

# 24.150 Liberalism, Toleration, and Freedom of Speech, Fall 2023

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Today:

Liberalism, and the case for paternalism. Glod continued.



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## five problems for paternalism

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Glod:

it won't work, it is insulting or disrespectful, it imposes values, it violates rights, and it is likely to be misapplied or abused.

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## can paternalism even 'work'?

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Glod:

People do not, in fact, always act in their best interests. Weakness of will. Hanna: "the general presumption that the individual is the party most able to secure his best interest may not apply."

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2. Anti-paternalists argue that paternalism harms our “individuality”. What does this mean? How do paternalists respond to this?

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Glod:

individuality [is]...[one’s] ability to develop [one’s] unique talents and learn from [one’s] mistakes as needed.

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does this capture the intuitive idea of ‘individuality’?

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Glod:

There may be times when sacrificing a bit of individuality would promote or protect [our] other interests.

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Glod:

Perhaps by banning cigarettes [for example] we could create an environment where people are less prone to conform and more likely to develop their own unique tastes and talents.

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## is paternalism 'disrespectful'?

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Glod:

paternalism is *more* respectful because it merely seeks to correct people's faulty judgment and prevent these shortcomings from getting them into trouble. Such corrections are not attempts to lord over people or run their lives for them. In fact, proper paternalism aims to help people so that they are freer and better able to live their lives as they themselves see fit.

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3. Anti-paternalists also argue that paternalism wrongly imposes values on people. How do paternalists respond?

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Glod:

[Paternalist] interventions should be as aligned as possible with the target's own beliefs and values, provided their beliefs are not obviously false and their values not clearly screwed up.

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Glod:

Limited paternalism is meant to prevent a person from making the kinds of choices which detract from the rest of that person's overall interest, all things considered. For instance, Bob stubbornly insists on not wearing a seat belt when he drives. This refusal serves no major benefit in his life (and seat belts don't cause him discomfort or delays) compared to the risks of harm he faces if he gets in an accident.

A paternalist can argue, quite plausibly, that Bob's *own* beliefs and values commit him to the wisdom of buckling up in order to protect the rest of what he values.

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## is paternalism likely to be abused?

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Glod:

this is a concern for all legislation handled by flawed humanity. It's not a distinctive problem for paternalism. If one argues that we shouldn't have legislation on the chance that such laws would be misapplied or abused, then one is arguing that we shouldn't have any legislation at all.

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## Conly pro paternalism

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quoted in Glod:

[Some] recognize that the responsibility for making [some] choices is a burden, and one that we are often quite willing to give up. [When unfulfilling but daily decisions] are also difficult, requiring expertise, and important, such that a failure in their regard can substantially alter our quality of life, it can be liberating to have them taken out of our hands.

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Chapter 2, How do we know what other people are up to?



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1. Glod writes, "Most contemporary defenders of paternalism agree that welfare is subjective." What is meant by the claim that "welfare is subjective"?

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Glod:

...there isn't some Objective and True Good Out There that we should all pursue in order to live a good life. Instead, a good life is judged by the goals we set and the preferences we have with regard to pursuing those goals.

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Not very precise!

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Regarding "welfare." The target notion is that of *a life good for the one who lives it*. The target question is: what factors make a life good in this way?

The **desire satisfaction theory of welfare** says, roughly, that getting something that you want makes your life better, and failing to do so—a frustrated desire—makes your life go worse.

Plausible?

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**Objective list theories of welfare** say that a life goes well insofar as the person obtains certain goods (on the 'list'), for instance: health, friendship, pleasure, knowledge, romance, children, achievement,...

More or less plausible than the desire satisfaction theory?

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