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Abstract & Two-sentence Summary

Social positioning and the question of power

Emanuele Lobina
Greenwich Business School, University of Greenwich
(and Cambridge Social Ontology Group)
e.lobina@gre.ac.uk

Social positioning is an evolving theory of social constitution. Central to this account are the positive and negative deontic powers (i.e. rights and obligations) exercised over the relations entertained by the occupants of different social positions (Lawson, 2022, 2016). Advances have recently been made towards the understanding of how different forms of power affect social positions and the embodied dispositions of the occupants of social positions (Martins, 2022). Yet, tensions in categorising forms of power call for greater care in theorising the implication of power in social positioning.

First, I will argue that the categories of coercion and manipulation are unparsimonious (because the broad definition of coercion encompasses manipulation) and omit the unconscious exercise of power. Second, I will dispute claims that empowerment and disempowerment are the product of domination and subjectification (but not of coercion/manipulation). In fact, coercion/manipulation can, acting in conjunction with domination, result in the containment of power (Lobina et al., 2019). Third, I will dispel suggestions that deontic power subsumes all power. The exercise of power may in fact take the form of deviance from socially accepted collective practice, as in the cases of corruption and “excess of power”. Ultimately, all this raises questions as to whether social positioning is, in its current instantiation, exclusively preoccupied with collective practice as opposed to the full interplay between agency and structure.

Two-sentence summary

I will argue that positioning power within social positioning theory raises questions as to whether social positioning is, in its current instantiation, exclusively preoccupied with collective practice or the full interplay between agency and structure. It also reveals, on a methodological level, the epistemological promise of triangulating philosophical and scientific social ontology.

References

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