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Epistemic Paternalism and Political Normative Epistemology

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I always think that doing philosophy is an intimate activity. For one, it makes you confront yourself as you nearly constantly find things you don't know, are unaware of, or are wrong about. These things include your surroundings, your relations with each other, and yourself. For another, as a best possible result, it is consoling. It is consoling because, by knowing that you don't know, are unaware of, and are wrong about these things, you have somewhat changed; your perspectives about them are enriched, and you are interacting with them differently. It is hopeful. On the other hand, it is consoling because, there are, and will continue to be, so many possibilities and potentials for us to know and to act. It is vital. Last, and most importantly, it is consoling because you are not alone in it. You find that there are people who are worried by the same issues as you, thinking with you. And people who call attention to issues you are not aware of and who aspire to understand these issues as well as to change them—and that becomes your aspiration, too. You realise that you engage in this very intimate activity in a community.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that epistemic paternalism can be a tool of providing epistemic interventions that address both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions. This thesis is based on concepts such as epistemic values, (epistemic) autonomy, and their relation to our agency. We must recognise the social and interactive character of our epistemic agency to understand how it flourishes and shrinks, and thus to be able to account for what is epistemically valuable for us. For epistemic paternalism to be effective, it must be grounded in an understanding of how both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions affect our epistemic agency. It must also be committed to the view that we actively strive to mitigate or undermine these oppressions as they hinder our epistemic flourishing, or else we risk perpetuating them.

To illustrate this project, this thesis also engages with existing debates surrounding epistemic paternalism, including Epistemic Access Paternalism and Epistemic Nudging. Exploring core conceptions and assumptions involved in these debates helps to clarify what epistemic interventions involve and to develop an account that addresses our compromised epistemic agency. Finally, one example case of an act of epistemic paternalism is discussed, the use of singular *they* in English.

(German)

Diese Masterarbeit argumentiert, dass epistemischer Paternalismus ein Instrument epistemischer Interventionen sein kann, die sowohl epistemische als auch nicht-epistemische Unterdrückungen bekämpfen können. Die Masterarbeit basiert auf Konzepten wie epistemischen Werten, (epistemischer) Autonomie und ihrem Verhältnis zu unserem Handlungsspielraum. Wir müssen den sozialen und interaktiven Charakter unserer epistemischen Handlungsfähigkeit (epistemic agency) anerkennen, um zu verstehen, wie sie gedeiht oder verkümmert, und dadurch zu erfassen, was epistemisch wertvoll für uns ist. Damit epistemischer Paternalismus wirksam sein kann, muss er auf dem Verständnis beruhen, dass sowohl epistemische als auch nicht-epistemische Unterdrückungen unser epistemisches Wirken beeinflussen. Er muss auch der Ansicht verpflichtet sein, dass wir aktiv danach streben, diese Unterdrückungen zu mindern oder zu beseitigen, da sie unsere epistemische Entfaltung behindert, andernfalls besteht die Gefahr, Unterdrückungen zu verstärken.

Um dieses Projekt zu veranschaulichen, befasst sich diese Arbeit auch mit bestehenden Debatten rund um den epistemischen Paternalismus, einschließlich des Paternalismus des epistemischen Zugangs (epistemic access paternalism) und des epistemischen Nudgings. Die Untersuchung grundlegender Konzepte und Annahmen, die in diesen Debatten eine Rolle spielen, hilft zu klären, worum es bei epistemischen Interventionen geht, sowie um ein Modell zu entwickeln, das unser beeinträchtigtes epistemisches Wirken berücksichtigt. Schließlich wird ein Fallbeispiel einer epistemisch paternalistischen Handlung diskutiert: die Verwendung des Pluralspronomen *they* als Singular im Englischen.

Introduction

In this thesis, I intend to re-theorise epistemic paternalism as an epistemic intervention that can resist oppressions. This conceptualisation of epistemic paternalism is in stark contrast to much of the ongoing debates surrounding epistemic paternalism. In these debates, theorists tend to worry about the lack of consent that characterises epistemically paternalistic practices as well as worry about violating the epistemic autonomy of agents and their right to epistemic access. I will argue that this view does not account for the lived experience of oppression and the need for practices such as epistemic paternalism to address our undermined epistemic agency.

I will focus on the ongoing debates surrounding epistemic paternalism, particularly since Alvin Goldman's "Epistemic Paternalism, and Blindspots of Reasons" (1991). Broadly conceived, a practice is epistemically paternalistic when it intervenes in an agent's inquiry with the aim of bringing about epistemic improvement to the agent, without the agent's consent.

My re-theorisation of epistemic paternalism is greatly inspired by works in political philosophy, feminist philosophy and social epistemology. Recent work in these fields has emphasised the need to foreground structural injustice and oppressions in theorising our everyday social experiences. This work has also called for broadening our understanding of epistemic agency and epistemic activity. Traditional accounts of epistemic agency and epistemic activity are frequently concerned with rationality and ideal belief-forming processes. I will point out that epistemic activity should be understood as also including knowledge production and revision, processes that are embedded in social settings and go beyond simply believing according to evidence. Similarly, it is often assumed, e.g. Emma Bullock (2018) as will be discussed in Chapter 1, that increasing the number of true beliefs is the principle epistemic value. Instead, I argue that the mere accumulation of true beliefs is not sufficient for the flourishing of our epistemic agency.

Applying the insights of recent work in the fields mentioned above to the concept of epistemic paternalism allows us to see that worries about consent and autonomy are not the only worries that epistemic paternalism must attend. We must include amongst other things in our thinking: how are certain social groups included in or excluded from

participating in the collective knowledge pool; how is people's confidence in their own ability as knowers compromised by their identification with certain social groups; how inadequate social imaginations are so resilient to change, how ignorance of certain issues comes about and is sustained and is harmful to us (Mills 1997, 2017). Only after considering the above points (and more) can a more adequate understanding of epistemic paternalism be attained, one that is truly responsive to our epistemic flourishing.

This thesis is structured as follows: In Chapter 1 I will focus on a specific form of epistemic paternalism: epistemic access paternalism (EAP). The debate surrounding this form is largely about its permissibility: what justifies an action of epistemic paternalism (Ahlstrom-Vij 2013). I will show that many of the examples selected in discussion of EAP do not meet the commonly agreed-upon constitutive conditions, which reveal the underlying concerns of these theorists. I will also engage with Bullock's claim that epistemic access paternalism is merely a form of general paternalism. My main argument in this chapter is that the idea of epistemic value is conceived of too narrowly across this literature.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss two adaptations of epistemic access paternalism. Firstly, epistemic nudging, which is argued by Kengo Miyazono (2023) to be a weaker, and thereby more preferable, form of epistemic paternalism. However, I will show that Miyazono's concern, that epistemic nudging mobilises other cognitive aspects of agents, making it irrational, is caused by their narrow and implausible definition of rationality. Secondly, I will engage with Amiel Bernal's (2020) considerations about epistemic paternalism. Bernal begins theorising epistemic paternalism including the consideration of background social relations, which I aim to continue. However, Bernal's worry, that epistemic paternalism inevitably leads to epistemic objectification, is unfounded.

Having discussed various perspectives in the literature on epistemic paternalism, in Chapter 3, I will offer my theorisation. I propose an epistemic paternalism as a trio project: epistemic, moral and political. It has the aim of resisting epistemic and social oppressions. It can be, and should be, practiced through interpersonal exchanges, amongst other following José Medina's (2013) interactionist approach to epistemic agency. I will provide an example of such an interpersonal form of epistemic paternalism: the use of the pronoun singular *they* in English. Based on this example, I will argue that epistemically paternalistic practices

have normative force as they contribute to the struggle against oppressions, but they are alone likely insufficient to overcome social and epistemic oppressions.

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Chapter 1. An Inquiry into Epistemic Access Paternalism

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the existing discussion of epistemic access paternalism and evaluate the underlying assumptions that motivate its defenders and opponents. *Epistemic Access Paternalism* (EAP)¹ is a form of epistemic paternalism. EAP distinguishes itself from other forms of epistemic paternalism in that it either enables or blocks recipients' epistemic access to an inquiry, rather than, for example, rearranging the way information is presented (like that of epistemic nudging). There are numerous instances of EAP occurring in our everyday social interactions and institutional practices. For example, we often round to the nearest quarter-hour when reporting the time, or food packaging usually includes information about ingredients and nutrition. These examples show that our interactions with each other are often highly information selective. By being highly selective in what we communicate, we preserve each other's epistemic capacities by avoiding cognitive burnout and communicate what we see as sufficiently important for the other's needs. We take for granted that these practices contribute to our epistemic agency. As I will further discuss below, EAP also involves absence of consent by its recipients and that there is a clear goal of bringing about epistemic improvement in its recipients.

I will point out that in the body of literature regarding EAP, EAP is generally taken to be a narrower phenomenon. According to standard conceptions, the acquisition of true beliefs is primarily seen as the only form of epistemic improvement or success of an EAP practice, rather than other epistemic values that constitute the flourishing of our epistemic agency.

In addition, part of the inquiry into EAP revolves around identifying the conditions that justify this practice. I will illustrate the debate's preoccupation with the moral motivations behind EAP by discussing three examples, concerning legal justice, public health, and effective pedagogy. However, this preoccupation has not been explicated as the primary motivator of EAP; rather, moral reasons are typically assigned the role of "negative indicator" (i.e. that no moral concerns arise from an EAP practice), with which epistemic goals cannot conflict (Ahlstrom-Vij 2013a, 2013b).

¹ Hereafter abbreviated EAP.

After discussing the constitutive and justificatory conditions of EAP in the literature, I will engage with the challenges that a particular critic has posed to EAP theorising.

Emma Bullock (2018) charges that EAP either collapses into general paternalism or cannot morally justify itself. I identify that this challenge is structured around Bullock's premises concerning conceptions of *eudaimonia*—or our flourishing, epistemic value, and personal sovereignty. I will argue that, on the one hand, Bullock shares with other EAP theorists some problematic assumptions in theorising EAP, such as their understanding of epistemic value. On the other hand, in attempting to object to EAP, Bullock conceives of our agential flourishing too thinly, and mistakenly conceptualises personal sovereignty and its relations with EAP. By examining the existing literature and responding to Bullock's critiques, I hope to further conceptualise an epistemic paternalism that more usefully addresses various epistemic wrongs in our social world of domination and oppression.

1. Constitutive and justificatory conditions of Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP)

I begin this section with an overview of the literature on epistemic paternalism, focusing on EAP². Like other forms of epistemic paternalism, EAP aims at enhancing its recipient's epistemic state without their consent. Most theorists assume a case of EAP partially consists of the absence of informed consent. ³ Informed consent, in short, refers to recipients agreeing to a practice on the basis of being provided good or relevant information. Note that a practice qualifies as an instance of EAP if recipients are told that the practice will be implemented on them, but they do not agree to this. So, it can be the case that recipients are not told about the EAP practice, but are not given the option to disagree with it; or it can be the case that they are told about the EAP practice, but that they disagree with it. What distinguishes EAP is that it is implemented by means of enabling or disabling one's epistemic access to an inquiry, and this epistemic access is usually enabled or disabled by providing or withholding information or evidence. Note that, in EAP theorists' view, the act of access-enablement or -disablement is tailored to the acquisition of true beliefs or avoidance of false beliefs that are primarily considered as the improvement of an agent's epistemic state.

² Also referred to as "hard direct epistemic paternalism".

³ See Eyal (2019) for the discussion.

The literature on EAP mainly consists of two sets of inquiries: EAP's constitutive and justificatory conditions. Here I begin with the discussion of EAP's constitutive conditions, as those are less disputed in the literature.

To qualify as EAP, it is generally taken that a practice has to satisfy **three jointly sufficient conditions** (with my examples):

(1) Interference qua epistemic access control: The practice **interferes** with the recipient's inquiry, by **either enabling or disabling recipients' epistemic access to an inquiry**.⁴ An example of enabling epistemic access would be a lecturer recommending Iris Marion Young's *Responsibility for Justice* to students thinking about why liberal societies do not tend to remedy social inequalities. An example of disabling epistemic access would be a lecturer removing Descartes' *Meditations* from a list of recommended literature for a reading group focused on structural injustice.

(2) Epistemic improvement *qua* true beliefs: The practice aims at **achieving epistemic improvement** in the recipient, specifically the acquisition of true beliefs or absence of false beliefs. To this purpose, the interference in condition 1 is to serve an agent's belief-forming processes. In the same example above, the student comes to believe that the current social and institutional arrangements are far from sufficient in combating the various social inequalities.

(3) Absence of consent: Interference is exercised **without** the recipient's **consent**⁵, i.e. the recipient is given no say about their own epistemic access to the information withheld from them. As mentioned above, it can be the case of absence of consent, in which that

⁴ "Interference" may sound to some people a strange word to apply in cases of "enabling epistemic access", as the word "interfere" usually has a negative connotation. However, this is the word assumed in the literature.

⁵ Ahlstrom-Vij (2013a) formulates this condition as non-consultation, rather than non-consent. The reason they provide is that, if one seeks advice or input from others (consultation), it is inconsistent or incompatible for one to then go against their expressed desires or preferences (62). I see that, however, this does not fit the concept of epistemic paternalism. This is because, what makes a practice (epistemically) paternalistic is not based on whether one has been told about the practices, but rather, it hinges on the lack of choice in deciding whether one is the recipient of such practices. Consider, for instance, I ask my friend whether it is okay if I only round up the time to every half-past, rather than providing the exact minute (or second). My friend objects, but I, considering avoiding imposing additional cognitive burden on my friend, persistently communicate the time rounded up to every half-past. This practice, despite being annoying and imprudent about my friendship with my friend, would still be considered as an instance of epistemic paternalism.

recipients are either not informed about the interference (and therefore not given option to disagree with it), or told about the interference but disagree with it. For example, an environmental activist puts pamphlets about the climate crisis in lecture halls and cafés.

As mentioned above, condition 1 distinguishes EAP from other epistemically paternalistic practices, such as epistemic nudging, which does not interfere with one's inquiry by enabling or disabling their epistemic access to an inquiry. Rather, the practice of epistemic nudging rearranges how the information or evidence is presented without making any related information unavailable. I will discuss epistemic nudging in Chapter 2.

So far, we have seen the three jointly sufficient, **constitutive conditions** for EAP. Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij (2013a, 2013b), further proposes two **justificatory conditions** for EAP. They argue that an act of EAP is **morally justified** if the following conditions are *jointly* met:

(4) No conflicts between epistemic improvement and other moral reasons: The epistemic and morally-relevant reasons for engaging in an act of EAP are not in conflict with each other. For example, distributing pamphlets about the climate crisis can both raise readers' consciousness and help them to become more responsible concerning the issue.

(5) High likelihood of epistemic success: There is evidence indicating a high likelihood that an act of EAP achieves its epistemic goal, namely, epistemic improvement or success in its recipients.⁶ For example, removing Descartes' *Meditations* from a list of recommended literature for a reading group focused on structural injustice is highly likely to mitigate students' confusion as compared to leaving the book on the list.

Ahlstrom-Vij proposes these two justificatory conditions in response to challenges to EAP, (1) its **reliability** (whether the alleged epistemically paternalistic practice reliably leads to any epistemic improvement), (2) its **moral permissibility** (whether EAP's goal at epistemic improvement conflicts with other moral reasons), and (3) its **overriding recipients' epistemic autonomy** (whether the practice compromises the epistemic autonomy of the recipient).

⁶ It's important to note that Ahlstrom-Vij originally phrases this condition broadly, suggesting that everyone affected by a given instance of EAP will benefit epistemically from it. However, its application appears to be narrower, focusing on the likelihood of EAP achieving its epistemic goal in its recipients. See Ahlstrom-Vij 2013a (118–122).

Below are three EAP-candidate examples that I have selected from the literature to illustrate practices that respective EAP theorists present as justified EAP. I select these examples for their frequency in the body of EAP literature (examples 1 and 3), being controversial whether they qualify as instances of EAP (examples 2 and 3), and having been further, interestingly elaborated in the body of literature (example 3). In addition, example 3 gives us a sense of what might make EAP objectionable to some theorists, a point which will be further discussed in section 2. It is important to note that all three examples focus on our cognitive limitations as obstacles in our belief-forming processes. Ahlstrom-Vij takes our cognitive limitations as the circumstance providing the background for epistemic interventions. Whereas epistemic autonomy is about “the freedom of inquirers to conduct inquiry in whatever way they see fit” (Ahlstrom-Vij 2013a, 61), we knowers cannot always solely rely on our epistemic capacities to arrive at true beliefs; sometimes we have to rely on our communities for that.⁷

Example 1 is a juridical case, a pioneer example in the EAP literature prompted by Goldman (1991) that has been discussed by many EAP theorists (see for example Ahlstrom-Vij 2013a, 2031b; Bullock 2018; Jackson 2021). A judge refrains from disclosing a defendant’s past criminal record or negative personal traits to the jurors during a juridical case. The judge deems this information irrelevant to the case in question and believes that presenting it likely biases the jurors, preventing them from reaching a just verdict.⁸

⁷ Godden (2020) outlines two distinct positions on epistemic autonomy. The first position conceives of epistemic autonomy as *autarkeia*, or self-reliance. In this view, individuals are ideal, autonomous knowers who depend solely on their own cognitive capacities, engaging in the pursuit of evidence independently and deferring to no authority. According to Godden, Ahlstrom-Vij (2013a, 2013b) and EAP theorists endorse this perspective. I share Godden’s view.

Contrarily, the second position regards epistemic autonomy as self-rule, emphasising our choice on whether and how much we defer our epistemic authority to which communities and when to withhold trust. Zagzebski (2013) supports this view, which is relevant in section 2 when I discuss that Bullock also takes epistemic autonomy as an epistemic agent’s self-rule, yet they argue EAP still cannot pay the cost of violating one’s personal sovereignty. In addition, Haslanger (1999, 474) also endorses this view, asserting that our epistemic autonomy involves making decisions about what we believe, taking responsibility for those beliefs, and actively participating in our epistemic communities where crucial examinations of each other’s beliefs occur. I take this position on our epistemic autonomy and integrate it into my argument.

⁸ Goldman’s juridical example continues to be well-cited in the literature of epistemic paternalism. I found this example both interesting and important for my discussion on epistemic paternalism, for, it simultaneously implies and neglects an important part of how jurors form beliefs regarding the defendant. On the one hand, Goldman’s judge is aware that information about the defendant, particularly “negative” information, tends to

Let's first see if this example meets the constitutive conditions for EAP.

The interference in this example is the control of access to information (henceforth "epistemic access control"). So, it meets condition 1 (interference *qua* epistemic access control). The goal of this epistemic access control is to make it more likely that its recipients (the jurors) can arrive at the correct verdict. Therefore, it meets condition 2 (epistemic improvement *qua* true beliefs). The partitioner (the judge) does not seem either to ask for or to obtain any consent from the jurors about the information control. Hence, it meets condition 3 (absence of consent). We can conclude that this is a case of EAP.

Next, let's see if the example is justified in accordance with Ahlstrom-Vij's justificatory conditions. The judge aims at a just verdict for the defendant so that the defendant is not wrongly misjudged as guilty and is protected from deprivation of freedom and other options that would likely be brought about by imprisonment or a criminal record. Since the practice is to lower the risk for any morally bad consequence, the practice meets condition 4 (no conflicts between epistemic improvement and other moral reasons). Besides the epistemic improvement in question not giving rise to moral concern, I want to remark that it is morally relevant that legal justice is served in this example. As Goldman emphasises, arriving at a just verdict benefits not only the defendant, but also society at large. It is *legal justice* that matters in this EAP practice, that nobody is found guilty of crimes they have not committed.

This example should also meet condition 5 (high likelihood of epistemic success). Goldman (as well as Ahlstrom-Vij) motivates their theorising of EAP by considering the relations between our cognition and our inquiry; they appeal to the findings of cognitive bias, which suggest that we tend to overemphasise the association between negative character traits and a person's actions while downplaying the connection between positive character traits

mislead jurors' verdicts. On the other hand, however, they have not explored how our perceptual biases are also at work in contributing to such "negative" information in practice. Based on social categories such as race and gender, and the social positions of the defendant, jurors may perceive the defendant and the case through related assumptions. What jurors see are often not the defendant's individual character, but representations of the social groups they belong. Miranda Fricker (2007) tries to include these social dynamics by citing another juridical example from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960); José Medina (2013) provides a thorough discussion on how the testimonies of the prosecutor and the defendant are inflated and excluded from evidence due to the social imagination regarding their race at that time (white man verse black man in 1930s Southern American society).

and deeds. In this case, epistemic access control in regard to negative character can eliminate an epistemic factor that likely detrimentally affects the jurors' inferences.

Example 2 is about randomised controlled trials in clinical research, discussed and defended by Ahlstrom-Vij (2013a, 2013b). In such trials, clinical researchers randomly allocate individuals to either the control group (uninformed about receiving a placebo) or the intervention group(s). Upon concluding the experiment, researchers gather and compare reported effects from both groups.

In clinical research, randomisation serves as a preventative measure against the misattribution of observed effects to confounding variables, which can lead to erroneous conclusions or biased findings. This epistemic intervention affects both researchers and participants. For researchers, it frames the way they establish links between reported effects by participants and the tested prescription, attempting to clarify the effect of this prescription to the researcher. Participants in the control group are unaware that they have been given a placebo with no medical effects.

Let's see if this example meets the EAP's constitutive conditions. Since Ahlstrom-Vij stresses that the concern of this example is not the participants but, rather, the clinical researchers who are expected to use randomisation as a data-handling approach (2013a, 45), we will focus on whether randomisation is an instance of EAP when its recipients are the researchers.

Researchers are blocked from a sort of epistemic access, in that they lack access to certain information about the participants. This meets condition 1 (interference *qua* epistemic access control). The goal of this practice is to prevent researchers from establishing wrong causal relations between attributions and the findings. This meets condition 2 (epistemic improvement *qua* true beliefs). It seems, however, to be disputable whether researchers give their consent to randomisation process. It is not a relevant concern whether the researchers give their informed consent to randomisation process, as the latter is integrated as part of the research study implemented by the researchers. If we are to understand this case more sympathetically, the researchers give informed consent to the practice, as they agree with what they are doing, i.e. carrying out the research, embedded with the

randomisation process. Therefore, this example **does not** meet condition 3 (absence of consent) and is **not an instance of EAP**. Still, it is an interesting example, for it shows Ahlstrom-Vij's focus in discussing purported cases of EAP is the act of withholding information.⁹

Before moving on, it is interesting to see how the example would meet the justificatory conditions if it were an instance of EAP. It seems probable that this example would meet condition 5 (high likelihood of epistemic success), as researchers stand to gain from more accurate information about the potential effects of the tested medication.¹⁰ It also meets condition 4 (no conflicts of epistemic and moral reasons), for its goal of achieving accurate findings regarding the medical effects. In general, achieving more precise findings can prevent delays in (searching for alternative) treatments, ultimately benefiting those in need. This failed-to-be-EAP example, like example 1, not only has its epistemic and moral reasons aligned, but it is also primarily, **morally relevant** as public health is to be served in this example.

⁹ Even if the recipients are not the primary focus for Ahlstrom-Vij, it is still interesting to note that they also consider the randomisation example as an instance of EAP when participants are the recipient. Recipients actively provide informed consent to the practice, a requirement for carrying out the research. Like researchers, recipients are restricted from epistemic access, though they are being withheld from different information (the groups to which they are assigned).

This example is interesting not only because it highlights Ahlstrom-Vij's focus (disabling recipients epistemic access), but also because most EAP theorists tend to focus on the act of withholding information and its permissibility. They assume that agents are *prima facie* entitled to epistemic access to information in their inquiry, and this entitlement creates a burden of proof for EAP theorists to justify their position. In contrast, critics of EAP, such as Emma Bullock (2018) and Eve Kitsik (2023), often object to EAP on the grounds of its absence of consent, which *prima facie* violates an agent's personal sovereignty. I will further discuss Bullock's respective objection in section 2(b) and (c).

¹⁰ In certain medical research contexts, relying solely on randomisation might not be adequate to prevent false causal-effect associations. Emphasis on randomisation alone for precise causal-effect analysis can cause researchers to overlook other influential variables.

An example of such a situation occurred in the 2000s in the United States during a Women's Health Initiative (WHI) clinical trial aimed at clarifying the risks and benefits of combination hormone replacement therapy (HRT). While randomisation was applied, the study failed to account for factors such as participants' age and other health conditions, which were crucial in understanding HRT's effects on women after menopause (see McDonough 2002).

However, this does not conflict with condition 5 of EAP. It only points out that EAP is highly context-sensitive, and that we may require more than one, or multiple epistemic interventions in conjunction in order to promote the epistemic good in question.

Example 3 is about high school physics pedagogy, prompted by Bullock (2018).¹¹ High school students are first taught Newtonian physics before they are taught quantum mechanics. They are not told, by the time they learn Newtonian physics, that they will later learn quantum mechanics.

Bullock and other theorists on epistemic paternalism, see this example as an educational tool of “lying-to-children” (Bullock 2018; Jackson 2021; Meehan 2020), which is “a deceptive interference with an individual’s inquiry [... It] involves teaching false or incomplete theories to students in order to facilitate a better understanding of more complex theories” (Bullock 2018, 434; Jackson 2021 and Meehan 2020 phrase this similarly).

Let’s see if this example meets the three jointly sufficient constitutive conditions of EAP.

Despite the view being wrong that Newtonian physics is false, and it being very questionable whether this practice is a deception¹², when students learn Newtonian physics, it is withheld that they will be later taught quantum mechanics, which is more complicated but can be learnt more easily after understanding Newtonian physics. This meets condition 1 (interference *qua* epistemic access control). The example also meets condition 2, because it has an epistemic goal of assisting students to learn better later, and eventually understand the more complex theory of quantum mechanics. According to Bullock’s framing of the example, since the physics teacher does not tell the students about this curriculum arrangement, the practice also meets condition 3 (absence of consent). However, in this understanding, much teaching may count as “without consent” as students do not know what they will be taught; many students also consent (by choosing) to take the course in which they will be taught. We cannot easily conclude that the practice meets condition 3, nor that it is a case of EAP.

¹¹ Meehan (2020) understands this example as a case of epistemic nudging. It is neither the view of Bullock nor mine.

¹² Though Bullock quotes the pedagogical method ‘lie-to-children’ to formulate the intervention of withholding the information (i.e., what students learn right now is preparatory for the latter learning in the curriculum) as deception, I do not assume that it naturally follows that the intervention would become morally (more) culpable, if so.

Another point that is interesting to remark is that, even though Newtonian physics is not as accurate when it describes extreme situations as quantum physics, it is accurate enough for our **practical** application, such as in making electronics circuits. This point will be relevant in section 2.

Let us look, though, at whether the example could be a justified EAP, if it were a case of EAP. There is no moral concern arising from this practice, and it curtails students' cognitive overload¹³, so, it meets condition 4 (no conflicts of epistemic and moral reasons). It also meets condition 5 (high likelihood of epistemic success) in comparison with the available interventions, such as teaching quantum mechanics first or teaching both theories simultaneously. Therefore, this example could be an instance of justified EAP, were it a case of EAP.

In summary, as illustrated in the three examples above, Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) predominantly considers epistemic improvement or success as the acquisition of true beliefs. Such focus on true beliefs as the sole epistemic value affects the kind of epistemic interventions to be carried out in EAP: By enabling or disabling (often disabling) recipients' epistemic access in the inquiry, recipients can arrive at some true beliefs (Ahlstrom-Vij 2013 and Goldman 1991, see also Godden 2020 and Bullock 2018). These interventions are in light of our cognitive limitations intended to ensure reliable cognitive processes of belief formation within the knower. The cognitive limitations considered in these respective examples are our tendencies of (1) inflating negative evidence when it concerns people's characters, (2) overconfidence in making inferences, including but not limited to causal relations, about the world, and (3) advancing the grasp of knowledge more effectively when commencing with simpler contents. Yet, there are many cases that do not require reliable inference for the knower to acquire true beliefs. If EAP theorists see true beliefs as the primary or only epistemic value, it would mean that such cognitive reliability is instrumental to true beliefs and that EAP is not necessarily an intervention to ensure reliable cognitive processes. Rather, it would be an intervention aimed at ensuring the acquisition of true beliefs alone.

A challenge to this perspective has been raised by Duncan Pritchard (2013), who suggests that EAP narrowly endorses a veritistic view, considering true beliefs as the ultimate

¹³ Reducing an individual's cognitive overload falls to both epistemic and moral reasons. Cognitive overload has the potential to harm an individual's epistemic confidence, which is constitutive of their capacity as knowers. Developing knowing capacities is also essential for the flourishing of our agency. This illustrates that while the issue is primarily related to an individual's epistemic capabilities, it also holds moral significance. I will further elaborate on the moral significance of the epistemic aspect in my proposal for an epistemic paternalism addressing epistemic injustice in chapter 2.

epistemic good. Pritchard's worry is that this focus on true beliefs potentially leads to the neglect and compromise of other epistemic values, particularly that of reliabilism, which maintains that the reliability of a knower's cognitive processes is constitutive of knowledge.

For the purpose of my inquiry, I assume that no qualified and justified instances of EAP face significant challenges in promoting knowers' acquisition of true beliefs, and that EAP theorists, like Goldman and Ahlstrom-Vij, include relevant insights from social psychology and effective pedagogy to illustrate how enabling or disabling epistemic access should be implemented, and its impact on the likelihood of epistemic success. I also assume that no qualified and justified instances of EAP raise other moral considerations. As mentioned before, some instances of EAP and EAP-candidates has morally relevance in their background. Later, in Chapter 3, I will further develop this point and argue for the moral (and epistemic) importance of epistemic paternalism to address both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions, which also makes epistemic paternalism itself normative and political.

Before that, in the next section, I will cast doubt on whether we should be content with settling with true beliefs as the primary epistemic value, which has been the primary concern of the current EAP literature. I will elaborate on my disagreement with this focus. My response aligns with, but does not entirely correspond to, Pritchard's concern that EAP theorists do not care as much about the reliable belief-forming processes that has been seen as crucial by the reliabilists. My response centres on the presence of a broader range of epistemic values that are intrinsically valuable for the kind of human agency we possess.

2. Bullock's Challenges to Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP), and My Responses

Before moving on to furthering my discussion on the kinds of epistemic values we should consider, and argue for, in an epistemic paternalism, I will first outline Emma Bullock's challenges to Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP), in their article "Knowing and Not-knowing for your own good: The Limits of Epistemic Paternalism" (2018). As I will elaborate in the following paragraphs, it is important to engage with this paper, as, together with Bullock's critiques, the problematic assumptions I identified as underlying the current scope of inquiry of epistemic (access) paternalism are crystallised here: EAP theorists and Bullock assume true beliefs to be the only epistemic value; that epistemic and moral reasons are

always separate; and that the interference—particularly the blocking of epistemic access in one’s inquiry—*prima facie* violates some sort of autonomy (epistemic autonomy for some EAP theorists and personal sovereignty for Bullock). Responding to them is helpful in shedding light on the possibilities we have for conceptualising epistemic paternalism, and in developing my argument for an epistemic paternalism that resists epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions in Chapter 3.

Bullock’s main critique of EAP lies in their scepticism that EAP is a distinct form of paternalism. It is important to note that, even though Bullock’s direct objections are given to EAP, their scepticism is cast on other forms of epistemic paternalism whose goal is distinctively epistemic. Bullock argues that if epistemic paternalism cannot stand on its feet claiming that there is something distinctive about the epistemic, epistemic paternalism is just going to collapse into paternalism. Bullock’s main assumption in this scepticism is that **epistemic values are instrumental to human’s well-being**.

Another challenge Bullock poses to epistemic (access) paternalism is that the latter cannot be a justifiable project. This challenge lies in their view that epistemic values *ought* to give way to an agent’s personal sovereignty. This view stands out from the views shared by most other EAP (and other forms of epistemic paternalism) theorists. Whereas most assume the conflict is by default between epistemic interventions and an agent’s epistemic autonomy, Bullock sees the unresolvable conflict instead between epistemic interventions and one’s personal sovereignty.

I will summarise the two main arguments Bullock provides regarding epistemic (access) paternalism and respond to them respectively after the summary of each argument.

2.1. Bullock’s first horn of dilemma: Eudaimonic epistemic (access) paternalism as a project indistinctive from general paternalism

Bullock frames their challenges to EAP as “two horns of a dilemma”, arguing that EAP is caught between two equally unfavourable options: either EAP is indistinct from general paternalism, or it is morally unjustifiable. The first horn of the dilemma they posit is that EAP collapses into general paternalism. I summarise this argument as follows:

Whereas general paternalism aims to promote agents' well-being (eudaimonia), epistemic paternalism aims to specifically promote epistemic improvement (true beliefs) in agents. However, since epistemic improvement, like all other values that are not contradictory to the value of agents' well-being, is instrumental to agents' well-being, whenever there is a conflict between promoting one's epistemic improvement and their well-being, promoting well-being always takes the priority even if epistemic worsening would result. This proves that the real goal of epistemic paternalism is not the epistemic but well-being, which means epistemic paternalism just collapses to general paternalism.

Bullock gives three examples to illustrate this argument. The first example is the “war on drugs”, a policy campaign by the US government concerning drug abuse. This campaign involves spreading misinformation about the effects of drugs, exaggerating their severity. The spread of this information increases the chance for the public to acquire false beliefs but hypothetically has a higher chance of limiting drug use (438).

The second example is prescribing placebic treatments to patients without informing them of the (side) effects of the treatments, with an aim to bring about therapeutic or health improvements in them. Placebic treatments include injecting saline to produce an analgesic effect in patients, or giving a placebo to alleviate their symptoms. The goal is to improve patients' health condition and, therefore, their overall well-being (438–439).

The third example is fostering a particular kind of cognitive bias in individuals, namely their inflated self-perception in certain psychological or counselling practices. The goal is to avoid depression in individuals and promote their self-esteem and, therefore, their overall well-being (439).

Bullock argues if EAP defenders admit that these examples are justified, their position would not be different from that of general paternalists, as they would have to accept that these practices bring about epistemic worsening in the recipients for the sake of their physical and mental health. This stands against their commitment to bringing about epistemic improvement.

2.2. Responses to Bullock's first horn of dilemma

Before examining Bullock's second horn of dilemma for EAP, let us look into the strength of their premises.

a. Deploying a thin conception of eudaimonia

I identify two problems in Bullock's premises concerning *eudaimonia*. One problem is that Bullock deploys a **thin conception** of *eudaimonia* in formulating their objections to EAP and, in general, epistemic paternalism, offering little insight into its evaluative meaning. They do not elucidate the constituents necessary for flourishing of our agency. Another problem is that Bullock falsely assumes that epistemic value(s) is **instrumental** to our flourishing. These problems interact to make up Bullock's argument. I will elaborate them while going through Bullock's premises below.

Firstly, Bullock's first horn of dilemma focuses on the goals of epistemic (access) paternalism and general paternalism. While general paternalism aims at making an agent all-things-considered better off, epistemic (access) paternalism aims at making its recipients epistemically better off without making them all-things-considered worse off.

Secondly, Bullock asserts that general paternalism is motivated by the value of an agent's *eudaimonia*, which warrants general paternalism: "wellbeing, flourishing or living a good life are all things that are intuitively valuable" (436). From the three examples Bullock provides to illustrate this argument—the American policy campaign "war on drugs", placebic treatments, and practices fostering inflated one's self-perception—to "good relationships", "good night's sleep", "dental health", all of which contribute to our well-being (438), Bullock claims that we can easily find promoting different aspects of our life justifies paternalism.

Thirdly, Bullock sees no significant difference in these two goals, arguing that epistemic (access) paternalism's aim of bringing about epistemic improvement (i.e. true beliefs) eventually serves to make an agent better off. Therefore, if defenders of epistemic paternalism accept this premise, they have to agree that epistemic value(s) is **instrumental** to an agent's *eudaimonia*. In situations where aiming at epistemic improvement conflicts with promoting *eudaimonia*, defenders of epistemic paternalism would not sacrifice an

agent's *eudaimonia* for their epistemic good and accept that "epistemic decline" is desirable.

The problem here is that Bullock fails to provide an explanation of what they consider essential for the flourishing of our agency. It appears that their conception of *eudaimonia* is undiscerning and thin, a conception that also endorses a utilitarian framing of well-being as maximising pleasure and the absence of pain (this point is maintained in Bullock's argument in their second horn of dilemma, in their example of playing a physics lecture to someone who is sleeping without their consent). It is unlikely that other theorists of epistemic paternalism and epistemologists endorse this thin conception of flourishing in considering epistemic interventions.

Recall in last section, I outlined that a justified EAP must not only meet the condition that its deployment does not conflict with other moral reasons, but moral importance has been part of the inquiry of epistemic paternalism, even though it has not been explicitly argued for. In Goldman's example (example 1), (legal) justice is the very moral reason for the epistemically paternalistic practice. In Ahlstrom-Vij's example (example 2), even if it turns out to be a non-EAP case, it is clearly motivated by public health concern. Other examples that are not mentioned in this chapter also seem to assert that moral reasons play a crucial role in the inquiry of epistemic paternalism.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that, while most epistemic paternalists seem to take true beliefs as the central epistemic value, they do not seem to see true beliefs *per se* as enough to motivate epistemic paternalism.

Bullock also fails to recognise that there are many ways our agency can flourish, and many ways our flourishing can be undermined. As feminist theorists have argued in the recent literature, there are in our societies many forms of personal and structural injustice that undermine the flourishing of many peoples. This undermining affects people in various ways, and this variety is determined by one's central projects in life and their moral significance, as well as the mildness or severity of the effects. For instance, we would think that flourishing is severely undermined if a person's daily environment is a place where they are constantly running into people who do not see them as equal human fellows; whatever

¹⁴ See the volume *Epistemic Paternalism: Conceptions, Justifications and Implications* for more examples.

they say will be discredited as alien opinions instead of potentially helpful resources, just because they are perceived as someone from a different social group (be that based on culture, race, gender, age, etc.). It might be less severe to one's flourishing, though, if this only happens very rarely, and most of the people in the environment are not like that. Still, regardless of how pervasive this condition is, discriminating other's opinions based on their identities is morally wrong.

Similarly, as Sophia Dandeleit (2023, 236) suggests, even though it is not pleasant for someone to be prevented from eating the ice-cream of one's best liking and not being able to eat it for a day would be quite different from not being able to eat it for a month or a year, we would not think this person's flourishing is undermined. It is therefore necessary to make clear which kind of interventions do and do not undermine our agential flourishing. As Bullock's conception of *eudaimonia* does not distinguish between these different types of intervention, their conceptualisation is rendered problematic in the first place.

On the other hand, it is not clear why Bullock sees epistemic value (true beliefs) *instrumental* of an agent's well-being, but not partly *constitutive* of it. Many theorists have the view that true beliefs are necessary for achieving human agency (see for example Haslanger 1999, 473; Mills 2017, 3). To make sense of the intrinsic value of true beliefs to one's well-being, we are required to consider a thicker sense of *eudaimonia*, i.e. the flourishing of human agency. For this, we also need to explore what sort of agency humans possess, the prerequisite conditions to such flourishing and the essential components to achieving it.

We function as social agents, that have the capacity "influence how things go in the social world" (Fricker 2007, 9). However, our actions and their outcomes are invariably circumscribed by the structural dynamics of our societies (Fricker 2007; Young 1990/2011, 2013). As moral agents, we possess the capacity to discern right from wrong, engage in (intentional or unintentional) actions of moral consequence and take responsibility for our actions (Fricker 2007; Marin 2017; Young 1990/2011, 2013). Additionally, we operate as epistemic agents, leveraging cognitive capacities to represent the world, both by drawing upon communal epistemic resources and contributing our own perspectives to the collective understanding (Fricker 2007; Haslanger 1999). Furthermore, as embodied agents,

our bodily experiences enable and situate us to perceive, know and act. Therefore, Bullock is false by assuming true beliefs to be merely instrumental of an agent's flourishing. Moreover, epistemic paternalism is distinctively epistemic, because there are epistemic aspects that are constitutive to our flourishing as **epistemic agents**.

Finally, it is also false that Bullock assumes that once we promote other aspects of well-being and that requires some avoidance of promoting true beliefs, epistemic paternalism loses its epistemic distinctiveness. As said, there are many aspects that constitute an agent's flourishing. It makes sense that we conceptualise epistemic paternalism not as a practice that unconditionally promotes true beliefs. Sometimes, such practices are still epistemically paternalistic, think of the example, again, that one rounds up the clock time to prevent another's cognitive overload. These practices promote some epistemic values other than true beliefs. Alternatively, if the conditions do not require an EAP intervention, there is also no need to deploy such an intervention.

b. Constraining epistemic improvement to true beliefs

Bullock takes it that the goal of epistemic improvement is to acquire true beliefs. This becomes clear when we look at how they contrast epistemic improvements with "epistemic declines" (438 onwards). In their example of the US campaign against drug abuse, Bullock sees the epistemic interventions that "exaggerate drug's negative effects" as causing an epistemic decline—specifically, individuals arriving at false beliefs about drugs. Regarding placebo treatments, the epistemic decline is the false beliefs about the medical treatments patients are provided. In the example of self-esteem promotion, the epistemic decline is an agent's inaccurate beliefs on their self-perception.

This narrow assumption of true beliefs as **the** epistemic improvement is widely shared in the body of literature on epistemic (access) paternalism. It preoccupies theorists of epistemic paternalism attempting to justify their epistemic interventions—especially those involving blocking an agent's epistemic access in their inquiry or inducing false beliefs in an agent or when acquiring the targeted true beliefs would be more desirable even if it would undermine other true beliefs.

This assumption further suggests that epistemic improvement, encompassing true propositions and/or true beliefs, is regarded as a matter of fair and equal distribution of epistemic goods, recognising epistemic goods as finite resources and in limited supply.¹⁵ Recall the EAP-candidate example 2 in section 1, Ahlstrom-Vij focusing on the example's act of withholding information and its permissibility, neglects the fact that the randomisation with placebo control is a clear case of researchers' and recipients' consent. For many theorists of epistemic paternalism, epistemic interventions become a question of elucidating why we can promote certain true beliefs in recipients of EAP while blocking recipients' epistemic access to some other information in their inquiry. It appears that their assumption of agents having a *prima facie* entitlement to epistemic goods, namely information, partly creates a burden of proof for EAP theorists to justify their position in the first place.

Bullock, on the other hand, argues that epistemic improvement is not as intuitively valuable as *eudaimonia* (437) because they see no reason to believe that true beliefs necessarily contribute positively to an agent's well-being. Yet, Bullock, while unintendedly but rightfully pointing to the possibility that not all true beliefs are constitutive to an agent's well-being, along with other theorists on epistemic (access) paternalism, has a narrow understanding of epistemic improvement that would limit our inquiry on epistemic paternalism when a wider range of epistemic values are under consideration. It is crucial to recognise that while true beliefs are partly constitutive of our epistemic agency as discussed in the last sub-section, it does not follow that our epistemic improvement is necessitated by attaining all true propositions and/or true beliefs. Consider that true beliefs alone are insufficient in being conducive to our survival, if we conceptualise epistemic values as *instrumental* to our survival, as noted by Haslanger (1999, 471).

Also, consider in certain contexts, having too many and/or irrelevant true beliefs might be detrimental to our cognitive or epistemic agency. Fricker (2016) emphasises that good epistemic practice is not about making all epistemic resources available to us. On the contrary, it is highly selective. There are two main reasons for this selectivity: (1) We need

¹⁵ Fricker (2007, 19–20) and Medina (2013, 62) argue that the Rawlsian distributive conception of justice is not applicable to epistemic goods, as their analyses focus on credibility.

to manage our epistemic resources owing to our limited cognitive capacity, that we have limited energy, time and attention; being presented with an unlimited number of epistemic resources would overwhelm us. (2) Not all epistemic resources are useful; some can even be morally or prudentially harmful for us. Fricker provides instances such as “intimate details that are none of our business; techniques of criminality; methods of rekindling old ethnic hatred in a population” (160)¹⁶. This implies that *not* holding true beliefs is not inherently negative; it depends on *what* true beliefs we are (not) holding.

If we acknowledge that the purpose of epistemic improvement is to enrich our epistemic agency, then the mere accumulation of true beliefs falls short of truly constituting our epistemic improvement. Therefore, I am not convinced that we should engage with the domain of inquiry about whether epistemic paternalism *per se* is morally permissible in the way it interferes with one’s epistemic access to certain epistemic resources (in the forms of evidence or information, or beliefs), either positively or negatively (presenting or withholding them).

The background assumption in the discussions of epistemic paternalism, considering the violation of rights to epistemic resources, and—as I will elaborate on another line of Bullock’s argument next—(partial) interference with epistemic autonomy in an agent’s inquiry, is grounded in the idea of a fair and equal distribution of epistemic goods, which are considered as a type of distributive good, specifically when referring to evidence or true beliefs (or reliable belief-forming processes, in line with Pritchard’s (2013) reliabilist view).

I want to repeat that there are many epistemic values that are not merely *instrumental* to but that are *constitutive* of our agential flourishing, and therefore are *intrinsically* valuable to us (Haslanger 1999, 471). The intrinsic values of such epistemic values can also justify EAP both morally and epistemically, and substantiates that epistemic paternalism is distinctive epistemically. Even if the flourishing of our epistemic agency makes up the moral reason for

¹⁶ Though, I am not sure we can simply assume that all these kinds of beliefs are morally or prudentially harmful. I believe it still depends on the specific context, such as who holds these beliefs and for what reasons or purposes. For instance, knowledge of criminal techniques may be useful for detecting and preventing criminal activities. Similarly, understanding how old ethnic hatred operates within a population could help identify patterns of conflict between different groups and the motivations behind them, and develop strategies to resist the spread of group-based hatred.

epistemic interventions, it does not render epistemic values indistinct from non-epistemic values.

2.3. Bullock's second horn of dilemma: Strict epistemic access paternalism

Having shown and responded to Bullock's argument that epistemic paternalism collapses into general paternalism, let us examine Bullock's second horn of dilemma posed to epistemic (access) paternalism. This argument is constructed around the premise that any epistemic paternalism other than one that ultimately promotes well-being is either implausible, or still inevitably collapses into general paternalism. Bullock argues that EAP theorists who hold epistemic value as a distinctive value from promoting an agent's well-being, would fall to one of these conclusions. Bullock calls this EAP position "strict epistemic paternalism".

Note that Bullock proposes three alternatives for this position, but I will only outline two of them. I see it to be sufficient for outlining the main premises, with which Bullock poses their second horn of dilemma for epistemic (access) paternalism. The only premise that is distinct but omitted in the following is that "epistemic value is the only value that can outweigh one's well-being", which is implausible and unlikely to be endorsed by theorists on epistemic paternalism.

This argument is grounded on two main premises surrounding the promotion of an agent's epistemic improvement (true beliefs), the promotion of an agent's well-being, and the preservation of an agent's personal sovereignty. In this horn of dilemma, Bullock brings in the concept of personal sovereignty (or autonomy *proper*), and contrasts it with epistemic autonomy. Personal sovereignty and epistemic autonomy pertain to two distinct domains: whereas personal sovereignty is, broadly conceived, an agent's freedom in decision-making and action, epistemic autonomy is, broadly conceived, an agent's freedom to acquire knowledge and beliefs.

Bullock explicitly poses no challenge that epistemic access paternalism would violate one's epistemic autonomy. As discussed in section 1 (and footnote 2), Ahlstrom-Vij, defending epistemic paternalism on the basis of our tendencies for bias and overconfidence in our own belief-forming processes, emphasises that agents depend on others in the process of acquiring true beliefs. Since Ahlstrom-Vij has a self-reliance view of epistemic autonomy,

even though they argue that we need to rely on each other for epistemic resources, this epistemic mutual reliance has not been integrated into their conceptualisation of epistemic autonomy, but as an exception. This means that, to Ahlstrom-Vij, even when an act of Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) is justified, it must still violate an agent's epistemic autonomy. For Ahlstrom-Vij, it is exactly EAP's inevitable violation of an agent's epistemic autonomy that requires a defence of EAP's justifiability.

Bullock adheres to a different view of epistemic autonomy from Ahlstrom-Vij, namely the self-rule view (see footnote 2). In addition, Bullock adheres to a distinction between personal sovereignty and epistemic autonomy proposed by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (2012). In Zagzebski's view, personal sovereignty pertains to **non-interference from external will**. It means there is an absence of violation or coercion that prevents an agent from executing (acting or judging) their own will.¹⁷ In contrast, epistemic autonomy, understood as self-rule but not self-reliance, concerns **reflective choices an agent makes regarding external influences**, such as who one trusts, whether and when one chooses to defer epistemic authority to whom, in the acquisition and evaluation of knowledge or true beliefs.

Bullock thinks epistemic paternalism does not violate an agent's epistemic autonomy, but rather an agent's personal sovereignty.

2.3.1. Strict epistemic access paternalism

I summarise Bullock's argument regarding this position in the following:

*In this position, EAP theorists hold that true beliefs are a distinctive good to promote, a good that is independent of one's well-being. The following problem appears: when promoting true beliefs conflicts with the consideration of an agent's well-being, we need a compelling explanation of how promoting true beliefs can counterbalance the consideration of well-being, and EAP theorists can unlikely provide a compelling explanation for that. In those cases, EAP compromises its epistemic goal (promoting true beliefs) and collapses into general paternalism. In other cases, when promoting true beliefs in an agent **does not***

¹⁷ Zagzebski conceptualises personal sovereignty (which they call autonomy) as non-hinderance from other's will, which is a Kantian concept of autonomy: "Heteronomy of the will because of hindrance from the outside leads to the common view that autonomy means noninterference. You respect a person's autonomy by leaving the person alone. Autonomy in this sense has to do with the way people treat other people...[A] person should be permitted to make wrong decisions. Autonomy entails that there is a *prima facie* case for others to give me the space to govern my beliefs, desires, and acts independently of what others think about it." (2012, 235)

conflict with the consideration of an agent's well-being, it still can unlikely outweigh our respect of an agent's personal sovereignty, so epistemic (access) paternalism is an implausible project. However, since promoting an agent's well-being can outweigh the consideration of an agent's personal sovereignty, general paternalism does not have a problem in justifying itself like epistemic (access) paternalism.

2.3.2. Strict epistemic access paternalism, *modified position*

Bullock suggests that a modified position can be divided from the former position, with an attempt to avoid the charge of violating one's personal sovereignty, and thereby one of the results mentioned above. This modification is done by embedding the promotion of one's well-being. I summarise this position in the following:

*In this position, EAP theorists hold that true beliefs are a distinctive good to promote, a good that is independent of one's well-being. In addition, they hold that a paternalistic practice is morally justified **if and only if** it promotes both true beliefs and an agent's well-being. The problem follows: this renders general paternalism morally unjustified as general paternalism usually only promotes an agent's well-being, but not true beliefs. But there is no good reason to believe that general paternalism is morally unjustified. This renders the position implausible.*

2.4. Response to Bullock's second horn of dilemma

First of all, EAP theorists are unlikely to hold the modified position Bullock sketches. They are unlikely to be concerned with paternalistic practices other than *epistemically* paternalistic practices. Therefore, Bullock's reasoning is false. Secondly, we can imagine there are justified EAP cases that merely aim at promoting true beliefs (or other epistemic values), without invoking potential charges of violating personal sovereignty. Thirdly, as I have discussed in section 2.2., true beliefs, and other epistemic values, though distinctively epistemic, are (at least partly) constitutive of our agential flourishing. In the following, let us consider whether and how the preservation of an agent's personal sovereignty calls for a defence from epistemic (access) paternalism.

c. Assuming prima facie violation of personal sovereignty/autonomy proper

Whether the respect of personal sovereignty is a legitimate *prima facie* concern for epistemic (access) paternalism depends on the concept of personal sovereignty, and whether this conceptualisation can engage with our social circumstances. To answer this

question, we need to consider the concept of personal sovereignty that Bullock assumes. In section 2.3, I mentioned that Bullock adheres to Zagzebski's concept of personal sovereignty (autonomy *proper*), which is about absence of violation or coercion that otherwise prevents an agent executing (acting or judging) their own will.

Autonomy *proper*, conceptualised as the granting of *prima facie* moral standing to an agent's will and choices, is a central value of liberalism. Chambers (2008) points out that it is J.S. Mill who integrates liberalism into anti-paternalism. Mill states that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." (206) While Mill established that the only circumstance in which paternalism is legitimate is when the practice is to prevent harm, permission of paternalism has been extended for protecting other liberal values. Bullock, for example, presumes that promoting one's *well-being*, which is another central (liberal) value (Chamber 2009, 229), can justify (epistemic) paternalism and counterbalance the latter's *prima facie* violation of autonomy *proper*.

This liberal conceptualisation of autonomy *proper* assumes that individuals can ideally make free and autonomous choices without external interference. Yet, this ideal concept of autonomy *proper* and our social experiences talk past each other. Firstly, our societies are structured in ways that create objective constraints on our choices and actions. These structures are the result of complex historical, political, economic, and social processes (Young 2013). They manifest as laws, regulations, economic disparities, and societal norms, constrain our choices and dictate the consequences of our actions. Our social realities render this concept of autonomy *proper* inadequate, as none of us is making free and autonomous choices without influence by such social arrangements. If autonomy *proper* is conceptualised in such a way that we are still making autonomous choices even though our choices are channelled and constrained by these social arrangements, it owes us an explanation why some interferences and constraints are tolerated but not others, especially when these social arrangements already have moral consequences. For example, some social groups are more autonomous in terms of their choices, at the expense of other groups' choices.

Secondly, not all of us have the same possibilities and face the same limitations. Due to different social positions that we occupy, we are subject to oppressions, or advantaged by the oppressions that other members of the society suffer from. These oppressions manifest as a systematic deprivation or restriction in access to resources necessary for developing and exercising our capacities and making choices about our lives. Charles W. Mills (1999, 2017), for instance, points out that the ideal theorisation that liberalism adopts excludes discussions of race and racism, as the history of European imperialism and settlement is absent in its account, thereby interfering with our perception of the socio-political world as a raceless world. Such conceptualisations, also embedded in liberal values—including the value of autonomy *proper*—mislead us into thinking that the presence of privileged groups is the result of individual merits, not of oppression.

In other words, the societies we live in are ones with injustice. These not only give us moral reasons, but also assign us responsibility for undermining or resisting pervasively unjust conditions. This responsibility includes that we should not assume an ideal or neutral personal sovereignty. For some people benefit from how our societies are currently structured, their interests are sustained at the expense of the oppressed group of people. Assuming non-interference to one's choices in these circumstances perpetuates the present social injustice.¹⁸

Let us examine whether Bullock's objection to epistemic (access) paternalism, considering personal sovereignty, might still be legitimate. Bullock provides an example to illustrate how intuitive epistemic (access) paternalism violates personal sovereignty that renders EAP morally unjustified: playing a physics lecture series to make a sleeping person subconsciously learn quantum mechanics, even if they are not interested in the subject (2018, 442). Bullock wants to show in this example that epistemic (access) paternalism is intuitively unjustified when there is no moral reason to justify it. In addition, Bullock wants to prove their premise that once EAP theorists accept that epistemic value (true beliefs) is a distinctive value from *eudaimonia*, epistemic interventions can be done without making the recipient better or worse *in a certain sense*, and therefore, there is no normative reason for

¹⁸ There are still many cases in which asserting our personal sovereignty is necessary, particularly when it is concerned with wrongdoings. For instance, it helps individuals to resist threats to their emotional well-being posed by manipulative behaviours in relationships.

suggesting that such epistemic interventions should be done. In such cases, personal sovereignty has the *prima facie* moral standing, we should respect an agent's choices for their own interests, even though those interests are not morally relevant (e.g. having ice-cream of their best liking, knowing what neighbours do during weekends).

Setting aside that this example may only illustrate that there is only a prudential reason, rather than a moral one, that it is not appropriate to do something harmless to another person without their consent, however, a question arises: Are such cases that might invoke the consideration of personal sovereignty relevant to the inquiry of epistemic paternalism? As mentioned, the body of literature on epistemic (access) paternalism is primarily concerned with cases that are morally relevant (justice, public health, prevention of cognitive overload). These moral reasons may not be additional justifications for epistemic (access) paternalism, but rather, **motivating** reasons embedded in its epistemic goal (acquiring true beliefs). Legal justice, public health and human cognitive capacity are partly constitutive of our flourishing in different ways. Yet, they need to be actively enacted, given there are obstacles—human cognitive biases—as noted by the EAP theorists. These cases tell us that having true beliefs or knowledge is important for us in many situations as we need an accurate representation of the world for us to act morally.

Moreover, as mentioned in section 2.2 (b), while epistemic values are distinctively epistemic, they are constitutive (but not instrumental) to our flourishing. Considering this, we can reject Bullock's premises that "promoting one's epistemic value cannot counterbalance the demand of respecting one's personal sovereignty", "epistemic paternalism is implausible if the epistemic value it promotes is not instrumental to well-being", as they are based on flawed assumptions; Bullock's challenge to epistemic (access) paternalism is ineffective.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the existing inquiry in the body of literature concerning Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP). The epistemic goal, or epistemic value, in this inquiry is predominately seen as the acquisition of true beliefs or knowledge ("veritism" as coined by Goldman), and occasionally, as assuring reliable belief-forming processes (reliabilism, discussed by Pritchard).

I began with the discussion of the jointly sufficient conditions of constituting epistemic access paternalism, as well as the justificatory conditions of its application. I selected three examples which I considered representative to the existing inquiry, and found that even though two of them are not instances of EAP—as there is consent from recipients regarding blocking epistemic access—EAP theorists often, if not always, motivate their inquiry by moral reasons.

I then responded to Bullock’s challenge to EAP. Bullock’s challenge consists of two horns of dilemma, which they posed to EAP. I argued that their premises lie in (1) a thin conception of our agential flourishing, (2) considering true beliefs as the singular epistemic value, (3) the flawed deployment of a liberally conceived autonomy *proper*. Based on these assumptions, Bullock develops their arguments falsely, including seeing epistemic improvement as only having instrumental value to a person’s flourishing, and the consideration that epistemic improvement cannot outweigh that of autonomy *proper*.

In addition, I also argued that Bullock’s objections to EAP talk past other theorists’ inquiry into EAP. Last but not least, I reckoned that parts of the inquiry and challenges regarding EAP applies to other forms of epistemic paternalism, which should together facilitate my elaboration of an epistemic paternalism that resists epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions in Chapter 3.

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Chapter 2. Epistemic Nudging, and Some Other Considerations of Epistemic Paternalism

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin in section 1 by exploring another type of epistemic paternalism: epistemic nudging¹⁹, specifically as proposed by Kengo Miyazono (2023). Epistemic nudging is a form of epistemic paternalism, which distinguishes itself from Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) in the act of interference: epistemic nudging does not control epistemic access from its recipients, rather, it arranges epistemic resources according to recipients' perceptual and cognitive dispositions on belief-forming processes, nudging its recipients to form true beliefs. Miyazono argues that epistemic nudging is a better type of epistemic paternalism than EAP, as it leaves options to its recipients.

I discuss epistemic nudging for two reasons: first and foremost, like EAP, epistemic nudging is a candidate for an ameliorative project addressing both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions. Secondly, engaging with Miyazono's proposal of epistemic nudging allows us to inquire what is *epistemically relevant*, and explore a broader range of epistemic values that may be incorporated into epistemic paternalism. Current theories of epistemic nudging attempt to serve as a good basis for justifying epistemic intervention while avoiding some challenges commonly attributed to EAP—namely, that EAP fails to distribute epistemic goods fairly (assuming that epistemic goods are a type of distributive good) and violates agents' autonomy *proper*. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, these challenges are based on mistaken assumptions: similar to EAP, the current scope of epistemic nudging is limited by the assumption that its primary aim is to promote true beliefs in recipients. In addition to this limitation, Miyazono appears to adopt a narrow view of epistemic activities, assuming they are exclusively a matter of epistemic rationality. Furthermore, Miyazono's conception of epistemic rationality is too narrowly defined. Miyazono also presupposes that epistemic nudging operates by altering agents' perceptions and dispositions in belief-formation, which gives rise to a major justificatory issue—Miyazono calls this “the irrationality problem”. Besides misunderstanding the standard view of rationality in epistemology, Miyazono's assumptions about what constitutes epistemic activities overlook other essential aspects of our knowledge production, hindering our inquiries into possibilities of epistemic paternalism as resistance to epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions.

¹⁹ Also referred to as “epistemic libertarian paternalism”.

In section 2, I will briefly discuss two consequentialist objections to the justificatory conditions of EAP anticipated by Amiel Bernal (2020), and Bernal's criticism that epistemic paternalism *prima facie* objectifies recipients' epistemic agency. Bernal assesses where the violation of epistemic paternalism lies differently from other theorists and thereby arrives at a different justificatory condition epistemic paternalism must meet. I think that Bernal's anticipated objections to the justificatory conditions of EAP rightfully capture the role of social power dynamics in the shared epistemic resources of a society and its influences on moral and epistemic values, although these are not Bernal's focus in their own responses. I don't agree with Bernal's response that recognition of social dynamics in our moral and epistemic landscapes leads to moral relativism. Rather, I see it points to the epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions that we must resist. I also think that Bernal's worry that we can't avoid epistemic objectification in epistemic paternalism does not hold. Contrary to Bernal's assumption that epistemic agents are inevitably put in a hierarchical relation of epistemic superiority and inferiority, I suggest that epistemic paternalism can aim to facilitate our epistemic agency by pointing to alternative epistemic resources and our epistemological systems that are resilient to change or revision. The discussion in this section will further serve my retheorisation of epistemic paternalism as resistance to oppressions in Chapter 3.

1. Epistemic Nudging (EN)

In "Epistemic Libertarian Paternalism" (2023), Miyazono proposes and defends *Epistemic Nudging* (abbreviated as EN) as a weaker form of epistemic paternalism than EAP.²⁰ Recall the constitutive conditions of EAP in the last chapter (1.1): an EAP practice consists of the absence of informed consent, the goal of epistemic improvement *qua* true beliefs, as well as an interference *qua* epistemic access control. According to Miyazono, these are also the constitutive conditions of EN. Yet, there is a major difference that makes EN a weaker form of epistemic paternalism than EAP: EN's relatively moderate form of interference. EN does not *withhold* epistemic access from agents, "no inquiries are banned or blocked" (2023, 8); rather, it influences agents' belief-forming processes by *framing* information or evidence in favour of certain true beliefs. Miyazono argues that EN can justify its epistemic interventions

²⁰ Another EN theorist is Daniella Meehan (2020). In contrast to Miyazono, Meehan argues against EN. They see EN as a practice of mitigating epistemic vices, which will lead to epistemic laziness.

more convincingly, because, while similarly able to promote true beliefs, EN *prima facie* avoids violating agents' autonomy *proper*.

An example of EN given by Miyazono is an experiment about attitudes towards vaccination during a hypothetical outbreak. When the efficacy and side-effects of vaccination are framed more positively, participants exhibit more positive attitudes toward the safety of vaccines and *vice versa*. Below are Miyazono's examples of how such information is positively and negatively framed (3; my bold):

“Positive Frame: 999 people out of 1,000 don't have any severe side effects after being injected.

Negative Frame: (Only) 1 individual out of 1,000 has some severe side effects after being injected with a vaccine.

Positive Frame: 90% of medical scientists think that vaccines are safe.

Negative Frame: (Only) 10% of medical scientists don't think that vaccines are safe.”

In this example, participants tend to believe that vaccines are safe when the relevant evidence is framed positively (e.g. emphasising lives saved, as opposed to emphasising deaths). As a result, EN can likely achieve epistemic improvement (i.e. true beliefs) in its recipients while merely rearranging the way relevant evidence or opinions (or propositions expressing the opinions) are presented, without taking away evidence or opinions, as EAP does (7). Miyazono contends that EN has the advantage of being more “libertarian” by not blocking epistemic access to its inquirers and therefore not overriding autonomy *proper*.

The underlying reasons leading to Miyazono's preference for EN over EAP overlap in large part with those of defenders and opponents of EAP. One of which, as mentioned above, is the presupposition that withholding epistemic access conflicts with respecting agents' autonomy *proper*, along with the fair distribution of epistemic goods (regarded by Miyazono as a type of distributive good) *via* epistemic access. I argued in the previous chapter that from the outset, this assumption overlooks that we are not individuals making completely free choices, uninfluenced by social arrangements. Furthermore, these social arrangements often disproportionately empower certain social groups and disempower other social groups, and sustain relations of domination and oppression. These social arrangements channel the

moral consequences of our choices, even when such consequences are not part of our intentions or within our awareness.

However, the challenge to EN that Miyazono anticipates introduces a new problem that is worthy of discussion here. Miyazono argues that framing evidence or opinions with the purpose of an epistemic intervention raises an *irrationality problem*, following what Miyazono claims to be the “standard” picture of rationality that has been adopted from Edward Stein (1996/2011), “which defines rationality in terms of rules of logic and mathematics.” (10) In contrast, belief-forming processes relying on the framing of evidence or propositions to co-opt psychological processes, i.e. alter agents’ perceptions by taking advantage of their dispositions in making inferences and decisions, are considered “irrational”, rather than non-rational or arational. In Miyazono’s view, recipients in the example above form beliefs that are positive about vaccination not by their own reasoning, but due to their heuristic biases or other cognitive limitations—in this case the framing effect, an effect which manifests humans’ cognitive biases in forming beliefs based on positive and negative connotations of evidence or opinions. Having adopted the above picture of rationality, Miyazono considers prompting the alteration of our perception and dispositions irrational and thereby disrespectful to our rational agency²¹; irrationality is also the most urgent challenge to EN being distinctively epistemic, compared to non-epistemic nudging. (17)

As a solution to the irrationality problem, Miyazono proposes two jointly sufficient justificatory conditions (11):

*“(1) **Veridicality Condition (VC)**: X is more likely to form a true belief when X is nudged by N than when X is not,*

*(2) **Not-More-Irrationality Condition (NMIC)**: It is not the case that X is more likely to form an irrational belief when X is nudged by N than when X is not.”*

In short, an EN practice is justified *if* the practice is more likely to bring about true beliefs **and**, rationality-wise, EN is on a par with not non-EN. I am less troubled by the Veridicality

²¹ Miyazono also raises a worry that when EN is deployed in cases such as policies or involving hierarchal relationships, framing effect often follows “recommendations” by the authority. I understand such cases used for perpetuating or sustaining a relation of domination as non-EN practices (due to not meeting the constitutive condition of bringing about epistemic improvement).

Condition, as long as epistemic success is conceived of more broadly than merely as the attainment of true beliefs. What I am concerned about is Miyazono's deployment of the concept of (ir)rationality underlying the Not-More-Irrationality Condition, which has drawn various critiques from feminist philosophers.²²

In the following, I dispute Miyazono's presumption that "irrationality" poses a serious problem for EN and epistemic paternalism in general, for three reasons: (1) Miyazono's narrow conception of rationality (and "irrationality") overlooks the multiplicity involved in knowing within a non-ideal world, making their account of knowing implausible. (2) The "standard" view of rationality that Miyazono presumes is not aligned with the *standard conception* of rationality in epistemology—namely, believing according to evidence—and is defined too narrowly. Furthermore, EN is still not troubled by this *standard conception* of rationality, as reframing the evidence still presents the same evidence supporting the same belief(s). (3) In addition to these issues, Miyazono's approach obscures our inquiries surrounding epistemic paternalism and wrongs faced by individuals due to race, gender, and other social identities. In section 1.1, I will discuss two views of rationality—Miyazono's (misconceived) "standard" view and the more widely accepted, *standard* conception in epistemology. In section 1.2, I will briefly address the limitations of Miyazono's position, which seems to recognise only epistemically reasoning as "epistemic" activities. This restrictive view of the epistemic fails to facilitate broader inquiries involving EN, and in particular, its potential for addressing epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions.

1.1. Two views on rationality

Let us first look at what Miyazono presumes to be the "standard picture" of rationality. According to Miyazono, following Edward Stein's (1996/2011) analysis of rationality, it is conceptualised as principles of reasoning aligned with a broadly conceived notion of Enlightenment excellence—the ability of engage in coherent reasoning guided by logical or mathematical principles. This form of rationality is regarded as constitutive of conducting objective, impartial, or universal scientific inquiries in knowledge production. In the context of epistemic paternalism, Miyazono worries that the absence of rationality presents a more serious challenge for EN than for non-epistemic nudging (2023, 9–10). Unlike the latter, EN

²² See Haslanger (2013, 37 footnote 5) for a detailed list of important work in feminist critiques of rationality.

specifically targets the recipients' *epistemic* improvement, where rationality is seen as constitutive of the epistemic to ensure consistent and reliable belief-forming processes. Miyazono assumes that rationality is intrinsically valuable for our autonomous agency; thus an epistemic practice that lacks rationality fails to manifest such agency.

I contend that Miyazono, by assigning epistemic value exclusively to rationality, overlooks other constitutive aspects of knowledge. While rationality holds constitutive epistemic value *in relation to true beliefs*—serving a general function in support the formation of true beliefs—other cognitive capacities are also constitutive of our capacity of knowing. For example, our values and emotions draw our attention to what is important to know, guide the ways in which we conduct inquiries, and shape our perceptions and cognitive dispositions of making judgments, including how we look out for and evaluate evidence. Miranda Fricker (2007) argues, for instance, that our perceptions play a role in how we weigh up testifiers' credibility. This process not only influences how we know through others' words but also affects the epistemic standing of testifiers by either weighing their words fairly, or unfairly, due to our prejudices. Thus, our perceptions are also arguably part of our epistemic and moral responsibility for each other.

Because our knowing is not solely constituted by rationality but also other cognitive capacities—such as values and emotions, which in turn shape our perceptions and cognitive dispositions—epistemic interventions that incorporate these aspects should not be regarded as *prima facie* problematic. In other words, there are circumstances in which epistemic interventions are required for changing our epistemically (and often morally) culpable perceptions. This is because epistemic activities often carry both epistemic and moral consequences: harming a person's epistemic agency is also a moral wrong (*via* epistemic agency being constitutive of one's agency), additional to being an epistemic wrong (*via* hindering the flourishing of one's epistemic capacities within the epistemic community's knowledge production and revision). In Miyazono's EN example of vaccination, the goal of the inquiry is for inquirers to obtain a view of vaccination that promotes survival during a viral outbreak—namely, understanding that vaccines are safe and useful for preventing severe outbreaks. In this case, at least our values (concerning health and survival), emotions (related to vulnerability to illness), and reasoning (regarding how our attitudes to vaccines align with or undermine these values and emotions) work together to form this belief. The

positive framing deployed in such an intervention helps achieve the intended epistemic goal. Thus, saying that practices focusing on altering our perceptions and epistemic dispositions are irrational, and thereby not epistemic, is wrong. This view fails to acknowledge how our perceptions and epistemic dispositions come about but also overlooks their constitutive roles in our epistemic agency. Furthermore, it neglects how EN practices can be necessary for fostering our epistemic improvement.

Secondly, Miyazono's view on rationality is not "the standard" one. In fact, Edward Stein (1996/2011), whose view Miyazono adopts, acknowledges that there are multiple readings of rationality. However, Stein still considers this as "the standard picture of rationality" (4), because, for them, it is "intuitively very plausible: it seems certain that the principles which we think are the normative principles of reasoning are in fact the normative principles of reasoning." Yet, Stein's primary thesis argues that human beings do not empirically reason in accordance with this ideal. If we were to endorse this standard picture of rationality as a normative ideal for how we ought to reason, we would all fail and be deemed irrational. However, the conception of rationality typically assumed in epistemology is different from this view—it simply involves *believing in accordance with evidence*.

This standard conception of rationality in epistemology does not pose problem for EN. Although EN reframes or reorganises the presentation of evidence, it does not alter the evidence itself; the evidence remains the same. Both positive and negative framings convey the same content, that "999 people out of 1,000 don't have any severe side effects after being injected" is "(only) 1 individual out of 1,000 has some severe side effects after being injected with a vaccine". Since both frames convey the same content, agents should arrive at the same belief conclusion—that this vaccine is largely safe, with a 0.1% chance of severe side effects. Thus, EN is not concerned with *altering* what agents *epistemically ought* to believe. Rather, plausibly through changing agent's perception and aligning agents' emotional responses in the inquiry, EN encourages agents to adhere to epistemic norms, to believe what they *epistemically ought* to believe—by helping agents to reason carefully with the given evidence, ultimately arrive at true beliefs.²³

²³ It may be noted that believing what evidence supports does not necessarily help one to arrive at true beliefs. For instance, as Lisa Bortolotti (2023) says, "[w]e know that beliefs that are well supported by evidence at

However, even if Miyazono's view of rationality were the standard conception, their concern about the "irrationality" of EN, that EN poses threat to our autonomy, still does not hold. Miyazono cites Neil Levy's discussion on (non-epistemic) nudging and reasoning (2019) to express this concern, pointing out that a common criticism of nudging is that nudging bypasses our reasoning and, therefore, undermines our autonomy. This concern can be understood through the view that rationality is partly constitutive of our epistemic autonomy.²⁴ In the Kantian sense, being epistemically autonomous means that we can only be epistemically (and morally) responsible for what we believe, if it is out of our own reasoning. It is unclear whether Miyazono endorses a position of epistemic autonomy as *self-reliance* or *self-rule*, two positions I discussed in the previous chapter. Recall, in the position of *self-reliance*, individuals are ideal, autonomous knowers who rely solely on their own cognitive capacities, independently pursue evidence, and defer to no authority. If Miyazono incorporates the position of epistemic autonomy in their view of rationality, "cognitive capacities" likely refer to "reasoning guided by logical or mathematical principles" (2023, 10), and this process is deferred to no one else, even if Miyazono does not insist on independence in evidence gathering. However, as illustrated in Chapter 1, this view of autonomy is implausible. Moreover, the view of rationality embedded in it is problematic. This is not only because the standard conception of rationality is a matter of reasoning in accordance with evidence, as discussed earlier, but also because this narrow view of reasoning excludes many aspects of our reasoning processes—such as our affective mechanism, perception, memory—thereby neglecting the scope of our knowing.

If Miyazono endorses the alternative position of *self-ruled* epistemic autonomy, as elaborated in Chapter 1, this view offers a better understanding of our epistemic activities without reducing us to being epistemically unfree merely because we epistemically rely on each other. Furthermore, EN does not, *prima facie*, present a problem of irrationality: it is

some stage can turn out to be false at a later stage, as the succession of competing scientific theories through history of science illustrates" (54). In addition, among others, what is considered as evidence differs individually. interlocutors may dispute whether personal experiences are good or bad evidence. See Bortolotti 2023.

²⁴ Miyazono does not specify whether it is epistemic autonomy or autonomy *proper* that is at stake in agents not forming beliefs through a rational inference. I think it makes more sense that Miyazono has epistemic autonomy in mind, as they say the irrationality problem for EN is more serious than that of non-epistemic nudging. However, I have discussed both epistemic autonomy and autonomy *proper* and their relations with EAP and epistemic paternalism in general in the last chapter, which also applies to my discussion of EN.

agents' choice to defer their epistemic effort to another party, for which they remain epistemically responsible when errors or problems occur. For example, in the case of framing efficacy and effects of vaccination, agents delegate their epistemic authority regarding the source of evidence to those they trust. In a hypothetical assessment like this, recipients form beliefs based on the limited information provided to them, including the framing itself which is also selected and suggested by the information provider, who is a trusted epistemic authority. Since these beliefs are derived from recipients' deference of their epistemic authority, this EN practice—and EN practices in general—does not undermine recipients' epistemic autonomy or render them irrational. Rather than treating such “arational” interventions as inherently disrespectful to our epistemic agency, we should ask under what conditions these epistemic interventions should be deployed to foster the flourishing of our epistemic agency. Additionally, since the standard conception of rationality does not imply that EN threatens agents' epistemic autonomy but instead supports their reasoning in their inquiry in accordance with evidence, EN is not *prima facie* troubled by concerns about (ir)rationality.

In summary, both proponents and opponents of Epistemic Nudging (EN) and Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) share common premises, as discussed in the previous chapter. Both EN and EAP are understood as aiming for a specific kind of epistemic improvement—namely, the acquisition of true beliefs or reliable belief-forming processes that bring about true beliefs. However, their justifications are often misplaced in the balance of promoting epistemic improvements and maintaining a self-reliant view of epistemic autonomy, in which agents are expected to engage independently with evidence and arrive at beliefs *solely* through their own reasoning. Crucially, these discussions overlook the broader range of cognitive aspects and epistemic practices we require for the flourishing of our epistemic agency. As demonstrated above, EN does not make itself *prima facie* questionable regarding its relationship with rationality and autonomy. Moreover, similar to EAP, EN can plausibly function as an epistemic intervention that addresses problems in our current epistemic practices beyond simply promoting the acquisition of true beliefs. In the next chapter, I will illustrate what such epistemically paternalistic practices may look like.

1.2. Limitations of Miyazono's conception of the "epistemic"

As discussed above, Miyazono's view of rationality differs from what they presume to be the "standard" view. In contrast to the *standard* conception, which defines rationality as believing in accordance with evidence, Miyazono narrowly sees rationality as believing according to logical or mathematical principles. In addition to this restrictive view, Miyazono further narrows the scope of epistemic activities to reasoning alone and concludes the following: (1) since EN operates by engaging other cognitive components other than one's reasoning, it is deemed irrational; and (2) part of justifying EN involves demonstrating that it does not render agents "more irrational" than they were prior to the intervention. In this part, I explore another constraint of Miyazono's position on what consists of our epistemic activities: the presumption that (except for true beliefs) epistemic value lies exclusively in epistemic rationality. This narrow view not only limits our inquiries into what constitutes our epistemic agency and which epistemic interventions we may need to attain certain knowledge, but also risks contributing to create and sustain certain injustices and oppressions in social contexts. Although Miyazono's presupposition alone is to substantiate these injustices and oppressions, it may contribute to sustaining them.

One important area of inquiry that Miyazono's position cannot accommodate concerns the problem of ignorance. In Chapter 1, I discussed Fricker's (2016) argument that good epistemic practices are highly selective because human cognitive capacities, including time, energy, and focus, are limited. Not all epistemic resources are equally useful, meaning ignorance is not inherently bad for our (epistemic) agency. Whether ignorance becomes a problem depends on what we remain ignorant of. However, one particularly harmful form of ignorance is our ignorance of oppressions (Mills 2017).

The problem with ignorance of oppression is *structural* rather than individual. While individual ignorance emphasises the intentions of agents who wilfully avoid certain knowledge and thereby the responsibility lies with their intentions or epistemic vices (Alcoff 2024), structural ignorance arises from deficient epistemic practices ingrained within social structures. Participation in structural ignorance does not require malicious intent or epistemic vice from individuals, though these factors can play a role. Moreover, individuals living within such social structures may still act in ways that are epistemically rational, i.e.

they still believe in accordance with evidence available to them. Even without individual flaws or irrationality, structural epistemic deficiencies are perpetrated through daily social interactions. This shows that structural ignorance can be maintained simply by engaging in social-structural processes (Mills 2017), regardless of individual agents' intentions or epistemic capacities.

Aside from merely making inferences to beliefs based on what evidence supports, much more are involved in our epistemic activities. In discussing the structural problem of ignorance, Charles W. Mills (2017) identifies several salient cognitive components that shape how we know and how we fail to know. These cognitive components include our perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interests (vis-à-vis material interests, values, and meanings endorsed by a social group). These elements are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

A clear example of how these cognitive components work in tandem is seen in the behaviour of a U.S. police officer who disproportionately perceives *black* male people as a potential threat, due to racial biases. The police officer's conception of race and its association with crime in the community, influenced not only by personal experiences but also by the collective memories and testimonies within the law enforcement community and society at large, in turn reinforce and perpetuate these biased perceptions on black male people. The police officer may also be motivated by a sense of duty to protect the community or by an interest in preserving their own racial privilege, which further sustains the biased cognitive framework through which they interpret different social situations.

It is to note that our perceptions, how we see and hear, are inherently socialised. It involves interpreting the world through a specific conceptual grid and depends on both individual and collective memories and testimonies. The ways we remember and forget, give uptake to others' testimonies and incorporate them into our memory, and shape our conception and perception through memory, are all influenced by social norms and practices, or what Haslanger (2021) calls *cultural techné*—a framework of social meanings and values that operate in a society. This framework “consists in a set of tools from which we pick and choose in navigating social space; choice and agency are part of the picture” (26). In turn, our perception and conception influence what we remember, how we interpret testimony,

and how we evaluate and incorporate them into our understanding. Background knowledge formed through these processes guides our inferences and judgments in reverse. Our group interests, such as shared values, material interests, or social identities, also shape what we perceive, remember, and accept as facts and frameworks of our knowing.

Having articulated the roles of these cognitive components in our epistemic activities, Mills uses them to reveal a form of structural ignorance concerning historical and ongoing white supremacy. The legacy of colonisation and imperialism persists in shaping contemporary epistemic practices. Many descendants of European settlers, privileged by their inherited dominance, as well as some of those who are socially vulnerable or disadvantaged but still align with social norms and practices prompted by Anglo-European dominance, perpetrate this *white ignorance*. By forgetting colonial history and denying the continuing existence of racial oppression in the social structure, they fail to conceive and perceive racial oppression as a present reality.

Let us return to Miyazono's discussion of EN. Miyazono identifies an "irrationality problem" with EN, partly because they (mistakenly) believe that EN bypasses agents' rational processes by altering their perceptions in their inquiry, such as those regarding safety and efficacy of vaccines, through motivating agents' heuristics. However, instead of excluding other cognitive aspects from what counts as epistemic activities, Mills acknowledges that our perceptions and heuristics, shaped and guided by our background knowledge and our motivational interest, are constitutive of our epistemic activities. Mills further illustrates the need to account for the complexity of how these cognitive components interact within our epistemic practices and how they are embedded in our social contexts. This nuanced approach allows us to better grasp the political dimension of knowing: how our knowledge is driven by particular social interests and shaped by shared social meanings and values. At the same time, what is excluded from our social knowledge are crucial histories of oppressions, such as racial and gender oppressions, or oppressions against disabled individuals, which continue to persist and shape our reality.

In conclusion, instead of assuming that our epistemic activities, and epistemic interventions therein, should focus solely on promoting epistemic rationality, we must also recognise other cognitive aspects in these epistemic activities. As elucidated in Mills' analysis of white

ignorance, for example, our epistemic agency can be compromised through social relations and structures. EN, along with epistemic paternalism more broadly, can serve as necessary interventions to address our epistemic agency, that is compromised under such conditions and foster a more favourable epistemic environment.

2. Some Other Considerations of Epistemic Paternalism Prompted by Amiel Bernal

In the following, I will discuss Amiel Bernal's (2020) considerations on epistemic paternalism. These considerations, which eventually lead to Bernal's conclusion that epistemic paternalism is *prima facie* unjustified, both overlap with and are distinct from those of other theorists. They primarily conceive of epistemic paternalism as an individualistic practice (though the practice may also address a group of recipients), and that the epistemic intervention is disrespectful of and/or unfair to recipients' agency. While other theorists ground epistemic paternalism's violation as against agents' epistemic autonomy, in the way that agents are unable to arrive at epistemic improvements (i.e. true beliefs) self-reliantly, Bernal grounds the violation in *epistemic objectification* of recipients, which *prima facie* disrespects their agency. Moreover, in contrast to other theorists, Bernal accepts that epistemic paternalism can do more work than primarily promoting true beliefs. In particular, Bernal thinks that epistemic paternalism may be deployed to address two types of epistemic injustice—testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, articulated by Fricker (2007).

Bernal recognises that the ongoing discussion on epistemic paternalism is predominantly driven by the standard account of fairness and respect of agency. In Bernal's assessment, these accounts fall short in accurately capturing the kind of disrespect and unfairness experienced by epistemic agents owing to epistemic paternalism. Consequently, such discussion also fails to adequately discern instances where, and how, epistemic paternalism might be justified.

In response to this pitfall, Bernal anticipates potential consequentialist and deontological objections to epistemic paternalism, objections which Bernal uses to elaborate why epistemic paternalism is *prima facie* epistemically unjust. Firstly, Bernal discusses two consequentialist objections corresponding to the two jointly sufficient justificatory conditions for an act of Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) proposed by Ahlstrom-Vij which I discussed in the previous chapter. Recall, justificatory condition 4 (*no conflicts between*

epistemic improvement and other moral reasons) demands that the epistemic and morally pertinent reasons for EAP are not in conflict with each other; condition 5 (*high likelihood of epistemic success*) requires available evidence to support the likelihood of epistemic improvements.

According to Bernal (2020, 237), a consequentialist objection to the plausibility of condition 4 (*no conflicts between epistemic improvement and other moral reasons*) would look as follows: what are considered moral considerations by a society is a result of power dynamics in that society, reflecting values of the dominant class. Therefore, what is commonly believed to be moral is informed by cultural and personal biases. This might make epistemic paternalism susceptible to rank abuse, where individuals in higher positions in various social contexts justify their epistemic interventions by promoting their dominant moral views. Another consequentialist objection applies to the plausibility of condition 5 (*high likelihood of epistemic success*), that meeting the burden of proof for the efficacy of epistemic interventions is challenging, as it requires empirical content as support. Moreover, our evaluation of the efficacy of epistemic improvements is influenced by the dominant views in our societies.

Bernal doubts these two objections would hold. Firstly, these two objections hold that the success of epistemic improvements is highly context-sensitive and empirically uncertain. The objection introduces a slippery-slope worry, because suggesting that moral views commonly shared in the society are informed by dominant social groups does not necessarily render epistemic paternalism morally unjustified. Otherwise, Bernal argues, all teachers and applied ethicists, among others, could be criticised for their epistemically paternalistic practices (and most of them are not). Secondly, Bernal argues that the burden of proof should lie on the sceptics; these objections should show why epistemic interventions meeting both justificatory conditions still need to address this worry.

Even though I agree with Bernal that these two consequentialist objections do not render epistemic paternalism unjustified, I find them helpful in calling our attention to how we conceptualise epistemic paternalism. A central argument in this thesis is that what we conceive and prioritise to be epistemic or moral values for our agency very much affect and guide how we envisage epistemic improvements and epistemic interventions. Defenders and

critics of EAP, as well as Miyazono, who proposes and defends EN, endorse a set of liberal values and presuppositions and many of those presumed in traditional analytic epistemology. These values and presuppositions guide their conceptualisation of epistemic paternalism, together with drawing boundaries and limitations that have theoretical and practical consequences that contribute to how we can(not) flourish as knowing agents.

Our concepts and perceptions are influenced by conceptual resources and frameworks available in our social environments. In other words, we draw on social meanings available in the social structure when thinking about what rights and wrongs are, as well as what we need for our flourishing. Bernal accurately points to social dynamics, that the privileged group possesses the epistemic power over our shared epistemic resources and our values. However, different from Bernal, I don't see that it implies by a moral relativist conclusion. What it implies is that in addressing our need for epistemic amelioration, we must pay attention to in the ways dominant views, in the form of social norms or schemas, rightfully or wrongly influence what we perceive to be morally and epistemically valuable. In addition, both objections remind us that our current best practices should remain revisable given that the available conceptual resources we draw on to understand our moral and epistemic obligations, along with our social environment, change over time. An epistemic paternalism, as an epistemic ameliorative project, therefore, should attend to these social constraints on us.

Now let us turn to what concerns Bernal about epistemic paternalism. First, Bernal worries that epistemic objectification results in epistemic paternalism, which might harm its recipients in a way that it disrespects their autonomous agency and treats them unfairly. This concern does not stem from a self-reliant conception of epistemic autonomy or from a view of the distributive unfairness of evidence or knowledge regarding epistemic goods; these two issues are central preoccupations for both theorists of EAP and EN mentioned earlier. Rather, it is based on Fricker's (2007, 132) conceptualisation of epistemic objectification, that epistemic paternalism can hardly avoid objectifying the recipient's epistemic agency. Epistemic objectification, according to Fricker and Bernal, occurs in two ways: (1) recipients are treated as passive sources of information instead of informants, disregarded for the knowledge they produce and contribute; (2) their knowledge and

opinions are kept out of their epistemic community, and they cannot participate in the sharing of knowledge.²⁵

What's more, Bernal argues that "[e]ngaging in epistemic paternalism suggests epistemic superiority...both regarding the relevant truth-claims and appropriate means of interference" (2020, 241). In summary, Bernal contends that even if epistemic paternalism can serve more sorts of epistemic improvements, such as addressing epistemic injustice, rather than merely true belief acquisition as it is typically conceived, by treating individuals as epistemic recipients, and by practicing epistemic superiority through epistemic interventions, epistemic paternalism inevitably disrespects and is unfair to its recipients. Thereby, epistemic paternalism is another *prima facie* form of epistemic injustice.

However, Bernal suggests epistemic paternalism might still be justified in some circumstances, if the practice meets two jointly sufficient justificatory conditions:

(1) it should be practiced to mitigate epistemic injustice and (2) carried out in a very agent-respectful way. Bernal illustrates a what they consider to be justified practice: A lower-ranked veteran Marine suffering from post-traumatic stress is epistemically marginalised, as they lack the epistemic resources to comprehend their mental condition and their condition demands mental health care. Due to social (and military) norms, few veterans reach out for mental health care, resulting in a lack of understanding in mental health care sectors about the mental conditions that these veterans tend to experience. Bernal argues that cases like those of providing pamphlets or online information accessible to veteran Marines are justified, as only a passive interference is involved, which remains respectful to veteran Marines and does not "emasculate" their agency (245).

²⁵ There are other analyses of epistemic objectification. For instance, José Medina (2013, 91–93) argues that epistemic objectification should not only include what Fricker says, where an agent is undermined in their capacity as "a giver of knowledge", but also when they are undermined in their capacity as an inquirer. This is because treating an agent only as an informant also wrongs them epistemically, as "there is no full and equal epistemic cooperation". Aidan McGlynn (2021) draws on Martha Nussbaum's analysis of seven ways of epistemic objectification and adds three more ways to it based on Rae Langton's work, arguing that the notion is far richer than Fricker's account suggests. However, I believe that these accounts do not pose problems for epistemic paternalism, but rather shed light on the epistemic goals we should aim for and effective interventions. I will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

Although I agree with Bernal that this example shows a way epistemic paternalism can help address epistemic injustice, I don't agree with Bernal's views that epistemic interventions inevitably objectify their recipients' epistemic agency, and are thereby disrespectful of or unfair to them. There are epistemic interventions that do not epistemically objectify, and epistemic paternalism does not necessarily invoke an epistemically objectifying act for its success. For instance, epistemic paternalism can work to draw our attention to what matters in an inquiry, redirect our cognitive (and possibly affective) dispositions from, or call our awareness and sensitivity to, our inadequate epistemic resources that perpetrate both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions. It can work as appealing to and making scrutiny of our common epistemic resources, values, and meaning, without positioning ourselves in a hierarchical relation. In the next chapter, I will draw on José Medina (2013)'s interactionist view on epistemic agency and epistemic interactions to further illustrate that the role epistemic interventions play in dynamics where we perform different epistemic roles at different times in our epistemic exchange within our epistemic community.

Finally, I want to underscore that Bernal's scope of epistemic paternalism is limited to individualistic interventions that does not regard our epistemic (as well as moral and political) responsibility in the condition of oppressions. While Bernal does not explicate in what way the example of veteran Marines does not objectify one's epistemic agency, Bernal seems to suggest that epistemic paternalism would not deprive of epistemic authority, only if it is exercised without being perceived as intended by other epistemic agents, or if it is exercised in a so trivial way that it does not seem to be a kind of epistemic interaction between two agents, specifically no one is passing any evaluation about what is the right thing to do. Similar to my last point, Bernal's precaution on epistemically objectifying effects from the act and intention of epistemic paternalism does not hold as epistemic interventions are not necessitated by a hierarchical relation of epistemic superiority and inferiority. This also applies to cases where epistemic paternalism aims at facilitating our epistemic agency, in which we perform many roles in our epistemic community (to be discussed in Chapter 3).

With the goal of facilitating our epistemic agency, which has been compromised and wronged by various oppressions, I will conceptualise in the next chapter epistemic paternalism as a *political normative epistemology*. Following Haslanger's (1999) view of

normative epistemology, this epistemic paternalism is primarily concerned with how we best cooperate in our cognitive efforts as agents, that our flourishing is necessitated through epistemic interactions in our epistemic communities. It is *political* because differential treatments of social groups in the past and present have advantaged some groups and disadvantaged other groups in collective knowledge production and revision, which enables *differential epistemic power* that continues to be in part constitutive of *differential political power* in these social groups. Therefore, epistemic paternalism is both a form of epistemic and political resistance to the current distribution of epistemic and political power.

3. Conclusion

I started this chapter by discussing Epistemic Nudging (EN), proposed by Miyazono. The major difference between EN and Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) is that EN adopts a different means for its interventions, although it can still be broadly conceived of as evidence or information channelling, in the form of reframing and maintaining epistemic resources accessible to recipients. EN is argued to be a weaker form of epistemic paternalism, aiming to avoid the charge of disrespecting recipients' epistemic autonomy.

I identified that, similar to both proponents and opponents of EAP, Miyazono presupposes that the goal of epistemic improvement in EN is the acquisition of true beliefs and assumes a self-reliant view of epistemic autonomy, where we independently gather evidence and form beliefs. Furthermore, Miyazono frames the irrationality problem as the central justificatory issue for EN, based on their mischaracterisation of the standard conception of rationality as being guided by "logical or mathematical principles".

However, this view of rationality is implausible for being too narrowly defined, as it excludes many cognitive aspects involved in our reasoning processes. In contrast, the standard conception of rationality should simply refer to believing according to what evidence supports. Under this standard conception, EN is neither manipulative nor does it *prima facie* violate our rationality; instead, it helps us arrive at true beliefs by presenting the same evidence in ways that engage our other cognitive components.

What's more, Miyazono's framing of epistemic activities as primarily concerned with reasoning alone overlooks other cognitive capacities constative of epistemological inquiry. This narrow view obscures our understanding of how epistemic practices are intertwined

with epistemic and social-political oppressions and, correspondingly, which epistemic practices are required to address them. Drawing on Mills' analyses, I have shown that various cognitive components—including perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational (group) interests, are also constitutive of our epistemic practices. These components not only shape how we know but also play significant roles in enacting and sustaining of social oppressions.

Then, I drew on some other considerations Amiel Bernal raises about epistemic paternalism. On the one hand, Bernal is more sensitive to a broader range of epistemic values for our agency, epistemic values that are necessitated by our participation in (epistemic) communities. On the other hand, Bernal argues that epistemic paternalism remains *prima facie* unjustified for recipients because its epistemic interventions are inherently disrespectful and unfair to our epistemic agency, setting aside that part of our epistemic flourishing involves being active informants in our communities. Additionally, I discussed the consequentialist objections anticipated by Bernal, which, while they do not hold, provide us insights on how social norms and meanings in a particular society channel how we consider moral and/or epistemic values. Last but not least, Bernal worries that epistemic superiority and epistemic objectification almost always take place in epistemic paternalism, leading to the conclusion that epistemic paternalism is *prima facie* unjustified. I briefly illustrated an alternative of how epistemic interventions can work without objectifying recipients' epistemic agency. In fact, I think that not only both EAP and EN can serve to address epistemic oppression without facing objections, as I discussed in this chapter and the last one, but also, such epistemic interventions are necessary for bringing about social change through the change of our epistemic practices.

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Chapter 3. Toward an Epistemic Paternalism of Normative Political Epistemology

1. An Epistemic Paternalism That Resists Oppressions

After having discussed some standard views and considerations on epistemic paternalism in the previous chapters, let me begin this chapter by proposing an epistemic paternalism that is not *ideal*, but rather corresponds to our social reality structured by oppressions. An epistemic paternalism that resists oppressions is epistemic interventions aimed at the flourishing of our epistemic agency, while taking into account that its flourishing or failure cannot be achieved by individual agents' efforts, but in the interaction within and between different social groups—both the privileged and oppressed. These epistemic interventions consist of sustained efforts across time and social space, and is a political struggle. It is paternalistic because of its *prescriptive* practice. The normative force of this practice justifies not requiring consent from its recipients. Furthering points developed in previous chapters, I also argue in this chapter that not requiring consent does not necessarily make epistemic paternalism coercive to its recipients' agency, and it does not rely on a hierarchical view of epistemic authority, but epistemic authority in our epistemic interlocutors who possess social knowledge about themselves and the others.

Epistemic paternalism that resists oppressions is not theorised as a single form of either epistemic access control or epistemic nudging. It allows both forms at joint work to be more effective, or even more than those two forms, which goes beyond the scope of this thesis. There are also cases in which epistemic paternalism necessarily requires (at least) both epistemic access control and epistemic nudging at work.

Arguing for this epistemic paternalism should also in part show that our epistemic improvements, i.e. the flourishing of our epistemic agency or lifting obstacles that prevent this flourishing, go beyond the acquisition of true beliefs; they involve fostering our habits and sensitivities to (the possibility of) alternative perspectives that are largely suppressed or missing in our societies. To successfully facilitate our epistemic agency, epistemic interventions will be required to restructure our perception and redirect our attention, so that we are more likely to get out of the kind of active ignorance that sustains the privilege of a group and the subordination of others, including the structural epistemic wrongs against oppressed groups.

Following Charles W. Mills' (1997, 2017) approach to the epistemology of ignorance and José Medina's (2013) epistemology of resistance, I will propose an example of epistemic paternalistic practices to instantiate my conceptualisation of epistemic paternalism. This example is using singular pronoun *they* in English-speaking contexts. I intend for the scope of this epistemic paternalism to be both narrow and broad. It is narrow because it serves as a necessary, but not sufficient, strategy for resisting oppression, with its task often tailored to specific local and temporal social conditions. It is broad due to its high adaptability and diverse approaches to resisting various forms of oppression, ranging from everyday interpersonal exchanges to the epistemic and political projects aimed at revealing pluralistic ways of knowing.

2. (Re)theorising Epistemic Paternalism

In the following, I will outline an approach to epistemic paternalism aimed at resisting oppressions. My central argument is that if the flourishing of our epistemic agency is the goal of epistemic paternalism, and oppressions are a condition that systematically inhibit or even impairs the flourishing of our epistemic agency, then there is a normative reason for epistemic paternalism to safeguard our epistemic agency by resisting oppressions. To support this argument, I will provide an account of epistemic agency, epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions, and their relationship. Additionally, I will demonstrate how epistemic paternalism can avoid challenges to its justifiability and effectively promote our epistemic agency.

2.1. Social positions, epistemic agency and epistemic paternalism

One substantial question in relation to theorising epistemic paternalism is what constitutes our epistemic agency and what undermines it. In chapter 1, I argued that we should not assume the acquisition of true beliefs as the only, or predominant, epistemic value for our us. Partly, that is because possessing more true beliefs or epistemic resources is not necessarily facilitating, but can sometimes be detrimental to, our epistemic agency, such as when we take into account the limitation of our cognitive capacity. When we consider what brings about our epistemic improvement, we also need to consider which epistemic resources are useful for us. Partly, it is also because possession of true beliefs alone is not sufficient for the flourishing of our epistemic agency, or to redeem our compromised

epistemic agency. Therefore, we also need other epistemic practices that promote other epistemic values other than true beliefs.

Medina's (2013) interactionist view of epistemic agency suggests two other epistemic values that constitute our epistemic interactions and can lead to the flourishing of epistemic agency: *reciprocity* and *reversibility*. According to Medina, in epistemic interactions, where our epistemic resources are pooled and "[our] experiences and imaginations are shared, compared, and contrasted" (7), our roles must be reciprocal and interchangeable in order to engage in the pursuit and use of knowledge, and collaborate in generating and interpreting possible meanings. Moreover, Medina points out that our epistemic roles in epistemic interactions are not simply taken one at a time; rather, *epistemic interactions should be seen as communicative dynamics in which we can simultaneously be inquirers, informants, assessors, and evaluators* (95, my italics).

However, the dynamics of social relation of privilege and oppression can negatively influence epistemic interactions. Before describing how oppression can harm epistemic agency, I will illustrate the connection between social groups oppression (and provide a more precise definition of oppression in 2.2.). Who is oppressed or privileged is often determined by our membership in social groups *within a local social context*.²⁶ Typically, there are multiple social groups in a society that are associated with social positions such as gender, sexuality, race, (dis)ability, age.²⁷ Our membership in these social groups can be either voluntary (through self-identification) or involuntary (through others' ascription), and it does not require our awareness to be in a social group. In some cases, individuals may not be immediately aware of their group membership.

For example, a Nigerian moving to the US takes a long time to cognitively and emotionally arrive at a social understanding, specific to the American society, that they are perceived as *black African* (in contrast to black American, Hispanic, Asian American, white American and

²⁶ I follow other feminist philosophers' non-essentialist conceptualisation of social groups as forms of social relations, such as Haslanger (2012) and Young (2011), in contrast to other individualistic approaches to groups. See Young (2011) for an analysis of different individualistic approaches.

²⁷ Importantly, not all social groups are theorised equally; some are more widely recognised, while others remain undertheorised.

other racial groups in the US), as this social group does not exist in Nigerian society.²⁸ Or a gender-nonconforming faculty member may be unaware that they receive more requests for help from students due to being perceived as a *woman* and, therefore, perceived as more available for emotional labour than other male faculty members.

These examples illustrate that there are many ways in which oppressions are sustained by and operate through social perceptions and biases. Such oppressions may not always be directly or immediately discernible, even to the oppressed themselves. It is important to note that both the oppressed and the privileged can maintain prejudicial social perceptions even if they hold beliefs that are inconsistent with, or even directly opposed to, those perceptions (Fricker 2007; Medina 2013, 129–30). For example, somebody may believe it wrong to think that black people should be limited to low-paid jobs solely due to their race. Yet they may still assume that black people are waiters when dining in restaurants. In this case, promoting true beliefs alone is not sufficient to counteract the harms of oppression on epistemic agency.

Let's see how Medina's account illuminates the ways in which oppression can inflict harm on the epistemic agency of both the socially privileged and the oppressed by maintaining biases and prejudices related to social groups. Consider the stereotype "black people work in low-paid service sectors". First, let's take the perspective of a black person, Mona, and examine how this may affect them. Mona likely struggles to resist this social imagination (manifesting as stereotypes) *both in others and within herself*. They may resist by pointing out various opportunities available to them and asserting that they deserve the same possibilities as members of other racial groups. This struggle can be experienced in many ways, and manifest differently with regards to others and Mona herself.

For instance, Mona may repeatedly be assumed to be and misrecognised as service personnel by different people, often by those who are privileged. Depending on the social context, these people may be the white, but they could also be from other racial groups, including other black people. Alternatively, Mona may undermine herself, feel undeserving

²⁸ Throughout Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2013) novel *Americanah*, one of the protagonists, Ifemelu, experiences different treatments compared to people from other social groups during her time studying, working and integrating in the United States. It takes her a long time to make sense of these experiences in relation to being seen as a black African woman.

and excessively self-critical when they pursue a different or “better job”—one less stereotypically associated with lower-class or underprivileged racial groups.

These perceptions and assumptions by others are difficult to change or correct, owing in part to their failure or insensitivity to engage with what Mona says or consider what Mona means. Their flawed, racially-stereotyping assumptions about what Mona does or should do, lead to their failure of giving uptake to Mona’s various epistemic roles, such as informant (through testifying themselves by words, or presenting themselves in ways that should challenge the assumption that they are service personnel).

Furthermore, Mona is likely excluded from participating in the inquiry or understanding of others because of who Mona is and what Mona does. Besides, Mona may also find herself unable to raise awareness about, or effectively contest, racial stereotypes and racism.

Not only is Mona’s epistemic agency undermined in epistemic interactions with their community, but the community also fails Mona by not supporting their development of self-knowledge. This failure increases the burden on Mona as they struggle to maintain a clear sense of themselves in their epistemic capacity as a knower and their agency. They must resist internalising or submitting to the oppressive social roles imposed on them, roles that are wrongfully seen as their natural roles. Additionally, this impairment affects their development of knowledge about others, including other black people, as they navigate the same oppressive stereotypes.

Secondly, let’s take the perspective of the privileged group. As Medina argues, oppression is also detrimental to the epistemic agency of the privileged, who habitually perceive and assume that black people are suited for servitude. The privileged tend to be insensitive and unable to see alternative hermeneutical possibilities, and therefore become hermeneutically marginalised themselves (113). They may not know it is not in the nature of black people to be subjected to social underprivilege, but partially because of the complex history and ongoing social arrangements that sustain racism, and from that social relations they continue to enjoy that privilege. Yet, being epistemically disadvantaged in this sense does not challenge the privileged, but rather reinforces their social dominance.

I suggest epistemic paternalism as an epistemic, moral and political project, with particular attention to oppressed people, who suffer both epistemically and socio-politically. The central goal of epistemic paternalism is to facilitate the epistemic agency of the oppressed, as this agency is necessary for the political struggle against oppressions (which will be further discussed in the following sections). However, as a result, this practice may also facilitate the epistemic agency of the privileged. This is because the success of epistemic paternalism requires enactment by the entire social community, and its implementation should lead to a greater sensitivity and awareness among both the oppressed and the privileged.

2.2. Epistemic paternalism resisting epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions

Next, I will elucidate the relation between non-epistemic oppressions and epistemic oppression²⁹, and what I think epistemic paternalism should do in face of them. I take oppressions to refer to a consequence of social relations in which there are *privileged* groups maintaining advantages at the expense of other *oppressed* groups. Oppressions should be understood from a structural, but not individualistic, perspective. Irrespective of individuals' conscious choices or intentions, simply enacting on existing social arrangements is sufficient to produce and reproduce oppressions (Haslanger 2012; Young 1990/2011, 2013). One can perpetrate racial oppression to black people by assigning duties of servitude to a black person considering black people are more suitable to such tasks. One can also perpetrate gender oppression to female people by assuming that they are stay-at-home-mothers at the initial interaction with them. In section 2.1, I illustrated how prejudicial social perceptions can harm oppressed groups both epistemically and morally, even when individuals do not hold consciously prejudicial beliefs. These harms often contribute to shaping the socio-economic conditions of oppressed people, such as the greater constraints black people face in improving their living conditions, or the limitations placed on female people in pursuing careers not centred around caregiving, compared to male people.

²⁹ I use the term "oppressions" in the plural to highlight their multiplicity, such as racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism. However, I use "epistemic oppression" in the singular to refer to a distinct form of oppression rooted in the epistemic domain, despite the various ways an individual's epistemic agency can be systematically undermined due to their membership in a particular social group. Additionally, I follow Dotson's (2014) usage of "epistemic oppression" in the singular when discussing its different orders (i.e., first, second, or third order of epistemic oppression), which I will elaborate on below.

On the other hand, epistemic oppression refers to the persistent infringement on a person's epistemic agency, limiting their ability to contribute to the production and revision of knowledge (Dotson 2012, 2014; Medina 2013). Although epistemic oppression is distinctively epistemic, it is closely connected to other forms of oppression. I argue that epistemic oppression is plausibly, in part, constitutive of and sustained by non-epistemic oppression. Based on this premise, I further argue that epistemic interventions are necessary to resist both epistemic and non-epistemic forms of oppression.

Before proceeding, I will elaborate on the discussion of addressing epistemic oppression, through which I aim to demonstrate that resistance at the epistemic level is necessary to combat social oppression. This issue is raised by Dotson (2014), who suggests that we do not always need epistemic interventions to resist epistemic oppression, as testimonial and hermeneutical injustices can be addressed through non-epistemic interventions, given their status as by-products of social and political oppression. In a critical response to Dotson, Taylor Rogers (2021) argues that correcting these injustices through non-epistemic means may only have one-off effect, as they fail to address the underlying sources rooted in the epistemic domain.

Dotson (2012 & 2014) conceptualises epistemic oppression into three orders, each requiring a different level of resistance. First-order epistemic oppression, or epistemic standing exclusion³⁰, includes testimonial injustice, where a hearer assigns insufficient credibility to a speaker due to social prejudices associated with the speaker's identity.³¹ Dotson's *preliminary solution* (2014, 11) to this issue is to reorganise cognitive functioning by aligning the hearer's perceptions with their beliefs, thereby compensating for the hearer's tendency to undermine certain social groups' credibility.

Dotson argues that our societies already possess the shared epistemic resources—such as the concept of credibility—needed to facilitate changes in the epistemic standing of the

³⁰ As neatly put by Aleksandra Hernandez (2023).

³¹ In contrast to Fricker's (2007) framing, Medina (2013) convincingly argues that testimonial injustice also happens when a speaker is given more credibility than they deserve, when we look at our epistemic interaction in communicative dynamics. Let's look at *The Talented Mr Ripley* again: Marge's suspicion not taken seriously, in addition to "being a woman", is also in part due to Greenleaf assigning too much credibility to Tom Ripley, plausibly also partly due to the latter "being a man". Marge's words may be taken differently, if the suspect was (1) a female, or black (man), who are also subject to, though different set of, social biases, or (2) another person whose character is not favoured by Greenleaf.

underprivileged. Dotson explains that the reason individuals from subordinate groups are still assigned less credibility is not due to a lack of epistemic resources, but rather due to the distribution of *epistemic power*. This power, defined as “relations of privilege and underprivilege afforded *via* different social positions, relevant resources and/or epistemological systems with respect to knowledge production” (Dotson 2014, 11; I will explain Dotson’s use of epistemological systems below), is unequally distributed across social groups. Drawing on Medina’s interactionist view of epistemic interaction (discussed in 2.1), Dotson shows how differential epistemic power manifesting in credibility assessments are directly divided from and reflecting social relations of domination and subordination. Thus, Dotson concludes that to address the diminished epistemic standing of oppressed groups, we must critically engage with the social and historical landscape of epistemic power.

Second-order epistemic oppression, or conceptual exclusion³², exemplified by what Fricker (2007) terms *hermeneutical injustice*, occurs when a person is disadvantaged in making sense of and communicating their experiences, due to the absence of relevant meanings within the shared epistemic resources. Dotson’s *preliminary solution* to hermeneutical injustice, alongside the redistribution of the credibility, involves being *willing to recognise* that the shared epistemic resources are insufficient for an adequate understanding of our social world and require revision. However, as with first-order epistemic oppression, Dotson argues that the solution to conceptual exclusion should involve the redistribution of social, political and economic power toward oppressed groups. This is because conceptual exclusion persists as a result of differential epistemic power: dominant epistemic resources work well for the privileged, who therefore see little need to change them, while the underprivileged face frustration by failing in knowledge production and revision, as it is the privileged who shape how epistemic resources are pooled in the society.

Third-order epistemic oppression, known as *contributory injustice* and first articulated by Dotson (2012)³³, refers to a situation in which an epistemic agent’s deliberate or wilful

³² Also used by Hernandez (2023).

³³ Dotson conceptualises contributory injustice in face of Fricker framing testimonial and hermeneutical injustices as two primary forms of epistemic injustice. Dotson worries that Fricker seems to assume a unitary set of hermeneutical resources, and this assumption perpetrates epistemic oppression, in a way that it “fails to

hermeneutical ignorance—through the use of structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources—undermines a knower’s ability to contribute to shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community, thereby compromising their epistemic agency (32). In other words, this form of epistemic oppression involves the systematic exclusion of alternative epistemic resources from the shared pool, typically by the dominant group’s failure to attend to these resources. In epistemic communities where contributory injustice occurs, a person’s epistemic agency is compromised because alternative resources are prevented from receiving proper uptake in comparison to the dominant, shared epistemic resources.

Dotson (2014) argues that our *epistemological systems* being resilient to change has been constitutive of contributory injustice, and, therefore, contributory justice cannot be reduced solely to social or political factors. These systems are resilient (though not all equally so) because they are structures that govern how we conduct inquiries and make sense of the world. They set the boundaries of what should be investigated (*the scope of inquiry*), and regulate how inquiries should be pursued (*standards of inquiry*). In other words, whether something qualifies as an epistemic resource depends on whether it meets the standards of inquiry, making it relevant or legitimate for consideration.³⁴ This governing structure helps stabilise epistemological systems, also in part by relying on dominant, shared epistemic resources. It achieves this by granting epistemic authority to the privileged (while simultaneously diminishing the epistemic authority of the oppressed), and enforcing conceptual exclusions upon the oppressed. These exclusions, in turn, reinforce the governing structure, creating resilience that requires significant disturbance to alter.

However, to recapitulate, being epistemically disadvantaged does not necessarily result in social disadvantage for a person. Some forms of ignorance, such as white ignorance theorised by Mills, significantly contribute to maintaining the privilege of certain social groups. In this sense, epistemic oppression is not merely a consequence of other forms of oppressions, it is simultaneously instrumental in maintaining ignorance and the privileged

take into account alternative epistemologies, countermythologies, and hidden transcripts that exist in hermeneutically marginalized communities among themselves.” (2012, 31)

³⁴ Here I also refer to Dotson (2019), in which Dotson elaborates on their use of epistemological systems with the case of current academic philosophical inquiries.

status of certain groups. Epistemic oppression is inflicted on agents concurrently with non-epistemic oppressions.

An instance of contributory injustice, as discussed by Manon Garcia (2021), Serene Khader (2019) and Medina (2013)³⁵, occurs when white feminists tend to view gender oppression in non-Western societies through stereotypical preconceptions. These preconceptions frame gender oppression as merely a result of cultural, religious, and institutional coercion imposed homogeneously upon all female people, with the assumption that all female people in these societies respond with a full endorsement uncritically and homogeneously (in contrast to the presumption that Western women make their own choices). This approach to gender oppression not only undermines the (epistemic) agency of female people in non-Western societies by complicitly “othering them”, but it is also arguably a result of a refusal to acknowledge alternative epistemic resources. Instead, it assumes the dominant Western epistemic framework has universal explanatory power. This contributes to and perpetrates contributory injustice, resulting in suppressing other epistemic resources that could offer a more adequate understanding of gender oppression across different societies at different historical contexts, including in contemporary Western societies.

Since this kind of epistemic oppression occurs within the structure of our inquiries, addressing it requires *at least a sensitivity to the working of our epistemological systems*, so that there are higher chances that we and our social imaginations are open to revisions. As explained above, according to Dotson, the resilient governing role of our epistemological systems in our inquiries makes it more challenging to resist this form of epistemic oppression. It demands our awareness of our epistemological systems and the inadequate epistemic resources they contain, along with critical engagement with them.³⁶

³⁵ Though, all three scholars have not formulated their analyses with Dotson’s term *contributory injustice*.

³⁶ Hernandez (2023) calls attention to significant role that affective mechanism plays in keeping epistemological systems of both privileged and oppressed resilient to change. In the case of having hermeneutical resources, if an oppressed agent does not regard their epistemic authority, their anxiety might prevent them from trusting their interpretations of experience, and thereby give them hard time in knowledge production. On the other hand, in the same case, if they trust their epistemic authority, their doubts in their hermeneutical resources may be productive for them to reflect on the dominant resources and generate knowledge. Additionally, Hernandez emphasises the importance of the affective aspect in epistemic resistance to oppressions. I will ground this point in my examples of epistemic paternalism as a form of resistance to oppressions.

An objection is raised by Rogers (2021), who agrees with Dotson’s analysis on and solution to third order epistemic oppression, but argues that redistributing social and political (as well as economic) power is insufficient in grappling with other forms of epistemic oppression. Using Barack Obama’s U.S. presidency as an illustration, Rogers convincingly articulates that we cannot address epistemic oppression of any order without also addressing inadequate epistemic resources, the latter which are the source of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Concepts such as “post-racialism” emerged and circulated in American society after Obama’s presidency, which, Rogers notes, have perpetuated and adapted inadequate racist ideologies to fit a contemporary social landscape in which overt racism is no longer socially acceptable among white people. Instead, white people find subtler ways to reinforce a social order that continues to privilege them, by masking the United States as no longer a racist country (188–189). These concepts work to muddle that a *black man* being elected as president is sufficient for racial progress in the United States, while neglecting that black individuals can also be complicit in perpetrating epistemic oppression—for instance, in Obama’s endorsement of racial blindness in their speeches and policies³⁷. Rogers argues that as a result of failing to address inadequate epistemic resources, Obama’s presidency has contributed to testimonial injustices, as the white majority continues to refuse to grant credibility to those testifying about racism in the country. Rogers’ illustration demonstrates that addressing epistemic oppression is impossible without considering the role of inadequate epistemic resources and the mechanisms within our epistemological systems that stabilise them and make them resilient to alternative epistemic resources.

However, in addition to Rogers’ point, I see that Dotson’s *preliminary solutions* to first- and second-order epistemic oppression (epistemic standing exclusion and conceptual exclusion)—which involve changing our perceptions and being willing (and thereby directing our attention) to recognise our shared epistemic resources need significant revision—are not, as Dotson conceives, ones that *follow* the redistribution of social, political (and

³⁷ Though, Obama did not *always* endorse racial blindness. There are also occasions in which Obama addresses racial blindness and conditions of other underprivileged groups. For example, they commented on a 2007 campaign stop that judges should have the criteria to recognise and understand, with empathy, “what it’s like to be a young teenage mom, [...] to be poor, or African-American, or gay, or disabled, or old”. (Glynn & Sen 2014)

economic) power. Despite the resilience of our epistemological systems, this resilience is partly supported by our cognitive functioning, which enables us to habitually perceive and frame our experiences in certain ways (and not others). I discussed this point in the previous chapter, where I referenced Mills' analyses of how the ignorance of oppressions is sustained by our cognitive processes. However, our cognitive components can function not only to strengthen our epistemological systems' resilience and perpetuate oppressions, but can also function to disrupt this resilience and resist oppressions, given the relation between our epistemological systems and our cognitive capacities is complex and interactive. For instance, C. Thi Nguyen (2023) emphasises that we rely on heuristics, a cognitive tool, for "generating *rough estimates* of what's worth investigating and what's not" (7, author's italics). I suggest that *it is plausible for us to develop heuristics that direct our attention to detecting various oppressions in their relevant contexts*. I argue that motivating changes in our cognitive processes is a necessary epistemic intervention, and thus, epistemic paternalism can help us resist oppressions and prompt us to engage with alternative epistemic resources or social imaginations.

Finally, I want to underline that the relationship between the production and maintenance of epistemic oppression and non-epistemic oppressions should not be understood in a unilateral and/or a reductive way, but rather as dynamic as *mutually constitutive*. This means that oppressions are difficult to combat because they are sustained by the resilience of our epistemological systems to change. Similarly, addressing epistemic oppression without efforts to redistribute social, political (and economic) power is challenging. For instance, the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems is a "central goal of colonial violence" (Berenstain et al. 2022, 284), for disrupting these systems—their "[e]mbodied ways of knowing, spiritual ways of knowing, and land-based ways of knowing", on which Indigenous knowers rely for survival—facilitates colonialism and land dispossession, as long-term settlement cannot rely solely on physical violence. I hope to have established that the scope of epistemic paternalism must be envisioned as necessary for resisting both non-epistemic oppressions **and** epistemic oppression.

2.3. Justification and scope of epistemic paternalism

The epistemic paternalism I have re-theorised thus far aligns, at least *prima facie*, with the two jointly sufficient justificatory conditions proposed by Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij for the

exercise of Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP), which I discussed in Chapter 1. These conditions are: first, that there are no conflicts between its goal of epistemic improvement (aimed at the flourishing of our epistemic agency) and other moral reasons; and second, that there is a high likelihood of achieving epistemic success. However, its epistemic and moral landscape diverges from the standard or ideal views commonly found in traditional epistemology and moral philosophy, which tend to assume for us self-reliant (epistemic) autonomy with which we make free choices without influences by social structures and our social positions. Accordingly, these justificatory conditions may not be as relevant to epistemic paternalism that is theorised as a resistance to oppressions as to EAP.

To recall, Ahlstrom-Vij proposes these justificatory conditions in light of EAP being presumed by its theorists and critics to override agents' epistemic autonomy or autonomy *proper*, as well as their right to epistemic access. In this view, epistemic value *almost* exclusively designates the possession of true beliefs and, *occasionally*, reliable processes for acquiring true beliefs. Additionally, it assumes that our epistemic flourishing is theoretically and practically isolated from, and independent of, our agency.

However, the epistemic paternalism I propose here holds on to a different conceptualisation on epistemic values, (epistemic) autonomy, and their relation to our agency: we must recognise the social and interactive character of our epistemic agency to understand how it flourishes and shrinks, and thus to be able to account for what is epistemically valuable for us. For epistemic paternalism to be effective, it must be grounded in an understanding of how both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions affect our epistemic agency. It must also be committed to the view that we actively strive to mitigate or undermine these oppressions as they hinder our epistemic flourishing, or else we risk perpetuating them.

Following the commitment to resisting the detrimental effects of oppressions on our epistemic agency, epistemic paternalism, *prima facie*, does not operate through epistemic objectification. This contrasts with Bernal's argument, which claimed that epistemic objectification is inevitable in epistemic interventions and inherently disrespectful to the recipients' epistemic agency (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2). On the contrary, the goal of epistemic paternalism is to facilitate the flourishing of our epistemic agency, which has been hindered and wronged, due to the structural veiling of crucial epistemic resources.

These resources, vital for critically understanding our social experiences, have often been obscured by ignorance or excluded from consideration as relevant epistemic resources.

Similarly, as with EAP, the “likelihood of success” for epistemic paternalism is highly context-sensitive. An epistemic intervention only makes sense if it aligns with the specific context in which it is enacted. Determining the right context for an apt epistemic intervention concerns not only a particular space and time but also the ongoing epistemic interactions. Thus, the same epistemic intervention may work well for some agents but not others, or work well for the same agent in one situation but less effectively in another. This variability occurs because an epistemic intervention, in addition to the agents who initiate it, engages different epistemic agents who are not only given access to new epistemic resources but also perform roles as inquirers, informants, and evaluators in processing those resources. In other words, epistemic paternalism is partly about facilitating fruitful epistemic interactions.

Moreover, measuring the success of an epistemic intervention cannot be done from a static or immediate perspective, as epistemic interventions often require an extended period of time, with continuous or multiple efforts, and their effects may not be immediately apparent. The success of epistemic paternalism, therefore, depends not only on the immediate reception of epistemic resources but also on the long-term development of epistemic agency in their contribution of resisting oppressions.

Nonetheless, its effectiveness depends on the specific *locations* of (epistemic) oppressions—namely, how resilient an epistemic community is to become aware of and revise inadequate epistemic resources. This resilience to know, as Mills discusses, or resilience to revise epistemological systems, as Dotson frames it, is partly tied to the social positions and motivated interests of epistemic agents. The ways and the degree to which their motivated interests are connected to their social positions play a significant role. For example, how much, if at all, an epistemic agent from a privileged group takes the suffering of their underprivileged fellows as their own interest, and is willing to pay attention to and engage with the issues at hand. Thus, “likelihood of success” is not a useful metric for guiding epistemic interventions of this purpose.

However, that does not imply that epistemic paternalism lacks justification altogether. Instead, it suggests that epistemic paternalism must be sensitive to these nuances in order to tailor epistemic interventions more effectively or revise its own methods when required to resist oppressions. In this sense, the justification for epistemic paternalism lies not in a fixed notion of success but in its capacity to adapt to the complexities of social and epistemic contexts, ensuring that interventions are attuned to the needs of those whose epistemic agency is compromised.

It is also to note that an epistemic paternalism that resists oppressions does not rely on a hierarchical view of authority—it does not require one to be an expert in a specific domain. Instead, it operates by granting epistemic weight (i.e., credence) to social knowledge—self-knowledge and knowledge about others—which is both an epistemic and moral prerequisite for reclaiming the compromised epistemic authority and epistemic agency of those oppressed due to their social positions. This approach fosters epistemic interactions where we, as epistemic agents, exercise our autonomy in a self-ruled yet interdependent manner. Epistemic authority here is dynamic, manifesting itself through epistemic interactions in which we all engage, reflecting our capacity and responsibility for knowledge acquisition and evaluations, and our contribution of epistemic resources to our epistemic communities.

Last but not least, the scope of epistemic paternalism is broad. It is broad in a several ways: (1) it is not limitedly aiming to promote agents' acquisition of true beliefs or ensure reliable beliefs-forming processes, but rather seeks to facilitate our epistemic agency, particularly in light of the detrimental effects that social conditions impose on us; and (2) it can take multiple forms rather than favouring just one approach. For example, Epistemic Access Paternalism (EAP) and Epistemic Nudging (EN), both discussed in previous chapters, can be deployed depending on the context. The scope is also broad because its goal is to resist both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions that continuously and extensively undermine many of our epistemic agency. Epistemic paternalism must be versatile, given that there are so many ways in which oppressions harm our epistemic agency, such as by (1) constraining our ways of knowing, (2) keeping us insensitive to what we don't know, (3) maintaining inadequate epistemic resources that preserve dominant social imaginations, (4) impairing our abilities in our epistemic interactions with each other, (5) eroding our trust in our own epistemic authority and capacities. These harms are not inflicted separately; they compound

and amplify each other. Yet, many of these harms are not simply the result of conscious or deliberate choices and beliefs, but are also enacted through complex cognitive processes, such as our heuristics, perceptions, and affective habits, which are shaped by our social structures. This complexity implies that various types of epistemic interventions are required, and plausibly not only one at a time but in combination³⁸, corresponding to our cognitive processes to make epistemic paternalism an effective tool in resisting oppressions.

2.4. Epistemic paternalism as political normative epistemology

Before concluding this section, I want to clarify that epistemic paternalism is a trio project: it is epistemic, ethical, and political.

Firstly, it is an *epistemic project* because its goal and interventions are epistemic. It aims to facilitate our epistemic agency—our capacities for knowledge production and revision, which can only flourish (and diminish) through epistemic interactions with our communities.

Secondly, it is an *ethical project* in part because our knowing capacities are a prerequisite for our overall agential flourishing, and thereby epistemic values that constitute the flourishing of our epistemic agency also constitute our agency as a whole. It is also partly because our epistemic activities, which go beyond mere belief formation, have moral consequences for both individuals and our societies. Thus, we are morally obliged not only to refrain from ignorance about the oppressions faced by (epistemic) agents and recognise that our epistemic activities, which are necessary for our agential flourishing, are social, mutually reliant, and interactive. We are also obliged to actively resist these oppressions in our everyday epistemic practices. These practices are not irrelevant or trivial; they are the very place where oppressive social arrangements are both produced and perpetuated.

Finally, epistemic paternalism is also a *political project*. Wrongful social arrangements are manifested in the social norms, schemas and practices that dictate how social groups interact in enacting and sustaining oppressive social relations. In such oppressive social relations, our epistemic agency is undermined, partly because certain forms of knowledge,

³⁸ This attempt of distinguishing and quantifying epistemic interventions can be artificial and dependent on how the line is drawn. Such as whether counting the act of suggesting reading Mills' (1997) *The Racial Contract* as one or more epistemic interventions when one does it with different people at separate times in different occasions.

often those belonging to privileged groups, are regarded as more valid or more important than others. This dominant knowledge is not just considered specific to one group but imposed as universal, marginalising alternative epistemic resources that could challenge oppressive structures. Moreover, our epistemic agency is not just compromised as a consequence or byproduct of wrongful social arrangements and the distribution of political power; it is also compromised in maintaining these very oppressions. By keeping alternative epistemic resources that are adequate for understanding many social experiences and/or social change out of the shared epistemic landscape, oppressive social realities are upheld.

Therefore, epistemic paternalism should be understood as a subject matter of *normative political epistemology* that is:

(1) A political endeavour must be done with a goal to change the current social arrangements that both influence and are shaped by the epistemic landscape. It acts to raise awareness about how epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions are mutually constitutive and calls for sensitivity to these dynamics.

(2) It carries the normative implication that it *should* be exercised, not as a merit or virtue in itself, but a necessary practice. If we don't resist the current oppressive conditions through both personal and collective efforts, we, as epistemic agents, inevitably contribute to the perpetration of these oppressions, whether directed at ourselves or our fellows who are subject to different oppressions.

(3) It must take place within epistemology, because (epistemic) oppressions occur in our epistemic landscape which need to be resisted by investigating how our epistemic activities are shaped by, and in turn shape, the social and political conditions we live in, and, therefore, how we should engage in epistemic activities.

3. Epistemic Paternalism as Resistance to Oppressions: An Example Case

I present a case to illustrate the following points: (1) how epistemic paternalism, as a form of resistance to oppressions, can take place and look like in our everyday interpersonal exchanges; (2) how we should consciously consider our daily practices as integral to resisting oppressions; and (3) how these epistemic practices are political, as they address oppressions imposed on members of different social groups. Additionally, they (4) exemplify

how *everyone* across social groups, particularly the privileged—also because they possess significantly greater epistemic power as elaborated in 2.2, can and should engage in resisting oppressions *via* epistemic paternalism. Furthermore, they (5) demonstrate how context-sensitive and context-dependent epistemically paternalistic practices are. A particular, epistemically paternalistic, practice may be effective on one occasion but not another or may lose its effectiveness over time due to changing social conditions. This variability does not undermine the justifiability of epistemic paternalism in resisting oppressions, nor does it invalidate a specific practice. Instead, it highlights that epistemic interventions require ongoing revision.

3.1. Resisting gender oppression with the use of *they* as singular pronoun in English

This example case of epistemic paternalism focuses on **using *they* as a default singular pronoun in various forms of exchange in spoken and written English.**³⁹ In the third-person singular pronoun forms, English distinguishes between the masculine, *he*, the feminine *she*, and the neuter *it*. When referring to people, the masculine or the feminine pronouns are used. The effect of this pronoun system is that, in describing the actions of other people, English speakers are required to, if adhering to this system, assign gender to the people they address.

On the other hand, the pronoun *they*, generally used as the third-person plural pronoun, is gender neutral. By replacing the singular pronouns *he* or *she* with *they*, the goal is to avoid to explicitly express or imply gender ascription to other people. It should be noted that in many languages gender ascription does not work in the same way. Some languages, such as Bengali, use only gender-neutral pronouns. Others, like Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, do not differentiate gender in their spoken pronouns (though they do in written form) but still embed gendered social roles in their vocabularies. Further, some languages, like Croatian and German, not only have gendered pronouns but also gendered suffixes within their vocabularies.⁴⁰

³⁹ This also includes gender-neutral grammar, such as using *them* in other sentence structures (i.e. as a grammatical object). This will be assumed in the whole practice without mentioned again.

⁴⁰ In the latter languages, gender ascription is entangled with the noun system: every noun has a “gender”, even if it is not correct to say that *die Sonne* “the sun” is perceived as feminine in German, more that the features of inflection of *die Sonne* are shared with most, though not all (i.e. *das Mädchen* “the girl” has neuter case), “semantically feminine” words.

This example case is an *epistemic* practice in addition to being a linguistic one—namely, a series of repeated actions concerning language use—in the sense that it addresses the shared social imagination regarding gender. Specifically, it resists gender oppression, which is sustained through assuming gender identity to people and the ascription of gender roles and norms based on a person’s perceived or imagined bodily features, as I will further argue below. The use of singular *they* draws interlocuters’ attention to these background assumptions, raising their awareness and sensitivity, and prompting them to seek alternative epistemic resources. Moreover, it is a *paternalistic* practice because it does not require the consent of interlocuters or its recipients. Its normative force arises from its aim to compensate for our compromised epistemic agency by resisting epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions related to gender.

I aim to demonstrate that the epistemically paternalistic practice of using singular *they* is *necessary* but *insufficient* for resisting gender role ascription, both within and beyond language. That means that other epistemic (and linguistic) practices, which critically engage with other gender markers dictating gender roles, may also be required. For instance, another epistemic intervention that arguably resists gender oppression through language use would involve avoiding gender-role-specific markers, such as *girlfriends* and *boyfriends*, *wives* and *husbands*, *mothers* and *fathers*, *sisters* and *brothers*, *daughters* and *sons*.

This epistemic intervention is practiced through communicative dynamics of epistemic interactions with other interlocuters, as articulated by Medina, where individuals share their epistemic resources—such as their evaluations, inquiries, information or evidence—regarding the relationship between gendered language, gender ascription, and gender oppression. The epistemic intervention of using singular pronoun *they* as a form of resistance to oppressions does not rely on a hierarchy of epistemic authority of language users. Instead, it draws on our epistemic autonomy, allowing us as epistemic agents **to make reflective choices and take responsibility for our knowledge acquisition and evaluation in epistemic interactions.**

In alignment with Zagzebski’s self-rule view of epistemic autonomy, as discussed in Chapter 1, we exercise our epistemic authority by contributing our social knowledge (our self-knowledge and knowledge about others) as resources to our epistemic communities, and,

at the same time, exercise epistemic autonomy by determining how to make use of these resources, including when and how much to defer our epistemic authority to our epistemic communities. In other words, this form of epistemic paternalism invokes our epistemic authority to foster more adequate social knowledge through our epistemic interactions.

Moreover, this example case centres on interpersonal transactions rather than institutional, legal, or educational contexts, or broader public discourse. Institutional guidelines advocating for gender-neutral language exist in academic and professional settings, such as the guidance provided by American Psychological Association, APA (2023). However, I intend this example case to instantiate how we, as individual epistemic agents, can and should engage in our everyday epistemic interactions to resist oppressions. It also illustrates that such epistemic interventions are paternalistic without necessarily invoking the authority of experts in specific domains, to whom we typically assign special epistemic weight (Jäger *forthcoming*). Instead, epistemic interventions such as this can and should occur in our interpersonal interactions.

Below, I illustrate how this practice of using singular *they* operates in interpersonal exchanges:

Scenario 1

Lan: *They* play very good shots.

Matthias: Who do you mean?

Lan: (Pointing at a person) *They*.

Scenario 2

Strauss: *She* is very caring!

Quinn: Yes, *they* are.

Strauss: (quiet for a moment) But *she* is a woman, isn't *she*?

In both scenarios, the hearers (Matthias and Strauss) are puzzled by the speakers' (Lan and Quinn) use of the singular pronoun *they* to refer to individuals. Both hearers are unfamiliar

with this linguistic practice. However, this may not be the first time that they encounter an interlocuter who uses *they* as a singular pronoun, as it is not entirely uncommon in English. As mentioned above, this usage has also been recommended by professional guidelines, such as those provided by the APA. Still, whether or not they have encountered this in the past depends on their epistemic communities, and whether there are other interlocuters in their surroundings who, for example, are sensitive to sexism or other kinds of oppressions (which is not necessarily related to their membership in a particular social group).⁴¹

Nevertheless, these hearers have no dispositions to use gender-neutral pronouns or grammar themselves, and the speakers' use of pronouns catch their attention. Matthias, for instance, does not continue the conversation or seek clarification for their puzzle. They might reflect on it, suspend judgment, or simply forget about it. It is also possible that Matthias interprets this as a peculiarity of Lan's idiolect rather than a prompt to revise their understanding about gender or gender oppression. The possibility of different epistemic responses in Matthias depends dynamically on their own epistemic activities and those of their interlocuters. For instance, Matthias might be inclined to reflect on their own ignorance and pay attention to epistemic resources that are unusual or unfamiliar to them. Alternatively, Matthias might come to better understand the reasoning of Lan's use of pronouns if more members of Matthias' epistemic community also use gender-neutral pronouns.

On the other hand, Strauss expresses their confusion to their interlocuter. In doing so, they may assert their understanding of gender and their confidence in accurately ascribing gender, which can manifest with different sorts of attitudes, such as dismissiveness or receptiveness. Strauss may also seek clarification or engage in a discussion with their interlocuter. How it unfolds depends on how open they are to reconsider the views on gender and how resilient they are to revise their inquiry.

There are two main goals of this practice: (1) *resisting gender oppression by refraining from gender ascription*, and (2) *challenging the epistemic oppression that both constitutes and*

⁴¹ Interlocuters should be broadly conceived as both people who one has oral conversations with and people whose works have some sort of influence on one's inquiry, and these works may be in written or visual forms, like literature or discipline-specific writings, static work of art or performative art.

sustains gender oppression. First, in line with Dembroff and Wodak (2018) and Kukla and Lance (2022), I hold the view that using gendered pronouns in English, along with other acts of gender ascription, is a speech act that does more than merely describe or attribute properties to individuals. It is not about making truth claims but about imposing the dominant social imagination of gender onto individuals and perpetuating the current social arrangements and expectations about how one should act in social spaces. When a speaker attributes gendered pronouns like *he* or *she* to an individual, they are not just expressing of the referent's gender but actively enacting that gender upon the person. In doing so, they signal to others (and themselves) how this individual is positioned within their society and what social roles they ought to fulfil.

This practice reflects that language is not insulated from its social context; rather, it operates within in a social sphere where social schemas and shared social imagination dictate how individuals of different social groups are expected to behave and interact. Thus, when one ascribes a gender to another person, they are not merely describing what they have assumed or perceived about that person's biological sex assigned at birth. Instead, they are assigning a set of social norms and roles that are associated with that gender along with their perceived biological sex.

This is similar to what I discussed in 2.1, where holding the belief of “women are caretakers” contributes to gender oppression. In both cases, upholding such a belief and ascribing gender to others through language inserts a prescriptive force into the social realm, masked as descriptive statements. For instance, consider a sport player saying, “I lost because *she* is my teammate”, in contrast to others with male teammates. While the player *may* be referring to a specific individual they believe didn't perform well, they *may* also be implying that because their partner's gender—being a *woman*—suggests less capability, given stereotypes about *women's* abilities in most sports.

Alternatively, in a third case, the hearers might simply interpret the speaker as highlighting their teammate's gender, without any explicit intention by the speaker to reinforce gender stereotypes. However, regardless of whether the speaker intends to refer to their teammate's gender, the very use of the gendered pronoun *can* reinforce gender roles ascription (I will suggest in the following that it *can* also challenge gender roles). By invoking

she in this case, they are situating their teammate within the dominant social imagination of gender and likely perpetuating it. Thus, refraining from the use of gendered pronouns is to avoid enacting these gender ascription practices that contribute to essentialising gender roles as natural roles and further upholding them as norms.

I take for granted the argument put forth by Kukla and Lance (2022), that denying a person's gender self-ascription assaults their "core bodily integrity and autonomy" (1144), providing us a sufficient moral reason to go by a person's self-ascribed gender without needing to argue further that self-ascription constitutes one's gender⁴². Therefore, using gender-neutral pronouns by default should not be seen as an assault to individuals with self-ascribed gender identities, as it resists the dominant practice of assuming and ascribing gender to individuals. Moreover, as Dembroff and Wodak (2018) argue, using singular *they* can avoid misgendering, because there is no background assumption about a person's gender from the outset.⁴³

In addition, one of the main benefits of this practice is that it is not grounded in gender identity, but in resisting gender oppression that arises through the ascription of gender norms by others. For example, there are individuals who do not identify with any gender. This lack of gender identity does not shield them from gender oppression. When they are referred to using gendered pronouns *he* or *she*, they are not only placed into gender categories to which they do not belong, and are thereby misrecognised, but also subjected to, as other people who actively identify with a gender, gender roles and gender norms and are being told how they should engage in the social world.

This view incorporates Haslanger's (2012) concept of gender, according to which gender is conceptualised as an extrinsic property that emerges from *a social relation of the privileged (men) and the oppressed (women)*. This social relation is established and sustained through social perception and the normative marking of a person's bodily features that are associated with a biological sex, which others associate with this social relation. Gender

⁴² Nor do I think that gender self-ascription *does not* constitute one's gender. I see gender as political and epistemic struggle.

⁴³ It is to note that there are studies showing that there is a high acceptability of using singular *they* among cisgendered people (whose self-ascribed gender aligns with the sex assigned at their birth), and interestingly, a higher acceptability for that among cisgender women than cisgender men. See for example Conrod (2022).

oppression is partly constituted by the attribution of roles and norms to individuals based on their perceived bodily features and associated sex, disadvantaging one gender (*men*) while privileging the other (*women*). It also partly operates through the uptake and internalisation of these norms by both biologically male and female people.

In order to address gender oppression, I am on board with a conditional use of binary-gendered pronouns (*he* or *she*) when specifically referring to the oppressive relation between *men* and *women*, while using *they* as the default singular pronoun in other contexts. This conditional use of gendered pronouns distinguishes itself from Dembroff and Wodak's (2018) argument, which calls for the complete replacement of gendered pronouns and grammar with gender-neutral singular pronouns *they* or neopronoun *ze* in English.⁴⁴

Let me provide an example of how this can be applied in both narrative and analysis:

*In a major scene in the novel The Talented Mr Ripley⁴⁵, the protagonist Marge suspects that **their** partner Dickie was murdered by Tom Ripley, Dickie's best friend. This suspicion is rejected by Greenleaf, Dickie's father. Greenleaf discredits Marge's thoughts by reducing **them** to fantasy as opposed to objective reasoning ('Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts' (Fricker 2007, 14)) and disregards **her** words in the inquiry of Dickie's death. Fricker argues that Greenleaf wrongs Marge epistemically by excluding Marge from participating in knowledge and meaning making.*

⁴⁴ The reasons why I don't recommend using neopronouns such as *ze* (also *xe*, *fae*, *thon* as discussed in Conrod 2022), are both conceptual and practical ones. This practice suggests itself to go beyond the problem of gender identity and focus on an (epistemic) oppression that is done through imposing gender norms and roles on *potentially everyone* regardless of what they identify. It is not to say that (epistemic) oppression related to gender identity is not as severe and worth to resist. On the one hand, I take that using *they* by default in English, as Dembroff and Wodak (2018) argue, is also a resistance to this type of oppression. On the other hand, I think resisting the dominant social imagination and the related set of epistemic resources also allow us to be open to alternative epistemic resources and better understanding of various gender experiences. Practically, I use *they* simply because of its better intelligibility than other neopronouns in other communities that are more distant from non-cisgender communities, based on Conrod's (2022) statistics and my own observation. Besides, although Dembroff and Wodak (2018) argue that proliferating pronouns are difficult to learn for everyone because they function in English as "closed classed" words, I think this misses out an important aspect of how epistemic resources become shared knowledge in a community (in this case a broad sense of language community). Learning new gender pronouns is more likely to be evaluated as less worthy of effort, less motivating to reorganise cognitive resources for, in a language community that is dominated by cisgendered ideology.

⁴⁵ This is a prominent illustration of female people being silenced and excluded from sharing of knowledge in a non-academic setting exemplified by Fricker (2007).

*This silencing and exclusion from epistemic activities does not happen by way of coercion, but by making Marge not trust or lose confidence in **her** own thoughts as contributing to the inquiry (such as by doubting **her** own suspicion of Tom Ripley as the murderer), and by making **her** suffer “testimonial smothering” in Kristie Dotson’s (2011) analysis, that **her** continued experience of not being taken seriously eventually leads **her** to stop communicating **her** thoughts.*

I used gendered pronouns (with italics) to emphasise how Marge’s reasoning was dismissed by Greenleaf because Marge is a *woman*, contrasting this with the use of *they* throughout the rest of the thesis. Furthermore, even when we use singular *they* by default, gendered pronouns can still be strategically invoked to challenge social norms and expectations around gender. For instance, in the sports context mentioned above, when a strong player happens to be female, or a female athlete wins a competition, emphasising the individual as *she*, or uttering “*she* won first place”, may serve to challenge the default assumption that the sport is male-dominated.

Another focus of this practice is its emphasis on the epistemic aspect of oppressions, showing that gender ascription not only works against individuals who identify with a gender but also those who do not. This means that structural disadvantage is not limited to people who are perceived as *women*; individuals who are perceived as *men* may be also subjected to epistemic oppression.

Firstly, part of the gender oppression occurs in epistemic domain: individuals are assigned with gender roles and gender norms, which dictate *how they should (not) navigate and engage in inquiry* about their experiences, who they are, or who they should become. This has a direct influence on restricting how one forms their self-knowledge.

Secondly, individuals are likely to suffer all three orders of epistemic oppression, according to Dotson (2014), when gender ascription is imposed on them. As discussed in 2.2., Dotson (and Fricker) points out that a person’s *epistemic standing as an informant* is often disregarded due to their membership in underprivileged social groups. However, it is to note that individuals can lose their privileged position, and thereby their grounded epistemic standing in some circumstances, even if there is no other intersectionality involved (such as

class and race). It is plausible that when people who are perceived to be in a socially privileged group (in this context, *men*) protest gender ascription to them, or express their criticism or non-conformity to gender norms and gender roles preassigned in their societies, they pose risk to the sustenance of epistemic power of the entire privileged group. As a result, they may lose their membership in this privileged group, and their epistemic standing may also be disregarded, as they are seen as failing to be *men*, or are labelled as *gay*, *trans women* etc. Consequently, their epistemic role as informants may be undermined.

In addition, individuals may be subjected to second-order oppression, *conceptual exclusion*, prevented from understanding their experiences of gender and gender oppression through more adequate epistemic resources. They must struggle to obtain these resources.

Furthermore, it is taxing for individuals to contribute our experiences or alternative epistemic resources in the face of the resilient, dominant social imagination that dictates how people should act and express their gender in their societies, as well as to resist the influence of such dominant social imagination and work to change it.

Therefore, in the case of gender ascription, one's epistemic agency is likely compromised not only by being dismissed as an informant, but also in one's epistemic roles as accessors, inquirers and evaluators, due to (potentially) alternative epistemic resources related to gender are systematically prevented from receiving uptake by those who possess dominant epistemic power, who are also most likely to be socially privileged, in the production and revision of knowledge within the society.

For these two goals—resisting gender oppression by refraining from gender ascription, and challenging the epistemic oppression that both constitutes and sustains gender oppression, I propose using singular pronoun *they* by default (**and** maintaining the use of binary-gendered pronouns *he* and *she* in exceptional circumstances when referring to gender oppression) is **cognitively salient** in addressing individuals' circumstances of gender oppression, by way of working against individuals' habitual perceptions and heuristics, calling for both speakers and hearers' attention and sensitivity to the (un)naturalness and justifications of gender norms. Like perception and cognitive components that constitute our inquiry, heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that help us make quick decisions with limited cognitive resources, prioritising speed and ease of use over accuracy. As discussed in 2.2, Nguyen (2023, 7)

argues that we should view heuristics as constitutive of our epistemic activities for us as cognitively limited beings. Contrary to Miyazono's presumption that mobilising heuristics is an irrational and thus unwarranted epistemic practice, as discussed in Chapter 2, Nguyen emphasises that "[w]e need a heuristic for generating *rough estimates* of what's worth investigating and what's not. This would function as a *thought-terminating heuristic*—a rough guide to when we should look away and save our energy for something else" (author's italics). Therefore, the practice I am suggesting can help to build a heuristic that allows us to spot the ascription of gender norms in relevant contexts, rather than letting gender norms ascription remain in the background of our epistemic interactions, which precludes us from chances to scrutinise them.

I also intend to use the singular *they* as an oppositional epistemic force (or what Medina 2013 calls *epistemic friction*) to resist the dominant, yet inadequate, epistemic resources regarding gender. As a goal, building a heuristic that makes us more sensitive to gender roles and norms ascription should also prompt us to be sensitive, and open to alternative epistemic resources that provide different ways of understanding gender relations—and, optimally, other social relations as well. As I aimed to show in the scenarios, this practice is cognitively salient and likely effective due to its functioning as an oppositional epistemic force that addresses the *status quo*, habitual and dominant epistemic practices. Therefore, it is not proposed as an ideal practice, but rather as a practice to be exercised in the face of the prevailing, immersive practices of gender roles ascription.

The scope of this practice is not sufficient to end gender roles ascription and gender oppression altogether. Like Dembroff and Wodak (2018), I think that using *they* as a defaulted singular pronoun *alone* is unlikely to turn around gender oppression. However, given the reasons outlined above, this is a practice we should adopt within the English-speaking context as a force resisting gender oppression. Otherwise, we risk conforming to and perpetuating the current practice of ascribing gender roles based on social perceptions of *men* or *women*. This practice is aimed at (English-speaking) epistemic communities, and it requires not only *enactment* by epistemic agents, but also *uptake* from them. Uptake may be easier in communities with an interest in combating gender oppression—either because they suffer from it directly or because they have developed sensitivity to oppression through experiences with other kinds of oppression. Though, it should be noted that not everyone

who is aware or critical of gender oppression will necessarily embrace this practice. Some feminists, for instance, may resist this practice due to their different conceptions of gender and strategies for addressing gender oppression.

Uptake may be more challenging among those whose interests conflict with this practice—those who benefit from the *status quo* gender role ascription or who are less aware of or reflective about the resilience of their epistemological systems to change. Even so, this practice can be especially cognitively salient for epistemic agents who are less aware of, or resistant to, recognising gender oppression and the inadequacy of their epistemological systems. In conversations where one speaker uses *they* for a third-person singular pronoun and another uses *he* or *she*, both speakers' pronoun choices will stand out in contrast. This difference will highlight the interlocutors' varying dispositions and assumptions about gender ascription, as illustrated in both scenarios above; they clearly notice the divergence in each other's pronoun usage.

This highlights that the use of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* is not only cognitively salient to the *hearers*. *Speakers*, or those who use gender-neutral pronouns in English, are also situated in gendered social arrangements, which they must continuously work against, as these arrangements persist and impose themselves in various occasions. This practice requires ongoing efforts, especially when interacting with users of gendered pronouns.

Both the enactment and uptake by epistemic agents are necessary (though not sufficient) for making this practice, and its goals, transferable within and between epistemic communities. On top of that, this process requires affective dispositions or response from epistemic agents (Hernandez 2023). While the affective complexity and its importance in achieving epistemic paternalism unfortunately goes beyond the scope of this thesis, being an epistemic force, the act of using *they* to resist common gender ascription practices is significant enough to call itself “successful”. This practice makes itself cognitively salient to epistemic agents, thereby increasing the likelihood of their awareness and sensitivity to that the wrongs and harms involved in the *status quo* gender ascription.

There are two exceptions to this practice. The first is using an individual's identified pronouns. This is corresponding to the argument of respecting a person's self-ascribed

gender, which supports their bodily integrity and autonomy. The second exception, as noted earlier, is in contexts where specifying a person's circumstance of either oppression or privilege related to their gender ascription is necessary to challenge gender norms and expectations associated with them. For example, referring to a female person as *she* when addressing the harm done to them due to their perceived gender, or referring to a male person as *he* when discussing someone essentialising their gender privilege and perpetuating norms of female inferiority, such as female people should be caretakers, stay at home, or refrain from certain activities due to their gender.

By proposing the use of gender-neutral singular pronoun *they* in English, I hope to have shown (1) the social dynamics between different epistemic agents with varying social positions, interests, perspectives, epistemic sensitivities, and cognitive dispositions, and how these dynamics influence the enactment and uptake of epistemic interventions, and (2) why we should still practice epistemic paternalism to resist oppressions, considering its various opportunities for uptake in different epistemic communities. This practice serves as a countering epistemic force in epistemic interactions, even if it may just cause "discomfort" to our epistemological systems.

4. Conclusion

Up to this point, I have demystified the claim that epistemic paternalism is, *prima facie*, a deprivation or violation of one's (epistemic) autonomy, and showed that epistemic interventions can facilitate our epistemic agency, and *should* be employed to resist both epistemic and social oppressions. I propose to theorise epistemic paternalism as a trio project: epistemic, ethical and political. Even without explicit theorisation, feminist epistemologists have already been engaged in epistemic interventions, aiming to address (epistemic) oppression in recent decades. Many of them provided me with valuable resources to engage in the debate of epistemic paternalism and its potentials to combat both epistemic and non-epistemic oppressions. Their writings, which explore the workings and inadequacies of our epistemological systems, articulate and disrupt our insensitivity to oppressions that compromise our epistemic agency. These scholars challenge the dominant frameworks that not only appear resistant to self-revision but also play an active role in sustaining such oppressions. With the arguments I have presented in this thesis, I hope to contribute to the persuasion that we need a political normative epistemology to resist the

current oppressive arrangements that shape both our social and epistemic life, where epistemic paternalism is one of its tools.

However, there are some limitations in this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole. First, while I recognise the significant role that metacognitive feelings play in epistemic paternalism (Fernández Velasco and Love 2024; Hernandez 2024), I have not been able to explore this aspect here. Secondly, through examples of epistemic oppression, I have aimed to intersect epistemic oppression with as many forms of social oppressions that have been articulated as possible, as I see writing this thesis itself as a practice of epistemic paternalism, and an acknowledgment of how much we owe to acts of resistance against oppressions—even though such resistance may appear burdensome and its effects often latent. The examples I used, unfortunately, have only touched briefly upon sexism, racism, colonialism, but not other kinds of oppression such as ageism and ableism. I hope this does not convey a message that these other forms of oppression are less severe, less oppressive or less worthy of attention. Rather, it testifies that these issues are still relatively under-explored in the literature and debates surrounding oppressions. Thirdly, I have not yet managed to elaborate on how this epistemic paternalism could operate at an institutional level—for instance, in public speeches, where the singular *they* can be easily used, or in transforming conventional practices such as journalism to specifically work against epistemic objectification. These limitations, however, point toward potential directions for epistemic paternalism in resisting various forms of oppression.

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