

Paternalism as Caring

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Abstract

My paper aims to outline an alternative approach to paternalism based on the ethics of care and virtue ethics. I argue that the main underlying virtue behind paternalistic practices (e.g. parenting, nursing, medical practices, etc.) is the virtue of care. If we reinterpret autonomy in a way that focuses on the importance of human relations instead of 'disengaged' rationality, autonomy will develop through the development of caring relations, including paternalism. Moreover, paternalistic practices, insofar as they are representations of the virtue of care, contribute to the development of human character. Consequentially, hard paternalism does not necessarily oppose (relational) autonomy and might have a more favorable reception in this framework.