

ARE ALL DECEPTIONS MANIPULATIVE OR ALL MANIPULATIONS DECEPTIVE?

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MANIPULATION and deception are intriguing concepts in the sense that they both raise important and complex ethical issues that are not primarily speculative, theoretical, or the subject of extraordinary scenarios, but are rather the stuff of everyday concern for common people. The ability to reflect fruitfully about both concerns is, however, hindered by the significant lack of agreement on what both “manipulation” and “deception” precisely mean. There is serious risk of arguing past each other in normative debates when there is implicit disagreement on the precise meaning and contour of the phenomenon that is being evaluated.¹

An immediate effect of the difficulty in defining both concepts is the problem of delineating the border between them. One attestation of the magnitude of disagreement and confusion can be found in the fact that we encounter two diametrically opposed positions on the relationship between the concepts: on the one hand is the view that manipulation is a subset of deception (all manipulations are deceptions), while on the other hand is the view that deception is a subset of manipulation (all deceptions are manipulations). The latter view is a direct conclusion of the thought that manipulations cause faulty mental states or deliberations in the other, and the trivial premise that false beliefs are (a paradigm of) faulty epistemic states that hinder successful deliberation.² Recently, Vladimir Krstić and Chantelle Saville argued explicitly that deception is a subset of manipulation, characterizing deception elegantly as “covert manipulation.”³ The opposite view, that all manipulations are deceptions, has

- 1 A good way to gain an initial appreciation of the difficulties involved in determining the meanings of “deception” and “manipulation” is to consult the respective encyclopedia entries for both concepts; see Mahon, “The Definition of Lying and Deception”; and Noggle, “The Ethics of Manipulation.”
- 2 See, e.g., Noggle, “Manipulative Actions”; Barnhill, “What Is Manipulation?”; and Hanna, “Libertarian Paternalism, Manipulation, and the Shaping of Preferences.”
- 3 Krstić and Saville, “Deception (under Uncertainty) as a Kind of Manipulation.”

also had adherents.⁴ The intuition here is clearly related by Shlomo Sher: “We connect deception with manipulation so strongly that it is sometimes thought that deception is a necessary aspect of manipulation.”⁵ The view that all manipulations are instances of deception has been explicitly and vigorously defended recently by Radim Bělohrad.⁶ Bělohrad’s is the most sustained argument for this view; I will therefore naturally spend some time engaging his arguments.

The core objective of this paper is to argue against both positions. If successful, this will illuminate the true relation between “manipulation” and “deception”—namely, that there is but a partial overlap between them, that none encompasses the other. It is possible that various thinkers have indeed assumed this view on the relationship between the two concepts, but to my knowledge, it has never been properly shown or systematically argued for. Hence, the two extreme views are still popular. Beyond the core project of arguing for the partial-overlap view, the discussion below will suggest some steps for delineating the borders between the two phenomena, highlighting some aspects of the relations between them, and pointing to a basic normative upshot.

1. ARE ALL MANIPULATIONS DECEPTIONS?

A *prima facie* observation may well suggest that many kinds of manipulation, while admittedly “tricky,” do *not* amount to deception. In a previous paper, I provided an overview of such kinds of manipulations.⁷ The following is an instructive example. It speaks of a pharmaceutical company that, being cognizant of people’s tendency to associate the color blue (more than, say, the color orange) with tranquility, manufactures blue tranquilizer pills. “Predictably, marketing blue tranquilizer pills causes the public to buy more of them than the rival company’s orange pills—coming to view them, falsely, as more potent.” I concluded: “Since nothing in marketing blue pills deviates in any way from standards of veracity, there is no deception. And yet judgment was surely manipulated.”⁸ Beyond mere reliance on intuition, I argued that false beliefs in the consumers are triggered by a psychological mechanism that associates the color blue with tranquility. They are not caused by expressing a proposition—not even an implicit proposition—hence this manner of creating false beliefs

4 See, e.g., Goodin, *Manipulatory Politics*; Beauchamp, “Manipulative Advertising”; and Bruderman, “The Nature of Aesthetic Manipulation in Consumer Culture.”

5 Sher, “A Framework for Assessing Immorally Manipulative Marketing Tactics,” 104.

6 Bělohrad, “The Nature and Moral Status of Manipulation.”

7 Cohen, “Manipulation and Deception.”

8 Cohen, “Manipulation and Deception,” 485.

is non-propositional. “Being non-propositional, these cases of manipulative communication have *no truth value*. This undergirds the intuition that they cannot possibly qualify as deceptions.”⁹

Radim Bělohrad has recently suggested a way in which to oppose all such analyses and reassert the view that “manipulation essentially involves deception.”¹⁰ He believes that this view can be upheld if only we think more carefully on the *intentions* of the manipulator. Here is a reconstruction of his all-manipulations-are-deceptive argument:

1. All manipulations involve lack of transparency regarding the manipulator’s true intentions.
2. Lack of transparency regarding intentions creates false beliefs in the other—viz., about the agent’s state of mind—and by virtue of this qualifies as deception.

From 1 and 2 we conclude that all manipulation is deception.

While Bělohrad’s is the most developed defense of this view, it represents a common intuition. This intuition is clearly articulated by Nathaniel Klemp:

Manipulation always involves some level of insincerity. In fact, manipulative actions are the antithesis of sincere ones. When speakers lie, conceal relevant information, or distract listeners by appealing to irrational tendencies, they act with a lack of genuineness and with hidden ulterior motives. Such actions are in direct opposition to the “honesty,” “genuineness,” and “straightforwardness” defining sincerity.¹¹

Below I attempt to refute both claim 1 and claim 2 independently (in sections 1.1 and 1.2, respectively). This analysis will, in turn, help delineate the scope of manipulation that *is* deceptive.

1.1. Refuting Claim 1

The counterclaim to 1, above (all manipulations involve lack of transparency regarding the manipulator’s true intentions), is that lack of transparency of intentions is *not necessary* for manipulation. Two elements make up and support this view: that there is an extensive set of examples of manipulations that seem not to involve lack of transparency, and that—in contrast to Bělohrad’s argument—not all these examples can be explained away as cases of coercion. In 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 I review these in turn.

9 Cohen, “Manipulation and Deception,” 487.

10 Bělohrad, “The Nature and Moral Status of Manipulation,” 459.

11 Klemp, “When Rhetoric Turns Manipulative,” 74.

1.1.1. *Manipulation without Lack of Transparency*

Examples of transparent manipulations seem very easy to come by. This in itself serves as a presumption against the thought that all manipulations involve lack of transparency regarding the manipulator's intentions. Common metaphors used to describe manipulation are those of "pushing one's buttons" or "pulling one's levers." Very often we are all too aware that such a manipulative interpersonal dynamic is taking place, but we nonetheless consider such kinds of transparent cases not only to be manipulations but *paradigms* thereof. Importantly, this last point renders the presumption against the thesis of universal lack of transparency *very strong*. What kinds of cases are we talking about? Salient examples usually involve invocation of either positive or negative feelings that serve to motivate the other. Prominent instances include:

Playing on emotions of guilt in inappropriate ways: The mother tells her daughter: "After all the hardship I went through in raising you, how can you do this to me?" The smart daughter understands that "this" refers to a decision that concerns a trifling matter that her mother happens not to like, and which only concerns her own personal life and is none of her mother's business—she easily sees through the manipulation. Yet she reluctantly admits that these guilt-evoking manipulations, when they come from her mother, have a way of working on her.

Directing social pressure against someone in a way that corners him and makes him feel uncomfortable not to conform: Your partner wants to go on a family camping trip but you do not. While you are discussing it, your partner calls out to your children "Hey kids! Who wants to go on a camping trip?" The children cheer. You correctly judge that it is better to go on the camping trip (despite the drawbacks) than to disappoint your children.¹² (Assume that, *a priori*, both partners agree that decisions regarding trip destinations are to be made by them, not the children.)

Influencing someone by stroking their vanity: The best chance of getting John to agree is to flatter him in the right way. Dan, who feels lazy at the moment, exploits this; he tells John: "This math problem is a bit too difficult for me. Take a look at it—I am sure you can figure it out in no time." While John is aware of this weak spot of his, Dan's playing on John's sense of pride in his ability nonetheless proves (again) to be the winning move.

12 Barnhill, "What Is Manipulation?" 54.

Influencing someone with the help of seduction: Whenever Delilah wants Samson to be more open with her about things he prefers to keep discreet, she makes sure she is wearing her sexy robe before asking. While her tactic is obvious to Samson, he admits that it mostly works.

All the above are arguably paradigmatic cases of manipulation (the first two by eliciting negative emotions, the last two by eliciting positive ones); yet they are (and surely at least can be) fully transparent. The phenomenon of transparent manipulation is perhaps nowhere as straightforward and common in our culture as in advertisements. Ads are often, if not always, manipulative; and while the game they play is fully transparent (often ads are explicitly *declared*), advertising works—indeed, sometimes phenomenally.

In an effort to defend the universal nontransparency thesis of manipulation, Bělohrad offers the following argument: “I agree that sometimes the victim of manipulation may see through the intentions of the manipulator. But the question we must ask is not whether manipulation can be disclosed and still be effective, but whether the manipulator can be truly explicit about her intentions.”¹³ To this there are two responses. (1) It is not clear why we should think that the latter (i.e., the manipulator actually verbalizing her manipulative intention) rather than the former (the victim seeing through the intention) is the crucial parameter. The reason I believe this claim is wrong is the following: in order to manipulatively induce the intended emotion—say, guilt—in the other, the manipulator obviously has to *act out* a guilt-inducing behavior; and the point is that this could have the intended conditioning effect even if the person being affected is aware of what is happening. But if, on the other hand, the potential manipulator verbalizes that she could so act out, without actually acting it out, then *this* obviously would not contain the crucial element for exerting psychological influence on the other, and could not therefore amount to manipulation.¹⁴ (2) It could rightly be argued that verbalizing the intention would interfere with the successful acting out of the manipulative behavior (as it nonsurprisingly does in the example of lying, and normally would in cases of inducing guilt). This lack of explicitness, however, just is not invariably the case. A beautiful example, which has been increasingly investigated in recent years, is that of “open-label placebo.” In open-label placebo, the prescription of placebo pills is not done deceptively but is honestly *explained* to the patient;

13 Bělohrad, “The Nature and Moral Status of Manipulation,” 458.

14 Bělohrad provides an example to support his diagnosis, but his example is infelicitous, since it is an example of *lying*, which is the least helpful kind of example to give if one wants to prove that in manipulation *generally* one cannot verbalize one’s intentions and still succeed.

nonetheless, accumulating evidence shows that the open-label placebo manipulation works!¹⁵

1.1.2. Manipulation and Coercion

Given the implausibility of denying the observation that some manipulative influences seem transparent, perhaps the natural move to take is to argue that transparent “manipulations” (i.e., where the intentions of the influencer are overt and clear to the target) are all in fact cases of *coercion*. This is precisely the route taken by Bělohrad. The intuition here is, presumably, this: if one sees that one is being manipulated and still cannot resist succumbing to the influence, then such irresistible influence is best understood (not as manipulation but) as coercion. If one shows that all nondeceptive (transparent) “manipulations” are in fact instances of coercion, then this clears the way to defending the view that all manipulations are indeed deceptive.

In lieu of expounding a theory about how to distinguish manipulation from coercion (which would require a full-blown paper), I will here take a paradigmatic example of transparent manipulation, and explain why it is not coercion. Recall the example of transparent manipulative seduction (or temptation) above. We ask: Is it reasonable to reclassify all transparent manipulative seductions as, in effect, cases of coercion? I will now offer four clear and simple intuitions why such a move would be exceedingly unreasonable.

(a) Reclassifying all transparent manipulative seductions as, in effect, cases of coercion would improbably get all those who succumb to overt seduction off the moral and legal hook. When one acts under coercion, one is (at least typically, if not always) neither morally blameworthy nor legally guilty. If all transparent manipulative seductions are coercions, then it would be enough for anyone charged with, for example, committing adultery, to simply convince us that he was overtly seduced (without having solicited it, being negligent or reckless, etc.) and this would deflect all moral blame or legal responsibility. This would obviously be a laughable line of defense in, say, an alimony lawsuit in the wake of infidelity.

(b) If transparent manipulative seduction amounts to coercion, then engaging in sexual intercourse as a result of overt seduction would be considered *prima facie* as rape (since rape is defined as nonconsensual sexual intercourse, and “nonconsensual” and “coerced” amount here to the same thing). This is clearly absurd.

15 For helpful general discussions see, e.g., Kaptchuk, “Open-Label Placebo”; Kaptchuk and Miller, “Open-Label Placebo”; Schaefer, Sahin, and Berstecher, “Why Do Open-Label Placebos Work?”

(c) Consider an example where a woman who wants her husband to stay at home seduces him sexually, knowing that he finds it hard to resist.¹⁶ Since the husband obviously perceives and understands what she is doing, we are supposed to view this as a case of coercion. Now imagine that the husband, who is no less manipulative than his wife, realizes that he can either stay home and get nothing or stay home while being pleasantly seduced; he therefore begins to feign needing to go out. While his smart wife realizes what is now happening, she finds that, in this new predicament, it is the all-things-considered best option to continue playing this game. What we have here is a reciprocally (transparent) manipulative relationship—surely not a rare phenomenon as such. According to the definition of transparent manipulation as coercion, however, we are supposed to view this tangle as a two-way coercion. But can an interaction one enters and remains in voluntarily be defined as coercion? This might be possible, some think, in cases of “coercive offers,” but then even they never argued that such a type of interaction can possibly be *reciprocally* coercive.

(d) Transparent manipulative seductions can be quite reliably effective, even when the seduction is *very mild*. Consider in this respect the interaction between physicians and pharmaceutical sales representatives. These representatives are chosen often because they are very attractive; their task is to manipulate doctors into prescribing their companies’ drugs. While the doctors know precisely what the true intentions of the representatives who “present medical information” to them are, this simple ruse is nonetheless effective (the companies would not continue investing in this practice were it not profitable). The manipulation here works through a very mild type of seduction: no sex is involved, merely the eliciting of a pleasant feeling through being showered with positive personal attention by a very attractive person. It defies common sense to argue that the doctors who are seduced by the sales reps in this very mild sense are thereby *coerced* by them. (Aristotle’s words are fitting here: “It is absurd to make external circumstances responsible, and not oneself, as being easily caught by such attractions, and to make oneself responsible for noble acts but the pleasant objects responsible for base acts.”)¹⁷

These simple examples are enough to show, I believe, how improbable it is to try to salvage the all-manipulations-are-deceptions view by rebranding all transparent manipulations as instances of coercion. Similar demonstrations as those I brought with respect to seduction can be easily constructed with respect to other examples of transparent manipulations.

¹⁶ Taken from Rudinow, “Manipulation.”

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1, 1110b14.

Finally, let us remember that the fact that some influence is transparent normally serves to *increase*, rather than decrease, the agency of the person subject to it. Hence, the argument that transparent manipulations are coercive would normally imply that they would be *a fortiori* coercive if they worked nontransparently (and there is surely no reason to think that seducing, inducing guilt feelings, and so on stop working when the manipulative intentions behind them remain in the dark). This further shows the deeply problematic nature of the idea that transparent manipulations are necessarily coercive.

1.2. Refuting Claim 2

If, as we saw, not all manipulations include concealed intentions—if, that is, some manipulations are transparent to their victims—then a necessary condition for the thesis that all manipulations are deceptive does not hold, and so the thesis fails. While my argument could stop here, I will nonetheless proceed to show how the second premise of the all-manipulations-are-deceptive argument also fails, as this will expose further valuable insights into the relations between manipulation and deception. That second premise, let us recall, says: “Lack of transparency regarding intentions creates false beliefs in the other—viz., about the agent’s state of mind—and by virtue of this qualifies as deception.” Since the analysis above arguably demonstrated that not all cases of manipulation involve lack of transparency regarding intentions, we now focus on and inspect only the subgroup of manipulations that do in fact lack transparency of intentions.

We should also note that not all cases of lack of transparency of intentions amount to manipulation. (This is trivial; e.g., that I do not disclose to the vendor my intentions in buying the product does not by itself amount to manipulating the vendor.) Hence, what is interesting to show is not merely that it is not the case that all lack of transparency of intentions qualifies as deception—i.e., the rejection of premise 2—but the rejection of the stronger, more specific thesis that not all lack of transparency of intentions *in the context of manipulation* qualifies as deception. (Since we struck down premise 1, this condition is not anymore given, and needs to be added.) I will accordingly amend premise 2 in a way that would make it more specific and precise—and concomitantly less vulnerable to criticism—and will make *this* the target of my attack.¹⁸

The amended (more defensible) version of the second premise of the all-manipulations-are-deceptive argument is this:

18 To clarify the formal aspect of this move: to show a counterexample to a subgroup of x is more demanding than to show a counterexample to x , since the former satisfies the latter, but not vice versa.

- 2*. Whenever there is lack of transparency of intentions, and it is sufficient to qualify as manipulation, then it is also sufficient for deception.

This stronger thesis is the one I will now oppose. The basic idea then is this: manipulation lacking transparency of intentions, even when it is expected to cause false beliefs (regarding the agent's state of mind) and indeed does cause them, is *not sufficient* for deception. Manipulators can be nontransparent about intentions without this making their (misleading) influence of others deceptive.

The structure of the argument below will be the following. First, I will explain that causing false beliefs in others by nontransparency, and especially by nontransparency of intentions, does not as such amount to deception. Second, I will claim that causing false beliefs in others by manipulating them does not as such amount to deception. Third and finally, I will argue that the combination of the previous two claims—namely, causing false beliefs in others by means of manipulations with nontransparent intentions—also does not as such amount to deception. This, if true, will refute 2* (and, *a fortiori*, 2).

The idea that intentional nontransparency (that causes false beliefs) does not as such amount to deception is very intuitive inasmuch as “reticence is not necessarily deceptive.”¹⁹ This is expressed in the deception literature in the distinction between deception and “keeping in the dark.” James Edwin Mahon writes: “If *A* prevents *B* from acquiring a true belief, then *A* keeps *B* in ignorance. However, *A* does not deceive *B*.”²⁰ Deception causes its target to be mistaken, while “keeping in the dark” can cause its target to merely remain ignorant—these two are qualitatively different. Keeping someone in the dark *can* of course amount to deception, but only if certain conditions hold. Thomas Carson elaborates: “withholding information can constitute deception if there is a clear expectation, promise, and/or professional obligation that such information will be provided.”²¹ In the absence of such conditions, nontransparency is merely a withholding of information, which does not as such invariably (or even usually) amount to deception.

Against this general baseline, we are here interested in the particular case of withholding information about one's *intentions*. To assess this, let us first quickly articulate the theoretical context. According to a very common view, a necessary condition for deception is that “truth is warranted” in the communicative context. This is often explained by the idea that not communicating the

19 Mahon, “Kant and Maria von Herbert,” 417.

20 Mahon, “A Definition of Deceiving,” 187.

21 Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 56.

truth involves a *breach of trust*.²² Now the important question for us is about the *scope* of this warrant of truth, and therefore of breach of trust. Some thinkers assume that, strictly speaking, it applies only to assertions.²³ Others believe it applies to conversational implicatures just as much as to assertions.²⁴ Yet others are explicit that this warrant must be extended to nonlinguistic deceptions (e.g., gestures) too.²⁵ The question for us here is whether the norms regarding warrant of truth extend also to the communicator's *intentions*. The norms in question are clearly not metaphysical; they are conventional norms of human communication.²⁶ What is required of us, therefore, is to consult our intuitions about the limits of the application of the norms of communicative trust. Now it is quite clear that the norms regarding warrant of truth, and hence regarding trustworthiness, often (or at the very least sometimes) do not extend to the intentions of communicators. The reason for this, however, is never made explicit. Our reluctance to view such nontransparency as deception is not arbitrary. Rather, viewing such nontransparency as deception (and hence *pro tanto* morally wrong) would spell a (*pro tanto*) moral obligation to reveal one's inner world to others to an extent that would breach basic norms of privacy and thereby harm the dignity of persons. The fundamental dignitary interest in privacy is by no means suspended by the sheer fact of participating in communication. Thus, the moral imperative of respecting human dignity serves as a boundary to expanding the notion of deception to a wholesale, or even a default, inclusion of a requirement to reveal intentions. Communicators are therefore under no default obligation to make their intentions public domain. There is consequently no prevailing norm of warranting the truth of intentions in communication.

Next comes the question of whether causing false beliefs in others by manipulating them is sufficient for deception. This question is addressed precisely in the following example:

Paul intends to manipulate Mary emotionally (for example, into liking Paul). Paul's actions cause Mary to develop certain false beliefs, although

- 22 This dominant view can be found in different variations in Chisholm and Feehan, "The Intent to Deceive"; Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*; Strudler, "The Distinctive Wrong in Lying"; Faulkner, "Lying and Deceit"; among many others.
- 23 See, e.g., Augustine, "Against Lying"; and Chisholm and Feehan, "The Intent to Deceive."
- 24 See, e.g., Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*; and Saul, *Lying, Misleading, and What Is Said*.
- 25 See, e.g., O'Neil, "Lying, Trust, and Gratitude"; and Cohen, "The Moral Gradation of Media of Deception."
- 26 While I assume that these norms apply to humans more or less universally, it is enough for the purposes of this exposition if they apply only to the community of speakers in "our" civilization.

this was no part of Paul's intention. Lacking that intention, his action is not deception; yet it is (intentional) manipulation that causes false beliefs.

The conclusion: "Manipulations that cause false beliefs are clearly not *ipso facto* deceptions."²⁷

The third, ultimate question is whether the combination of the above two conditions—i.e., causing false beliefs by manipulation that involves concealed intentions—is necessarily deceptive. It is not unreasonable to expect that the addition of relevant parameters could cross a certain threshold and thereby enter the scope of a given concept. However, the following example illustrates, I believe, that this does not hold in our case.

Stroke: Nicole's neighbor, Isaac, suffered a stroke; and although he recuperated quite well, Nicole knows that the minor disability that remains evokes feelings of worthlessness in Isaac. Today Nicole needs a new shelf, and was just about to go out to buy one when she recalls that Isaac used to take much pride in his carpentry skills. She also knows that Isaac has a soft spot for her. So, Nicole forgoes visiting her favorite store and knocks on Isaac's door instead. She tells him: "I really need a new shelf, and I remember you are . . ." Before she completes her sentence, Isaac interjects, "Let's go down and take measurements!" Despite giving up on the shelves from her favorite store, Nicole is happy she could find a way to strengthen Isaac's sense of self-worth.

Nicole solicited Isaac's help in a manipulative manner: she caused him to act by (i) stroking his vanity regarding his artistry, (ii) exploiting his liking for her, and supposedly even (iii) exploiting his manly tendency to want to feel like "the rescuer of a woman in need." And while Nicole expected that Isaac would assume falsely (hence form the false belief) that Nicole's intention was to seek help, Nicole's intention was in fact *to* help. So Nicole intentionally formed a false belief (about her intention) in Isaac. But (as most agree) not every case of causing false beliefs in others amounts to deception, and, in particular, I believe it is far-fetched to claim that Nicole deceived Isaac: she needed a new shelf, and that is what she communicated to him. Her communication was truthful. As we have seen, it could be interpreted as deceptive only if there were "a clear expectation, promise, and/or professional obligation" that information about Nicole's (benevolent) intention be announced.²⁸ But as anyone who has had neighbors knows, such high expectations of transparency are not

27 Cohen, "Manipulation and Deception," 484.

28 Carson, *Lying and Deception*, 56.

normally part of that type of relationship. More importantly yet, expecting such transparency—vis-à-vis neighbors or whomever—would severely diminish our ability to help people in need while preserving their sense of self-respect; for this reason, as well as others, humanistic societies reject such a norm of transparency. If I am right that it is unreasonable—and, I would add, even dangerous—to call Nicole’s communication deception, then Stroke is a case of *nontransparent manipulation that is nonetheless nondeceptive*.

Manipulation and deception have various similarities; it is therefore easy to transfer our intuitions from one to the other. Nicole (benevolently) manipulated Isaac, and given that Isaac acquired false beliefs in the process, it is easy uncritically to assimilate manipulation into deception, and judge erroneously that Nicole deceived Isaac. But manipulation and deception are different creatures, and while Stroke is a case of manipulation, it is not a case of deception.

1.3. No Alternative Arguments

My discussion responded to the argument that all manipulation involves nontransparency regarding intentions, that all such lack of transparency amounts to deception, and that therefore all manipulation is deceptive. I showed that both premises do not withstand scrutiny, and therefore that the conclusion is (doubly) not vindicated. It could be argued that this leaves the possibility of some alternative argument—i.e., one not based on lack of transparency of intentions as a mediating term in a transitive argument—that could vindicate the all-manipulations-are-deceptive claim. Building on what has been already said, I will now argue that such alternative paths are blocked.

Our discussion has shown that it is not true that all nontransparency of intentions in communication amount to deception (and simultaneously that it is not true that these two are extensionally equivalent). This conclusion naturally lends support to the complementary (opposite) possibility: that all deceptions involve nontransparency of intentions. This view is indeed quite intuitive, as it is entailed by the (common) view that all deception is intentional, and the insight that one cannot possibly declare the intention to deceive and still proceed with *deception*.²⁹ Now if all deception involves necessarily the nontransparency of intentions, then, if we want to hold the all-manipulations-are-deceptions view, we must conclude that all manipulations involve nontransparency of intentions. This, however, has already been shown above to be false. The upshot of this argument is that it is not true that all manipulations are deceptions.

29 Mahon, “The Definition of Lying and Deception.”

One small lacuna remains in this argument. It involves the possibility that there exist deceptions that do not involve concealment of intentions—which is only sensible to the extent that those deceptions are nonintentional. But even if we grant the possibility of nonintentional deception, this cannot save the all-manipulations-are-deceptions argument. The reason is that *manipulations* are necessarily (at least to a certain level) intentional, and that which is intentional cannot be completely contained within that which is not.³⁰ With this realization, the argument against the all-manipulations-are-deceptive view is now complete.

2. ARE ALL DECEPTIONS MANIPULATIONS?

2.1. A Prima Facie Reasonable View

While the idea that all deceptions are instances of manipulation has rarely been the subject of elaborate or even explicit articulation, it seems to follow from a straightforward reading of one of the most influential accounts of manipulation in the literature—that of Robert Noggle. Noggle writes: “There are certain norms or ideals that govern beliefs, desires, and emotions. I am suggesting that manipulative action is the attempt to get someone’s beliefs, desires, or emotions to violate these norms, to fall short of these ideals.”³¹ Getting someone to acquire false beliefs, which is what deception does, is a paradigm of making someone’s beliefs fall short of the ideals relevant for them; hence, we may conclude, all deception is manipulation. Noggle’s reasoning is quite compelling, and it is noteworthy that no one, to my knowledge, has ever attempted to refute it directly. Recently, Noggle wrote explicitly that what he calls “the trickery account” tends to treat manipulation “as a broader category of which deception is a special case.”³² Vladimir Krstić and Chantelle Saville, based on an analysis of some interesting cases, concluded similarly that “while manipulation is not

30 Nobody I know of ventured to claim the opposite, i.e., that manipulation can be strictly unintentional. Marcia Baron writes of reckless manipulation, but she sees recklessness as at most an aspect of *intentional* influence (“The Mens Rea and Moral Status of Manipulation”). Kate Manne eloquently describes a subconscious passive-aggressive manipulative attempt to cause guilt in others, but this too is not unintentional (“Non-Machiavellian Manipulation and the Opacity of Motive”). Rather, Manne’s case shows that even if there is no self-aware intention “to *manipulate*” (i.e., that is described to oneself in such terms), there is nonetheless a clear *intention to influence*—and this, in conjunction with other manipulation-constituting attributes of the behavior, is all that is needed to diagnose intentional manipulation.

31 Noggle, “Manipulative Actions,” 44.

32 Noggle, “Pressure, Trickery, and a Unified Account of Manipulation,” 243.

a species of deception, deception is a species of manipulation.” They also suggested a precise identification of the subgroup of manipulations that comprise deception: “purposeful covert manipulations constitute deception . . . whilst those that are not covert constitute manipulations *simpliciter*.”³³

Despite the *prima facie* reasonableness of the view that all deceptions are instances of manipulation, I believe it does not withstand scrutiny. I present below three counterexamples.

2.1.1. Nonintentional Deception

The simplest argument against subsuming all deception under “manipulation” is available to those who hold that deception can be unintentional. Jonathan Adler, for instance, argues: “Deception generally, of course, need not be intentional or voluntary.”³⁴ More radically yet, Gary Fuller refers to the distinction between intentional and unintentional deception as “unimportant.”³⁵ Chisholm and Feehan’s classic paper on deception presents a similar view.³⁶ If, as indeed seems the case, manipulation *must* be intentional, then the conclusion immediately follows that not all deception is manipulation.³⁷

In the remainder, I set aside the (minority) view that deception can be unintentional, and present two independent arguments for the claim that some intentional deceptions are not manipulations.³⁸

2.1.2. Deception without Intention to Influence

Consider the following case.

Liar: Larry is sometimes described as a pathological liar, since he seems to lie compulsively just about anything, irrespective of any benefit he might get from producing the corresponding false beliefs or their effects. People who know him describe him rather as an “aesthete of deception”—they say he simply relishes making up beautiful false stories in response to questions directed to him, without caring the least about the impact of his fanciful stories on others or about how others would react to those stories.

33 Krstić and Saville, “Deception (under Uncertainty) as a Kind of Manipulation,” 835.

34 Adler, “Lying, Deceiving, or Falsely Implicating,” 435. Adler opines that lying only must be intentional.

35 Fuller, “Other-Deception,” 21.

36 Chisholm and Feehan, “The Intent to Deceive.”

37 See note 30, above.

38 Lack of intentionality will indeed feature in the next argument, but it will refer to a particular aspect, as I explain presently; hence, deception will not be unintentional *simpliciter*.

Larry intentionally tells what he knows to be falsehoods to unsuspecting listeners, under circumstances where, we assume, truth is (taken to be) warranted.³⁹ This is *sufficient* to identify Larry's behavior as deception.⁴⁰ Larry follows Oscar Wilde in thinking that the most awesome kind of lying "is Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is . . . Lying in Art."⁴¹ Now in point of fact, Wilde's "lying" is not real deceptive lying, as we do not expect works of art to be factually true; but Larry does tell his (believable) stories in circumstances where (he knows) truth is warranted, and this does make him a deceiver.

Typically, behavior such as Larry's exhibits a complementary characteristic—namely, an intention to change another's mind by implanting false beliefs in the other. However, this linkage is not *necessary*, and in particular, it is not the case in *Liar*, where self-centered Larry simply relishes making up his imaginative stories "without caring the least about the impact of his fanciful stories on others." His intention is wholly focused on exercising his wild artistic imagination; the audience is, as it were, but a trigger—and not a necessary one at that.⁴² (While in most kinds of scenarios stating entails objectively "an invitation to believe," and therefore stating falsehoods qualifies as deception, the fabricator need not *subjectively* intend this invitation. Accordingly, he need not intend to influence.) Since manipulation *necessarily* involves an intention to make some impact on, i.e. to influence, the other, the combination of factors that *Liar* manifests makes it an example of deception without manipulation. This, if true, shows that it is not the case that deceptions (at least as understood here) are a subtype of manipulation.⁴³

In *Liar*, the intentional telling of falsehoods is separate from the intention to create false beliefs. (Although the two intentions are typically related, they are

39 Hence, we assume that listeners are not aware that Larry is a repeat liar. Let us also assume that the stories Larry tells are believable, and that he realizes that much.

40 For one of the clearest expressions of such a view see Saul, *Lying, Misleading, and What Is Said*, 3.

41 Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," 34.

42 Interestingly, Larry's phenomenon exhibits precisely the opposite characteristics from Harry Frankfurt's "bullshitter": while the bullshitter cares only about the impact of his words on others, and not about their truth, Larry cares only about the (un)truth (i.e., fictional character) of his stories, and not about their impact (Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*).

43 I should add that "aesthetic" lying is not a bizarre, far-fetched phenomenon, as some might initially suspect. As against the view that "lying for the fun of it is a form of craziness" (Burge, "Content Preservation," 474), there exists the idea that "lying is lovely if we choose it, and is an important component of our freedom" (Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, 11). The aesthetic motivation for lying was perhaps never as pithily phrased as by Samuel Butler: "Any fool can tell the truth, but it requires a man of some sense to know how to lie well" (*The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, 300).

clearly distinct.) The—normally unnoticeable—gap between the two intentions opens a space for deceptions that are not manipulations.

As an addendum, I should mention that an even stronger argument can be made here, though space does not allow me to develop it. A skeptic might claim: when someone intentionally tells falsehoods to others in contexts where truth is typically warranted, there must be at least some indirect sense—be it as derivative and remote as possible—in which an intention to influence others (to cause false beliefs) *can* be attributed to him. In response, even if, for the sake of argument, we accepted this view, this would not change our conclusion. The reason is that, being socially constituted creatures, there is virtually *always* some sense in which our self-directed actions can be simultaneously interpreted as referring indirectly to others. This, therefore, cannot helpfully point to a reasonably circumscribed domain of potential “manipulations.” Hence, even if it were insisted that Larry must have some indirect intention to influence others, such a trivial sense of “intention” would be insufficient to constitute manipulation.

2.1.3. *Deception without Phenomenological Features of Manipulation*

Next, I want to argue that lying as such may not be enough to constitute manipulation, even if there is a direct intention to influence (to cause false beliefs). This argument is independent from any specific understanding of deception. Consider the following example.

Grumpy: Smith woke up in a very grumpy mood this morning, and has no patience to have even the most minimal conversation with anybody. As he is standing in the street corner, waiting for the light to turn green, a passerby asks him, “Excuse me, do you know if this street leads to the market?” Smith knows the answer, but anticipating that a truthful answer might lead to a follow-up question, he just spits out “No clue!” and the passerby continues on his way.

I contend that Grumpy is not a story of manipulation. While Smith lied to the passerby, Smith did not manipulate him.⁴⁴ What is the ground for this assertion? In the absence of an authoritative definition of manipulation, we can nonetheless get a reliable assessment of Grumpy in light of paradigmatic characteristics of the phenomenon of manipulation. If, as I suspect, “manipulation” is likely *not* evoked in people’s minds upon hearing Grumpy, if it is annexed to lying merely due to some (explicit or implicit) theory that “all deceptions are

44 Smith’s grumpy reaction can be meant by Smith and interpreted by the passerby as merely communicating “Get lost!” In such a case, it would not be a deceptive lie. But obviously it *can* be interpreted as a deceptive lie, and this default interpretation is the sense I here intend.

manipulations,” then we should return to the phenomenology of manipulation to check whether the generalization imposed by theory does justice to the phenomena. Accordingly, I describe below salient features of the phenomenology of manipulation—features that have not received serious attention—and assess Grumpy in their light.

Definitions of manipulation have all, in one form or another, focused on a problematic attitude toward rationality.⁴⁵ While this is important, it is not the only salient feature in the phenomenology of manipulation. Manipulative action is routinely described as “pulling levers” or “pushing buttons,” and the metaphor of puppet and puppeteer recurs frequently and seems to embody something distinct and important about the character and “feel” of manipulation.⁴⁶ What is conveyed by these is, arguably, a deep sentiment that the manipulator *plays with* his target. Specifically, “playing” refers to some sense of penetrating the mental or psychic machinery of the target, which allows steering the target.⁴⁷ Another important, related feature of manipulative action is that in its attempt to obtain control of the target’s behavior, it involves at least some minimal *focused attention* on its target, and, I should add, this attention is geared toward *harnessing* the victim to play a role in the manipulator’s scheme. Now Grumpy, instructively, does not exhibit these salient features of manipulation.

Let us look first into the parameter of metaphorically “playing with” the other’s psyche. Joel Rudinow insightfully describes the manipulator’s behavior as “predicated on some privileged insight into the personality of his intended manipulee.”⁴⁸ In stark contrast, the pure and simple lie of answering no instead of yes does its deceptive job straightforwardly, without any need to “penetrate into the mental machinery” of its victim. Smith’s behavior does not express

45 For the best/most influential definitions available, see Faden and Beauchamp, *A History and Theory of Informed Consent*; Noggle, “Manipulative Actions”; and Gorin, “Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation.”

46 For an expression of the thought that the puppet-puppeteer metaphor is important for understanding the concept of manipulation, see Sunstein, “Fifty Shades of Manipulation,” 216.

47 “Steering” as such is clearly not enough to capture *manipulative* influence specifically. Steering could be done physically, as with a cattle prod, but this is clearly not “manipulation” in the relevant sense. Even “communicative steering” is not precise, as this could also refer to rational persuasion, which often—though not invariably (Gorin, “Towards a Theory of Interpersonal Manipulation”)—constitutes the *antithesis* of manipulation. “Non-rational-persuasion communicative steering” too is not accurate: this could refer, for example, to endless gestures that we all employ in communicative influence (e.g., smiling), and nobody intends to brand that entire dimension of human interaction as “manipulation.” Hence, we need a very sensitive analysis to zero in on the relevant parameters constituting the idea of *manipulative* steering.

48 Rudinow, “Manipulation,” 346.

any attempt to “operate the passerby from within,” as it were; he rather merely utters a falsehood, whose misleading impact is an automatic function of language, requiring neither intention nor understanding of how to operate human beings “from within.” Just as when telling the *truth*, the truth “speaks for itself;” i.e., the impact of what is said is the direct function of the linguistic message, rendering interpersonal dynamics of influence—and hence manipulation—superfluous, so is the case with the crude simple lie: its inherently misleading nature does not require the interpersonal dynamics and phenomenology of manipulation. Hence, for each case of lying, we need to check whether the dynamics and phenomenology of manipulation are exhibited or not. The distinction alluded to here aligns well with my distinction between manipulation and deception: while manipulation interferes with the workings (the “form”) of judgment—and this requires having a grip on the other’s psyche—deception as such merely provides false input to judgment, i.e. in contrast to manipulation, it interferes with the *content* of judgment.⁴⁹ This latter, I stress, need not exhibit the kind of “managing” of the other so pathognomonic of manipulation (see more below). In a related vein, Todd Long has emphasized the difference between influencing others by providing false information (only) and influencing by gaining control of their psychological mechanisms.⁵⁰ While Long’s focus is on the question of influence that preserves moral responsibility (the former does, the latter does not), his view that deception as such does not undermine moral responsibility demonstrates a rather similar intuition to the one expounded here: deception presents misleading information (i.e., content), and this as such is distinct from gaining control of the other’s inner psychological mechanisms (i.e., judgment)—which is what the manipulator typically does when “pulling his victim’s strings.”⁵¹

Manipulation requires at least the minimal interpersonal sophistication needed to understand how to harness the other’s psyche to perform as the manipulator wishes. In contrast, when a liar (e.g., grumpy Smith) says no, although the true answer is yes, such misleading requires devoting zero *attention* to the liar’s victim or to how circumstances affect the victim’s information processing; it requires zero understanding of the other’s psyche, and therefore also zero planning of how to maneuver the other. There is nothing in this most minimal act of deflecting another that exhibits the phenomenology of “playing with” the other. The phenomenological difference between manipulation and Smith’s lie can also

49 Cohen, “Manipulation and Deception,” 486.

50 Long, “Information Manipulation and Moral Responsibility.”

51 Long does use the term “information manipulation” for deception, but this is primarily because he writes in the context of the free-will literature, where “manipulation” is used generally for the act of influencing others’ decisions and actions.

be presented from a complementary angle. The crude simple lie (as in uttering no instead of yes) exhibits a “mechanical” character of sorts: it can be viewed instructively as the verbal analogue of the physical act of forcing the target’s head in the opposite direction, so as to prevent her from seeing reality. This analogy to physical steering suggests a point overlooked in the literature: crude lying can be much closer in its phenomenology to *coercion* than to manipulation!

A typical feature of manipulation involves the manipulator harnessing his victim to become a pawn in his scheme; but Smith is not interested in the passerby playing any role in any scheme of his. Smith just cannot be bothered with giving an iota of consideration to the passerby—and indeed he does not. The extreme lack of attention to the other exhibited by Smith is the very *opposite* of the mindset characteristic of *manipulating* the other. While, unlike Liar, Grumpy does contain the element of attempting to influence the other, the effect sought by Smith is merely to brush off the passerby; and *merely* brushing someone off is, at least sometimes, the wrong sort of influence to constitute manipulateness. This argument, I should stress, refers to the *process* of manipulating, clearly not to its goal (which can be anything, including brushing someone off). As a process, manipulative influence *engages* the other (“playing with” is a form of engaging). Smith’s lie does precisely the opposite: it holds off the other; it is a form of *disengaging*.

The claim that deceptive lying is invariably manipulative ought to be supported by the phenomenology of manipulation. The novel phenomenological analysis presented here strongly suggests that Grumpy is a case of deception without manipulation. (In the lack of a reasonably comprehensive theory of manipulation, it is virtually impossible to offer a precise delineation of the necessary conditions for manipulation. Hence our phenomenological analysis, while strongly suggestive, cannot be shown to constitute a decisive proof.)

Notice that while my discussion of Liar attempted to demonstrate that there can be deception without intention to create false beliefs, my discussion of Grumpy attempted to show that there can be intention to create false beliefs, which does not qualify as manipulation. In both of these ways, then, there can be deception without manipulation.

To sum up this section, I presented three arguments against the view that all deceptions are manipulations: the first referred to the idea of unintentional deception, the second to the idea of deception as the intentional telling of falsehoods in situations where truth is warranted, yet without intending to influence (by creating false beliefs), and the third referred to deceptive lying that intends to cause false beliefs, but that lacks central phenomenological characteristics constitutive of manipulation. It is worth emphasizing that the three counterexamples are independent of each other, so that any *one* of them is enough to

undermine the thesis that all deceptions are manipulations.⁵² While I do not contend that this constitutes a knockout argument (which would require much more extensive treatment than possible here), it does, I believe, offer a new position for further debate, and even shifts the burden of proof. In philosophy, these typically constitute a real step forward.

2.2. Implications for Understanding Manipulation and Deception

If the analysis above is right, it shows that not all deceptions are manipulations. Beyond this, however, it has other interesting implications for our reflection on both deception and manipulation. I will here briefly mention two thoughts.

That lying may not be manipulative is interesting, I believe, because lying has been taken to be a—if not *the*—paradigm of manipulation. For example, in Robert Noggle's influential account (mentioned above), manipulation “leads astray” by making others fall short of ideals for belief, emotion, and desire. However, what precisely are to be taken as ideals for emotions and desires may be difficult to determine objectively. Hence, the clearest case of making others fall short of ideals refers to beliefs; and within this category, the clearest case of making beliefs fall short of the ideals pertaining to them is to induce false beliefs. Lying, the most straightforward way of inducing false beliefs, thus becomes paradigmatic of manipulation. In addition, Noggle's idea on how to characterize formally the ideals with which manipulation interferes is based on the constraint of preserving “a conceptual parallel with lying.”⁵³ Claudia Mills, as another example, sees a deep analogy between manipulative action, as providing bad reasons, and lying, as providing false information—so much so that Mills finds in lying the key to deciphering the moral nature of manipulation, and consequently declares: “If lying is wrong, so is manipulation.”⁵⁴ Realizing that lying is less paradigmatic of manipulation than it has been taken to be can open the way to novel and perhaps subtler explorations of manipulation.

Reflecting on why lying in Grumpy is not manipulative can advance our understanding also of the theory and ethics of deception. An interesting debate in the ethics of deception concerns the question of whether the *form* of deception (notably, lying versus falsely implicating) has moral significance, and if so, how? The dominant position seems to be that lying is morally worse.⁵⁵ However, Clea Rees has argued that falsely implicating (in her terms: “merely

52 Again, while the first and second arguments rely on particular views of deception, the third is not similarly restricted.

53 Noggle, “Manipulative Actions,” 47.

54 Mills, “Politics and Manipulation,” 103.

55 See, e.g., Webber “Liar!”; and Shiffrin, *Speech Matters*.

deliberately misleading”) is worse.⁵⁶ The reason, according to Rees, is that while lying breaches trust in assertions only, falsely implicating breaches wider linguistic trust, encompassing conversational implicatures as well as assertions. Our reflection on Grumpy suggests a different reason for why falsely implicating may be worse than lying (when and to the extent that it is): it adds the wrongness of manipulation to that of deception. The liar typically need not bother assessing how his message would be processed by her victim, since what she tells is straightforward (in this, again, false statements are basically similar to true ones). Things are very different with the nonlying deceiver who uses false conversational implicatures or nonlinguistic deception, however. *That* deceiver must give much more consideration to the psyche of her victim—to calculate how to be subtly suggestive in the right way and measure so as to influence her victim into making the wrong inference, and thus falling into the trap. While in lying, the falsehood itself does the deceptive job, in nonlying deception, the misleading is mediated via the victim’s misinterpretation of the meaning of the message (which is not a falsehood in the strict sense but only pragmatically) in the given context. The typical nonlying deceiver must therefore *plan* (even if only furtively and subconsciously) how to maneuver her victim’s interpretative mechanisms so they draw the misleading conclusion. This kind of tampering with the mental machinery of the other so as to steer it into operating in the way the agent wants them to operate is the typical work of the manipulator. (Think for instance of double bluffing as a clear illustration of such distinctively *manipulative* deceit.) Above I argued that lying is not an apt paradigm for manipulation; our last considerations suggest that *nonlying* deception may provide a more instructive model.

Deception, I conclude, is not necessarily manipulative; in addition, the paradigm for deception that *is* manipulative is probably different from what it has been taken to be.

3. CONCLUSION, AND ETHICAL UPSHOT

3.1. A Partial Overlap

We have seen that it is neither the case that deception is a subtype of manipulation nor that manipulation is a subtype of deception. (Our arguments simultaneously ruled out the possibility that they are coextensive.) This leaves two logical options: either deception and manipulation are completely discrete entities, or they partially overlap. It is patently obvious, however, and denied by no one, that many cases are simultaneously of deception and of manipulation; it is

⁵⁶ Rees, “Better Lie!”

hence incorrect to think of deception and manipulation as completely discrete. These considerations generate the conclusion that the relation between “deception” and “manipulation” is one of *partial overlap*: while some manipulations are not deceptions and some deceptions are not manipulations, some cases qualify as both deception and manipulation. This conclusion runs against some powerful prevailing intuitions, and it has never been systematically argued for before.

3.2. Moral Conclusions

If manipulations are not essentially deceptive and deceptions are not essentially manipulative, then *moral judgments* regarding the one cannot automatically be transferred wholesale to the other, based on the intrinsic relations between the concepts.

This conclusion is perhaps especially significant with respect to (the rejection of) the view that all manipulations are deceptive. Since deception is usually taken to be *pro tanto* morally wrong, that view implies that manipulations too, being a subset of deceptions, are *pro tanto* wrong. Rejecting that view means that that shortcut to a general moral characterization of manipulation is not available. The debate as to whether manipulation is or is not *pro tanto* wrong therefore remains open.⁵⁷

Similarly, rejecting the view that all deceptions are manipulations means that we cannot, strictly on the basis of the relation between the concepts, transfer wholesale our complex moral judgements regarding manipulations to deceptions. This too is instructive and may prove significant for moral judgment. For instance, in cases where deception, but not manipulation, would maintain the target’s moral responsibility (as in Long’s view mentioned above), and where that is a salient moral consideration, deception might be all-things-considered morally permissible, so long as it is not manipulative too.⁵⁸

I conclude that while the moral analyses of deception and of manipulation should surely inform each other, they must, ultimately, be approached independently.⁵⁹

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57 Most thinkers assume that manipulation is *pro tanto* wrong, but there are plausible dissenting opinions; the latter include: Baron, “The Mens Rea and Moral Status of Manipulation”; Blumenthal-Barby, “A Framework for Assessing the Moral Status of ‘Manipulation’”; and Cohen, “Manipulation and Deception.”

58 Long, “Information Manipulation and Moral Responsibility.”

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