

Paternalism and the Rearing of Society

In a society that emphasizes freedom in making decisions, how many of those choices derive from autonomy and how many from guidance? When it comes to health decisions, the role of the person directly affected is certainly crucial, especially since health is a value that holds weight differently for everyone. But autonomy also means making choices "in accordance with objective morality rather than under the influence of desires." Paternalism does not entail hard-handed control exerted from higher authority. Rather, a softer mode of paternalism encourages the best interests of others with an underlying notion of respect and accountability. In the case of Goop, the beauty empire owned by Gwyneth Paltrow, paternalism helps explore the question of whether or not their products are based on scientific truth, particularly in a clash of intellect between Goop doctors and Dr. Jen Gunter. Although paternalism reinforces similar values upon others, soft paternalism is warranted because it leads to enhanced autonomy where people make better choices for themselves following reasonable precedents set before them.

On one hand, some argue that paternalism reinforces alien values upon others and causes more harm than good. Jonathan Pugh argues that coercive paternalism implies that certain values hold more weight than others in ways people do not usually uphold, suggesting that it leads to 'back-door perfectionism' (Pugh). He emphasizes that each person naturally holds different priorities, but paternalism forces everyone to conform to a way of thinking imposed on them. For instance, requiring everyone to abstain from smoking implies that they must value their health over temporary fulfillment. According to him, by enforcing paternalism, people lose their freedom in prioritizing their values as they wish. Gerald Dworkin points out that monitoring others' decisions through paternalism assumes that the person is making a mistake (Dworkin). In his view, paternalism is inherently condescending and overreaches in an attempt to correct

others. Similarly, according to Alan Wertheimer, "when society 'does interfere, the odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place,'" essentially meaning that third-party members never really know what is best for others (Wertheimer). Both authors reinforce the idea that paternalism reduces the diversity of people's beliefs and values to a "perfectionistic" baseline.

However, though individuals are too unique for paternalism to impose a uniform set of values upon them, people are only able to make the best decisions for themselves as long as they can navigate within reasonable limits set through paternalism. According to Sarah Conly, although it is thought to be wrong to interfere when someone causes harm to themselves, "it is equally permissible, perhaps obligatory" to do so, arguing that harm to oneself is not any less important than harming others (Conly). Even if someone ultimately does not care about the harm done to themselves, it is likely that their actions will impact others, so setting precedents and guidelines not only benefits those making the decisions, but others around them as well. Smoking, for example, has significant effects on the public even if the person behind the cigarette is unfazed by the prospect of long-term health consequences. Moreover, everyone tends to make decisions that "undercut [their] ability to reach some of [their] valued goals" despite knowing better, meaning that some decisions, while they may provide temporary comfort, are detrimental to a person in the long run (Conly). Paternalism helps ensure that individuals can choose options that will make them happy in the moment while avoiding long-term consequences. Coercive paternalism is a spectrum and using "cost-benefit analysis" allows for that fluidity depending on the situation; if "a great effect can be achieved with relatively little cost," it is worth more in the long run to do what is beneficial rather than harmful, even if it means choosing the less desirable path (Conly). Conly's statement emphasizes that paternalism does not entail loss of freedom through rigid top-down control because a variety of

circumstances call for different degrees of interference. Encouraging others to eat fruits and vegetables versus curbing addiction to cigarettes and alcohol would require very different modes of regulation. Regardless of the various costs and benefits, paternalism guarantees establishment of guidelines out of respect and compassion for others, rather than introducing alien values through control or superiority, so it is worthwhile to step in and guide others either directly or simply by example.

Paternalism employed among health professionals is particularly significant in ensuring that professionals engage in plentiful research and conversations. This encourages the production of guidelines that can be validated for the public to navigate when making their own decisions about health. Some of these guidelines may be derived from debates like the following. In response to Dr. Jen Gunter's harsh backlash, Dr. Aviva Romm of the Goop industry reminds her to "not forget that many common medical practices that were not too long ago considered wellness trends, at best, unscientific bunk, or at worst, dangerous, are now widely incorporated into conventional patient care" (Romm). She points out that many of the advanced health practices today were once thought to be as implausible as Dr. Jen Gunter believes Goop products to be. Only with consistent research and discussions can theories be validated and approved as acceptable guidelines for people. Dr. Romm also wants to "seek to understand what women are looking for, what the mainstream isn't providing" (Romm), suggesting that the only way the public can be provided the best guidelines they seek is to continually have conversations about underexplored issues. Health professionals need to keep addressing questions and controversy while holding one another accountable in making decisions that will impact the public. Paternalism can help achieve that. Dr. Steven Gundry defends his stance, specifically regarding the controversy over the damage lectins can cause, by bringing attention to the "hundreds of

peer-reviewed research articles that [he] [cites] in *The Plant Paradox*, showing the damage lectins cause" (Gundry). Dr. Gundry's point that it has taken Goop doctors significant amounts of research and proof to arrive at their findings strengthens his *ethos* and appeal to *logos* since it increases the validity of his work and scientific viewpoints.

Though her neutral, composed tone effectively carries her argument, Dr. Romm falls a bit short of maximizing her appeal to *logos* by making an overgeneralization about contemporary medical practices. Perhaps if she were to offer a few specific examples, then her statement would have the support it currently lacks. A noticeable fallacy in Dr. Gundry's statement is a use of circular reasoning, in which he employs his very own research to back up his argument, whereas bringing up the work of other health professionals would increase the validity of his findings. Paternalism can be seen as a necessity through Dr. Romm's and Dr. Gundry's arguments themselves because they show that health practitioners are human and can make imperfect conclusions.

The deceptively omniscient scientific standpoint is limited, and using highly emotionally charged language does not drive the point of logic in further and reduces the possibility of having open-minded, productive conversations. Dr. Jen Gunter derails Goop products and expresses her "growing exasperation . . . at the almost constant debunking of the health 'advice' and all around medical bullshit" that Goop distributes (Gunter). She essentially believes her scientific knowledge is the only valid source of information, and anything else that she deems implausible is medically illiterate. Her use of an expletive not only fails to help support her argument in any way, but severely undermines her professional *ethos* with an overabundance of *pathos* appeal and practically an *ad hominem* attack on the Goop doctors by condemning their "disreputable" approach. Moreover, given how much there is still to learn in science and the time span it took to

arrive where we are now, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that some of Goop's theories can increase in validity in the future.

The key component of paternalism is that it must emphasize the best interests of the agents and not be used to exert control. This becomes important to consider in areas where advancements such as biotechnology are constantly developing. The public presents demands and health professionals work to fulfill them--as well as the reverse--but there comes a point where the advancement of medical research begins to raise questions about ethical implications, in which case paternalism becomes even more warranted to check human pride. To address concerns surrounding the kinds of decisions people are faced with, perhaps maintaining trust and respect for others will improve how interference can be done most appropriately under more difficult circumstances.

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