

## A Note from the Editors

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This Special Issue of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* came about in recognition of a growing interest in the role of philosophy in prison, including education about, with, and through philosophy (what we are calling 'philosophical education') in the prison environment. Our motivation was to reach beyond our own disciplines and begin a conversation – a *critical* conversation – not only about the practices of philosophical education in prison, but also about how philosophy, education, and prison sociology, including criminology, intersect, what these fields, traditions, and disciplines might learn from one another and how they may illuminate one another. This Special Issue has been put together as the first step in this conversation.

Of course, philosophy and prison are no strangers. Prison and prisoners play a role in philosophical imagination, not only in discussions of punishment but also more broadly in ethics, where thought experiments and examples conjure up "criminal" acts and characters for philosophical examination. The relationship is longstanding, complex and, at times, troubling. Recently, philosophy has been increasingly introduced to the space of the prison, from university modules to inquiry-based discussion groups, communities of philosophical inquiry, reading groups, and online courses. Yet, philosophical education can extend further to the education of philosophers through their experiences of, or reflections on, prisons and imprisonment. Consider some prominent examples: the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham contributed to the design and 'reform' of British prisons, Michel Foucault gave us a new perspective on the birth of the prison, its relation to power, and the question of the 'intolerable' through his work with the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*, and Angela Davis has argued for the abolition of prisons and was herself incarcerated. In this issue, two of our authors (Kouppanou and Earle) reflect on the life and work of Bernard Stiegler, whose work on philosophy of technology has shaped contemporary philosophical landscapes and who offered profound reflections on the world of the prison and the question of individuation in his essay 'How I Became a Philosopher' in *Acting Out* (2009). Finally, drawing on her research in prison, Alison Liebling in this issue offers a set of moving philosophical reflections on the writings of George Eliot. In so doing, she reveals how attenuated, sensitive, prison-based research might in turn shape moral philosophy.

Yet, it is important to remember that prisons are institutions and, moreover, communities: spaces where people must live together, often in difficult circumstances, and sometimes

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for very long periods of their lives. To enter these spaces as educators, as philosophers, and as researchers, requires critically reflecting on our motivations and practices, the nature of our encounters, and developing awareness of the dynamics of these spaces. In so doing we can also come to deepen our understanding of the ways in which our reliance on different concepts in practice and research makes different characteristics of people and places visible or invisible. For these reasons, and others, bringing philosophy into the prison classroom can be fraught with moral questions, questions that can sometimes be overlooked. What topics should we cover? What might be the impact of discussing moral dilemmas in a context where people have had to grapple with intractable moral dilemmas themselves? Would discussions of freedom, justice, responsibility, and forgiveness be too close to the bone? Might more abstract topics, such as the nature of time or radical scepticism, have significance for students in prison that we cannot foresee? Why are we there? What is our motivation for going into this space in the first place? How do our motivations fit with those of the prison and those of the people who wish to attend as prison-based students?

These questions are not merely educational. They also pertain to ethical and existential issues, concerning the roles we play in prisons, our impact on the people we meet there, and the potential for philosophy to have significant and unexpected meaning in and implications for a person's life. As such, it is important that research on philosophical education in prisons does not solely focus on non-educational success criteria, particularly those of interest to the prison estate such as prison-based outcomes of rehabilitation, desistance, reduced violence, and well-being. Studies that focus on these kinds of criteria may well offer important insight into how to deliver programmes and their potential impact. Nonetheless, they risk obscuring what is of educational and existential value in the space of a prison and could instead reflect more carefully on what kinds of criteria might more faithfully reflect what is valuable in education. Yet, so too, the prison context itself, as we saw above, can also shape philosophical thought and education. It's important, therefore, to reflect on the aims of education in this context.

This Special Issue does not answer all the questions it raises. But we hope that it opens a fruitful conversation between philosophy, education, and criminology, as fields of research, scholarship, and practices. In the following sections, as editors, we offer our own reflections from our different disciplinary perspectives, perspectives shaped by our engagement with the authors in this Special Issue.

### **Education (Aislinn O'Donnell)**

#### **Learning to See: Ethics and Education**

Firstly, even to have somebody learn, you first have to make a connection with that person, and you have to have a relationship. And it is personal how that works, particularly with people in jails. That if the personal connection is made, the academic part, the knowledge that is being imparted is secondary. There is a trust. You are insisting you are coming from the authority side, and it is a very polarised side, so you are coming from that system. To gain that trust and for them to open to you, in order that they will learn, then they must feel that you are on their side almost, without compromising yourself. If I were in the position of an educationalist, then I would spend a lot of time around that and continue to spend a lot of time around that. It is only at a certain point that people are open to possibilities from you, when you have gained that trust. (Interview in O'Donnell, 2012b, p. 22)

The opening quote from a former Republican (Provisional-IRA) prisoner spoke of how they (the people in prison) must feel like you (the educator) are on their side, but without compromising yourself. He was convinced that a relationship must be established before education can begin. In her article in this issue, Fairbairn explains the relationship between trust and

transformation in education, in particular the ways in which education can enable people to be seen, to see themselves, and to see the world and their place in it in a different light. This conviction framed how I approached doing philosophy in prison and attuned me to the importance of building trust. Some years later, I listened to a young man who had begun computer classes in prison. He said to me, 'It was the first time in my life that I felt I had been *seen as a singular human being*.' The language of 'being seen' recurred in different ways through my time teaching in prison, and it underpins how I came to think of foundational commitments in education, in particular the concepts that, as we learn to use them, shape our lives and outlooks (Lavery, 2010), in this case, *seeing* the other.

So, whilst Kant's critical project of transcendental philosophy described the conditions of possibility for experience, here, following Gilles Deleuze in the vein of this tradition, I'd like to propose some of the conditions for the creation of educational experience. I begin with meditations on ethics and education and then offer a brief introduction to the relationship between education and 'love of the world'.

These examples of the importance of trust and 'being seen' do not mean that such ethico-existential encounters are educational *tout court*, however, they intimate some of the conditions for someone to open up to, or be opened up by, education. Megan Lavery (2010) and Alison Liebling (this issue) tell us of the importance of moral insight and attention by drawing on the writings of Weil, Murdoch, and in Liebling's case, George Eliot. Ethical life here involves particular ways of seeing, looking, and attending and, I suggest, these ways of seeing are made possible by a deepening moral, intellectual, and emotional understanding of significant concepts, like justice or ethical attention, in the life of the person, in ways that are supported by the institutions in which they live or work. From the perspective of philosophical education, this can involve, for both the students and participants, coming to develop a richer, and more intimate understanding of concepts that matter in living a life. For educators, it can invite moments of interruption and re-orientation such that these living concepts, like trust, or care, or dignity, become embodied in the presence of the educator *and* in the institution, slowly deepening through practice. Helpful in this regard is Jean Oury's (2007) description of the way of thinking about ethics as an ethic of respect for the singular other.

There is something of that in the articles that follow – not losing sight of the singularity of each person, notwithstanding the other pressures that can come to bear in (educational) life. Yet, even as an ethical relationship is a kind of educative relationship, education also involves a relationship with the world, ideally fostering 'love of the world'. This, in turn, involves supporting and creating the conditions for what Deleuze (1988) calls 'processes of singularisation' and, drawing on Spinoza, the 'composition' of subjectivities. One never knows in advance what one will come to love, which is why it is important to offer diverse and rich curricula and approaches (O'Donnell, 2012a).

When I knew I was to begin teaching philosophy in prison, I contacted two philosophers whose work had shaped some of the emerging ethical principles that would come to define my engagement with education (not only in prison) and with philosophy. The first, Susan James, helped me to come to understand Stoicism and the kinds of exercises or technologies of self that can provide a (fragile) set of rituals to sustain the self, in times of crisis, such as life in a total institution. The second, Raimond Gaita, had written a book *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (2001). In one example that has always stayed with me, he describes a nun who came into the psychiatric institution in which he worked as a young student. As she talked to the patients, she revealed to him, and the other (benevolent) psychiatrists working there, that despite what they said about equality, they did not really believe this, because only she spoke to the patients without a trace of condescension. The way she looked at the patients revealed the full humanity of those whose affliction had made them invisible. In his example, the acts of looking and being-*with* were revelatory. This tells us something of the relationship between ethical life and the feeling that one has been *seen*, not as object but

as a singular human being, but also that one can learn to *see* the other in this way. This is not simply the dialectic of recognition but rather a phenomenological experience that expresses the revelatory power of a particular kind of way of looking. Developing relationships, including educational relationships, involves cultivating this way of looking so that the other feels that they are seen as a moral equal. It is also a form of understanding. Perhaps then, two concepts of love - attention as love and justice, and love of the world - can help to bring together the ethical and the educational.

Unfortunately, 'deficit' discourses and attitudes can seep into both criminological and educational discussions about those in our society who are in prison or who are marginalised. The appropriate response is not necessarily one that focuses on strengths, resilience, and flourishing as these too can sometimes fail to adequately face the harm that prisons do and the suffering and affliction in these sites, striving too quickly to transform vulnerability into strength or to move beyond the tragedy that is part of the human condition. Furthermore, the risk of sociological or psychological explanations of causes of crime is that they may serve to obscure *who* someone is beyond all those categories and classifications, treating them, as Duguid (2000) says, as object rather than subject, or as Maxine Greene (1995) says, seeing small rather than seeing big. Speaking to this sense of psychic alienation, some of the students in my philosophy class once remarked, this is like the Foucauldian double: only the pile of paper, the records about you, the interpretations of the comments that you once made 'speaks' and is heard, and you are muted, seated beside this 'paper tiger' whilst the professionals decide who you are.

The act of creative attention to the other, seeing how things are, is one of de-creation, or renunciation of the 'fat relentless ego' as Murdoch (1970) calls it, making space for the other to appear. The metaphor here is one of light – a particular way of looking illuminates the other. For instance, when the Samaritan stops on the road before a broken, bleeding part of flesh, that which was a 'thing' becomes visible as human once the act of creative attention *sees* that which does not exist: love sees the invisible.

It is this capacity to 'face reality' and '*see* the other' that provides us with a valuable lesson about the ethics of education. An important role of the teacher involves creating the condition for educational experiences and encounters. I am suggesting here that to do so one must not only *see* students as singular human beings, but these students should also feel that they have been seen. Of course, this is but one element of what matters educationally. The authors in this Special Issue also invite us to turn attention to concepts like trust (Fairbairn), freedom (Higgins), collaboration (Snyder and Brown), intellectual character (Pritchard), reintegration (Grossi), moral insight (Liebling), and dialogue (Stapleton and Ward), as well as enabling us to understand intimately the relationship between prison, philosophy, and education in reflections on Bernard Stiegler (Kouppanou and Earle).

### **Education: Coming to Love the World**

Education is often seen as a tool to solve the problems of the world, from Plato's efforts in the *Republic*, to Rousseau's reflections on political life, to more contemporary justifications in terms of social cohesion or employment. When approached with this intent, education itself is valued only instrumentally and can readily become part of wider disciplinary apparatuses, for example, when reports on engagement in education are included as part of an individual's profile in probation or when participation in education is encouraged in incentivised regimes, whereby, as is often noted, rights too swiftly become privileges. Such initiatives are perhaps understandable from the perspectives of security or even socialisation and qualification, but do not illuminate the value of education for the individual, and the beautiful risk that encountering education involves – one never knows how one will be changed (O'Donnell, 2018, 2012a, 2013). This is not to suggest that education is not of instrumental value, but rather that it ought not be reduced to this, and that the purposes and aims of education ought to maintain a sense of

its intrinsic, ethical, and existential value.

Brian Collins (2014) offers a philosophical analysis of the ways in which non-educational aims can lead to the co-optation of education to other ends in prison. In describing the importance of the autonomy of education in prison, he argued that education must remain a space of freedom and of *parrhesia* or fearless speech for students in prison, uncoupled from rehabilitation. In this issue, Higgins argues that rehabilitation can fail to acknowledge the pains of imprisonment, the criminogenic nature of prisons, and that too much weight is placed on recidivism as a measure of success. She argues that the concept of rehabilitation may itself need to be ‘rehabilitated’, so to speak, in order to invite a more holistic approach whereby rehabilitation and education are approached “as processes that have the potential to enable the person in prison to realise their potential, interrogate their place in the world and experience freedom”. One way to reflect on this is offered by Masschelein and Simons (2013) who describe the school or *scholé* as a source of free time where immediate and utilitarian concerns can be temporarily suspended in order to take up a different relation to ‘study’. This ‘free time’, they claim, “transforms knowledge and skills into ‘common goods’, and therefore has the potential to give everyone, regardless of background, natural talent or aptitude, the time and space to leave their known environment, rise above themselves and renew (and thus change in unpredictable ways) the world” (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, p. 10). This does not ignore key sociological and identity issues such as race, class, and gender, but by inviting a different kind of approach that does not begin with an identity position and starts instead with what Jacques Rancière (1991) calls an “opinion about equality”, it can serve to interrupt the linear dynamics which justify education as a tool used ‘in order to’ achieve something else, such as the rehabilitated prisoner. For an example of the beautiful risk of education, a transformative encounter with making art is described in one interview. This quote invites us to reflect on the ethico-existential dimensions of educational experience, the implications of the ‘suspension of world’, and the importance of ‘encountering the world’ as constitutive of the educational endeavour, including in prison.

Previous to all of this I had read – there was a great Russian Prince Kropotkin who was a Russian anarchist and he served time in prison. He said the colour of prison is grey but our memories and our imaginations and our creative thoughts are multicoloured. Well, if the prisoner is in jail long enough the memories fade, and basically the colours in our imaginings fade in keeping with the prison. Basically, if it ever comes to the point at which the prisoner’s thoughts become as grey as the prison, then he is lost. I remembered this. And when [the artist/teacher] came with the possibility of making colours and shapes and seeking harmony in a place which was totally unnatural and totally disharmonious. This was an opportunity in a sense to take me out of where I was, and I could escape into trying to create pieces. And that was what it gave. For me that was the principal thing. I wasn’t going to allow myself to become as grey as the place I was in. (Interview in O’Donnell, 2012b, pp. 28-29)

In a prison it is as though the world is inverted. Rather than assuming all is permitted unless there is a reason or a law to prohibit it, in the space of the prison one must assume that everything is prohibited unless explicitly sanctioned. Sensual and sensory experience becomes drained of colour and texture, but an educator can also invite attention to the tiniest moments or gestures, the least of things, as Oury says. Teaching is also a practice of ‘acts of ostension’ – look at this! The moss growing between concrete flags, or even, as one man said, the toilet roll in a painting class...

Both Kouppanou and Earle (this issue) share with us their reflections on the philosophical thought and life of Bernard Stiegler. When Stiegler (2009) recounted his time in Saint Michel prison for an armed robbery, he described how that time brought him to his vocation as a philosopher. “Studying the senses, Aristotle underlines in effect that one does not see that, in the case of touching, it is the body that forms the milieu, whereas in the case of sight, the milieu

is what he calls the *diaphane*. And he specifies that this milieu because it is *that which is most close*, is that which is *structurally forgotten*, just as water is for a fish” (pp. 13-14). The deprivation of an ‘exterior milieu’ – the world – brought to his ‘interior milieu’ “an incommensurable depth and weight” (p. 17). No longer living ‘in the world’ but in the absence of world, yet one can still weave a world from its remains, like memories, artworks, or texts.

For Stiegler, there is no interior without an exterior – we cannot have an interior life without an exterior milieu – so the problem, one so challenging in prison, becomes one of somehow weaving or creating this milieu. To avoid falling into decay, and to save himself from tumbling into madness, Stiegler described developing a *meleté* or technics of the self – rules, maxims, and practices. Through these practices some sense of and feeling for the world could be re-figured, and with this so too can one’s interior milieu, one’s inner world. In Stiegler’s case, through his solitude he developed this ability to ‘become-other’ that he equates to individuation. Jean Oury (2007) says that first and foremost we need to take care of our institutions so that they become spaces for encounters and heterogeneity rather than preserving an atmosphere of sameness and deadening homogeneity so that these practices can open up other possibilities of existence precipitated by curiosity and interest, and in so doing this support “the struggle for social justice”, which as Gaita says, “is the struggle to make our institutions reveal rather than obscure, and then enhance rather than diminish, the full humanity of our fellow citizens” (2001, np).

### **Prison Sociology (Kirstine Szifris)**

With philosophy you can bring out your own ideas and then, through the group you can rework it, remodel it, change it, look at it, to get to somewhere. So it’s your part in building that and, I suppose, it’s more empowering in that sense because you are doing it yourself. (Philosophy participant, Grendon, quoted in Szifris, 2021)

Constituting a ‘radical shattering’ of continuity and routine (Liebling, 1992), in entering prison, prisoners are isolated from friends and family, excluded from participating in society, and have the unenviable task of establishing themselves within the prison community. The stigma that comes with entering prison and becoming a ‘prisoner’ brings with it a sense of being labelled or condemned (Crawley & Sparks, 2005). Coined by Sykes (1958), the term ‘pains and deprivations of long-term imprisonment’ highlights the deteriorative impact of incarceration. Boredom, isolation, lack of activity, victimisation, breakdown in relationships, and poor living conditions all contribute to the difficulties of maintaining psychological wellbeing whilst in prison (Liebling, 1992). In such an environment, a space for philosophising and for philosophical dialogue with others, takes on a particular meaning.

Prison sociology focuses on prisons as a place in which people live, socialise, develop, and change over time (see Clemmer, 1958; Sykes, 1972; Toch, 1977). Early studies of prisoners and prisons highlighted the role of relationships in shaping prisoner experience, with emotional distance and social isolation characterising much of people’s time spent in prisons. These studies suggested that isolation within the prisoner community results from the small pool of people from which the individual can choose their friends (Cohen & Taylor, 1972). More recently, Crewe’s study (2009) demonstrated that social relations are often a defence against loneliness and for personal safety, with prisoners reporting that they only made one or two ‘proper friends’ during their time in prison. However, my own research indicates that social isolation might also stem from the types of interactions that occur in the prison environment.

My work involved conducting an ethnographically led study into philosophy education in prisons (see Szifris, 2017 and 2021). I took on the dual-role of teacher-researcher and drew heavily on prison sociology in an attempt to understand the environment in which I was working. At the heart lies an interest in the interaction between the individual and the context in which they find themselves. Taking philosophical education into the prison classroom

emphasises this interaction – the prison environment and the participants’ status of ‘prisoner’ shaped the nature and content of philosophical discussion. In the philosophy classroom, people in prison have space to engage in topics of conversation that go far beyond the prison walls.

My research findings demonstrated that, through philosophy, it is possible to ‘grow’ trust, develop relationships, and give space for personal exploration. Even in the context of a complex and charged prison atmosphere, philosophy provided a space for a community to develop. These findings highlight the importance of recognising the interaction of person and context – the environment shapes the individual’s experience, and the individual’s ability to express the self shapes their experience of the environment. When the environment is a prison, the need to recognise the relevance of context becomes more apparent.

In this Special Issue, several of the authors offer further insights into the role of education in the prison environment. For example, Grossi discusses the APAC model in Brazil – a model based on a particular perspective on human nature that emphasises issues of reintegration. Education is discussed for those incarcerated but also with reference to the need to educate society towards understanding and welcoming those who have spent time in prison back into society upon release. Higgins also discusses the role of education in prison by articulating education as a right that should not be withdrawn from the individual when they enter prison, whilst Snyder and Brown consider collaborative education in prison as part of the continuum of education from school, to college, to university. With these different views on the role of education in the prison environment, these articles, along with others in this issue, offer insights into how our perspectives, the environment, and education relates to the individual and their experiences. What’s more, we have aimed for a critical conversation, where we reflect on the prison environment, the prison, and the individual to understand more fully the role of education.

Prisons and prison experiences vary. However, the overwhelming feeling among prisoners is that of boredom and stagnation. Cohen and Taylor’s (1972) use of the term ‘psychological survival’ encapsulates the pains of imprisonment in that prison involves a mental struggle. Prison life is monotonous. Prisons are often grey, dull places with little daylight and characterised by bars, locks, and doors. Although staff often attempt to alleviate this by putting up paintings by prisoners, placing plants in corridors, and adding colour to the walls, the lack of variety in a prison is palpable.

Prison exerts control over every aspect of a prisoner’s life, resulting in a loss of autonomy and agency. Confined *to* as well as *within* the prison (Sykes, 1958) prisoners are moved around, from location to location, from cell to work, to gym, to education (Sparks et al., 1996). Reduced to a dependent state (Sykes, 1958), prisoners wait to be provided with meals, wait to be taken to work or visits. Toch (1977) argues that this loss of autonomy amounts to an attack on the individual’s personal integrity, whilst Liebling (1992) claims it leaves prisoners at risk of ‘losing themselves’ to the routine of the regime. A range of research demonstrates that prison can induce an existential crisis – the individual is removed suddenly from their normal, everyday lives, and thrown, often unprepared, into the life of the prison (Liebling, 2012). In my research, prisoners often discussed the difficulties of this loss of autonomy. Their studies would be interrupted by difficulties getting materials, their interests curtailed due to the lack of opportunities in prison, and their skills would often go unused. One of my participants said he would be happy if he could “just do a bit of gardening”, with another saying he spent his days playing computer games to numb himself to the pain of being inside and stop himself from worrying about losing his relationship with family (Szifris, 2021).

The prison environment thus offers a unique space to consider philosophical questions of identity: how does the prison environment affect a person’s sense of self? What do people in prison do to adapt to and navigate the prisoner community? What strategies are employed to ‘psychologically survive’ the experience? Answers to these questions are inevitably underpinned by further, philosophical questions about the nature of the self, its persistence, and its

relation to others. Concepts such as trust, wellbeing, relationships, power, and transformation also take on particular meaning in the prison environment. Philosophy provides a means to understand what these concepts mean for the individual in the prison environment. Through engaging in philosophical conversation, the prison sociologist can gain an insight into the prisoner experience and the prison society. However, perhaps most importantly, space for open, genuine, philosophical conversation in the prison environment is most relevant to the prisoner-participant. For them, it is about freedom of expression, freedom to disagree, and freedom to explore different ideas in the company of others. In a deeply dehumanizing environment, education – and, in particular, philosophical education – can provide space for people in prison to take on identities beyond those assigned to them by the penal landscape. In the philosophy classroom they are not ‘prisoners’ or ‘offenders’, but instead ‘people’, ‘philosophers’, and ‘learners’.

### **Philosophy (Mike Coxhead)**

One aim of this editorial is to reflect on our individual disciplinary perspectives and motivations for this Special Issue. I am a UK-trained academic philosopher and a practitioner of public philosophy, insofar as I have been delivering programmes of philosophical education in UK prisons since 2016. I shall here speak from both perspectives. In the spirit of this Special Issue, I hope to offer some critical reflections on the interaction of philosophy with prisons, prisoners, and prison research.

First, some context. In 2015, midway through my PhD, I found myself disenchanted and unmotivated by academic philosophy. My research on Aristotle’s epistemology felt stale, excessively niche, and without worth. I took an interruption of studies and reflected on what to do. During this time, I met with my mentor and once supervisor, MM McCabe, who had recently learned about college-prison partnerships in the US, such as Princeton’s Prison Teaching Initiative. She suggested I extend my interruption and think about teaching philosophy in prisons, in part as a way to explore the value of philosophy outside the academy. I swiftly requested a 12-month period of leave and, with the support of my then Head of Department, Bill Brewer, started contacting prison governors with the offer of an introductory philosophy course. By summer 2016, with colleagues Andy West and Andrea Fassolas, we had piloted our first course at HMP Belmarsh. In the years to come, we continued to deliver at Belmarsh, as well as other London prisons, including Downview and Wandsworth. The courses we deliver are discussion-based – ‘dialogic’ in the terms of Stapleton and Ward in this issue – in order to be relatively accessible to students independent of formal educational background and English literacy. The project is ongoing, once funded predominantly by King’s College London and now supported by the charity, Philosophy in Prison.

My initial motivations for taking philosophy into prisons were at the same time personal and theoretical. I wanted to know whether philosophy had value beyond the confines of specialists and university students – and, moreover, whether *my* doing philosophy could have such value. Prison seemed to me a potentially rich environment to explore this issue. Though, I should be clear, the prospect of teaching in prison was also alluring for other reasons. It appealed, for example, to my curiosity: for me, as many others, prisons play a significant role in our cultural imagination but remain relatively opaque institutions. It also appealed to my desire to do something worthwhile. Surely, I thought, it would be a straightforwardly good thing to offer philosophy classes in prisons, particularly given the need for UK prisons to offer educational programmes better suited to the diverse needs of the prison population (Coates, 2016, pp. 27-37).

The pilot course at Belmarsh was a rich and stimulating experience. One particularly striking outcome was the diverse range of values that our students associated with the course. Students remarked, for example, on the pleasure and enjoyment they took in the classes; the intellectual and emotional stimulation of philosophical discussion; a sense of community and



an enriched social life, through new relationships, topics of conversation, and a fresh way of socialising back on the wing (philosophical discussion is, after all, a social activity); access to an otherwise inaccessible and, in one student's words, "high-brow" academic subject; re-engagement with education and reading; intellectual empowerment, particularly as the result of being heard and taken seriously by others; and intellectual changes, such as becoming more open-minded, an ability and willingness to engage in open-ended inquiry, a better understanding of others, and a better understanding of oneself and one's own actions. As we continued to deliver courses, many of these values recurred in student feedback and others arose, particularly as we taught in new contexts such as a women's prison and with vulnerable prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

In short, I had found what I was looking for: it was clear that philosophy had worth beyond the academy, perhaps even significant worth. But at the same time important questions remained unanswered: were these values unique to philosophy? Surely other educational programmes could increase access to education, intellectually empower students, and so on. If so, what, if anything, is unique about philosophical education? If philosophy is intellectually empowering, would this persist beyond the classroom and carry through to new contexts? Can philosophy really help us understand other people better (rather than, say, ideas, arguments, and systems of thought)? What about understanding our own actions – how might philosophy be relevant to *that*? What is valuable about open-mindedness and open-ended inquiry? Do these have any special significance in the prison environment? And in what way, if at all, is philosophical discussion shaped, informed, and perhaps even constrained by being conducted in a prison?

One initial motivation for this Special Issue, then, was to delve deeper into the nature and value of philosophy and, in particular, philosophical education in the prison context. Consider, for example, Pritchard's paper in this issue, which focuses on a philosophy-based prison education programme developed by staff from the University of Edinburgh, New College Lanarkshire, and the Scottish Prison Service. Pritchard analyses student interviews through the lens of a particular philosophical thesis, i.e. that the development of intellectual character virtue is the proper epistemic goal of education, where intellectual character virtues include open-mindedness, curiosity, integrity, intellectual humility, etc. Pritchard thus argues for a sensibility approach to teaching philosophy in prison, which focuses on "cultivating a kind of critical sensibility that is characteristic of a philosophical engagement with a topic". This is contrasted with approaches that focus primarily on teaching the subject matter of philosophy. According to Pritchard, sensibility-focused approaches are best suited for the cultivation of intellectual character virtue and thus the proper epistemic goal of education. He also explores the ways in which the development of intellectual virtue might have value in the prison context, for example intellectual virtues can have instrumental, practical value for prisoners in interactions with prison staff, but also have non-instrumental worth as an integral part of a flourishing, human life more generally.

Stapleton and Ward's co-authored paper also mounts a case for how we should think about the value of philosophical education in prison. They distinguish between two ways of thinking about the value of philosophy outside of the university context. According to the transactional model, educational goods such as knowledge and cognitive skills are transmitted from teacher to students. On the dialogic model, the teacher is a facilitator, rather than a transmitter of goods, whose primary aim is to be an active and sincere participant in philosophical discussion. Although the teacher-facilitator will help to structure discussion, classes are open-ended insofar as there is no fixed end-point or outcome. Stapleton and Ward argue that the nature and value of the dialogic model cannot be reduced to the transactional. Moreover, the dialogic model better captures a dominant strand of philosophical education in UK prison, has instrumental advantages such as being more accessible to prison learners with diverse for-

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<sup>1</sup> For the first-hand perspective of one of our students at HMP Downview, see How philosophy helped a woman in prison, 2020.

mal educational backgrounds, and is well adapted to facilitate transformations in the form of “perspective-unsticking”, for students and facilitator alike.

Both papers exemplify how the practice of philosophical education in prison, as well as prison education more generally, can benefit from philosophical research and interrogation. But a further prospect for the interaction of philosophy with prisons is that philosophy itself will be enriched. As Stapleton and Ward note, taking well-worn philosophical questions into prisons can throw up novel ideas and perspectives, e.g. that an artistic forgery might be of greater value than the original on account of the expertise and creativity of the forger. Similarly, Jennifer Lackey, director of the Northwestern Prison Education Programme, has written about how her philosophical views on the ethics and epistemology of credibility changed as the result of teaching courses in a maximum-security men’s prison in Chicago (Lackey, 2016, cf. Lackey, 2020). By taking their interactions and experiences with prisoners and the prison context seriously, these philosophers have found themselves prompted to reconsider and develop their own philosophical views.

My own experiences reflect this. Philosophical treatments of open-mindedness – an archetypal intellectual virtue – have explored various ways in which open-mindedness is valuable. Some, for example, have argued that open-mindedness has instrumental value from an epistemic point of view, insofar as being open-minded promotes epistemic goods for the open-minded agent, such as true belief, knowledge, or understanding (e.g. Carter & Gordon, 2014; Fantl, 2018; Kwong, 2017; Riggs, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Zagzebski, 1996, cf. Battaly, 2018). Others have argued that open-mindedness has value independent of whether it yields such epistemic goods, simply in virtue of the fact that an open-minded agent has good epistemic character (e.g. Baehr 2011; Montmarquet 1993).<sup>2</sup> But reflections offered by prison-learners on courses I have delivered suggest that these accounts of the value of open-mindedness may not be exhaustive.

Rather than focusing on the value of being open-minded for the open-minded agent – e.g. in terms of the epistemic goods that being open-minded might yield, or the value of being an intellectually virtuous person – students commented instead on the value of being treated with an open-mind by another. Students remarked, for example, that they felt intellectually empowered because others treated them and their ideas with an open-mind during class. This, it seems to me, offers a novel way to think about the value of open-mindedness. Suppose that being open-minded towards another person requires taking them seriously, as worthy of intellectual engagement. This act of taking another person seriously might confer a sense of intellectual worth upon the person being treated with an open-mind and, in turn, empower them intellectually (to see this, think of the negative, disempowering effect of being treated with a closed-mind – the thought is that being treated with an open-mind can have the opposite, enabling effect). Open-mindedness might then have value insofar as acts of open-mindedness can function to empower people as epistemic agents – as thinkers, learners, knowers, etc.

This line of thought is overly compressed, requiring significant elaboration and argument. It would also benefit from engagement with systematic research on the value of traits such as open-mindedness in the prison context (e.g. LoCI and Wittenberg University Writing Group, 2016; Szifris, 2021, pp. 85-98). But it is nonetheless instructive of the ways in which doing philosophy in prison might offer novel insight into substantive, philosophical debates. This is not to claim, of course, that doing philosophy in other contexts beyond the usual confines of academic research and university teaching would not yield novel insights. The point, rather, is that in whatever ways and to whatever extent the context of prisons and the experience of being imprisoned can be unique, the interaction of philosophy with prisons, prisoners, and prison research is likely to shed new light on certain philosophical questions. What’s more, this interaction will be all the richer the more integrated it is, e.g. with more prisoners and

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<sup>2</sup> Arguments have also been offered for the moral value of open-mindedness, e.g. Arpaly 2011; Cremaldi and Kwong, 2017; Song, 2018.

ex-prisoners authoring philosophical research, or collaborative projects between prisoners and non-imprisoned university staff and students. Indeed, the worth of collaborative programmes is brought out particularly well by Snyder and Brown in this issue, who argue that collaborative, project-based education programmes between imprisoned and non-imprisoned students can produce particularly rich and rewarding results, for both parties.

For all its potential value, however, philosophical education in prison is not without its challenges and scope for problems. Perhaps obviously, though not often reported, is the fact that not all students find value in doing philosophy, with some even finding it discomforting. Some of my students, for example, experienced the open-ended nature of philosophical debate as frustrating, disorientating, and even distressing, for example when definite answers are so infrequently, if ever, arrived at.

There are also ways in which philosophy might be shaped and even constrained by the prison context. Although it is often the case that practitioners of philosophical education in prison are formally external to the prison – they might be entering the prison environment as representatives of a university or a charity, rather than as prison staff – their presence is nonetheless sanctioned by the prison, and they must operate within the constraints of its structures and aims. For my colleagues and I, our relation to the prison is often visually represented, for example in the form of temporary, staff, security badges and drawn keys. As such, some students quite reasonably wondered if we were reporting back on what was said in class. If we tackled moral questions, for example, were we taking note of the views expressed? Others wondered if we were there to deliver a course specifically for prisoners, insofar as we might have selected topics that we considered to be of particular relevance to prisoners, such as issues of justice, normative ethics, or freedom. Or perhaps we were there to help our students improve themselves in ways relevant to the prison's aims of rehabilitation, desistance, reduced violence, security, etc. Each of these worries have the power to shape a conversation, for example through self-censorship, and thus the potential to derail philosophical thought which, we often think, should strive to follow an argument wherever it may lead.

The prison context might also shape the import and perceived value of philosophical education for students in prison. As noted, students often report intellectual changes, for example in the form of increased open-mindedness. In my courses at Belmarsh, some students explicitly framed these changes in terms of the development of “thinking skills”, occasionally with reference to their actions. Some claimed, for example, that the philosophy course had helped them acquire thinking skills that would help them think more carefully about the potential consequences of their actions, or to understand another person's perspective before acting. This was not language that I had used to frame the value of philosophy and it initially appeared to me benign coincidence – our students had experienced, as many who study philosophy do, that philosophising can help develop cognitive skills and intellectual traits, in some form or other. But the language of thinking skills is also reminiscent of Ministry of Justice Offender Behaviour Programmes, such as the Thinking Skills Programme then running at Belmarsh. A central premise of such programmes is that “cognitive skills deficits, such as poor reasoning and problem solving, are important factors in explaining offending behaviour and that these skills can be taught” (Clarke et al., 2004, p. 2). The relevant cognitive skills addressed include critical reasoning, flexible thinking, understanding the perspectives of others and society, moral and value-based reasoning, and interpersonal problem solving – outcomes often associated with philosophical education. What's more, it has been claimed that similar cognitive skills programmes, such as Enhanced Thinking Skills, have a positive impact on recidivism (Sadler, 2010; Travers et al., 2015).

As my co-editor, Aislinn O'Donnell, discusses above, discourses of deficit can be harmful, and we should be wary of co-opting education for agendas such as desistance and rehabilitation. Whatever relevance education might have for these aims of the prison, the broader and arguably more significant values of education stand to be diminished if it is instrumentalised

in this way. Perhaps, then, practitioners should resist framing the value of their courses to prisoners and prisons in terms of the development of thinking skills, cognitive skills, etc. What's significant about my example, however, is that the evaluation of philosophy in terms of thinking skills was not imposed by myself nor, as far as I'm aware, directly by prison staff. Instead, it was brought by our students. As such, it is an example of how prison discourses and agendas can indirectly come to shape the perceived value of philosophical education.

How should we respond to this? What seems to me genuinely significant about the current trend of philosophical education in prison is that it is primarily discursive, aiming at open-ended, critical discussion, where those delivering courses act as sincere participants in group inquiry. One significant advantage of this model is that any topic or question can in principle be tackled. I have seen, for example, students use our philosophy classes to address and explore challenging issues beyond the syllabus, such as issues of racism within and external to the group. Similarly, then, thorny questions about the value of philosophy in relation to prison aims such as desistance and rehabilitation, as well as the impact and potential constraints of the broader prison context on philosophical conversation, can also in principle be explored critically by practitioners and students together. It's on this basis, I submit, that we should continue to think about the nature and value of philosophical education in prisons.

### **Conclusion**

As previously noted, philosophy and prison have a longstanding history but, as this Special Issue hopes to make clear, there is still much to gain through philosophy's engagement with prisons and prisoners, and vice versa. What's more, we hope to show that an interdisciplinary approach – with conversations taking place between philosophy, education, prison sociology, and criminology – is well placed to shed novel and unexpected light on the value and complexities of this engagement. The nature of interdisciplinary work is inherently complicated, particularly when fields of study have significantly different traditions, methodologies, and aims. We take it for granted that this is a conversation that will have to walk before it can run and, as such, this Special Issue should be viewed as a starting point for future discussions, rather than the final word. We intend that our practices and understanding of philosophical education in prison will not only continue but flourish as a result.

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