

## Call for Papers for a Special Issue of the

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### For Your Own Good? History, Concept, and Ethics of Paternalism

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#### **Abstract**

It is fairly uncontroversial, even among liberals, that paternalism, i.e. interferences with a person's freedom or autonomy for their own good, is justified and called for if this person is not, not yet, or no longer sufficiently autonomous and thus not able to decide and act in her best interest. This applies first and foremost to children and people who are mentally incapacitated, be it temporarily or permanently. However, once people are deemed sufficiently autonomous, liberal consensus states that paternalistic interferences are out of the question. Yet, it seems that paternalistic interferences still pervade our lives, be it in the form of certain laws or state actions or be it in the form of social interaction on various levels. For example, we are obligated to wear seatbelts when driving or to have insurance when owning a car, so that we avoid or at least lower the risk of serious injury and are avoid going bankrupt when having to cover costs in case we cause an accident. In the medical context, physicians often still face the expectation to decide and act on behalf of their patients, i.e. to act paternalistically, despite the prominence of the principle of respect for autonomy in medical ethics and getting a patient's informed consent. In private life, friends and family tend to interfere with our lives if they think we are about to make a mistake that goes against our best interests. Finally, sometimes we even try to act paternalistically toward ourselves—strange as this may sound—e.g. by using technology to manipulate and steer our own behavior toward what we think is best for us but which we would not do if it were not for such manipulations.

All of these examples and practices raise a number of theoretical and ethical questions. First of all, how should we understand the concept of paternalism in general? A number of different conceptual variants of paternalism have been put forward in philosophical debate, and it is far from clear which of these we should refer to in order to classify certain situations or actions as paternalistic or not. Most prominently, hard paternalism, which consists of ignoring also autonomous decisions of persons, has been distinguished from soft paternalism, according to which paternalistic interferences are essentially only meant to check whether a person's decision is sufficiently autonomous or to improve on a person's autonomy, and which is supposedly compatible with respecting peoples' autonomy. Moreover, libertarian or nudge paternalism has been suggested not even to in-

terfere with peoples' liberty, let alone their autonomy, while still being able to steer people in the direction of their own good. Yet, firstly, it has been questioned whether soft paternalism and nudging should count as paternalism at all. Secondly, regardless of whether to classify such interferences as (soft or nudge) paternalistic or not, they may raise serious ethical concerns of their own, e.g. when it comes to the kind of interferences needed in order to be able to check whether a person is sufficiently autonomous in the case of soft paternalism, or whether nudging, due to its subtle manipulating nature, may in fact still count as interfering with a person's autonomy. Finally, hard paternalism raises the question of what should count more in cases of conflict: a person's well-being or her autonomy, whereas this includes the challenge whether (respecting a person's) autonomy should be considered an important part of well-being. Moreover, these questions are not only of theoretical or metaethical interest, i.e. how to spell out these conceptions convincingly and in sufficient detail, but also unavoidably comprise serious practical ethical challenges. Accordingly, there is an ongoing debate on whether, and if so on what grounds, either of these conceptions may be morally acceptable or even called for in certain contexts or situations.

The contributions to the special issue are intended to discuss both the theoretical and the practical ethical dimension of paternalism, with a special emphasis on the interrelation between theoretical or metaethical analyses, on the one hand, and discussions in various contexts of applied ethics, on the other hand. What implications may certain conceptual analyses and conceptions of paternalism have on specific assessments of concrete situations in applied ethics, and how plausible are these implications, especially when it comes to possible or contested justifications for paternalistic interferences (vs. non-interfering)? Conversely, what can discussions in applied ethics about cases of (apparent) paternalistic interferences tell us about the appropriateness of certain theoretical or metaethical analyses of such cases in terms of conceptions and theoretical distinctions of paternalism? Could they provide us with convincing reasons for criticizing and revising certain conceptual analyses of paternalism? Finally, what can we learn from historical examples of paternalistic practices for current debate? In addressing these questions, the contributions to the special issue are supposed to shed further light on the history, concept, and ethics of paternalism.

**Deadline for submission** of final paper: **January 31, 2023**

If you are **interested** in submitting a paper, **please contact one or both of the guest editors** to discuss further details.