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Philosophy in Prisons and the Cultivation of Intellectual Character

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Abstract: *There have recently been a series of prominent projects in the UK that aim to bring philosophy into the heart of prison education. The aim of this paper is to consider a possible rationale for this pedagogical development. A distinction is drawn between a content and a sensibility approach to teaching philosophy, where the latter is primarily concerned not with teaching a particular subject matter but rather with developing a certain kind of critical expertise. It is argued that the sensibility conception of teaching philosophy dovetails with an influential account of the epistemic aim of education in terms of the cultivation of intellectual character, in the specific sense of developing the intellectual virtues that constitute one's intellectual character (i.e., virtuous intellectual character). The significance of this point for prison education is illustrated by considering how the use of a pedagogical approach in prison education known as CoPI ('Community of Philosophical Inquiry') can be construed as teaching philosophy on the sensibility model just outlined. With this in mind, it is argued that the value of teaching philosophy in prisons primarily relates to how it provides a particularly fundamental kind of education, one that is both finally and instrumentally valuable. These points are illustrated throughout by considering a particular case study involving a recent philosophy in prisons project that employed the CoPI methodology.*

Keywords: *prison education, philosophy of education, community of philosophical inquiry, virtue epistemology, philosophy in prisons, epistemology*

Why Teach Philosophy in Prison

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the UK in the idea of teaching philosophy in prisons, with numerous initiatives being launched for just this purpose.[1] One challenge facing any such project is to explain why philosophy, specifically, should be taught in this context. In particular, wouldn't it be more beneficial for prisoners to be taught expertise of a more practical nature, such as accountancy or electrical engineering? This issue dovetails with a further question, which is what we take ourselves to be doing when we teach philosophy in prisons (which may or may not be different from what we take ourselves to be doing when we teach philosophy more generally). The reason why the two questions inter-relate is that one can view the teaching of philosophy as itself offering a kind of practical expertise, albeit of

1 Some recent examples: the University of Aberdeen ran a project (2012-13) bringing philosophy into a local prison (HMP Aberdeen); Kirstine Szifris has run philosophy in prisons projects (2014-17) at HMP Grendon, HMP Full Sutton, and HMP Thorn Cross; and since 2016 KCL has been running a philosophy in prisons project at HMP Belmarsh, a project that has led to the creation of the nationwide Philosophy in Prison charity (see www.philosophyinprison.com). There is also the philosophy in prisons project that has been run by the University of Edinburgh since 2014, which is described in more detail below. See Szifris (2016; 2018) for further discussion of the philosophy in prison projects that she ran.

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a very general nature (which is not to say that it is thereby of less practical utility than more specialized forms of expertise; indeed, it may have greater practical utility).

In particular, we can differentiate in this regard between two different ways in which one might teach philosophy. One might approach the teaching of philosophy by focusing on imparting the subject matter of philosophy—i.e., philosophical ideas and theses, and the history of the discipline. In this content approach to teaching the subject, teaching philosophy isn't essentially any different from teaching any other subject matter, such as civil engineering or organic chemistry. There is an alternative conception of teaching philosophy, however, whereby one's overarching goal is not imparting a body of knowledge at all, but rather cultivating a kind of critical sensibility that is characteristic of a philosophical engagement with a topic. Call this the sensibility approach.

In practice, of course, this distinction does not manifest itself in a clear-cut fashion, not least because often one is aiming, to varying degrees, to achieve both aims—i.e., to impart knowledge of the subject matter of philosophy and develop the kind of expertise that is associated with good philosophical inquiry. Nonetheless, the distinction is useful to bear in mind, since the two approaches can come completely apart. In particular, in line with the content approach, one could potentially teach the subject matter of philosophy without thereby cultivating any kind of critical philosophical sensibility at all. Conversely, in line with the sensitivity approach, one could in principle cultivate a critical philosophical sensibility without in the process imparting any knowledge of the subject matter of philosophy.

This distinction between a content and a sensibility conception of teaching philosophy is especially important when it comes to prison education since the particular initiatives that bring philosophy into prison education that are of concern to us are of the latter kind, with a focus on developing a kind of philosophical expertise rather than teaching the subject matter of philosophy. Indeed, they are often especially pure manifestations of the sensibility conception of teaching philosophy, in that philosophical subject matter barely enters into the proceedings. For example, a number of philosophy in prison education initiatives employ approaches to teaching philosophy like Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI)—which we will consider in more detail in a moment—that are predominantly focused on developing a kind of philosophical expertise. Whether that makes the teaching of philosophy in prison more palatable (compared to the pedagogical alternatives) depends, of course, on whether we think such an expertise has value for the prisoners concerned.

I want to confront this issue by situating contemporary philosophy-based prison education initiatives in terms of a wider project that offers a virtue-theoretic conception of the goals of education. I suggest that this way of teaching philosophy is concerned with the cultivation of intellectual character, which is the subject's stable set of integrated cognitive skills. In particular, I claim that this style of teaching philosophy in prisons cultivates intellectual character in the specific sense of developing a sub-class of the subject's cognitive skills known as the intellectual virtues—i.e., it is devoted to developing virtuous intellectual character. I will be saying more about the intellectual virtues in due course, but one key point I will be making in this regard is that developing a subject's intellectual virtues involves more than just developing their critical thinking capacities (though the two kinds of cognitive trait are closely related, as we will see). The wider conclusion that I will be arguing for is that on a virtue-theoretic conception of education, according to which education is geared towards the cultivation of virtuous intellectual character, it makes perfect sense to teach prisoners philosophy in the ways described. Indeed, while everyone would benefit from being taught philosophy on this model, there are reasons to think that it might be especially advantageous to prisoners.

A CoPI-Based Philosophy in Prisons Project

It will be useful for our purposes to consider a concrete philosophy-based prison education initiative. This was a collaboration between faculty from the University of Edin-

burgh—specifically philosophers from the Eidyn research centre which is based in the School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, and faculty from the Moray House School of Education—and colleagues at the 'chalk-face' of prison education who at that time were working in this sector as part of a contract between New College Lanarkshire and the Scottish Prison Service. While the project has since been expanded to other prisons, in its initial phase (which will be our focus here) it was targeted on just two Scottish prisons, HMP Low Moss and HMP Cornton Vale, which house male and female prisoners, respectively. The project has been described in detail elsewhere (Pritchard, 2019), so here I will focus on those elements that are most relevant to our current concerns.

The teaching was centred around a weekly classroom discussion, with classes of around 7-8 students. This class size was chosen because it was large enough to create a lively discussion group, but also small enough to allow for full participation in the planned discussions. Each run of the course lasted for seven weeks. Each week the students were shown a video which covered a core area of philosophy. These videos were created from a highly successful MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) entitled 'Introduction to Philosophy' that the Eidyn research centre has been running since 2013 on the Coursera platform. This is designed to offer an accessible introduction to the main areas of philosophy and presupposes no background knowledge in the subject. The MOOC has been very popular, with millions of people taking the course worldwide. Since prisoners do not have access to the internet, it was necessary to specially create an off-line version of the lectures from this course. Each video covers a core area of philosophy, starting with topics that students are likely to have some familiarity with (such as ethics and political philosophy) before moving on to more abstract topics like epistemology (e.g., scepticism) and metaphysics (e.g., free will).

Each weekly discussion seminar was paired with a topic from the video that the students watched that week. These discussion seminars employed the CoPI methodology. This is a pedagogical approach to developing thinking and reasoning skills that is familiar from Philosophy for Children (P4C) programmes (Kennedy, 2012; Lipman, 1998).[2] While CoPI is widely used in philosophy education projects aimed at children, it has also been found to be effective as a way of teaching philosophy at any educational level, particularly when the students concerned are encountering philosophy for the first time. The aim of the CoPI methodology is to create open, discursive environments that break the process of thinking down into its essential characteristics in order to make rational processes, ordinarily implicit, explicit to the protagonists, and thereby help students to develop critical judgement. CoPI-based discussions foster collaborative inquiries among the participants, encourage the clear articulation of ideas, and provide a structured opportunity for self-expression. This discursive environment is facilitated by the discussion leader creating an intellectual setting that puts the focus on reasons and reasoning. This is achieved via the implementation of 'rules of play', rather than aiming to cover specific kinds of philosophical content (though that may be covered as a means of stimulating discussion). CoPI is thus straightforwardly aligned with the sensibility, rather than the content, conception of teaching philosophy noted above.[3]

For an example of these rules of play, students were not allowed to use their real name, but were required to create a fake name for the purpose of the discussion. This helped students to abstract away from their personal experience and focus on the reasons at issue. This is particularly important in a prison context, as the prison educators we worked with pointed out that it is difficult to prevent discussions from becoming forums for the students to discuss their lives (even when this is explicitly not the purpose of the discussion), and in particular

2 The version of CoPI that we employed was highly influenced by McCall (2009). See also Szifris (2016) for discussion of a philosophy in prisons project based around the CoPI methodology that was based at HMP Grendon.

3 CoPI is thus a form of 'non-directive' teaching' in the sense articulated by Hand (2018, 37), such that the dialogues introduced and facilitated by the discussion leader have no particular persuasive aim. Teaching philosophy in the content sense, in contrast, would constitute 'directive' teaching.

the circumstances that led to them being in prison.[4] Another key rule of play is that in order to enter a claim—make a move in this game of reasons, as it were—students had to make explicit their reasons for making their assertion, so that the reasoning itself can be brought forth for discussion by the group. Relatedly, in objecting to an assertion a student must be willing to state both the claim that is being objected to and also the reason offered for that claim. In this way the students become used to the idea both of explicitly formulating their reasons and of understanding the explicit formulation of reasons offered by others. Rules of play of this kind enable the educator, whose goal is merely to facilitate this discussion (rather than direct it, much less 'teach' the students), to focus the discussion on reasons, and thereby on what it is to engage in good reasoning. The discursive nature of the process means that the students learn together, in a social and collaborative environment that is receptive to each person's contribution.

CoPI provides an ideal structure to discuss ideas in a philosophical manner, as the focus is not on a specific philosophical subject matter, much is it less designed to test student knowledge of that subject matter, but is rather concerned with developing ways of thinking critically. The CoPI pedagogical approach also has obvious advantages in a prison context, where one cannot assume anything about the academic background of the students, given the wide range of educational backgrounds of the prisoners.[5] Moreover, as we've already noted, the strictly impersonal nature of this approach, whereby personal digressions are disallowed, is also useful in a prison setting, as it helps the students to avoid distractions and focus on the ideas in play.

The results of this project have been discussed at length elsewhere (Pritchard, 2019), but we can summarize the four main themes that are of particular relevance for our present purposes as follows. First, there was clear evidence of the students developing their critical reasoning capacities, such as the ability to articulate reasoning in support of their claims, to accurately represent the reasoning offered by others, and to articulate competing considerations in support of a claim (and thereby adjudicate between different positions in a debate). As one of the prison educators interviewed put it when asked what the prisoners gained from doing the CoPI seminars:

> Critical thinking skills. They are developed in a lot of other subjects up to a point, but that's the biggest transformation I've seen in the nearly five years that I've worked with prisoners in such a short space of time. […] I think their critical thinking and their way of listening and interacting with each other and actually how they articulate themselves changed dramatically. (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 256)

Second, students also developed related cognitive skills, such as a sensitivity to evidence and reasons, an ability to fairly examine ideas that are not their own, a willingness to change their mind in the face of argument, and a greater tendency to reflect on their beliefs where appropriate. Indeed, this was a recurring theme in the prisoners' own descriptions of what they gained from the CoPI seminars. Here is one of the prisoners describing the effect of CoPI in this regard:

> I think this course gives you more understanding, you learn how to manage things better, you learn how to look at things from all different points of view. Whereas before you would just look at it from your own point of view, which

4 There are also obviously both practical and ethical reasons in a prison education context why it might be important to preserve the student's anonymity.

5 A recent longitudinal study of prisoners in England and Wales—see Williams, Papadopoulou & Booth (2012)—makes startling reading in this regard (and in several other regards too). For example, it reports that an astonishing 63% of prisoners had been suspended or temporarily excluded from school, with 42% experiencing permanent exclusion. (For comparison, a recent report for the UK government—see Timpson (2019, 6)—notes that just 0.06% of schoolchildren nationwide were permanently excluded in the 2013/14 school year). A recent report on Scottish prisons specifically states that around 20% of prisoners had difficulties with writing, numbers, and reading (against a national average of around 3%). (Scottish Government Justice Directorate Report 2015, 6).

> is quite selfish, you know. But, now you're open to other ideas, so it makes your mind open to new issues that you wouldn't think about so much. (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 257)

Third, students demonstrated greater intellectual respect for others, such as a willingness to carefully listen to what others are saying and then rationally engage with them. Several prisoners reported that the CoPI seminars gave them an insight into how they had previously been insufficiently attentive to what others were saying, but that engaging with the CoPI method helped them to change in this regard. For example:

> I actually needed to learn how to listen and absorb information, also how to construct arguments properly and not just jump in and try and talk over people. This is a major issue of mine. It always has been. (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 258)

Finally, fourth, students displayed a greater degree of intellectual self-respect, in the sense that they put greater stock in their own opinions and in their cognitive capacities. Interestingly, this was especially so with regard to the female prisoners, who in general were described (by both themselves and by the teachers involved) as suffering from low self-esteem (both intellectually and otherwise). Here is how one female prisoner from HMP Cornton Vale described the results of taking this CoPI-based course:

> [T]his course has actually given me a lot of confidence. To feel like your actual opinion does count and it's okay to give your opinion, no matter whether you agree with other people or not. (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 258)

These four themes are all closely related, of course. For example, in developing critical thinking skills, it is unsurprising that one also enhances one's cognitive skills more generally, or that one demonstrates a greater intellectual respect for others. Nonetheless, it is important to keep these themes distinct, since as we will see there are ways in which the development of one aspect of a student's cognitive abilities might be achieved in isolation from the others. It is also notable that the students themselves recognized the value of the kinds of cognitive traits developed by CoPI, both in terms of how they are useful across a wide range of situations and in terms of how they are important to their own personal development. On the latter front, for example, here is one of the prisoners describing the cognitive skills they gained from participating in the CoPI tutorials:

> […] the skills are not just useful in a CoPI [tutorial], these are skills that are useful when you're back in the block, when you're dealing with officers, when you're having to go to ICMs [integrated case management meetings …]. They're skills that are transferable to everything […]. I've actually found myself watching more news and things that are of interest and topics that are quite current, so you can do these sorts of things, maybe secretly practising it and no telling other people you're practicing on them, you know what I mean? (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 257)

Education as the Cultivation of Intellectual Character

The CoPI methodology dovetails with a conception of the epistemic goals of education that has proved popular, both historically and in the contemporary literature. According to this proposal, the overarching goal of education, at least from a purely epistemic point of view, is the cultivation of intellectual character. As already noted, intellectual character here concerns the subject's stable and integrated set of cognitive skills. This includes both innate cognitive faculties, like one's perceptual or memorial skills, and also acquired cognitive capacities, such as arithmetical or observational skills that one has learnt through training.

When theorists describe the epistemic goal of education as being the cultivation of intellectual character, however, they are usually understanding intellectual character in a par-

ticular way, such that it specifically concerns the development of an especially sophisticated sub-set of the subject's stable and integrated cognitive skills known as the intellectual virtues. That is, the overarching epistemic goal of education on this proposal is not so much the development of intellectual character simpliciter (which may not involve any specific development of the intellectual virtues), but rather virtuous intellectual character (which does essentially concern the development of the intellectual virtues). The intellectual virtues are admirable character traits like curiosity, intellectual humility, integrity, intellectual tenacity, conscientiousness, and intellectual courage (Battaly, 2014; Roberts & Wood, 2007; Zagzebski, 1996). These are acquired cognitive skills that involve a nuanced capacity for judgement across a broad range of application and which are accompanied by distinctive motivations (as we will see in a moment). As such, the intellectual virtues are clearly instrumentally valuable due to their practical utility. But they are also held to be of final (non-instrumental) value too, on account of how they enable one to flourish as a human being. Accordingly, while education might in addition serve all kinds of non-epistemic purposes, such as practical, ethical, or political aims, its epistemic goals are thought to be geared towards the development of a virtuous intellectual character on account of the special value (both practical and final) of the intellectual virtues (Baehr, 2016; Battaly, 2006; Byerly, 2019; Hyslop-Margison, 2003; MacAllister, 2012; Pritchard, 2013; 2015; 2018; 2020; Sockett, 2012; Watson, 2018).[6]

We can see the attraction of such a proposal by considering the alternatives. For example, perhaps the epistemic goal of education should be a particular kind of epistemic standing, such as having true beliefs or knowledge. One of the problems facing this kind of view, however, is that it seems to imply that many of our educational practices are somewhat redundant, at least from a purely epistemic perspective. If this is the epistemic goal of education, then why encourage students to think for themselves, or to be able to undertake their own inquiries? Why not instead simply drill them with the true beliefs or knowledge that you want them to have, and make sure that they passively accept what they are taught?[7] The point is that education is not primarily about what one learns, but rather how one learns, and that means that what we are trying to cultivate through education is the good intellectual character to acquire epistemic goods like true belief or knowledge in the right kind of way.

The CoPI method speaks directly to a characterization of the epistemic goal of education as the development of intellectual character because of its focus on thinking itself, and in particular how to think (and reason, and argue, etc.) well. The setting aside of the goal of learning facts about a subject matter—and anything else that is extraneous to the task in hand—is important to bringing the nature of thinking itself to the fore. So understood, CoPI is a way of teaching philosophy that is aligned with the sensibility conception that was outlined above, such that one is engaged in the philosophical practice of thinking about thinking as opposed to learning particular philosophical theses or arguments (though one might learn the latter while in pursuit of the former). While there are undoubtedly other ways of cultivating intellectual character, and thereby targeting the epistemic goal of education, pursuing philosophy on the sensibility conception as CoPI does is a particularly direct way of doing so.[8]

Thus far we have made a case for thinking that the epistemic goal of education is the de-

6 See also the wider literature on the role of the virtues in education, beyond the intellectual virtues specifically, such as Carr (2014) and Kristjánsson (2015). For further discussion of the epistemology of education more generally, see Robertson (2009) and Baehr (2016).

7 This point becomes even more acute once one considers the increasing reliance on technology in education, as explained in Pritchard (2018).

8 Another way that virtuous intellectual character (and, indeed, virtuous character in general) is often held to be cultivated is through the emulation of virtuous exemplars. For some recent discussions of virtuous exemplars in education, see Zagzebski (2010; 2017), Olberding (2012), Tanesini (2016), Croce & Vaccarezza (2017), Korsgaard (2019), Alfano & Sullivan (2019), Croce (2019; 2020), and Croce & Pritchard (forthcoming). The role of exemplars in prison education brings with it further issues—such as how prisoners relate to perceived authority figures and the importance of exemplars who are sufficiently relatable to the students concerned—that would take us too far afield to explore here (though I hope to be able to do so in future work).

velopment of intellectual character, and that teaching philosophy on the sensibility conception via the CoPI methodology is an especially straightforward way of pursuing this goal. Interestingly, however, while it is plausible that CoPI is devoted to the cultivation of intellectual character, it isn't obvious that it is concerned with the cultivation of virtuous intellectual character specifically (i.e., with the development of the intellectual virtues).

This point is particularly pressing for our purposes since the CoPI method is often explicitly characterized as being geared towards critical thinking, and while the skills involved in critical thinking often overlap with the intellectual virtues, they are not necessarily the same thing. The reason for this is that there is more to the intellectual virtues than just the cognitive capacities involved in critical thinking. There are various features of the intellectual virtues that are relevant in this regard, but one key feature is that the intellectual virtues have a distinctive motivational component that need not be associated with critical thinking capacities. In particular, to be intellectually virtuous is to be motivated towards intellectually good ends, which means to have an overarching desire for the truth and thus for accuracy. This is a more demanding requirement than is relevant for most other cognitive skills, including critical thinking skills, as usually the possession of a cognitive skill doesn't require that the subject has this specific motivation (which is why the intellectual virtues are a distinctive kind of cognitive skill). In particular, cognitive skills, like skills more generally, can usually be successfully manifested with purely strategic motives, or indeed with no motives at all. In the case of critical thinking skills, for example, one might successfully employ them simply because one wishes to win an argument, or to look clever in front of one's peers. The same is not true of the intellectual virtues, however. One might successfully act as if one is intellectually humble for purely strategic reasons, for example—perhaps because one thinks that others will be impressed as a result—but while what one is doing is undoubtedly skillful (it is hard to even appear intellectually humble after all), it is not the manifestation of intellectual humility, since that intellectual virtue is always accompanied with the appropriate motivational state.

There is a lively debate in the literature about whether thinking of the epistemic goals of education as being devoted to the cultivation of intellectual character should be cashed-out in terms of the development of the intellectual virtues or merely in terms of certain critical thinking capacities (Baehr, 2019; Carter, Kotzee & Siegel, 2019; Hitchcock, 2018; Huber & Kuncel, 2016; Hyslop-Margison, 2003; Siegel, 1988, 1997, 2017). I think it is clear that the CoPI methodology is primarily focused on the development of intellectual character in general, and that it at least develops intellectual character in the weak sense of enhancing students' critical thinking capacities. But I want to suggest that what it actually does in practice is cultivate intellectual character in the strong sense of developing the intellectual virtues (and thus virtuous intellectual character).

Indeed, we can see this in the results of the case study noted above. The student prisoners who attended the CoPI seminars weren't learning merely to employ critical thinking skills but were in addition acquiring the motivations that accompany the intellectual virtues. Being willing to change one's mind in the face of the counter-evidence, or showing greater intellectual self-respect or respect for others, are cognitive traits that encompass more than just critical thinking capacities. This is because they essentially involve having an overarching desire for the truth that is associated with the intellectual virtues.

Moreover, it is not a mere side-effect of the CoPI methodology that it has this result. One could certainly teach critical thinking in a purely instrumental fashion, whereby one focuses on certain practical goods, like winning arguments or impressing one's peers, and showing how reasoning in this manner might achieve those goals. But CoPI is precisely not instrumental in this way. It is rather focused on the nature of thinking itself, with all other concerns, including the practical utility of good reasoning, set to one side. It is this feature of the methodology that makes students aware of how the space of reasons functions independently of any practical merit this learning might generate, and in the process helps to develop in the students a delight

in reasoning itself, and thus in the truth, which is what reasoning aims for. The CoPI method is thus a way of bringing the epistemic goal of education right to the very fore of the educational enterprise. When viewed this way, it is no surprise that the employment of this method leads to the development of the intellectual virtues, and thus cultivates virtuous intellectual character.

Cultivating Virtuous Intellectual Character in a Prison Setting

With the foregoing in mind, let us return to our question of what purpose teaching philosophy in prisons serves. If by 'philosophy' here one means teaching prisoners about a body of philosophical knowledge—philosophical theories, arguments, the history of the subject, and so on—then nothing we've argued for here would show that there is any specific benefit to teaching that in prisons, as opposed to teaching history, say, or poetry. Any number of topics can be worth learning, with philosophy just one of many. Indeed, if the goal is just to train the prisoners up in a particular subject matter, then it might well make sense to focus on subjects that have more practical appeal, such as accountancy or electrical engineering.

It is not this content sense of teaching philosophy that is held to be of specific interest to prison education, however, but rather the sensibility conception of teaching philosophy that was articulated above, whereby one trains students to think about the nature of thinking itself. As we have seen, this is just what the CoPI method is all about. Moreover, we have also argued that this method helps to cultivate intellectual character in the strong sense of developing the intellectual virtues (i.e., and not just critical thinking capacities). In addition, we have contended that the development of intellectual character in just this manner is the overarching epistemic goal of education. By employing the CoPI method one is thus targeting that goal is a particularly straightforward fashion.

The foregoing only demonstrates the general utility of teaching the CoPI method, however, and not specifically the utility of employing it within prison education. Still, one might argue that conceiving of the teaching of philosophy in this fashion at least explains why philosophy in this sense might have a special role to play in prison education, in that it has a special role to play in any educational context. That said, I still think we can provide a further rationale for why teaching philosophy, via the employment of the CoPI method, might be especially relevant to prison education.

We've already noted one such consideration above, which is that CoPI doesn't presuppose anything about the students' academic background; indeed, it doesn't even presuppose that the students can read and write. This is very important in the context of prison education, where there are students with a diverse range of educational backgrounds, including a high number of students who have a very limited experience of formal education.[9]

A further practical benefit of employing the CoPI method relates to the utility of the skills that it generates. While the intellectual virtues are held to be finally valuable, they are also practically useful skills to have as well (as are, for that matter, mere critical thinking skills). Indeed, they are by their nature highly transferable skills, which are useful to dealing with a wide range of challenges (whether intellectual, social, practical, and so on). In particular, possessing the intellectual virtues will help prisoners to acquire further expertise of a specifically practical nature, since the intellectual virtues help one to learn.[10] Indeed, that CoPI generates such practically useful skills was also a theme in the results of the case study described above. This highlights the point that it is misleading to contrast the teaching of philosophy in this content sense to prisoners with teaching them practical skills, as if this is a zero-sum choice. We should rather view the teaching of philosophy as a way of enhancing the overall educational

9 See endnote 5 for further details about the educational background of prisoners in the UK.

10 There's a useful summary of the practical benefits of teaching for the intellectual virtues in Baehr (2015). See also Baehr (2021). For a helpful recent discussion of the extrinsic merits of teaching philosophy via the CoPI method specifically (i.e., teaching philosophy on the sensibility conception, as we have put it), see Gatley (2020). See also Trickey & Topping (2004), McCall (2009), and Gorard, Siddiqui & See (2017).

opportunities for prisoners. Relatedly, insofar as one holds that the teaching of practical skills to prisoners is vitally important for improving recidivism rates, then that needn't count against the teaching of philosophy in prisons.

Beyond these practical advantages to teaching philosophy in prisons, there are other advantages whose value is not predominately instrumental. We've noted above that the virtues, and hence the intellectual virtues, are held to be finally (i.e., non-instrumentally) valuable in that they contribute to a life of flourishing. Clearly to be able to flourish as a person is valuable to anyone, but there might be specific reasons why we would want prisoners to flourish in this way. There was evidence of this in the case study noted above, where the cultivation of intellectually virtuous character was found by the prisoners to be empowering. This is obviously important for prisoners who often feel powerless, particularly from an intellectual point of view, in the sense that their opinions are not valued or listened to.[11]

More generally, cultivating virtuous intellectual character helps one to both value oneself and also others, and this is also important in the context of prison education. In particular, it helps prisoners to handle social situations involving debate without this collapsing into hostility or conflict. This advantage was seen in the results from the case study, where the prisoners who completed the course displayed both an intellectual self-respect and an intellectual respect for others. Indeed, some of the prisoners themselves remarked on how this had changed their dealings with others, to the extent that they attributed their previous difficulties to a failure to properly communicate with others, which they saw rooted in their own inability to reason clearly or understand the reasoning employed by others.[12] Here, for example, is testimony from one of the prisoners:

> I think a lot of the trouble I've been involved in in the past, especially violence, has been through misunderstanding, or being misunderstood has led to a lot of the violence including what I'm in for now […] In CoPI, it's good to hear people having different views, without actually feeling as if, well actually different from me, just because they believe or they have a different view on something, it doesn't mean they disagree with what my views are. A lot of stuff and violence that I've been involved in in the past has been through misunderstanding, you know […]. (Quoted in Pritchard, 2019, p. 257)

Clearly such skills, while finally valuable, are also practically useful as well. In particular, if prisoners are to prosper outside of prison, then it is vital that they not only gain the practical skills that will ensure gainful employment, but also the social skills that enable them to properly relate to others. But that in turn requires the development of the relevant kinds of cognitive skills, and that is something that the cultivation of virtuous intellectual character speaks directly to.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing offers an overarching rationale for the teaching of philosophy in prisons,

11 We've previously noted that this issue of empowerment was particularly evident in the case of the women's prison that was part of the study described above. Powerlessness among prisoners, and how this affects their health, especially their mental health, has been widely explored in the empirical literature. For a recent study in a UK prison that looks at health outcomes in prisoners, including issues regarding mental health that are relevant to our current concerns, see De Viggiani (2007). For a recent discussion of the specific issue of powerlessness among prisoners, and the role of prison education in mitigating this, see Evans, Pelletier & Szkola (2018). See also Duguid (1988). The issue of powerlessness among prisoners is also related to a range of other issues, not least the way in which prison demands that prisoners adopt different identities in order to accommodate the prison regime. See, for example, Crewe et al (2014), Liebling & Williams (2018), and Warr (2019). (I am grateful to Kirstine Szifris for alerting me to relevant literature on this last topic).

12 Note that it is not being suggested that employing teaching philosophy in prisons via the CoPI method is the only way achieving this. For example, therapy could be used for a similar purpose. For example, Szifris (2016) argues that the CoPI method should be employed in prisons alongside therapy, where each is contributing to the success of the other (without being in competition with each other, due to the very different foci of philosophical and therapeutic dialogue).

at least where this is construed in terms of the sensibility conception that involves the development of a distinctive kind of philosophical critical expertise. There is a sense in which philosophical training in this fashion—such as embodied in the CoPI pedagogical method found in some of the UK-based philosophy in prisons projects under consideration—is really just teaching in the broadest possible manner, in that it is directly targeted at the cultivation of the subject's intellectual character, in the specific sense of their virtuous intellectual character. This is in keeping with a particular conception of the fundamental epistemic goal of education, whereby the cultivation of virtuous intellectual character generates goods for the subject that are not only instrumentally but also finally valuable, in that it helps them to flourish as persons. Moreover, we have argued that there are benefits, both instrumental and final, to teaching that enhances virtuous intellectual character in a specifically prison setting.[13]

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