

## COMMENTARY ON KAMPHORST AND KALIS

by Daniel DENNETT (Medford)<sup>7</sup>

In my essay, I argue that a condition for free will is absence of manipulation by another agent (the puppeteer, in effect) and point out that causation of one's decision by events in the environment does not in itself constitute manipulation. Kamphorst and Kalis see a shortcoming in my attempt to demonstrate this. The technologies of manipulation are getting ever better, and mere awareness of this fact does not show that we can always appreciate the risks of underestimating the degree of manipulation of our most 'rational' choices.

They are right that I should have stressed this point. There is an arms race of techniques of persuasion — an arms race as old as human interaction. Anybody who falls seriously behind in their defenses is likely to be manipulated, and to that extent will not be a genuinely free and autonomous agent. Part of moral responsibility, I claim, is taking responsibility for protecting yourself from the guiles of propagandists, rhetoricians and con men. Most children can count on getting quite specific training and warnings about this in their youth, so that by the time they are of age, they are well enough equipped — and poised to update their equipment as novelties are introduced — to be held, and to hold themselves, responsible. Whether we excuse them from responsibility in cases where they are seriously misled is a matter of negotiation. There is no foolproof defense against covert manipulation, but that does not diminish the requirement; it just obliges us to recognize that we are always in jeopardy of being less autonomous than we feel at the time. Still, we need not be paranoid about this; we can wisely apportion our vigilance, taking extra precautions when deciding about matters of ultimate concern, while nonchalantly making the minor decisions — like which cereal to buy — with minimal attention to security. The law is well-equipped with standard language about how vigilant the normal responsible individual is expected to be, and makes special cases out of those who should be held to higher standards. Strict liability laws for pharmacists, for instance, mean that they do *not* get to plead ignorance that other folks can use as an excusing or partially exculpating condition. If you don't want to be held to this higher standard, don't make pharmacy your life's work.

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