

BOOK REVIEW

Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk (Eds.).
The Philosophy of Online Manipulation.

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This book is a product of collaboration among different minds applying philosophical concepts on online manipulation. It provides different points of view of philosophers and scholars who explain online manipulation, making the work unique and interesting. The authors and contributors are experts in their fields, young and promising professionals, researchers, writers, and seasoned philosophy teachers. This book will particularly interest philosophy researchers and advanced students working in ethics, epistemology, philosophy of technology, and critical thinking. It is good reading material for undergraduate and graduate philosophy students as well. The book is rather long - 425 pages - but it is simplified to make it more understandable for philosophy students, teachers, and every academic. It is interesting and intriguing, and it engages the reader in every chapter, which brings an array of enlightening points of view. By bringing together rational discussions and persuasions on online manipulation, this book provides a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the key concepts, questions, and challenges that online manipulation creates daily in our society. *The Philosophy of Online Manipulation* is one of the projects of Routledge Researches in Applied Ethics. It is an open-access e-book in Taylor & Francis Group. The editors, Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk are young philosophers and experts in their field. Fleur Jongepier's interests include philosophy of mind, epistemology, digital ethics, feminist ethics, and moral pedagogy. She is actively engaged in political philosophy or public philosophy. Michael Klenk's interest is in metaethics, epistemology, moral psychology, and philosophy of technology.

The introduction and overview (1-12) are comprehensive and instructive. Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk gave a bird's eye view of the book, explaining the 19 chapters, general observations, and concluding remarks. Reading the introduction, one will already have a kaleidoscopic perspective of the chapters tackled by the authors. It effectively lays out the reasons that make one appreciate online manipulation as an intellectually stimulating and practically problematic phenomenon. The book is divided into four parts: Part I is on conceptual and methodological questions (13-131); Part II is on threats to autonomy, freedom, and meaning in life (133-271); Part III is on epistemic, affective, and political harms and risks (273-369); and Part IV is on legal and regulatory perspectives (371-425).

Part I provides five foundational chapters expounding on the conceptual and methodological parameters of the project. It gives the readers the parameters of the

book concept and the method used. Indeed, there are several philosophical inquiries as well as controversies regarding the concept and methodological nature of manipulation. In Chapter 2, Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk's topic on "Online manipulation: Charting the field" offers rational discourses and debates applicable to online manipulation. They introduce some methodological questions to be used to study manipulation (online), the normative charge of the concept, and the level and the intentionality of manipulation. The authors critically discuss the most prominent philosophical approaches to the study of manipulation. They touch upon some methodological and conceptual preliminaries, give a brief overview of so-called outcome and process-based accounts of manipulation, and explain the distinct problems raised by manipulative online technologies, such as personalization and opacity (5). They were able to provide a great view of the theoretical backdrop and parameters so that the readers, whether philosophy or non-philosophy students, will be on neutral ground to appreciate the other topics in the next chapters. In Chapter 3, Anne Barnhill's "How philosophy might contribute to the practical ethics of online manipulation" described how philosophizing could help in understanding manipulation. This chapter allows discussion as a kind of philosophical inquiry as the most productive way for philosophers to contribute. She proposed that when online influence is called "manipulative," we should figure out what kinds of "concerns" are registered and then "query" whether the influence of that particular form is problematic and why (5). Massimiliano L. Cappuccio, Constantine Sandis, and Austin Wyatt's "Online manipulation and agential risk," in Chapter 4, compare and contrast online manipulation enhanced by autonomous technologies to its more old-fashioned technologies. The question of manipulation raises an issue on the nature of agency and responsibility. What does it take to act with knowledge, intention, voluntariness, and freedom? The determinants of morality play an important role as they are crucial to tackling the more focused question of whether there are kinds of agential risks (viz. dangers which we expose ourselves to in acting) that are specific to online manipulation. In Chapter 5, the topic "Manipulative machines" by Jessica Pepp, Rachel Sterken, Matthew McKeever, and Eliot Michaelson asks how the contemporary concept of manipulation could capture current and future instances of manipulation by machines. Can machines manipulate us? It might seem obvious that a superintelligence like Oracle AI could manipulate us. The authors provided three views considered: a conservative conceptual analysis, which slightly tweaks extant influence-based theories of manipulation (92, 94); a dismissive view according to which it doesn't matter much if machines are manipulative, provided we can classify them as we make sense of our interactions with them (92, 99); and an ameliorative analysis of the concept of manipulation, according to which we should change our concept of manipulation better to make sense of machine manipulation (93, 101). Michael Klenk's topic on "Manipulation, injustice, and technology" in Chapter 6 supports the view that manipulated behavior is explained by injustice. Technology can manipulate us, even if technological artifacts like robots, intelligent software agents, or other 'mere tools' lack agential features such as intentionality. The author argues that "technology can contribute to injustices" that explain our mental states as we can be manipulated by technology, independently of whether technology has "intention" (6).

Part II presents threats to autonomy, freedom, and meaning in life. It has 7 chapters. They are principally concerned with the moral dimension of manipulation by addressing the question of what would make online manipulation immoral and what is at stake when a person is manipulated online. Thomas Nys and Bart Engelen's topic on "Commercial online choice architecture: When roads are paved with bad intentions" in Chapter 7 upholds the view that there is no manipulation without intention. Our choices are manipulated, and it is therefore not autonomous. This conceptual point has normative implications. The intention determines the morality of the act. The authors turn to the question of what exactly is manipulative about commercial online choice architectures and in what way they threaten personal autonomy. They argue that considering the intentions of the manipulator is key, both conceptually and normatively (6). The topic on "Microtargeting people as a mere means" in Chapter 8, provides an approach that argues that corporations or political agents involved in online manipulative practices act wrongfully because they use persons as "a mere means." Fleur Jongepier and Jan Willem Wieland focus on political microtargeting. There are potential downsides to focusing on consequences for people's autonomy in terms of the risks posed. "They go on to explain what "caring about consent" comes down to in digital contexts and argue that political microtargeting involves treating people as a mere means due to a lack of care about people's consent to be used as a means towards the microtargeter's ends" (6). Marianna Capasso's topic on "Manipulation as digital invasion: A neo-republican approach" in Chapter 9 discusses the creation of a more systematic interaction between the fields of philosophy of technology and political philosophy. Political actors in the public sphere often manipulate others: they provide incentives and other means to purposely influence and alter individuals' behaviors and beliefs. "She argues that the main worry about digital nudges is not (just) the fact that they are typically not transparent but that it involves alien control and a lack of democratic means of empowerment, communication, and contestation" (7). Moti Gorin's "Gamification, manipulation, and domination," in Chapter 10, presents a norm-based account of manipulation and introduces a type of domination – interactive domination – that differs from the structural domination articulated by republican theories of political liberty. Gamification can be understood as an imposition of game reasons in domains that ordinarily lack such reasons. When agents act in response to game reasons rather than the reasons that ordinarily govern behavior, they are manipulated. Gamification can be a form of manipulation. Manipulation can be understood as a form of domination. W. Jared Parmer's topic on "Manipulative design through gamification" in Chapter 11 calls for cogent philosophical analysis. It analyzes gamification as the implementation of inducements to strive to play in artifacts that are not themselves games. It further argues that gamification, and this more generic mode of design, is manipulative when using these tools in such ways serves the designers' hidden purposes. Parmer points out that one of the dangers of manipulative design is that it stands in the way of making our lives more meaningful because it can make it "harder to work out" and act on what "we care about" (7). Sven Nyholm's topic on "Technological manipulation and threats to meaning in life" in Chapter 12, discusses whether technological manipulation poses threats to our opportunities to live meaningful lives, to have meaningful relationships, or to do meaningful work. Technological manipulation poses significant threats to our

opportunities to live meaningful lives. Nyholm offers a helpful overview of the different positions that one may take on the question of whether technology can manipulate humans. Geoff Keeling and Christopher Burr's topic on "Digital manipulation and mental integrity" in Chapter 13, discusses the permissible and impermissible use of software agents to influence internet user behavior through targeted content such as app notifications, product recommendations, and prices for goods and services. It is argued that impermissible behavioral influence typically involves manipulation, coercion, or deception. The authors distinguish morally permissible from morally impermissible behavioral influencing strategies by software agents as they argue that morally impermissible instances of behavioral influence by software agents undermine the "mental integrity" of human users (7-8).

Part III is about epistemic, affective, and political harms and risks associated with online manipulation and has 5 chapters. Contributors clustered under the third header consider possible threats to knowledge, control of our emotions, and political legitimacy. Hanna Kiri Gunn's topic on "Is there a duty to disclose epistemic risk?" in Chapter 14, explores, then, the notion of a specific duty to warn about epistemic risks that target our agency. The fact that many processes and forms of personalization online strike us as pre-theoretically manipulative is discussed in light of this proposed duty to disclose the epistemic risks of agency-shaping qualities of online life. Hanna Kiri Gunn argues that the personalization of online life shapes the communicative and epistemic agency of individual persons and their wider communities. Furthermore, she argues that being shaped in these ways by online personalization is epistemically risky, so we ought to be warned about these risks and our moral responsibility. Lukas Schwengerer's topic on "Promoting vices designing the web for manipulation" in Chapter 15, discusses a problematic relationship between user-friendly design and manipulation. Some specific features of a website can make it a more or less potent tool for manipulation. Such features that can be summed up as creating a user-friendly experience can also be manipulation-friendly. It is difficult to mobilize suitable intellectual virtues when the website is quick and easy to use. Furthermore, when we lack that virtue, "we are easier targets for manipulation because we might more readily and less critically believe, feel, or desire what the website's creator wants us to believe, feel, or desire" (8). Nathan Wildman, Natascha Rietdijk, and Alfred Archer's topic on "Online affective manipulation" in Chapter 16 explore to understand how online affective manipulation is morally problematic. The authors argue that online affective manipulation constitutes a novel form of affective injustice that they call affective powerlessness. They introduce the notions of affective injustice and affective powerlessness and show several forms of online affective manipulation. Alexander Fischer's topic on "Manipulation and the affective realm of social media," in Chapter 17, focuses on both the nature of manipulation and its moral evaluation. Fischer argues that manipulation manifests itself in changing the victim's evaluation of a given end as "pleasurable or displeasurable" (9). According to this Pleasurable-Ends-Model of manipulation, a manipulator tries to modulate an agent's affectivity by rendering an end as pleasurable/unpleasurable, which modifies its attractivity and thus the likeliness to be chosen or not. Adam Pham, Alan Rubel, and Clinton Castro's topic on "Social media, emergent manipulation, and political legitimacy" in Chapter 18, begin by

observing that political advertising and disinformation campaigns on social media can have a significant effect on democratic politics.

Part IV is about legal and regulatory perspectives, and it has 2 chapters. Chapter 19 is about "Regulating online defaults," by Kalle Grill, which concerns the normative aspects of manipulation, which he explores through a discussion of online defaults and how they may be regulated. A default option is an option from which one can only opt out by taking action. Grill shows how online defaults – which have become inevitable features of online environments – can distract, misinform, harm, and eventually manipulate people (9). And finally, Chapter 20 discusses "Manipulation, real-time profiling, and their wrongs." Jiahong Chen and Lucas Miotto explain the morality of real-time profiling, that is, the collection of information about an individual's present status to generate a profile in an attempt to influence the individual's actions in the immediate future based on that profile. After explaining what real-time profiling consists of and showing that it can be presumed to be a form of manipulation, the authors argue that real-time profiling is wrong because the profiler psychologically hijacks profiled subjects, and it continues to work as a gateway to further wrongs. "The authors then turn to regulatory measures and discuss the implications for consumer protection law and data protection law and their limitations, arguing that a more targeted regulatory approach is needed to effectively address the unique challenges of real-time profiling" (10).

I applaud Fleur Jongepier and Michael Klenk, who are not just editors but also contributors, for taking on this original project. It is ambitious and is certainly a significant addition to the advancement of digital ethics in the world. The authors dealt with the interconnected topics of online manipulation using the distinct branches of philosophy, as seen in four parts of the book. This system provides the readers with a broad philosophical view of the state of the art when it comes to online manipulation. It is an excellent guide and showcase for applied ethics. It is applicable, useful, and relevant in our everyday life. The publication of *Philosophy of Online Manipulation* is very timely and responsive to the call of the times. With 19 chapters, written by multiple young philosophical scholars, men and women, reflecting on manipulation, whether online or offline, it truly is an added treasure in the field of philosophy, especially online ethics. It is a testament that philosophy or philosophizing could remain relevant by dealing with pressing current concerns besetting society. I would say the organization of the book is thematic, systematic in approach, and adaptable in its organization. Appropriate selections from the philosophy of online manipulation could be very helpful in introducing philosophy subjects like ethics, epistemology, political philosophy, critical thinking, moral psychology, and philosophy of education, as each chapter is clearly written, comprehensive, and philosophically intriguing and engaging. The differences in emphasis and focus are undoubtedly a reflection not just of the authors' academic discipline but also of personal experience and situation. Indeed, the book provides a rich, kaleidoscopic view of philosophical concepts, methodologies, moral dilemmas, and applications that are at stake for rational discourses in the public sphere.

The book has the potential to become a classic philosophy book. It is an updated material to complement primary readings in philosophy. As I see it, it can continue to be a work in progress. The authors could continue to explore and update

their philosophical stand on the matter. Or the book project can branch out to include more philosophical topics or subtopics and by expanding the contributors to represent scholars from other parts of the world. It could be tedious, but it will be worth it if there are philosophical foundations for every discourse or issue. They can be related to ethical theories like Confucian, Kantian, Virtue, Utilitarian, Ethics of Care, Digital, etc. It just needs to be polished with good references. Perhaps, the second volume of this book could take an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary approach. It can be holistic and all-embracing, as it can feature views from Psychology, Technology, History, Pedagogy, and so on.

The Philosophy of Online Manipulation illustrates the human tendency to work with impressions, twist words, or even tweak the truth to achieve specific goals, for example, marketing. Implicitly, it also highlights the challenging role of philosophizing: to see beyond appearances. Manipulation is too much a universal experience, challenging us to see beyond impressions.

Therefore, sustained philosophizing remains critical. The role of philosophers is to find and safeguard the truth. We seek to reveal the truth and those that thwart it. Like puppets, we are moved by outside strings, according to Horace, who established that manipulation is as old as rhetoric. Indeed, there are as many ways of manipulating others as various technologies enable forms of communication in mass media and online media. Philosophers must come out and seek the truth in the midst of it all. Philosophers must continue to reflect and think. Manipulation, whether online or offline, can be revealed through keen observation, persistence in rational discourse, then through life-long dialogue. We must continue to engage in reasonable discourse until we seek the truth. We live in challenging times, but philosophers are called to be purveyors of truth and ministers of wisdom and not of manipulation.

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