where we find: (i) the availability, transformation or creation of a powerful position to be occupied; and (ii) the existence or development of adequate capacities and dispositions for occupying the position. Disempowerment, conversely, takes place either by making a powerful position with its rights and obligations unavailable, or by changing embodied dispositions so as to make the individual unable to occupy successfully the position. This means that *social positions* and *embodied dispositions* are central aspects for understanding the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment. A typology of different forms of power can be constructed by analysing which of those aspects are targeted when empowering or disempowering individuals.

An interesting analysis of power, which can be fruitfully combined with the ontological analysis of the positioning process in order to reach such a typology of different forms of power, is the study of the four faces of power undertaken by Peter Fleming and André Spicer (2007, 2014). In their analysis, they identify the following faces of power:

(i) "coercion", which is the "direct exercise of power by individuals" so as to achieve certain ends (Fleming and Spicer 2007, p. 14);

(ii) "manipulation", in which agenda setting takes place so as to limit the issues to be discussed, or the perception other individuals have of those issues (Fleming and Spicer 2007, p. 17);

(iii) "domination", in which influence is exercised through the construction of hegemonic ideological values (Fleming and Spicer 2007, p. 19);

(iv) "subjectification", in which influence is exercised on the sense of selfhood of the individual (Fleming and Spicer 2007, p. 23).

The first three faces of power are broadly in line with Steven Lukes's (2005) three faces of power (even if, regarding "manipulation", Lukes ends up focusing more on non-decision making and agenda setting), while the fourth face of power is in line with Michael Foucault's (2001) idea of subjectification. These various faces of power usefully summarise various approaches to power (Foucault 2001; Lukes 2005), and can be further grounded in the theory of social positioning presented above.

The cases of coercion and manipulation pertain essentially to the second principle of the positioning process, concerning the occupation of positions already created or constituted. For in coercion and manipulation, what is at stake is the exercise of powers associated with positions already created or constituted. Thus, coercion can be seen as a case where the positional powers associated with a given social position are exercised over other individuals, regardless of whether they want it or not. In the case of manipulation, the reason for limiting issues to be discussed, or the perception individuals have of the options available, is aimed at influencing the decisions individuals make drawing on their positional powers.

In the case of domination, in contrast, what is at stake is the very creation or transformation of social positions. The creation or transformation of social positions depends, *inter alia*, upon hegemonic values and "ideology" that play a functional role in the social system (Bhaskar 2015, pp. 67-71), leading to certain beliefs and attitudes regarding rights and obligations. Since the formation of an ideology through which domination takes place is an essential ingredient of the creation and transformation of social positions, domination is an aspect of power connected mainly to the first principle of the positioning process, that is, the creation or transformation of social positions.

The cases of coercion and manipulation do not necessarily require a change in embodied dispositions – which are, nevertheless, essential conditions for functioning in a given social system. For in coercion and manipulation, what is at stake is the exercise of positional powers associated with social positions already created or constituted, and already accepted by human individuals. Thus, there is no need of further transforming embodied dispositions so that human individuals can function in the existing social system, and accept it. Domination, in contrast, entails a transformation of the capacities and dispositions of human agents. But domination requires only a transformation of the capacities and dispositions required to shape what is worthy of attention (Fleming and Spicer 2014), not the individual's embodied personality (at least not in a significant way) and sense of selfhood, as it happens in subjectification.

Lawson's (2003) distinction between *embodied personality* (which includes embodied dispositions) and *social identity* (which depends on, or maybe just is, the social position occupied in a social system), helps understanding the distinction between domination and subjectification. Subjectification is a case where the embodied personality of the human agent is transformed so that the individual occupies a social position of subordination to others. Notions such as *bio-power* (Foucault 2001), seen as the achievement of control over the bodies of human beings, can be conceptualised as cases of subjectification, in which embodied dispositions are transformed so as to lead to a tendency to accept certain norms (Searle 2010, pp. 152-160), and function in a given way in the social system.

Domination, in contrast, is not so much a case of transforming the embodied personality of the individual, but rather of creating or transforming rights and obligations associated with social positions so that a given social system becomes an important social identity for the individual. In domination, embodied dispositions are transformed only to the extent necessary for the creation or

transformation of social positions, not in order to change embodied personality so as to fit into an already existing position of subordination. In short, while domination *naturalises* a social system of positional rights and obligations, subjectification *normalises* a *way of being* in the social system (Fleming and Spicer 2014).

Domination and subjectification can also occur simultaneously, if the transformation of embodied dispositions is aimed both at creating or transforming social positions, and at transforming the capacities and dispositions necessary to be positioned. But there is an analytical distinction between domination, which is aimed primarily at constituting or transforming social positions, and subjectification, which is aimed primarily at transforming the human individual, so that the individual acquires the capacities and dispositions for occupying an already existing social position of subordination to others.

The four forms of power just discussed can now be understood in terms of the theory of social positioning. We can identify two mechanisms through which power is exerted (or conditions for the exertion of power are created):

(i) the exercise of positional rights and obligations, which is all that is required for coercion and manipulation;
(ii) changes in embodied dispositions, through which domination and subjectification take place.

These mechanisms can *both* function *primarily* through one of the following two ontological entities:

(i) *social positions*, associated with the exertion (coercion) or creation or transformation (domination) of positional power;

(ii) *human agents* who are positioned, be it by influencing the decisions of human agents (manipulation) or by transforming the very sense of selfhood and embodied personality of human agents (subjectification).

The mechanisms identified above, and the ontological entities through which they function primarily, lead to the following systematisation of the four faces of power in table 1:

TABLE 1 – FORMS OF POWER

Entity / Mechanism	**Social position**	**Human agent**
Exercise of positional rights and obligations	Coercion	Manipulation
Change in embodied dispositions	Domination	Subjectification

While this classification could seem to suggest that power is connected to social positions only in the cases of coercion and domination, social positioning is crucial also for understanding the cases where power works primarily by transforming the decisions of human agents, through manipulation, or by transforming human agents themselves, through subjectification. Manipulation aims at influencing the decisions of human agents because those agents possess certain *positional powers* whose exercise is prevented through manipulation. And subjectification also occurs through the transformation of the capacities and dispositions of human agents for being

positioned. But in manipulation and subjectification, social positions are essentially presupposed, rather than the mechanism used either for exercising power, or for creating the conditions for exercising power.

Conversely, embodied dispositions are also relevant for all forms of power. The difference is that in coercion and manipulation there need be no change in embodied dispositions (which remain relevant, nevertheless, for successful functioning in the relevant social positions), while in domination and subjectification the mechanism through which power relationships are changed is connected to changes in embodied dispositions, so as to create or naturalise a given social system and its ideology (domination), or to transform the individual's self (subjectification), as noted above.

Domination and subjectification lead directly to the empowerment or disempowerment of individuals since they transform social positions or the capacities and dispositions for occupying those social positions. Coercion and manipulation, in contrast, presuppose merely the exercise of positional powers associated with social positions already occupied, and thus presume that empowerment or disempowerment has already taken place when occupying those positions. This means that the *dynamics* of empowerment and disempowerment take place through domination and subjectification. Thus, the analysis of the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment requires some further elaboration on how changes occur at the level of embodied dispositions. This topic is now addressed in the next two sections before concluding.

5. Institutionalisation and routines

An important idea to be used when analysing changes in embodied dispositions is the notion of *institutionalisation*, which provides the means for analysing, for example, how "[c]lass relations"

can become "naturalized as a stable feature of the constraining environment", that is "institutionalized" (Jepperson 1991, p. 148). However, the notion of "institutionalisation" has been used in different ways in the literature, and is mentioned by Lawson (2015, p. 573) only in passing. So it is necessary to explain it in more detail now, before showing how it can be used – in articulation with the theory of social positioning – to further elaborate the analysis of domination and subjectification, and of the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment.

Subjectification poses particularly challenging problems to the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment, since the changes it causes in embodied personality can be difficult to revert. Furthermore, institutionalisation is often conceptualised in terms of its impact on human subjectivity (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Selznick 1957). Given the difficulties surrounding cases of subjectification, and the fact that institutionalisation is usually conceptualised through its impact on human subjectivity, this section starts by addressing the effects of institutionalisation on human subjectivity in some detail. The explanation of whether institutionalisation leads to domination or subjectification (depending on the extent of its impact on embodied dispositions), in turn, is undertaken in the subsequent section.

In order to understand institutionalisation, it is necessary to explain first what is understood here by institutions. Lawson (2015, p. 561) defines *institutions* as *social phenomena* that are intended to be "relatively enduring", or are discovered *a posteriori* to be "relatively enduring", and recognised as such. According to this definition, which is also adopted here, persistence through time is the key property for a social phenomenon to qualify as an institution. But persistence through time can only be assessed in comparison with other social phenomena.

In this context, *institutionalisation* can be understood as the "process" (Jepperson 1991, p. 145; Selznick 1957, p. 16) through which a given social phenomenon becomes recurrent or

persistent, that is, the process through which social phenomena become *instituted*. This view is consistent with Lawson's (2015, p. 573) view of becoming "institutionalised" as a process of being "transformed into institutions". To understand domination and subjectification, however, it is important to understand how human subjectivity and embodied dispositions are affected by this process, as noted above.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann engage in a study of the impact of institutionalisation on human subjectivity and embodied dispositions, which can be fruitfully combined with the analysis undertaken so far. Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 72) argue that institutionalisation "occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors", where "any such typification is an institution", and the "typifications of habitualized actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones". When those typifications are shared across the subjective conscience of the various individuals involved, there is an *externalisation* of subjective meaning, which becomes *objectified*. Externalisation and objectification are projections of subjective states of consciousness where, subsequently, "the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 78) through *internalisation*, in a dialectical relationship.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 70), a human being "must ongoingly externalize itself in activity", since this is an "anthropological necessity" grounded in "man's biological equipment". This "biological equipment" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 70) can be explained here in terms of embodied dispositions. Embodied dispositions can be seen as means for externalisation, because sharing intentional states of consciousness requires the development of similar embodied dispositions by the individuals involved (Searle 1995). But since embodied dispositions are conditions of possibility of intentional states of consciousness in general (Searle

1995, 2010), embodied dispositions are also necessary for internalisation as an appropriation of subjective meaning (Berger and Luckmann 1967). And "successful socialization" occurs through "the establishment of a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 183).

A conceptualisation of internalisation, externalisation and socialisation in terms of the way in which embodied dispositions are transformed through social positioning is in line with Berger and Luckmann's (1967, p. 66) presupposition that "man's organismic development, and indeed a large part of his biological being as such, are subjected to continuing socially determined interference." This leads to a view where institutionalisation certainly influences subjective consciousness (Berger and Luckmann 1967), but within a process that functions through the embodiment of acquired dispositions. The influence of institutionalisation on subjective conscience takes place through the performance of the "routines of everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 37), which lead to "habitualization" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 72). Routines are enabled by embodied dispositions, but also contribute to the transformation of embodied dispositions.

Lawson's (1997) notion of routine is adopted here in order to study institutionalisation. Lawson (1997, p. 159-160) defines routines as "a regular course or manner of proceeding or going on, a recurrent performance of particular acts." It is through routines that institutions such as social systems, and the power relationships they establish, become "relatively self-activating social processes" (Jepperson 1991, p. 145). Routines play a crucial role when counteracting departures from institutionalisation, leading to "ongoing reproductive processes" (Jepperson 1991, p. 145). But routines also play an important role when dealing psychologically with uncertainty. Thus,

Philip Selznick (1996, p. 274) argues that individuals "cope with uncertainty by relying on routines, which may become rituals."

The notion of routine also plays an important role in Lawson's (1997, 2015) writings. Drawing on Ronald Laing (1960), and especially on Anthony Giddens' (1984) account of Laing's (1960) contribution, Lawson (1997, p. 180) notes the existence of a "basic need for inner security grounding a generalised disposition towards the maintenance of trust" and the "avoidance of anxiety", where this disposition is "in practice fulfilled through, if amongst other things, the doing of familiar things routinely." Lawson (1997, 2015) draws essentially on Giddens' (1984) account of Laing's conception, but here I shall draw more directly on Laing's (1960) conception in order to explain the role of routines in shaping subjectivity.

The performance of routines is aimed at achieving a sense of control, thus counteracting anxiety-generating mechanisms. Laing (1960) argues that in order to achieve this, the individual construes (what the individual believes to be) an *inner self* through the pursuit of routines aimed at achieving solidity, continuity and security, while maintaining the inner self isolated from the dangers of a contradictory and uncontrollable world. The individual must, nevertheless, engage in some way with the social systems in which the individual is positioned. The solution for engaging with social systems arises through the formation of a *false self* (Laing 1960).

The *false self* can be interpreted here – hopefully without causing much harm to Laing's (1960) original meaning of the term – as a component of personality constituted by embodied dispositions developed to serve system functions within a given social system. That is, the individual protects identity by associating (what is perceived to be) the true identity with the inner self, while assuming that the characteristics that allow for interaction with others are not part of the true identity, and are thus a false self. There is thus a distinction between the imagined position

or identity of the inner self, and the social position or social identity assumed before others through the false self.

Although Lawson does not address the topic, this psychological dimension seems to be essential to the formation of two fundamental identities: (i) the inner self is the identity that the person construes as being the *internal* or true identity, with which the person engages with through what Margaret Archer (2007) calls *internal conversation*, and (ii) the false-self is the external *persona* incarnated when engaging with the outside world, which can differ from the inner self to various degrees, possibly leading to dualistic splits. A person is thus always trying to get socially positioned within an inner subjective world, through internal conversation, and within the external world, through interaction with others. This psychological dimension is important for understanding how internal and external social identities emerge through social positioning.

Using the useful concepts developed by Berger and Luckmann (1967), we may say that the aim of the inner self is to avoid being externalised and objectified. Externalisation and objectification would make the inner self accessible to others, and thus prevent full control of the individual over the inner self. The individual intends to externalise and objectify only the false self, that becomes shared and accessible to others. A *double (or parallel) institutionalisation* process thus occurs: (i) the institutionalisation of the routines connected to the pursuit of solidity by the inner self, who avoids externalisation and objectification; and (ii) the institutionalisation of routines connected to the social positions occupied by the false self, which constitutes the externalised and objectified self. The separation between an inner self and a false self leads to a *divided self* (Laing 1960).

The distinction between the inner self and the false self can occur in various degrees, from milder forms to more severe ones, possibly leading to contradictions in embodied personality.

Contradictions in embodied personality may occur because the "organismic development" of human beings is "subjected to continuing socially determined interference" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 66), as noted above. Thus, processes of double institutionalisation through the performance of contradictory routines lead to the *embodiment* (Knights and Willmott 1983) of contradictory routines.

Dualism (Knights and Willmott 1983; Laing 1960) consists of the existence of a divided self, constituted through a process of double institutionalisation. Dualism leads to a sense of alienation from the social world, expressed in the fact that the individual perceives its inner self to be separated from the false self that interacts with the social world. Alienation from the social world can become sufficiently severe so that the individual feels alienated from the material world too. That is, the feeling of dualism can become sufficiently intense so that the person feels *unembodied*, rather than embodied, in the material world (Laing 1960), so as to remain protected from the dangers posed by the material world, or from the way in which social dangers are expressed through material means. But the feeling of being embodied is essential for a sense of continuity, solidity and stability achieved through an interaction with material objects, so losing the sense of embodiment increases insecurity, and exacerbates dualistic splits (Laing 1960).

This presupposes, of course, that "non-dualistic awareness is in a sense primary, and dualistic awareness is an alienated expression of non-dualistic awareness, serving to displace and partly to conceal it" (Lawson 2015, p. 572). As Lawson (2015) notes, this is the position taken by Hugh Willmott (1986, p. 116), who argues that "the primacy of non-dualistic awareness is always present in the gaps between the screen of solidifying thoughts and feelings." If human beings are constituted by their internal relations to material and social reality, dualistic splits are ultimately illusory and alienated forms of existence.

Psychological anxiety and insecurity springs ultimately from a fundamental contradiction, namely the impossibility of predicting outcomes in an uncertain world. The pursuit of routines is aimed at reaching solidity, continuity, stability, sameness and trust when faced with uncertainty and contradictions (Lawson 1997, 2015). However, in a relational and processual world, where exact regularities are not guaranteed and change must always occur, routines will often fail to deliver the degree of control of the surrounding world demanded by an insecure person. And the failure to achieve control can only exacerbate the degree of anxiety, and the consequent immersion in routines. In such a case, the pursuit of routines ends up being "a condition of anxiety rather than of its control" (Lawson 2015, p. 573). Or, as Willmott (1986, p. 115) puts it, "seeking to contain anxiety through immersion in routine can offer only a fitful and ultimately illusory resolution of the existential contradictions of human life."

6. Rationalisation and power

The attempt to achieve control in an uncertain world is also behind the institutionalisation of *rationalisation* (Weber 1930, 1978). Rationalisation, or instrumental rationality, can be defined as a calculative evaluation of means for achieving certain ends (Weber 1930, 1978). The continuing attempt of achieving control in everyday life can lead to the institutionalisation of a calculative attitude towards means and ends, that is, to the institutionalisation of rationalisation.

The calculation of gains and losses in market activity contributes to the expansion of rationalisation as market relations penetrate various aspects of life (Weber 1930). But rationalisation, as an attempt of achieving control through a calculative attitude, is expressed in a high degree also in scientific activity concerned with quantitative analysis and prediction, and can be found also in social sciences even in the absence of sufficiently exact regularities such as those

generated in laboratorial experiments in the natural sciences (Lawson 1997, 2003). Rationalisation can also be observed in various practices aimed at quantification, such as business analytics, the use of big data, and is part of a general tendency towards mathematisation in Western thought (Lawson 2003; Weber 1930). Bureaucratisation is also a well-known expression of rationalisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Weber 1978).

Rationalisation in the social realm provides the means for externalising and objectifying an inner reality as a predictable and calculable set of processes, while avoiding interactions with others outside the context of a predictable and calculable set of processes. Rationalisation provides thus a solution to dualism in personality, as the inner self finds a territory for achieving control over the surrounding world by externalising and objectifying predictable routines into a predictable and calculable set of processes. Instead of adapting itself to an uncontrollable external world, the inner self projects, externalises and objectifies its own routines into the outside world.

This externalisation and objectification, through which rationalisation takes place, consists of replacing traditional and ceremonial practices with a (presumably) more efficient calculation of means and ends (Weber 1930). But once institutionalised, practices connected to rationalisation can acquire a ceremonial character because legitimation, that is, collective acceptance by others (Lawson 2012, 2019; Searle 1995, 2010), starts to depend on following practices which are now regarded as rational regardless of their actual efficiency (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

This presupposes that rationalisation, after being externalised and objectified, is also internalised by others, through socialisation. Thus, those who seek legitimation when interacting with whoever accepts rationalisation will also need to engage in rationalisation so as to acquire legitimacy, leading to the expansion of rationalisation and bureaucratisation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For example, “professionalized economics makes it useful for organisations to

incorporate groups of economists and econometric analyses", since even if "no one may read, understand, or believe them, econometric analyses help legitimate the organisation's plans in the eyes of investors, customers […] and internal participants" (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, p. 350).

Once rationalisation is accepted, institutionalised practices and norms connected to rationalisation play a central role in the legitimation of certain power relationships. But power only exists as such when it is exercised over someone else (Lawson 2012; Searle 2010). Thus, the acceptance of rationalisation influences power relationships by bringing legitimacy to certain social relations established between social positions. And the pursuit of power consists in the occupation of powerful positions within those social relations.

This means that rationalisation leads to the creation, naturalisation or legitimation of social positions through which power relations can be exerted. To the extent that rationalisation leads merely to the creation, naturalisation or legitimation of social systems and associated social identities (for examples, the social identity of the economist, technician, financial expert, and so on), rationalisation constitutes a case of *domination*. This is typically the case. But if rationalisation affects embodied dispositions sufficiently so as to lead to a change in embodied personality, it may also become a case of *subjectification*. This is the case when double institutionalisation leads to deeper dualisms in the self, which fails to achieve a sense of control, as noted above.

Whatever is the case, the psychological motives for pursuit of power spring ultimately from an attempt of achieving control in a relational and processual world, often through rationalisation. The institutionalisation of the pursuit of power can then be (and typically is) a consequence of the institutionalisation of the systematic attempt to achieve control through routines, typically triggered by anxiety-reducing mechanisms. But once institutionalised, the pursuit of power becomes a social phenomenon that gains a life of its own, while going beyond the territory wherein

it first emerged. This means that the relation between human subjectivity and institutions must be studied in both directions. That is, a critical analysis of institutionalisation requires both an analysis of how institutionalised power relationships influence human subjectivity (possibly leading to various degrees of dualism), and an analysis of how human subjectivity (possibly affected by dualism) leads to the reproduction of institutionalised power relationships.

This bidirectional nature of the relation between human subjectivity (and its pursuit of control) and institutionalised power relations springs from a double role played by routines produced through double institutionalisation, as noted above: the institutionalisation of routines connected to the pursuit of solidity by the inner self occurs side by side with the institutionalisation of routines associated with the social positions occupied by the false self, in a context where the latter are necessary for the "ongoing reproductive processes" (Jepperson 1991, p. 145) through which institutions become "relatively self-activating social processes" (Jepperson 1991, p. 145).

This is an aspect where the analysis of institutionalisation can contribute the study of the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment in a particularly useful way: by studying the ways in which routines aimed at achieving control, which are reinforced by institutions – but are also a condition of possibility for the reproduction of institutions and the associated power relationships – may enter into conflict with the relational and processual nature of social phenomena, leading to various forms of dualism when coping with uncertainty (Giddens 1984; Laing 1960; Lawson 1997, 2015; Willmott 1986). As Lawson writes, regarding Willmott's analysis of dualism:

"if theorists like Willmott are correct it is interesting to question the sorts of institutionalised structures that are most conducive human flourishing on this particular conception. Clearly,

institutions, i.e. recognizably enduring structured processes of interaction, allow possibilities for human action that would otherwise not occur. But to the extent they serve to regiment and atomise rather than to facilitate and connect with others, then presumably there is a case for transforming them into something more in line with our needs." (Lawson 2015, p. 573)

7. Conclusion

The analysis undertaken above can now be summarised, so as to achieve a systematisation not only of various forms of power, but also of the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment. The theory of social positioning enables the conceptualisation of various forms of power, such as coercion, manipulation, domination and subjectification. Coercion and manipulation function through positional powers that presuppose the existence of adequate embodied dispositions, while domination and subjectification require varied degrees of *change* in embodied dispositions.

When an individual is positioned in a given social system, capacities and dispositions are harnessed to serve a system function. If this process leads merely to the creation, naturalisation or legitimation or social positions, it constitutes a case of domination. But if this process leads to deeper contradictions in embodied personality, typically expressed as dualisms in the self, it can become a case of subjectification. In any case, the coherence or incoherence of embodied dispositions developed through these processes manifests itself in human subjectivity and social activity, especially in the way it influences the capacities and dispositions for successful functioning in various social positions.

Drawing on the analysis above, we can define human development in the following way: human development occurs when embodied personality and its embodied dispositions become more coherent and integrated, while allowing for successful functioning across the various social

systems in which the individual is (multiply) positioned. This is in line with Lawson's (2003) Aristotelian approach to human development as the flourishing of human capacities and dispositions. To evaluate whether social systems contribute to human development, we must then assess whether social systems contribute to the development of a coherent and unified embodied personality and subjectivity. Processes that transform social systems so as allow for human development can be seen as processes of *humanisation*, in the sense that they contribute to the coherent development of the potentials, powers, capacities or capabilities that are intrinsic to human beings.

An *integrated* embodied personality occurs when individuals possess coherent embodied dispositions, avoiding dualisms in the self. A *disintegration* of embodied personality is a process where our embodied personality loses coherence, typically through the emergence of dualisms in the self. The disintegration of embodied personality, which hampers the potentials, powers, capacities or capabilities of human beings, constitutes the *opposite* of human development, and can thus be termed as a process of *dehumanisation*. Dehumanisation leads to the deterioration of the capacities and dispositions required for successful functioning across social positions, and thus to disempowerment.

The pursuit of routines plays a central role in dehumanisation, through the double institutionalisation processes that leads to a divided self, as noted above. The impact of dualism on embodied personality and its embodied dispositions further reinforces dehumanisation, since overcoming dualistic splits depends crucially on "our evolved dispositions both to care for, and also to interact with, others" (Lawson 2003, p. 304). Or as Lawson (2015, p. 572) puts it, "the reliance upon routine and other features that serve to maintain a sense of solidity and security of (unified) self apart from others is ultimately illusory and 'dehumanising'." Based on the analysis

above, a critical analysis of institutionalisation processes can then proceed through an examination of whether institutionalisation processes contribute to the development of coherent and unified dispositions for engaging with a relational and processual world, or to dehumanising dualisms.

Embodied dispositions can always be transformed – and typically are always transformed to some extent – through human activity. Domination, and especially subjectification, denote cases where this transformation is aimed at disempowering individuals. But the transformation of embodied dispositions can also contribute to the empowerment of individuals, when it leads to the development of embodied dispositions that enable human development. The question to address when engaging in a critical analysis of the dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment is then whether the transformation of embodied dispositions leads ultimately to human development, or to dehumanisation.

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