

Call for Papers for Special Issue “Critical Reflections on Philosophy, Education, and Prison Sociology”

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Paper Length Maximum: 8000 words in APA style.

Philosophy and prison are no strangers. Indeed, their relationship is longstanding and complex. In recent years, philosophy has been introduced to prison education, with philosophers delivering courses in a variety of forms, from university modules to inquiry-based discussion groups, communities of philosophical inquiry, reading groups, and online courses. Philosophers have also impacted and been impacted by the prison system: Jeremy Bentham contributed to the design and “reform” of British prisons, Michel Foucault gave us a new perspective on the birth of prison and its relation to power, and Angela Davis argues for abolition and was herself incarcerated. Prison and prisoners play a role in philosophical imagination, not only in discussions of punishment but also more broadly in normative ethics, where thought experiments and examples frequently conjure up “criminal” characters for philosophical examination. To take one final example, philosophical ideas and theories, such as virtue ethics and philosophical accounts of flourishing and well-being, have influenced and been used by criminological researchers.

This Special Issue of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* will focus on the intersection of the practices and disciplines of philosophy, education, and prison sociology, with a particular focus on the tensions, difficulties, and challenges that arise from their interaction. In putting this call together, we are seeking articles that engage critically with the relationship between philosophy, education, and prison research. We are particularly interested in articles that take multi-disciplinary perspectives, seeking conversation between these disciplines. We are also interested in articles that take theoretical and critical perspectives on engaging prisoners directly with philosophy. In addition, we will have space for one straightforward practitioner piece. In what follows we detail several areas and questions for exploration in the Special Issue. These are intended to guide but not limit submissions.

Prison, philosophy, and education

Take, for example, philosophy education in prisons. Philosophy is often idealised as a critical discipline, in which philosophers freely discuss radical ideas and break the bounds of conventional thought. But to what extent can this take place in a total institution? How does the prison context shape philosophical thought and education? Philosophical education is sometimes associated with the development of cognitive skills, intellectual virtues, and even preparation for participation in liberal democracy. Indeed, some have explicitly drawn comparisons between such outcomes and the aims of Offender Behaviour Programmes, which seek to address an individual’s cognitive and behavioural “deficits”. In what ways do discourses and

agendas of rehabilitation impact philosophy education in prison? And how might philosophy and philosophers respond to this, both theoretically and practically?

This raises broader questions about the aims of education, as discussed both by philosophers of education and educational theorists. For example, some philosophers of education have argued that the primary goal of education is the development of intellectual character virtues. But is this an appropriate goal for education in the prison context? And how might reflecting upon philosophical education in prison, the philosophy of education, and prison education more broadly inform debates about what education ought to aim for? Similarly, what difficulties and tensions might other theories of education face in the prison context, e.g. accounts that conceive of freedom of thought, exploration, autonomy, and transformation as central to education. More broadly, how should we conceive of the goals of education in light of the aims, discourses, and regimes of prisons? What would it mean to conceive of and undertake philosophical education for its own sake in the prison context?

Philosophy, education, and prison sociology

Another angle on the relationship between philosophy, education, and prison relates to what engaging prisoners in philosophical education - particularly in the form of philosophical *conversation* - can tell us about prison, the prisoner experience, and the prison society. Prison sociology articulates the relevance of power, trust, legitimacy, relationships, well-being, and survival in the prison context. People who are sent to prison have often been suddenly torn out of their everyday lives and placed in what can be a violent and unpredictable place. The prison environment thus offers a unique space to consider philosophical questions of identity. Previous research has asked how the environment affects a person's sense of self, the adaptation and mechanisms prisoners engage in to navigate the prisoner community, the means by which prisoners endeavour to 'psychologically survive' the experience, and the way in which different prison regimes relate to different social environments. What can philosophical education with prisoners tell us about the way in which imprisonment affects the individual? What does imprisonment tell us about being human and what it means to grow, develop, and progress? How might engaging in philosophical conversation shape the individual's experience of imprisonment? How might prison sociology inform conversations about what it means for philosophical education to take place in the prison context? And what are the risks of looking at education through this lens?

Philosophy and criminology

A final example concerns the role of philosophical theories in criminological discourse, and vice versa. Consider the use of virtue ethics in desistance literature: what are the implications of adopting one ethical theory over another? More broadly, what are the philosophical commitments made by criminologists and prison sociologists, and how might conversation between philosophers and prison researchers broaden our understanding of prison and the role of education therein? Similarly, to what extent, if at all, has prison research influenced philosophical debate, particularly concerning discussions of punishment and morality? How might criminological research shed light on these philosophical subjects?