

Christian Coons and Michael Weber, eds., *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*. Oxford University Press 2014. 270 pp. \$105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199338207); \$36.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780199338214).

Manipulation is an inherently social practice. As you'd expect, then, we encounter it in our daily lives all the time, and have been doing so for a while. It's been written about quite a bit in different contexts, and the philosophical literature often refers to our attempts to make sense of it through stories. These includes Shakespeare's oft-cited *Othello*, but I would include Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*, the television series *UnREAL* and, needless to say, both versions of *House of Cards*.

Before I started reading *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*—a collection of essays edited by Christian Coons and Michael Weber, released in August 2014—my understanding of the subject was mostly informed by fiction. This book adds to this existing body of work on manipulation in an analytical philosophical style, so I would recommend it to readers looking for a detailed summary of current theories about manipulation. The essays in this volume take important steps toward identifying the core features of manipulation, and they are well written, thorough and methodical. The book contains multiple perspectives on the methods of manipulation, discussing the distinction between manipulation and coercion, the moral status (or statuses) of manipulation, how manipulation is used as a morally loaded term from several viewpoints, and a discussion about the ethics of more systemic attempts at manipulation in our societies. In short, *Manipulation: Theory and Practice* is a valuable and engaging contribution to the literature. It helped me to make sense of my own thoughts about manipulation. Where I disagreed, arguments were detailed and well-put, so I could then work toward explaining why, and on what grounds, I disagreed. By contrast, other contributors described my intuitions more clearly than I could have myself. However, as I will explain below, the reader will be better able to place those views in their context if they've read some other works in the academic literature.

As I progressed through this book, it seemed that the authors were clustering into two rough groups, and it took some further reading to understand this. The essays seem to generally agree with either Robert Noggle's 1996 article in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. 3, No. 1), or Marcia Baron's 2003 article in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Society* (Vol. 77, No. 2), both of which discuss the moral and conceptual features of manipulation. The difference between Noggle and Baron is in their answer to two questions: firstly, what is manipulation? And secondly, what is the moral status of manipulation, and why?

Noggle defines manipulation narrowly, as a one-on-one affair, and argues that it is always unethical; whereas Baron has a broader view of what constitutes manipulation, and argues that the ethics depend on the situation. To be clear, this alignment I'm suggesting with either Noggle or Baron is something I have inferred, rather than an avowed position of each contributing author, and some essays adopt elements from both views. While there are nuances in the essays, there does seem to be a general agreement with either Noggle or Baron about what manipulation is, and why it's bad (when it is).

Noggle's allies within the pages of *Manipulation: Theory and Practice* seem to be Alan Wood and Anne Barnhill. They argue that manipulation is the wiggling-about of someone's psychological levers, to use a mechanical metaphor, to affect that persons' beliefs, desires or emotions for the benefit of the manipulator. The manipulator distorts someone's understanding of their situation in order

to drive specific behaviours desired by the manipulator. The *mens rea* of manipulation comes from the manipulator's intent to mislead, meaning Noggle views manipulation as a fundamentally interpersonal exercise in behaviour modification.

As Noggle notes in his article, defining an act as manipulative by the agent's intent makes it difficult to be sure that someone is manipulative, as intentions are personal and can only be surmised. However, where the intent to distort is clear, the ethics are then simple: manipulation is morally unacceptable because the intention and act of leading someone astray violates that person's rational and moral agency. For Wood, in their chapter, manipulation compromises someone's freedom; their independence from the will of others. Barnhill adds that it often runs counter to the self-interest of the manipulated party, and so isn't some neutral exercise, but directly and intentionally detrimental. This detriment is a betrayal when it comes from our friends, lovers or colleagues; because one should be able to trust that they will treat you with honesty and respect. For these philosophers, to manipulate is to disregard someone's personhood.

Baron, both in her 2003 paper and in her contribution to *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*, takes a different approach, along with Moti Gorin, J.S. Blumenthal-Barby and Kate Manne. They argue that manipulation is an intentional, subtle attempt to sway behaviour (contra coercion, whose money or your life' dynamic tends to the blunt). They argue that manipulative action needn't just be interpersonal, as there are many ways we can sway others' behaviour which don't require directly fiddling with someone's mind. Some examples are lies, false promises or browbeating. Baron also includes social engineering, by manipulating the circumstances or people around the 'target' to affect their decisions. She argues that manipulative acts are distinct from the character trait of manipulativeness, which is the willingness to act this way for one's own ends. Baron describes manipulativeness as a vice in the complex Aristotelean sense, being an error in 'how much to steer others', by not doing so for the right reason and in the right way. This distinction, between manipulative acts and manipulativeness, carves out a space for ethical manipulation. While a manipulative act is the means, the moral status comes from its end.

This conflicts with Noggle's view that manipulation is wrong because it compromises someone's right to self-governance. Gorin understands manipulation as an attempt to influence that deliberately avoids being based upon reasons, but instead is based upon the manipulator's aims—and that, when manipulation is morally impermissible, it is because it fails to follow reasons and aims to mislead. Blumenthal-Barby argues that the moral status of an attempt to influence depends upon, all things considered, whether it threatens or promotes the autonomy of the subject. She also takes into account the virtuousness or viciousness of the intent behind the act, and whether one has been manipulative out of duty.

I have described Noggle, Baron and their apparent allies all-too briefly, but the disagreement between Noggle and Baron seems to reoccur in the individual essays in *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*. On the one hand, some contributors argue that manipulation is a kind of psychological interference with questionable intent; this is wrong because it compromises someone's rational and moral agency. The moral status derives from the act itself. Conversely, others argue that the purpose (rather than the form) of an action determines whether it is manipulative or not; the intent of the manipulator determines the moral status. This creates a moral grey area which contains manipulative acts that are warranted by the circumstances.

It should be clear that the analytical philosophical debate on manipulation is detailed, with multiple questions that are still open and competing points of view on their answers. *Manipulation: Theory and Practice* captures the state of the debate well because these unresolved questions and their prospective answers are clearly explained by the contributions in the book. However, it also means that the book shouldn't be read alone as an introduction to the subject—not that it ever billed itself as a primer—but the reader would be helped along by reading Noggle's and Baron's articles on manipulation.

At the start of this review, I said that manipulation was an inherently social practice, and I mentioned some of the stories that work through the same kinds of issues as this book does. The only criticism I would make of *Manipulation: Theory and Practice*, and some would see this as a strength, is that it largely doesn't draw upon the rich and long-running non-analytical attempts to understand manipulation. The notable exceptions to this are Claudia Mills' paper on manipulative works of art, like films or novels, and how attempts to influence the audience can be a flaw; and, secondly, Kate Mannes' essay on the difficulty in drawing out the motive behind manipulation, a problem she brings to life by referring to works of fiction which grapple with this from behind the manipulator's eyes.

Our stories about manipulation provide scenarios to test our theories of how it works, and what ethical conclusions we might draw. I imagine most of us are acquainted with manipulation on some level, as manipulator or otherwise, but not likely well-practiced with it. Accordingly, stories are a stand-in for real world experience we mightn't have, and perhaps we could test our theories by seeing how well they can account for, and comprehensively evaluate, some of the curlier examples of manipulation we see in fiction all the time. It is for this reason that Baron's view seems more plausible, as it could accommodate the messiness and moral grey areas of manipulation. If there is one suggestion I would make, it would be that authors writing on manipulation should put their theories through the wringer by seeing if they can, for example, draw ethical conclusions about the various characters in *UnREAL* or *House of Cards*. What are we to make of Rachel Goldberg or Doug Stamper, respectively—and why?

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