


ARTICLE

Self-Respect Paternalism

Søren Flinch Midtgaard 

Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark, and Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination (CEPDISC).

Email: Midtgaard@ps.au.dk

Abstract

According to the influential disrespect account of what paternalism is, and why it is wrong, paternalism involves an anti-egalitarian, disrespectful attitude on the part of the paternalist: X (the paternalist) assumes an attitude of superiority when interfering in Y's matters for Y's good. Pace this account, the article argues that an important, although somewhat overlooked, form of paternalism is not, all things considered, insulting. This form of paternalism focusses on people's occasional lack of appropriate self-respect or their failure to see themselves as equals or to stand vis-à-vis others as such.

Much ink has been spilled on the problem of paternalism since Gerald Dworkin's seminal 1971 essay.¹ One development stands out in the recent literature. This is the view that paternalism involves a certain *negative belief* on the part of the paternalistic agent X: X believes that X is more capable than Y (the agent who is treated paternalistically) to undertake matters that fall within Y's legitimate sphere of control. The view is most fruitfully seen as holding that paternalism involves such a belief as it is manifested in acts of interference aimed at catering to the well-being of the agent interfered with.² Proponents of this view suggest that paternalism thus conceived is disrespectful.³ Hence, I shall refer to it as the *disrespect objection* to paternalism. This understanding of paternalism echoes important concerns about paternalism voiced by, for example, proponents of relational egalitarianism, including Elizabeth Anderson.⁴

With this account of the wrongness of paternalism as my starting point, I investigate what I take to be an important, and somewhat overlooked, subset of paternalistic acts.⁵

¹Gerald Dworkin, Paternalism, in *Morality and the Law*, ed. by Richard A. Wasserstrom (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971), pp. 107–26. Reprinted in *The Monist*, 56 (1972), 64–84.

²Cf. David Enoch, What's Wrong with Paternalism: Autonomy, Belief, and Action, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 116 (2016), 21–48.

³Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism without Perfection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ch. 3, and Seana Valentine Shiffrin, Paternalism, Unconscionability Doctrine, and Accommodation, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 29 (2000), 205–50, are the two most influential contributions that support this view.

⁴Elizabeth S. Anderson, What Is the Point of Equality?, *Ethics*, 109 (1999), 287–337 (esp. pp. 301, 319, 329–30).

⁵Important exceptions to the implied neglect in the literature include: Richard J. Arneson, Paternalism, Utility, and Fairness, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 43 (1989), 409–37 (pp. 431–32); Anne-Sofie Greisen Hojlund, Mitigating Servility: Policies of Egalitarian Self-Relations, *British Journal of Political*

Those acts are directed at people who for various reasons do not consider their good to be as important as the good of others – they see themselves as *lesser*. Here is an example. Some people do not think that they are entitled to equal political rights in their community. Suppose that many women decline to vote, because they think women should not be involved in politics, or men are more important, etc. If legislators compel women to vote on the grounds that this would be good for them by enhancing their self-respect, we have a case of what I shall call self-respect paternalism.⁶ I consider this set of acts and policies to be of particular interest, because the reasons for finding it disrespectful are weaker than the reasons for finding it respectful. The latter reasons pertain especially to its egalitarian credentials.

My article is organized in the following way. Section I presents self-respect paternalism. Section II puts forward the argument for why this set of paternalistic acts is not insulting all things considered. Section III concludes.

I. Self-respect paternalism

Paternalism according to the disrespect objection may be understood as follows:

- X acts paternalistically towards Y by Φ -ing (or omitting to Φ), if and only if
- (i) X's Φ -ing (or omitting to Φ) interferes with Y, that is, infringes Y's autonomy
 - (ii) X Φ s (or omits to Φ) in order to promote the interests, good, or well-being of Y⁷ and
 - (iii) X Φ s (or omits to Φ) on the grounds of X's negative belief regarding (a) Y's capacity to make appropriate *judgements* regarding what is good for them [and/or] (b) Y's choice-following ability (or their *willpower*) [and/or] (c) the likelihood that Y will in fact *exercise their abilities* of this kind in ways that are conducive to their own good.

As captured by this definition, paternalism involves the notion that Y will (or X believes that Y will) – in the absence of X's intervention – fail to respond to certain reasons that apply to Y. Putatively, X's Φ -ing (or omitting to Φ) promotes Y's well-being (or X believes that it will promote Y's well-being), where this includes preventing it from deteriorating. X takes this as a reason for Φ -ing. Furthermore, X's intervention infringes Y's autonomy. That is, X seeks to influence Y by the use of means other than rational persuasion.⁸

Science (2021) doi:10.1017/S0007123420000629; Danny Scoccia, Paternalism, *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). Arneson's and Scoccia's essays point to the sort of paternalism I am interested in. However, they do not elaborate on it. For example, they do not consider the point that it may be respectful all things considered. Unlike my argument, Hojlund's argument does not appeal to self-respect as an important condition for people's autonomy.

⁶I owe this example to an anonymous reviewer for the journal. Cf. Malte Dahl and Jacob Nystrup, Confident and Cautious Candidates: Explaining Under-representation of Women in Danish Municipal Politics, *European Journal of Political Research*, 60 (2021), 199–224; Hojlund, Mitigating Servility (esp. pp. 8–9); The Wrongs and Remedies of Political Inequality (unpublished paper).

⁷One of the prominent proponents of this view, Shiffrin, includes in her understanding of paternalism acts not intended by X (the paternalist) to promote Y's well-being (see, Shiffrin, Paternalism, p. 217). It suffices, she thinks, that X acts to influence matters within the legitimate control of Y on the basis of beliefs such as those stated in condition (iii). I happen to agree, but I bracket this here because it is a minority view and immaterial to the argument that I shall put forward.

⁸Cf. Daniel M. Hausman and Brynn Welch, Debate: To Nudge or Not to Nudge, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 18 (2010), 123–36; Danny Scoccia, In Defense of Hard Paternalism, *Law and Philosophy*, 27

Condition (iii) fleshes out the content of X's negative beliefs regarding Y. The negative beliefs should be seen against the backdrop of X's Φ -ing (or omitting to Φ), that is, X's acting on the beliefs in question. That is, paternalism and its wrongfulness latch on to actions thickly described.⁹ The nature of the negative beliefs is this. They concern Y's ability to tell what is in their own interest, Y's willpower to pursue what is in their own interest, and the likelihood that Y shall exercise such abilities appropriately in concrete decision-making contexts. The beliefs do not concern Y's self-respect or Y's concern for Y's own good. Traditional paternalism presumes that this is not an issue. Perhaps it need not work on this presumption. The definition could easily be modelled such as to include this particular concern also. Yet there is a point in defining traditional paternalism in the way I do. The mentioned presumption appears to be ingrained in how we traditionally understand paternalism: as a tool for aiding people better to promote their own good (assuming that their own good figures prominently among their concerns).¹⁰ The presumption that people are not deficient in their concern for their own good has a long pedigree. It is represented, for example, in the works of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant. Consider Kant to this effect: "To secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly) ... But here also do men of themselves already have, irrespective of duty, *the strongest and deepest inclination toward happiness*, because just in this idea are all inclinations combined into a sum total ..."¹¹ And Mill: "No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that *each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness.*"¹²

On the conception of paternalism as characterized by the definition above, there is not a sharp distinction between the disrespect and the autonomy objections to paternalism: paternalism always infringes autonomy, and the disrespect it involves is intertwined with this infringement.¹³ This is related to the point that the morally objectionable features of paternalism do not attach to certain negative beliefs in themselves but to (autonomy infringing) actions on the basis of those beliefs. Yet even on my view paternalism need not be understood to infringe any distinct autonomy right.¹⁴ For example, we may for paternalistic reasons decline to assist a person in certain ways (e.g., because we believe that it would benefit this person to deal with the matters in question

(2008), 351–81 (p. 352). Some, I should note, believe that even certain forms of rational persuasion may be paternalistic. See George Tsai, Rational Persuasion as Paternalism, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 42 (2014), 78–112. This need not concern us here, though. I think that self-respect paternalism could easily be reformulated to capture this broad understanding of paternalism. Yet it would add unnecessary complexities to try to do so here.

⁹Cf. Benjamin Eidelson, *Discrimination and Disrespect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 77; Kalle Grill, The Normative Core of Paternalism, *Res Publica*, 13 (2010), 3–20.

¹⁰This presumption is rarely, if ever, explicitly stated. Yet it is reflected in the standard outline of the concern of paternalism. In this outline individuals' potential lack of self-respect is not mentioned. See, for example, Jason Hanna, *In Our Best Interest: A Defence of Paternalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 1; Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008), p. 5.

¹¹Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* with On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns, 3rd ed., translated by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993/1765), p. 12 [399]. Emphasis added.

¹²John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 36. Emphasis added.

¹³Other views distinguish between disrespect and autonomy concerns. See, for example, Arneson, Egalitarian Perspectives on Paternalism, in *The Routledge Handbook of Paternalism*, ed. by Kalle Grill and Jason Hanna (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 194–205.

¹⁴Cf. Shiffrin, Paternalism, p. 213.

themselves) where this person has no *right* to our assistance. We may still though, I suggest, have *reasons* pertaining to autonomy not to decline assistance on the indicated ground; and we infringe the person's autonomy if we do. Similarly, it might be wrong for me to decline to assist you on racist grounds, even though you have no right to my assistance to begin with.¹⁵

As indicated "traditional paternalism" consists of acts and policies that satisfy conditions (i)–(iii). "Self-respect paternalism," in contrast, is attentive to a specific type of reason (amongst the array of reasons that an agent, unassisted or unhindered, may fail to respond to in appropriate ways). This type of reason pertains to Y's self-respect; hence its name. Specifically, as we shall see, self-respect paternalism seeks to correct for two kinds of deficiencies in a person's self-respect. First, a person may fail to see that they enjoy moral standing on a par with others in the moral community. Second, they may fail to act appropriately given their equal standing (and their knowledge of this), for example by refraining from voting or asserting or exercising others of their equal rights. Traditional paternalism, in contrast, is preoccupied with *other* reasons to which the agent is not appropriately responsive.

To highlight this relatively narrow concern of self-respect paternalism, I suggest the following more specific version of condition (ii):

Condition (ii)*: X Φ s (or omits to Φ) only in order to promote the interests, good, or well-being of Y by helping Y to have appropriate self-respect.

Defining self-respect paternalism requires furthermore a new formulation of condition (iii). This must reflect the fact that the negative beliefs self-respect paternalism involves are distinct from those involved in traditional paternalism. In self-respect paternalism X does not deny that Y has the abilities mentioned in condition (iii), nor that Y would be likely to exercise those abilities in ways conducive to Y's good (were Y in fact committed to Y's own good or found it equally important as that of others). The negative beliefs of self-respect paternalism are exhausted by X's negative beliefs regarding Y's lack of attention to their own good in one of the ways alluded to above (i.e., cases where Y does not regard themselves as equal or act accordingly). On the other hand, negative beliefs of this kind are, as noted, exactly those that are absent from traditional paternalism. The requisite new formulation of condition (iii) is this:

(iii)* X Φ s (or omits to Φ) on the grounds of X's negative belief regarding Y's self-conception or the weight Y assigns to Y's own worth.

Here is an example that may help us see the difference between traditional and self-respect paternalism. A person may have a "born to run" lifestyle in which they operate "suicide-machines" (i.e., drive fast and recklessly on a motorcycle without wearing a crash helmet).¹⁶ Such a person is a paradigmatic case for traditional paternalistic intervention (e.g., a helmet mandate). For example, a traditional paternalist may take issue with the excessive weight this person assigns to experiencing temporary thrills or

¹⁵I take it that Shiffrin would concur that although paternalism need not violate distinct autonomy rights paternalism is always in tension with autonomy (and equality) considerations. Yet I acknowledge that this exegetical point is disputed.

¹⁶Andrew Reeve, *Impartiality between What? Lifestyles, Conceptions of the Good, and Harm*, *Political Studies* 44 (1996), 314–17 (p. 315).

intense feelings of freedom vis-à-vis the insufficient weight they assign to avoiding considerable risks to their health and well-being. Yet people with such a high-risk lifestyle may not harbor any doubt in their hearts or minds that they have worth and rights on a par with others. Moreover, they may not be afraid to use such rights. Accordingly, they do not fall within the purview of self-respect paternalism. Another example that allows us to see the difference between traditional and self-respect paternalism is the one I mentioned in the introduction concerning women's potential lack of a sense that they have rights to political influence on a par with men. As I have defined the two conceptions of paternalism the former neglects such a case, whereas it is key to the latter.

It might seem crucial to my concerns in this article that self-respect paternalism as described apparently steers clear of the kind of disrespect that proponents of the disrespect objection have associated with traditional paternalism. This is the disrespect associated with the negative judgement regarding the features of Y mentioned in condition (iii)'s sub-conditions (a)–(c). Yet as condition (iii)* brings out, self-respect paternalism involves its own negative judgement and self-respect paternalism also infringes people's autonomy on the basis of this belief. Accordingly, it is not my claim that self-respect paternalism, in contrast to traditional paternalism, avoids the disrespect objection or that this objection is weaker regarding the former. My argument below shall be that unlike traditional paternalism, self-respect paternalism – due to its prominent and inherently egalitarian credentials – is capable of identifying clear instances of paternalism in which the reasons for finding paternalism disrespectful are outweighed by egalitarian considerations.

Paternalism of any variety is usually taken to be either *pro tanto* or *prima facie* wrong (and I agree that it is at least *prima facie* wrong; in fact, I affirm that it is *pro tanto* wrong).¹⁷ Why? Because by making a negative judgment regarding certain of the paternalized agent's capacities and/or their exercise of those capacities, and acting on this judgment by way of bypassing, or in part taking over, their agency, the paternalistic agent casts themselves as *superior* in a certain sense to the agent they paternalize. The latter is conceived as *inferior* when it comes to running their own life in a way that is appropriately and sufficiently sensitive to the relevant reasons pertaining to them. Accordingly, paternalism introduces a dimension of inequality between the paternalizer and the paternalized. The former, by virtue of their act, appears to deny the latter's status as a person with appropriate and sufficient capacities for running their own life.

This flies in the face of the notion that citizens uniformly possess (and exercise), to a certain minimal degree, such capacities. One way of expressing this notion is to say that each citizen shares with others a range-property that forms an important ground for their moral equality or equal standing.¹⁸ Proponents of the disrespect objection believe that there is a weighty moral reason against paternalistic acts because of the aspect of superiority they imply. I admit that paternalistic acts – including self-respect paternalistic acts – imply an aspect of the mentioned kind, and that this constitutes an objection to them. Yet, as indicated, self-respect paternalism shows how this objection can be outweighed by countervailing considerations. Before putting forward my argument, it would be helpful to state in brief two facets of self-respect paternalism that supplement the characterization of it provided above.

¹⁷Cf. Quong, *Liberalism*, p. 100, fn. 66; Shiffrin, *Paternalism*, p. 220, fn. 25.

¹⁸Ian Carter, *Respect and the Basis of Equality*, *Ethics*, 121 (2011), 538–71.

(A) Comparative and non-comparative

Self-respect paternalism is concerned both with deficient self-respect of a kind in which a person assesses their own worth lower than is warranted, and of a sort in which they incorrectly assess their worth to be less than the worth of others. That is, it speaks to both non-comparative and comparative deficiencies in self-respect. Consider first an example of the former kind. Michel is a misanthrope. That is, he is defectively responsive to a certain worth that *he* possesses and at the same time similarly and inappropriately inattentive to other persons' worth – worth they (objectively) possess on an equal footing with Michel, but which they are not recognized by him to possess. In brief, Michel believes that he has the same (low) worth as others: he does not really think that *anyone* has much worth. Michel is one appropriate candidate for self-respect paternalism of the kind I am interested in. This conception is concerned with people who see themselves as having less worth or importance than is warranted, and non-comparatively speaking Michel fits the bill.

An arguably more typical target for self-respect paternalism is Virginia, whose salient defect consists in her not having appropriate respect for *her own worth* while at the same time recognizing appropriately *others'* worth. That is, her problem is in part that she considers herself to be of less worth than others – as *lesser*. Accordingly, Virginia's failure from the perspective of self-respect paternalism is both that she does not assess her own worth as highly as she should, and that she assesses it to be lower than the worth of others. That is, she fails to respond to the reasons pertaining to her worth both non-comparatively and comparatively speaking. In principle, self-respect paternalism may also be concerned with individuals with an *inflated* sense of their own worth,¹⁹ who, say, assess the worth of others appropriately. Such individuals fail in assessing their own value too highly and higher than the worth of others. Self-respect paternalism, we may say, is against both snobbery and servility.²⁰

(B) Self-respect

There are two distinct forms of respect, to wit, *recognition respect* and *appraisal respect*.²¹ Self-respect paternalism, or at least self-respect paternalism of the (egalitarian) kind I am interested in, is concerned only with the former. This form of respect may concern a wide range of things and is basically “a disposition to weigh appropriately some feature of the thing in question and to act accordingly.”²² Let us focus on this sort of respect for a person. To have recognition respect for a person is to give proper weight to the fact that they are a person.²³ This means that there are certain moral constraints we should observe in our dealings with them.²⁴ The exact nature of these constraints is of course disputed.²⁵ However, plausible moral conceptions arguably affirm people's “equal fundamental moral worth and standing in the moral community.”²⁶

¹⁹Cf. Robin S. Dillon, *Arrogance, Self-Respect and Personhood*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14 (2007), 101–26.

²⁰Cf. Jonathan Wolff, *Forms of Differential Social Exclusion*, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 34 (2017), 164–85 (p. 178).

²¹Stephen L. Darwall, *Two Kinds of Respect*, *Ethics*, 88 (1977), 36–49. Cf. Christian Schemmel, *Real Self-Respect and its Social Bases*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 49 (2019), 628–51.

²²Darwall, *Two Kinds of Respect*, p. 38. Cf. p. 39.

²³Darwall, *Two Kinds of Respect*, p. 39.

²⁴Cf. Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 215.

²⁵Cf. Darwall, *Two Kinds of Respect*, p. 38

²⁶Dillon, *Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political*, *Ethics*, 107 (1997), 226–49 (p. 229).

In the form of “the abstract egalitarian thesis” that has played an important role in contemporary discussions regarding theories of distributive justice: people are entitled to *equal respect and concern*.²⁷ Very generally, this means that there are certain basic goods each person is due and certain ways in which they should (not) be treated. Recognition self-respect consists then in respecting oneself as a person. As indicated above, one can err here both comparatively and non-comparatively speaking.

Echoing Hill,²⁸ an agent is wanting in recognition self-respect if: (i) they fail to recognize that they enjoy *rights* on a footing of equality with other members of their moral community (meaning *inter alia* that it is owed to them that their interests are valued equally with those of other persons); or (ii) when, against the backdrop of such a correct understanding, they out of “laziness, timidity, or desire for some minor advantage” persist in acting as if they have less worth than other persons – when they lack “courage to affirm it [their moral status as a person] openly.”²⁹ Self-respect paternalism of the kind I am interested in seeks to correct deficiencies of type (i) or (ii), and this focus is, as we shall see, important to its justification. As suggested by (i) and (ii), the conception of self-respect paternalism in focus here is comparative.

We should not confuse certain cases in which one sets aside one’s interests for certain reasons with cases in which one shows a lack of recognition self-respect. For example, a person who out of love (e.g., romantic or parental) and with *a full and vivid understanding of their rights* sets aside their interests and caters to the interests of their beloved one is not lacking in recognition self-respect.³⁰ Similarly, I take it, a person who is enlightened in the same way regarding their moral rights and chooses, out of love of humanity, or more broadly out of altruistic concern with the plight of others, to dedicate significant time, energy, and other resources in the services of others, is not failing in recognition self-respect.

II. Why self-respect paternalism is not insulting all things considered

In this section, I shall argue that self-respect paternalism is not insulting all things considered. My argument can be represented in the following way:

P1. It is not insulting all things considered to infringe people’s autonomy when: (i) this is necessary to establish and/or preserve important aspects of their autonomy; and (ii) it can be done in accordance with a respectful egalitarian rationale.

P2. Self-respect paternalism infringes people’s autonomy: (i) in ways necessary to establish and/or preserve important aspects of their autonomy; and (ii) in accordance with a respectful egalitarian rationale.

Hence,

C: Self-respect paternalism is not insulting all things considered.

Consider first P1. I understand conditions (i) and (ii) as being jointly sufficient for an infringement of autonomy not to be insulting all things considered. Regarding (i),

²⁷The phrase is originally due to Ronald Dworkin. See, for example, his *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 180–81.

²⁸Thomas E. Hill, *Servility and Self-Respect*, *The Monist*, 57 (1973), 87–104 (esp. pp. 95–97).

²⁹Hill, *Servility and Self-Respect*, p. 96.

³⁰Cf. Paul Bou-Habib, *Compulsory Insurance Without Paternalism*, *Utilitas* 18 (2006), 243–63 (p. 245, fn. 6); Hill, *Servility and Self-Respect*, pp. 90, 95. The person in question need not fail to have an appropriate understanding of their equal rights, and they certainly do not decide to set aside their interests out of “laziness, timidity, or some minor advantage [to themselves].”

establishing or preserving autonomy may take several forms, including promoting autonomy-congenial beliefs, putting in place constraints that cater to personal security, and preventing people from undertaking very dangerous, and potentially autonomy-undermining, activities (e.g., doing drugs that hinder their ability to form complex intentions³¹). If the goods in question could be achieved by the use of non-coercive or non-autonomy-infringing means, it would be wrongful, in part because disrespectful, to infringe people's autonomy. In such circumstances, we should abide by what Gerald Dworkin refers to as the principle of the least restrictive alternative.³² Why? Because infringing people's autonomy is never an innocuous matter. When we infringe people's autonomy, we act in a way that is *pro tanto* impermissible.³³ Respecting people's autonomy is an important part of respecting persons.³⁴ That is, (recognition) respect requires that X does not make judgements that disparage "Y's capacity to make choices as an autonomous agent" and recognizes that because Y is an autonomous agent, Y is "capable of deciding how to act for herself."³⁵ To infringe people's autonomy for no reason, or where there are viable alternatives to doing so compatible with still achieving the important goods at stake, is plausibly disrespectful. It would show that we are not in an appropriate sense attentive to valid *pro tanto* reasons against infringing people's autonomy. We would fail to recognize in an appropriate sense autonomy as an important aspect of the person – a feature of the person that requires us to act (or refrain from acting) in certain ways towards them.

Consider now P1 (ii). It can be motivated in the following way. Respecting persons requires more than respecting their autonomy. It requires also that we respect their equal moral worth.³⁶ This was the aspect of recognition respect I focused on above. In the present context, we may say that in order for an autonomy-infringing policy (for example, taxing people to ensure various autonomy-congenial goods and services to all) to be respectful or non-insulting all things considered, it must be justified in a way that is compatible with respecting people as free and equal. The notion of people's equal worth should, we may say, form the ethical foundation of the measure in question.

Anderson's juxtaposition of the rationale of a paternalistic policy, and policies justified in accordance with her favored doctrine of democratic equality emphasizing people's equal moral worth, is instructive here. The former, she suggests, is disrespectful, whereas the latter is not:

In adopting mandatory social insurance schemes for the [paternalistic] reasons they offer, luck egalitarians are effectively telling citizens that they are too stupid to run their lives, so Big Brother will have to tell them what to do. It is hard to see how citizens could be expected to accept such reasoning and still retain their self-respect.³⁷

It [democratic equality] tells the person who would not purchase insurance for himself: "You have a moral worth that no one can disregard. We recognize this

³¹Cf. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 372.

³²See, Dworkin, *Paternalism*, 1972, p. 84.

³³Cf. Christopher H. Wellman, *Toward a Liberal Theory of Political Obligation*, *Ethics*, 111 (2001), 735–59 (p. 745).

³⁴Eidelson, *Discrimination and Disrespect*, p. 95 and ch. 5.

³⁵Eidelson, *Discrimination and Disrespect*, pp. 144–45.

³⁶Eidelson, *Discrimination and Disrespect*, esp. ch. 4.

³⁷Anderson, *What Is the Point of Equality?*, p. 301.

worth in your inalienable right to our aid in an emergency ... everyone shall be taxed for this good, which we shall provide to everyone. This is part of your rightful claim as an equal citizen.” Which rationale for providing health insurance better expresses respect for its recipients?³⁸

I agree with Anderson that autonomy-infringing policies of the sort we are considering here³⁹ will be insulting all things considered unless they are justifiable on the grounds that people have equal worth or on grounds consistent with the idea that people have equal worth.⁴⁰ I disagree, however, that this implies that paternalistic policies (including mandatory social insurance schemes justified paternalistically) are necessarily ruled out as reasonable and, importantly, as policies that are respectful all things considered.⁴¹ I shall argue that at least an important subset of paternalistic policies, namely self-respect paternalistic policies of the kind I have presented above, is respectful all things considered: it is both necessary to support people’s autonomy and may be seen to rest on a sturdy, respectful egalitarian foundation.

Let us turn now to “P2. Self-respect paternalism infringes people’s autonomy: (i) in ways necessary to establish and/or preserve important aspects of their autonomy; and (ii) in accordance with a respectful egalitarian rationale.” Let us begin with (i). First, in some circumstances, self-respect paternalism may be required to cater to people’s self-respect or help them develop an appropriately (equal) conception of their own worth. In fact, we could simply say that self-respect paternalism applies only to cases in which (i) is true and leave open whether the argument extends to various real-life social and political cases. Yet, as indicated above, there are important actual cases where people lack self-respect and where more familiar, non-paternalistic, policies have not proved effective.⁴²

Second, according to plausible accounts of (relational) autonomy, people need to have appropriate (recognition) self-respect to have and/or preserve their autonomy. For example, according to what Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen calls the “content-focused relational account,” facts about the content of a person’s mental states are crucial: “An agent is autonomous only if, presently, she holds certain autonomy-congenial beliefs and desires about the social relations in which she and (relevant) others are involved.”⁴³ A

³⁸Anderson, *What Is the Point of Equality?*, pp. 330–31.

³⁹I take it that Anderson would agree that policies such as mandatory participation in an insurance scheme infringe people’s autonomy in a relevant sense. She says, for example, that the liberty being limited here is significant, and that those whose liberty is restricted in this way are owed a dignified explanation. See Anderson, *What Is the Point of Equality?*, p. 302.

⁴⁰As I shall suggest below, the strength of respectful egalitarian rationales varies relative to their proximity to the abstract egalitarian thesis that people should be treated with equal respect and concern. Accordingly, a rationale is all things equal stronger if it is justified on the ground that people have equal worth than if it is (only) justified because it is consistent with such a ground.

⁴¹I should say that Anderson does not deny that certain paternalistic policies such as helmet and seatbelt mandates might be reasonable and non-insulting (or at least that it is not a “great insult” to citizens if the state adopts such policies). See *What Is the Point of Equality?*, p. 301. For discussion, see Hojlund, *What Should Egalitarian Policies Express? The Case of Paternalism*, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 29 (2021), 519–38.

⁴²See, for example, Dahl and Nyrup, *Confident and Cautious Candidates*; Dillon, *Self-Respect*, esp. pp. 235–36; Hojlund, *Mitigating Servility*, esp. pp. 8–9.

⁴³Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, *Could Friends of Relational Autonomy be Relational Sufficientarians Rather than Relational Egalitarians?*, in *Autonomy and Equality*, ed. by Natalie Stoljar and Kristin Voigt (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 57–79 (p. 65). Italics in original. I take it that it is integral to this

person's having recognition self-respect and associated egalitarian beliefs is arguably congenial to their autonomy. This is so in part because a person with self-respect can see, and persist in seeing, their good as something that is worth pursuing.⁴⁴ Without such a sense, the adequacy⁴⁵ of the agent's range of options is under threat. As John Rawls memorably stated, in the absence of self-respect "nothing may seem worth doing."⁴⁶

This might seem too strong: for example, even if a person lacks self-respect, they may have various impersonal concerns, for example, to preserve biodiversity for its own sake. In this way, at least something might seem worth doing even in the absence of self-respect. Yet it seems justified and important to emphasize, as Rawls does, that an important array of doings and beings (i.e., various personal concerns) has meagre value for the person who does not have appropriate recognition self-respect. The meagre value relates to the fact that, in order to derive value from certain activities, a person must endorse them.⁴⁷ A person's endorsement, or the so-called endorsement constraint, is, of course, usually weaponized against paternalism. Paternalism is taken to give people what they do not want, and hence what is not valuable to them. Yet in principle, nothing rules out that paternalism can be conducive to engendering endorsement of the kind alluded to, and this is exactly what self-respect paternalism, *inter alia*, does (or aims to do). In this way, self-respect paternalism may promote people's well-being in the fundamental sense that it creates the necessary background for a person to benefit from some of their plans and projects. Self-respect paternalism does so with an important inbuilt egalitarian constraint in that it is concerned with promoting a state of affairs in which people endow their own worth with an appropriate equal weight.⁴⁸ This also explains why catering to people's autonomy qua catering to their self-respect is key to self-respect paternalism: catering to people's self-respect and their autonomy is ultimately conducive to people's well-being.

We have established that restricting people's autonomy may be necessary to promote their (recognition) self-respect. The latter, in turn, is required for their autonomy on the content-focused relational account of autonomy. Moreover, autonomy is crucial to people's well-being. The implied notion in this train of thought that restricting people's autonomy in certain respects may promote their autonomy all things considered sounds paradoxical. Yet it is familiar from other contexts, and plausible, I think. For example, restricting people's liberty to undertake very dangerous activities may help to preserve important aspects of their autonomy.⁴⁹ Likewise, restricting the liberty of everyone in a

view that autonomy also requires certain capacities that make it possible for the agent to have (autonomy-congenial) beliefs and desires. Cf. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, p. 372.

⁴⁴John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 386.

⁴⁵For the importance of this to autonomy, see Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, pp. 373–77.

⁴⁶Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed., p. 386.

⁴⁷Cf. Serena Olsaretti, Endorsement and Freedom in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, *Economics and Philosophy*, 21 (2005), 89–108 (esp. 98–100). For discussion, see Arneson, Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 16 (1999), 113–42 (esp. sec. XIV).

⁴⁸Of course there may – in addition to the well-being-related reasons for being concerned with people having an appropriate conception of their own worth – be non-well-being-related reasons for such a concern. See, for example, Martin O'Neill, What Should Egalitarians Believe?, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 36 (2008), 119–56 (p. 130). For contributions concerned with the importance of self-respect in the well-being related sense see, for example, Roger Crisp, *Mill: On Utilitarianism* (London, 1997), esp. chs. 2–3, and pp. 195–97; Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), ch. 2; Søren Flinch Midtgaard, Non-Renounceable Rights, Paternalism, and Autonomy, *Utilitas*, 27 (2015), 347–64.

⁴⁹Peter de Marneffe, Avoiding Paternalism, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 34 (2006), 68–94 (p. 87).

society may be crucial to securing autonomy for everyone.⁵⁰ Still, it may be more precise and illuminating in this context to distinguish between different notions of autonomy.⁵¹ First, autonomy may be seen as a right. A right of this kind is infringed when we, for example, restrict people's liberty to make important decisions or, in general, when we use means other than rational persuasion to influence them in important regards, even when we do so for their own good. Second, autonomy may be seen as a certain consideration (or set of considerations) that gives us reasons to act or not to act in certain ways toward others. Third, autonomy may be understood along the lines of the content-focused relational account of autonomy where the nature of the person's mental states is key. Against the backdrop of those distinctions, self-respect paternalism may be seen to involve, first, an infringement of autonomy rights or of certain autonomy considerations. Yet this infringement may promote autonomy of the distinct third form. That is, the infringement of autonomy may have as a consequence that the person whose autonomy is interfered with has mental states that are more congenial to autonomy than this person would have had had their autonomy not been interfered with.

Let us turn now to the defense of P2 (ii), that is, the claim that self-respect paternalism infringes people's autonomy "in accordance with a respectful egalitarian rationale." Yet what I have already said regarding P2 (i) bears in part on P2 (ii). It does so because my defense of the former brings out significant egalitarian features of self-respect paternalism, including that it (a) promotes egalitarian mental states (namely beliefs that one's good is just as important as the good of others, and a basic sense that one's good has equal value of this kind) and (b) caters to people's well-being associated with people's endorsement of their own plans and projects, correcting inequality-generating shortfalls in recognition self-respect in the process. In addition, I want now to supplement (a) and (b) with two additional egalitarian features pertaining to self-respect paternalism, namely (c) valuable egalitarian relations; and (d) intrinsic egalitarian features of self-respect paternalism.

Concerning (c), as we have seen, self-respect paternalism promotes autonomy through furthering equal relations between people and promoting and enhancing people's recognition self-respect. These egalitarian relations are arguably of significant value, including *for* persons who relate in this way. To explain, relating to others as equals, interpersonally speaking, demands of us that we regard and treat *ourselves* as equals. As Anne-Sofie Greisen Hojlund puts it: "for *X* and *Y* to believe (and act in accordance with their belief) that their rights and interests are, at a fundamental level, equally morally important requires that they each consider their own rights and interests to be just as important as those of the other."⁵² Self-respect paternalism, as we know, seeks to support considerations of this kind. Respect and self-respect are arguably mutually supportive. If one appropriately respects others, then one ought to extend, it seems, this respect to oneself (a being who has the very respect-worthy features that make the respect of others appropriate).⁵³ Likewise, self-respect may be seen to involve respecting oneself as an equal *among persons*,⁵⁴ where this, I take it, implies that one respects others as equals just as one respects oneself.

⁵⁰Michael Blake, Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 30 (2002), 257–96 (p. 282).

⁵¹I owe this suggestion to an anonymous reviewer for this journal.

⁵²Hojlund, *Mitigating Servility*, p. 3. Cf. Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Autonomy*, p. 66.

⁵³Cf. Victor Tadros, *Consent to Harm*, *Current Legal Problems*, 64 (2011), 23–49 (pp. 32–33).

⁵⁴Dillon, *Self-Respect*, p. 229.

Relating as equals is arguably non-contingently good, and in part so *for* the people relating in this way.⁵⁵ It contrasts favorably with relations characterized by hierarchy in which underlings bow and scrape to those at the top. Relating as equals may also be contingently good by virtue of, for example, promoting community, trust, and the important good of health.⁵⁶

Concerning (d), acting on the basis of a recognizable egalitarian attitude or disposition is part of what self-respect paternalism *is*. A person who performs a self-respect paternalistic act is in part motivated by a thought with a certain non-trivial egalitarian content (i.e., that the paternalized person's interests are just as important as others' interests), or has appropriate attitudes of this kind towards the paternalized agent. If X acted in ways that might be conducive to Y's self-respect but did not do so out of a concern with Y's recognition self-respect, X would not, on my account, be a self-respect paternalizer. So egalitarian attitudes of the kind emphasized here are part of the definition of self-respect paternalism as I conceive of it.

The takeaway when we contemplate self-respect paternalism's egalitarian features (a)–(d) is that it is a doctrine with considerable egalitarian virtues. Those features provide reasons in favor of the claim that self-respect paternalistic policies rest on a solid respect-based egalitarian foundation. Yet it should be clear that there are countervailing reasons for thinking that self-respect paternalism is insulting. First, the paternalist implies that the person whose self-respect they cater to is either (i) insufficiently enlightened regarding their own worth and rights, or (ii) reluctant to respond in appropriate ways to the fact that they enjoy standing on a footing of equality with others (a fact about which they are well informed) out of laziness, timidity, or in order to obtain a minor advantage (or to avoid a minor inconvenience). In both cases, X (the paternalist) sees themselves as more knowledgeable than Y (the person X treats paternalistically) or more adept than Y at responding to reasons that pertain to Y. Second, on the basis of those beliefs, X intervenes in matters ordinarily considered to be within the legitimate control of Y.

Whilst those countervailing reasons for thinking that self-respect paternalism is insulting should certainly not be neglected, they seem to me, in a range of cases,⁵⁷ less weighty than the reasons suggesting it is not. Self-respect paternalism, we may say, is justifiable all things considered. It is fair to ask here whether traditional paternalism could (also) be justified on the grounds that people have equal worth. My response is that it might. My core claim in this article is that there are especially strong reasons to think that self-respect paternalism meets the indicated justificatory burden. Those reasons pertain perhaps especially to the egalitarian feature (d) that I have just mentioned.

⁵⁵See, for example, Anderson, *What Is the Point of Equality?*, p. 312; Hill, *Servility and Self-Respect*, esp. sec. IV; Hojlund, *Mitigating Servility*, p. 5; David Miller, *Equality and Justice*, in *Ideals of Equality*, ed. by A. Mason (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 21–36 (p. 31); O'Neill, *What Should Egalitarians Believe?*, p. 130. For useful distinctions between various forms of goodness (badness) see Gerald Dworkin, *Moral Paternalism*, *Law and Philosophy*, 24 (2005), 305–19 (pp. 307–08).

⁵⁶Cf. Susan Hurley, *The "What" and the "How" of Distributive Justice and Health*, in *Egalitarianism: New Essays on the Nature and Value of Equality*, ed. by Nils Holtug and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 308–34 (pp. 330–31); Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (London: Cambridge University Press), p. 108.

⁵⁷This qualification is necessary in that, as I indicate below (see, fn. 60), there are certainly policies that may be characterized as self-respect paternalistic but are not justifiable or non-insulting all things considered. My claim is that self-respect paternalism has egalitarian features that make it easier to justify than traditional paternalism.

Self-respect paternalism, we may say, wears its egalitarianism on its sleeves. That is, it promotes directly the fundamental egalitarian idea – what Dworkin refers to as the abstract egalitarian thesis – that people have a right to be treated with equal respect and concern. In this way, it clearly expresses to those subjected to the measures in question that they have worth on a par with others and that they ought to believe and act accordingly. This seems to be significant, expressively speaking. Whereas people lacking in self-respect do not affirm their moral status openly, as Hill has it, self-respect paternalism does exactly this, and does so in the hope that it will rub off on citizens.⁵⁸

More traditional forms of paternalism may be shown to be consistent with – or to be plausible interpretations of – the notion that people are free and equal and ought to be treated as such (and regard themselves as such and act accordingly). Yet the egalitarian foundation is less manifest than is the case in self-respect paternalism.

Here is a case that brings to the fore the competing considerations relevant to assessing whether self-respect paternalism is all things considered insulting.⁵⁹ Imagine a woman with anti-egalitarian beliefs who decides to join a religion, a core tenet of which is that men's interests count for more than women's interests. Let us presume that her deliberations satisfy stringent procedural autonomy-related conditions. Apparently, this woman is an apt target for self-respect paternalism as I conceive of it. Yet subjecting her to self-respect paternalistic measures would very likely be a source of insult to her. Accordingly, we may question the plausibility in saying, as I apparently do, that self-respect paternalism towards this woman is all things considered respectful.

In response, I affirm first that, on my view, the woman is an apt target for self-respect paternalism. If she, for example, is reluctant to participate in politics because she believes that women's interests matter less than men's, I hold that measures aimed at altering her anti-egalitarian beliefs are appropriate.⁶⁰ Second, I do not regard this as an unwelcome or implausible implication. As explained above, I regard the idea that each person is an equal among equals as fundamental for a highly valuable form of moral community, that is, one in which people relate as free and equal, and I do not consider it implausible that this idea in certain circumstances outweighs opposing values and beliefs. Third, I find the substantive egalitarian conception of autonomy I rely upon here compelling. According to this, in order to be autonomous, people must entertain certain egalitarian beliefs. For example, if women entertain views to the effect that they and their worth should, to a higher degree than it is true of men's worth, be assessed on the basis of their appearance – and that they do not have value as persons on a par with men – this plausibly constrains their freedom in ways that are incompatible with, or severely reduce, their autonomy.⁶¹

Fourth, it is likely, as the objection points out, that the woman in question will feel insulted by self-respect paternalistic measures. Yet this does not imply that there is not a satisfactory respect-based egalitarian foundation for the measures in question. Hence, self-respect paternalistic measures are not insulting all things considered on what I

⁵⁸This function of institutions regulated by egalitarian principles of justice is a recurrent theme in Rawls' work.

⁵⁹An anonymous reviewer for this journal suggested this case to me.

⁶⁰Plausible measures might include, for example, public campaigns and educational measures. Measures that prevent people from practicing certain anti-egalitarian religions or seek to remove them from cultures in which such religions are practiced are not, I think, likely to be conducive to people's self-respect and may be problematic for other reasons.

⁶¹Cf. Paul Benson, *Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization*, *Social Theory and Practice*, 17 (1991), 385–408.

think is an appropriate objective conception of insult. According to this conception, whether something is insulting or demeaning does not hinge on whether or not people think that they have been insulted or feel insulted, but on whether they have good reasons to think that they have been insulted and feel insulted.⁶²

All in all, then, self-respect paternalism seems to handle well a critical case of the kind just considered.

III. Conclusion

In this article, I have introduced a novel form of paternalism, to wit, self-respect paternalism. This form of paternalism, I have argued, is easier to justify than traditional paternalism is. Self-respect paternalism is characterized, first, by involving an infringement of the autonomy of the person who is subjected to it (it shares this feature with traditional paternalism). Second, the infringement in question is undertaken with a view to promoting the well-being of the person interfered with by helping them to have appropriate self-respect. Third, the self-respect paternalist is motivated by a certain negative belief regarding the self-conception or self-worth of the person interfered with. The justificatory advantage of self-respect paternalism vis-à-vis traditional paternalism relates to the transparently egalitarian nature of the former, to wit, its clear message that the person whose autonomy is infringed for their own good has value on a footing of equality with others.

Acknowledgements. A first draft of the article was prepared for an International Conference on the topic of “Ethics and Management in Trade, Health Care, and Politics” (EMTHCP-2019) on December 29, 2019 organized by the School of Management Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, India. I am grateful to the hosts for the invitation to present at this conference. I am also grateful for comments received from (i) members of the Political Theory Section at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, (ii) participants in the Northern Lights Workshop in Political Philosophy #3 (Aalborg University, Aarhus University, and UCLouvain), on September 25, 2020, (iii) participants in a workshop organized in connection with Didde Boisen Andersen’s doctoral defence (including Jessica Begon and Thomas Schramme), (iv) participants in the Nordic Network for Political Theory, Aarhus 2021. For detailed written comments I am indebted to Didde Boisen Andersen, Andreas Bengtson, Göran Duus-Otterström, Axel Gosseries, Kalle Grill, Anne-Sofie Greisen Højlund, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Lasse Nielsen, Lauritz Aastrup Munch, Astrid Fly Oredsson, Eva Maria Parisi, and Viki M. L. Pedersen. Furthermore, two anonymous reviewers for this journal have been very generous with pertinent and challenging comments for which I am very grateful. For her impeccable research assistance, I thank Anna Christine Hjulder Dorf. For excellent edits I am indebted to Kate Thulin and Annette Bruun Andersen (and to one of the anonymous reviewers, and the Editor). I also thank Department of Political Science and head of department Peter Munch Christiansen for a ‘small grant’ enabling this project. Moreover, part of the research for this article is supported by Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF144).

Competing interests. The author declares that there are no competing interests regarding this article.

⁶²Cf. Deborah Hellman, *When Is Discrimination Wrong?* (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2011), ch. 3; Viki M. L. Pedersen, Respectful Paternalism, *Law and Philosophy*, 40, 429–42 (pp. 426–427) quoting Hanna, *In Our Best Interest*, p. 68.