

Manipulation and Communication – Manipulation as an Anti-Communicative Act

Manipulacja i komunikacja – manipulacja jako działanie
antykomunikacyjne

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Oftentimes, it is believed that manipulation is one of the activities involved in communication, a unique activity, because its proper or effective use requires appropriate skills and expertise work. Thus, for some, it is not simply one of the many competencies, but it is a kind of art; it is something worth learning in order to obtain remarkable achievements that will bring real benefits.

However, the question of whether this is true is worth raising: Is manipulation an art? Are the benefits that flow from it real, meaning do they positively influence the integral development of the human person, or are they only short-term achievements allowing us to meet immediate needs?

In order to answer these questions, it is worth looking at what comprises the essence of manipulation. Only based on this definition can we build a moral evaluation of the phenomenon and draw conclusions concerning its effects in the personal lives of the manipulator and the person being manipulated, as well as in social life. All of these points will comprise the contents of the following report.

1. The evolution, essence and introductory (general) evaluation of manipulation

Regardless of how we evaluate manipulation, we cannot say that being a manipulator does not require some skills, and therefore it is related with possessing certain knowledge and being trained to behave in a certain way, meaning it concerns actions that favorably affect the development of an individual and society (the development of knowledge and skills). In essence, these are positive phenomena. Many people simply stop at this point and express their admiration for those who are manipulators, even calling them skilled masters, and for them, manipulation is an art¹.

¹ Cf. G. Beck, *Verbotene Rhetorik. Die Kunst der skrupellosen Manipulation*, Piper Verlag GmbH, München 2007. Cf. also J. Darko, *Mind Control NOW: A Powerful Guide to Manipulation, Persuasion and Human Psychology That Works!*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

As outlined above, a positive understanding of manipulation is augmented by historical traces rooted in a language, for example, by the fact that even up until the eighteenth century manipulation meant efficiency in using tools (e.g. in various trades and medicine)². Some fields of knowledge, particularly in folk-speech, still use this word to describe the ability to use one's hands. This is due to the genealogy of the expression, which is derived from the Latin words *manus*, meaning "hand" and *plere* "to fill" or *pellere* "to disperse, put into motion." In the first case, manipulation means that a hand is filled with something, it is a handful, an armful, or filling these up. The second case concerns manual dexterity. Hence comes our understanding of manipulation as performing high-precision tasks manually or by using a hand-held tool (in the technical sciences), or as a gripping ability of the external limbs, which is best developed in primates and allows objects to be grasped (in the natural sciences)³.

It is worth noting that in the humanities and in the vernacular, manipulation is seen somewhat differently. This is due to the fact that something else is meant by this term. We must remember that it still means "skillful holding it by hand", we have to be aware that here we mean "to keep a firm hand on a person". In other words, "to manipulate someone" is "to have someone in your hands", to have power over someone, to treat someone as an object, and to use someone for one's own needs⁴.

More specifically, we can therefore say that manipulation is defined as the intentional, biased and secret operation in order to impose upon a person or a group of people a false picture of reality in order for the manipulator to obtain personal benefits; it is using another person to achieve one's own goals (the goals of the other person, not the person being used). It is shaping opinions and attitudes and directing another person's behavior and emotions, not only without a person's consent, but also without their knowledge (in this sense, manipulation very clearly differs from formation, education and persuasion, which will be discussed later).

The tool used in manipulation can be the spoken word, a picture, a written text, sounds, but it can also include other things that affect the emotions and the generally understood mood, meaning people's perceptual capabilities. Manipulation can also use another person (or people), for example those who express public opinion. Manipulation can also be divided and segregated according to its

[no city of publication] 2014; G. Hartley, M. Karinch, *Podręcznik manipulacji*, Polish transl. [from English] A. Kaczmarek, Warszawa 2011.

² Cf. P. Morciniec, *Manipulacja. Aspekt moralny*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 11, ed. S. Wilk, E. Ziemann et al., Lublin 2006, col.1161.

³ Cf. [No Author], *Manipulacja*, in: *Encyklopedia PWN* [on-line], <http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3886302> [dated: 10.11.2014].

⁴ Cf. S. Zawada, *Manipulacja*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, ed. J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna, Polwen, p. 303; Z. Skwierczyński, *Manipulacja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 11, col. 1157.

contents (e.g. commercial, political, ideological) and the medium used (e.g. press, television, direct contact). But it always comes down to leading someone into error by introducing misinformation, meaning the failure to provide the adequate knowledge needed to make a correct decision, one that is in accord with the truth of this perceived (analyzed) phenomena, or by introducing chaos to the information provided⁵.

Some people link manipulation with public activity, especially political or the media, or with the employer to employee relationship. This is probably due to the fact that it is precisely in such contexts that it is sometimes analyzed⁶. Perhaps a similar impression can be obtained from reading this text. It must therefore be made clear that it can occur in any situation in which communication takes place, meaning in every interpersonal relationship. As anti-communication – meaning activities that are not communication (which is always focused on community building, sharing what is good with others, including, for example, information⁷) due to the substantive content of the delivered topic (subject matter) and the acting person's attitude (their intention), meaning the effects of this undertaking, although from the "outside" it resembles communication – in reality it can take its place by creating havoc in interpersonal relationships rather than building desirable and beneficial for people ties that support the social order and, ultimately, the integral development of every person. Researchers perceive signs of manipulation even in relationships that are vastly different from public encounters, even in marital relationships⁸.

Although we can infer it from the above argument, it is worth stating bluntly: manipulation is not a lie, but a clever forgery of reality designed to induce in the mind of the recipient (the person being manipulated) the belief that something is different than it really is. Thus, it is worth emphasizing that the manipulator does

⁵ Cf. Skwierczyński, col. 1157; Zawada, p. 303-304.

⁶ Cf. M. Iłowiecki, *Krzywe zwierciadło. O manipulacji w mediach*, 2nd ed., Lublin 2009, p. 106-169; Skwierczyński, col. 1157.

⁷ Cf. J.M. Bergolio – Francesco, *Il senso della vita. Dialoghi con Abraham Skorka e Marcelo Figueroa*, Italian trans. [from Spanish], Francesco Mondadori srl, Milano 2014, p. 199-206; E. Kasjaniuk, *Komunikacja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 9, ed. A. Szostek, B. Migut et al., Lublin 2002, col. 510; J. Herbut, *Komunikacja. W filozofii*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 9, col. 510-511; K. Klauza, *Komunikacja. Teologiczna interpretacja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 9, col. 517-518; T. Reroń, *Komunikacja społeczna*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, p. 264-269.

⁸ Cf. E. Mandal, *Sztuka wpływania*, „Charaktery”, 18(2014), n. 10, p. 19-27. Of course, we cannot agree with the proposed thesis that love is a tool of manipulation. Love is always geared towards a person's good (cf. F. Drączkowski, *Miłość*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 12, ed. S. Wilk, E. Ziemann et al., Lublin 2008, col. 112). Therefore, it seems that here we are dealing with certain type of anti-love, being analogous to the concept of anti-communication.

not provide false information, which is what a liar does⁹. Instead, a manipulator leads the listener to believe that he himself came to the conclusions which were actually desired by the manipulator. Therefore, the manipulator does not lie, but provokes thinking that is not in accord with the truth. The person who was manipulated reaches a conclusion that is inconsistent with the state of the facts provided by the manipulator, while at the same time believing that they received from the manipulator sound contents in accord with the truth. Eventually, it's the manipulated person who lies to themselves because of the unique atmosphere created by the manipulator, which makes it difficult to recognize the truth, and even directs one's thinking into realms where there is no truth.

Thus, distancing ourselves from the above very narrow, specialized technological and biological context and returning to "everyday life", the universal understanding and heritage of the humanities, we can define manipulation as the ability to deceive, meaning the handy creation of an illusion or delusion, resulting in the wrong perception of the subject concerning its traits, properties and characteristics (this does not concern the very existence of the subject, but only the way it is perceived, being inconsistent with the facts)¹⁰. Otherwise, we can say that it consists in creating a kind of mask, or "a fake reality", which is a dummy, in the assumption of the person doing the manipulation, which the recipient is supposed to perceive as being the true reality. That's what the matter looks like when we think about the subject of the action (*finis operis* – the subject of the manipulator's actions). Due to the goal of the action (*finis operantis* – the intention of the manipulator), as already noted, this concerns taking advantage of someone else's erroneous impression to achieve a previously established goal¹¹.

2. A detailed evaluation of moral manipulation

Although it can be easily deduced from the previous argument, for the record it should be explicitly stated that manipulation is a morally wrong action. Given that, as noted, both the subject and the purpose of the act are wrong, regardless of the circumstances, such an act cannot be good. However, this is not just about some way to classify this action, but we are rather stating that it is a reality that ruins a person, it degrades his humanity; it is an act that makes him lose the goal

⁹ Cf. M. Wyróstkiewicz, *Lying and Communication – Lying as an Anti-Communicative Act*, „Biuletyn Edukacji Medialnej”, 12(2014), n. 1, s. 44-45.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Stępień, *Iluzja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 7, ed. S. Wielgus, J. Duchniewski et al., Lublin 1997, col. 44; Z. Chlewiński, *Iluzja. W psychologii*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 7, col. 44-45.

¹¹ Cf. *Finis operis* and *finis operantis* belong to the basic facts that create the structure of a human act. These are two of the three principle criteria of the moral evaluation of an act (*fontes moralitatis*). Cf. S. Nowosad, M. Wyróstkiewicz, *Czyn ludzki*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, p. 131.

of his existence and makes it difficult to maintain and implement the meaning of life. Due to its natural social consequences, manipulation also destroys relationships with others and disrupts peace and harmony in community life¹².

Manipulation always concerns violating the freedom of the manipulated person. It leads to the destruction of individuality and creates an attitude of opportunism and unjustified availabilities. It is therefore a kind of “playing around with a person”. As already stated, a manipulator does not take into consideration the personal dignity of their recipient, but wants to possess them, making him or her into a “tool in their hands”. It is a violation of personal dignity and justice. It is also a violation of the commandment to love, according to which we must respect our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-40). In this sense, manipulation is seen not only as a denial of the Christian ideal, but it is clearly a sin. Due to the fact that it is an explicit offense against truth, and thus a violation of the eighth Commandment of the Decalogue, it is a mortal sin¹³. A confirmation of the severity of this sin is the fact that manipulation is completely directed against man. Therefore, it is a moral evil, which must be placed in the highest order among the hierarchy of evil (analogous to the moral good, which aims for the good of man as such)¹⁴.

As noted above, a person manipulates in order to achieve their own benefits. There is no doubt that the manipulator does not deserve these benefits. If the manipulator in fact deserved them, he would not have to resort to using manipulation. We can also assume that, due to the natural sense of what is good, the natural desire to commune with it and also the natural desire to strive to obtain it, a manipulator would not have done such a thing¹⁵. In this sense, manipulation turns out to be extraordinary, meaning that it is an unnatural course of action. Thus, it turns out to be a bad means for a person to use for his or her development, making it morally illegitimate (this is another argument showing the immorality of such an action)¹⁶.

If manipulation is striving for what one does not deserve to have, it is an injustice. Justice is defined as giving everyone what rightfully belongs to them¹⁷. Injustice, therefore, is a violation of the principles of social life (the principles of

¹² Cf. M. Wroblewski, *Kiedy czyn jest zły i jakie to ma znaczenie?*, „Katecheta”, 56(2012), n. 12, p. 61-63.

¹³ Cf. Idem, *Co to jest grzech i dlaczego warto się nim zajmować?*, „Katecheta”, 57(2013), n. 1, p. 50-53.

¹⁴ Cf. S. Nowosad, M. Wroblewski, *Dobro moralne*, in: Jan Paweł II. *Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, p. 147-149.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Wroblewski, *Dlaczego ludzie grzeszą?*, „Katecheta”, 57(2013), n. 2, p. 51-56.

¹⁶ Cf. Idem, *Human Ecology. An Outline of the Concept and the Relationship between Man and Nature*, Lublin 2013, p. 67-72.

¹⁷ Cf. Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 201-203, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html [date: 10.11.2014].

justice). This means, therefore, that in a natural way, manipulation destroys social order¹⁸ (and this is yet another argument proving this thesis).

In addition to this, manipulation turns out to be a selfish activity, since its goal is personal benefit without regard to the needs of others, and even clearly disregards another person's dignity. Taking into account the fact that love is the basic building block of social order¹⁹, selfish actions that reject love are the essential tools which destroy social order.

There is also no doubt that manipulation perceived in such a way cannot be a tool for communication. It is rather an expression of anti-communication, meaning such an action, which on the outside resembles communication, but because of its nature and effects, that is, breaking up the community instead of building it up, manipulation cannot be considered to be an expression or tool for communication activities.

There is also no doubt that manipulation, as already mentioned, although it undoubtedly expresses some skillfulness, does not deserve to be called an art. Due to its very essence, a skill is something that has a positive effect on the integral development of the person; it has positive connotations. Manipulation, as already noted, cannot be assessed in such a way. We can conclude that calling manipulation an art is itself an act of manipulation that seeks to deprive someone of being sensitive to the evil that it causes, both to a community of people and towards a particular person, including both the person manipulated and the person manipulating.

At this point it is interesting to go back to one of my first statements, namely the thesis that it is related to the deepening of knowledge and training in certain behaviors, meaning actions that favorably affect the development of individuals and society (the development of knowledge and skills). After what was stated above, this thesis appears to be an additional accusation against the manipulator. The point is that the manipulator uses good tools that can serve to develop and perform evil deeds.

3. Responsibility for manipulation

We must clearly state that a manipulated person experiences the bitter consequences due to the fact that they are taken advantage of by someone else. But at the same time a manipulated person also bears moral responsibility for what has happened. Therefore, to some extent, the manipulated person is also villain, meaning someone who caused evil to happen, meaning the manipulation that oc-

¹⁸ Cf. Ibidem, n. 160-163 and 205.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibidem, n. 204-208; J. Nagórny, *Posłannictwo chrześcijan w świecie*, vol. 1: *Świat i wspólnota*, Lublin 1997, p. 204-245.

curred in the world. Although he is “poor” because he was manipulated, he is “additionally” guilty of this event.

The moral guilt incurred by the person manipulated stems from several reasons. First, it results from the already mentioned lack of caution, and therefore the lack of prudence, meaning insufficient self-concern. Although this can actually be said for almost every case of bad behavior, it is difficult not to point this out in the context of manipulation.

Two more reasons are characteristic of manipulation. The first is insufficient attention paid to the truth. The second is not using one’s reason, which means a man’s self-degradation. It should be emphasized that the violation of freedom does not take place without the consent of the person manipulated, and that is why a person who was manipulated is also responsible and guilty of the manipulation and its effects. The person who was manipulated somehow opened up to it, giving the manipulator the opportunity to take control of them²⁰. This does not so much concern imprudent acceptance of a false picture of reality, but the lack of concern for the truth and not using one’s reason.

As stated above, both the manipulator and the manipulated take responsibility and incur moral guilt for manipulative actions. It should be noted, however, that this liability and fault are not always equally great. These depend on the degree of involvement in the matter. In the case of extreme situations (brainwashing, indoctrination etc.), the responsibility of the person being manipulated is greatly reduced. But we cannot talk about completely excluding it. This is because it arises from consent to enter into an “unhealthy agreement” (e.g. by freely entering into an organization in which indoctrination procedures take place). But if this happened “by chance”, then the accusation arises because of the reckless actions and lack of concern for finding the truth about the institution a person gets involved in and not caring for their personal condition (including health, especially mental health).

4. Appropriate behavior mistakenly treated as manipulative

Reflecting on manipulation, it is worth noting that not all of what at first may seem to be manipulation actually is manipulation. This is worth keeping in mind so as not to be deceived by appearances, and not to be convinced or unnecessarily take on the burden of the blame for manipulation in a situation where it did not

²⁰ We can defend itself against manipulation. Cf. T. Witkowski, *Psychomanipulacje, Jak je rozpoznawać i jak sobie z nimi radzić*, Wałbrzych 2000, p. 237-273. However, it is not easy and obvious. Cf. D. Maison, *Złap mnie, jeśli potrafisz* [rozmawiała D. Krzemionka], „Charaktery”, 18(2014), n. 10, p. 29-33.

happen. We cannot agree with the thesis that every attempt to influence another person is manipulation²¹.

It is difficult to agree with the statement that persuasion, meaning the art of persuading, is a manipulative action. As such, it has an ambivalent characteristic. Of course, the truth is that it can be used as a tool for manipulation. But when someone wants to convince another person about their opinion, he or she is not always a manipulator. If every persuasion were to be manipulation, then the work of teachers, the mission of parents, priests and all educators and informers would be immoral. And yet this is not so. It is worth repeating that if we do not want to enslave man and make him into a tool for achieving our own undeserved success, if we really want to have an impact on another person for his or her own good, and he or she accepts this, then we are not manipulators.

These sentences clearly show that education and formation should be expressly separated from indoctrination. The dividing line for this reality is, generally speaking, respecting the freedom and dignity of the person being brought up. There are also other goals: manipulating means to "keep a tight grip on someone", while in formation we are dealing with the integral development of a person²².

But it is worth wondering whether a child is brought up or students educated, or are these activities for our juveniles perhaps based on indoctrination or ideologization etc.? The younger and thus less independently thinking the child, the easier it will be to subject him or her to such actions. Parents and educators need to remember that children are not their property, their toys, etc., but intelligent and free people. We should always communicate the truth to them, of course, according to their capabilities ("according to their capabilities" does not mean that after noticing a lack of or severe restrictions in activities, we can allow ourselves to pass on false information, but it means that the transmission of truth, and "nothing but the truth" should be adapted to the capabilities of senders and recipients).

We cannot also be under the illusion that caring for our needs is always an action against another person, and demanding the implementation of legitimate needs is manipulation. Every person has the right to pursue their own legitimate needs. Clearly speaking about them is the expression of maturity. In psychology and communication theory, this is called assertiveness²³. It is not uncommon that situations requiring strongly appealing for one's own benefits is necessary and

²¹ Some people understand this in such a way. The introductory article dedicated to manipulation is one of the top Polish psychological journals, the author, quoting a philology professor, writes: "If I want them to listen to me and I smile – I am manipulating. If I lower my voice to a whisper – I am manipulating. If I raise my voice – the same thing" (P. Pająk, *Manipulacja*, „Charaktery”, 18(2014), n. 10, p. 3). Other authors are of the same opinion, making manipulation and persuasion the same thing. We cannot agree to this, as I clearly state in the main text.

²² Cf. Z. Chlewiński, *Formacja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 5, ed. L. Bieńkowski, P. Hemperek et al., Lublin 1989, col. 389.

²³ Cf. M. Goryniak, *Autentycznie asertywni*, „Charaktery”, 15(2011), n. 10, p. 80-83.

is a result of the convention related to this situation. One example can be a job interview in which the people talking want to influence each other and receive appropriate beneficial effects for each of them, but this is already clear to both parties and written into the nature of the meeting. Meanwhile, in specific motions, they should not perceive manipulative actions, but treat them as a sign of professionalism and adequate preparation in order to complete the tasks. Of course, the limit that cannot be exceeded is based on respect for the interlocutor.

5. Towards a synthesis

These reflections do not leave any doubt as to the fact that manipulation is seen as an unnatural (non-ecological) reality, and thus harmful to the human person. It is an evil that destroys a manipulated person as well as the manipulator and negatively affects social order, impeding maintaining proper order in society. While the manipulator does not actually lie, but only by means of agility leads their recipient into the realm of untruth (the recipient himself creates a fictional scenario, of course, as a result of the suggestions of the manipulator), the manipulator undoubtedly distorts the truth and blocks access to it. In this sense, between manipulation and the proverbial lie, we can find many analogies as to their sources and consequences. A liar's mentality and that of a manipulator's are similar. They merely use different tools to obtain their undeserved and selfish interests²⁴. Both the manipulator and the manipulated person are responsible for the evil that appears in the world as a result of manipulation. The manipulated person committed a mistake by showing too little concern for the truth and not sufficiently using their reason, allowing the manipulator to directly lead them into error.

Everything that has been said above leads to the belief that manipulation cannot be considered communication. It is in fact a reality (action) that apparently resembles an act of communication. Due to its nature, meaning that it does not build the community (which belongs to the essence of communication), but is the achievement of self-serving purposes, it appears to be an anti-communicative action.

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²⁴ Cf. Wroblekiewicz, *Lying and Communication*, p. 44-53.

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Słowa kluczowe:

antykomunikacja, komunikacja, manipulacja, nieprawda, prawda, rozwój osoby ludzkiej, rozwój społeczny

Key words:

anti-communication, communication, development of the human person, false, manipulation, social development, true, truth, untruth

Summary

Oftentimes, it is believed that the manipulation is one of the activities involved in communication. It is not simply one among many competencies, but a kind of art; it is something one should learn in order to make remarkable achievements that will bring real benefits. However, in the humanities, philosophy and theology, the way of looking at manipulation is somewhat different. We must remember that it still means “a skillful hand grip”, we have to be aware that here we mean another person hold something. In other words, “to manipulate someone” is “to have something in one’s hand”, to have power over something, to treat something as an object, and to use something for one’s own needs. More specifically, manipulation is defined as the intentional, biased and secretive operation in to dictate to some

man or group of people a false picture of reality in order to achieve their personal benefits; it is using people to achieve their own goals (according to the used neighbor). It is shaping the opinions and attitudes and directing behavior and human emotions, not only without a person's consent, but also without their knowledge (in this sense, manipulation very clearly differs from formation, education and persuasion, which will be discussed later). However, we cannot be under the illusion that caring for our needs is always an action against another person, and demanding the implementation of legitimate needs is manipulation. Every person has the right to pursue their own legitimate needs. Of course, the limit that cannot be exceeded is respect for the interlocutor.

These reflections do not leave any doubt as to the fact that manipulation is seen as an unnatural (non-ecological) reality, and thus harmful to the human person. It is an evil that destroys a manipulated person as well as the manipulator and negatively affects the social order, impeding its proper maintenance. While the manipulator does not actually lie, a liar's mentality and that of a manipulator's are similar. They merely use different tools to obtain their undeserved and selfish interests. Both the manipulator and the manipulated person are responsible for the evil that appears in the world as a result of manipulation. The manipulated committed a mistake by showing too little concern for the truth and not sufficiently using their reason, allowing the manipulator to directly lead them into error. Manipulation cannot be considered to be communication. It is in fact a reality (action) that apparently resembles an act of communication. Due to its nature, meaning that it does not build the community (which belongs to the essence of communication), but is the achievement of self-serving purposes, it appears to be the action of anti-communication.