The previous chapter argued that recent research on our dual tendency for bias and overconfidence suggests that we cannot rely on ourselves for epistemic improvement, and that our best bet is to instead impose certain external constraints on information access, collection and evaluation. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that practices involving such external constraints are properly termed *epistemically paternalistic*. One of the few previous discussions of epistemic paternalism is provided by Alvin Goldman.\(^1\) Goldman suggests that certain forms of information control practised in society are motivated with reference to how they make us epistemically better off by protecting us from our cognitive failings, but he neither discusses the important role our tendencies for overconfidence play in motivating such protection, nor attempts to define the relevant kind of epistemic paternalism. Because we discussed the former issue in Chapter 1, let us turn to the latter.

Before taking on the task of providing a characterization of what makes a practice epistemically paternalistic, it is worth noting that there might not be one uniquely correct analysis of paternalism, epistemic or otherwise. The following is, however, an attempt to delineate what seems a helpful and interesting notion of an epistemic form of paternalism. The notion takes its cue from an idea prevalent in the paternalism literature, namely that a paternalistic practice is a practice that involves interfering with the doings of another for her own good without consulting her on the issue. In what follows, I will spell out this rough yet intuitive idea in some more detail in terms of three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, as they pertain to *epistemic* paternalism: the interference condition, the non-consultation condition and the improvement condition.

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2.1 The interference condition

As just noted, one central feature of a paternalistic practice is that it constitutes an interference with the doings of another for her own good. We may interfere with people in a variety of ways, of course, including by way of requirements and by way of prohibitions. For example, the state may require that drivers wear seatbelts and forbid the purchase of certain narcotic substances. That said, I will not put too much emphasis on this distinction, because every requirement implies a prohibition (not to fail to do what is required) and every prohibition implies a requirement (not to do what is prohibited). Let us turn, instead, to the particular kind of interference relevant to epistemic paternalism. I take the relevant kind of interference to be an interference with the extent to which an agent can go about doing inquiry in whatever way she sees fit. When engaging in inquiry, we are engaging in a pursuit of epistemic goals. Moreover, the present investigation follows Alvin Goldman in taking the formation of true belief and the avoidance of false belief to be the paradigm goals of epistemic practices. It needs to be stressed, however, that inquiry should not thereby be identified with belief-formation. For one thing, inquiry is something we do, whereas belief-formation is something that happens to us, given the undeniable fact of doxastic involuntarism. Moreover, what makes something an instance of inquiry is not that it involves the formation of belief – after all, basically all human activities do – but rather that the methods used and activities engaged in are selected specifically on account of their epistemic merits, that is, because of how they (as far as we can tell) tend to lead us towards true belief and away from false belief. Just consider one of the paradigm instances of inquiry: science. Science, like any human activity, involves the formation of true belief. But what makes science a kind of inquiry is not that it involves belief-formation but the fact that its methodology and emphasis on experimental design is guided by the epistemic goals of promoting specifically true belief, and avoiding specifically false belief.

2.1.1 Interfering with inquiry

Thus understood inquiry involves a whole host of activities, including but not restricted to accessing, collecting and evaluating information. But what is it to interfere with inquiry, if understood along these lines? One way to understand the relevant kind of interference is in terms of it being in conflict with our liberty or freedom in the negative sense, that is, in the sense that denotes an absence of