

Public Lecture 7, 2018

“Social Engineering”

Lubica Ucnik
Philosophy
Murdoch University

Edward L. Bernays. “The Engineering of Consent”

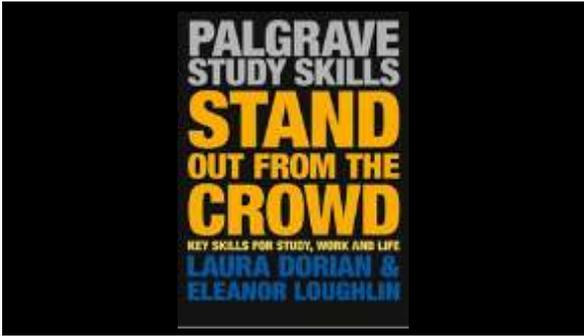
[A] first element in molding public opinion...[is] How can the propagandist reach ... groups who make up the large public? He can reach them through their leaders, for the individual looks for leadership to the leaders of the groups to which he belongs. ...a second factor must be borne in mind by the propagandist. What are the great basic motivations of people, wherever they are and to whatever groups they belong? Self-preservation, ambition, pride, hunger, love of family and children, patriotism, imitativeness, the desire to be a leader, love of play – these and others are the psychological raw materials of which every leader must be aware in his endeavor to win the public to his point of view (Bernays, 1935, 83)

This paper has attempted to give a dispassionate outline of the techniques and the media involved in the molding of public opinion by any group. No attempt has been made to discuss the social significance of this new development in our complex civilization (Bernays, 1935, 87)

“media provide open doors to the public mind”

“Freedom of speech and its democratic corollary, a free press, have tacitly expanded our Bill of Rights to include the right of persuasion. ... All these media provide open doors to the public mind. Any one of us through these media may influence the attitudes and actions of our fellow citizens” (Bernays, 1947, 113)

“...leaders, with the aid of technicians in the field who have specialized in utilizing the channels of communication, have been able to accomplish purposefully and scientifically what we have termed ‘the engineering of consent’” (Bernays, 1947, 114)



Strange History of Ideas – related not only to ‘standing out of crowd’ or ‘engineering of consent’...

Let me start with a few ‘groundbreaking’ examples...

First – the beauty of our current language

- Create a sense of urgency; Sustain acceleration; Enable action by removing the barriers; Form a strategic vision and initiatives.....
- [Low hanging fruit](#); [High hanging fruit](#) or [Quick wins](#)
- [Pushing the envelope](#) by testing limits and trying out new, often radical ideas
- Avoid box thinking and think outside the box
- [Share the best practice](#)
- Use [performance metrics](#) and [benchmark to improve performance](#)
- Take proactive steps to provide solutions for a changing terrain
- Be proactive by bringing things to the table while brainstorming (or [take idea showers](#))....
- Magnify your vision from being traditionally “linear” to “circular vision or 360 degrees”
- Prepare transformation roadmaps, medium term initiatives, or long term initiatives, or even transformational initiatives
- [Increase the bottom line](#), or, even better, broaden a business’ focus on the financial bottom line to include social and environmental considerations, called [TBL](#) (the triple bottom line)

Why you need quick wins when leading change in your team?

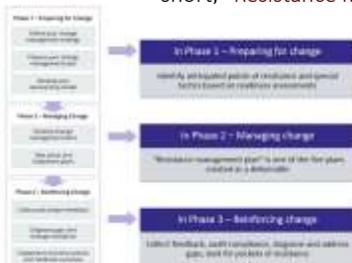
“Making changes within a team is always challenging...[and] difficult because there are so many reasons why things could just stay the same”.

- Why quick wins are important to leading change
 - Leading change requires quick wins to show that it's possible
 - Leading change requires quick wins to build momentum
 - Leading change requires quick wins to celebrate

“Master the language of change”

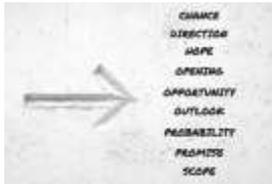


Change Management Process: or, in short, “Resistance Management”



Tool 4: Your mental toughness [is] also called resilience

In short, "mental toughness is a must when you are selling change because you are dealing with adversity and crisis during a process that can be draining".



“dealing with adversity and crisis”

Perhaps, one should ask, is the managerial “adversity and crisis” the same as the one we have tried to discuss in our series: “*Crisis of Modern Self and Society*”?

Here, at the end of our series, I want to reflect on speakers of “adversity and crisis” not only, or not even primarily, in ‘administrative leadership’ or ‘management consultancy’, but, rather, to look at the market discipline imposed on all domains of our lives supported by solutions presented by the power of Big Tech.

How did we get to this supposedly unpreventable historical moment that seems like being driven by forces of nature or history?

So, let me ask:

Why change is necessary and why do we need to change perpetually? Is it really our only 'option'?

We live in a time of unprecedented changes...

- “a change from industrial production to post-industrial processes and services
- a change from analogue to digital media
- a change from a print-based culture to a global society unified by the instantaneous circulation of data and information” (Crary, 2014, 35).

This inevitability of change is presented as an unavoidable ‘evolution of societies’, the unstoppable historical progress, or, simply, as “facts of nature” (Crary, 2014, 36).

One might even say that this process of change is basically driven by the laws of nature or history to which we must adapt if we do not want to be left behind, crying on rocks of irrelevancy.

Jonathan Crary reminds us also that by enumerating all those changes, one ‘change’ is conspicuous by its absence – “the most important techniques invented in the last 150 years: the various systems for the management and control of human beings” (Crary, 2014, 36).

“The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. ...[because] it is sometimes impossible to reach joint decisions based on an understanding of facts by all the people. The average American adult has only six years of schooling behind him. With pressing crises and decisions to be faced, a leader frequently cannot wait for the people to arrive at even general understanding. In certain cases, democratic leaders must play their part in leading the public through the engineering of consent to socially constructive goals and values. [They must use all] available techniques, to bring about as complete an understanding as possible” (Bernays, 1947, 114)

“Primarily... the engineer of consent must create news. News is not an inanimate thing. It is the overt act that makes news, and news in turn shapes the attitudes and actions of people. ... The developing of events and circumstances that are not routine is one of the basic functions of the engineer of consent....

...Newsworthy events, involving people, usually do not happen by accident. They are planned deliberately to accomplish a purpose, to influence our ideas and actions.

Events may also be set up in chain reaction. ...the engineer of consent can stimulate them to set in motion activities of their own. They will organize additional, specialized, subsidiary events, all of which will further dramatize the basic theme” (Bernays, 1947, 119)

“Words, sounds, and pictures accomplish little unless they are the tools of a soundly thought-out plan and carefully organized methods. If the plans are well formulated and the proper use is made of them, the ideas conveyed by the words will become part and parcel of the people themselves....But such results do not just happen. In a democracy they can be accomplished principally by the engineering of consent” (Bernays, 1947, 120)

Who needs conspiracy theories!

From the *method* of modern science to management of society

In order to understand this trajectory – let us consider the history of thinking that until recently framed our understanding...and, at the present, is undergoing mutation

We need to realise that it *does not have to be this way* – because “nothing [is] settled”

Whitehead: "Nothing was settled, though much was opened"

"The sixteenth century of our era saw the disruption of Western Christianity and the rise of modern science. It was an age of ferment. **Nothing was settled, though much was opened – new worlds and new ideas**" (Whitehead, 1925, 1).

"[Thinkers of Renaissance] maintained that they were only restoring what had been forgotten. It is quite otherwise with the rise of modern science. In every way it contrasts with the contemporary religious movement. **The Reformation was a popular uprising, and for a century and a half drenched Europe in blood**" (Whitehead, 1925, 2).

"Since a babe was born in a manger, it may be doubted whether so great a thing has happened with so little stir. ...**this quiet growth of science** has practically recoloured our mentality so that modes of thought which in former times were exceptional, are now broadly spread through the educated world"

(Whitehead, 1925, 3).

The Modern Way of Thinking: Leading to the Enlightenment

- **The Renaissance:** return to the thinking of the Ancient Greeks – formulating the 'new' conception of humanism
- **The Reformation:** Questioning the Catholic Church' *interpretation* of the bible – freedom of thinking relating to a God (freedom of conscience)
- **Modern Science:** Destruction of the Ancient and Medieval Kosmos by affirming the power of human reason – the mathematisation of nature

Enlightenment – *Aufklärung*

The Age of the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason: 18th century

- The principles of the Enlightenment are (very broadly speaking) two:
 - **negative**: the Enlightenment aimed to devalue and eradicate irrationality, emotions and superstitions
 - **positive**: in terms of rationality and progress (realisation of the successes in natural science)

The perfect society should and could be built on reason alone

• Negative goal:

- All narrative versions of the Enlightenment begin with an assertion of the **victory of reason over superstitions, false beliefs, prejudice and intolerance** [...a rebellion *against*...]

• Positive goal:

- The almost universal claim was that the faculty of reasoning is the property of every human being (leading to **the idea of rights and 'autonomy'**).
- From this time forward, knowledge is seen not as the God's prerogative but as something which is determined by the power of human reason relating not only to nature but society as well.
- Rational individuals are autonomous, questioning the tradition, free in respect to all they inherited. They *can* question the inherited presuppositions ...

Genealogy of Political Ideas

Liberalism: The new political current advocating liberty of the individual – it was another change brought about by the Enlightenment – individual negative liberty: each person is free if it does not interfere with the freedom of another person

Democracy – from the Greek: *demos* = people; *kratia* = power, rule; democracy presupposes equality (not social, but political and legal)

Two World Wars brought a realisation that technology based on scientific 'reason' cannot 'solve' our problems. Rather the opposite. We need to rethink it

Liberal Democracy – the post-WW II idea of the state, leading to the Welfare State – a very short experiment to figure out how can individualism, freedom, equality of all and the market work together

Neoliberalism – from 1980s with the expansion of globalisation in 1990s (after the collapse of socialism)

What is freedom? What is autonomy? What is individual? What is nature?

These are all questions that the Enlighteners ask and during their inquiries changed the answers as well as questions themselves...

Let us consider...

- Is community the traditional society ruled by customs, Gods, traditions?
- Is society the modern bureaucratic commercial society ruled by the state?
- Is society an amalgamation of free atomistic individuals guided by their reason alone?
- Is society an amalgamation of free atomistic individuals ruled by market forces?

Is the individual...

- a rational, autonomous free human being ...?
- is s/he an exchanging human being ruled by the free hand of the market, achieving the best economic benefit for all even when s/he acts in his/her own self-interest?
- is the individual a selfish, self-interested, self-made human being, pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps, aiming high and being competitive, in short, is s/he the entrepreneur of his/her own human capital?
- Is "the individual" an atom, becoming "the focus of attention while the larger market society in which s/he live is largely ignored" (Esposito and Peters, 2014, 41)?

Individual, Society, Context

Are we individual atoms or are we a part of society?
 Is the 'human nature' social or are we self-interested, selfish, competitive entrepreneurs 'creatively' disregarding others to win at all costs?
 Is our understanding of ourselves unique or is it 'shaped' by the historical situation we live in?
 Do genes determine our entire life? (Bagnoli, 2015)
 In short, what does it mean to be a human in today's society?

Autonomy

Autonomy (as we understand it today) is the modern notion: starting with the Renaissance thinkers, who reformulated the Greek notion of *autonomia*. But it was during the Enlightenment that the modern notion of 'autonomy' as 'self-governance' came into being.

Note – it did not mean liberty.

- Ancient Greek *αὐτο* [*auto*] from *αὐτός* (*autos*) = 'self' and *νόμος* (*nomos*) = law
- Auto – self-ruling, self governing according to *laws* that we can give to ourselves

As Immanuel Kant defined it: autonomy vs heteronomy (rule by others)

“Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere Aude!* ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’—this is the motto of enlightenment” (Kant, 1997 [1784], Vol. 35, 85).

So, what are the consequences for our understanding of ourselves?
Are we ‘autonomous, self-governing, rational individuals’?
Was the Enlightenment’s dream fulfilled?

Neoliberalism

• Google: About 16,900,000 results (0.39 seconds)

https://www.google.com.au/search?ei=SsG6W4iULoPN-Qbgmr_QCg&q=neoliberalism&og=neoliberalism&gs_l=psy-ab..0i67k1j0i20i263k1j0i8.20592.23165.0.23551.13.10.0.1.1.0.404.1531.2-3j1j1.5.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..8.5.1129...0i10k1.0.nmRg2DiNNdI

So, why to speak of 'neoliberalism'

- My claim is that neoliberalism inverts ideas that came to us from the Enlightenment (hence, the importance of history of ideas), by reducing all reasoning to the engineering language of 'solutionism'. All human and social problems are reduced to finding a way to solve those problems, while ignoring the social context
- Justice becomes market justice based on inequality
- Freedom is reduced to freedom to choose in the market place – freedom to protect your assets, to invest into one-self, to position one-self in the market; accept risk that is yours alone

Problems...

- The one of main aims of neoliberalism was to dismantle the social net that has helped to protect society from the market excesses
- All public goods, social services, health, education, were pronounced to be open for business (as our esteemed Tony Abbott belatedly spelled out after his victory)
- The individual's risk are personalised, while corporations' risks are socialised (2008 crisis)
- Humans are 'reconfigured' as risk-taking players on the competitive chessboard, risk is theirs only (casino and lottery are a training ground for the less adventurous)
- Our personal interests are supposedly the only consideration for us

"A squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa" —*Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook founder*

Neoliberalism is a *reductio ad absurdum* of social engineering

- If everything becomes economic value, all other values fade away
- “All human values are offered for option. All ends and all means, both material and ideal issues, the sublime and the base, the noble and the ignoble, are ranged in a single row and subjected to a decision which picks out one thing and sets aside another” (Don Milau, in Dardot and Laval, 2008)
- The market becomes the only arbiter for all values, needs, desires
- “The neoliberal doctrine of the market [is] über-information processor” – “the greatest information processor known to mankind” – it means that we simply cannot know, only the market does (Mirowski, 2013)
- Freedom suddenly means very little

“Found yourself in trouble? You could always sell a kidney or enroll in a drug trial ... Maybe you could rent your body as surrogate mother, or maybe resort to just a little strategic intimacy, with discreet recompense on the side ...Wait! Someone from India is already calling you on the phone to offer you an even more outrageously far-fetched baroque loan! And there’s an app for that ... Just make the leap of faith ... Make some money in your spare time! **Unemployment is an unbidden golden opportunity to start anew with an entirely different life!** Don’t let the moochers and complainers drag you down! **Become your own boss, after you embrace the power of positive thinking ...** Didn’t you always want to start your own business, after working a quarter-century for corporations?”

(Mirowski, 2013, 101-102)

Financialisation of our lives

- We are not in exchange economy, *laissez-faire* is not what is ‘driving’ the market; exchange economy presupposes equality of the partners in exchange
- We live in financialised economy, based on inequality, we are concerned about our portfolio value – self-investment – life is nothing else but the site of strategies
- Google, Facebook, Twitter are helping us (and corporations along the way) to sort our needs and desires and forge the new ones....

New Neoliberal Self

- “political project is aimed at reformation of society by subordinating it to the market” (Hirshleifer, 2013, 51)
- “Politics has become so outré that the possible impending collapse of the government is itself reduced to a set of abstract statistics, which the individual feeds into his strategic risk calculations on the apparat. Revolution is just another occasion for disaster porn and reshuffling the portfolio, rather than a transformation of history” (94)

Carpe Diem: Live for the Moment

“Self-care must be balanced against the dictum that **bygones are bygones**, or in more economic terms, **sunk costs should never be entered into calculation of expected future revenues**. **The weight of history is more often than not considered a burden of little consequence for the entrepreneurial agent**, something that can be repudiated and reversed. The stipulation of flexibility militates against treating any aspect of the self as indispensable...” (100)

Entrepreneurial Self

- *The fragmentation of identity is attendant upon an entrepreneurial version of the self – provided for you for free by Facebook*
- *An entrepreneurial regimen for the self will eventually extend the purview of its calculus to every conceivable social activity, and not just those narrowly oriented to pecuniary profit – education, health, gym, healthy food – all are calculated investment into your future*
- *“The malleability of the self presumed by the theory of human capital investment will extend down to the most basic corporeal level, which will eventually mean investment in genetic manipulation.”*

- *“The Entrepreneurial self cannot be passive, but must move strategically in a world rife with risk. Hence, reward and punishment are accepted by the agent as the outcome of calculated risks, not as the dictates of Justice”*
- *Ignorance is the natural state of mankind, and the guarantor of neoliberal order. The neoliberal self is comfortable with this ignorance* (94-95)

And the ‘new’ technology is here to help us along the way....

- The question is, of course, is technology able to help us?
- Is it ‘neutral’ to the neoliberal project that aims to turn all of us into profitable ‘businesses’, while those who fall by the side-ways, discards as superfluous to the economisation of life?
- But wait, we need bodies for surrogacy, we need new organs, we need to expand the market of After all, there is always a hope that a new creative entrepreneur will make use of those disposable ones and turn them into a profit

Today – we have become to believe that technology will help us to decide everything!
Forgetting that “technology offers ever greater temptations to take path of forgetting” (Turkle, 2017, xxiii)

“Recasting all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimize – if only the right algorithms are in place!” (Morozov, 2014, 5)

“The problem with solutionist technologies and designs is that, ... **Surrounded with such technologies, we have little choice but to behave in accordance with the seemingly universal norms of anonymous social engineers**, ideally without ever coming to question the adequacy of those norms” (Morozov, 2014, 201)

Evgeny Morozov on technology: The folly of solutionism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOvaNzlx54>

Jonathan Crary. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*

“A 24/7 environment has the semblance of a social world, but it is actually a non-social model of machinic performance and a suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness. ...What is new is the sweeping abandonment of the pretense that time is coupled to any long-term undertakings, even to fantasies of ‘progress’ or development. An illuminated 24/7 world without shadows is the final capitalist mirage of post-history, of an exorcism of the otherness that is the motor of historical change. 24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability” (Crary, 2014, 9).

We live in a perpetual present. No future or the past is of any consequence. We already have everything, we just need to improve apps, update, make it smaller or bigger...

Nothing else matters. The end of the world? There are planets we can migrate to. Too many environmental refugees? We have built a closure for them to keep them away to spoil our beautifully constructed presence....people might suddenly realise that the dream is only for the top 1% percent? We have equipped police with the latest military equipment.

The End 😊

My concern in this lecture was to trace the changes in ideas/concepts to show you how important it is to reflect on the ordinary things around you; how reflecting on historical changes of ideas might show you a new way to think differently about our understanding of the everyday because ideas influence the way we understand ourselves, others and the world around us.

Moreover, and this is about our collective future, technology cannot provide a path since it is based on big data and algorithms that are drawn from the past to 'predict' the 'future' patterns. We need to start thinking about it. Or we can accept technological solutions...

We need to realise that our future is still open, but we must start again with "Sapere Aude" – "Dare to think!"

"The world is big and great and beautiful. My scientific knowledge of the events in it comprises hundreds of millions of years. Yet in another way it is ostensibly contained in a poor seventy or eighty or ninety years granted to me – a tiny spot in immeasurable time, nay even in the finite millions and milliards of years that I have learnt to measure and to assess. Whence come I and whither go I? That is the great unfathomable question, the same for every one of us. Science has no answer to it. Yet science represents the level best we have been able to ascertain in the way of safe and incontrovertible knowledge"
(Schrodinger, 1956, 97-99)
