

**PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF MANIPULATION: ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY
AND ETHICS OF COVERT COERCION**

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Abstract

This article undertakes a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of manipulation, moving beyond its narrow psychological interpretation. Manipulation is considered as a fundamental mode of human communication and social interaction, rooted in the structures of consciousness, power, and knowledge. The aim of the research is to reveal the essential (ontological) characteristics of manipulation, the mechanisms of its impact on an individual's cognitive (epistemological) capacities, and its normative (ethical) status. It is argued that manipulation represents not merely a technique of deception, but a form of symbolic violence based on the exploitation of a priori trust, autonomy, and human rationality. As a theoretical foundation, the concepts of existential analytics, critical theory, the philosophy of dialogue, and modern theories of communicative action are utilized.

Keywords

manipulation, covert coercion, autonomy, authenticity, symbolic violence, communicative rationality, alienation, responsibility, power-knowledge.

Introduction

The problem of manipulation, while actively exploited in applied sciences-psychology, political science, marketing-rarely becomes the subject of systematic philosophical inquiry. Meanwhile, it is precisely philosophy, with its focus on revealing the ultimate foundations of phenomena, that is capable of uncovering the essence of manipulation as an anthropological constant accompanying human being-with-others. Manipulation is not reducible to a set of techniques ("manipulative tricks"); it is a specific mode of relation to the Other, in which the Other ceases to be an end-in-itself (in the Kantian sense) and becomes a means for achieving the manipulator's hidden goal. Philosophical analysis aims to answer the questions: What are the ontological conditions of possibility for manipulation? How does it affect a person's ability for authentic cognition of self and the world? And finally, why is manipulation, even when "effective," a profound ethical evil?

In its ontological dimension, manipulation appears as a form of inauthentic existence and social alienation.

From an existential perspective (J.-P. Sartre, M. Heidegger), man is condemned to freedom and bears the burden of responsibility for his choices. The manipulator, striving to achieve his goal, negates the Other's freedom, substituting the Other's existential project with his own. He acts in the mode of "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*), hiding from himself the fact that he deprives the Other of a fundamental human quality-the capacity for self-determination. The victim of manipulation also often resides in "bad faith," preferring the illusion of independent choice to the painful awareness of their position as an object.

Materials and Methods

According to M. Heidegger, inauthentic existence is characterized by dissolution into the "Man"-the impersonal "They" which dictates modes of behavior. Manipulative communication is the embodiment of the "They": it uses clichéd, impersonal formulas, appeals to the "generally

accepted" and "obvious," thereby alienating a person from his own, unique understanding of the situation. The Other is transformed from a co-being (Mitsein) into a tool (Zuhandenes), stripped of an inner world.

P. Bourdieu expands the ontology of manipulation to social structures. Manipulation is symbolic violence, that is, violence exercised not through physical coercion, but through the imposition of legitimate schemes of perception and thought. The manipulator's power lies in his ability to determine what is significant, true, desirable, while remaining invisible. This violence is "soft," incorporated into habitus (habitual dispositions), and therefore particularly effective.

Manipulation always has an epistemological dimension, as it aims to construct a specific, manipulator-beneficial picture of the world for the subject.

The manipulator systematically creates and maintains a state of agnotology (production of ignorance) in the victim. This is not simply a lack of knowledge, but a purposefully constructed ignorance, achieved through information selection, creation of informational noise, and discrediting alternative sources of knowledge. The goal is to make the victim epistemically dependent, to deprive them of the tools for critically checking reality.

J. Habermas, in the theory of communicative action, contrasts "strategic action" (oriented toward success) and "communicative action" (oriented toward mutual understanding). Manipulation is the quintessence of strategic action, parasitic on the forms of the communicative. It mimics dialogue, but its internal goal is monologic success. Manipulation violates the "ideal speech situation," in particular, the requirement of sincerity (the manipulator conceals his true intentions) and the requirements of normative rightness (exploits implicit social norms and expectations).

Results and Discussion.

Manipulation often appeals not to rational arguments, but to basic emotions (fear, hope, envy, guilt). Philosophically, this can be interpreted as an intentional eclipsing of ratio by pathos. Emotional response is used to "short-circuit" and bypass the slow and critical procedures of rational analysis, making the subject an impulsive conductor of another's will.

The ethical evaluation of manipulation is categorical: it is a morally impermissible form of interaction. I. Kant, in his categorical imperative, demands that humanity always be treated as an end and never merely as a means. Manipulation is a direct violation of this imperative. Using covert mechanisms, the manipulator deprives the victim of the opportunity to make an autonomous choice based on their own reason and values. He appeals not to the rational will of the other, but to their vulnerabilities, passions, prejudices, thereby demeaning their dignity as a rational being.

Ethically acceptable influence (persuasion, enlightenment, argumentation) is based on transparency of intentions and presupposes that the final decision is made by the agent voluntarily, based on reasons understandable to them. Manipulation, being opaque, relieves the victim of moral responsibility for the action (since it was performed under false premises) and simultaneously usurps the authorship of that action by the manipulator.

Conclusion

Philosophical analysis reveals manipulation as a complex, multi-level phenomenon affecting the very foundations of human existence: the capacity for authentic existence, critical cognition, and moral self-determination. Ontologically, it is rooted in the fear of freedom; epistemologically, it constructs convenient ignorance; ethically, it negates the dignity of the person.

The task of philosophy in confronting manipulation is not in developing "counter-techniques," but in the cultivation of immunity based on:

- a. Awakening the reflexive ability to analyze one's own motives and external influences.
- b. Nurturing epistemic virtue-love of truth, intellectual humility, and critical thinking.
- c. Asserting the ethos of authenticity and dialogue, in which the Other is recognized as an equal and free co-participant in the search for understanding and truth.

Thus, resistance to manipulation is not merely a technical task, but an existential and moral imperative, requiring from a person the courage to use their own reason and from society- the creation of conditions for genuine, not simulated, communication.

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