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PSYCHOMANIPULATION
RECOGNIZING AND DEALING WITH IT.

How many times- not just once, but a hundred or a thousand times, every single day, using the same methods and in the same circumstances- have I made myself believe something which I later realized was false?

M. de Montaigne

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INTRODUCTION

*The truth which you are afraid to tell
Is like a sabre wielded by a hermaphrodite.*

*A selfish man devours books with their wisdom and
knowledge, all by himself- the world has no benefit
from it.*

Tirukkural

As I begin to talk about manipulation, I hear the cracking of dry ice that I'm stepping onto. There are several reasons why writing about manipulation poses a serious challenge to the author. **The first reason** is the strongly negative connotation of the word manipulation. The Polish thesaurus gives a variety of synonyms, most of which have a definite negative ring. Among them we find: *machination, ploy, conspiracy, scheming, plotting, deception, intrigue, fraud, conning, swindling, cheating.*¹ We do not want to be manipulated and we do not like people who manipulate others. Sometimes we refuse to acknowledge that we let ourselves be manipulated, or manipulate others. The author of a book on manipulation could be accused of helping his readers to become manipulative. For this reason, I would like to clearly emphasise that writing about manipulation, taking a closer look at manipulation, analysing the mechanisms which are responsible for its effectiveness are all **morally neutral**. Any attempts at moral evaluation can only be made with regard to the way in which the resulting knowledge is put to use. I realise that some readers will take advantage of the presented knowledge to achieve personal goals, and will do so against others' will. Still, it remains an open question whether disclosing manipulation strategies could actually prove to be more beneficial to those who are the object of manipulation. Obviously, I am not able to provide an unbiased answer to that question. I can only rely on the opinions voiced by the audiences attending my lectures who often argue that the very awareness of manipulation mechanisms is enough to guarantee more effective protection. This belief has prompted me to devote my energy to writing a book on

¹ A. Dąbrowka, E. Geller, R. Turczyn, *Słownik synonimów (Dictionary of Synonyms)*. MCR, Warsaw 1993.

psychomanipulation. To disperse all doubts, I would like to point out that many discoveries and inventions in the history of science posed a massive threat to humanity, and were later regarded as milestones in the development of civilisation. The advantages which followed the discovery and use of gunpowder have probably long outlived the damage and suffering inflicted by the same invention. I believe that every attempt to further our knowledge about the surrounding world in its physical, social and psychological aspect, and the spreading of knowledge on the discoveries contributes to civilisational progress in the most positive meaning of the word. By the same token, restricted access to knowledge poses a threat from those not deprived of such access, leading to the emergence of an "enlightened" elite whose prime motive is to gain power and control over others. The knowledge of manipulation processes is not an occult knowledge, but its use poses a danger of massive indoctrination which may even result in identity loss suffered by the manipulated person. It is the same knowledge, however, which makes the victim resistant to manipulation.

There is yet another reason for my efforts aimed at presenting research findings and knowledge on manipulation in a comprehensible form. Every shortage of goods in the official turnover, be it information or products, leads to the emergence of unofficial distribution channels, the black market, the grey zone. The secondary market is quickly filled with low quality products, copies, and unconfirmed information. If legalised, however, this market is more likely to communicate reliable information. The scarcity of publications based on scientific fact opens the door to persons well versed with practice and boasting of their achievements, but unable to draw the right conclusions from their actions, and formulate generalisations and formulations cannot be called reliable research. Self-help books flooding the market with their colourful, loud covers, offering advice on how to convince others or become a genius of persuasion in five minutes, are cheap trinkets in comparison to the handicraft of a true jeweller. If this book does not enthrall and seduce the reader with the ease of understanding a complex world of psychological processes, let him rest assured that he owns a product that does not pretend to be what it is not.

The second reason why it is difficult to write about manipulation is that there is a whole series of false pre-conceptions on the subject. One of these is the conviction, totally unfounded but one which I have often encountered in my work, that manipulation was *invented by psychologists* and that only they have the keys to doors of the secret laboratory with its shelves full of ready-to-use manipulative techniques. We can find a curious expression of this belief in the first sentence of a web page about influencing colleagues at work: *It's a well-kept secret that entire science(sic) is devoted to how people are persuaded.* ² Are we really to believe that biologists, as well as theoretical physicists, astronomers, geographers and many other scientists, are all exclusively concerned with research into methods of influencing people? Such a statement is laughable, as there is no attempt to tone it down in the following sentences, and even after making allowance for the typical American inclination to exaggerate, it contains more than a hint of conspiracy and immoderation. It is only a short step from there to the conviction that everything is the result of a plot by freemasons or some other secret organization, at the expense of the man on the street. That at least is the opinion expressed in a curious book by Pascal Bernardin, entitled "Machiovelli the Teacher. Manipulation in Education. Reforms or Plans for Destruction." ³ This book is based on a conspiracy theory, according to which most psychological research, as well as the activities of organizations such as UNESCO, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, etc. are all part of one huge manipulation. But while the claims of Bernardin or of the Rev. Henryk Czepułkowski, who wrote the preface to the book, are merely curious, astonishing or laughable, as neither of them is a recognized authority on social psychology, the opinion expressed in the above quotation is much more dangerous, as the website which it is taken from is, according to its authors, devoted to the scientific aspects of exercising influence, and refers to the names of several important authorities in the field. The website goes on to say: *In this introduction, we approach the topic of influence from a scientific viewpoint – you won't hear us talking about our hunches, fabricating entertaining distinctions,*

² (My italics). See: <http://www.influenceatwork.com/index.html>.

³ ANTYK Marcin Dybowski Publishers, Komorów 1997.

constructing pseudo-scientific systems, or offering anecdotes as substitutes for hard evidence. 4

The truth of the matter is that, contrary to many unfounded beliefs, manipulation has existed for as long as people have tried to influence one another. Even in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament we can find numerous examples of manipulation, for example the temptation of Eve, the low self-esteem of Cain, the action of Lot's daughters, Jacob's stolen blessing. A classic authority on this subject is Aristotle's "Rhetorics". Psychology did not invent manipulation, but it does attempt to describe it, to explain how it works and to classify it. In their studies on the mysteries of influencing others, researchers most commonly use the method of the social psychologist Robert Cialdini, a well-known authority in this area. His method is known as the "full cycle of social psychology", and begins by observing people in their normal environment. The researcher observes how people attempt to influence others and what they do to make others change their minds – for example, when persuading a customer to make a purchase. Groups of people whose work involves persuading others, such as shop assistants, politicians, insurance agents, advertising agents, door-to-door salesmen, collectors of money for charities, negotiators and lawyers, have proved to be particularly fruitful material for observation. The first stage of the "full cycle" procedure concludes with a precise description of the methods of manipulation. The second step is an experiment to test the effectiveness of the methods described. In this phase, the researchers check if their observations and conjectures are confirmed in experimental situations devised by them. The experiments are often carried out in normal conditions, even on the street. The third stage is the most interesting one. Here the researchers are looking for the psychological mechanism which could explain the effectiveness of a given type of interaction. This stage involves discussion and conflicting arguments in an attempt to find the most exact possible description of the mechanism. It is a particularly important stage in the procedure, because without an exact description, it is not possible to move on to the final phase of the "full cycle" – returning to real life. In this phase, the researchers attempt to influence people in a controlled manner and to manipulate them without their knowledge, in order to check whether they have correctly described the mechanism. By the end

4 <http://www.influenceatwork.com/index.html>.

of this phase, the manipulative technique has been formulated as a rational and precise type of interactive behaviour – and that is the end of the role of the researcher.

Another pre-conception which many people have about manipulation goes something like this: *nobody is able to manipulate me*. It is a prejudice which I have often encountered. I once had an experience which clearly demonstrates the falsity of this conviction: a government institution responsible for inspecting companies commissioned me to run a training course for its inspectors, concerning psychological methods of increasing the effectiveness of their work. The choice of the detailed content of the course was left to me. It had emerged from previous conversations with the inspectors that they were often exposed to strong influences from the persons under their supervision, and therefore I felt it would be useful to acquaint them with the problems of manipulation, so that they could protect themselves more effectively from various forms of pressure from others. However, during the course, I encountered considerable resistance from the participants. According to them: - *suspicion is in our blood. We were brought up not to believe anybody. Nobody can manipulate us. You can go and talk about it to students, not to us. We have to deal with it every day at work, people are always trying to manipulate us, but we're completely immune to it*. I had often encountered similar claims of immunity, most of which turned out to be unfounded. Nevertheless, I began to wonder if it might not be true in this case. I thought that this group might be an exception, as a result of the exceptional nature of their work. I decided to perform an experiment. On the morning of the second day (it was a two-day course) I gave them a fairly simple task. It was an exercise involving a certain amount of emotion, due to the pressure of time, and the desire to perform well in relation to others in order to have a positive opinion of oneself. These two aspects resulted in the participants working more quickly and automatically. They began to perform commands which, in a normal situation, without pressure, they would have ignored. I must admit that when I gave them the instructions for the exercise, I doubted that the manipulation which I had prepared would succeed. To my amazement, all the inspectors – without exception – began to perform the foolish commands I had given them! Since then I have been strongly disinclined to believe anyone who claimed not to be vulnerable to manipulation.

The belief in one's own immunity is based on a well-known psychological mechanism, referred to by psychologists as a *self-serving bias*. It can very easily be illustrated by a few simple examples taken from research. Are you aware, Reader, that when asked, the majority of drivers rate themselves as having above-average driving skills? Even drivers who have been hospitalised as a result of car accidents continue to rate themselves as above average! Likewise, residents of severely polluted cities believe themselves to be much healthier than their neighbours. The average student is certain that he has 10 years' longer life expectancy than his friends. It is no exaggeration to state that there are thousands of similar studies on this subject, always with the same results, showing that our perceptions of ourselves are false. In the light of such results, it is not difficult to understand why most people consider themselves to be immune to manipulation.

The next most frequently encountered prejudice is the belief that *the ability to manipulate others increases my effectiveness*. This is a typical example of asymmetrical ethics. If I manipulate others I am effective, but when manipulated by others I am deceived. Why do I claim that the ability to manipulate others does not increase one's effectiveness? Above all, because our relationships with others are mostly long-term relationships, even if we often have the impression that they are temporary. Manipulation is more likely to bring immediate rewards than assist in building of long-term relationships. A car salesman who manipulates his customers forgets that people need to change cars every few years. Customers are more likely to return to a place where they were not manipulated. The purchase of any item can create a psychological connection with the company manufacturing or selling a given item. It may be simply a question of habit, but it may also be a question of loyalty. Loyalty is not possible in a situation where someone feels that they have been swindled or pressured into buying something. In our everyday lives, we avoid people who try to manipulate us; it is certain that we will not want them to be our friends. If we feel that we have been manipulated by someone we know, we will not want to have anything to do with them. Besides, the use of manipulation in social contacts always entails the risk of encountering someone who is a better manipulator than us. As the popular saying has it, *if you play with fire, you'll get burnt*.

A long time ago, Stańczyk, the famous 16th Century Polish court jester, bandaged his head and set out for the Krakow Market. As he soon found out, everyone he met on the way considered themselves an expert on medical problems. In my work with people I have often observed (without the need for bandaging my head) that almost everyone considers himself to be an expert psychologist. In reality, however, there are very few individuals whose intuitive knowledge of psychology is confirmed by the results of scientific research. Of course, I am aware that, precisely because of self-serving bias, there are many people who may consider themselves to belong to this very small minority. To check whether this really is the case, and also to establish whether the false pre-conceptions of manipulation which I have mentioned are shared by the reader, I have devised the following short test. Its purpose is to compare our intuitions on the subject of influencing others with the results of research.

Test of the ability to predict people's reactions in manipulative situations⁵

Read the following situations carefully and for each one, choose one answer which you consider to be the most probable.

1. If there was an undetectable drug which could enhance athletic performance at the cost of reduced life expectancy, how many athletes would agree if you advised them to use it?

- a) none*
- b) up to 25%*
- c) 25-50%*
- d) over 50%*

2. In their dealings with men, many women tend to:

- a) show off their intellectual abilities*
- b) show off their artistic abilities*
- c) hide their intellectual abilities*
- d) hide their artistic abilities*

⁵ This test is intended only for the purposes of checking knowledge, it has not undergone the required validation procedures and must not be used for diagnostic purposes, for example as an instrument for evaluating the suitability of a candidate for employment, etc.

3. *In the same situation, men tend to:*

- e) show off their intellectual abilities*
- f) show off their artistic abilities*
- g) hide their intellectual abilities*
- h) hide their artistic abilities*

4. *You are asking someone to express public support for some opinion which he does not agree with, but is not in a position to refuse. (For example, you are a manager, and you are asking the head of the Sales Department to persuade employees to accept a plan which you have suggested and he is personally opposed to. As your subordinate, he is not really in a position to refuse.) You decide to reward him for agreeing to your proposal, while at the same time trying to win him over to your point of view. Your chances of convincing him are highest if:*

- a) you offer a large reward*
- b) you offer a small reward*

5. *You are planning to negotiate an important contract. As well as the essential conditions, there are also several less important conditions that need to be discussed. In the process of preparing your negotiating strategy, you decide:*

- a) to begin by negotiating the essential conditions, and to be the first to make concessions.*
- b) to make minor concessions in order to create a better atmosphere.*
- c) to persuade the other party to make minor concessions.*
- d) to persuade the other party to make concessions on the major issues.*

6. *You have money problems. Of all your friends, there are only two who are in a position to help you. One of them already lent you a small sum of money some time ago. The amount of money which you need to borrow now is much larger. Who is more likely to agree to lend you*

money?

- a) *the person who you borrowed money from before.*
- b) *the person who you haven't yet borrowed money from.*

7. *Suppose that you are approached on the street by someone who is collecting money for charity. You've just experienced a minor incident. After which one of them would you be most inclined to donate money to charity?*

- a) *You were fined for jay-walking, but afterwards you found some money lying on the street, which was enough to cover the unexpected fine.*
- b) *You found some money on the street, but soon after that you were stopped by a policeman, who made you pay a fine for jay-walking.*
- c) *You were fined for jay-walking.*

8. *You have been given a job for 10 days as a sales assistant in a self-service store which is closing down. If you manage to sell most of the goods in the store, the company will offer you a permanent job with very attractive conditions. If not, you will have to look for another job. As one of many possible methods of influencing customers, you are allowed to change the prices of goods. You decide:*

- a) *to raise prices so that you can surprise customers when they pay for goods by telling them that the actual price is lower.*
- b) *to leave the prices as they are.*
- c) *to lower the prices, and to inform customers when they come to pay that there has been a mistake.*
- d) *not to display the prices of goods, so that you can talk to customers and tell them the prices.*

9. *You are an employee in the public relations department of a company which is in serious financial trouble. The problem is a complex one and many people are to blame for the situation.*

To make things worse, journalists have found out what is happening and publicized it to the extent that the company is no longer able to operate. The situation is so serious that the very existence of the company is threatened. At a meeting of all the members of the management, it was decided to resort to subterfuge and choose one group of people to be blamed for the whole problem. Your task is to choose which group, taking only one question into consideration – which is likely to be the most effective choice? You decide to choose:

- a) the leaders of the trade unions.*
- b) the elite of financial analysts – the group which has the strongest influence on the management.*
- c) the management of the commercial department – a large group of easily replaceable employees.*
- d) the management of the social welfare department, which is due to be wound up anyway.*

10. The local government of a small town has decided to try to reduce alcohol consumption by banning the official sale and consumption of alcohol at discos and parties organized for young people. What do you think will be the result?

- a) less alcohol will be consumed*
- b) more alcohol will be consumed*
- c) there will be no change in the quantity of alcohol consumed*
- d) the ban will result in more people using drugs.*

11. Suppose that you are working as a debt collector. You are talking to a debtor who has fallen behind with payments for a long time, and who you intend to collect X amount of debts from. To increase the probability of him agreeing to pay, you suggest one of the following:

- a) first you tell him that the debt, interest payments and collection costs amount to $5X$, and if he does not agree, you agree to accept X .*
- b) you immediately tell him to pay X .*
- c) you demand payment of the sum of $2X$, and gradually come down to X .*

The correct answers and scoring are at the end of this chapter.

The third and final reason why it is difficult to write about manipulation is the relatively backward state of research and considerable theoretical chaos in this field. Systematic research into psychomanipulation has only been conducted for some thirty years⁶ and it has certainly not been one of the main themes of psychological research. This situation means that there is a lack of authoritative sources to refer to, of laws which have been verified by repeated observations and of generally accepted classifications in the literature on the subject. All of these restrictions mean that any attempt to organize the material on this subject encounters difficulties from the very start. To add to the confusion, the same phenomenon of manipulation is the subject of research in different branches of psychology and is referred to by different terms. The issues relating to manipulation overlap with the material relating to influence, and also with the subject of decision making. For example, the phenomenon of “anchoring” described by researchers into decision making is referred to as the door-in-the-face technique in the research on manipulation. There are many, many more similar examples of overlapping. However, I do not propose to enter too deeply into the question of whether one interpretation or the other is more correct, as I am aware that readers of this book are more interested in the practical application of knowledge.

One of the many difficult tasks involved in the theoretical description of phenomena which I will undertake in this book, and one which I can hardly avoid, is an attempt to define manipulation. To assist me in this task, I will refer to the opinions of other psychologists. To begin with, let us look at several definitions from the literature on the subject.

We can define mechanisms which initiate processes that permit your thoughts, emotions and actions to be controlled by others as manipulation. Manipulation is the deliberate exercise

⁶ The publication of J. L. Freedman and S. C. Fraser’s study of the foot-in-the-door technique (*Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique*. “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, 1966, vol. 4, pp. 195-202)

is often cited as the beginning of systematic research into manipulation. Other sources go further back, to the Second World War and the work of the social psychologist Carl Hovland for the American armed forces. He was employed by them to motivate soldiers in the war against Japan.

of influence on another person or on a group of people in such a matter that the manipulated person or group acts, without being aware of it, according to the needs of the manipulator. Both the presentation of information and its content play a part in manipulation.

Psychomanipulation is a narrower concept and refers to techniques of influencing others based on basic psychological principles in order to control human behaviour. 7

Social manipulation is deliberate and planned activity whose purpose is to influence another person in such a fashion that the latter is not aware of being influenced, or at least is not aware of the power and consequences of such influence.

The underlying motivation of persons who resort to social manipulation is to further their own interests or the interests of a group or an institution which they identify themselves with. 8

Manipulation occurs in any situation where in the opinion of the instigator (manipulator) there would be a divergence between the accepted model of behaviour of the performer (person who is being manipulated) and the model of behaviour which is suggested to him by the instigator, unless the performer's choice of behaviours is somehow restricted. The very process of restricting someone else's choices is what we call manipulation. So, manipulation means any kind of influence on individuals or groups which gives the false impression that one is the instigator or decision maker in some type of activity, whereas in fact one is merely a tool in the hands of the actual instigator. 9

Unfortunately R. Cialdini, who is one of the few authorities on the subject of manipulation, does not define the concept. He refers to it using the ambiguous term *social influence*, whereas a manipulator is described as a *social influence practitioner*. Following his

7 T. Maruszewski, E. Ściagała, *Nasze wyprane mózgi lowców (Brain-washed hunters)*. "Charaktery", 1999, no.7, pp.12-18.

8 D. Doliński *Inni ludzie w procesach motywacyjnych (Different people in motivational processes)*. W: J. Strelau (editor) *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki. Część 2 Psychologia ogólna Psychology. An Academic Textbook. Part 2*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2000. p.506.

9 A. Podgórecki, *Zasady socjotechniki (Principles of Social Techniques)*. Warsaw 1976.

example, many other authors have adopted the same terminology. The advantage of these terms is that they do not give rise to immediate and drawn out discussions on the ethical dimensions of the phenomenon. A definite disadvantage is that they extend the range of the subject to cover almost the whole of social psychology. Whereas Cialdini has avoided definitions in his seminal work, other researchers have risen to the challenge. Here are some more definitions:

Social influence is a type of interaction in which an individual, group or other institution produces changes in a person's cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural sphere. Social influence may be a conscious, intentional process, or it may be unintentional, if the instigator is unaware of the effect his behaviour has on the thoughts and emotions of another person. 10

There are also forms of social influence which are not accessible to the consciousness of the individual who it is intended to act upon. These forms of influence will be referred to in this survey as social manipulation. Manipulation in this sense is planned, targeted action, undertaken by individuals who have knowledge of the workings of human social behaviour and make use of it to influence people in such a manner that they do not realize that they are being subjected to any kind of influence. 11

Of course there are many more definitions which I could quote, but the above examples are sufficient for us to form our own views on the phenomenon of manipulation. All the definitions have common themes. Their authors emphasize the issue of consciousness both on the part of the instigators and the victims of the process. I propose to take a systematic approach to the problem: the instigator exerts influence either consciously or without being aware of it. Likewise, the victim is either aware or unaware of the influence which he is being subjected to. These permutations can best be presented in the form of a table.

Tabel 1. The role of consciousness in defining manipulative situations.

Is the	IS THE INSTIGATOR ACTING CONSCIOUSLY?	
	YES	NO

10 Kofta, Malak, 1981 za: Nawrat R., *Manipulacja społeczna - przegląd technik i wybranych wyników badań (Social manipulation- a survey of techniques and results of selected studies)*. Przegląd Psychologiczny, 1989, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, 125-154.

11 *ibid.*

YES	In this situation the victim's consciousness means that the instigator's actions cannot be manipulative.	In this situation there is an obvious lack of manipulation.
NO	This is clearly a manipulative situation.	This area requires further discussion.

Obviously the situation represented in the bottom right section of the table is the most controversial one. The question arises of whether people who make unconscious use of techniques of social manipulation can also be described as manipulators. The main thing that this question shows us is that a definition of the phenomenon based only on the consciousness of the instigator and that of the victim is not enough to show that manipulation has actually taken place. There is one thing missing from our definition, common to the definitions quoted above – the interests of the instigator, in other words, his motive for manipulation. Without a motive, there can be no manipulation or social influence. Specialists in the subject of influence have written exhaustively on this topic. According to them, motivation is essential both for manipulation to take place and also for the control of the instigator's own image. Motivation depends on three main factors. The first is the connection between the impression made on others and the possibility of achieving one's own aims. The second is the value of the desired aim. The third is the discrepancy between the actual and desired image. ¹² Applying all this to manipulative situations will make it possible for us to define clearly a wide range of events. Thus we can only say that manipulation has occurred when, in addition to the previously described conditions, there is a connection between the activities of the instigator and the possibility of benefiting his own interests. Besides this, the purpose of his activities must be of some value for him. And finally, there must be some discrepancy between what the victim is prepared to do without being

¹² M. Leary *Wywieranie wrażenia na innych. O sztuce autoprezentacji (Making an impression. The art of self-presentation)*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 1999.

manipulated, and his activities as a result of manipulation.

The fact that the above description of manipulative behaviour resembles the legal approach to evaluation of an act, which is usually based on finding its motive, suggests that it is an accurate one. In the words of Seneca the Younger: - *Cui prodest scelus, is fecit* – the perpetrator of the crime is the one who benefited from it.

I have recently read about a certain incident in a newspaper which is a clear illustration of the above. The incident occurred in Gdansk, where a police car was involved in a collision with a private car one night. As a result of the accident, the driver of the second car (a Daewoo Espero) was killed, and three policemen were injured. The police and the prosecutor's office issued official statements appealing for witnesses to come forward. At the same time, they began investigation of the incident. *"The Regional Prosecutor's Office(...) acknowledged that Jan O., the deceased driver of the Daewoo, caused the accident. According to the statement made by the driver of the police car, it was O. who drove onto the crossroads despite the stop sign. (...)*

Investigation of the incident would probably have been discontinued in view of the death of the alleged perpetrator, had it not been for further calls for witnesses in the media, which bore fruit at the end of last year when Jaroslaw D. and Leszek B. – two businessmen who had witnessed the accident – came forward.

- *We saw the whole incident. The police car overtook our Toyota on Rzeczpospolita Street. It didn't have its headlights switched on. (...)*

In September this year the Prosecutor's Office unexpectedly accused both witnesses of giving false testimony. Yesterday, the trial of B. and D. began at the Gdansk Regional Court.

- *(...) Decent people who only wanted to help clear up the case are being prosecuted in the name of the law. They were naïve enough to come forward when they heard that someone had died in the accident. They only wanted to act for the good of society- said the counsel for defence (...). He emphasized that the defendants had **neither any motivation nor anything to gain** by giving false testimony. They had no connection with the deceased driver of the Daewoo. (...) The indictment does not make any mention of their motive at all.¹³*

¹³ K. Wójcik, *Już nie będę świadkiem (No longer a witness)*. "Gazeta Wyborcza", December 16th, 1999, p. 4.

From this we can infer that the main argument for the defence will indeed be the lack of motive. In this case we may even find that all the three essential factors of the motive for manipulation are missing. To find out if they are, we need to answer the following questions: could the individuals in this case achieve any aim of their own by giving testimony? Could this aim be of value for them? Was their testimony not in accordance with the truth? If the answer to all of these questions was YES, we could then assert that the witnesses had sufficient motive for manipulation. If the answer to any one of them is NO, then we have no basis to suppose that manipulation took place. We can evaluate any given situation in the same manner. Of course, in the previous example we do not have access to all the relevant information about the incident, but as an exercise I invite the reader to evaluate the probability of the existence of a motive for manipulation on the part of the prosecution.

The second task which I need to undertake is no less difficult than defining manipulation: a classification of manipulative techniques, as an attempt to bring order to the extensive, but at the same time incomplete material derived from the results of research, observations and also the numerous accounts by lay observers of manipulative situations. The reader may well ask why I have chosen the particular method of classifying manipulations used in this book. The reason is the comparatively short period, as I mentioned previously, over which research into manipulation has taken place – a mere thirty years or so. This period has not sufficed to bring order into the study of social influence. As a rule, new theories, hypotheses and scientific concepts bring about a rapid increase in the materials used to provide evidence, together with the first attempts at classification. As time passes, some of these fall by the wayside, while others gain acceptance and are quoted in textbooks. As far as manipulation is concerned, we are still at the beginning of this process. The classification which I am about to suggest is not a solution that I would like to impose on others. It is merely a contribution to the continuing debate on manipulation, arising from the need to bring order into the extensive lecture materials which I have been presenting to participants in my seminars over the last few years. As my classification

(author's emphasis)

met with their approval, I am hoping that it will also satisfy the readers of this book and facilitate their understanding of the subject. The basis for classification are distinct psychological mechanisms, which is not by any means to say that particular mechanisms have been definitively defined and categorized. Rather, the opposite is the case. On many occasions I have wondered where to assign a given psychological technique. For example, irrational behaviour which suggests inability to control oneself invokes a strong emotional reaction, and techniques based on self-esteem also involve emotions. Where should I assign them? Should I refer to them in connection with manipulation of the feeling of control, or with manipulation which exploits emotions? It was only on the basis of my subjective convictions that one or the other mechanism played a greater role that I placed a given technique in one category or the other. I must admit that the more I reflected on the mechanisms underlying particular techniques, the more doubts I felt, and these were only intensified by further reading; as Paul Anderson has said, *I have never met a problem, no matter how complex, which didn't become even more complex when I looked into it.*

In the end I categorized the material by applying various taxonomies of phenomena to well-known manipulative techniques in an attempt to check whether they could be used for this type of classification. An additional criterion which I kept in mind during these attempts was the usefulness of a given system for categorizing the material. By usefulness I mean whether it was easy to remember a group of techniques without needing to memorize each of the methods which it included. Above all I was interested in the practical application of the system, in that it would allow the reader to quickly recognize a specified group of techniques and apply the appropriate behaviour to counteract them. The final version of my system of classification can be found in the table of contents and also in the structure on which I have based this book.

Readers who are familiar with Robert Cialdini's seminal work *Influencing People. Theory and Practice* are sure to ask why I did not make use of the system of classification suggested by the classic authority on the subject. This system categorizes on the basis of six important rules: **mutuality, consequences, social evidence of validity, liking, authority and inaccessibility**. However, in my opinion, some forms of human interaction require us to

distinguish other techniques which are applicable to those particular situations. For example, the technique of “what if” is not covered by any of Cialdini’s rules, and yet it is a technique very commonly encountered in negotiations. This relatively simple technique exploits the inexperience of the negotiator and attempts to deprive him of control of the process of information transfer. The technique of making personal attacks, which is familiar to everyone and not only to negotiators, arouses strong negative emotions in order to exert influence. Although this technique can be used to exert a very strong influence on a negotiating partner in order to change his behaviour in accordance with one’s requirements, it cannot easily be related to any of the six rules. For this reason, I have decided not to base my account of manipulation on the rules proposed by Cialdini.

The literature on the subject also mentions other criteria for categorizing manipulations. They are worth mentioning at this point if only to give the reader an idea of the diversity of suggested formulations. Some authors propose influence on the other psychological processes involved in psychomanipulation as a criterion for classification. For example, they refer to manipulations based on e.g. perception, memory, imagination, thinking, emotions and motivation. However, since both memory and perception are very strongly dependent on emotion, this system immediately raises doubts. It would be difficult to apply these categories to particular techniques without impairing the practicability and clarity of classification. Besides, even if these categories are useful for the study of psychology, they are not necessarily applicable in dealing with manipulators.

Psychomanipulative techniques can also be classified according to which stage in the processing of information the interference by the manipulator takes place, for example psychomanipulation based on post-decision dissonance, with interference in the process of explaining behaviour (attributive techniques) or based on the effects of group pressure. This system of classification probably comes closest to the system which I have suggested, although it does not take automatic behaviour into account. There are some situations where the very lack of information processing is the reason for the effectiveness of a given technique.

Another system for categorizing manipulations (or, to be more precise, influences) which

is fairly widespread in the literature on the subject is based on the criterion of the depth of interference in the mind of another individual. This system is of particular relevance to analysis of the effects of manipulation and to moral and even legal considerations. In this system the first category is of techniques which are intended to produce concessions; in this case, the aim is to modify behaviour on a single occasion only. For example, a shop assistant might persuade us to buy something which we didn't really want to buy, or a beggar might talk us into giving him a coin which we had no intention of giving. A second group of techniques goes deeper, with the aim of changing not only behaviour, but attitudes. These are often described as persuasive techniques. For example, in the previous example, the shop assistant might succeed not only in selling us some object, but also in influencing us so that after the sale we believe that we actually needed the object, and that we bought it intentionally. Changes in personality, or rather in identity, and thought control, are the results of the third type of techniques. The effects of this process are the slowest to appear. Examples of this kind of indoctrination are the influence of some religious sects, political and terrorist groups, and so-called brain-washing.¹⁴

A similar system has been suggested by Margaret Thaler Singer, a specialist in research into thought control. According to her, methods of exercising influence can be located on a continuum. At one end of the continuum are methods used in education, next are advertising methods, propaganda techniques and indoctrination techniques, with methods of thought control at the other extreme.¹⁵

However, this book is not intended to demonstrate the superiority of one system of classification over another, but to present the issues of manipulation in situations of human interaction in an accessible manner; therefore, I would like to remind those who find the question of classification to be an obstruction of the words of a certain preacher: *"Brothers, here is the barrier; let us face it bravely and we will overcome."*¹⁶

The book which you are reading is on the subject of manipulations. This is an unusually

¹⁴ There are detailed descriptions of these systems of classification in:

<http://www.influenceatwork.com/definit.html>, and: T. Maruszewski, E. Ścigala, *Nasze wyprane mózgi łowców*. "Charaktery", 1999, no.7, pp.12-18.

¹⁵ M. T. Singer, J. Lalich, *Cults in our midst*. Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco 1995.

wide-ranging subject, which includes fraud, lies, propaganda, manipulation of information, the influence of groups and the mass media, and it deals with questions which are the province of academic disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, political studies, ethical philosophy and even anthropology and religious studies. In writing about the psychology of manipulation, I felt that it would be impossible to deal with all of these related phenomena in one book, and further that I have neither the knowledge or the competence to undertake such a task. For that reason, I have decided to limit my description of manipulative techniques to those which are used in the direct contacts between one person and another. I chose to concentrate on the **psychology of manipulation**, while neglecting or altogether avoiding related subjects.

There is one more thing which I need to explain to the reader. In this book, as in my seminars, I have chosen to preserve the anonymity of persons involved in incidents of a neutral or positive nature. At the same time, I reserve the right to report facts and to name companies and institutions which in my opinion have deliberately manipulated me. I believe I have as much right to do that, as they have to manipulate me.

Correct answers and interpretation of the results of the test

1. Difficult as it is to believe, studies show that people value their self-esteem more highly than health or even their lives. The reader will find more on this topic in the chapter on self-esteem.

- a) 0
- b) 1
- c) 2
- d) 3

2. In their dealings with men, women often use the technique of “acting dumb”. There is a detailed description of the results of research in the section on “Manipulation of one’s own image”.

16Arrow, K. J. (1979) *Eseje z teorii ryzyka (Essays on risk theory)*. PWN: Warsaw.

- a) 1
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 0

3. Men use a similar technique, but with slight differences. Refer to the same section.

- a) 3
- b) 1
- c) 0
- d) 2

4. In this case an exceptionally strong mechanism of cognitive dissonance comes into play, so that the person who received a lower reward will begin to convince himself. An entire long chapter is devoted to this phenomenon.

- a) 0
- b) 3

5. Here too the outcome is determined by the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, or to be more exact, the "foot in the door". People who have already done something for us or have made concessions are far more likely to do so again than people who have never done anything for us.

- a) 0
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 1

6. This is exactly the same phenomenon as in the previous question.

- a) 3
- b) 0

7. Behaviour in this case is determined by emotions, and our submission is explained by so-called mood swings.

- a) 3
- b) 0
- c) 0

8. The most effective strategy in this situation is the escalation of demands, even though it can not be defended on ethical grounds. If you chose the wrong answer because of honesty but were aware which strategy is most likely to succeed, add 3 points to your score.

- a) 0
- b) 1
- c) 3
- d) 2

9. This is the method of reorientation in a crisis, or to put it more simply, the search for a scapegoat. This method is most effective when a powerful minority is chosen as the scapegoat. More on this topic in the section on "Reorientation".

- a) 1
- b) 3
- c) 2
- d) 0

10. This is the phenomenon of reactance. "Forbidden fruit tastes sweeter, and rules are made to be broken" There is a detailed description of this phenomenon in the chapter on the psychology of resisting manipulation.

- a) 0
- b) 3

- c) 1
- d) 2

11. The aptly-named “door in the face” technique involves starting with unrealistically high demands; subsequently, a request for a substantially smaller amount is more likely to be fulfilled. The title of the relevant section is the same as the name of the technique.

- a) 3
- b) 1
- c) 2

Add your scores together to obtain a total. If your total score is in the range of:

0 - 8 You are very poor at predicting how people will behave. You might even be an ideal target for manipulation. I strongly recommend that you read this book.

8 - 16 You are able to predict some types of behaviour, but you still have a lot to learn. Be careful, because you are in danger of being manipulated. Reading this book will help you to make better predictions about your own reactions and the reactions of other people.

16 - 24 You are not at all bad at predicting people’s behaviour and are capable of resisting attempts to manipulate you. If you would like to perfect your skills in this area, I recommend reading this book.

25 - 33 Either you are an expert at predicting people’s behaviour in accordance with the results of psychological research or you are a social psychologist. You may as well give this book to someone who needs it more than you.

MANIPULATION BASED ON SELF-ESTEEM

The need for self-esteem is one of the more powerful human needs. We are ingenious at defending and raising our self-esteem. When describing human activity as being driven by the need for self-

esteem, I have no hesitation in describing it as a “monster”. This monster feeds on whatever can enhance self-esteem. When sated it is willing to make concessions, but when under attack it is particularly irritable and capable of fighting tooth and nail in its own defence. There is a whole series of manipulative techniques which make use of the mechanics of self-esteem. They can generally be referred to as ingratiating techniques, and they make use of conformism, raising the value of the other party, manipulation of one’s own image, and depreciation of others.

This chapter will present some fundamental psychological research which has helped us to learn about these manipulative techniques, besides describing some of the evolutionary conditions which explain why we are prone to be manipulated by these techniques. However, the main purpose of this chapter is to show how the techniques are used and what limitations they have. Ingratiation in a situation where the manipulating person needs to gain something from another person tends to be fairly obvious and not very effective. On the other hand, disguised ingratiation can be extremely effective, in the form of imaginary or postponed conformism, raising the value of the other person with the help of a third party, manipulation of memory, or other similar methods.

In order to show the full range of applications of these techniques, this chapter includes many anecdotes and other illustrative material; we will describe manipulative situations in pubs, palaces, offices, and also at the kitchen sink and in jail.

MANIPULATIVE TECHNIQUES WHICH EXPLOIT COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

The discovery of cognitive dissonance by Leo Festinger was one of the major breakthroughs of 20th century psychology. It gave us a powerful tool for the analysis of human behaviour, particularly concerning the creation and modification of attitudes. Although we know about many methods of influencing human behaviour, it is particularly difficult to change someone’s attitudes. However, cognitive dissonance is a method which can be used to achieve this. When the concept of cognitive dissonance was applied to the analysis of social behaviour, it was soon found to be the reason behind our vulnerability to many manipulative techniques, such as “foot in the door”, “every penny counts”, “foot in mouth”, engaging in dialogue and – a method which is characteristic for markets – escalation of demands.

As in the preceding chapter, we will begin with a description of the psychological research and the theoretical basis of the phenomena, and proceed to details of the individual techniques and their practical application in the reality of social interaction.

MANIPULATING THROUGH EMOTIONS

The literature on manipulation pays very little attention to emotions, even though they are one of the basic psychic processes. Emotions are the source of many positive experiences, but they also cause disorganization in our behaviour. In addition, they can be used by others to control our behaviour. The simplest form of manipulation involves the creation of stressful situations, for example in the course of negotiations. A more refined method makes use of mood swings to produce cognitive confusion, yielding significant concessions. This method has been the subject of experiments conducted on the streets of Polish cities and in everyday situations, and it is familiar to many as the “good guy-bad guy” interrogative technique shown in detective films. However, its use is not confined to films or to the police force. It has also entered the canon of unethical negotiating techniques.

Emotions are also the key to understanding the “door in the face” technique widely used in everyday life, for example by spouses to obtain permission for unexpected purchases or by policemen determining the size of a fine. The final technique based on emotions is the invocation of a guilty conscience. This is also a widely used method for obtaining concessions in our personal relationships as well as in politics.

MANIPULATING THROUGH THE SENSE OF CONTROL

We are no less ingenious in searching for good motives for our

own bad deeds than in looking for bad motives of other people's good deeds.
Charles Caleb Folton Lacon

Let's imagine the following situation. You have run into a former schoolmate. As usually happens in such cases, you start talking about the people you used to know. It turns out that two of your former classmates have serious problems. Both are unemployed, their wives have left them, they have piles of unpaid bills and are up to their ears in debt, and on top of this both have health

problems. There is, however, an important difference between them. One of them is an alcoholic. He started drinking fairly early on, not long after graduating, when he got a good job. Quarrels began at home, and he started to have problems at work too. When it came to promotion, he was passed over. As a result of his drinking habit, he made one serious mistake after the other at work. As a result, his employers found someone else to take his place, and he became unemployed, living off his wife's income. After a long period of being unable to find a job, his wife had enough of the situation and the constant arguments caused by her husband's drunkenness, and she decided to get a divorce. As a result, he started to drink even more, his health deteriorated, and on several occasions he was hospitalised. At the moment his chances of getting another job are close to zero, he is no longer entitled to unemployment benefit, he is deeply in debt and living on the verge of poverty.

What happened to the other friend? One autumn, he started to feel very sick. After a visit to the doctor it emerged out that he had back problems, resulting from his sedentary life-style (it seems he was a workaholic, as he spent all his time at work) and it turned out that they could only be cured by an operation. Unfortunately, the operation did not succeed. As a result, he had to spend four months in hospital. After being discharged, he found that his young and attractive wife had found another man in the meantime, resulting in the end of his marriage. They decided to get divorced. As a result of complications arising from the operation, he had to undergo intensive therapy and was constantly on painkillers. As a result, he was no longer able to meet the demands of his job, which required his constant presence at work, besides frequent business trips. Anyway, after getting divorced his financial needs were much less, even though he had spent a large part of his money on medical treatment. His continuing ill-health made him increasingly dissatisfied with his work and less and less motivated. As a result, his employers gave him notice; this came so unexpectedly that he didn't even have time to apply for disability benefit. Not long ago he heard about an operation at a German clinic which offered the possibility of a cure in cases such as his. He decided to risk everything on the chance of a cure, and took out a loan to pay for the operation and hospitalisation. Unfortunately, this operation did not succeed either. At the moment he is unemployed, with huge debts and nothing to repay them

with. Just to prevent his current state of health from deteriorating even further, he needs constant rehabilitation. He is applying for disability benefit, but even if he gets it, he will not have enough money to repay his debts or for the constant medical treatment which his condition requires.

How do we react to the situation of these two men? Do we feel equally sorry for both of them, or do we perhaps feel more sympathy for the second one, and if so, why? The answer seems to be straightforward enough. In the first case, our friend was responsible for his own misfortunes. Had he acted differently, he would not have ended up in the same way. By contrast, our other friend was the victim of an unfortunate combination of circumstances. He had no control, or very limited control, over his destiny. It would seem therefore that our sympathy depends on the causes of the present situation of each one.

Let us further suppose that these two people ask us for help. Will we be willing to help them? If so, both of them or, more probably, only the second one? At this point we have arrived at the essential feature of the next group of manipulative techniques – the sense of perceived control. It turns out that our evaluation of a situation depends on how we perceive the causes of events. The phenomenon of perceived causes has received considerable attention in psychological studies, and it is described by theories of attribution.¹⁷ However, we are concerned only with so-called freedom of choice in making decisions and its influence on our behaviour. We have already seen that people are more inclined to help, or at least to feel sympathy for someone who had no control over his circumstances. So, the chain of events is as follows: first we evaluate the freedom of choice of a person in a given situation, and then we decide on our own behaviour. What happens if we apply this for the purposes of manipulation?

I found an answer to this question in a television programme broadcast by Nova, the Czech TV station. This included situations which were filmed by a hidden camera. In one of

¹⁷ Readers interested in these issues can refer to the sources quoted in this book, for example:

¹⁷ M. Hłasko, *Piękni dwudziestoletni (20th Century Beauties)*. Kos Publishers, Krakow 1981.

¹⁷ J. Paradowska *Divisions on all Sides*. "Polityka" 24, 2000 p. 15.

¹⁷ M. Twain, *Inter-planetary Travels*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷ Science and Behaviour Books, Inc., 1972.

E. Aronson, T. D. Wilson, R. M. Akert, *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł (Social Psychology. Heart and Mind)*.

these, two beggars were placed close to one another on one of the main streets of Prague. One of them was a typical beggar, dirty and with tattered clothes, with the usual grubby piece of cardboard with the words: I'M A DRUG ADDICT WITH AIDS, PLEASE HELP. The second beggar was more unusual. He was wearing a suit, a tie, and clean shoes. On his piece of paper the following text had been printed by computer: I AM A MANAGER. I LOST MY JOB AT SHORT NOTICE AND DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY TO LIVE...PLEASE HELP. Both beggars were sitting on the pavement and looking at the ground, as beggars usually do. Apart from the astonishment of passers-by, which was understandable in the circumstances, and some unusual reactions, the most surprising outcome was the measurable difference in the success of the two beggars. The second beggar collected almost three times as much money! Of course, we can theorize about the reasons for such a large difference. Perhaps the passers-by were able to identify with the second beggar, perhaps they were intrigued by the paradoxical situation, or by his clothes. No doubt several factors played a part. After all, it was a television programme, and not a precise experiment. However, in my opinion what really made a difference were the perceived causes of the two beggars' situations. If we react as a chance passer-by might do, without deep reflection on the topic, our thoughts might go something like this: *I'll help the one who's in trouble for no fault of his own. The other one chose to become a drug-addict and got AIDS as a result, so I'm not going to help him.* Now, any situation in which people were deliberately encouraged to follow a similar line of thought in order to extract some definite benefit from them would be a clear case of manipulation.

At this point it would be a serious omission not to mention the topic of belief in a just world, in order to reveal some of the errors and distortions in perceptions of the causes of other people's behaviour, and – as a consequence – the reasons of their current situation. We can therefore allow ourselves a short digression. The hypothesis of a just world theory was formulated in the 60's by Melvin Lerner. According to him, people feel a need to believe that people generally get what they deserve. A result of this belief is the conviction that someone's present situation is a direct reflection of what they deserve. If someone is in trouble, he clearly

got what was coming to him, probably he was too lazy to work or, if he worked, he had some kind of morally dubious job which brought about his current problems. If, conversely, someone is successful, we assume that he earned it. No doubt he spared neither time nor effort to get ahead, and probably he was a diligent student. The observant reader will not fail to notice the cultural background to such a belief. It is, of course, typical of Protestant thinking to believe in a just world, and no doubt the belief is formulated differently in Catholic cultures and to an even greater extent in countries where socialist values were imposed in addition to the influence of Catholicism. Coming back to the arguments of the author of the theory, it needs to be emphasized that the result of such a perception of the world is a particular kind of behaviour. It turns out that people with a strong belief in a just world are more likely to be involved in charitable activities. Why, we may ask? The reason is the need to defend one's vision of the world. By helping others, we help to restore justice, thus confirming ourselves in our beliefs. From the point of view of our discussion, the most interesting thing is that people are more likely to engage in altruistic activities when they believe that their actions had a significant impact on the situation of the person they were helping! Conversely, if they believe that their actions have no effect, they begin to denigrate the person on the grounds that they have clearly deserved such a situation and that there is no point in making an effort to help them, as nothing will change. This tendency becomes even stronger if they see a person in troubles of their own making.

Of course, not everyone shares in the belief in a just world to the same extent. However, the behaviour of people who subscribe to it is yet another instance of the important role played by our conviction that someone has control over his own destiny. This conviction has a significant influence on our actions, particularly on actions involving, or even caused by another person, and it determines whether or not we will do anything to help.

What does all of this have to do with manipulation? There is a whole range of manipulative techniques which are intended to create the impression that the person manipulating us is not in full control of his behaviour, and is not in a position to influence its results. Moreover, by skilful presentation of information and facts, he leads us to believe that only we are in a position to influence the course of events. My favourite example of this, which

may also serve as a metaphor for most manipulative techniques which exploit the sense of control, is that of a man carrying a wardrobe on his back. Suppose that as you are climbing the stairs you meet a man coming down with a wardrobe (those who are fond of the classics may like to imagine two people carrying a large wardrobe!). You meet him carrying a heavy load, half way up the stairs. You can see at once that he is not able to go back, nor to make way for you. Even if he did, he might drop the wardrobe, or be crushed by it. So, how do you react? Of course, you make way for him, go back and let him pass. But what kind of manipulation is this? asks the outraged reader. The secret is that the wardrobe is a fake one made of polystyrene! This is just the kind of trick used by skilful manipulators, who pretend to be carrying a burden which makes it impossible for them to control their actions, so that we have to back down for them. In a situation like this, where only one of two parties has control over his behaviour, and has the choice of either backing down or acting in a different way, he is far more likely to back down because of the psychological pressure to do so. The manipulative techniques described in this chapter are all variants of the fake wardrobe and methods of carrying it on one's back. This group of techniques includes those of the hard-hearted partner, all or nothing, *fait accompli*, irrational behaviour, and reorientation.

Another group of techniques exploiting the sense of control involves either insidiously depriving the victim of the feeling that he has control of a situation "what if...?", or depriving him of actual control (trained helplessness), or by creating the belief that it would be possible to control a situation which we had not taken into consideration at all (the screenplay procedure).

The hard-hearted partner

This is probably the most common of the group of techniques which operate by manipulating through the sense of control. I am convinced that most of my readers (or even, I suspect, all of them) have used this type of manipulation at least once in their lives. It is also certain that this method has been used on you. It is very frequently used in negotiations. When more concessions are being demanded of one of the parties than he is willing to make, he will declare: *-I'm very sorry, but I'm not authorized to make so many concessions. It's for my boss to decide, but I doubt if he'll agree.* If negotiations have reached an advanced stage and an agreement is important for the other party,

he is likely to back down rather than face the prospect of interrupting discussions and postponing the signing of a contract. This type of concession is obtained by invoking a “hard-hearted” and often “invisible” partner. If at this moment we were to insist on a meeting with the boss, the manipulating party would probably start to make excuses, for example that the boss has just gone out or is inaccessible for some other reason. Finally, if he is equally determined to reach an agreement, he may eventually back down, “but the boss won’t like it”.

A wife, boss, partner or sometimes even an imaginary person can all play the role of a hard-hearted partner. It is not possible for us to back down or to make a decision, because what will our hard-hearted partner say? Sometimes even an abstraction can represent the hard-hearted partner – *We would like to compromise on this point, but our company policy doesn’t allow it.* An impersonal hard-hearted partner has the advantage that whereas we can demand to see a boss, it would be difficult to react to “company policy” by demanding a meeting with it. We could however ask who is responsible for such a policy or who could influence it, and then demand a meeting with that person. I personally have also encountered a price list, a computer or a computer program in the role of a hard-hearted partner; it would be difficult to conduct a discussion with any of them.

At first sight it would appear that this technique is best suited for people who are working under somebody else. However, I have seen it used by company directors and CEOs, who covered themselves by referring to their hard-hearted accountant, or financial director, or even trade unions. This technique is indeed a very widely used one. The hard-hearted partner is nothing other than the polystyrene wardrobe of our story. It represents a form of indirect refusal, and sometimes appears as typical non-assertive behaviour. Of course, we do have to bear in mind that our negotiating partner may indeed have a difficult boss, or a temperamental wife at home; it is, therefore, not always beneficial to take a schematic approach to such situations. It is up to us, depending on our ability to analyse and evaluate the situation, to decide whether we are dealing with a fact or just a negotiating ploy.

All or nothing

Sometimes you have to know how far you can go too far.

Tristan Bernard

There used to be a story about an American writer, who was writing a serial. One day, he came to speak to his boss.

Writer: - Boss, I want a raise of ten dollars per episode, from tomorrow.

Boss: - Get out!

The writer leaves, whistling jauntily. The boss calls his secretary and tells her to send Rappaport in. Rappaport comes in.

Boss: - Rappaport, from now on you're writing this crap.

Rappaport: - OK Boss.

He picks up the manuscript nonchalantly and goes out, and the boss gets back to work. One hour later, Rappaport comes back: he is totally drunk, and pale as a corpse. He gives the manuscript back to his boss.

Rappaport: Finished. And now give me a break.

He staggers out, and the boss calls for Treppengelande to be sent in. Treppengelande comes in.

Boss: - Patrick, from tomorrow you're writing this garbage.

Treppengelande: - Alright.

He goes out. An hour later, he comes back, pale as a corpse, and drunk. He throws the manuscript on the table and goes out without saying a word. The situation is getting serious; the printing room needs the manuscript. The boss calls in his top writer.

Top Writer comes in.

Boss: - From now on.. etc.

Top Writer: - OK.

An hour later he comes back, drunk and pale as a corpse.

Boss: - What's up?

Top Writer: - There's nothing I can do. The hero jumps out of an aeroplane at an altitude of ten thousand metres and he doesn't have a parachute. There's a squadron of fighter planes and they're firing missiles at him. Below, sharks are waiting for him with open jaws. I've had enough, give me a break.

*Top Writer goes out. The Boss calls the first writer back in and promises to give him a raise. The next episode of the story comes out the next day, with the following opening: "With a superhuman effort, Mike Gilderstern overcame these irritations and went back to New York."*¹⁸

This is one of my favourite stories, and it is a perfect illustration of how the technique of "all or nothing" works. It consists in one of the parties consciously giving up all control of events. "The hero jumps out of the plane at an altitude of...etc.". In reality, however, this giving up of control is only an illusion, as there is always the option of making "a superhuman effort to overcome these irritations".

This strategy is often used by politicians. They make a public statement of the conditions under which they are prepared to negotiate, while making it clear that they are not prepared to make any concessions. By doing this, they put pressure on the other side even before discussions begin. When it comes to negotiation, a politician who has used this strategy can counter any proposed concessions with the answer: – *I understand your point of view, but please remember that I have already made a public statement of my position, and if I back down now, nobody will take me seriously. I simply can't afford to back down.* This is something of a gamble, as the manipulating party risks losing control of the situation without leaving any escape route open. While writing this, I am a witness of the collapse of the Polish governing coalition of two parties, Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarność" (Electoral Action Solidarity) and Unia Wolności (Freedom Union – FU). Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz withdrew all the FU ministers from the government, thus surrendering control of the situation. Soon afterwards, before the Prime Minister (representing Electoral Action Solidarity) had accepted the ministers' resignations, the FU initiated negotiations. Despite conducting negotiations in accordance with the strategy of all or nothing, the FU failed to achieve its aims, and the fact that it entered into negotiations after its ministers had tendered their resignations exposed the weakness of the party's position and its manipulative strategy. It became clear that the party was not so much interested in leaving the coalition as in simply improving its negotiating position. According to political commentators: *If we try to establish what the FU was trying to achieve by passing a resolution on the withdrawal of its ministers from the government,*

¹⁸M. Hłasko, *Piękni dwudziestoletni (20-years-old Beauties)*. Kos Publishers, Krakow 1981.

it seems fairly obvious, that an almost unanimous vote to end the current coalition reflected the conviction that it would be essentially impossible to heal the rift. (...)

During the next few days this position began to weaken. The Union was revealed as a party with internal divisions and without any clear goals, as a result of which it allowed itself to be drawn into something which is the speciality of EAS, that is, negotiation until the bitter end, when nobody remembers what the point is any more.¹⁹

Trade unions sometimes act in a similar manner in their negotiations with employers. First they make a public statement, which they then invoke during discussions. –*We understand your arguments, we know that it is not in the interests of the company to give a pay rise, we know that it will make restructuring more difficult, but try to see it from our point of view – before coming here, we promised our members that we wouldn't leave without getting concessions from you... etc.* An extreme version of this method is to present a *fait accompli*, which is another form of giving up control over events.

Fait accompli

When a husband comes back from a long business trip, he finds that the house has been refurnished and redecorated. He is furious, because when he and his wife talked about this, they agreed that they would wait till next spring to buy new furniture and get the house decorated, as it was more important to pay off their debts this year, and besides, they had planned to do more than just re-painting. Now they will have to do the whole thing again next year after doing the other repairs. It is on the tip of his tongue to ask her why, to tell her off, but his wife immediately cuts him off with her explanation –*Everything was so dirty, besides, the furniture was falling to pieces. I only wanted to make our house look better. Is that too much for you to understand?...* and so begins a fairly unappealing process of making the victim appear as the guilty party! Why does a poor wife have to be attacked by her husband? Why does he always have to be so angry, cruel and insensitive, when she only wants to do good? Why is he always picking on her?

If the procedure is repeated several times, especially in the presence of observers, we end

¹⁹ J. Paradowska *Divisions on all Sides*. "Polityka" 24, 2000 p. 15.

up with a clear case of a tyrant and an oppressed victim. The method of the *fait accompli* is even more insidious than that of “all or nothing”. In the latter case, there is always the possibility of making “a superhuman effort to overcome these irritations”. In the case of the *fait accompli*, there is no such option. The victim has two possible choices:

1. To accept things as they are, which is equivalent to acquiescence in the *fait accompli*, and is certain to result in similar instances in the future.
2. To fight for his right to take part in decisions, as a result of which he will however appear as the guilty party.

Unfortunately, use of the strategy of the *fait accompli* is not confined to marital quarrels. Take the case of a company in which each of the members of senior management is competing to improve his reputation in the eyes of the staff. One of the deputy managers whose responsibilities include the company’s policy on employees’ pay goes on holiday for a week. When he comes back, he finds that the managing director has given all the heads of departments a substantial pay rise, besides new and better company cars. You can imagine what kind of face the deputy manager will have when he comes back from holiday, and what kind of thoughts will cross his mind. However, what can he do about it? Even if he dares to question the decision to award pay rises, he will certainly not do so in public. After all, the fact that they were awarded during his absence makes it look as if he was the one standing in the way of any increases. On the other hand, what if he decides to accept and publicly express his support for the managing director’s decision? He is unlikely to do so, as it would make him look like a sycophant and a flatterer, without any opinions of his own. Besides, if he does so, people will ask what prevented him from awarding the pay rises himself, as he was entitled to do. Whichever way we look at it, he, as a victim of manipulation, is in a fix, and all the more so as his reactions are likely to be very closely observed. As for the manipulator, he gains the recognition and gratitude of his staff. After all, he is the one who apparently took advantage of the deputy manager’s absence to oppose his policies on salaries and to intervene on behalf of the employees.

A more common example of *faits accomplis* are illegally built houses. Until recent changes in the law, one could build almost anywhere without taking much notice of planning permission.

What court would want to appear as a tyrant and to order the demolition of somebody's house, especially in a situation where there is a housing shortage? At most, the builder was likely to incur fines, which were still much less than the costs of obtaining permission for legal building. Many of these "faits accomplis" are still standing; there are several of them in my neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, my next example is taken once again from the plentiful mistakes made in the negotiations between representatives of the coalition between Electoral Action Solidarity and the Freedom Union. I do not wish it to be thought that I dislike the individuals mentioned here or the values that they represent, merely to express my dismay and even pity for the attempts of the coalition partners to reach an agreement. It so happened that while Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek was abroad (travel on the part of the victim is a common feature of this particular manipulative strategy), the Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz publicly announced the so-called White Book with his plans to reform the Polish tax system with the introduction of a flat rate of income tax for all. The proposals were reported by the media and, not surprisingly, were interpreted as official government statements. On being informed of this, the Prime Minister, who was still abroad, denounced the proposals, which he pointed out had not been approved by him. The fait accompli was not accepted, and once again the internal divisions in the government were exposed. I have an equally poor opinion both of the action of the Deputy Prime Minister and the emotional reaction of the Prime Minister. A calmer and more considered response would certainly have maintained at least the appearance of cooperation, instead of revealing internal conflict and providing yet another instance of divisions within the government.

Irrational behaviour

*Any idiot can reduce the most advanced
brain to confusion, whenever he feels like it.
Elias Canetti*

One of the departments operating in companies offering financial services is the debt recovery department, whose responsibility it is to collect arrears from the company's more unreliable customers. The work of employees in this department is by no means pleasant. They have to deal with people who are nervous or even annoyed at having to meet their creditors. Negotiations

with them are difficult and require discretion and tact. Not surprisingly, they are very tired by the end of a day's work. In one such company, just a quarter of an hour before closing, a customer who was behind with his payments came into the office. At this point it is important to add that he had travelled all of several hundred kilometres from some town at the other end of Poland. Somewhat out of breath, he came in, and found himself face to face with the manager of the debt recovery department, an otherwise pleasant, calm and balanced-looking man. He immediately started explaining his situation. In reply, he was given a pencil and paper, and the following brief command:

- *Draw a snail.*

- *But* – replied the astonished customer, after a long pause – *I came here to explain...*

- *I know why you came here. Please draw a snail.* – the manager interrupted his explanation. The customer did not give up:- *I've got serious problems, I've been behind with my payments for a long time, you sent me a letter telling me to come here, and...*

- *Yes, I know.* – the manager interrupted him again. – *Please draw a snail.*

- *But...*

- *Look, I don't have time. I can write off 6% of what you owe us, if you draw a snail that I like. So please get on with drawing, because I have to go home soon.*

The customer, who by now was seriously worried, looked up at the manager, took a pencil and started to draw a snail. As a result of this conversation and a not particularly beautiful specimen of a snail, he obtained a reduction of 3% in his debts. However, we can be certain that to this very day, he has no idea why. We can also be sure that he will try to avoid any contacts with the debt recovery department of that particular company by paying his dues on time.

This is an example of the manipulative technique known as *irrational behaviour*. How does it benefit the manipulator? It works in exactly the same way as the other techniques in this group, by suggesting that the manipulator does not have control of the situation, is unable to control his own behaviour, and is therefore unable to back down. And of course, even children are aware that there is no use arguing with an idiot. We need to approach someone who is imbalanced and hot-headed with extreme care, and dealing with individuals who are ready to risk everything is like trying to defuse an unexploded bomb. In this case, however, it is very likely that there would ever

be an explosion.

Specialists in self-presentation are also interested in issues concerning the appearance of a lack of accountability. In our discussion on techniques exploiting one's own image I mentioned the technique known as "acting dumb". In the case of irrational behaviour, we could alternatively describe it as "acting crazy". People usually "act crazy" in situations where they do not want to be held accountable for their actions, for example in court. Its use by young men who want to avoid conscription goes back a long way. Odysseus, who was not too keen on going to fight the Trojans, sowed salt on his fields so that people would think he was mad. In the case of such situations, it is fairly easy to see through the manipulator's behaviour as the motive for manipulation is obvious. In the case of Odysseus, we are fortunate that his strategy did not succeed, as otherwise we would not have the story of his adventures. It is interesting to note that even people who are genuinely mad are also able to "act crazy". One experiment was carried out in a psychiatric hospital, and involved patients diagnosed as having schizophrenia being told that they were to be visited by a psychologist. For the purposes of the experiment they were divided into groups and given different reasons for the visit. In the case of the first group the purpose of the visit was allegedly to decide whether the patient was to be allowed to stay in the open ward or transferred to the closed ward. The second group was told that the visit was to determine if they could be discharged from the hospital. What were the results? It turned out that the patients who were worried about being transferred to the closed ward displayed far fewer symptoms than the patients who were worried that they would have to leave the hospital (most long-term schizophrenia patients tend to prefer to remain in hospital and are fearful of having to leave). So, even the mentally ill are able to display symptoms of mental illness when they have a definite motive for doing so.

Situations like the ones described at the beginning of this section are a lot more subtle, as the motive for manipulation is less obvious. Here the person who is manipulating through irrational behaviour wants to create an impression of being unbalanced, irresponsible, and even desperate. It is not so easy to explain why he is acting in this way as in the case of someone who is accused of a crime or faced with conscription. One reason is that, if the negotiating party using this technique is the weaker party, he can block negotiations (as it is difficult to communicate with persons whose

behaviour is unaccountable) in order to gain time to strengthen his position. He can also obtain concessions in view of the rule that “it is better to let an idiot have his own way,” if only for the sake of peace and quiet. Finally, in conflict situations, his behaviour can expose the opposing party’s lack of skills in the discussion and resolution of conflicts. The use of threats, which are a commonly used weapon in the next stage of this strategy, creates an impression of irrationality, and can impede the activities of the other party by forcing him to act much more cautiously. Irrational behaviour also serves as a kind of smoke screen for the real activities of the manipulator. If we make the effort to consider what the manipulator is really trying to achieve, we will find that in areas which are beyond our control his actions are entirely rational, and it is the same areas which may subsequently turn out to be of central importance for negotiations.

Mark Twain’s short story *Interview* is a wonderful literary example of irrational behaviour. A young journalist approaches a famous writer in order to conduct an interview:

- *I hope you don't mind if I do a short interview with you. (...)*
- *Oh well, yes, all right. Ho Hum! Very well. (...) I went to the bookcase and after six or seven minutes of browsing, I felt that it was time to turn round and look at the young man.*
- *How do you spell it?... – I asked.*
- *Spell what?*
- *Interview.*
- *Good Lord! What do you want to write that for?*
- *I don't want to write it, I just want to check what it means!*
- *Hmm, it means, well, I must say, how strange. I can tell you what it means, if you--if you--*
- *Marvellous! That will do for me; I would be most obliged to you.*
- *In: i-n, ter: t-e-r, inter-*
- *So you spell it with an “i”?*
- *Of course.*
- *Aha, that's why I couldn't find it.*
- *Very well, Sir, but what letter did you think it began with?*
- *Oh yes, I... I- well, to tell you the truth, I don't really know. I picked up an encyclopaedia*

*and I started looking from the end, and I thought I would find it in one of the pictures. It's a very old one, you know. (...)*²⁰

After this scene, once the journalist had cooled down a little and explained the meaning of *interview*, he proceeded to ask questions:

- *How old are you?*
- *Nineteen, in June.*
- *You don't say! I would have put it at thirty-five or thirty six! Where were you born?*
- *In Missouri.*
- *When did you start writing?*
- *In 1836.*
- *Really, how can that be possible if you are only nineteen years old?*
- *I don't know. Strange, isn't it?*
- *It certainly is strange.*²¹

The subject of the interview goes on to reveal that he once knew a person he could not possibly have known, and that he even spoke to him while attending his funeral. The journalist's attempts to return the conversation to normality are immediately defeated:

- *Allow me to ask you another question. What day were you born on?*
- *On Monday the 31st of October 1693.*
- *What? Impossible! If that were true, you would be one hundred and eighty years old. How do you explain that?*
- *I have no inclination to explain it.*
- *But you just told me a minute ago that you were only nineteen years old, and now you tell me one hundred and eighty. That's an enormous contradiction!*
- *Aha! So you noticed? (shakes hands). I've often thought it seemed strange, but for some reason I could never work out why. How observant you are!*²²

In this way the journalist, who by now was completely harassed and confused, was forced to

²⁰ M. Twain, *Inter-planetary Travels*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

listen to more absurdities, until he finally gave up the whole idea of an interview, which no doubt was the narrator's original intention.

Why, we may ask, did the journalist not put a stop to this grotesque situation? Why do people so often allow apparently unbalanced individuals to have their own way for so long? Sheldon Kopp, an American psychotherapist, has given a very convincing answer to this question in his book *If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!*²³ He cites the example of the madness of Don Quixote and his down-to-earth companion Sancho Panza to show how difficult it is to define the concepts of health and normality in this case. Sancho is a realist, who only believes in what he can see with his own two eyes, but he accompanies Don Quixote throughout his insane adventures, follows him into the world of illusions, obeys all his whims and orders. All of this is possible, because Sancho's so-called normality is based on greed. Don Quixote has promised to make him the governor of one of the islands which they are sure to conquer in the course of their adventures. The apparently sensible Sancho allows himself to believe that his master knows what he is doing, and lets himself be directed by his irrational behaviour, as the apparently "healthy" desire for wealth and power is one of the factors underlying his master's "sick" illusions.

We may well ask if similar processes are going on in manipulative situations. Is it because of so-called "healthy" motives such as the journalist's "healthy" desire to secure an interview, or the businessman's "healthy" desire to strike a deal, that we allow ourselves to be manipulated by people who appear to be insane? I leave it to the reader to try and answer these questions.

Reorientation

At beginning of 1923 the rate of exchange for the dollar was 7650 German marks; by the beginning of October it had risen to 3 billion, and one month later it was 6 billion marks. The social turmoil caused by hyperinflation was accompanied by the desire to revenge the humiliation of Germany at Versailles in 1919. Adolf Hitler took advantage of the rise in nationalistic feelings by assigning the blame to one group – the Jews, who according to him were in control of the

government of the Weimar Republic. The strategy of picking on a so-called scapegoat was an obvious method of diverting attention from the real causes of a problem; it involves blaming the causes of a conflict on an individual or group (usually a weaker group, a minority) and is known as reorientation.

The use of this strategy goes back a long way. The term scapegoat comes from a religious ceremony described in the Old Testament: “*Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one to be for the Lord and the other for Azazel. He shall present the goat on which the lot of the Lord has fallen and deal with it as a sin-offering; but the goat on which the lot of Azazel has fallen shall be made to stand alive before the Lord, for expiation to be made over it before it is driven away into the wilderness to Azazel. (...) Aaron ...shall bring forward the live goat. He shall lay both his hands on its head and confess over it all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their acts of rebellion, that is all their sins; he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness in the charge of a man who is waiting ready. The goat shall carry all their iniquities upon itself into some barren waste. (...) The man who drove away the goat to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and not till then may he enter the camp.*”²⁴

For the sake of completeness it needs to be added that Azazel was an evil spirit inhabiting the desert. In this case we have no fewer than two “scapegoats”, one to be slaughtered for the sins of the Israelites and sacrificed to God, and the second to be banished to the desert after having all their sins “laid upon its head”. This ritual is not exclusive to the cultures which are rooted in the Old Testament. According to cultural studies, the sacrifice of a scapegoat is one of the most universal features of religious rituals throughout the world and it could even be described as a cultural archetype. Later on, however, it was transformed from a religious ritual to a social technique for the evasion of responsibility in conflicts. As a method of evading responsibility, it is no less popular than it once was as a religious ritual.²⁵ For example, the Ik, an East African tribe living on the

²³ Science and Behaviour Books, Inc., 1972.

²⁴*The New English Bible*, Book of Leviticus from the Old Testament, 16.8-26.

²⁵ The interested reader will find more on this topic in: R. Girard *Kozioł ofiarny (Scapegoat)*. Łódzkie Publishers, Łódź 1987.

borders of Kenya and Uganda, are perfectly familiar with this technique. In his book about the lives and habits of the Ik tribe, C.M. Turnbull has written about one example of this.²⁶ While hunting in the nearby hills, Jana, a member of the tribe, found a stray goat. After killing it, he found a secluded spot where no-one was likely to see him to prepare and cook the goat. Soon afterwards, Jana was joined by several other members of his tribe. Meanwhile, Dodos, another member of the tribe, was on the lookout for his lost goat. When he came upon the fellow members of his tribe in the middle of a feast, the goat had almost been finished. Instead of the usual excuses for such a situation, for example, the goat was dead when they found it, they didn't know who it belonged to, and so on, the Ik tribesmen jumped up the moment Dodos appeared on the scene, swallowed the last morsels, and accused Jana of stealing the goat. After catching him and giving him a sound beating, they threw him on the ground in front of Dodos and told him to take him to the police station.

The search for a scapegoat is the purpose and essence of reorientation, and it is one of the most popular methods for dealing with conflict situations. Picking on one person or group to carry the blame and divert the energies of the conflicting parties is considered to be a very effective strategy. It is often used in politics or in management to pacify dissatisfied social groups or groups of employees. It is interesting that, for manipulation to be effective, the role of the scapegoat should be played by an elite group: this could be an economic elite (for example, the Jews in Nazi Germany), an intellectual elite (for example in post-war Communist Poland), or a powerful ethnic minority. This has to do with the fact that it would be difficult to believe in the power of a weaker group to influence us in a threatening manner or otherwise.

Skilled manipulators anticipate conflicts and select their scapegoat in advance. This is what happened in the case of well-publicised negotiations conducted in 1999 concerning compensation for those forced into slave labour by the Nazis. *According to Wiesław Walendziak, who at that time was the director of the Polish Prime Minister's Office and was in charge of the special negotiating team (...), the initial stages were something of a reconnaissance mission before battle: according to surveys, the Germans would not be prepared to pay compensation to the Poles, and it was not*

²⁶ C. M. Turnbull *The Mountain People*, Touchstone, 1987

worth risking damage to our relations with our western neighbours on account of it. – “That’s why it was decided that I would be in charge of negotiations, so that the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister could be kept in reserve” If talks broke down, it would be possible for Professor Geremek to step in and to blame everything on Walendziak’s youthful inexperience and over-enthusiasm.²⁷

In both political and economic organizations the role of a scapegoat is often played by a spokesman. Experienced spokesmen are fully aware of this possible ending of their careers and take it into account in their career plans. It should be pointed out that the finding of a scapegoat is only a very temporary solution. It tends to involve a strong emotional response from large social groups which tend to be governed by the laws of mob behaviour. The dismissal of a spokesman, for example on the pretext that he made unrealizable promises without authorization, only silences critics for a short while. Reorientation is an ineffective means of resolving conflicts, because conflict will flare up again as soon as the strategy is exposed.

A variant of reorientation is to fabricate or expose a common enemy. The purpose of uniting in joint defence is to gain allies in the battle against a third party. In the case of this method one can usually be sure that after the common enemy has been dealt with, the new-found ally itself will come under attack. Saddam Hussein attempted to use this method, luckily without success, during the Gulf War of 1991. On January 18th, one day after the allies began military operations, Iraq launched SCUD missiles against Israel. The aim of Baghdad was to involve Israel in the war in the hope of splitting the alliance by removing the support of its Arab members. It was obvious that Hussein wanted to gain the support of the Arab world for his aims, and to turn them against Israel and then, perhaps, the coalition. If we bear in mind that Iraq had occupied Kuwait, which is an Arab state, we can well imagine the probable loyalty of the invader to his potential allies. Most likely it was the rapid flow of information and the pressure of public opinion throughout the world – the so-called “global village” – which helped to foil Saddam’s plans.

The search for an external enemy or threat is also a very common strategy for dealing with everyday quarrels. Although conflicts may be subdued for a while as a result, as soon as the threat has gone, they flare up again.

²⁷ Burdzy P. *Miejsce przy stole (At the negotiating table)*. "Polityka" 24, 2000 p. 34-38.

What if?

As a rule, I usually only become aware of an opportunity when it's gone.
M. Twain

Take the following discussion:

- *Good, so we've settled most of the terms of the contract. You've already told us your suggestions about how much the machinery should cost. There's just one more important thing for me to mention. We've got some rather far-reaching plans for development. After fitting out the workshop which we've just shown you, we're going to install machines in the next one. As you can see, there are plenty of opportunities for doing good business with us. What would the price of the machinery be if we ordered it for both workshops right now?*

- *Well, in that case, we could consider giving a discount of... let's say 8%.*

- *Really? In that case I'll let you in on another little secret of ours. According to market research, the market share of our products is expected to go up fairly steeply. In that case, we might need to build yet another workshop next year. Suppose we took these plans into consideration in our contract, would it be possible for you to make any further discounts?*

- *We'd have to look at it more closely.*

- *Of course, I don't want to pressure you into making any decisions right now, but do you suppose we could count on another 8% discount in the situation I've just described?*

- *Maybe not 8%, I guess somewhere in the range of 3 to 5%.*

- *That's great. Listen, I've got a suggestion for you. Seeing as you would be able to lower the prices which we've negotiated for the contract by up to 13% or even a little bit more, why don't we sign a contract for the machinery for one workshop with a discount of 10% on the suggested prices. After all, you'll still be making a profit, won't you?*

Of course, most seasoned businessmen are already familiar with this negotiating ploy. Nevertheless, young and inexperienced negotiators still fall victim to it, and it is also used in political negotiations. It can be employed in discussions, or for example, by making a sending a request for information or proposing a tentative preliminary agreement. If the other party shows willingness to accept the terms of this agreement, the manipulating party will have obtained a much clearer picture of their partners' situation, about their willingness to make concessions and even, as

in the conversation quoted above, about the maximum concession that they might be willing to make. The essential feature of this method is taking over control of the discussions, and it becomes all the easier when the emotions of the negotiating partner come into play; we can imagine the excited response of an inexperienced negotiator in the above conversation. In the words of Mickiewicz, “the fox is in the garden and meeting the goose...”.

Learned helplessness

When I began writing this book, it never occurred to me that it would include a section on learned helplessness. After all, I have studied this phenomenon together with its mechanisms and consequences for several years. So why did I decide to include this section, even though it is not what I (or many others who are familiar with the topic) would have expected? When I was doing research into learned helplessness, I never imagined that this mechanism could be used for manipulative purposes. It was only while working on this book that I analysed the “brain-washing” methods used in Chinese prison camps and realized that classic examples of helplessness training were used there. From there, I went on to conclude that the method was not only used in prison camps. In my opinion, it is also used by various types of totalitarian systems, and also in a much more subtle form by employers, by inspectors in the course of their work, and also by husbands and wives in relation to each other or to their children.

Let us begin with an introduction to the phenomenon. In 1967 Martin Seligman and Steven Maier published a paper with the results of the first research into learned helplessness in animals.²⁸ As so often happens with scientific discoveries, chance played a major role in their work. They found that dogs which had been subjected to moderate electric shocks in experiments on classical conditioning over a longer period could no longer be used for research. The problem was that the dogs developed a certain apathy, and were no longer able to learn; their only response was fear. After observing this fact and interpreting its significance, Martin Seligman devised a precise experiment to determine if the dogs became “untrainable” by chance or as the result of a specific

²⁸ Seligman, M. E. P., & Maier, S. F. (1967). Failure to escape traumatic shock. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 74, 1-9.

process of learning about the lack of a connection between an action and its consequences. To do this the dogs were placed in cages, in which they were subjected to electric shocks. The dogs in one of the groups in the experiment could avoid this by pressing a board in their cages with their noses. They had, therefore, an opportunity to learn how to avoid getting electric shocks. A second group had no possibility of influencing the unpleasant stimulus – this was described by the authors of the experiment as a helplessness training procedure. A third group, the so-called control group, was not subjected to any shocks at all. After the first phase of the experiment, came the second phase, in which the dogs were placed in cages containing a low barrier. Once again, the dogs were subjected to electric shocks. The dogs from the first group quickly discovered that it was possible to avoid the unpleasant stimulus by jumping over the barrier. The dogs from the control group also discovered this possibility after a few seconds. Only the dogs from the second group which had not been given the option of preventing the stimulus did not learn to jump over the barrier, but only lay on the ground and whimpered with pain. The authors named this response (or rather, lack of response) learned helplessness.

This experiment was soon followed by others on the same phenomenon, some of which involved human subjects. In one of the earliest and simplest experiments, people were placed in a room in which they were subjected to a loud and unpleasant noise from loudspeakers. Each of the people in the experiment was sitting in front of a “control panel” with numerous buttons and lamps. They were instructed to find the button or combination of buttons which would switch off the loudspeakers. In fact, however, there was no such possibility. The subjects of the experiment spent the whole time looking for the off switch, without success. Another group had the possibility of switching off the unpleasant noise, and most of them succeeded in doing so. In the second stage of the experiment, the subjects were removed to a second room, in which they were once again subjected to an unpleasant noise, which they could switch off by putting their hand in the right place. It turned out that the people in this experiment behaved just like the dogs described previously! Most of those who had failed to switch the noise off during the first stage made no attempt whatsoever to do so now. The others very quickly learned how to switch it off.

Since then, there have been thousands of experiments on learned helplessness, and several

significant attempts to find a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon. Some of these have been applied to therapy and to education, and even to sports and politics. This is neither the time nor the place to give a detailed account of them; I intend to confine myself to describing a fairly simple theory which accounts for human behaviour in situations where the connection between stimulus and behaviour is absent, and from there to explaining how these psychological mechanisms can be used for manipulative purposes.

What happens to a person in a situation of helplessness? In a situation where none of his actions has any effect, a person reaches the conclusion that he has no control over events, and there is no connection between his behaviour and what happens to him. As a result he comes to expect that in the future he will continue to have no control and that the connection between his behaviour and events will continue to be absent. He begins to display the following symptoms of helplessness:

- decreased motivation for further action,
- impaired ability to learn about new connections between phenomena, decreased effectiveness of his intellectual functions,
- emotional disturbances resulting in depression, fear, hostility, and sometimes increased anxiety.

In extreme cases the feeling of helplessness can develop into a reactive depression.

The scientific term for subjecting people to situations over which they have no control is helplessness training, and when it is performed intensively, it often leads to generalization of the feeling of helplessness. This means that, for example, someone who has tried and clearly failed to learn foreign languages on several occasions may begin to generalize his lack of success in this area to learning all kinds of new skills and will no longer undertake any such activities.

How can the mechanism of helplessness be used for manipulative purposes? Any reader who had the dubious pleasure of arranging anything in Polish government offices during the eighties or earlier was definitely subjected to helplessness training. If we take a close look at some institutions, we will also find many present-day examples. As a reminder of what people used to be subjected to, I would like to invite you to read a description of an experiment conducted by D. C. Glass and J. E. Singer²⁹. Although it was conducted in the United States, it is a perfect illustration of how this

²⁹D. C. Glass, J. E. Singer *Urban stress: Experiments on noise and social stressors*. Academic Press, New York 1972.

kind of manipulation works.

After arriving at the place where the experiment was to be conducted, the people taking part in it were subjected to the kind of bureaucratic procedure which many of us have to undergo daily. First they were directed by a notice on the door to contact the organizer's assistant and fill out several forms before proceeding to the experiment itself. Then they had to go to another building, where they found the assistant in charge. There they were given a very long form to fill out with questions about the full names and addresses of relatives, which schools they attended, and so on. Some of the questions on the form were repeated, and the spaces for writing the answers were not big enough. After the subject of the experiment had filled out this ridiculous form he handed it in to the assistant for checking, only to be told that it had not been filled out properly and that he would have to do it again, usually on the grounds that he had written on the margins or used abbreviations. No sooner had he finished filling out the form a second time than the phone (a fake one, of course) rang. The assistant answered it and spent the next few minutes discussing some entirely personal matters on the phone. After checking the form again, he sent the subject of the experiment to another building, where he was subjected to tests and questionnaires to find out the effects of this bureaucratic "adventure" on people. Most of the participants who completed all the stages of the helplessness training felt annoyed, depressed and inclined not to continue with the experiment.

Each of us has experienced the same kind of treatment, many times. Wherever there is bureaucracy, this method will be used by officials as a private tactic in their battles with petitioners. The treatment of Polish tax payers by the Inland Revenue is a perfect example. *Surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Study Centre show that three years ago, 49% of those questioned had problems with filling out their income tax returns. Two years ago, this figure had risen to 61%, while last year's income tax declaration turned out to be too difficult for as many as 71% of tax payers*³⁰. I dread to think what will happen in the future, what kind of helplessness bureaucrats will inflict on us. Bureaucratic practices of this type have become so widespread that it has become a matter for psychotherapy. At the 17th International Psychotherapy Congress, which took place in 1998 in Warsaw, two Canadian psychologists – Maria Koczorowska and Jan Jekielek – presented

³⁰ *Głowa w PIT (Dealing with your income tax returns)*. "Polityka" 24, 2000, p. 59.

a paper about methods of dealing with the invisible forces of officialdom, manifested in the neglect or ignoring of petitioners. It was shown that the victims of these forces displayed all the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder! Among other methods of dealing with them, the authors suggested engaging in a “paper war”: sending two pages in reply to a one-page official letter, four pages in reply to a two-page letter – not forgetting to enclose copies of all previous letters together with their enclosures. To use the terminology of research into learned helplessness, this is a way of showing that we have not yet acquired a conviction of our lack of control of the situation; on the contrary, by sending ever-longer letters with ever-increasing attachments we can demonstrate that we have very good control of the situation.

Now, however, it is time to turn our attention to the strategies of extreme manipulation which were the reason for me to include this section in the book. The procedure known as brain-washing or thought control, used on the most recalcitrant inmates of Chinese prison camps, involved an extreme form of helplessness training, among other methods. These prisoners were prevented from undertaking any activities independently, including eating or defecating. They were assisted, fed, washed and cleaned after defecation by fellow prisoners who had proved to be more receptive to modification of their opinions. After a long period of complete dependence, the victim became totally convinced of his helplessness and dependence on others, and became strongly attached to them. When he was allowed to move freely again, he was no longer capable of undertaking any activity without first asking for permission. His condition of dependence remained, which meant that he was much more inclined to adopt the opinions of those on whom he had been dependent for so long³¹. Hard as it is to believe, history shows that even less extreme (but more prolonged) helplessness training can induce a similarly strong state of dependence. Take the following example: *After Stalin died, there was a special assembly of the prisoners in the Labour Camp at Libiąż, in the Jaworznicki Coalfields. Most of them were members of the intelligentsia, and many of them had been party activists or officers, condemned to forced labour in the “Janina” mine, in the damp and inhuman conditions of what had been a subsidiary of the German concentration camp in Auschwitz. After the announcement, many of the prisoners started to cry, and some even began to express their*

31 R. Waelder *Demoralisation and Reeducation*. "World Politics" 14, 1962.

*fears of having to manage without him. These were prisoners with heavy and undeserved sentences, whose lives had been destroyed, whose future, and to some extent even their past, had been taken away from them, whose dignity had been trampled on, and these were the people who were worrying about what would happen to the world without Joseph Stalin.*³²

This extreme variant of learned helplessness is known as *Homo sovieticus*. It describes a man who can only feel free when he is not free. He has accepted the lack of freedom as an inevitable feature of human society, and is satisfied with his role in it. He is the hero of George Orwell's *1984*, who has learned to love his executioner, and he is any one of us who has had enough of responsibility for his own life and feels nostalgia for the times when someone else made decisions for us, leaving us only with the hope to survive.

Let us turn our attention from these dramatic situations to other, more routine cases which we can encounter in everyday life. I myself am the victim of a certain company, which has made me dependent on them and created a strong feeling of helplessness. To make things worse I am fully aware of the situation, but still allow myself to be manipulated. The only comfort is that millions of other people have been manipulated by the same company, and many of them are not even aware of it! No, I am not talking about cigarette manufacturers, nor about Coca-Cola, nor McDonald's, nor even about coffee manufacturers.

Microsoft is the company which, in the guise of doing good, has made millions of people dependent on it, to the extent that without it not even these humble sentences would be able to reach the reader. Although my story is fairly mundane, it is definitely an example of this rather underhand kind of manipulation. *Exempla docent*, as the Latin saying has it.

A long, long time ago, when the world was still dominated by XT-type computers, and AT computers were just beginning to make a first, hesitant appearance, there once was a kind-hearted DOS – an operating system which only got stuck when infected by a virus – a rare occurrence in those days. Like many others, I used my computer mainly for writing or for calculations. The word-processing programs of those times had a fairly limited range of functions compared to today's programmes, but they worked well enough, and it was possible to read a text in Word Perfect format

³² K. Obuchowski *Człowiek intencjonalny (A Man with Intentions)*. Warszawa PWN 1993, p. 154.

using other word processors or vice-versa without any particular difficulties. However, computer “geniuses” set to work and came up with Windows, a “revolutionary” operating system, which was supposed to make computers accessible to all. For a while, I observed these technological innovations with the mild conservatism which is a characteristic of mine. Only for a while, because it soon emerged that one publisher after the other was no longer able to read texts written by me. The “revolutionary” Windows could not manage the texts written in DOS, nor could not do it the people who used Windows. What could I do? With a few suppressed oaths I acquired a new computer, installed the hapless Windows system, and learned how to use the new word-processing programme, which was of course Word. And that is when it all began. Whereas before the computer only froze occasionally, when there was something seriously wrong, now it started to do it all the time, as if it felt it had a right to do so. While using the new word-processing programme, I began to increasingly curse its inventors, who surely never actually had to use their own invention. I got used to part of my work getting lost whenever the system broke down. However, the “geniuses” from Microsoft did not rest on their laurels. Their next product was another hybrid system, Windows 95, followed by Windows 98, Windows 2000, and Windows XP. Nowadays it has become a reflex action of mine to press the Ctrl and S keys every few minutes in order not to lose my work. Any situation in which the system is not paralysed at least once a day has come to seem strange for me. I have become an advanced user of programming tools. I have become as suspicious as a detective, checking everything for viruses, making back-up copies of everything possible, checking suspicious files, scanning and defragmenting discs, and yet at least once every few months I end up with a complete feeling of helplessness in the computer repair shop, where I am advised to start all over again by re-installing the whole system! To begin with, I went through phases of aggression, protest, and finally apathy, as my helplessness developed. I use programmes which I dislike, I am always adding to the RAM memory, and from time to time I have to change the microprocessor. Somewhere deep down I continue to hope that some other system, maybe LINUX, maybe BeOS, will come to the rescue. I am behaving like the dogs in the experiment which didn’t even try to avoid an unpleasant stimulus, or the people who made no attempt to switch an unpleasant noise off. However, I suspect that this is only a phase in an experiment conducted by the company which is manipulating

me, and although at present I still have no possibility of avoiding the unpleasant situation, I hope I will be able to sense the moment when I am at last able to jump over the barrier (as the dogs did in Seligman's experiment).

The creation of a sense of helplessness can also be observed in long-term human relationships, for example between husband and wife, parents and children, boss and subordinates, teacher and students, and it often occurs with the consent of the person who is being manipulated. Let us look at the relationship between husband and wife. Suppose the husband is a determined, protective person who likes to be in control of his environment. This state of affairs suits his wife, as there is no need for her to make difficult decisions or deal with complicated problems. Maybe by "acting dumb" she manages to get out of some of her chores. As a result of this, her husband takes over control of the household expenses, deals with the tax returns, takes most of the decisions, and is responsible for operating most of the technical appliances in the house. After a while, however, the wife starts to be bothered by her lack of freedom. When it starts getting cold in the autumn, she decides in the absence of her husband to switch the central heating system on and programme it. As she lacks the relevant knowledge and experience, she makes a mess of it and the result is an emergency situation. When her husband comes back from his business trip he finds out what happened and makes a big deal of it. Time passes by and once again the wife summons up the courage to make a decision on her own. One of her friends has a husband who is an insurance salesman. She takes out some insurance. Unfortunately, the insurance company which she has taken out a policy with has financial problems, and in any case her husband already signed a policy in her name with a different company a long time ago. Another fiasco, leading to more tension at home, more reproaches and more accusations. It is enough for situations like this to be repeated several times for helplessness to set in. It is true that in this case the victim herself contributed to this process. However, in some other situations, the victims (for example children or subordinates) are not aware of what is going on, and the manipulating party aggravates the situation by concealing information or distorting the facts in order to reduce the victim to helplessness and dependence on him.

The scenario procedure

Suppose that salesmen for a cable television company come to your street. Their job is to persuade as many people as possible to try cable TV out and to pay for its installation. Of course, different salesmen have different techniques for presenting the product. Your neighbour is visited by one of them, who gives a matter-of-fact description of the advantages of cable TV, something like this: *Cable TV is a modern way of accessing information. People who have cable TV can choose the programmes which interest them most. With cable TV you can watch the best films, you can watch cultural programmes, you have constant access to news about current affairs and sports, you can also choose stations with the type of music which interests you, etc.* Your house is visited by a salesman who has a somewhat different approach to the same product. His presentation goes something like this: *Just imagine that you have cable TV in your house. You know how the state TV channels always show the same old boring repeats of game shows and soap operas – with cable TV you can choose any programme you like. If you want to watch a film, just switch on the film channel, or if you want to relax by listening to music, just press the button to switch to a different channel. Don't forget that you can choose the news channel with the most objective coverage of current affairs, etc.*

Which salesman do you think has the best chance of selling cable TV to someone? Does a potential customer make a rational decision, or is he influenced by presentation of a product? Think about it for a moment, try to imagine how people, including yourself, react in a situation like this, and then read about the following real-life psychological experiment.

In 1982, a group of three social psychologists carried out an experiment, with the consent of a local TV provider, to measure the effectiveness of different types of persuasion.³³ Information on cable TV was presented to residents of a suburban area, chosen at random. The information was presented in one of two possible ways, exactly as described above. Did it make any difference to the decisions taken by the persons subjected to this procedure? Take a look at table no. 5.

Table 5. Percentages of people who were persuaded by information presented as a scenario.

³³ Gregory W. L., Cialdini R. B., Carpenter K. M., *Self-relevant scenarios as mediators of likelihood estimates and compliance: Does imagining make it so?* "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1982, vol. 43 pp. 89-99.

Type of decision	Information presented in traditional form	Information presented in the form of a scenario: <i>Just imagine...</i>
Agreed to try out cable TV for one week, free of charge	41%	66%
Agreed to pay for installation of cable TV	19%	47%

How could such an apparently small difference in presentation make such a difference in the making of a decision, and by no means a trivial one? How can this phenomenon be explained? It is the result of a simple manipulative process, which in this case involves our imagination. In order to explain it, we need to look into the research on decision making processes and information processing.

Ten years earlier, researchers on this subject had already discovered the so-called rule of mental accessibility. What does it mean? If we were to ask the average person to estimate the probabilities of dying from flooding, aeroplane crashes, blood poisoning, asthma or heart attack, we would find that causes of death such as blood poisoning, asthma or heart attack are considered to be much less probable than they actually are, whereas the probabilities of death from floods, aeroplane crashes and other dramatic incidents are considerably over-rated. Why is this so? Deaths from asthma are rarely publicized, except in the case of some important person. People die of blood poisoning out of the limelight, in hospital, and deaths from heart attacks do not feature in the media either. On the other hand, the floods which afflicted Poland in 1997 received a lot of publicity, particularly in Europe. At the time I was living in Germany, and I was able to get live coverage of the events on any news programme. Any major air crash is reported on all the Polish TV and radio stations, likewise in other countries. As a result, we get used to the fact that deaths are caused when aeroplanes crash, rivers burst their banks and overflow, but we do not have the possibility of familiarizing ourselves with deaths from asthma, blood poisoning or heart attacks. Even if we do hear about such deaths, we do not give them the attention they deserve. Somehow, the information about casualties of flooding is in the forefront of our minds – this is what psychologists refer to as

mental accessibility. Vivid memories, dramatic events and the emotions involved make some kinds of events more accessible than others, which in turn can cause misleading perceptions of reality. The phenomenon has been proven by many experiments. What does it have to do with the manipulation which we described at the beginning of this section?

Imagining a scenario with oneself in the starring role has the effect of making an event more mentally accessible, for example we gradually assimilate a vision of ourselves with cable TV in the house. Having cable TV comes to seem a lot more probable than before. When a salesman comes and suggests that we pay to have it installed, we are much more inclined to agree than before our imagination got to work.

Now perhaps the reader can understand why in so many advertisements a warm and gentle voice invites one to: *Imagine that.... think what would happen if...*

MANIPULATIVE TECHNIQUES BASED ON INSTINCTIVE REACTIONS

Our behaviour is not only controlled by our consciousness. Despite our development both as individuals and social beings, we still have many evolutionary hangovers which cause us to act instinctively in a variety of situations. Our instincts act as a kind of auto-pilot and can often be useful, for example, if we and other people are trying to escape from an emergency situation in an unfamiliar place. They can, however, be exploited by manipulators, especially our instinctive obedience towards authority, our instinct for the mutuality of interests, and our instinctive restraint from aggression.

The clearest illustration of obedience towards authority is the Biblical story of Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac when called upon to do so by God. The extent to which this instinct can be used for manipulative purposes has been demonstrated by Milgram's horrifying experiments, and also by the experiences of the Second World War and examples of people committing genocide "under orders".

Mutuality is a no less powerful instinct, even if its results are less dramatic. Although it facilitates social life, it is liable to exploitation by salesmen, negotiators, collectors of money for charities, religious sects and, of course, our relatives.

The third manipulative mechanism makes use of our instinct to restrain ourselves from aggression, as a result of which we are vulnerable to self-deprecatory techniques. In this chapter, I will attempt to explain the origins of this instinct, and also how it can be used for underhand purposes.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES CONCERNING MANIPULATION

Terms such as brain-washing, hypnosis and subliminal persuasion arouse a strong emotional response. The purpose of this chapter is to disperse some of the myths, prejudices and straightforward lies surrounding these phenomena by examining them from the perspective of contemporary experimental psychology. In my analysis of brainwashing, I will refer to the activities of religious sects (with results such as the ritual suicide of 913 people in Jonestown) and terrorist organizations, as well as the techniques used in Chinese prison camps. I will also present the phenomenon from the perspective of the American Psychological Association and the research which it has commissioned on this subject. My analysis will not be confined to describing the effects of brain-washing; I will also analyse how it exploits basic mental processes and particular manipulative techniques.

Another widespread myth concerns the use of hypnosis as a manipulative technique. There is no doubt that literary works on this subject and the films based on them have contributed to such misconceptions. As hypnosis has been the subject of serious scientific research for several decades, I propose to examine it from this perspective in order to evaluate some of the prevailing ideas on the topic.

The final section of the chapter is devoted to reflections on the subject of subliminal persuasion. The myth of the power of subliminal persuasion was originated by James Vicary and has been eagerly subscribed to by generations of advertising specialists. Why has it found such wide currency? Mainly because there is a lot of money to be made from the belief in a strange and mysterious method of manipulating consumers' senses. The chapter includes some facts which demonstrate the falsity of the myth.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RESISTING MANIPULATION

As the main purpose of this book is to enable the reader both to recognise manipulative techniques and to protect himself against them, the longest chapter of this book is devoted to a description of natural protective mechanisms as well as some techniques which one can use to prevent oneself from being manipulated.

One of the mechanisms which enables us to defend ourselves is habituation, in other words, we get used to stimuli which we have been exposed to for a long time. The same instinct to refrain from aggression which is often manipulated for underhand purposes can also assist in protection. Empathy is another mechanism which plays a significant role in manipulative situations. Reactance, which is a typical response in a situation where someone is trying to limit our choices, is also an important defence against manipulation.

Similarly self-esteem, often exploited for manipulative purposes, can also assist in our defence, together with other personality traits.

A separate section is devoted to techniques for dealing with manipulation. These are explained with the help of examples and can be used in many manipulative situations, provided that the reader takes the trouble to learn about them and, in some cases, to practise them.