

Ingrid Rottinghuis

# On Manipulating Others



If we believe that no man should live under the dominance of another, we must be able to recognize signs of subtle manipulation of human beings in ourselves and others. Sometimes as we manipulate or are being manipulated, we may vaguely sense what is going on, but do not consciously realize the implications.

Among our most important human relationships are those with our marriage partner, our children and our friends.

Aren't we all familiar with the situation where a person tries to leave a party early, for whatever personal reason, but meets ardent protests? "You can't be the first to go home and start breaking up the party! Come on, be a good sport, have another drink, stay with us!" Apparently, our host is warm and

hospitable. On second thought, we may be dealing with an overbearing person who manipulates others by vaguely suggesting that the leaving guest is more of a kill-joy or spoilsport than a friend.

When we are imposing extremely high standards on our child and expect excellent performance in all fields, we may think that we are encouraging him to unfold his potentiality. But we may be unknowingly brutal in our great expectations and we may be displaying a deep disrespect for him as a person. We have the power to manipulate a child, by giving love and approval, or by withholding it. We may, in the process, be directing his life into "serving his parents' desire" for his greatness, thus building a compulsive perfectionism into the child's character.

We also should learn to recognize the means by which our children try to manipulate us into catering to

---

Mrs. Rottinghuis-Fischer is a mother and part-time student. She and her husband are currently representing a Dutch Company in the United States.

them. Is our child really too young to learn to tie his own shoelaces, or are we being manipulated by what seems a charming display of helplessness or cuteness? Children are clever at the "art of manipulation" and discover in infancy what kind of behavior will make us run to their rescue. We have to care for our children and attend to them; but we also have the responsibility of raising them toward independence.

Do we borrow sugar from the neighbors because we are too lazy to run an errand, or do we restrain our borrowing habits, which may be imposing on others? And do the neighbors send their children to us whenever they want their hands free? "You are such a wonderful mother! My children adore you and love to play with your youngsters on that marvelous equipment in your yard. You really have a way with children. Of course you have more time for them, while I have my hands full with four small ones." Are we being paid a compliment, or are we flattered into carrying another person's load?

Perhaps a wife wants to apply for a paying job when her children have reached school-age. Her husband discourages her in every possible way, by pointing out that he has a handsome salary and that children sometimes do have colds and other ailments, or snow-days off from

school. Does she have a concerned husband? Chances are that he may indeed be very concerned for the children, and that he is offering to be financially responsible for her, so that she can enjoy a luxurious life. But it may be that he unconsciously resists the idea of a financially independent wife, who unfolds her talents outside the home, instead of being always available to serve the family, to make their beds, iron their shirts, cook their meals. Maybe he is manipulating her by using the children as an excuse, instead of helping find solutions for snow-days and sickness and encouraging her to build a life of her own.

Libertarian philosophy can have far-reaching implications!

A wife who urges career ambitions on her husband might be motivated by the noble wish for him to unfold his talents. Or, again, she might be manipulating him into competing with the Joneses.

Do we have the courage to give a friendly but firm "no" to aggressive fund-raisers on the telephone or on our doorstep, or are we manipulated into giving our money out of fear of being disliked or appearing avaricious?

And can we take "no" for an answer, without offense, when others turn down our demands?

Are we our own master, or the slave of public opinion or inner compulsion?

Do we respect the fact that other people want to be their own master, pursue self-interest and live by their own values and that our friends and relatives are not living on earth just to do us favors?

A voluntary and friendly exchange of services is a nice way of cooperation as long as we do not take each other for granted or think in terms of duties. A grandmother may be very willing to babysit for us, but it is not her duty.

Even the tiniest infant, who is completely dependent on us, has a "self" which should be respected. If we lift our baby from its cradle for every admiring visitor, we disrespect the child's need for undisturbed sleep. A child is not an object, not our property.

Equality does not mean that children have a right to unrestricted freedom. We often mistake license for freedom. While trying to be "modern" parents, we sometimes tolerate children with deplorable manners, loud demands for attention and tantrums whenever they are refused something. Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs writes in his book, *Children: The Challenge*: "Equality means that people, despite all their individual differences and abilities, have equal claims to dignity and respect."

This word "people" includes children, the very aged, the handicapped and all those who cannot be

expected to live without our help and guidance.

People who cannot live "free" under the authority of their own self-discipline, because of mental disability, immaturity, senility or whatever other reasons, cannot make a claim to the same amount of freedom enjoyed by mature and responsible citizens. But they do have a claim to dignity and respect and such freedom as they can handle, such degree of independence as is within their limits. In that sense, "equality" stretches out to include those who *have* to live under the authority of others.

Authority can be wise leadership and counseling, respectful of the human nature, the *individual nature*, of those under guidance. Authority can also mean overbearing dominance, which must lead to rebellion and an urge to break away from authority.

The book I've quoted, *Children: The Challenge* by Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D., and Vicki Soltz, R.N. (Hawthorn Books, Inc.) is one I've found especially useful as a guide in helping children grow toward adulthood, responsibility, self-respect and respect for others. Beyond that, it has challenged me to review my relationships with all fellow beings. To be free of manipulation by others, we must refrain from manipulating their lives. ☉

# THE WAR AGAINST PROGRESS

IN the old days we used to start things and clean up afterwards. Now, for fear that there might be something unforeseen to clean up, we argue interminably. It is coming to take ten or more years to get "yes" on a project, and even then the possibilities of court action are not exhausted. Herbert E. Meyer calls it *The War Against Progress* in a book of that title (Storm Publishers, Inc., 4 East Main St., Box 252, Middletown, N.Y. 10940, 195 pp., \$11.95). He can't quite bring himself to recommend going back to the old ways, but he does think a happy medium could be struck.

The difficulty of reaching a happy medium is that the war against progress consists of hundreds of battles that seem unconnected. As Mr. Meyer says, no single battle is especially dangerous by itself. But when the battles are all added up, the wallop is significant. Mr. Meyer likens it to a bleeding that comes from

a thousand tiny cuts. It could kill a man.

Mr. Meyer describes some of the single battles. There is a fierce one now raging in Alaska. Since Alaska is relatively unpopulated, its citizens don't have much argumentative clout. The federal government owns most of the land, and the rules can be made by a distant landlord. Environmentalists in the lower forty-eight states who will never visit Alaska can set the tone in Washington, D.C. So we have a bill that would set aside 125 million acres of Alaska territory for parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, scenic rivers and plain "wilderness." This latter is a special category that would prohibit the building of roads of access, so not even the hardest outdoorsman would have much of a chance to taste a bit of wilderness life.

What the enthusiasts of caribou and grizzly bears do not see is the