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Abstract

This paper argues that providing a forum for philosophical conversation within prison education is relevant to the self-understanding and desistance of prisoners. Semi-structured interviews with 20 participants of an in-prison philosophy class in Scotland investigated the personal relevance of engaging in philosophical dialogue. Findings demonstrated that philosophical dialogue develops participants' self-understanding providing vocabulary for alternative self-definition. The philosophy class achieved this by encouraging self-reflection, developing communication skills, and providing a forum for positive pro-social interaction with peers. These skills are essential in reframing self-understanding which is, in turn, essential to desistance.

Key words: Prison, education, desistance, philosophy

It's not something I've ever done before, philosophy, but I think for me helping to understand what I've done, what I'm here for, and maybe help improve my life in the future.

Introduction

The word Philosophy comes from the Greek words 'Philo', to love and 'sophia', wisdom (Butler-Bowdon, 2013). It has been described as an 'activity' (Thompson, 2003), a method of finding 'truth' (Butler-Bowdon, 2013), an 'inquiry' (Grayling, 1995), and as 'thinking about thinking' (Honderich, 1995). Philosophers encourage us to consider what it means to be a person. What is our identity? On what principles do I base my actions? How should we, as people and members of a society, behave? What does it mean to live the 'good life'?

In this paper, I focus on the process of engaging in philosophical conversation. In the Socratic tradition, Philosophy is an activity to be conducted in the company of others. Interested in how we ought to live, and often referred to as the father of Ethics (Stokes, 2010) Socrates changed both the focus and the method of philosophical inquiry. The Socratic Method allows individuals to engage with philosophical discussion without having read or pursued study in the writings of the historical figures of Philosophy. The practice of philosophical discussion provides the

individual with opportunity to explore these questions with others. In a discursive environment, weaknesses and discrepancies in a speaker's views can be brought to the fore. Being exposed in a safe, non-adversarial and inquiring atmosphere can allow participants to explore their own, and each other's, way of thinking. Through such discussions we can develop a deeper and more insightful understanding of how we, and others, think.

As the medium of Philosophy, language allows us to "*express our beliefs and assumptions*" (Grayling, 1995, p. 5). When expressed through communal dialogue, these assumptions can be questioned and interrogated. Philosophical dialogue is characterised by critical inquiry and rational thought and, to engage, we must be willing to reflect on our own opinions and develop our understanding of the fundamental principles that govern our lives (Grayling, 1995).

Within criminology, desistance literature suggests that offenders need to develop a 'replacement self' that is inconsistent with criminal activities if they are to successfully desist from crime. Maruna (2001) argues that this process involves a 're-biographing' of the past to understand the present and move towards the future. Giordano et al's research (2002) suggests that developing a concept of a 'future self' is the first stage in this process. Both theories place heavy emphasis on the offender's view of themselves – or self-understanding. Research indicates that self-reflection (Maruna, 2001), developing language for alternative self-definition (Giordano, Cernkovitch, & Rudolph, 2002) and improving understanding of alternative lifestyles (ibid.) are key in understanding the self and working towards a positive future.

This paper presents the findings from 20 semi-structured interviews with participants of a philosophy class in Scotland. The interviewees all participated in a philosophy class delivered by Nikki Cameron in Low Moss Prison, Scotland. At the point of data collection, the prison education department had offered philosophy for just under a year. Over this period, the class had grown in popularity. The education department increased the delivery of the class from one session per week to five per week and New College Lanarkshire was in the process of expanding delivery of the course to other prisons. As such, an investigation into the impact and relevance of this type of education was both necessary and timely.

This research constitutes the pilot stage of a broader investigation into the use of Philosophical dialogue in prison classrooms. The findings presented here are built upon in subsequent research forming part of a PhD thesis [REMOVED FOR BLIND

VERSION]. The classes under discussion are based on the principles of Socratic dialogue (Barrow, 2010) where the teacher aims to establish a 'Community of Philosophical Inquiry' (CoPI) which, in practice, is a group of individuals who discuss philosophical questions in an exploratory, non-adversarial manner (Lien, 2007). The conversation can be based around a particular topic (e.g. the death penalty, personal identity or happiness), a specific philosopher (e.g. Kant, Socrates, St Thomas Aquinas) or a school of philosophy (e.g. the Stoics, utilitarianism). A facilitator 'leads' the discussion by presenting the topic and encouraging dialogue but who also acts as a member of the community offering opinions and guidance where appropriate. The key feature of a CoPI is that it uses dialogue as the primary method of delivering educational content. The pedagogy is based on collaborative questioning to encourage understanding of the topics at hand (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980).

Analysis of findings demonstrated a clear relevance of Philosophy to the self-understanding of participants with prisoners highlighting the role of the dialogue as well as the subject matter in encouraging self-reflection, providing structure to their opinions, and providing language for alternative self-definition. Their comments have clear parallels to theories around desistance with this paper constituting a first step towards exploring the role of this type of education in encouraging desistance and self-understanding. The conclusions are limited by small sample sizes but provide promising indications upon which future research can build.

Desistance theories

The term 'desistance' refers to the process of becoming an 'ex-offender' (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003). Recognised as a process rather than an event, desistance theories reflect the gradual change in behaviour (and reduction in criminal activity) that many individuals undertake when moving away from a criminal lifestyle. Early theories of desistance focussed on external factors acting upon the individual (see Sampson & Laub, 1993 for example). Data shows that desisters, unlike their persisting counterparts, are more likely to have a steady job and/or stable relationship. **Criminologists therefore conclude that events such as finding a steady job or developing a stable relationship constituted the required 'turning point' in the offenders' lives (Sampson & Laub, 1993).** Other theories, broadly reflecting available quantitative data regarding criminal trends and the age-crime

curve, argued that the offender simply 'grows up' (Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003). However, a key limitation of both these conceptualisations of desistance is their neglect of the agency of the individuals concerned (see Vaughan, 2007). More recent theories of desistance redressed this balance by focussing on the 'identity work' each offender undertakes in developing a crime-free lifestyle.

Two key pieces of empirical research established, and began to develop, theories of cognitive change: **Maruna's (2001) '*Making Good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*' established the importance of developing a coherent internal narrative in the change process; Giordano et al's (2002) '*Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation*' outlines the need to develop a positive cognitive blueprint that provides a *"well-developed linguistic and cognitive guide to the change process"* (pp. 1035). Both studies clearly state that successful desisters have established a new identity; they differ primarily in their accounts of how this identity is achieved. Both theories indicate that the 'identity work' involved in successful desistance relies, at least in part, on a reframing of how the offender sees themselves. Maruna's theory emphasises a reframing of the past, and Giordano's a reframing the future.**

Desistance is also discussed in terms of primary, secondary and, more recently, tertiary desistance where primary desistance refers to a change a behaviour, secondary to a fundamental change in identity and tertiary desistance to a sense of belonging (McNeill & Schinkel, 2016). These three 'levels' of desistance reflect an understanding of how desisting from crime can present in different ways and also involves a complex interaction of behaviour change, altered self-understanding, and integration into community and society. Here I will focus on secondary desistance, the process of identity change. In particular, in the context of prisons and this research, it is problematic to study desistance directly or relate the philosophy course to actual behaviour. However, what this paper seeks to articulate, is that education, and in particular philosophy education, could be relevant to the processes of secondary desistance; providing the 'hook' or scaffolding for the individual to develop a difference future self. Fundamentally, both Giordano and Marunas' theories of desistance indicate that secondary desistance involves asking and answering two questions – 'who do I want to be?' and 'how do I want to live?' – and developing answers that are incompatible with a criminal lifestyle.

These theories are highly relevant to the research discussed in this paper. They provide a clear framework in which we can place philosophical education and understand the role it can perform. It is therefore important to understand the mechanisms underpinning the processes of change. Both theories provide insight into this process allowing us to build a theory of what is required of an in-prison education programme that aims to encourage participants in their path to desistance.

Maruna and the internal narrative

In interviewing current and former offenders, Maruna (2001) found specific differences between the life-story narratives of persistent offenders and those who had desisted. In particular, he noted the different ways in which desisters framed their past behaviour and the way they viewed themselves in the present. From this he theorised that, in order to successfully desist from crime, offenders needed to reflect back on their lives, consider the positive things they had done and re-establish their identity in this light. He termed this the 're-biographing' process which led to a fundamental shift in identity.

Here 'identity' consists primarily of an internal narrative that allows the individual to consciously construct a sense of who they are. This view of identity is based in the sociological theories of Giddens (1989) – who claimed self-identity is constructed through human experience and is mediated by language – and McAdams (1993) – who claimed that identity is a self-reflexive project involving examination of the inner-self, engagement in self-improvement and the development of a coherent internal narrative. Maruna accepts the notion of actively constructing a sense of self through the development of a life story and claims that it is the nature of this narrative that distinguishes successful desisters. As such, 'identity' refers to our personal identity, or self-understanding (Jenkins, 2010).

Maruna conducted extensive analyses of life-story interviews with current offenders and ex-offenders. He concludes that desisters and persisters have distinct scripts to explain their past behaviour. Many persisters revealed 'condemnation scripts' in which the participants saw themselves as being condemned to a life of crime revealing a lack of self-efficacy or feelings of agency. The scripts of desisters differed from persisters in three ways: they establish core beliefs that characterize the core-self; there is an optimistic perception of the future; and they are characterised by a desire to be productive or generative (Maruna 2001). Maruna's theories therefore

place self-understanding at the heart of the desistance process; how the offender sees their past is of fundamental importance.

The internal narrative of an individual allows the person to articulate their self-understanding to themselves, and to others. Life-story construction is seen as an interpretive process which creates coherence by forming meaningful causal connections between life events (Pals, 2006). In creating a coherent life narrative, individuals need to engage in a level of autobiographical reasoning involving actively creating coherence between past life events and the current self (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The life narrative perspective is based on understanding the self, on self-reflection and upon coherently accounting for one's life story.

For offenders to become ex-offenders, the development of a coherent internal narrative must make desistance a logical necessity (Maruna, 2001). This is primarily seen as a cognitive process whereby the person fundamentally alters the way they think about themselves. This allows them to consider who they are now and who they want to be in the future. Those who are successful will be able to build a concept of the self that they can then strive towards allowing them to forge a positive, pro-social identity.

Giordano et al and 'hooks for change'

Giordano, Cernkovitch and Rudolph's research (2002) coined the phrase 'hooks for change'. These refer to opportunities for advancement available within society. The term highlights the need for the individual to actively take hold of these 'hooks' whilst ensuring that need for available opportunities is recognised. Giordano et al are clear in stating that the environment must provide the '*scaffolding that makes possible the construction of significant life changes'* (p. 1000). However, at the centre of their theory is cognitive transformation; the person in question makes their own decisions regarding what paths to take, and what opportunities will allow them to flourish.

The 'hooks for change' theory proposes a model of desistance based on phases of cognitive transformation. First, there is openness and exposure; the individual must be open to change and then be exposed to the hook in the first place. The transformative potential of a hook for change depends on the actors receptiveness and the extent to which it can contribute to the actors ability to "craft a satisfying *replacement self*" [italics in original] (p. 1027). This means that the opportunities

provided must aid the individual in developing a concept of the 'future self'. The final stage in cognitive transformation which confirms the new identity is for the individual to alter the way in which they view their past behaviour.

Like Maruna's theory, Giordano et al developed their theory through the analysis of life stories of current and former offenders. They recognise that a person's life history narrative will contain 'hooks' which they deem as "*shorthand ways to describe what seems essential from the communicator's point of view*" (Giordano, Cernkovitch, & Rudolph, 2002, p. 1000). These help organise the narrative into a coherent story. As such Giordano et al place emphasis on the role of language in the desistance process. As they are analysing stories of change, they note that successful desisters can describe the change process using linguistic techniques that provide opportunity of alternative self-definition ("*e.g. recovering addict vs. "crack whore""* [Sterk, 1999, quoted in Giordano et al. 2002]). In their 'Suggestions for Further Theory Building' Giordano et al highlight the need to emphasize language, along with identity work and cognitive process, within any theory of cognitive transformation.

An effective hook for change will direct the individual's behaviour and influence their choices (Giordano etal, 2002). Along with providing language for alternative self-definition, exposure to positive pro-social networks is also a key part of this process. Allowing offenders to develop relationships with peers that influence them positively in the change process exposes individuals with alternative models of behaviour. Developing alternative networks, based on positive, pro-social premises can cement the behaviour changes for the future.

Desistance theories should neither overstate nor underplay the role of cognitive transformation. Early theories, such as those discussed above, can be accused of the latter whilst more recent theories, such as Maruna's, of the former. An exception to this is Giordano et al's (2002) research. Their findings show that the role of cognitive transformation depends greatly on the social environment of the individual. For those who have a great deal of advantage (high social capital, good earnings), the transformations happen without much effort on the part of the individual – they play a very small role. Conversely, for those who are at an extreme disadvantage, the cognitive transformations are nowhere near sufficient to make a viable change to circumstances. For those somewhere in the middle, cognitive transformation plays the most significant role.

Both Maruna's theory and the 'hooks for change' theory emphasize the need for the offender to self-reflect. Both consider it important for the individual to frame their past behaviour in such a way as to be able to move forward. They also agree on the need for an envisioned future self to be crafted. However, they place emphasis on different areas. For Maruna, we must look to the past in order to understand our present. In re-biographing ourselves in a more positive light, we are able to move forward towards a constructed, desired self. For Giordano et al, crafting of the future self happens earlier with the view of past behaviours coming as the final stage in the desistance process. It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate which of these theories is correct or contributes more. Instead, it is sufficient to rely upon that which they have in common to frame our understanding of the desistance process. Somewhere, along the way, many offenders will need to forge a new self. This new self is important primarily to the offender themselves, rather than to others. Desistance is about self-understanding.

The role of the prison in developing a new identity

Giordano et al's research provides insight into the role prison-based programmes can play in assisting the prisoner in their own personal development. Over a quarter of men interviewed made reference to prison or treatment centres. Analysis of the narratives revealed that programmes provide participants with a way of thinking that allows for positive self-understanding and a language of change; a sort of 'cognitive blueprint' upon which they can build their idea of their future selves. More recently, (Soyer 2014) coined the phrase *'imagination of desistance'* to reflect her findings that juvenile offenders might speak of desistance whilst incarcerated, but are unable to put their desires into action. She asserts that this is, in part, due to the lack of skills the offenders have to forge a new self upon release. Healy, (2014) builds on this work attesting that the *'imagination of desistance'* is a necessary pre-cursor to actual desistance. Healy categorises desisters as imagined, authentic or liminal. Imagined desisters have not yet formed a credible, alternative self that they can work towards; authentic desisters have achieved the new self whilst liminal desisters have forged an interim identity but have not fully realised their desired self. This formulation of desisters implies that successful desistance rests

upon the individual's self-understanding and their ability to envision a meaning and credible future self.

Giordano's theory claims that 'hooks for change' must direct attention towards the future, provide access to new pro-social networks and provide a template for a meaningful, pro-social identity. The more recent work of Soyer and Healy provide more evidence for this standpoint.

Although more research is required regarding the process of desistance, there is sufficient evidence to make some claims with reasonable certainty. Namely, that self-understanding is of fundamental importance. Self-reflection, language for alternative self-definition, exposure to pro-social networks and the development of a realistic and credible future self are key mechanisms that can help the offender develop a positive self-understanding that can allow change to develop. The findings from the research presented here indicate that engaging in philosophical dialogue is relevant to these areas.

Philosophy in Low Moss Prison

All of the interviewees attended Philosophy classes delivered by Nikki Cameron in Low Moss Prison, Glasgow. These classes aim to engage participants in philosophical conversation with educational content delivered through dialogue. At the start of each session, Nikki provided participants with a copy of a leaflet that formed the basis of the day's discussion. The class begins with the teacher introducing the topic, using the leaflet prepared as a guide. **The content of the discussions revolved around various topics such ranging from the death penalty, to 'what is happiness?' to the teaching of the Stoics.** The class was then opened up to discussion with participants able to put forward their views, as they felt appropriate. As the discussion progressed, the teacher maintained the discussion by questioning participants' points and encouraging them to explain their thoughts. Each session lasts around an hour during which time participants can contribute verbally or just listen to the discussion.

The philosophy sessions aimed to be accessible to individuals of all educational backgrounds, they required no prior experience or knowledge. Each lesson was independent allowing participants to drop in and out of the class as it suited them. They were not required to do further reading, writing or homework as part of the course. The key strength of this approach is that there was no incentive to

attend (excepting the personal rewards the individual might obtain from attending). Participants sign up to the programme of their own volition with many attending because of a recommendation from a fellow prisoner.

Approach

Due to the lack of extant literature, this research was a qualitative, exploratory study which aimed to develop an understanding of the relevance of philosophical education to the participants. The primary data collection methods were observations and interviews.

Data collection was conducted in two waves, each consisting of four full days in the education department of Low Moss prison. Both waves involved observing philosophy sessions and interviewing participants. In total, twenty participants were interviewed. The research participants were a mixture of long and short-term prisoners who had a range of index offences. Some of the interviewees had been attending the course for nearly a year whilst others had only attended for a few weeks.

Interviewees were chosen according to their availability. During the day, if a philosophy class were running, opportunity would be taken to observe the discussion or ask for volunteers to be interviewed. At other times, the philosophy teacher would point out philosophy participants for me to interview. All interviewees were interviewed whilst in normal attendance in the education department and at their own discretion.

At the beginning of each interview, all interviewees were given a participant information sheet. The interviewer went through the information in detail with the participants with a particular emphasis given to ethical issues: cooperation was entirely voluntary; reported findings would be anonymous; and they have the right to withdraw at any point from the research. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. At the end of each day, all recordings were directly transferred onto a secure laptop and encrypted using TrueCrypt software. The original recordings were then deleted from the digital voice recorder.

Interviews were transcribed with the original transcriptions also being encrypted with TrueCrypt software. All participants were then given a code and a pseudonym. The transcripts were altered so that they referred to the interviewees only by these pseudonyms and any identifying comments were redacted. This

allowed the transcripts to be imported to NVivo (version 10.1.1) for analysis. These protocols are in accordance with the guidelines of the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge University. The only person with access to the encrypted files is the researcher.

All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach following an interview schedule. They lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour depending on how much the participants had to say. The length of the interviews broadly reflected how long they had been in philosophy with those who had been attending for nearly a year having the most to contribute.

The interview schedule was in two parts. The first part of the interview asked open-ended, exploratory questions that were designed to allow participants to put their own opinions forward without being led by the interviewer. The second half of the interview asked participants more direct questions that related directly to the researchers own theories about the use of philosophy in prisons. The interview schedule was developed and piloted over a period of several weeks prior to the data collection being undertaken. All questions were carefully worded to ensure they were open-ended, neutral, singular and clear (Patton, 2002). This style of questioning continued throughout the first half of the interview.

The questions were asked in a strict order to ensure experience; opinion, feelings and knowledge were all explored over the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). Follow up questions were used to encourage interviewees to elaborate as well as to clarify their statements. Core questions were asked specifically as written, with follow-up questions asked according to the responses provided.

Thematic analysis was employed to make sense of the data (Patton 2002). Half of the interviews were initially coded using an open-coding technique and were then organised into themes. A theoretical framework was developed according to the findings of the first half of the interviews. The remaining interviews were then coded according to these themes, allowing the themes to be refined and developed in light of the further findings.

To supplement the interview data, four philosophy sessions were observed. Taking the stance of non-participatory observer, the data collection took the form of extensive note taking. All participants were first informed of the research and the role of the researcher before the session began. The notes were used to provide insight into the mechanisms at work in the philosophy class. This means as well as

considering *what* philosophy does, we can begin to investigate but *how* philosophy affects participants.

Findings

In a reflection of the literature, the findings section has been divided into two sub-sections. The first section discusses the role of philosophy in developing participants' skills in self-reflection and the second section explores the role of philosophy as a 'hook for change'. The first section is most relevant to Maruna's conceptualisation of desistance; namely that the offender must reflect back on their past, re-frame it to allow for a positive self-understanding, thereby allowing for a positive, pro-social future self. Giordano et al's theory of cognitive transformation is most relevant to the second section. Their theory concludes that developing a meaningful and credible future self is key. 'Hooks for change' assist participants in developing these ideas with a clear indication that language and positive, pro-social relationships are part of this process.

Self-reflection, understanding past-behaviours and being aware of who you are today

Participants were clear in stating that philosophy promoted thinking – broadly as well as deeply;

> *Personally it educates me, makes me think about stuff. That's never happened before. It makes me think into stuff too much; I never used to think about that before. And also it makes me personally go back over it and re-think it and re-talk about it; what I've just spoke about in the education class in the philosophy class, I'll take that back* [to the wings].

This *'going back over'* topics with others on the wings developed participants' skills in reconsidering their initial reactions and points of view.

> *Aye, that course itself, it's made me think, 'well was that really worth it' because of the impact on my family and the people that care about me and my son especially. Was it good for him, his peace of mind, was it good for him?*

Rather than 're-framing' the past, participants seemed to be in the process of recognising their past; appreciating the impact of their past behaviours on those

around them. When prompted, some participants were certain that this awareness was directly attributable to the philosophy class;

> *Participant (P): I don't want to see people getting hurt by what I've done. I've been seeing the ripple affect of what I've done; I see the amount of lives that it destroys by drugs you know.*

Interviewer (I): And understanding that ripple affect, is that something that you've got from the philosophy classes?

> *P: Uh-Huh [yes]*
>
> *I: so, did you not appreciate that before?*
>
> *P: I never appreciated that before and just looking what it does to people, it makes me angry about what it does to people.*

Observations of the philosophy lesson revealed the exploratory nature of the dialogue with participants provided with the opportunity to articulate and examine their own points of view.

> *I find that philosophy is a great way of exploring your mind and a great way of exploring other peoples' minds without making it look like that's specifically what you're doing.*
>
> *There's been many a discussion where someone's said, 'well that's not right' and then, 'hold on a minute here how can that be' and it becomes a discussion. It becomes an argument and it'll get to the point where I can see where things are gonna end up. And it's just like, wait a minute here, this is you're opinion, this is my opinion. You've no right to be able to tell me I'm wrong and I've no right to tell you you're wrong but this is where we are and this is what I think.*

Participants discussed how the Philosophy class allowed them to link in their views with the topics they are covering within the classes. This helps them understand who they are now, and what they want for themselves as well as indicating that this contributes to the development of a more positive view of themselves;

> *I do feel better about myself, I feel more positive about things and I've felt that – I've been doing courses through the Links Centre to stop me reoffending you know but I've felt better before I started doing that course. I think it did have something to do with philosophy. It wasn't just education that was doing it, I*

think it was in particular philosophy because modern studies and history are just learning about stuff, it's fact. But, I would say I feel better in myself I really do think so.

Going to the philosophy class really brings out the nicer person that was hidden ... coming to the philosophy classes really help me sit back and think that I've got a life and I've gotta do things that – not saying that to be perfect because no one's perfect – but I've gotta live my life and live a decent life. I don't wanna be classed as a person, as someone that's out there just committing crimes.

There was indication that engaging in philosophical dialogue encouraged participants to self-reflect. They were given the opportunity to explore ideas, concepts, and philosophies allowing them to improve their understanding of their own opinions and link philosophies into their understanding of themselves. This self-reflection encouraged them to think about their past behaviours and the impact it had on others around them. Although, there was little indication that participants were reframing their past behaviours in a more positive light (as Maruna's theories of re-biographing indicate is necessary), the findings indicate that Philosophy encourages participants to reflect on the impact and relevance of their past behaviours to and on others. Participants were clear on the role of Philosophy in developing their own opinions, their self-understanding, and their broader understanding of the world and their place in it – all of which are relevant to Maruna's theories of desistance.

Philosophy as a 'hook for change'

A community for philosophical inquiry is primarily a discussion class. Participants are able to put forward their point of view, are encouraged to respond respectfully to each other, and provided the opportunity to expand, explain and develop their thoughts. Many of the participants stated that they had improved their communication skills. For some this was about being able to deal with differences of opinion in a calm, rational fashion whilst for others it was more about being able to explain themselves to others;

I always think back to when I'm working. I've been head chef at a few hotels and that and I've always had run-ins with restaurant managers and that and

I've never really handled them that well. Whereas I think now I would be able to listen to their point of view and construct a, erm, a constructive argument instead of shouting at them and saying 'you're wrong get out my kitchen' kind of thing because that doesn't really help anyone.

I: do you feel this is a good opportunity to get people to understand you better by providing an opportunity to explain things better to them?
P: Well, I try but at first I would get so angry but I keep that mindset of don't act stupid just explain. And when I get my say…I listen to them and then when I get my say I say this is what happens and this is why I believe in them ….
I: So you've got better at expressing yourself?
P: Uh-huh [yes] I've got a lot better.

Communication in the philosophy class built participants' confidence in conversing with others and, for some, this was of vital importance due to their minority status in the prison;

They're interested because they don't see that side. Most of them, they haven't had much contact with Muslim people – they don't see where this person is coming from. Normally they'll just see what they see in newspaper and on the TV, they're just talking about terrorism. Before as well and we did that as part of philosophy as well, and I had to explain to them, 'you guys look at Muslims and you think that's terrorism and that they're views are terrorists but terrorists are frowned upon in our religion as well. I mean you can't,' I said to them, 'if you kill yourself there's no way in religion you can believe you're going to heaven. How is that person even a Muslim and they kill themselves?' And they came round to the way of thinking about it and yeah, it can't be to do with religion it must be something else then. So there are things that I can explain to these people in here that'll get their way of thinking changed you know and they'll understand what a Muslim really is. So I quite enjoy the religious side of it you know.

Furthermore, participants were not only provided with opportunity to reveal themselves to others, but are also given time to get to know their fellow prisons;

I like the discussions; it seems to open up quite a lot. You see with boys you're doing a sentence with, normally you don't normally get to know what

they think about things. But I think it brings a lot out and you get to hear other folks' point of view and you get quite strong views on a lot of things. Sometimes to hear other people's things can be an eye opener, I don't agree with them but it does make me think twice and I think that's the best thing about it, I like that.

Participants discussed how the "*good banter*" in the classroom and how "*there's a lot of humour in that class*". It was clear that the class provided opportunity for developing positive, pro-social relationships with fellow prisoners that they might otherwise have not met. This extended beyond the classroom and into the halls;

The only external part is maybe me going back and talking to the other guys in the hall that don't do philosophy therefore recreating a subject when we're sitting at rec [recreation] time.

The social aspect of the class allows them to learn how to discuss contentious issues. The participants were clear that there were skills such as "*group work, social activities, getting involved with other people, participating in class*" they gained from taking part in the philosophy course. The dialogic pedagogy employed directly contributed to participants' skills in communication and in developing relationships among and within the group.

Returning now to the theories of desistance introduced above, developing language skills and providing opportunity for forging positive, pro-social relationships, both contribute to the development of a 'meaningful and credible future self' (Healy, 2014). **Here, Healy's typology of liminal, imagined and authentic desistance provides a useful discussion point with some indication that philosophy might prove most relevant to becoming an 'imagined desister'.** A key part of this is "*getting the education about different cultures*" that the Philosophy class provides;

I just try and pick as many of these things up as I can to try and improve my understanding about life, education, knowledge…

I've learnt views from Aristotle and Socrates. I've heard of these people but I didn't know what they were going on about. It opens up your mind because you are seeing a different reality to what you are used to, maybe you don't think of it but now you think of it because you've been taught it.

> *What they [philosophers] use to get through their lives, I think that's a bit like….just reading about it makes you feel like you should live your life like that way.*

Participants were exposed to alternative ways of thinking and ideas that they otherwise would not have come across. **This encouraged participants to look beyond their pre-prison lifestyles and begin to recognise alternatives as actual possibilities, and, perhaps, to become 'imaged' desisters (Healy, 2014). For** many, they were able to sift through the philosophies they were learning about and relate them to themselves, identifying with specific ideas and formulating a better understanding of themselves. This process, and the philosophical content, meant participants could develop a conception of possible future selves;

> *[You] just see what you can pick from the information and how that can relate to what I've been studying and how it can relate to life and how it can relate to being in prison …er….no, I just seem to identify with some things that you can see in prison, different things.*
>
> *Some of their points are valid, some of them are ridiculous, but the fact that you take all this information in and absorb it allows you to take snippets from each one. And if you take snippets from each one and absorb it and learn from it you take something away from it. It's impossible to take it all in, not in such a short space of time but if you can take a little bit of it away and practice it for yourself, it benefits you greatly.*

Here we have evidence of participants consciously constructing who they wish to be and utilising the knowledge gained from philosophy to develop the idea of who they wish to be. **There is clear indication here that philosophy has provided some of the participants with templates of alternative selves that they wish to cultivate and develop, perhaps a key stage in the process for liminal desisters who have develops an interim identity and are working towards realising this (Healy 2014);**

> *I said to myself, I'll look at all these and the bits I like will be the one's I go with. I think that's what's personal in it – it's got to be. Even in here you might think all prisoners got to think the same way, nowhere near that, it's so different, all things.*

When we started on about the Greek philosophers, I'd heard the names, Aristotle and so forth but realistically they didn't mean anything to me but once we got the class going and Nikki had got something and printing stuff out, they were quite interesting. They put an explanation behind the name, rather than that's just a philosopher, it was what kind of philosophy they do, what did he think? Because they're all different.

It also helps me because I've always been – in order for to have a good time – I've always needed to drink or take drugs so it's kind of given me a bit more confidence ... that people are a bit more interested in what I've got to say without being drunk or being under the influence of drugs which I always thought I needed to be drunk to speak to people and that. It's given me a lot of confidence to speak to people in that way as well.

Philosophy developed new interests, provided alternative ways of occupying time, and gave some participants the confidence to start thinking about another way of life. In Giordano et al's 'hooks for change' theory of desistance, opportunities provide 'hooks' that allow the individual to begin forging a new self. There is indication that Philosophy could act as a hook for change for some of these participants. It achieves this by providing alternative activities and ways of thinking that allow participants to open themselves up to alternative self-definitions ad possible future selves.

As an example, an interesting case was that of a serial violent offender; incarcerated for a violent racist attack, this man was proud of his identity as a protestant, a racist and fascist. In his seven-year sentence, he had never engaged in a behaviour programme, education or anything the prison had to offer. As a result, he had served more time – a source of pride for this participant as he was determined that prison would not change him. Despite this, he had decided to attend philosophy and stated;

[Philosophy has] got me into different things and got me reading a lot more about different things, not just philosophy, other things because it triggers wee thoughts. I'm quite political as well and there's a few things that are wrong to me but it triggers things and it just makes me more curious, it's made me go looking for answers.

For this individual, the open, more casual attendance of a Philosophy course had appealed to him and his attendance had encouraged self-reflection. He discussed how, although his views had not changed, the had '*softened*' and he had begun to appreciate the rights of others to hold different opinions and the value in engaging in conversation around these differences, as opposed to conflict.

The Philosophy classes had two relevant properties that go some way towards explaining the mechanisms at work; dialogue and community learning. The dialogic nature of the class developed communication and language skills whilst the community focus provided opportunity for developing positive pro-social relationships. In developing language and articulation skills, it follows that the individual can articulate their own thoughts to themselves – thereby developing their internal narrative. It is difficult to be sure that this is occurring, but what one can see evidence of is the participants improved skills at negotiating their way in social situations. The nature of the discussions allowed individuals to develop their skills at communicating who they are; as Hannah Arendt (1958) points out, we negotiate our identity in the social setting revealing ourselves through our actions and our speech . Providing opportunity to develop and practice these skills can have positive implications for desistance.

Discussion

The findings from this research indicate that engaging in philosophical discussion encourages participants to reflect – on themselves, on past behaviours, and on what the philosophical ideas mean to them. Although it is not possible to find evidence of the 're-biographing' process talked of by Maruna in a series of retrospective interviews, there is evidence that philosophy encouraged participants to recognise the impact of their past on those around them. **There is some, tentative indication, that this might be relevant to Healy's notion of 'imagined' and 'liminal' desisters.**

Participants explored ideas and philosophies in an open community forum with their peers. This allowed them to explore who they are and develop understanding of what their opinions are. This improved participants understanding of themselves, encouraging reflection on where their opinions have come from, what they mean in a variety of contexts, and how they relate to the philosophies that they

learn about. For many, this provided a template for understanding how their own mind works – arguably, a 'cognitive blueprint' for future development (Giordano, Cernkovitch, & Rudolph, 2002).

There is evidence that philosophy can act as a 'hook for change' for some participants. Exposure to alternative philosophies and ideas developed new interests in many of the participants. Following Giordano et al's model of cognitive transformation, the first stage is for offenders to be ready for change, and then exposed to a 'hook for change'. By entering the philosophy class of their own volition, it seems that the men were already looking for something else; they were ready to begin exploring other options and, for some, philosophy acted as the hook **(perhaps already 'imagined' desisters?). A** key strength of philosophy is that it is, in itself, an exploration of a variety of ideas. As such, it may not be practising philosophy that cements and maintains the lifestyle changes required, but rather, it is the medium through which the hook for change can be channelled; participants are exposed to the hooks when they attend philosophy. The variety of material covered makes it likely that most participants will find something that they can relate to and build upon for the future.

Philosophy assists in developing replacement selves by developing language skills in the participants. Through exposure to different philosophies for life, participants develop a vocabulary for alternative self-definition. Although both the theories of desistance discussed above focus on internal mechanisms of identity formation, we must recognise that identities are forged in public. We negotiate our identities in a social setting and this negotiation is mediated by language and requires effective communication. Being provided the opportunity to practice communication in a social environment improves vocabulary, articulation, and conversational skills. Many of the participants discussed how the classes helped them talk to people in a pro-social manner. This allowed the participants to reframe their identity in a social setting.

The social aspect of the class also provided opportunity for positive pro-social relationships to develop. This is a key part of identity development as participants are able to model their behaviour and take ownership of it themselves. They are able to consciously develop a sense of who they are. There is clear evidence that participants were able to develop their 'imaginations of desistance' by formulating an idea of who they are in relation to the philosophical ideas presented. For many, this gives them a

place in the world and provides opportunity to develop their identities in a social setting.

The focus of this paper has been on a specific philosophy class taught in one prison in Scotland. The philosophy class, as articulated, involves a particular pedagogy involving dialogue and discussion. In general, the content of the materials used in these discussion related to philosophical ideas and philosophical works. However, this pedagogy can be used in other subject areas and, speculatively, it may be that dialogue groups focussing on different subjects will have similar results. This is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. In this small-scale piece of research I have focussed on the use of philosophy as a tool to engage prisoners in a learning process. Further investigation is required before it can be confidently stated that there is something unique about the content of the discussions (see Szifris 2016 for further discussion of this).

Conclusion

This exploratory piece of research yielded some clear indications regarding the role of philosophical education in the desistance process. Prisons should recognise that providing opportunity for collaborative dialogue among prisoners, and exposing prisoners to a range of philosophies and ideas can be relevant to the individuals self-understanding. Philosophical dialogue provides the space for personal self-exploration, communication of ideas, and the practice of pro-social relationships.

There are clear limitations to this research. The accounts are retrospective; the results are based on a small sample of participants and pertained only to men in Low Moss Prison. **Furthermore, it is not possible to judge the true impact of such a course on the process of desistance without some form of post-release follow-up or a more comprehensive study. However, this research constitute the pilot stage to a more comprehensive study of philosophy in two English prisons (Szifris, 2017)** and provides a foundation for further investigation. **Finally, this paper involves an interpretation of the persona; accounts of the participants. As such, it does not include objective assessments of impact. Future research should address this.**

It has been demonstrated that philosophy encourages self-reflection, provides templates for future selves, develops language for alternative self-definition, and allows participants to develop positive pro-social relationships.

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