

Philosophy in Prison

An exploration of personal development

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When all you've got is a hammer, everything looks like nails.
(“A Hammer”, from the album “Everybody Down” by Kate Tempest)

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Abstract

Delivered through the medium of a Community of Philosophical Inquiry, this thesis outlines the experience of engaging prisoners in philosophical conversation, thereby articulating the relevance of this type of education for those in long-term confinement. The research, which took place in two prisons, explores the role of prison education, community dialogue and active philosophising in encouraging personal development. With similar populations but contrasting characters, HMPs Grendon and Full Sutton provided the backdrop to grounded, ethnographically-led research.

The research design reflects the exploratory nature of the approach. Derek Layder's adaptive theory has provided a methodological framework, whilst the theoretical framework draws on desistance literature, prison sociology, and philosophical pedagogy to enhance and develop understanding of the emergent themes. However, as a criminological piece of research, it sits within the criminological, and more specifically, prison sociological paradigm.

The thesis culminates in a discussion of personal development that articulates the role of education in developing growth identities among prisoner-participants. The research describes the role of philosophical dialogue in developing trust and relationships between and among the participants; the relevance of this type of education to prisoners' psychological wellbeing; and the significance of the subject-matter to participants' perspectives. The thesis argues that prison promotes the formation of a hyper-masculine 'survival' identity. It goes on to argue that education, and more specifically philosophy education, can play a role in cultivating growth identities that encourage personal exploration, self-reflection, and development of new interests and skills among prisoners.

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This work would not be possible without the co-operation and consent of my research participants and the participating prisons. I am grateful to the staff in Low Moss, Grendon and Full Sutton for taking the time to allow this research to take place. However, I owe the most to my research participants who engaged in my research thoughtfully, willingly and passionately. There are not many people who can say that they have engaged prisoners in philosophical conversation and I am privileged to have had the opportunity. The men with whom I worked proved to be earnest, insightful, and deeply intelligent. Their philosophical insights have broadened my horizons, challenged my skills and forever changed my worldview. I am grateful that they took the time to provide a space where, for a short time, my status as ‘teacher’ and ‘academic’ could fall away and I could be a philosopher for a time.

Finally, to my friends and family, without whom, I would never have been able to complete my thesis. My step-dad, Mike Scott deserves the first mention. He has read every word I have ever written, patiently explained more times than should ever be necessary the difference between effect and affect, and combed through my texts for every misplaced punctuation mark. My mother, Nina Szifris, and my brother Kieran Szifris are constant sources of inspiration, have always been ready to be supportive, provided entertainment when I needed a break, and listened to my concerns when things have proved difficult. Various friends have picked me up, encouraged me, and never lost faith in my ability to complete the PhD process. Particular mention goes to Yasmin Lee for feeding me on a weekly basis, reading sections of my thesis and

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Figure 1: A depiction of the research process

Figure 2: A summary of the findings of the thesis

Abbreviations

CoPI = Community of Philosophical Inquiry

HMP = Her Majesty's Prison

HMPI = Her Majesty's Prison Inspectorate

IMB = Independent Monitoring Board

IPP = Indeterminate sentence for Public Protection

Mains = Mainstream prisoners held on normal location

MPhil = Masters in Philosophy

MQPL = Measurement of the Quality of Prison Life

NOMS = National Offender Management Service

NRC = National Research Committee

ONS = Office for National Statistics

P4C = Philosophy for Children

PIE = Psychologically informed environment

PIPE = Psychologically informed prison environment

RoTL = Release on Temporary License

SAPERE = Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education

SQL = Staff Quality of Life

TC = Therapeutic Community

VP = Vulnerable prisoner

VPU = Vulnerable Prisoner Unit

Introduction

“With philosophy you can bring out your own ideas and then, through the group you can re-work it, remodel it, change it, look at it, to get to somewhere. So it’s your part in building that and, I suppose, it’s more empowering in that sense because you are doing it yourself.”

(Philosophy participant, Grendon)

Philosophy as a discipline encompasses the range of human achievement, driving forward civilisations, providing insight and guidance to the individual in times of crisis and celebration, and producing fundamental shifts in the way we understand the physical world (Grayling, 1995). In this research project, I have brought the ideas of some of the great Western philosophers to the prison classroom, engaging prisoners in philosophical discussion in an attempt to cultivate a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (McCall, 2009, Lipman et al., 1980). I have worked with and among prisoners in my endeavour to establish philosophical conversation in the prison environment. I have aimed to ensure my research works with, as opposed to against, that which a prison already offers, focussing on developing the strengths of prisoners and looking to provide a space where, for a short time, their status as prisoner can fall away and they can be philosophers for a time.

The aim of this research was to explore the role of philosophical education in prisons. Delivered through the medium of a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI), the ensuing discussion outlines both the experience of, and outcomes from, engaging prisoners in philosophical conversation in two prisons in England. With similar populations but contrasting characters, HMPs Grendon and Full Sutton provided the backdrop to a grounded, ethnographically-led, mixed-methods piece of research that aimed to explore and build a theory of personal development. I draw on prison sociology to develop an understanding of the prison context and how this can encourage a ‘survival’ identity (in particular, Liebling, et al., 2011; Sparks, et al. 1996; Cohen & Taylor, 1972). I also draw on desistance literature to delineate between an enabling environment that can encourage a ‘growth’ identity and a disabling environment that encourages a ‘survival’ identity (Bottoms & Shapland, 2016; Liebling, 2012; Maruna, 2001).

Finally, I have drawn on CoPI pedagogy and my own expertise as a professional teacher to understand how Socratic dialogue ‘works’ in the prison classroom. Through these literatures, and my own experiences of working with and among prisoners, I articulate an initial theory of personal development which describes the role of philosophy education in two prisons. This thesis therefore constitutes a ‘first step’ in the research process that I hope will be developed, tested and refined in future work.

I both delivered the course and conducted the research. Although such dual roles raise issues around objectivity, taking on both tasks has provided a clear advantage in that I was not simply an objective observer, but also a subjective participant in the research process (LeCompte, 1987). This has enabled me to provide an in-depth account of the course, placing the prison-learner experience, which I shared, at the heart of the data and at the heart of the analysis. As an exploratory piece of research, I took advantage of the lack of research into the use of philosophy in prisons by taking the opportunity to develop theory (Bachman, 2007). Throughout, I have allowed the data, emergent themes, and my own personal insights to guide me through the process, drawing on existing literature as and when it became relevant (Layder, 1998). I have taken an iterative approach to the research, building on extensive pilot work before delivering the course consecutively in HMP Grendon then HMP Full Sutton. After each stage, I have reflected upon my findings, developed new, distinct themes, and focussed my research questions more specifically to ensure that emerging theories were tested and refined (*ibid.*). I have used multiple streams of data collection, including extensive fieldwork notes, interviews, questionnaires, and feedback forms to allow for triangulation. I spent significant periods of time in the two prisons, taking time to get to know the environment and speak with prison officers, educators, and non-participant prisoners (Schensul et al., 1999).

The aim of this research has been to explore *what* role philosophy *might* play in the prison environment. In doing so, the aim is not to demonstrate philosophy’s superiority over other programmes or courses but to highlight how it can be complementary, and in what ways it might ‘work’. I have focussed on mechanisms, developing theories around the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of philosophy education as well as outlining ‘what it does’ (Pawson & Tiley, 1997). I have prioritised the role of philosophy for the individual (as opposed to its role in crime reduction, for example, although I do touch on this through desistance literature) as I am interested in the role of education in developing the whole person (Dewey, 1902). In this way, we can make the link from personal development to desistance, crime reduction, and increased employability through recognition of the individual’s own agency, interests and strengths, without having to compromise the aims of an education course.

The research design reflects the exploratory and theory-building nature of the research. Derek Layder's (1998) adaptive theory has provided a methodological framework, whilst the theoretical framework draws on desistance literature, prison sociology, and philosophical pedagogy to enhance and develop understanding of the emergent themes. However, as a *criminological* piece of research (as opposed to educational), I sit within the criminological, and more specifically, prison sociological paradigm. The focus in this research has been on the personal experience of engaging in philosophical dialogue from the perspective of *being a prisoner in the prison environment*. As such, although educational theory is touched upon to provide context and develop understanding of pedagogy, the data has been analysed from the perspective of a criminologist and prison sociologist.

At the outset of this research project, there was no literature available regarding the use of philosophy education in prisons. This research has therefore been aimed at theory-building as opposed to theory-testing (Bendassolli, 2013). It draws on a range of data collection techniques to build a comprehensive picture of philosophy in prison that can act as a foundation for future research (Layder, 1998). Through the adaptive theory framework, I moved between extant, relevant literature and emergent themes in the data as the research progressed. I gradually built and refined my thinking, making use of orienting concepts and theoretical memos to track and develop ideas. Subsequent chapters present the findings of this research project in their refined form, culminating in a discussion of the wider implications for this type of education in prisons. I provide an account of how I reached these conclusions, demonstrating that they are fundamentally grounded in the experiences of the prisoner-participants whilst at the same time taking account of broader academic writings of educational theory, philosophy, prison sociology, and criminological literature.

The findings of this research have been organised into four key themes: wellbeing, relationships, trust, and open-mindedness. The thesis argues that the dialogic nature of a CoPI can develop positive, pro-social relationships between participants even in the context of a prison environment that is characterised by division and distrust. Furthermore, over time, CoPIs can successfully engender respect and trust among the participants that can allow for collaborative conversation around complex philosophical issues to flourish. Growing a community of inquiry, founded on a shared experience and educational activity had bearing on the wellbeing of participants in part because such dialogue constituted a 'break' from the normal routine of the prison. This proved relevant in both a therapeutic environment (where the philosophy class was a little 'light relief' from the complex and heavy therapeutic work) and in a

maximum-security environment (where the CoPI environment provided a ‘humanising’ experience that cultivated a safe space for self-expression). Once a CoPI has had time to develop, trust and relationships among participants have begun to form, the content and structure of the philosophical stimuli became more relevant. Finally, this thesis argues that philosophical education can, and did, encourage participants to be more open to hearing different points of view, more willing to critically reflect on their own ways of thinking, and more able to develop opinions by taking account of their status as members of a community and wider society.

The overarching thesis presented here rests on the assumption that disabling environments can promote a ‘survival’ identity whilst enabling environments promote ‘growth’ identities (Liebling, 2012). I justify this assumption through a discussion of prison sociological literature and desistance literature, and an exploration of what is ‘known’ about the effects of long-term imprisonment and the process of change for individuals who have been convicted of an offence. The thesis also fundamentally acknowledges the role of the person as agent in forging and developing their own identities, whilst recognising that opportunity and space for self-reflection are important components of personal development. Descriptions and definitions of enabling and disabling environments, survival and growth, and identity formation are rooted in the context of the personal development of prisoners in the prison environment whilst also drawing on a range of literatures (Liebling, 2012; Liebling & Arnold; 2004, Haigh et al, 2012; Giddens, 1989; Arendt, 1958).

Chapter 1 introduces the key themes in this research. It provides an overview of what philosophy is, how a CoPI works, and what is currently known about the role of this type of education in general. The chapter then goes on to discuss prison education, justifying the position of this thesis that education is a tool for personal development. Finally, I move on to a discussion of identity, first reflecting on the use of the term in philosophy before introducing the literature that underpins the distinction between survival and growth. A ‘survival’ identity, as it is discussed throughout this thesis, draws on Goffman’s (1969) dramaturgical metaphor and wider criminological discussions around presentations of the self. A ‘growth’ identity is discussed in reference to desistance literature, with a focus on the process of change and identity formation (see, in particular, Shapland, et al., 2016).

Chapter 2 presents the methodology and methods employed in this research. I provide an overview of adaptive theory (Layder 1998), which has provided the methodological framework for this thesis, and detail the research design. I also articulate how I delivered the course, how I recruited participants and the methods of analysis, triangulation and validation employed. I outline the research context describing the two prisons and the characteristics of my

research participants and conclude the chapter with an outline of ethical procedures, and a reflection on the strengths and limitations of the approach. I also provide a reflective account of the dual role of researcher-teacher and the advantages and disadvantages of the subjective nature of this research.

Chapter 3 provides a descriptive account of life inside prison. It draws on prison sociological literature, outlining the key texts used to inform my understanding of the context of the research. However, it also constitutes a discussion of my own observations of the prison context, incorporating the comments and views of my participants and making use of the extensive fieldwork notes taken during my time in the field. Consequently, this chapter provides a rich and detailed account of prison life, with a focus on the themes that proved particularly relevant to my findings.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 constitute the main findings chapters in this thesis. Chapter 4 focuses on Grendon and Chapter 5 on Full Sutton. In both chapters I provide further details of the respective prison environments, and a more detailed account of the process of data collection and course delivery. Chapter 4 goes on to provide a detailed account of the role of philosophy in a therapeutic environment, focussing on the how philosophy encourages and develops open-mindedness among participants. It concludes with a brief discussion of community, coping and self-understanding, leading to a more detailed discussion of relationships and trust-building in Chapter 5. The findings from Full Sutton allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the role of a CoPI in developing relationships and growing trust, as well as its impact on the participants' wellbeing.

The thesis culminates in a discussion provided in Chapter 6 around growth, survival and identity. This chapter both summarises the research process and findings, and introduces the limited quantitative data collected. However, this chapter takes the discussion further and provides a reflective account of the research that seeks to extend and enhance the information presented in previous chapters. It presents the crux of the findings as a model of personal development illustrated in diagrammatic form on page 183. This theory is generated inductively from the material reported in the main body of the thesis and should be developed, refined and tested in further empirical research.

Finally, the concluding remarks reflect on the changing policy climate has impacted upon prison education over the last five years. I articulate how the findings of this research project are relevant to the current situation in prisons and reflect on what the research has found.

On the use of the male pronoun

Before moving on, it is important to justify the use of the male pronoun throughout this thesis. Nearly all of the research discussed here has been based in male prisons, and concerns the issues of men in prison. There is a limited, but growing, body of research discussing the experience of prison for women, which suggests some fundamental differences. Given that my own research is set in male prisons I shall be using the male pronoun throughout the thesis, as this is appropriate. However, I hope to expand my research further to discuss the role of philosophy in women's prisons and in the lives of women prisoners in the future.

Chapter 1

Philosophy, education and identity

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces some of the underlying principles used throughout this research. As an exploratory piece of research, the aim has been to develop a theory that is grounded both in relevant literature and in rich data. Throughout, I have drawn on a range of literatures to illuminate, refine and reflect upon emerging themes and developing ideas. In this chapter, I introduce some of these literatures. Beginning with an exploration of what philosophy is, I outline Socratic dialogue and introduce the pedagogical principles of a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (henceforth, CoPI). I then go on to discuss prison education, justifying the perspective of education as a tool for personal development. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of identity delineating between a ‘survival’ identity and a ‘growth’ identity and reflecting on the role of the environment in personal development.

1.2 What is philosophy?

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). As a mental exercise philosophy involves thinking through a problem in a structured, open, and inquiring manner, thereby facilitating examination of the lens through which we see the world (Butler-Bowdon, 2013). The teachings of Socrates, Plato, Hume, Descartes, Bentham, Mill and Arendt have been fundamental to our understanding of nature, the development of science and mathematics, the notions of justice and fairness,

of moral reasoning, and the development of critical reflections on normative values and received dogmas (Grayling, 1995). In this section, I provide an overview of what it means to philosophise and discuss the role of language and dialogue in philosophical inquiry.

Philosophy, in the context of this thesis, means engaging in inquiry. Fundamental to this practice is the philosophical question; engaging in philosophical inquiry involves asking questions that are general and abstract, and that seek to understand the principles that lie *behind* an opinion (Thompson, 2003). To then *answer* questions philosophically means seeking to be accurate and precise in language in order to clarify our thoughts, and refine our ideas (Pecorino, 2016). Philosophers' ideas are well thought out, carefully considered, and based on strong, logical argument forms. As a result of the depth of philosophical investigation and the accuracy required within the language, philosophical writings can become technical, convoluted and confusing. Scholars can dedicate their lives to interpreting the writings of a particular philosopher who often offer long, almost indecipherable explanations for their conclusions and their reasoning (Thompson, 2003).

Philosophers build their arguments from 'first principles'. By starting from first principles, the philosopher presents the foundation of their succeeding arguments allowing for objective, rational and logical assessment of their conclusions (Thompson, 2003). For example, Hume and Descartes' contrasting theories of the self stem from their assumptions around knowledge (Robinson, 2014). Where Hume argued that knowledge comes from observation (thereby providing the foundation of empiricism) Descartes, in one of his most famous thought experiments, claimed that we must doubt our senses and imagine instead that an evil demon has deceived us into believing that all that surrounds us is real, when in fact it is not. Following on from this, Hume's argument for sensory and observational knowledge led him to argue that there is no 'pearl of the self' as he had 'never caught sight of the soul'. Descartes' evil-demon scenario leads to the conclusion of *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, or, more accurately, because I have the capacity to doubt my own existence, I must, at least, exist. This is Descartes' first principle of knowledge – that we exist – and from there he built theories around the mind-body problem and the nature of being human (Hatfield, 2016).

The medium of philosophy is language. It is through language that we "express our beliefs and assumptions" (Grayling, 1995, p. 5) and through dialogue with others that our assumptions can be questioned and interrogated. In this research, philosophical dialogue is characterised by critical inquiry and rational thought, requiring both questioning and reflection (Grayling, 1995). Therefore, to engage we must be willing to reflect on our own opinions and

develop our understanding of the fundamental principles that govern our lives. However, in engaging in philosophy, as Pecorino (2016) points out, we also recognise that philosophy is not a way of life, nor is it a theory, belief or wish. Rather, it is a pursuit or activity of thought whereby we look for answers through a process of investigation and argument (Law, 2007).

The principles of the philosophical dialogue that I took to the prison classroom stem from one of the key figures in the history of philosophy: Socrates. Socrates is significant as he is credited with changing both the focus and the method of philosophical inquiry.¹ Unlike previous philosophers, Socrates was interested in how we ought to live (he is often referred to as the Father of Ethics, Stokes, 2010) and practised philosophy through conversation. He was known for wandering around market places, engaging people in conversation and asking questions. His quest to clarify moral terms such as justice and courage involved interrogating people of all classes and character, often revealing contradictions in other people's ways of thinking and challenging received knowledge (Janaway, 1995).²

In the Socratic tradition, philosophy is an activity to be conducted in the company of others. As such, individuals can engage in discussion without having read or pursued study in the writings of the historical figures of philosophy. 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'? 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 are brought to the fore. Being exposed in a safe, non-adversarial and inquiring atmosphere allows participants to explore their own and each other's ways of thinking. Through such discussions we develop a deeper and more insightful understanding of how we, and others, think.

The Socratic tradition of active philosophising has a growing number of followers with the rise of community philosophy groups such as Socrates Café and Philosophy in Pubs.³ These groups bring communities of philosophical inquiry to people in their everyday environments. Furthermore, as 'Socratic questioning' is seen as an effective technique for self-discovery and

¹ Although it should be noted that Socrates never wrote anything as far as historians are aware. Instead, Socrates appears as a character in Plato's *Dialogues* and is mentioned by a variety of other philosophers and writers of the age (Lacey, 1971).

² This eventually led to his demise when he was sentenced to death by suicide for corruption of the youth of Athens.

³ See http://www.philosopher.org/Socrates_Cafe.html or <http://www.philosophyinpubs.co.uk/>

inquiry-based learning, Socrates' methods of conversational philosophy and questioning techniques are in use today in therapeutic (Genders & Player, 1995) and educational (Kennedy, 1999) settings. This research describes the experience of delivering philosophy, based on the principles of Socratic Dialogue, in two prison education departments in England. The following section provides more details regarding the specific pedagogy used in this research.

1.3 A Community of Philosophical Inquiry

This section introduces the background, aims, and techniques of a CoPI. Philosophy, as discussed here, employs methods of systematic inquiry as a means of furthering knowledge and comprehension of a range of problems. In the Socratic tradition, the medium of this endeavour is language and non-adversarial dialogue. Accordingly, CoPIs aim to encourage clear articulation of ideas and provide opportunity for self-expression. Furthermore, the pedagogy of a CoPI seeks to develop open, collaborative and inquisitive conversation among participants to pique curiosity, and to encourage a systematic and rational method of approaching a problem.

My philosophy course was rooted in the practices of a programme called Philosophy for Children (P4C), a programme in which I have been formally trained and have experience of delivering in secondary schools.⁴ In moving my teaching to the prison world, I moved away from the official pedagogy, developing my own method of teaching philosophy, thereby ensuring the programme was appropriate for my participants. Chapter 2 provides an outline of how I conducted and facilitated the course and the methods used to develop and pilot material. Here, I discuss the underlying principles of a CoPI, outlining the aims, intentions and theories that drive this type of education. The section concludes with a discussion of the limited research into the use of CoPIs in educational settings.

The purpose of a CoPI is to engage participants in philosophical conversation (Murriss 2000). In practice, a CoPI operates in an exploratory, non-adversarial manner. The term 'community' refers to the acts of listening and participating in dialogue in an intellectually safe environment (Lien 2007). The word 'inquiry' reflects the exploratory nature of the dialogue

⁴ I was trained in Sheffield, UK, by an organisation called SAPERE, <http://www.sapere.org.uk>

and, in the Socratic tradition, the emphasis on developing understanding and gaining knowledge (ibid.).⁵

My philosophy classes broadly followed these principles. In recognition of the intellect of my participants, the majority of my sessions outlined complex philosophical ideas (whereas a CoPI actually need not cover specific philosophers or philosophies and can, instead, encourage philosophical conversation with a focus on the everyday (see McCall, 2009). I covered Socrates, Plato, Hume, Descartes, Bentham, Mill, Kant, Russell and Arendt, among others. Some sessions discussed schools of philosophy such as the Stoics or utilitarianism whilst others focussed on a particular philosopher. I delivered each session in stages designed to draw participants through an idea (see Appendix I and Chapter 2 for examples of teaching materials). I developed stimuli in line with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) ethos in that content aimed to provoke dialogue that involved “... common central and contestable concepts like truth, justice, friendship, economy, person, education, gender” (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2011, p. 266).

In a CoPI, a facilitator guides the participants through the discussion as a co-inquirer, seeking knowledge and understanding along with the participants. With dialogue as its primary means of encouraging learning, a CoPI is characterised by conversation. Based on the Socratic tradition (Barrow, 2010), the facilitator assists people in finding their *own* knowledge through collaborative conversation, and encouraging logical thought processes (Lien, 2007; Kennedy 1999). Research into CoPIs with children indicates that Socratic dialogue advances thinking and social skills as well as allowing participants the space to internalise moral thinking (Splitter, 2011). The original P4C pedagogy, developed by Matthew Lipman and Margaret Sharp in the 1970s, draws on Vygotskian learning theory which asserts that children learn to think for themselves by engaging in the social practice of thinking together (Murriss, 2008). It also draws on the work of John Dewey (Millett & Tapper, 2011), who argued that education should be an interactive and social practice. He argued that education ought to provide opportunity to explore the facts of a curriculum with reference to the learners own experiences, thus allowing the teaching of a subject-matter to become an experience in its own right (Dewey, 1902).

Developing a CoPI among adult prisoners presented a very different experience to developing one among young people. In my experience, adults (and particularly incarcerated adults) tend to be less open and trusting than young people, with interactions being tied up with

⁵ The phrase ‘Community of Philosophical Inquiry’ can also be used to refer to a specific practice developed by Katherine McCall (2009). Like Lipman and Sharp, she developed a specific method of practicing philosophy with a set of guidelines for teachers and facilitators to follow. I use the phrase in its more general sense to refer to a community of people engaging in inquiry based on a philosophical topic.

complex vulnerabilities, hierarchies and self-esteem. To ensure inclusivity, a CoPI must be a safe environment where participants are able to discuss their views without ridicule, and where differing opinions are accepted (Hannam & Echeverria, 2009). The discussion aims for co-operation with a purpose of constructing knowledge together rather than competing with each other (*ibid.*). Among adults, and particularly adults in the prison environment, developing a safe, co-operative atmosphere proved a complex task. However, by focussing on the pedagogy and the techniques of a CoPI, these hierarchies and vulnerabilities were eventually overcome (see Chapter 5 in particular).

In a CoPI, conversation aims to promote critical thinking (or reflexive thinking) to allow participants free and independent thought (Daniel, 2008). Part of the process of dialogue involves encouraging participants to evaluate themselves, their own opinions, and the opinions of others. This serves as "...a habit-building tool that works to anchor the student's mind on the value of reflective thinking and self-knowledge" (Lien, 2007, p. 76). Information introduced to a CoPI is considered and discussed rather than transmitted from teacher to learner (Yos, 2007). The focus on collaborative learning means a CoPI

"...stimulates fundamental values such as equality of rights and opportunity among members, individual and social responsibility, active participation in solving a common problem, and critical reflection with regard to the common good"

(Daniel, 2008, p. 39).

As such, CoPIs engender respect for oneself and others, with participants being encouraged to recognise that both their own views and the views of others have value (Splitter, 2011). Empirical research into the impact of P4C in schools has been conducted with the most comprehensive study being that of Topping & Trickey (2007). Taking a quasi-experimental approach, they found

"...P4C yielded cognitive gains compared with controls that transferred across domains of intelligence, were largely irrespective of pupil school/class, pre-intervention ability and gender, and which cost relatively little to achieve"

(p. 283).

Other, smaller-scale studies have highlighted gains in reasoning skills (Jenkins & Lyle, 2010), improvement in higher-order thinking skills (Daniel, 2008), and listening skills (Yos, 2007) with teachers also perceiving gains in communication, confidence, participation, and social behaviour (Millett & Tapper, 2011).

CoPIs are a space for the development of a personal and social project; an exploration of the self and of what makes a good society (Hannam & Echeverria, 2009). To achieve this,

the facilitator must recognise that there is no “agenda over and above that of the wellbeing of the members” (ibid. p. 498). For open discussion and inquiry to flourish, a facilitator should not attempt to teach a particular creed or philosophy within a CoPI; this would undermine the aims of such discussions. This does not mean that the facilitator cannot challenge the views of the participants or express an opinion. Instead, it means that the facilitator must always maintain the purpose of a CoPI as being a space for participants to freely discuss their own views and draw their own conclusions with facilitators, where possible, being seen as co-inquirers as opposed to authorities.

My work differs from the original ideas laid out by Lipman and Sharp. The P4C curriculum perspective emphasises instilling democratic values, moral norms, and pro-social behaviours in participants so that they can become positive and useful members of society (Lipman, et al., 1980). There is some research to suggest that the P4C pedagogy achieves these aims (see a recent report from Gorard, et al., 2016). However, in working with adults in prison, I take heed of Aislinn O’Donnell’s warnings regarding the purpose of education (2013), i.e. that education is most effective when it is aiming to instil an enthusiasm for a subject. I have steered clear, throughout my work in prisons, of the moralising and democratic aims of a CoPI. This is not necessarily because I disagree with them, but it is in recognition that working with adults is different from working with children. In particular, many of my participants were either the same age or older than me, had their own wealth of life experience to draw upon and, in some cases, came to the classroom with a depth of knowledge around philosophy, history, literature, or the sciences that surpassed my own. In such circumstances, seeking to take a moral stance of instilling ‘citizenship’ or ‘democratic values’ could indicate that I was entering the classroom with an idea that I, as facilitator, had a ‘better’ moral outlook or was seeking to in some way reform or change participants. Although some might argue that such goals would reflect the aims of imprisonment, I felt that any such attempts would undermine the aims of open, collaborative conversation. In subsequent chapters (most notably Chapter 5), I discuss in detail the relevance of trust and respect in moving towards collaborative, non-adversarial dialogue, and the fragile and carefully built sense of community within the philosophy classroom. Part of this process, in an environment such as a prison, relied upon setting up discussion to be open and inquiring with an aim in each session to have an in-depth, collaborative conversation around the topic at hand. This ensured participants’ knowledge, experience and expertise were recognised, and that I maintained my status as co-inquirer.

To understand the role this type of education could play in prison it is important to place it in context. The following section discusses prison education in general. First, I discuss the

broader aims of prison education and the relevance of education to the personal development of an individual. Two key concepts that tie all of these areas together – philosophy, education and personal development – are identity and self-understanding. These ideas are also relevant to the discussions within criminological literature around survival strategies in prison and desistance from crime. Following the discussion of prison education, I provide an overview of identity as it is discussed in criminological literature and beyond.

1.4 Prison education as personal development

This section outlines the theoretical reasons for conceptualising prison education as a tool for personal development. Every prison in England and Wales delivers some form of educational activity. In Grendon and Full Sutton, external providers delivered educational courses such as literacy, numeracy, employability skills, horticulture and art. The scope and nature of the education delivered in these prisons reflected the policy climate around prison education at the time which maintained that education in prison should relate directly to employability (Nichols, 2016).⁶ This focus is a result of a gradual change in policy and a narrowing of the curriculum available to prisoners. This is in spite of a body of evidence in favour of the use of a broad curriculum and the teaching of the humanities within prison (Duguid, 2000). Furthermore, recent academic literature indicates that such education develops self-understanding and encourages personal transformation (Behan, 2014).

This section provides an overview of the research around prison education as a tool for personal development. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive or in-depth account of the theoretical underpinnings of pedagogy, the purpose and aims of education more generally, or the history of prison education. Rather, the aim is to set the research under discussion in context and thereby provide some rationale for taking philosophy into prisons in the first place.

Research into prison education remains sparse and under-theorised. In part, this reflects a wider issue in penal policy, and in prison education, that the underlying principles and purpose of such endeavours remain vague and unstated. In April 2016, after the fieldwork had been completed for this research project, the Government released the Dame Sally Coates Review into prison education (Coates, 2016). Coates highlighted the need for basic skills and employability but also for higher-level qualifications and more casual courses that, she argues, can increase self-esteem. Despite this shift in focus regarding policy, the Coates Review failed

⁶ In the last six months of 2016, there were some significant policy changes in prisons and prison education. However, these are discussed and reflected upon in my Conclusion.

to provide a theoretical foundation for these assertions beyond the basic statement that education is ‘good’ for prisoners. Without clear theoretical reasons for delivering specific courses it can be difficult for an education department, or a prison, to provide a consistent programme.

Outside the context of a prison education department, the purpose of education more generally is a subject of much debate. For vocationalists, education should be about training individuals for the workforce. Liberal education focusses on the ‘whole’ person whilst humanist educational theories have similar aims but focus more on the emotions of the learner (Nichols, 2016). In the field of adult education some theorists take a humanist approach, arguing that education enables learners to become active participants in the wider world (see Paulo Friere, 1970, *The Pedagogy of The Oppressed*). Psychological perspectives focus on problem-solving skills (see Gagne, 1977, *Conditions of Learning*), whilst others focus on the role of education in developing self-actualising people and altering self-concept (see Knowles, 1975 or Rogers, 1969). In common, adult educational theorists tend to recognise the self-directed nature of learning as an adult and the role of experience and personal philosophy in shaping the educational activity (Jarvis, 1995).

The premise of a CoPI (and my own view on education) aligns most closely with the teachings of liberal education. For example, Durkheim (1973), who is often referred to by liberal educationalists, discussed moral education, suggesting that education ought to develop learners’ understanding of themselves as members of a community and a society. Liberal education cultivates the “...whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life generally...” (Nussbaum, 1998, p. 9). As such, it aims to develop the whole person by encouraging critical self-examination and developing empathy (ibid.). Although I agree with only some of the tenets of a liberal education (I am, for example, wary of the notion of education as a means for instilling ‘citizenship’ in a learner), I am neither an expert nor a proponent. As a practitioner,⁷ these high-level theoretical conceptualisations of education are often implicit to work on the ground. Instead, the teacher engages in educational delivery as a human being, seeing their learners as fellow human beings whom they wish to see flourish and develop in the classroom. It is only now, as a researcher, I come to realise that my teaching philosophy loosely fits within this paradigm. I therefore draw on some of the theoretical underpinnings of this field without being able to state that I built my philosophy course on these principles.

⁷ I qualified as a secondary teacher of Mathematics in 2009 and worked for three years in the UK and abroad.

Within prison education literature, a variety of scholars have argued for the use of a broad curriculum within prison that will address the ‘whole person’ (Duguid, 2000). In particular, Cormac Behan and other Irish academics have published widely on the need to ensure that prison education remains true to the pedagogical principles of the adult education tradition. This includes providing space for self-directed study, focussing on developing the whole person, and seeking to instil enthusiasm for a subject within the learner. They warn against the narrowing of education to fit the current penal policy agenda, arguing that prison education is most effective when it is based in the principles of adult education (see, for example, Behan, 2007). In particular, Aislinn O’Donnell (2013), a fellow teacher of philosophy in prisons, argues that the transformative nature of education occurs when the individual develops a love and appreciation for a subject. She goes on to argue that the educator’s job is to provide a space in which learners can explore their own interests such that it is flexible enough for the teacher to respond to and encourage learners in their personal pursuit of knowledge. She argues that personal development is emergent and that education, rather than attempting to transform people, should focus on developing personal interests and enthusiasm for a subject, which will allow personal transformation to take place.

Much of this work draws on the work of adult education theorist Jack Mezirow and his theories of transformative learning. Transformative learning argues that education alters our ‘frames of reference’ thereby changing the way we see the world and challenging our assumptions and beliefs (Behan, 2008). A developed ‘frame of reference’ is inclusive, integrative and open in that the learner is able to integrate new knowledge into their world-view, be open to new ideas and able to include other people’s perspectives in their own (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow placed critical reflection at the heart of the learning process, defining it as follows:

“To make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning. We learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us. Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built.”

(Mezirow, 1990)

Mezirow goes on to explore ideas around critical reflection, meaning making, frames of reference, and habitual patterns of expectation. He frames learning as a process of problem solving (“from the infant’s problem of how to get fed to the adult’s problem of how to understand the

meaning of life” p. 5) that involves a process of reflection on prior learning experiences to determine whether these experiences are still relevant in light of new knowledge.

Fundamental to this process is the ability to reflect critically on our assumptions. Mezirow defines *critical* reflection as the process of questioning (and therefore sometimes negating) the “...values that have been very close to the centre of one’s self-concept” (p. 12). He therefore places learning, and adult education specifically, at the heart of the process of self-understanding and meaning-making. He states,

“No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience.”

(1990, p. 11).

By making such a statement, Mezirow implies that engaging in education involves, and is centred on, a search for meaning and understanding. This theoretical perspective ‘fits’ the findings of this research which indicate that philosophy develops participants’ perspective of the world by encouraging them to be more reflective and open-minded (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

What then is the purpose of prison education? Should education be a means of developing the morality of prisoners or be used for behaviour change? Should we be actively trying to make prisoners ‘better’ citizens or ‘better’ people? Or should our primary concern be to develop skills so they can enter the workforce? My own view of education differs from all of these points of view. As a teacher, the role should always be to deliver the material of the course in an interesting and accessible manner, to develop learners’ interest in a subject and, in the spirit of transformative learning, open their minds to different ways of thinking about the world.

In considering what prison education *ought* to do, it is important to understand what it *does* do; what do we know about the outcomes of providing education to prisoners? Research suggests that participating in educational activities reduces recidivism and increases the likelihood of finding work, although these studies are subject to the issue of selection bias (Ellison et al., 2017). Beyond these stark measures, there are suggestions that education acts as a refuge within the prison (Ruess, 1997) with the Education Department representing a different ‘emotional climate’ (Crewe et al., 2013). Engaging in educational activities can relieve the boredom of prison (Hughes, 2009) and help prisoners cope with the pains and deprivations of prison life (Maruna, 2010). Furthermore, research suggests education provides a space for pro-social modelling and mutual support (Casey et al, 2013), an opportunity for the prisoner to be in an environment of social acceptability (Duguid & Pawson, 1998), and a space for positive socialisation (Waller, 2000).

Furthermore, engaging in discussion within the humanities, of which philosophy is a part, provides an opportunity to articulate and discuss your own personal life experiences (Ruess, 1997). This can lead to better self-understanding, encourage self-reflection and develop self-perception (Waller, 2000). Education builds confidence, developing a sense of self-worth by providing opportunity to discover talents (Hughes, 2009, Maruna, 2010). In this sense, prison education departments stand apart from the rest of the prison environment. Rather than focussing on the negative – for example, assuming a prisoner is ‘broken’ and requires ‘fixing’ – prison education focuses on the prisoner as a person and a learner (Costelloe & Warner, 2008). Teachers are seen as being separate to the prison regime and education is provided, and engaged with, for reasons outside the penal framework of corrections and criminogenic risk factors.

For the purposes of this research, I will take the view that the aim of education is personal development. This is in line with the work of Duguid, Behan, Costelloe, Warner, Wright, Reuss and Nicholls. The notion of personal development incorporates the current policy assumption that prison education is synonymous with employability, in that becoming more employable and developing skills is *part* of developing as a person. However, it goes beyond this by recognising that education is also about understanding yourself, the world and your place in it; it is about developing new interests and ways of thinking that can lead to personal transformation.

Liebling (assisted by Arnold, 2004) provides the most appropriate definition of personal development for this research. Liebling’s definition is rooted in long-term qualitative research in prisons across England. The authors state that personal development in prison is:

“The extent to which provision is made for prisoners to spend their time in a purposeful and constructive way, opportunities are available for self-development, and prisoners are enabled to develop their potential, gain a sense of direction, and prepare for release.”

(2004, p. 318).

In developing this definition they point out that prisoners in their study articulated “...a more universal need to learn, grow, and develop” (Liebling assisted by Arnold, 2004, p. 311). They draw on the work of Allport (1955) which discusses the need for human beings to develop an understanding of their relationship with the world. Growth and development therefore involves meaning making, developing a self-image, and the ability to move forward and look to the future.

Throughout this section I have made numerous references to ‘self-understanding’, ‘self-image’ and ‘self-reflection’. These terms are relevant to the formation of identity, which is, in turn, relevant to both personal development and the criminological field of desistance. This is also heavily linked to the previous discussion of philosophy as a way of ‘thinking about thinking’ (Honderich, 1995). The role of philosophy in developing self-reflection and self-understanding emerged as a prominent theme in the data of this research project. The following section provides an overview of philosophical ways of thinking about identity through an example of a philosophical stimulus used in the educational course under discussion here.

1.5 Contemplations of identity

Identity is a complex and contestable concept. My understanding of identity has been shaped by the philosophical discussions undertaken with prisoners, supplemented by reading widely in philosophy, sociology, mathematics and psychology. The philosophy course I delivered included a range of sessions focussed on identity. This reflects, in part, my own interest in philosophies that deal with issues of the self and what it means to be human, but also in part the prevalence of identity as a theme within criminological literature. In particular, identity (or a change in identity) is at the centre of some of the more recent literature on desistance as well as being present in the discourse around the reality of the pains and deprivations of imprisonment.

Philosophical understanding of identity is often concerned with ontological questions (Noonan, 2011). What characteristics or attributes can be assigned to a specific individual? What is human nature? What does it mean to ‘be’ who we are? The social sciences also address questions of identity, but, instead of focussing on what identity is, consider the question of the *nature* of a person’s identity. Where the psychological perspectives tend to focus on stable, heritable traits and seek to quantify personality (particularly in the field of psychometrics, Thomas, 1990), symbolic interactionism maintains that identity is developed through social interactions (Charon, 1992). According to this perspective, a person’s identity is formed through the nature, content and interpretation of their interactions with others. This highlights the importance of relationships, and learning how to react to different situations. Scholars often distinguish between personal identity – a person’s continuous sense of self; their self-understanding and perception of what makes them who they are – and social identity – determined by how they are identified by others, their place within a social structure and with whom they identify (Jewkes & Bennet, 2008, Jenkins, 1996).

To inform the ensuing discussion, I frame my discussion of the self around two ‘types’ of identity; the ‘survival’ identity versus the ‘growth’ identity. A survival identity relates to Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective (1969) and refers to constructing an image of the self within a potentially dangerous environment. My exploration of a growth identity draws on desistance literature and relates to the individual gaining a sense of self that allows for progression and development.

Identity, identity construction, and self-perception form the fundamental, underlying themes of this thesis. Therefore, it is important to both explicitly articulate how I am using the term ‘identity’ and to justify my definition. In section 1.5.2, I define identity as I use the term in this thesis. I then go on to outline two key conceptualisations of identity that are particularly relevant to the prison context and this research. These are Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor and desistance theory’s discussions of the narrative self. The aim of this section is to outline extant literature and provide a brief overview of the current, relevant conversations within criminology around identity and the self. In doing this, I provide the foundation for the key orienting concept within this research – the notion of a ‘survival’ identity versus a ‘growth’ identity.

I will come to the use of the concept of identity within the criminological literature in the next section. First, I introduce some of the philosophical stimuli that I used in my philosophy class that dealt with issues of the self in order to illustrate the complexities of the concept of identity, and to provide some concrete examples of the stimuli. This leads on to a more in-depth discussion of identity, growth and survival.

1.5.1 Philosophical explorations of identity

I have used the story of the Ship of Theseus as the opening stimulus in every philosophy class I have delivered. According to this story, Theseus returned to Athens after a great victory leading the people of Athens to preserve the ship for future generations (Deutsch, 2008)⁸. Over time, old, rotten pieces of the ship were removed and replaced with new pieces until, eventually, the entire ship had been replaced. The philosophers of Athens then began to ponder the question, ‘*Is this still Theseus’ Ship?*’ In the 17th century, Hobbes resurrected the problem by asking us to imagine that a young, poor sailor had kept the old pieces of the ship, using them

⁸ The paradox of Theseus’ Ship is well versed. As such, a quick web search will provide a range of sources of information on the paradox. Here, I reference the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, which I found to be an excellent source of information. See plato.stanford.edu/ for more information.

to build his own ship. So then there were two ships and the question became ‘*which* ship is Theseus?’ This story provided a simple yet accessible way of introducing philosophical discussion that leads to inquiry around the nature of identity, what makes us who we are, and what constitutes change. In discussing these issues, through the unfolding stimulus, it becomes apparent that the issue of identity is both complex and uncertain.

I returned to the issue of identity in Sessions 5 and 6 of my philosophy course, where I introduced competing arguments around the classic mind-body problem. Over the course of the two sessions the participants and I discussed Descartes’ arguments for the existence of the soul, Hume’s reasons for stating that humans are ‘nothing but a bundle of thoughts and experiences’, and Arendt’s ideas around a person revealing themselves through their speech and actions. We discussed internal ideas of the self, reflecting on our own individual influences that have shaped who we are today; how our environments, cultures and societies mould our ways of thinking and our actions; and what it means to have ‘self-understanding’.

In other sessions, we discussed issues that relate to the individual’s place in society and the (often conflicting) moral arguments around action and how we ‘ought’ to live. We discussed Plato’s Republic and the structure of society; moral action through Kant’s categorical imperative and Bentham’s utilitarianism; the ‘good life’ through Socrates, Russell and the Stoics; free speech; the purpose of Art; and human rights. Throughout, participants reflected on their own opinions in light of the philosophical ideas that they heard, debated contradictory and contrasting elements of different philosophies and developed a general understanding of the topic of philosophy.

However, concepts of the self underpinned these discussions. The dialogic nature of this style of philosophy meant that, regardless of the topic, participants can put their views forward and be responded to by their peers. The focus on identity meant that participants, as a group of people, could have in-depth discussions around what it means to be human. Participants came to these discussions with pre-existing ideas that drew on their own experiences and belief systems. By focussing attention on the work of philosophers, these pre-existing assumptions can be brought into sharp focus. Over time, such discussions can help clarify thoughts and develop a sense of self. As this research unfolded, the way in which these conversations worked, and how they were relevant to the participants, became apparent. For prisoners, this was about personal relationships, positive activity, wellbeing and developing a trusting community environment, as well as about broadening perspectives and opening minds. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 continue this discussion.

From this brief description of the content of the philosophy course, it is apparent that philosophy is, fundamentally, a self-reflective activity. Engaging in philosophical activity involves reflecting on the self, society, the way we live, and the moral beliefs that guide us. As such, an underlying question of this research has been to ask how engaging in philosophical inquiry affects the individual prisoner's self-understanding and identity construction. To explore this, it has been important to develop an understanding of what is meant by 'the self' and by 'identity'. Much of my own understanding of these terms has been developed through and among the participants in my course, as well as from reading around the subject. The following section outlines the perspective on identity I am taking in this research.

1.5.2 Defining 'identity'

In the context of this thesis, the term 'identity' refers to the subjective understanding of the self. In this sense, identity is a constructible concept whereby, in order to construct a coherent sense of self, the individual actively takes a perspective on who they are, who they wish to be, and where they have come from. I draw on McAdams' (McAdams, 1993) conceptualisation of the narrative self whereby the individual constructs an internal story that allows for a coherent understanding of the self in the present. Autobiographical continuity, coherence, and reflection are key aspects of the narrative self (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

However, any internally constructed concept of the self must be performed in public (Arendt, 1958). Through articulation of the self in a public setting, and through reactions of others that consolidate or undermine our sense of self, identities are shaped and moulded according to culture, society, and the environment in which we find ourselves (*ibid.*). In this thesis, the term 'identity' is therefore seen as being in a constant state of development and as something that is shaped and acted upon by the people with whom we interact.

Such a definition of identity recognises the presence of an internal, subjective understanding of the self and its interactions with presentations of the self in a public sphere. This chimes closely with Arendt's ideas presented in *The Human Condition* (1958). In this work, Arendt recognises the interaction between the private endeavour and the public domain. According to Arendt, it is through our actions and our speech that we reveal ourselves to others (Kreider, 2014). In this way, the internal self and the projected external self interact with the environment and the community with the reactions of others (to our presented selves) serving to shape our internal understandings. Such a conceptualisation of the self is grounded in the narrative of one's past, present and imagined future self. It is both internally articulated and

externally validated. It requires the ability to articulate the envisioned self appropriately in social situations and an understanding of the past and how it relates to the present, which is grounded in fact as well as interpretation.

1.5.3 Prisoners as the ‘experiencing subject’

Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to position the participant in my research as an ‘experiencing subject’ as opposed to ‘experienced object’ taking what Liebling, following the philosophy of Buber, calls a ‘humanistic’ approach to the individual (Buber, 1923, Liebling, 2015). With respect to prison education in particular, this perspective is described perhaps most eloquently by Stephen Duguid (2000) who argues that if we abandon the perspective of ‘prisoner as object’ and instead see the prisoner as reciprocal subject, *then* rehabilitation, reform and transformation can become possible. He goes on to argue that, in taking this perspective of the individual, prison programming can maintain the focus of encouraging development by addressing the needs and aspirations of the individual in an “equitable and practical manner” (Duguid, 2000, p. 30). In positioning myself as being interested in the experiencing subject, the perspective of the prisoner participants becomes of key importance. At the heart of this thesis is a discussion around how philosophical activity is relevant to the individual’s sense of self, their understanding of their place in the world and their take on what it means to live the ‘good’ life.⁹

The dichotomy of ‘survival’ versus ‘growth’ is grounded in the work of my supervisor Professor Alison Liebling. In particular, her early work, *Suicides in Prison*, (1992) articulates survival in the context of prison. However, my use of these terms and my description of their meaning have been shaped and informed by personal communications over the past 5 years as well as through consultation with literature. For a fuller discussion of her perspective in this area see Liebling (2012) *Can Human Beings Flourish?* These two perspectives of identity, grounded in desistance and prison sociological literature, underpin much of the ensuing discussion, offering orientation to the themes that emerged in the research. The following section discusses each in turn.

⁹ I ought also to make clear what I mean by the phrase ‘the good life’. I do not use this term to mean a life that is morally ‘good’ or ‘right’, as such an assertion brings with it complex arguments around what it means to be moral and connotations around how one ought to live. Instead, I refer to the ‘good life’ in the way the Ancient Greeks discussed it, as in, to live a life that is good in the sense that it is happy, healthy and fulfilling for the individual. See for example Frede (2016).

1.5.4 Presentations of the self and 'survival'

The individual does not exist in a social vacuum. Identity is formed, at least in part, through validation of the self by interaction with, and reactions of, others. This perspective of identity, often referred to as a person's 'social identity' (Jewkes & Bennett, 2008), maintains that the nature of identity and the true self can only be understood within a societal context. Within prison literature, social identity is often discussed using the language of Goffman's dramaturgical self. According to this account of social interaction, the individual plays out a front-stage persona that is in accordance with the 'working consensus' of the nature of social interaction of the setting (Goffman, 1969). This front-stage persona is developed through (and as a result of) social interaction. The individual's back-stage self presents only when they feel comfortable in the social setting and, according to Goffman, the individual presents a version of the self that is acceptable to the audience and the setting in which the interaction is taking place.

This characterisation of identity has proved to be particularly relevant to the prisoner experience. Prisoners often discuss the need to put on a 'front' in order to survive. Goffman's theory argues that the choice of persona presented will depend on the motivations of the individual. Evidence from prison research suggests that men, in entering prison, make a conscious effort to present a particular 'front' to the rest of the prison population. In particular, Jones and Schmid's (2000) research found that prisoners engage in a constant internal dialogue that attempts to reconcile their 'true selves' with their presented selves, with prisoners having awareness of their constant struggle to maintain their 'pre-prison identity'.

This perspective of identity can lead to the assumption that a person can consciously develop and outwardly project a specific personality suitable to a given situation. Jones and Schmid's work (2000), among others, demonstrates that, for some, this is true. However, to do this, a person must be capable of self-reflection with a reasonable level of self-understanding in order to consciously construct a 'front'. In reality, some people might not be capable of this level of insight, whilst others might construct a front more subconsciously. Furthermore, use of the terms 'front' and 'backstage self' implies that the 'front' is not a true reflection of a person's character. In reality, the 'front' may be more of a true reflection of their personality than researchers suggest.

Although Goffman's language is useful within a prison context, it is also an oversimplification of the way in which people manage presentations of the self. Crewe et al. (2013) discuss 'emotion zones' in prison where prisoners can alter the manner in which they engage

with one another due to the nature of these zones. They specifically highlight education, visitation and the chaplaincy as places in which prisoners can drop their masculine fronts and engage in a level of camaraderie with one another. To use Goffman's terminology, these are not necessarily zones in which the 'back-stage' self appears but, rather, places where different fronts can be presented (Crewe, *pers. comms.* 2014). This draws upon the work of Hochschild (1979) who discusses emotion-management in the context of how people try to feel as opposed to how people try to *appear* to feel. Hochschild claims that Goffman describes two forms of acting; 'surface' acting and 'deep' acting. In the former, the individual is managing the direct expression of behaviour whilst in the latter there is a management of the feelings from which an expression can follow. This is a subtle, but important distinction which highlights the point made by Crewe et al (2013); to truly understand the prisoner experience it is necessary to fully recognise the complex human emotions and difficulties that are faced by an individual within the prison environment (see Chapter 3).

The language of 'presentations of the self' introduced by Goffman takes a particular relevance in the prison context. In this thesis, I discuss presentations of the self with respect to the need to 'survive' the prison experience. This is, in some ways, an artificial leap. A presentation of the self, in a broader context, speaks to the idea of taking on different roles and identities in different aspects of one's life – work, the home, among friends, in court, in hospital, at school. We all, in everyday life, take on different personas suitable to different settings. These personas are not all necessarily about survival but often about understanding appropriate behaviour, putting our 'best foot forward', and demonstrating an understanding of social expectation. For many, there will be a smooth transition between different personas that do not necessarily represent a disconnected identity or a step away from the 'true' internal self. Prison however, represents a very particular type of social environment. As I go on to discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, prisons can be dangerous places, subsumed in a climate of distrust with threatening overtones and underpinned by a divided atmosphere. In such an environment, survival is imperative for both physical and psychological wellbeing. In this context, the dramaturgical perspective provides an important vocabulary for understanding the interaction between the individuals' construction of the self and the environment in which they find themselves. When this environment is prison, survival is inherently tied to presentations of the self.

1.5.5 *Personal development and 'growth'*

I now move the discussion away from 'survival' in the context of a prison environment, towards a more general discussion of personal development and 'growth'. Focussing, as this thesis does, on personal development in the context of long-term imprisonment, I draw on desistance literature, in combination with the discussion of identity above, as a means of exploring growth and change. The desistance paradigm has, arguably, paid the most attention within criminological literature to people (who have committed an offence) as active agents in their own lives. I therefore begin my discussion of personal development and growth with an outline of desistance. These discussions then return to prison sociological literature through the work of Liebling and Arnold (2004) who offer a definition of personal development that is grounded in the prison context. Finally, I refer back to the position that draws on Arendt's philosophy of the human condition: that identity is both internally articulated and externally validated.

Part of the life-course perspective of criminology, desistance literature considers people's lives in a social context. Interested in how people move away from criminal activity, desistance scholars study the process as an independent aspect of the criminal life-course (Shapland, et al. 2016). Maturation theories, developmental theories, life-course theories, rational choice theories, and social learning accounts offer both competing and complementary understandings of the desistance process (Laub & Sampson, 2001). For example, maturation theories suggest that individuals simply 'grow out' of criminal activities (Piquero, et al. 2003). These theories stem from the work of Glueck and Glueck (1940) and reflect longitudinal data that showed a decline in criminal activity when individuals were in their late-20s. Building on this, Sampson and Laub's social bond theory highlights specific life events (such as marriage or finding stable employment) as factors that can change the trajectory of a person's behaviour (Sampson & Laub 1993). However, with their focus on factors external to the individual, these early theories of desistance have been criticised for their neglect of the agency of the individuals concerned (see Vaughan 2007). As Kyvsgaard points out,

“...criminology has paid little attention to the subjective aspects of maturation in terms of personal philosophy of one's perception of one's place in the world and the potential connection that such changes might have to changes in offending.”

(Kyvsgaard, 2003, p. 241).

Following, in particular, the publication of Maruna's work in 2001, more recent desistance research takes a specific interest in identity and narrative accounts of change.

In recent years, desistance literature has become more influential in rehabilitative discourse. Within the prison system, much of the rehabilitative programming has been based on the Risk-Need-Responsivity model (known as RNR). This model assumes that higher ‘risk’ individuals have a broader range of problems and require more intensive programming and treatment (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). In contrast to this, Ward and Maruna (2007) offer the Good Lives Model (GLM) which takes a ‘strengths-based’ approach to rehabilitation. Since the early 2000s, there has been much debate between these two perspectives. Proponents of the RNR model highlight the large body of evidence that has accumulated demonstrating how programming based on prioritising the most important risks serves to reduce recidivism (see Serin & Lloyd, 2017). Proponents of the GLM model, however, argue that the RNR model is reductionist, leading rehabilitative efforts to focus on the deficiencies of the prisoner instead of looking to build on their strengths;

“...strengths-based approaches shift the focus away from criminogenic needs and other deficits and instead ask what the individual can contribute to his or her family, community and society. How can their life become useful and purposeful...?”

(Ward & Maruna 2007, p. 23)

A key critique of the strengths-based perspective is that it lacks an empirical evidence-base around reduction of offending (Serin & Lloyd 2017). However, this could be addressed by more extensive research into the impact of programmes developed from the GLM perspective.

In the context of this research, I am interested in personal development or the ‘whole-person’ approach to understanding change over the life course. Two key pieces of empirical research began to develop theories of cognitive change that are relevant to this thesis. The first is Maruna’s (2001) ‘Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives’ which emphasises the role of a coherent internal narrative in the desistance process. The second is Giordano, et al. (2002) ‘Gender, crime, and desistance: toward a theory of cognitive transformation’ which outlines the need to develop a positive cognitive blueprint that provides a “well-developed linguistic and cognitive guide to the change process” (p.1035). Both studies clearly state that successful desisters have established a new identity and indicate that the ‘identity work’ involved in successful desistance relies, at least in part, on a reframing of how the individuals see themselves.

Other research has further developed theories around identity, agency and change. Bottoms & Shapland (2016) articulate the need for the individual to be *active* in the maturation

process and consciously take responsibility for their own path (Bottoms & Shapland, 2016). McNeill (2016) argues that individuals need to develop self-efficacy and self-determination. In a more recent publication, Giordano emphasises the importance of a *desire* to change (Giordano, 2016). Finally, desistance is also discussed in terms of primary, secondary and, more recently, tertiary desistance. Primary desistance refers to a change in behaviour, secondary to a fundamental change in identity and tertiary 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.

Identity change and, in turn, identity-related desistance, involves the individual asking, and answering, two key questions; ‘Who do I want to be?’ and ‘How do I want to live?’ These two questions are fundamental to developing a personal philosophy and a sense of self. Although the questions of who one wishes to be and how one wishes to live are, in reality, questions of philosophy (Socrates was, after all, the first to develop theories of the ‘good’ life), desistance scholars have much to contribute to the question of how an individual actually goes about answering these questions. In particular, by focussing on a process of change (from an offending lifestyle to a non-offending lifestyle) desistance theorists, and desistance research, make a significant contribution to answering the question of personal development and identity formation in general.

What then, can desistance theory tell us about the process of change? In articulating the definition of identity used in this thesis, I highlighted the *interaction* between internal, personal understandings of the self, and the social environment in which they are enacted. Modern desistance theories also recognise the role of both internal processes and structural opportunity for change. Whilst desistance involves a re-conceptualisation of the self and a move towards compliance to social norms (see Bottoms, 2002, for more on compliance), “...the extent to which ex-offenders can achieve their desires and goals is partly dependent on the availability of legitimate identities” (Farrall, 2016, p. 201). Opportunity, therefore, plays a key part in successful identity change.

Giddens (ibid.) argues that language mediates human experience. He postulated that an individual achieves a stable self-identity when they have developed ‘biographical continuity’. This involves being able to piece together life events and understand how these events have been relevant to personal development. Desistance theorists focus on internal self-reflection (Maruna, 2001), the need to “craft a satisfying *replacement self*” [italics in original] (Giordano, et al., 2002, p. 1027), and the need to have a future ‘desired self’ (Bottoms & Shapland, 2016)

to work towards. As a self-reflexive project, the internal narrative perspective of identity development recognises the role of examining the inner-self and engaging in self-improvement (McAdams, 2009). According to this perspective, developing a coherent life story involves making causal connections between life events (Habermas & Bluck, 2000); developing meaningful connections between past experiences and the self (Pals, 2006); and fostering an understanding of our own ethical views and how they came to be established (McAdams, 2009). There is a growing body of evidence that this type of internal, personal self-exploration and imaginations of the self are key parts of the desistance process. In particular, Bottoms and Shapland's findings from the Sheffield Desistance Study indicate that personal philosophies and internal morals are key the motivators in the desistance process (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). Bottoms (2002) also frames this discussion in terms of different forms of compliance, one of which he terms 'normative' compliance that involves developing a desire to lead a different life.

However, as in the formation of identity, the process of desistance occurs within a social and structural framework. In developing a desire to desist, articulating a desirable future self, and gaining an understanding of the self, the individual must do so within the context of their environment. Successful desistance, therefore, not only relies upon identity change but also successful renegotiation of this newly formed identity in a public sphere. In this situation, the would-be desister is vulnerable to the structural situation in which they find themselves. In the context of this research, the social and structural framework for my participants, is the prison. There has been some, albeit limited, research into identity and change from the perspective of desistance in prison. In particular, the work of Soyer (2014), Healy (2014) and Schinkel (2015) all serve to highlight the different pathways to desistance prevalent among prison populations. Both Healy and Schinkel offer 'categories' of desister whilst Soyer emphasises the importance of opportunity. In addition to contemplations of the self, the individual needs to develop a 'credible and meaningful future self' (Healy, 2014) that is grounded in realistic expectation of opportunity.

Soyer's (2014) research into the subjective accounts of juveniles in prison leads her to coin the phrase 'imagination of desistance'. This reflected her findings that prisoners might speak of desistance while imprisoned, but find they are unable to put their desires into action upon release. She argues that the prisoners lacked the skills required to forge a new self upon release. Healy (2014) builds on this work attesting that the 'imagination of desistance' is a necessary precursor 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; while 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 meaningful and credible future self. Finally, Schinkel (2015) distinguishes between 'non-starters', the 'well-resourced' and the 'transformed'. For non-starters, the narrative desistance perspective is perhaps not relevant, as these individuals see their offences as being 'out of character'. They have significant personal resources outside of prison, a stable lifestyle to return to, and do not identify as an 'offender'. Similarly, for the 'well-resourced', agentic identity change is not relevant because, although they have been entrenched in a criminal lifestyle before entering prison, they have a stable family, home life and potential job to go to upon release. Self-reflection and narrative identity is most relevant for the group of prisoners Schinkel refers to as the 'transformed'. These individuals are described as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and have drawn on the resources of the prison to assist in their transformation, or in developing their 'reform' narratives. She argues that some of the 'transformed' had reform narratives that amounted to 'moral' transformations. This related to the time prisoners had for personal reflection.

These studies are somewhat consistent with Giordano et al's (2002) findings. Giordano's 'hooks for change' theory (2002) articulates the interaction between personal desires, goals, and development, and situational factors that can help or hinder a person's progress. The term 'hooks for change' refers to the opportunities for advancement that are available within society and highlights the need for an individual to actively take hold of these 'hooks'. Giordano et al. are clear in stating that the environment must provide the "scaffolding that makes possible the construction of significant life changes" (2002, p.1000). Reflected in Healy's emphasis on the need to 'imagine' a future self and Schinkel's discussions of 'moral transformation', at the centre of Giordano et al.'s 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. These hooks are activities or opportunities that can act as sources of behavioural control or act as a gateway to forming relationships with people who are not engaged in offending behaviour. Furthermore, they assist the individual in developing a projection of possible future selves by providing a "specific blueprint for how to proceed as a changed individual" (Giordano, 2016, p. 21).

By drawing on desistance theory, it is possible to develop an understanding of identity from the perspective of growth and development. Within desistance theories, criminologists

have looked at a process of change – from person committing offences to person not committing offences, from engaging in anti-social behaviours to engaging in pro-social behaviours. This process can be seen as a form of personal growth or development with the assumption that such change constitutes a ‘bettering’ of oneself, or a progress towards a ‘desirable’ outcome. What it means to ‘better’ oneself or what constitutes a ‘desirable’ outcome is often under-explored in the desistance literature. Working from the perspective of criminology, it seems self-evident that a desirable outcome would be a version of the self that is ‘non-criminal’ and a lifestyle that is offence-free. In reality, there is little to suggest that the process of self-reflection and identity-change discussed in desistance literature *necessarily* leads to desistance (Vaughan, 2007). As Maruna points out, desistance only occurs when the new identity that develops is one that is incompatible with a criminal lifestyle.

Throughout this discussion I have also made the assumption that personal development is important to the individual, or even necessary to find meaning. However, this raises the question of whether it is necessary for human beings, in general, to ‘move forward’, grow and develop throughout their lives. Instead of continuously providing for growth, perhaps we ought to be more concerned with providing an environment for each person to live happy and positive lives. That being said, in the context of education, and more specifically, prison education, framing identity change in the form of personal development is valid. Prisoners volunteer to engage in education and, there can be reasonable assumptions, that they do so due to some desire to self-improve or, at the very least, purposefully occupy themselves during their time in prison. Whether this occupation has a particular goal in mind, or intends to lead the participant onto the next step in their learning, is not relevant. For some, engaging in an educational course can often be about personal enjoyment as opposed to being part of a programme of personal development. Furthermore, as will be argued in Chapter 3, entering prison often leads to a form of existential crisis (Liebling, et al., 2011) and surviving the environment involves processes of meaning-making. It is therefore appropriate to consider how and in what ways an educational course can provide opportunity to facilitate the prisoner in their personal development.

In conclusion, I consider a ‘growth’ identity to be one that is future-oriented. I state this in full recognition that a future-oriented outlook is not a necessary attribute for a person to live a full and happy life. However, in the context of working with prisoners, who often need to demonstrate some form of change or development in order to gain their freedom, this perspective is appropriate. In particular, desistance literature suggests that individuals need to develop “meaningful and credible” future selves (Healy, 2014, p. 873). These identities ought to be

grounded in a coherent understanding of the self developed through reflexive practice and a narrative of the self that provides autobiographical continuity from past experiences through to the present and into the future (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Developing such growth identities involves a private and personal project that looks to answer the question of who we wish to be and how we wish to live. However, these identities are constructed in public, with constructing new narratives involving opportunity to practice fledgling identities and having access to ‘hooks for change’ that strengthen and develop different concepts of the self. Importantly, this involves developing language for alternative self-definition, communication of the self to others through action and speech, and confirming the possibility of accessing new identities through relevant and meaningful opportunity.

1.6 Discussion

This chapter has introduced some key concepts that represent the backbone of this thesis – philosophy, co-operative inquiry, prison education and identity. The practice of philosophy in the Socratic tradition encourages inquiry and self-reflection. The diversity of topics available for discussion within a CoPI means this type of education lends itself to discussions around society, the nature of identity, the foundations of morality and the structure of knowledge. As such, philosophical inquiry encourages self-reflection, allowing space for personal exploration of the self. Beyond self-understanding it incorporates perspectives on the world, allowing the participants to appreciate their connection with wider society. As this thesis demonstrates, philosophy encourages meaning-making and personal development through exploration of complex and abstract topics.

The discussion around criminological constructs of identity highlights the role of self-reflection and self-understanding in the lives of prisoners. Goffman’s (1969) work provides a vocabulary to describe the constructed ‘front’ prisoners often feel they are required to uphold as a means of survival. In contrast, desistance literature points towards personal and cognitive transformation as a key part of the process of identity development, whilst emphasising the role of opportunity to put into practice these cognitive transformations. Self-reflection, developing language for alternative self-definition, and the development of a realistic and credible future self are key mechanisms that can help the prisoner develop a positive sense of self. All are relevant to identity construction.

If we are to assume that the purpose of prison is to rehabilitate, then there is an expectation of transformation placed upon prisoners. However, they are placed in a Catch-22 situation where survival involves projecting a particular persona, but growth and transformation involve deep and careful self-reflection in an environment characterised by fear, violence and intimidation. By distinguishing between the development of a future-oriented, positive, ‘growth’ identity, and a defensive, ‘survival’ identity this contradiction is brought into sharp focus. A ‘survival’ identity refers to the preoccupation of many prisoners to cultivate a persona that will allow them to psychologically survive the prison experience and maintain their pre-prison identity. However, for many this is an unrealistic goal as the length of their sentence means they will spend a significant proportion of their life behind bars. Instead, I consider the possibility of developing a ‘growth’ identity and explore the role of philosophy in providing space for personal development. In this chapter I have highlighted the role education plays within the prison environment. Education departments have a distinct atmosphere within a prison, providing respite for prisoners and a place where prisoners take on the role of learner, work towards achievable goals, and develop a sense of self-worth.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the theories that underpin this research. I have outlined the role of philosophy in encouraging self-reflection, highlighted the ways in which identity formation is relevant to prisoners, and introduced personal development as a process of growth. The remainder of this thesis demonstrates that it is possible to develop a CoPI within, and among, prisoners. In doing this, I explore the underlying question of this research; how does this type of educational activity relate to the personal development of prisoners?

Chapter 2

Methodology, Methods and Participants

“Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data.”

(Ratner, 2002)

2.1 Introduction

This research takes an open and exploratory approach (Bachman, 2007). As an under-theorised and under-researched area, little has been written about the use of philosophy in prisons, with there being no in-depth study focussing on the experience of prisoners engaging in philosophy. Consequently, I have taken a grounded approach to this study, aiming to develop a theory of the role of philosophy in prisons that can then be tested and refined by future researchers (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The methodological framework draws on Derek Layder’s adaptive theory (1998). Following this framework, as the thesis progresses, I move between data and extant literature to illuminate and illustrate the findings. This chapter explains the theoretical framework of the thesis and outlines the research process, both with respect to delivery of the philosophy course and with respect to data collection and analysis.

I focus on the role of a CoPI for men serving long sentences. Half of my participants resided in Grendon, a therapeutic community, and the other in Full Sutton, a maximum-security prison. I delivered four philosophy courses altogether, two in each prison, allowing for a comparison both between the prisons and within the prisons. In each prison I delivered a 12-week course, grounded in the principles of Socratic dialogue, covering a range of philosophers, schools of philosophy and philosophical paradoxes. Research involved systematic pre-, during and post-participation data collection, and took place dynamically alongside delivery of the

course. As an ongoing process, analysis included reflection and refinement of data collection tools ensuring that data provided relevant and focussed insights as the research progressed (Foster, 2006).

Research tools and methods of analysis have been chosen according to that which was appropriate to the research questions. I have taken a multi-strategy approach to increase the validity of the research (Layder, 1998), triangulating data to produce thorough and robust findings (Murchison, 2010). Throughout, my methods reflect, and acknowledge, that I am working in a new field with little theory or research with which to work. I have therefore allowed the data to drive the direction of the research, whilst using my knowledge and expertise in criminology and education to inform my analysis and develop theory.

This chapter provides an overview of the methods employed, a justification for the approach taken, and an outline of the theory-building process. It begins by outlining adaptive theory as the methodological framework, followed by the overarching research design. I then articulate the research problem, describe the research context, and provide an overview of the research participants. This is followed by an account of course delivery and the methods employed for data collection and an overview of the techniques of analysis, including a discussion of triangulation, validity and reflexivity. Finally, I provide a reflexive account of the researcher at the heart of the research process before outlining the ethical procedures undertaken in the course of the research.

2.2 Adaptive theory

Adaptive theory provides a method for theory-building that takes account of existing literature as well as grounding itself in data (Layder, 1998). It is particularly appropriate for this research project as it provides a clear path for exploratory research in an emerging field. I have drawn primarily on Derek Layder's book *Sociological Practice* (1998) which provides an overview of the philosophy of adaptive theory as well as some guidance regarding methods for analysis.

Sociological Practice provides a critique of both purist qualitative and 'verificationist' quantitative methodologies. However, Layder does not wholly reject either perspective, instead offering a third way that allows the researcher to draw on emergent, data-driven analysis as well as extant literature. Layder argues that to maximise theory generation there should be a dialogue between all resources available (general theory, substantive theory, theory-testing, sensitising concepts and empirically emergent theory). Thus, he offers a framework that allows

for use of extant theory, combining what is known about philosophy in general, prison sociology, and desistance to guide my data collection and analysis, and adapt and refine the emergent theory. Such extant theories are used throughout this thesis in conversation with the findings.

Layder (1998) argues for a ‘multi-strategy’ approach to research and offers some guidance regarding data collection and analysis. These include developing ‘orienting concepts’, engaging in ‘memo writing’, and organising data through a system of ‘pre-coding’. As this chapter progresses, I discuss these different ideas and where they have been used in this research project. However, Layder’s account of research methods lacks detail and I therefore draw on a variety of appropriate methodologies to enhance my data collection and analysis.

In using Layder’s framework, I have taken a dual-role of researcher-teacher. In delivering the course, I sat at the centre of the philosophical dialogue, engaging with participants both personally and professionally, learning and developing my own understanding of philosophy alongside the prisoner-participants. The research was strengthened by the in-depth insight that this perspective provided. However, this also meant that the analysis passed through the ‘interpretive filter’ of the researcher (Foster 2006) and my findings constitute a subjective account. Therefore, I provide a brief account of my own perspective, my background and my understanding of education to enable the reader to critically consider the study’s conclusions (see section 2.12).

2.3 Positioning myself as teacher-turned-researcher

This research project has been driven by my belief in and passion for education. I moved from being a professional teacher to being a researcher in 2010 with a specific aim to involve myself in prison education. My approach to this research project has been shaped by my training and background in the teaching profession. It has also been driven by my perspective of what teaching ought to do, what it means to learn and what it means to have a positive learning environment. It is important therefore to articulate this perspective so as to contextualise my approach to delivering this course in prisons and my approach to my participants.

I take a self-conscious approach to teaching, which draws close to the humanistic perspective articulated in chapter 1 (see also Liebling, 2015). My ultimate concern, with respect to students under my care, is to provide an environment that facilitates learning. By learning, I refer to the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, or pursuit of new or existing interests. I also specifically use the word ‘facilitate’ to illustrate my understanding of the role of a teacher not as an instructor, but as someone who develops a space in which learners can

pursue learning in their own way and in their own time. Such a perspective encourages an individualised, personal, and holistic approach to education whereby the teacher looks to meet the student where they are in their learning journey.

Following this perspective, my role as philosophy teacher, first and foremost, was to develop participants' skills in active philosophising and encourage their acquisition of knowledge in the subject of philosophy. It was therefore important to create a positive learning environment for all participants. Inherent in this is a recognition that all learners, participants, pupils or students, must feel safe and able to engage in the learning process. A teacher's role involves some pastoral care whereby the wellbeing of their learners underpins practice. In the prison environment, this meant striving for an environment where the participants felt able to participate in conversation without fear of being undermined, with an understanding that their contribution had equal value, and where they were, first and foremost, learners in a classroom.

This perspective relates to the approach to the prisoner as 'experiencing subject' as opposed to 'experienced object' whereby I recognise that I, too, am an 'experiencing subject' in this research process. My experience as a teacher in the prison classroom provided a specific and unique perspective in the data. The findings were shaped by my approach to philosophy, the topics I chose to cover, the way in which I conducted myself in the classroom, and the relationships I developed with my participants. These, in turn, were driven by my understanding of what a 'good' learning environment looks like – one that builds learners' confidence, that encourages a thirst for knowledge, that looks to work with learners' strengths and interests, and, most importantly, one that encourages them to think critically about that which is presented to them, allowing space and time for them to challenge both what is being taught and the way in which the teaching is being delivered. For me, a positive learning environment is one that is 'buzzing' with energy and enthusiasm, where learners have not only learnt something but also enjoyed themselves in the process. To achieve this, in my experience, it is imperative for learners to understand that I, as their teacher, care about their progress in my classroom, about their educational journey and, consequently, about them as people who live in the world.

However, in discussing an ideal learning environment, it is also important to question whether it is possible to truly achieve such an environment in a prison. Or, perhaps more importantly, to ask whether the context of a prison changes the meaning of a learning environment. In prison, motivations for entering education, the ability to progress within the classroom and the capacity to apply the learning beyond the classroom are all constrained by the prison environment. It is therefore important that a teacher, in such an environment, recognises and

works with this distinct context with concepts such as pastoral care, wellbeing and safety taking on specific meanings relevant to the lives of these particular learners. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the environment of a prison and provides an in-depth discussion of issues that were borne out in the philosophy classroom during this research.

2.4 Research design

Research design took an iterative approach, involving a pilot stage followed by two stages of extensive fieldwork in Grendon and Full Sutton. The pilot stage included piloting data collection tools in Low Moss Prison (Szifris, 2017) and developing teaching materials and course content in HMP High Down (Szifris, unpublished dissertation). I then delivered the course in Grendon, administered questionnaires, and interviewed all participants. I completed all data collection and some preliminary analysis on this data before entering the field for the final time in Full Sutton. Several months separated each stage of the process, allowing time for reflection and analysis of data.

At each stage, fledgling theories emerged. These theories provided direction and orientation for the subsequent data collection whilst also ensuring data collection tools allowed for new themes and issues to emerge. Throughout, I used an iterative process of data collection, analysis and reflection to produce an overall theory that is both grounded in data and informed by current research.

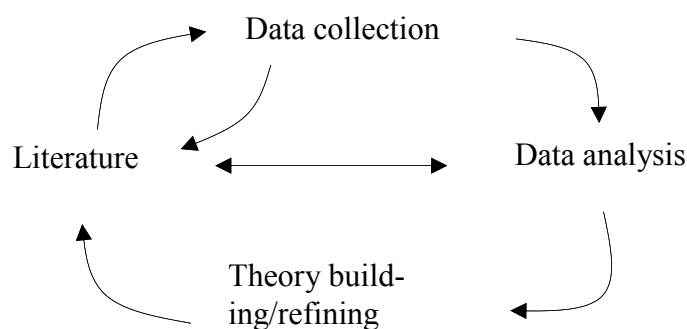


Figure 1: The research process.

The research design has been driven by the need to develop theory around philosophy in prisons. To investigate this, I delivered a philosophy course in two prisons to 24 participants.¹⁰ Delivering the course myself allowed for an in-depth, subjective account of the role of philosophy in prison to emerge. Data collection included interviewing participants before and after course delivery using semi-structured interview schedules refined, and developed during the piloting phase and throughout the research process. I also administered a questionnaire pre and post. To develop this questionnaire, I made use of already existing psychometric tests to create a ‘combined questionnaire’ that measured constructs that I considered potentially relevant. For example, due to the emphasis in desistance literature around self-reflection (see Chapter 1), I measured participants’ self-reflection and insight using Grant et al.’s scale (2002). Furthermore, philosophers discuss philosophical practice as a means of systematically reflecting on moral views and encouraging individuals to examine themselves and the world around them.

However, I have specifically designed this research to ensure that the voice of the prisoner-participant lies at the heart of the theory. Therefore, I drew on qualitative arguments that the individual at the centre of the research ought to be heard most clearly in the emerging theory (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As a subjective participant, I realised that, in delivering the philosophy course, my own experience and insight holds relevance as well and, consequently, kept systematic and extensive fieldwork notes throughout. However, I have endeavoured to begin with the participants’ own words, starting analysis with the post-participation interviews and using other strands of data to validate, refine, enhance and develop emerging themes. Triangulation and reflexive practice have been built into the research design.

This research is informed by, and based within, the work of the Prisons Research Centre at Cambridge University. As such, I draw on a range of techniques grounded in a fundamentally “humanistic” approach that has produced accurate and careful description of the prisons, the prisoners, and the communities of philosophical inquiry in which we engaged (Liebling, 2015). Liebling’s descriptions of such work as “emotional edgework” resonate with my own experience in the field; this research has been intimate, intrusive, and emotionally demanding (ibid.), yet, at the same time, it has been informative and worthwhile. The opportunity to engage men in prison in philosophical conversation is not granted to everyone. The experience has focussed the lens of this research onto the lives of prisoners, allowing them opportunity to articulate the

¹⁰ This is the number of participants who completed the course and engaged in all aspects of data collection.

prison experience, their status as prisoner, and the role of education from the dual-perspectives of the prisoner-participants and the teacher-researcher.

2.5 Focussing the research problem

Focussing the research problem involved reflection and refinement of research questions. This technique has been referred to as ‘progressive focussing’ (Foster, 2006), ‘analytic focussing’ (Patton, 2002) or even a ‘haphazard evolution’ of ideas (Layder, 1998). Drawing in particular on the ethnographic method of progressive focussing, each stage of the research included systematic focussing and refinement of research questions (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). The fundamental question for this research has been to consider the purpose and experience of providing philosophical conversation to prisoners. More specifically, the following two research questions came to underpin the inquiry:

- How is engaging in a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI) relevant to a prisoner’s personal development?
- How does the environment of a prison impact the role of a CoPI in the lives of the participants?

Using a method of progressive focussing meant each data collection period resulted in new research questions. The two (very different) environments in which this research took place produced distinct and specific research questions. In Grendon, the following research questions emerged:

- How does the dialogue in a CoPI differ from the dialogue employed in the therapeutic community?
- Does a CoPI complement or contradict the work of a therapeutic community?

Emergent themes from Grendon encouraged a greater focus on wellbeing and personal development. I entered Full Sutton with a renewed focus on the role of a CoPI in these two areas:

- Does philosophical inquiry encourage personal development among participants, and if so in what way?
- Does a CoPI improve participants’ wellbeing and in what way does it impact prisoners’ psychological survival?

The environment of Full Sutton produced its own research questions:

- How does a CoPI establish trust among its participants?

- What role does a CoPI play in establishing positive, pro-social relationships among prisoners?

Finally, working with the vulnerable prisoner population in Full Sutton produced:

- Why is the humanising effect of a CoPI particularly relevant to prisoners held in the vulnerable prisoner units of maximum-security environments?

As the research progressed, and I delivered the course in different environments, my understanding of the role of a CoPI changed and developed. The straightforward delivery of the course in Grendon contrasted with the complex social relations of Full Sutton. I entered the field somewhat naively and left it with a much deeper understanding of the difficulties of the lives of prisoners. Utilising methods of progressive focussing allowed the research to unfold and develop according to the natural evolution of the project, including the development of trust and respect between participants and the researcher, and among the participants themselves. It provided scope for incorporating emerging theories, testing and refining them as the research progressed, resulting in an in-depth account of philosophy education in two prisons in England. The following section describes the two prisons in which the bulk of the data collection took place.

2.6 The research context

This research is located in two prisons in England; HMP Grendon and HMP Full Sutton. The locations have been chosen for this study in part due to convenience, and in part due to the established relationship between my supervisor and the staff at the prisons. Furthermore, the prisons' relatively stable populations increased the likelihood a suitable number of participants complete the course. As a Category B establishment, I gained security clearance for Grendon first and began fieldwork there in June 2014. It took significantly longer to gain access to Full Sutton due to its maximum-security status and I entered the field there in April 2015.

The two locations constituted a comparison between a therapeutic community (Grendon) and a high-security, dispersal prison (Full Sutton). The prison populations were both similar (e.g. sentence length, offence category) and distinct (e.g. demographic make-up of the population). The environment in which this research took place became of key relevance to the different outcomes and processes involved in delivering the course. This section describes the two prisons' populations and regimes, and gives a brief insight into the prison estate in general. Subsequent chapters (in particular, Chapters 4 and 5) provide more in-depth insight into the atmosphere, social systems and experiences of being in these two prisons. Chapter 3 draws

upon extant prison sociology literature to reflect upon my own experiences and observational fieldwork notes generated as a means of understanding the life of a prisoner and the social climate of a prison.

Both Grendon and Full Sutton held long-term prisoners convicted of serious crimes. Prisoners in Grendon had a minimum of two years left to serve on their sentences when they entered the therapeutic environment, with the majority serving either life sentences (36%) or indeterminate sentences (53%) (HMPI, 2013). Similarly, the majority of prisoners in Full Sutton were serving life sentences (48%), indeterminate sentences (15%) or fixed-term sentences of 10 years or more (25%). However, Full Sutton had a more diverse population than Grendon. In Full Sutton, 68% of the population were white, compared to 84% of Grendon's population (compared to 86% of the general population in England and Wales, ONS, 2012). Of more significance to this study was the religious make up of the two prisons (see Chapter 3). In particular, 23% of Full Sutton's population identified as Muslim whilst only 9% of Grendon's population identified as such (compared to 4.8% of the general population of England and Wales, ONS, 2012). Grendon had a slightly older population with over 30% being over 50 and only 17.9% under 30 whereas only 13.2% of Full Sutton's population was over 50, with a quarter of their residents being under 30 years of age.¹¹

Grendon was a Category B prison with a capacity of 238 prisoners (Inside Time, 2014). Its regime ran on the principles of a democratic therapeutic community (see Chapter 4). This meant prisoners in Grendon engaged in extensive group therapy, had responsibility for running wings, and were expected to engage in the life of the community. They were afforded significant amounts of time out of their cells, with mornings involving general therapy and afternoons offering specialised therapies such as Art Therapy and Psychodrama. Prisoners in Grendon were, in general, engaged in the prison regime and expected to co-operatively work with the community to develop insight into their behaviours and their pasts in order to move forward. Those who did not would run the risk of being voted out of the community by their peers. During my time in Grendon two of my philosophy students were removed before the end of the course (and are not included in this research) with at least a further two leaving Grendon without completing therapy in the year following my research (these two are included).

In contrast, Full Sutton held over 600 prisoners. As a high-security prison, Full Sutton tended to take those who had committed very serious crimes or posed particular security risks.

¹¹ These statistics come from a combination of official figures provided by the prisons and HM Inspectorate reports 2013.

The prison ran a more traditional regime, with prisoners offered opportunities to engage in work or education during the core working day. Prisoners were escorted around the prison more closely than those in Grendon, were subject to more frequent searches, and followed a stricter regime. Although there were psychologically-based offender behaviour courses delivered in Full Sutton, the focus of the prison was security and purposeful activity. As such, prisoners in Full Sutton tended to spend their days in workshops or education. Chapter 5 provides a more in-depth account of life inside Full Sutton.

Prisoners in Grendon had, in general, progressed further in their sentences than those in Full Sutton. Although they held similar populations, Full Sutton, as a dispersal prison, held men either at the start of their sentences or men who struggled to comply with the expectations of prison life (and therefore had not ‘progressed’ in the system). As a therapeutic community, Grendon’s inhabitants comprised those who had been deemed suitable for such an environment. These prisoners had made some progress in their sentences, having moved from Category A to Category B in some cases, or having demonstrated their willingness to engage in rehabilitation activities in others.¹² During my time there, participants in Grendon sought open conditions or Release on Temporary Licence (known as RoTL) as the next stage in their sentence. In contrast, in Full Sutton, many participants still had Category A status and had yet to complete rehabilitation courses. Prisoners in Full Sutton were, in general, pre-occupied with survival, whilst those in Grendon focussed more on progress and growth.

Locating the research in these two prisons proved useful. Their similarities allowed for comparisons of different regimes and for reflection on the relevance of their differences. The following section provides more specific information about the participants.

2.7 Research participants

In total, 24 research participants completed the CoPI course, took part in the data collection and provide the focus for this research. The research also draws on extensive observations and informal conversation with staff and other prisoners as I immersed myself in the field (Bailey, 2007). Several members of staff (most notably the writer-in-residence at Full Sutton)

¹² In the wake of abolition of the death penalty, the justice system in England and Wales had to consider the question of what to do with those individuals who had committed the most serious offences. Following the Mountbatten Report (1966) into prison security, the prison system introduced a system of categorisation of prisoners related to their ‘risk’ of escape and the danger they present to the public (Price 1999). The system of categorisation allows the prison service to organise the prison estate according to the “level of security deemed necessary to safely hold them in custody” (Price, p.3). The current system of categorisation remains, unchanged, from the original recommendations of Mountbatten in 1966.

became key informants who shaped and developed my understanding of the prison context. Other prisoners passed through the philosophy class, thereby contributing to and affecting the atmosphere and direction of discussion, whilst one non-participant prisoner in particular provided insight into the broader impact of the course on the participants' interactions and behaviour on the wings. This section focuses on the 24 participants who completed the course in the two prisons, providing an overview of relevant demographic information, discussing some of the reasons for participating in the course, and outlining some key distinctions between the specific communities.

The philosophy communities in both prisons incorporated a range of individuals. They had various educational backgrounds, criminal histories and motivations for engaging in the course. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 64 years old, with the majority (16/24) being under 40. Sentence length and type varied: a third were serving life sentences; 3 indeterminate sentences for public protection and the remaining participants (13/24) had fixed term sentences. Only one of those with fixed term sentences had a sentence length of less than ten years.

In reflection of these heavy sentences, all of the participants had committed serious offences. In total, 7 participants had committed sexually-motivated crimes, 8 were serving time for murder, 3 for property offences, 2 for kidnap, 1 for drug trafficking and 1 for grievous bodily harm. A further 2 participants had been convicted under the Terrorism Act (known as TACT prisoners). Several participants' criminal careers revolved around, and were a result of, drug addictions whilst others had childhood stories characterised by abuse and neglect. Others were more 'traditional' prisoners seen as being part of the 'old-guard' hierarchy, with criminal careers involving large-scale drug trafficking and racketeering. Finally, some of the prisoners came from more ordinary backgrounds having completed school with varying degrees of success to go on to careers in industries such as catering, health care and management.

Some prisoners had entered prison for the first time on their current sentence, whilst others had had spells in prison since they were young men. Time served on their current sentences varied between the prisons, with prisoners in Grendon having served longer (mean 8.1 years) on average, than those in Full Sutton (4.7 years). However, the variation in both prisons was large, with some prisoners having served cumulatively a much larger number of years in prison (one participant had served over 30 years in prison across two life sentences, whilst another had only been in prison for 18 months).

Ethnically, the diversity of the groups reflected the diversity of the prisons. Half of the participants were white whilst the others were of black or minority ethnic origin. Most (23/24)

of the participants were British, some being second generation immigrants. The majority of the participants declared a religion (18/24) but, as in wider society, had varying degrees of commitment to their faith. A third of prisoners described themselves as Christians (8/24), while a fifth as Muslims (5/24). A further 5 participants described themselves as Quakers, Buddhists or Spiritualists. Several participants stated their religion in reflection of their family and upbringing, some of whom were non-practicing or only marginally faithful, whilst others saw their faith as a fundamental part of their identity. Some of those with a religion had found their faith whilst in prison; the Buddhists, Quakers and some of the Muslims had converted whilst inside.

Educationally, each of the groups represented a range of backgrounds. In Grendon, one of the participants had not completed any schooling prior to prison and had only engaged very minimally with education whilst in prison despite having been there for over a decade. Another had come to prison as a teenager and started at Literacy and Numeracy Level 1 but, by the time I worked with him, was in the process of completing a challenging Open University degree in the natural sciences. Another was studying for a Masters in mathematics, another had a degree prior to coming to prison, several had completed some university-level education in prison, whilst a couple had rarely engaged in formal learning. A similar story can be told in Full Sutton; some of the prisoners held, or studied towards, degree-level qualifications, whilst others came to the philosophy course having never engaged in formal education. In general, the participants in my philosophy classes were highly intelligent, articulate and, even if they had not gained qualifications, were engaged in some form of self-improvement whilst in prison. For some, their mission for self-improvement had been ongoing for some time. They came to discussions with an established breadth of knowledge and range of discursive skills. For others, engaging in the philosophy course represented a first foray into the realms of learning for the sake of learning.

Participants had a range of reasons for signing up to the course. For some, it was an opportunity to engage in something intellectually stimulating as an addition to their current studies, whilst for others it was simply something to do. Others were intrigued by the word 'philosophy' with some participants having very specific reasons for joining the course. For example, one of the participants in Grendon discussed struggling to 'find his voice' in group therapy sessions and thought the discursive nature of the philosophy class might improve his confidence (which he reported it did). Another in Grendon had developed a relationship with a girl whom he had known at school. She was now well-educated and he wanted to be able to

engage in conversation with her on a more intellectual level.¹³ In Full Sutton, reasons for engaging in the course were rarely this specific. For these participants, such a class seemed to represent a rare opportunity for intellectual stimulation.

Previous experience of philosophy varied among the participants. Many had never studied philosophy or engaged in the subject before, whilst others had read some philosophy in their own time. For instance, one had read Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (1946) and Plato's *Republic* (380 B.C.). Others had studied philosophy formally, with one participant studying philosophy, politics and economics through the Open University. The different backgrounds, experience, knowledge and levels of articulacy in the class meant that each participant came to the discussion with their own unique skills. All had strengths and weaknesses and all had specific preferences with respect to the different topics covered.

Here, I have provided an overview of the men with whom I worked. The demographic make-up of each of the classes, the backgrounds of the prisoners, and the stage in the sentence of each of the participants proved important factors in delivering this course. In subsequent chapters I provide more detail regarding my participants. The following section provides details of the process of delivering the course and the data collection.

2.8 Developing and delivering a CoPI in prison

This research involved two distinct pieces of work; developing and delivering a philosophy course suitable for prisoners, and designing and conducting appropriate data collection methods to answer the research questions. In this section I describe the process of developing teaching tools and delivering a philosophy course in the two prisons. In the following section I describe the data collection and analyses processes.

2.8.1 Course delivery

This section provides an outline of the course, describes the structure of the sessions and relates the methods of delivery in each prison. An example of the stimuli illustrates the content of the course and I discuss some of the aims of the course and pedagogy behind the choice of delivery (see also Chapters 4 and 5, and Appendix I).

¹³ He reported that he had won some arguments with her since being in the philosophy class for which I refused to take the blame or credit.

In both prisons, I delivered a 12-week Introduction to Philosophy course. Each class took the form of a CoPI with participants encouraged to engage in conversation around the stimulus provided. I delivered the course in the education department alongside other educational programmes. For the duration of delivery, I spent approximately two days in each prison using my time outside of the classroom to learn about the prison context and engage prisoners and staff in conversation around ‘life inside.’ I adapted the length and structure of the course according to the regime schedule so each session lasted between 2 ½ and 4 hours. In Grendon, as participants engaged in therapy in the morning, the course took place in the afternoon, from 12.30 until 4 o’clock with a ten-minute tea break. In Full Sutton, the class ran from 8.15 am until 12.30 pm with a fifteen minute tea break in one half of the prison and from 8.15 until 11.00 in the other half, with no break.¹⁴

Each session had the same structure. Participants would arrange themselves at desks, seated in a circle so all participants faced each other. I would place myself, seated, as part of the circle so that I could facilitate the discussion as a co-inquirer. The start of session 1 involved a brief discussion around the purpose and expectations of the dialogue before the class had a round of introductions. In subsequent weeks, I began each session by asking for feedback from the previous session and for a brief recap to get the dialogue going. Participants would occasionally have written some reflective thoughts for me to read and respond to, or would bring along questions and new ideas.

Once introductions and feedback had come to a close, I would introduce the day’s topic. As the time allotted for each of the sessions was substantially longer than a normal class time (which are usually around an hour), it was important to ensure there was sufficient material to maintain conversation throughout. I therefore introduced stimuli in stages, drawing participants through philosophical ideas. I took care to introduce each stage naturally, allowing conversation and dialogue to flow, but using each new stage as a means of redirecting and reinvigorating the conversation. After introducing each stage, I would ask participants to take a moment to read and reflect on the content before starting the discussion. Some participants would take notes whilst others would think for a moment. The purpose of this was two-fold – first to allow those with more limited reading skills time to digest the stimulus without feeling pressured, and second to allow all participants time to consider their own initial opinion. After a suitable

¹⁴ The difference between the two halves of the prison was due to movements around the prison. The men in the mainstream side of the prison were not going on to attend a different class after mine and needed to return to their wings for 11.30 otherwise they would have to sit in education until 15.30 or later. They were unwilling to do this and the compromise worked well.

pause, I would ask for contributions and the discussion would get underway. At the end of each session I gave participants a handout with optional further reading to take away. The readings always related to the topic discussed but often focussed on a different philosopher or way of thinking about the topic covered in the class.

I based each session on a different topic. Some of the sessions focussed on a particular philosopher such as Kant or Descartes. These sessions introduced the philosopher's ideas in stages, drawing the participants through their arguments, demonstrating how a philosopher builds from first principles. Sessions based on a school of philosophy, such as the Stoics or Utilitarianism, introduced participants to the ideas of several philosophers which provided opportunity to discuss arguments for and against a philosophical school of thought. The final 'type' of session focussed on classic philosophical problems such as the Ship of Theseus or the Trolley Problem (see Appendix I).

By way of an example, I return to the session on the Ship of Theseus introduced in Chapter 1. An ancient philosophical problem dating from the 1st century AD, the Ship of Theseus prompts discussion of identity and the meaning of change. The original story from Plutarch formed the basis of the first stage of the first session. The second stage, known as Hobbes' version, asks participants to consider a situation where a young, poor sailor kept the old, discarded pieces of the ship for himself in order to build his own ship. There are now two ships, and the question becomes 'Which Ship is Theseus?'. The final two stages in this session drew parallels between the changing physical nature of the ship and the way in which the cells in our own bodies die and become replaced over time. Despite this, we as human beings have continuity, leading to Locke's argument that our memories connect us to our past selves.

This stimulus prompts discussion of personal identity and change. What is the essence of the ship? Does the identity stem from how people relate to it or from the ship itself? How is identity constructed? How does someone else's perception relate to the way we see ourselves? How do our morals and values relate to our identity? What motivates change? Are identities constantly evolving or is there a core essence to who we are? My role as facilitator involved encouraging participants to think through the problem, offer opinions and provide reasons for their point of view, to question each other and interrogate the problem in a spirit of inquiry, and to engage in a dialogue with each other based around the stimulus. I encouraged participants to listen to each other, build on each other's points and be clear and precise in their language.

To develop materials, I drew on a range of resources for inspiration and guidance (see Appendix I). As an amateur philosopher with an interest in community philosophy (as opposed

to a Scholar who has studied philosophical works in-depth) I drew on popular philosophy books and secondary sources that provided summaries of philosopher's works. Initially, the topics reflected my own interests, focussing on identity, morality and society. As the course progressed, I incorporated participants' views and the topics came to reflect their interests.

My pedagogy drew on the P4C pedagogy. However, I adapted the methods to suit the population with whom I worked and developed my own methods of delivery through my MPhil dissertation research conducted in 2010-2011. Having come from teaching Mathematics in secondary schools and setting up CoPIs on the side, this work constituted an opportunity to develop pedagogical techniques and materials suitable for adult, male prisoners. My MPhil research involved delivering four philosophy sessions in HMP High Down, which provided opportunity to pilot materials.

2.9 Methods

Due to the lack of extant literature regarding the use of philosophy in prisons, the research design has taken an exploratory stance (Bachman, 2007). I have conducted over 50 interviews with prisoner-participants, administered 48 questionnaires (with variable return rates), and taken over 100 pages of typed fieldwork notes (Morse, 1991). In addition to this, I spent time in both prisons outside of the philosophy classroom, talking with a variety of staff and observing various aspects of the prison community. In designing the research tools, I used a system of progressive focussing (discussed above), incorporated open analytic techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and made use of existing theory, where appropriate, to guide analysis (Layder, 1998).

Data collection took a dual approach, drawing simultaneously on relevant literature and employing grounded processes. Interview schedules and fieldwork notes took an open exploratory approach, drawing on qualitative and ethnographic data collection techniques (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Desistance literature and prison sociology guided questionnaire compilation and some aspects of the interview schedule. Finally, the research involved reflexive practice and triangulation to increase validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Throughout each stage of the research, I undertook initial analysis on the qualitative data, developing orienting concepts and refining and testing theories in the field (Layder, 1998). I discuss each of these methods in turn below. First, I provide an outline of how I gained entry into the field.

2.9.1 Negotiating entry into the field and recruiting participants

Negotiating entry and recruiting participants in Grendon and Full Sutton involved different processes. In both prisons, I established contact with the Governor of the prison through my supervisor, Alison Liebling. Each of the governors gave initial approval for the research. I then sought, and gained, official approval for the research from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Finally, each institution required a different level of security clearance before I could begin the research.

Due to the different regimes in Grendon and Full Sutton, negotiating entry and recruiting participants took different forms. As a democratic therapeutic community, in Grendon I met with each of the wing research representatives to introduce myself and provide opportunity to ask questions. They then reported back to their respective communities, providing opportunity for each of the wings to discuss the philosophy course and vote on whether such an education class would be suitable for the therapeutic environment. Once all of the communities had agreed to the course, I attended a meeting on each of the four participating wings. I introduced myself, and the course in brief, to each of the wings and held a question and answer session for anyone who might be interested in attending the philosophy class. Interested prisoners then had to seek 'backing' from their communities to attend (see Chapter 4).

The process of recruitment in Full Sutton followed a more simple process. Once I gained security clearance, I met with two members of the senior leadership team who provided a tour of the prison and the education department. I supplied a poster to advertise the course and an information sheet for those who might be interested. The prison organised the class lists and arranged for the participants to come to the education department at the appropriate time of day. In both prisons I met with each participant before the course began to complete pre-participation data collection and ensure participants gave fully informed consent.

2.9.2 Observational fieldwork notes

Throughout the fieldwork, extensive and detailed notes recorded a range of observations (Bernard, 1994). These included observations of the prison in general recording everything from the particulars of a casual conversation with a member of staff to my own feelings of walking down the corridors of the prison. Specific focus on the education department ensured a clear understanding of the context of course delivery. As the fieldwork progressed, observational notes became more focussed, allowing for exploration of emerging themes.

During these general observations, I engaged a variety of prison staff in informal conversation. Staff on wings, in the education department and in the chaplaincy provided useful insights into the prison environment. This allowed for a deeper understanding of each of the prisons and opportunity to sense-check my observations (Foster, 2006). I also sought out specific members of staff to discuss particular themes that had emerged in my data. For example, I spent time with members of the psychology department in order to understand the psychological courses available, and I spoke with the chaplaincy in Full Sutton to improve my understanding of faith in prison.

Each philosophy session produced specific and separate fieldwork notes. During delivery of the course, I took the role of full participant when engaged in facilitation of philosophical conversation (Schensul et al., 1999) refraining from taking fieldwork notes during delivery of the course to ensure that I gave the dialogue my full attention. I therefore took fieldwork notes directly after each philosophy session, recording them via a Dictaphone during my journey home.

Observations are passed through the ‘interpretive filter’ of the observer (Foster, 2006). As such, fieldwork notes reflect my interpretation of what was interesting and what was important. However, by employing Layder’s methods of analysis, I consciously recognised and worked with my own subjectivities and interests (see below). I also employed several techniques to guard against bias and poor note-taking. First, I made my notes as detailed as possible, thereby capturing a wide range of data (Murchison, 2010). Second, my supervisor reviewed many of my fieldwork notes, offering advice and observations throughout (Murchison, 2010). Her regular emailed responses provided opportunity for reflection on content and encouraged clarification of thought.

Finally, all fieldwork notes have been subject to triangulation (Foster, 2006). In addition to my own observations, I ‘tested’ my thoughts through respondent validation (Murchison, 2010). Throughout delivery, feedback forms and informal conversations with participants provided opportunity to check my analysis of the environment and philosophy sessions. I discussed my conclusions regarding the atmosphere of the prison and the classroom with staff members, within the education department and beyond, and with prisoners. The following section discusses these methods in more detail. I dedicate a section to triangulation, validation and reflexivity below.

2.9.3 *Interviewing participants*

I conducted three types of interview over the course of the research (Wilson, 1996):

1. Pre-course interviews.
2. Informal, conversational interviews throughout delivery.
3. Post-course formal interviews.

Each of these interview stages adopted different interview styles and had distinct purposes (see Appendix II).

Prior to course delivery, I met with each of the participants. The purpose of this initial interview was threefold: to inform participants of the research being carried out and the nature of the course; to meet and gain rapport with the participants (Bailey, 2007); and to gain insight and understanding of the participants' educational backgrounds and attitudes (Roberts, 2002). Having fully informed participants about the research and gained consent, I asked participants for some information regarding their educational and philosophical backgrounds. This also provided insight into the skills and abilities of those in the group before I started the course. I recorded these interviews through note-taking and conducted them in a conversational style.

During delivery, I engaged participants in purposeful conversation to validate my observations of the class dynamics (Foster, 1996). Most of these conversations happened casually, in corridors as I walked with my participants towards our separate tea break areas, or as we waited for participants to arrive before the class began. On some occasions, I sought out specific participants to discuss something that happened in the class and engaged them in discussion in their wings or their workshops.

Finally, each of the participants engaged in a formal post-participation interview. Most (23/24) of these interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, with one participant asking not to be recorded. I recorded his interview through note-taking. The interview schedule took a semi-structured approach (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). The first part of the interview asked open-ended, exploratory questions designed to allow participants to put their own opinions forward without being led by the interviewer, and included several 'appreciative' questions (Liebling, et al., 1999). The second half of the interview asked participants more direct questions that related to my own theories about the use of philosophy in prisons (these questions were also adapted and altered at each stage of the process as theories emerged).

I developed and piloted the interview schedule over a period of several weeks prior to data collection. The wording of the questions ensured they were open-ended, neutral, singular and clear, whilst the order of the questions allowed for exploration of participants' experience,

opinion, feelings and knowledge (Patton, 2002). I amended and adapted the interview schedule as the research progressed to allow for exploration of new and emerging themes in the data, and the semi-structured approach allowed participants time to explore their own thoughts and ideas about the role of philosophy. In both prisons, but in Full Sutton in particular, the rapport that had developed during the philosophical discussions meant these interviews often took a conversational style.

The transcripts and notes from the interviews, particularly the post-participation interviews, provided the foundation of the data analysis. After each period of fieldwork (including the pilot stage), I began my analysis by reviewing and coding post-participation interview transcripts. From there, I developed themes, orienting concepts, and theoretical memos allowing participants' words to shape my thinking.

2.9.4 Quantitative Measures

The qualitative measures have taken priority throughout this research. However, quantitative measures have been used as a means of informing, reflecting upon, and illuminating qualitative findings. In particular, I administered a questionnaire before and after participation and made use of official statistics regarding demographics of the prison and prison social climate to consolidate my own observations (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Reports from the Measurement of the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) team at Cambridge University, Her Majesty's Prison Inspectorate and the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) proved useful in reflecting on my own observations and conclusions. Both prisons also provided some up-to-date statistics regarding the demographic make-up of the prisoners which allowed understanding of the types of population with whom I worked.

The questionnaire included a combination of various scales that measured constructs that literature and pilot work suggested might be relevant to philosophy in prisons. In accordance with literature discussing the role of philosophy in encouraging self-reflection and insight, I used Grant et al.'s (2002) Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS). It is developed as an improvement on the Private Self-Consciousness Scale and is considered to be the most comprehensive test for these attributes to date (Sauter et al., 2010). This scale has been tested for validity and reliability (Grant et al., 2002) with research indicating a link between these measures and wellbeing (Lyke, 2009). In reflection of the discourse around philosophy's role in encouraging greater understanding of others, I made use of the Basic Empathy Scale which has been tested for validity and reliability (Jolliffe & Farrington 2006).

I added two scales, personal development and wellbeing, for the final stage of the research in Full Sutton. Having spent time in Grendon and piloted the research in Scotland, initial analysis suggested a theory of personal development. An overwhelming majority of participants also discussed the role of philosophy education in improving their wellbeing. Following discussion with my supervisor, I employed specific aspects of the MQPL scale to measure personal development, wellbeing, distress and personal autonomy. These scales have been developed through extensive, qualitative fieldwork in five prisons across the UK and have been validated and tested for reliability over several years (Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004). I analysed the questionnaire data after all fieldwork had been completed to ensure it did not bias or influence my observations (Morse, 1991). This data has been used as a triangulation measure to illuminate and allow reflection on the emergent themes from the qualitative data.

With a small number of participants anticipated from the outset, the quantitative measures intended to be descriptive only and used as a means to begin considering how progress in such an educational course might be measured. In hindsight, use of such measures was somewhat premature and the return rates and findings were disappointing. As has been emphasised throughout, this research constitutes the first in-depth study of the use of philosophy in prisons, necessitating an exploratory approach. Using the adaptive theory framework has allowed for findings to emerge from data, yet be informed and shaped by extant literature. Attempting to predict the constructs upon which participants might make ‘measurable progress’ over the duration of a philosophy course with little research to go on proved difficult. I include the quantitative findings as a means of reflection upon, and triangulation of, the qualitative findings.

2.9.5 Participant feedback

I used a variety of methods to gain feedback from participants during and after delivery. Throughout delivery, participants completed feedback forms after each session (see Appendix II). The forms provided opportunity for participants to reflect on sessions in their own time and provide feedback as the course progressed. This allowed me to keep abreast of how the participants felt about the course, their engagement, and their view on the topics.

I also captured participant responses through focus groups and correspondence. In order to develop and refine emerging theories, some participants reviewed draft chapters and were asked to respond in writing if they had time. I returned to each of the prisons several months after course delivery to hold focus groups with participants. In each of these sessions, I outlined

my preliminary findings, asking participants to provide feedback in writing and verbally. These sessions proved particularly useful in sense-checking interpretations of themes (Foster, 2006). In some cases, participants corrected my findings, allowing for a more refined and developed theme. In others, the participants agreed with and confirmed my views, serving to validate my findings (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

2.9.6 *Ethics*

During the first, informal interview conducted pre-participation, I fully informed the participants of the research. I assured participants of their anonymity, the voluntary nature of participation, and of their right to withdraw from the research. I reiterated the distinction between the course and the research and clearly informed all participants of their right to take part in the philosophy course but not the research should they so wish. At the beginning of each interview, all interviewees were given a participant information sheet. I discussed, in detail, the purpose and use of the research, ensuring I had fully informed and voluntary consent from all participants.

All participants consented to taking part in both the research and the course. One participant withdrew his consent leaving the course part way through. He is not included in this research. Several other participants left the course without completing due to being transferred to other prisons. These participants are also not included in the research.

I recorded post-participation interviews using a digital voice recorder. At the end of each day, I transferred all recordings onto a laptop and encrypted the files. I deleted the original recordings from the digital voice recorder and transcribed the interviews with the original transcriptions also being encrypted. Some interviews were transcribed by an outside source which was recommended by my department. The transcribers were made aware of the sensitive nature of the research and agreed to confidentiality. Files were transferred in a secure manner. I provided a code and a pseudonym to all participants, and altered transcripts 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.

2.9.7 *Piloting the research design*

I piloted the research design in Low Moss Prison, Glasgow. This pilot also formed the first stage in theory-building (Bendasolli, 2013). At the time of the pilot Nikki Cameron, a teacher in Low Moss Prison, had been delivering philosophy classes for two years. Cameron's philosophy classes broadly followed the same principles as my own basing her stimuli around an information leaflet. As such, participants had all of the material for the basis of their discussion in front of them from the outset. The uptake of philosophy by the prisoners had gradually developed to allow the growth of delivery from one class per week to around seven classes per week. I took the opportunity to observe established philosophy sessions, and interview philosophy students.¹⁵

I conducted data collection across two waves, each consisting of four full days in the education department. Both waves involved observing philosophy sessions and interviewing participants. In total, I interviewed twenty participants, which included 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.

This research allowed me to develop a "primitive conceptual framework" (Layder, 1998, p. 117). Prisoners discussed how philosophy had helped them gain an understanding of themselves, their past, their present and their future. They discussed their enthusiasm for the intellectual fulfilment of philosophical dialogue, relating how they would take it back to their wings and recreate the discussions with their 'pals'. Philosophy provided them with a better understanding of the world, providing access to wider societal conversations that had previously seemed obscure and irrelevant. They found the conversations helpful in developing their understanding of their fellow inmates, creating a sense of community and camaraderie among them. They argued that it was relevant to the prison atmosphere as a whole, both helping them cope with their situations and teaching them to have self-control; to think before they speak and to recognise that they do not necessarily know all the answers.

Analysis of findings concluded that philosophy is relevant to the self-understanding of participating prisoners (Szifris, 2017). The dialogic nature of the classes encouraged development of language for alternative self-definition; as a method to expose participants to new and different ways of thinking; and as a means to develop social skills in a community of peers. As

¹⁵ I recount the findings of this research in detail in a paper (2017) entitled 'Socrates and Aristotle: The role of ancient philosophers in the self-understanding of desisting prisoners.' Credit for the title of this paper must go to my supervisor Professor Alison Liebling who has the habit of developing snappy ways of summarising the core of a piece of research.

such, pilot work in Low Moss provided a clear foundation for this research, confirming the relevance of the themes introduced in the opening chapter.

Many of these themes are present in the findings from my own philosophy course. They are developed and refined so that they relate to the particular environments in which I was working. Grendon and Full Sutton had very particular environments that framed the outcomes and context of this research project. However, there are some key overarching themes that extend from my pilot research into the work in Grendon and Full Sutton; those of community, self-understanding and broadened perspectives.

2.10 Data analysis and developing theory

Methods of data analysis drew most closely on the adaptive theory framework. I used grounded theory techniques of open-coding in the early stages to generate themes within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As themes and theories began to emerge, I gradually switched to Layder's method of 'pre-coding' whereby I read through transcripts and fieldwork notes pinpointing "theoretically relevant" (Layder, 1998, p. 57) sections. This allowed for a conversation between my data and my emerging themes. Throughout, I kept theoretical memos, again following Layder's framework, which tracked and explored emerging theories. As I progressed through interview transcripts and fieldwork notes some key interviews produced breakthroughs in my thinking. These interviewees had summarised the role of philosophy in the interviewee's life in a direct and succinct manner and their words became pivotal to the structure of my findings.

As analysis progressed, specific orienting frameworks developed theory (Layder, 1998). For example, Chapter 4 discusses the findings from Grendon, outlining in detail the development of the theme I refer to as 'open mind.' Ultimately, the definition used in subsequent chapters was grounded in the data from this research to ensure that it reflected the way in which the term was being used in the context of philosophy in prisons. However, in the spirit of adaptive theory, I consciously scanned literature in a wide range of disciplines for uses of the term 'openness', as well as for similar constructs employed elsewhere (e.g. 'integrative complexity'). I also discussed what it means to have an 'open mind' with colleagues, friends and relatives, and used internet forums to ask people what it meant to them in everyday dialogue. This allowed me to test and gauge the usefulness of this term in interpreting the data, thereby increasing its validity, in that it is both grounded in the dialogue and terminology of

the research participants and applicable and understandable to those in wider society (Layder, 1998).

Other orienting concepts came from the literature. The pilot work in High Down and Low Moss (as well as the guidance of my supervisor during my MPhil) directed the research towards desistance literature and perspectives of identity. As data analysis progressed and a theoretical framework emerged, narrative identity and presentations of the self became key orienting concepts, ultimately leading to the distinction between ‘growth’ and ‘survival’ introduced in chapter 1 and developed as the thesis progresses (see Liebling, 2012).

Analysis of data occurred in stages, with each period of data collection being independently analysed whilst building on the one that came before. For the purposes of this thesis, findings from each of the prisons are presented independently in Chapters 4 and 5. In Grendon, the interview transcripts from the twelve participants were analysed together, triangulating emerging theories with fieldwork notes and feedback forms. In Full Sutton, however, the distinction between delivering philosophy in the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit (VPU) and in the main wings led me to analyse these two groups distinctly. The assumption was that, because my experience was so distinct in the two prisons, so too would be the participants’ experience, which would in turn lead to distinct outcomes.

As Layder points out, theorising and data analysis are distinct processes, but should work in conjunction. I have made clear that the process of this research has taken an iterative form with periods of fieldwork, data analysis, theorising and engaging with the literature, each occurring several times at different stages in the process. Having developed the key orienting concepts from the data – open mind, trust, and community/wellbeing – as well as drawing orienting concepts from the literature – identity, self-understanding – the next stage was to draw these concepts together to develop an overarching theory (Bendasolli, 2013).

2.11 Triangulation, validation and reflexivity

In utilising a variety of research methods, I aimed to develop a coherent and comprehensive account of the role of philosophy in prisons. To achieve this, data collection involved a process of validation and reflexivity, with data analysis including a process of triangulation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). This research involved an iterative process with periods of data collection being interspersed with periods of data analysis, engaging with literature, and theorising (Layder, 1998). As such, methods of triangulation, validation and reflexivity are embedded in the research process.

Reflexivity has been a core part of the data collection process (Shaw, 1999). As the data collection progressed, I reviewed fieldwork notes to evaluate and critique what I had or had not included (Murchison, 2010). This allowed for the continuous development of theories, concepts and ideas that could be tested and developed upon return to the field. After each stage of data collection, I amended and developed interview questions to reflect the changing focus of the research. I added scales to the questionnaires in recognition of emerging, unanticipated themes. Observational notes became more specific and refined. From the design stage of this research, reflexivity has been seen as a key tool in the data collection process and one of particular importance when engaging in subjective, person-centred research.

Ethnography often uses the term ‘respondent validation’ to refer to a researcher taking care to sense-check their findings with their research participants (Bloor, 1978). I used these techniques to check that I had an accurate understanding of a particular situation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Throughout delivery of the course, I discussed my thoughts with participants, fellow teachers and other members of staff around the prison. With participants, I asked about details of their lives inside prison, the way in which their society worked, and what they thought about different aspects of prison life. With staff, I reflected upon my own experience of teaching particular individuals, discussing the difficulties and rewards of engaging this population. I also discussed with staff their view of current educational provision in the prisons, the wider regime and the general atmosphere of the prison environment.

I triangulated my findings by cross-referencing fieldwork notes with interview transcripts and feedback forms. This allowed for a rich, data-driven thematic analysis of the research (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). I also used quantitative measures of progress to reflect on the qualitative findings (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

I also drew on the experiences of other researchers in maximum-security environments, most notably that of my supervisor Alison Liebling and others in my department. Literary accounts such as Cohen and Taylor’s ‘Psychological Survival’ (1972) and Sparks et al.’s ‘Prisons and the Problem of Order’ (1996) have provided invaluable insight into the world of a maximum-security prison, providing opportunity to compare and contrast my own experience and findings with those of researchers who have come before me. The following chapter discusses these experiences in more detail. First, I provide reflections on my own background, articulating how my biases have influenced the development of theory in the course of this research.

2.12 Locating the researcher at the heart of the process

The subjective-objective dichotomy is perhaps best considered as a continuum. Where an individual sits on this continuum relates to their understanding of the nature of reality, to ontology and to epistemology. (see further Morgan & Smircich, 1980). In this section, I provide a reflexive account of my background articulating how being a young, female academic entering the prison classroom has shaped this thesis. In doing so, I highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of taking on this dual-role, arguing that, as an exploratory exercise in theory-building, the depth of insight gained by delivering the course myself has led to rich and robust findings.

From the topics I chose to discuss, to the direction of the philosophical dialogue, and the nature of the social interactions, my own background, personality, and interests have driven much of this project. Two key attributes served to differentiate me from many of my participants – being female and being an atheist.¹⁶ As a young female in an all-male prison environment, the participants, in general, approached me with respect, often addressing me as ‘miss’ and deferring to me in dialogues about gender and issues such as abortion and role of women in work. As an atheist, some of the men struggled to understand my lack of belief in God and openly challenged my stance. With almost no experience of religion or religious ceremonies, I felt unqualified to engage in debates about religion and the existence of God and I chose not to introduce topics considering, for example, the philosophy of religion.

My gender and lack of religion often became relevant to the content and nature of some of the philosophical dialogues. For example, on one occasion, the participants specifically sought my views on abortion and seemed keen to hear what I thought about the rights of a man whose partner was considering an abortion. Although they may have asked a male facilitator similar questions, they seemed particularly interested in understanding my point of view ‘as a woman’. With regards to religion, as subsequent chapters detail, facilitating dialogue among some of my participants proved complex. This was often as a direct result of being non-religious and, had I been religious, the content and nature of some of the philosophical dialogues would have taken a different tone. My confidence as an individual and my willingness to be open with my opinions proved essential to overcoming these differences.

¹⁶ There is, of course, a range of other attributes that differentiate me from my participants – many of my participants had a different ethnic origin, they had been convicted of an offence and imprisoned as a result, some had children, many were from a different part of the UK etc. However, my gender and lack of religion were explicitly addressed in the course of the dialogue and the data collection, therefore becoming particularly relevant.

In contrast, other aspects of my background and personality meant I felt able to empathise with many of the men in my course. Having spent my teenage years in Birmingham, I am familiar and comfortable with different cultures. As an adult, I live on a council estate in area of Sheffield with a large Muslim population, spend much of my time at ‘underground’ concerts in the hip-hop and dance music scene, and have close friends that range from privately-educated graduates to the long-term unemployed. In the prison classroom, I found I related to the way the men in my class spoke, dressed, and interacted with each other; their slang, interests and tastes were familiar. This allowed a genuine rapport to flourish.

While my gender and (lack of) religion were relevant to dialogic content, my class, education and family background were relevant to the theoretical framework I drew on to interpret my experience. In particular, my focus on identity and personal interpretations of the self stem from my upbringing. Without being strictly working class (my parents are teachers), I was raised in a working-class ex-mining community in the late-80s/early-90s. I am personally uncomfortable with the label middle class and have spent much of my life in and around working class culture. That being said, I am a homeowner, am well-travelled, and am as comfortable in a fine-dining establishment as I am in a Social Club with a karaoke. My great-grandparents were both doctors and my grandfather studied at Bern University in the 1930s. As such, I come from a long line of educated individuals. However, being Polish-Jewish (with a Russian-Jewish mother), my Grandfather also represents a family history of immigration and persecution.

Furthermore, my family regard knowledge and education in the highest esteem; we are politically aware and interested in the history of working class movements. We are trade unionists, have ties to English and Scottish working-class folk traditions, and value equality and access to opportunity. Education, learning and self-improvement have always been encouraged; my parents are self-taught musicians and, growing up, holidays often revolved around visiting historical sites and learning about political histories and different cultures. Understanding our musical roots, as well as the history and lives of the people that have come before us, are seen in my family as essential to understanding who we are, where we come from, and what our current position in society means. As a result, I have a strong sense of identity rooted in an understanding of the geography, history and politics of my culture, class and family history.

This strong sense of identity and connection to cultural roots has led to an emphasis on self-understanding. I believe in the importance of understanding one’s own culture and origins, and how society has been shaped. Philosophy, as I have articulated in the previous chapter, has played an important role in developing our societies culturally, politically and personally. From

the traditions of passing down stories through song to my mother's stories of teaching underprivileged children in inner-city Birmingham, the belief that knowledge and education ought to be accessible to everyone has been instilled in me throughout my life. These beliefs have been central to my understanding of the role of philosophy in the lives of prisoners.

Finally, my professional background has also shaped the perspective I have taken in this research. I studied Mathematics at the University of Sheffield, subsequently qualifying as a teacher. As such, I am a practitioner. In accessing the field, this lent an authenticity to my encounters – teachers in the education departments recognised my knowledge of their work, accepting me as 'one of them.' I am comfortable in a classroom and with classroom dynamics, and I understand the language and terminology of the education profession. In addition to being a teacher, I am a criminologist. As such, I have focussed on the role of philosophy education in the context of prisons and my participants' experience of the environment, consciously focussing my reading, research, and theory-building practices on issues relevant to my field.

The advantage of the dual-role in qualitative research lies in its depth and richness. In acting as facilitator, I actively philosophised alongside my prisoner-participants. I became an 'insider' in this process as we, as a group of individuals, worked together to move towards a Community of Philosophical Inquiry. Although I cannot know personally what this experience means to a prisoner whose lived reality is so different from my own, I can articulate the experience of facilitating philosophical conversation with prisoners. I have a clear understanding of what the philosophy course aimed to do and how the materials were shaped in an attempt to achieve this. Throughout, I reflected on the materials, the direction of the dialogue, and the personal interactions. Being part of these interactions – as opposed to observing them – provided an insight into the emotional climate of the philosophy classroom and the developing interactions between the participants.

A key disadvantage of taking a small-scale, subjective approach to this research is the lack of the transferability of the findings. Are the findings presented in subsequent chapters relevant to other prisons? Would they emerge with a different facilitator? Are they applicable beyond the specific participants in this study? These are important questions that future researchers will need to consider. There is also a question of "the degree to which empirical data, irrespective of the amount, can support non-observational (theoretical) statements" (Bendassoli, 2013). In this thesis, I seek to go beyond description to consider the role of this type of education in a particular context and for a particular set of people. As such, there is a question over the 'deductive leap' I have taken to draw parallels between my data and broader theories in prison sociology and desistance (*ibid.*). However, in the spirit of adaptive theory, the iterative

cycle and systematic methods of recording and analysing data employed, has led to a meaningful and relevant set of conclusions.

Finally, I have an ‘ideological interest’ (Eisner, 2009) in philosophy education. As I have outlined in this section, my background and interests mean that I take an interest in philosophy and have personally benefited from engaging in the discipline. I ‘believe’ that an improved understand of the self, a direction in life, and a broad understanding of the history of human thought can lead to an more fulfilled existence. This position has had an impact on the interpretation of results. In particular, research suggests ‘programme developers’ tend to produce more favourable findings when researching their own programmes than independent evaluators (see Eisner, 2009). However, these criticisms are levelled at evaluators who seek to provide evidence on the effect of a programme. As an exercise in theory-building, this research does not offer an independent evaluation. Instead, I offer a theory grounded in the participants’ experiences and passed through ‘interpretative filter’ of the researcher. As such, the dual-role of teacher versus researcher offers an authenticity to the theory articulated in the final chapter. By providing a personal account of my background and interests, as I have done here, I seek to ensure those building on my work can test my conclusions and have sufficient information to assess the application of my findings to other settings. In testing the theory outlined here, there will be a need for *independent* evaluation if we are to assess the true ‘impact’ of the philosophy course (Eisner, 2009).

2.14 Conclusion

This chapter provides details of the methodology and methods employed in this research. It also provides an overview of the research context and the research participants. The research was conducted in two clear stages; first in Grendon and then in Full Sutton. Course delivery and research design broadly took the same approach but the different contexts required some adaptations. These are detailed in the subsequent chapters. However, although methods required adaptation and nuanced delivery, the research followed a framework and maintained a person-centred approach. This chapter has highlighted the multi-strategy approach taken to data collection. Analysis and theory building has been ongoing with validation, triangulation and reflexive activity built into the process. Chapters 4 and 5 outline the findings of this research, providing more details regarding delivery and recruitment of participants. Before doing this, the following chapter describes the prison context. In the spirit of adaptive theory, this

chapter interweaves information from prison sociology and my own observations of working in the field to produce a rich and detailed account of prison life.

Chapter 3

Understanding Context: Prison, Prisoners and Personal Development

“Imprisonment was far more than the ‘physical deprivation of liberty’. It meant the deprivation of freedom of thought, action and identity.”

(Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004, p. 29)

3.1 Introduction

Concerned with the nature of life inside prison walls, prison sociology highlights the ‘total institution’ of the prison (Goffman, 1961). Focussing on the ‘communities’ (Clemmer, 1958) and ‘societies’ (Sykes, 1958) formed in isolation from wider society, with prisoners confined within prison walls and watched over by prison staff, prison sociology concerns itself with the day-to-day reality of those restricted to this closed community. Although there are areas in which the totality of the prisoners’ isolation is permeated (education, the chaplaincy, visits), the bulk of an individual’s time, whilst incarcerated, is within the ‘society of captives’ (Sykes, 1958).

Complex and varied interactions between participants in my philosophy groups meant philosophical conversation differed between prisons and between prisoners. Issues of hierarchy, power, trust, and suspicion filtered into the philosophy classroom. Prison sociological literature provided important insights into the reasons for these different experiences in relation to the status of prisoners, the prison environment, and the deteriorative effects of imprisonment. Throughout this chapter, I interweave my experiences of working with prisoners with prison sociology literature in order to present a comprehensive overview of the context of this research. I develop an understanding of the ‘enabling’ and ‘disabling’ factors of prison life (Lacouture et al., 2015) and provide context for a discussion around the factors that contribute to the development of a ‘survival’ identity or a ‘growth’ identity in prison (Liebling, 2012). In this chapter, I explore the question of ‘What is it like to be a prisoner?’ Following on from this, I also consider the following questions: ‘How does ‘the society of captives’ work?’ ‘How are

friendships formed and maintained?’ ‘How is power wielded?’ ‘What are the key ‘pains and deprivations’ of living in prison?’

Much of the ensuing discussion focuses on my experience of Full Sutton. Being a more ‘typical’ prison than Grendon in many ways, classical descriptions of prison life resonate more with my time there. However, I dedicate significant space in Chapter 4 to outlining the nature and culture of Grendon. It is also important to note that the majority of the participants in Grendon had spent time in Full Sutton or other dispersal prisons and had, at some point, experienced much of the life of prison as described in this chapter.

3.1.1 Populations

The lens of the prison sociologist often focuses on the ‘typical’ prisoner; a young (ish), male who has committed some form of property offence or violence against a person. Even those studies that attempt to incorporate a picture of the different types of prisoner often neglect to develop a comprehensive understanding of some types of prisoner. In particular, literature often overlooks women, sex offenders, and the ageing population. In this research, three particular and distinct groups of prisoner emerged – vulnerable prisoners, Muslim prisoners, and the other, more ‘traditional’ prisoners. I examine the first two groups in detail because their experiences of prison and interaction with prison culture were different from the traditional understanding of prison life in ways that proved relevant to this research.

Traditionally characterised by macho-culture and power plays based on old gang-ties, the informal economy and muscle, prison life today also incorporates hierarchies based on religion and piety, and stigmatisation based on offence-type and definitions of the ‘other’. Although many of the texts discussed here refer in some way to vulnerable prisoners and sexual offenders, these populations often sit on the periphery of the descriptions of prison life. They are referred to as ‘private sinners’ (Cohen & Taylor, 1972), ‘retreatists’ (Crewe, 2009) and ‘nonces’ (prisoner-terminology employed in Sparks et al., 1996). They keep themselves to themselves, comply with the regime and are precluded from engaging with the mainstream population due to their crimes. Muslim prisoners are subject to particularly acute levels of distrust from the establishment’s staff and, as in wider society, are often incorrectly grouped together as though they are one homogenous group. Vulnerable prisoners suffer an extra level of stigmatisation in entering prison as they are segregated from the mainstream population and

held on separate wings (known as ‘vulnerable prisoner units’) and rejected by the prisoner society.¹⁷

Today, many prisons have some form of separated Vulnerable Prisoner Unit (henceforth VPU). Despite this, the level of research into VPUs and sex offenders is often limited to research discussing treatment of sex offenders. Research into the prisoner society prevalent among sex offenders is rare (Ievins & Crewe 2015). Although Sparks et al. (1996) dedicate a chapter to the vulnerable prisoner unit at Albany, nearly all of the comments and conclusions made reference to the interactions or opinions of staff towards prisoners, and prisoners towards staff – there is little said about the interactions *between* the prisoners themselves, and no mention of how the vulnerable prisoner society is structured or organised. Sparks, Bottoms and Hay point to a key distinction made by staff between mainstream culture and the VPU as being the way in which the different populations resist rules; among the mains there is more of a “united front” whilst in the VPU “...protest is usually individualised” (staff quote, Albany, Sparks et al. 1996, p. 210). This indicates that the vulnerable prisoner population may not have a discernible social structure that prison sociologists can articulate.

In recent years, the need to include the perspective of Muslim prisoners has become apparent due to the changing nature of the prison population. In 2011 only 4% of the prison population identified as Muslim. By 2013, this proportion had risen to 13% (House of Commons Library, 2013) leading to a new interest in Muslim prisoners within public and political discourse. In-prison conversion to Islam is a factor in the rising proportion of Muslim prisoners, the reaction to which has been described as a “moral panic” (Spalek & El-Hassam, 2007) in reflection of a significant amount of ‘scare-mongering’ in the British popular press around the role of Islam in prison ‘gang’ culture. Consequently, engaging in research that involves the Muslim prison population is inherently tied up with the political climate and public opinion (see, for example, Quraishi, 2008). British national newspapers highlight forced conversions, Muslim ‘protection-rackets’, and talk of ‘terror gangs’ in prisons (see, for example articles from Daily Mail, 2015 and Express, 2015). Quilliam, a counter-terrorism think tank, produced a report entitled *Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist extremism in British prisons* (Brandon, 2009)

¹⁷ The term ‘vulnerable’ is synonymous with those convicted of sexually motivated crimes. In reality, within a VPU, many prisoners are not convicted of sexual offences having been moved to the vulnerable population due to difficulties not related to their offence (the label of ‘snitch’ for example). However, the participants of my philosophy course who acquired the label ‘vulnerable’ had been convicted of sex offences or other crimes against women and, as such, carried with them a stigma and shame directly related to their crimes.

and claimed that British prisons were ‘incubating’ Islamic extremism. They outline issues between Islamic and non-Islamic prisoners, argue that radicalisation occurs through extremists “gaining the sympathy and respect of other Muslim prisoners” (p.3), and claim the prison service has mishandled the situation. Such stories contribute to the moral panic around the rates of in-prison Islamic conversions, with some research suggesting that such conversions relate to a ‘gang-like’ presence of Muslim men (Brandon, 2000). However, the issue, as so often is the case, involves the labelling of all Muslims as being part of this process. Prisons often fail to distinguish between genuine faith conversion as part of a process of meaning-making and personal development, and conversion for protection (Liebling et al., 2011). Being a Muslim can mean being tacitly treated as being a ‘risk’ factor whilst conversion to other faiths is seen as a positive part of the rehabilitation process.

3.1.2 Themes

Four key themes emerged in the data – relationships, trust, wellbeing and open-mindedness. The first theme, ‘relationships,’ incorporates all of the wider social issues that occur in the prison – losing relations with those on the outside, developing friendships in prison, ‘getting on’ in prisoner society, hierarchy, power, attitudes to staff and fellow prisoners. The second theme of ‘trust’ relates to issues of how behaviour is perceived by the authorities, the feeling of being watched and held under suspicion, the constant concern around ‘biro-power’ (Crewe, 2009), and the limited opportunities for self-expression and dropping the ‘mask’. The third, ‘wellbeing,’ relates to psychological and physical health, the psychological stress of constantly being concerned about personal safety, boredom and lack of stimulation, the need to feel human and have opportunity for growth and development, and the pressure to conform to the norms of the prisoner society. The fourth theme, ‘open-mindedness’ refers to the role of philosophy in broadening minds and developing more open attitudes and the lack of opportunity to express oneself within the prisoner society.

All of these issues, and many besides, formed the context of this research. Many are well-documented aspects of prison life, with literature offering explanations and insights into the experience of prison that allowed for analytic interpretation of events in the philosophy classroom. Ultimately, these themes relate to the individual and their own fragile sense of self. They help us understand the prison environment and allow us to unpick the enabling versus

disabling environments that either develop hyper-masculine, survival identities among prisoners, or more self-aware, pro-social, growth identities that encourage personal exploration, self-reflection, and development of new interests and skills.

This chapter outlines what prison life is like and how it affects the individual who resides there. I begin by locating this research in the context of my own research background and with respect to the current literature. I provide a brief overview of the key texts that have influenced my thinking around prison life before going on to discuss the prisoner and the prison experience. I discuss the four themes in the data – wellbeing, relationships, trust and open-mindedness – through a discussion of pains and deprivations of prison life, prison culture, and coping or adaptation strategies of prisoners. Following discussion, for the sake of clarity, I formally define the key terms in the data. Specifically, I employ Liebling’s (2004) definitions outlined in *Prisons and their moral performance*. I conclude the Chapter with a discussion of what an ‘enabling’ environment might look like, compared to a ‘disabling’ environment, drawing on the ideas of a ‘growth’ and ‘survival’ established in the opening Chapter.

3.1.3 *Locating the research*

My research builds upon, and is intertwined with, other research projects in the Prison Research Centre (PRC), Cambridge University. Much of the PRC work involves Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL+) in various prisons which has informed my understanding of the penal landscape in England and Wales. The intellectual space provided by the environment of a research centre has developed my critical and analytical skills. Most significantly, my fieldwork in Full Sutton followed on from Alison Liebling’s most recent project looking at trust in maximum-security environments (see Liebling et al., 2016). In the year prior to my research commencing, Liebling et al. spent significant periods conducting fieldwork in Full Sutton, Frankland, and Long Lartin, all high security prisons in England. As this thesis is being written, Liebling and colleagues are in the process of writing up their findings and are in the preliminary stages of analysis for their research project *Locating trust in a climate of fear: religion, moral status, prisoner leadership, and risk in maximum-security prisons*. I am able to draw here on a short document that provides a summary of findings. However, in addition to this, Alison Liebling provided important support throughout my time in Full Sutton, assisting in my interpretations of the environment by her in-depth knowledge of the prison, with entry into the field being assisted by Liebling and colleagues’ relationships with staff and prisoners.

Liebling, along with Richard Bramwell, also attended a philosophy session at Full Sutton, engaging in the conversation and providing a point of reflexive discussion around the nature and atmosphere of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI). Finally, Ruth Armstrong served as my first and second year reviewer, providing feedback and guidance in my research. This project builds upon their work in Full Sutton which contributed to the developing 'rehabilitative culture' work going on in the prison.

In addition to the work in Full Sutton, there are also relationships between the PRC and Grendon. Following on from my work there, colleagues Ruth Armstrong and Amy Ludlow have successfully delivered Criminology programmes through *Learning Together* whilst myself and other colleagues have attended and spoken at a variety of conferences held at Grendon. Once again, I reiterate that Grendon, as a Therapeutic Community, has a specific type of environment. As such, this chapter relates more to the work in Full Sutton. However, the experiences described here are relevant to all of my participants as most had spent time in maximum-security environments at some point during the time in prison.

Three texts are of particular relevance to this research

- Cohen and Taylor's (1972) *Psychological Survival: The Experience of Long-term Imprisonment*.
- Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order*.
- Liebling, Arnold and Straub (2011) *An Exploration of Staff-Prisoner Relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 years on*.

All three are located in maximum-security establishments in England; all three use primarily qualitative methodologies that involve extensive observation; and all three aimed to understand aspects of prisoner society. However, they differ in their focus. Cohen and Taylor worked with a dedicated group of prisoners who attended their educational classes, working with their prisoner-participants to explore the pains and deprivations of long-term confinement. Sparks, Bottoms and Hay looked at power-flow and order in two prisons, spending time with prisoners and officers in an attempt to understand how different prison environments mediate control and order. Liebling, Arnold and Straub's work, although taking an open and exploratory approach to their research, focuses on the effect of the changing population in prisons, investigating the complex staff-prisoner relationships in the context of a rising Muslim population against a backdrop of fear, suspicion and the rise of Islamophobia in wider society.

The three works span forty years of prison sociological literature. In doing so, they provide insight into the changing landscape of the prison in England and Wales. The themes

they have in common highlight some of the more common issues in prison sociology, whilst their differences demonstrate new developments and areas of interest in the prison world. For example, Liebling et al (2011) focus on faith, trust and staff-prisoner relationships in White-moor, reflecting the growing concern around the fragmentation of the prison community along religious and racial lines. Reporting in 2011, Liebling et al's study provides the most up-to-date and, arguably, most relevant account of life inside maximum-security today. However, the different methodologies employed and the different research questions explored by Cohen & Taylor and Sparks et al. provide invaluable insight into the world of maximum-security prisons.

Cohen and Taylor's work represents one of the earliest studies into an English prison. The authors spent several months in 1967 teaching in Durham's E-wing, working with prisoners to develop a deep understanding of the life of a long-term prisoner and the pains and deprivations of long-term imprisonment. They used an emergent methodology, capturing the views and opinions of the prisoners via fieldwork notes, written pieces by the prisoners, and informal and formal focus-group style sessions. They compared the experience of long-term imprisonment to 'survival in extreme situations' drawing on literature from adventurers, disaster studies, and migration studies alongside written accounts of personal experiences of imprisonment in labour and war camps. They justified their use of the term 'extreme environment' in respect of prison by highlighting a prison's physical characteristics, sensory deprivations, social restrictions and "special psychological character as an authoritarian, punitive and relatively permanent regime" (Cohen & Taylor, 1972, p. 58).

Prisons and the Problem of Order aimed to "explore to what extent a stable and orderly form of life is achievable under conditions of confinement" (Sparks et al., 1996, p. 34-35). Their methodology included extensive fieldwork in two prisons in England known in the penal estate to have different approaches to the problems of order. They spent time "listening to staff, managers, and prisoners, and trying to understand the subtle dynamics of each prison's social life." (p. 113). Like my own research, they took a 'multi-strategy approach', citing Layder as the key influence. The heart of their strategy was qualitative, ethnographic data collection – observations and interviews – with quantitative data being used to inform the discussion around violence. The book entails a comprehensive overview of life inside two distinct dispersal prisons focussing, among other things, on power and relationships within the prison community. They develop a typology of prison violence (interpersonal, protest and the informal economy), analyse the application of rules by governors and staff, and develop a set of dimensions to characterise staff-prisoner relationships (close-distant and flexible-consistent). They focus par-

ticularly on social relationships, taking account of both staff and prisoner perspectives, describing patterns of power in the prison, and discussing the nature of the prison community. Unlike many other studies, they explicitly discuss vulnerable prisoners within one of the prisons (Albany) having the first separated Vulnerable Prisoner Unit in England.¹⁸ In view of this, Sparks, et al. dedicate a chapter to life inside Albany's VPU, providing one of the few studies to discuss the social organisation of prison outside of the mainstream population. They recognise the complex issues of order in prisons, quoting King (1985) in pointing out that prisons, by their nature, hold people against their will. As such, they argue that some form of "coercion, fear, and visible or submerged forms of violence" must maintain order (p. 34).

Liebling, et al.'s (2011) report into staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor also constitutes a comprehensive description of a dispersal prison. As a more recent study, it provides a relevant and contemporary account of life inside, and issues surrounding dispersal prisons in England. Liebling and her team used an ethnographically-led approach to the research. They spent a year (June 2009-2010) in 'sustained observation' of various areas of the prison. They held weekly dialogue groups with the prisoners, informally and formally interviewed both staff and prisoners, and administered an MQPL survey. The demographics and climate of Full Sutton most closely resemble the description of HMP Whitemoor. The aims of Liebling, Arnold and Straub's research included an exploration of the "nature and quality of staff-prisoner relationships" and "the contemporary prison experience in conditions of maximum-security" (p. ii). Unlike previous studies, this research specifically highlighted the role of faith, in-prison conversions to Islam, and the relationship between Muslims prisoners and other non-Muslims within the prison. The themes around the Muslim population in Whitemoor resonated closely with my own experience in the mainstream population of Full Sutton. Like Whitemoor, Full Sutton had a feeling of 'us and them' between Muslim and non-Muslim prisoners, was characterised by suspicion and distrust, and religion permeated the general atmosphere in the prison.

Several other studies have also proved insightful, including Sykes' (1958) seminal study of a maximum-security prison in the USA, Crewe's (2009) study of a Category C English prison, and O'Donnell's (2014) excellent discussion around Prison, Solitude and Time. Further to these, Mark Hamm's (2013) nuanced and careful account of 'Prison Islam' and prisoner radicalisation has helped put my experience into context whilst Alison Liebling's (assisted by

¹⁸ Prior to the early-1990s, 'vulnerable' prisoners were kept in segregation for their own protection. However, the social isolation of segregation meant many prisoners faced the choice between a solitary existence and a life in community at the risk to personal safety (Sparks, Bottoms, Hay 1996).

Arnold 2004) *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality, and Prison Life* provides a framework for defining and understanding emergent themes in this research.

The focus of this research is on long-term prisoners convicted of serious crimes. As such, the three key studies are of particular relevance as they, too, focus on this demographic. However, where Cohen and Taylor consider 13 years to be a long sentence, today there is a growing number in prison who measure their time in decades rather than years;

“In 1970 the prisons contained 225 men serving sentences of exactly ten years, 218 serving ten years or more and 159 serving ‘life’. ‘Life’ used to mean an average of nine years; longer periods were very unusual. However with the abolition of capital punishment, many lifers will now, in the words of the 1968 Home Office report, ‘have to be detained for a very much longer than average period.’ In fact at the end of 1968 the number of life sentence prisoners who had served over nine years was forty-seven, at the end of 1969 it was fifty-nine, by the end of 1970 it was seventy-one and by the end of 1971 it had increased to eighty-five of whom sixteen had served more than 13 years.”

(Cohen & Taylor, 1972, p. 15).

In contrast, Full Sutton had 391 prisoners serving life sentences and 171 serving fixed-term sentences of ten years or more (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013). Hulley et al. (2015), highlight 294 male prisoners across England and Wales who are serving life sentences with a minimum tariff of 15 years (and this number excluded any of those who received their sentences after the age of 25). In my philosophy group, one participant was serving life with a minimum tariff of 30 years; another was on his second life sentence and had spent a total of 39 years in prison, whilst others considered themselves lucky to have fixed term sentences of ‘only’ 11 years.

Thus far, I have provided a descriptive account of relevant studies and their fieldwork practices as a way of comparing this study with other prison sociological studies. The rest of this chapter outlines the analytic themes of these studies, highlighting those most relevant to the themes that emerged from my data. I use extant literature as an orienting tool to explicate and illuminate the context of this research, drawing on existing theories and prison ethnographies as a means of understanding the relevance of philosophy to the life of a prisoner.

3.2 Prison and the prisoner experience

In the introduction to this chapter, I outlined four key themes that emerged in the data – relationships, trust, wellbeing and open-mindedness. I explore these themes through a discussion of the pains and deprivations of prison life, prison culture and methods of coping with, or adaptation to, the prison environment. This reflects the terminology and dialogue within the prison sociology literature. As such, organisation of this section reflects these areas of interest before moving on to the final stage of the discussion around prisoners' sense of self and the relevance of prison climate, environment and culture, and the possibility of developing a positive pro-social identity characterised by growth.

3.2.1 Pains and deprivations in prison life

In discussing the difficulties of entering prison with friends, conversation often turns to issues surrounding the physical threat of prison – the risk of being beaten up, physically intimidated, raped or even murdered. As a researcher/teacher in prison, I am regularly asked if I feel 'safe' in the prison environment, whether the prisoners are in the same room as me, whether there is a 'guard', and if I have ever seen violence in the prison. The perception of a prison as a place of violence and intimidation is not without foundation; in 2015 over 16,000 assaults and 7 homicides occurred in the male adult estate (Ministry of Justice, 2015). However, surpassing these figures are those related to incidences of self-harm which, in 2015 stood at 20,409 and, eclipsing the number of homicides, 82 prisoners took their own lives (Ministry of Justice, 2015). These figures demonstrate that, although the risk of physical violence against the person is real, the effect of imprisonment on a person's psychological health is particularly acute.

Constituting a 'radical shattering' of continuity and routine (Liebling, 1992), in entering prison, prisoners are isolated from friends and family, excluded from participating in society and have the unenviable task of establishing themselves within the prison community. The stigma that comes with entering prison and becoming a 'prisoner' brings with it a sense of being labelled or condemned (Crawley & Sparks, 2005). The individual is removed suddenly from their normal, everyday lives, and thrown, often unprepared, into the life of the prison. Coined by Sykes (1958) the term 'pains and deprivations of long-term imprisonment' highlights the deteriorative impact of incarceration. His initial study highlighted four key areas of deprivation – liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, and autonomy – with subsequent research using his framework as a basis from which to build understanding of the effect

of long-term imprisonment. Boredom, isolation, lack of activity, victimisation, breakdown in relationships, and poor living conditions all contribute to the difficulties of maintaining psychological wellbeing whilst in prison (Liebling, 1992).

Prison exerts control over every aspect of a prisoner's life, resulting in a loss of autonomy and agency. Confined *to* as well as *within* the prison (Sykes, 1958) prisoners are moved around, from location to location, from cell to work to gym to education (Sparks et al., 1996).

“It's the same thing every day, same routine, ... we're still human beings, we're not sheep... open the gate, usher us forward through the gate, you stay up there for the day, and then the sheepdog comes, barks all you lot back into the little kitchen that you go in for the night or whatever it is, and that's it. And then when they come when it's feeding time, come, put all the food, and everyone comes rushing, buzzing, get their food.”

(Martin, Full Sutton)

Reduced to a dependent state (Sykes, 1958), prisoners wait to be fed, wait to be unlocked, wait to be taken to work or visits. Toch (1977) argues that this loss of autonomy amounts to an attack on the individual's personal integrity, whilst Liebling (1992) claims it leaves prisoners at risk of 'losing themselves' to the routine of the regime. In the philosophy classroom, prisoners in both prisons often discussed the difficulties of this loss of autonomy. Their studies would be interrupted by difficulties getting materials, their interests curtailed due to the lack of opportunities in prison, and their skills would often go unused. One of my participants said he would be happy if he could “just do a bit of gardening”, with another saying he spent his days playing computer games to numb himself to the pain of being inside and stop himself from worrying about losing his relationship with his family.

In Grendon, although staff treated the prisoners with respect and interacted with them in a more open and honest manner, prisoners were still subject to the expectations of therapy. As members of the therapeutic community, they were expected to engage in the process and speak openly and honestly about their past, their behaviour and their feelings. These expectations have a positive intention – to help the prisoner understand what they have done, how they came to commit their crime and deal with their criminogenic tendencies – but they still constitute a lack of autonomy. There was pressure from their peers to conform to the ways of the community and, for some on particularly long sentences, Grendon offered a hope of eventual release that non-capitulation removed. Although the majority of the prisoners in my study genuinely seemed to gain positive benefit from the experience of Grendon and were on a journey

of personal transformation and identity discovery, they still commented that “Grendon is the hardest time you’ll do in prison, it’s the slowest time and the hardest”. In Grendon, prisoners could not bury their past behaviours and – as the participants in Full Sutton did – spend their days in mind numbing activities that passed the time and guarded against too much inner thought.

The power of the institution over the individual underpins the loss of autonomy. Sparks et al., (1996) argue that maintaining control in a prison involves an implicit understanding that coercion, force and even violence can be used if necessary. Although I never felt a threat of violence in either prison, in Full Sutton I was constantly conscious of being observed. If I walked from the classroom towards the staff room engaging in friendly, casual conversation with one of my participants, I felt the gaze of suspicion from the Prison Officers who sat at their stations, silently observing but rarely interacting with the population. I discussed these feelings with teachers in the education department who candidly discussed the security concerns around conditioning or manipulation of staff by the prisoners. By way of an explanation, staff related the early history of the prison, characterised by a weak staff culture with prisoners holding power and staff succumbing to the demands of the population. Having regained control, the staff had long memories and maintained a purposeful distance from the prisoners. Consequently, anyone who did not was subject to suspicion.

Emotional distance and isolation characterise the prisoner experience. Psychologically, maintaining emotional ties with family and friends on the outside can induce serious suffering among prisoners (Crawley & Sparks, 2005) with some long-term prisoners choosing to sever all contact with the outside, focussing instead on their lives within the prison walls (Cohen & Taylor, 1972). However, isolation *within* the prisoner community results from the small pool of people from which the prisoner can choose his friends (*ibid.* 1972). The precariousness of these friendships (having developed a bond with a fellow prisoner, there is always a risk of a sudden transfer thereby ending the friendship) leads to psychological stress and some prisoners maintaining distance from their fellow prisoners. Crewe’s study (2009) demonstrated that social relations are often a defence against loneliness and for personal safety, with prisoners reporting that they only made one or two ‘proper friends’ during their time in prison. Participants in Full Sutton confirmed this when I asked whether there was anyone in the prison they could trust, “What, you mean prisoners I trust? No.” The population churn within a prison – albeit less so in high-security – means that friendships are constantly having to be renegotiated.

Cohen and Taylor’s study highlights the issue of social isolation in prison. Their participants suffered a greater level of isolation than those in my study, being segregated from the

mainstream prison community. Despite this, their description of the wing resonated with my own experience of Full Sutton. One of the prisoners in their study commented, “It’s like living in a submarine” (p. 60), a simile I have used on numerous occasions to describe my own experience of teaching in Full Sutton. My route through the prison involved passing through a number of doors, down a series of similar corridors, passing prison officers waiting and watching at their stations. A lack of windows, either in these corridors or my classroom, resulted in no daylight from the moment I stepped into the prison at around 8.00 am until I left again at 3 pm. It being the long, sunny days of June-August, this created a feeling of ‘otherness’ in the prison; that I was outside and separate from the surroundings whilst I was inside the prison walls. I often had the feeling of having been in a submarine, submerged from the outside world on entering the closed world of the prison and, in leaving, emerging back into the light and out of the depths of such an environment.

A key ‘pain’ of imprisonment, loss of personal safety, was far more evident in Full Sutton than in Grendon. Although both prisons offered relatively stable environments, prisoners regularly told me the atmosphere can “turn in a second” (see also Liebling, 1992). Prisoners live in a constant state of suspicion and distrust (Toch, 1977) with prison described as a ‘climate of brutality’ (Jewkes, 2005) in which prisoners live in a state of fear of exploitation. The community structure of Grendon, with an emphasis on open dialogue and shared responsibility, meant prisoners could share discuss and resolve grievances. Participants lived in wings of small communities of around 40 men, all of whom were part of a shared project of personal exploration. They knew each other intimately as they were expected to speak openly about their index offence, their childhood, and their behaviours. In Grendon, because of this, there was no ‘fear of the unknown’, no concern that you might have befriended the wrong person because his crimes meant he should be ostracised and excluded. Full Sutton, a much larger prison with no official forum for dialogue, and no regular meetings to air grievances and discuss concerns, felt a more anonymous environment with prisoners left to navigate the prison social system on their own.¹⁹

The prevalence of violence, or lack of it, forms an important distinction between White-moor (as discussed by Liebling et al., 2011), and my experience of Full Sutton. In the four

¹⁹ To be clear, I do not mean to imply here that residents of Grendon do not have concerns around personal safety, rather that such feelings were less prevalent than in Full Sutton and, as such, did not feature in observations and interviews of this research.

months of fieldwork in Full Sutton, disruption due to ‘lock downs’ occurred only once.²⁰ Although levels of security were apparent and high at all times – with staff lining corridors during movement, and three staff sitting directly outside my classroom at all times – in general, the prison seemed calm and (in some ways) unthreatening. I did not systematically investigate the role of violence in Full Sutton prison, it not being the focus of my research. However, discussions with staff indicated that violent incidents occurred only occasionally. In general, these comments came with the caveat that when an incidence did occur, ‘these men do it properly’, meaning that violent incidents in Full Sutton, although rare, often involved serious injury, planning, and conscious decision-making (as opposed to petty ‘scraps’ that might occur in other establishments). Furthermore, some 18-months before my fieldwork in Full Sutton, a hostage-taking incident involving three Muslim prisoners and a prison officer occurred. This incident served to undermine staff-prisoner relationships and created a concern among Muslim prisoners that they would suffer a backlash from the staff (Liebling et al., 2016). In comparison, violent incidents at Grendon were rare. That being said, a murder occurred in Grendon in 2011, an incident that the men in the prison (some of whom were residents at the time) still recalled and discussed as a means of demonstrating to me the uncertain and risk-laden nature of the prison environment.

However, the overwhelming feeling among prisoners is that of boredom and stagnation. Cohen and Taylor’s use of the term ‘psychological survival’ encapsulates the pains of imprisonment in that prison involves a mental struggle. Prison life is monotonous. Prisons are often grey, dull places with little daylight and characterised by bars, locks and doors. Although staff often attempted to alleviate this by putting up paintings by prisoners, placing plants in corridors, and adding colour to the walls, the lack of variety in a prison is palpable. In Cohen and Taylor’s study, lack of variation led to concerns among their participants regarding intellectual and mental deterioration. At the time of their study, in Durham’s secure unit, prisoners were unable to associate with the main prison population, leading to worries around “social maladjustment” (p.104).

This lack of meaningful activity in prison leads to a feeling of being suspended in time (O'Donnell, 2014). In prison, there is simply nothing to do. Despite the focus on ‘purposeful activity’ in prisons in England, workshops are often characterised by too little to do and too

²⁰ Lock downs occur when an incident has happened in the prison. In this case, a violent incident had occurred and the wing in question was placed on lock-down meaning prisoners were kept behind their doors until the issue had been dealt with. This tactic is used to allow officers time to investigate what happened and keep the wing calm to ensure no further incidences occur.

many workers. My own observations of workshops in various prisons involved seeing men pacing aimlessly around the space or playing cards to pass the time. Among the prisoners in Full Sutton, the opportunity to engage in philosophical conversation provided opportunity for intelligent conversation that they explicitly stated they ‘craved’ in the prison environment.

The prison experience is characterised by social isolation, loss of autonomy, and fear of violence. These issues contribute to psychological stress, with scholars arguing that imprisonment – and particularly long-term imprisonment – leads to deterioration. Some psychological studies have equated imprisonment to a ‘deep freeze’, claiming there is no evidence that prison results in deterioration or long-lasting emotional damage (see Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Furthermore, some evidence suggests that the most damaging and distressing period of imprisonment is at the start with pains gradually dissipating over time (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). This is supported somewhat by Liebling’s (1992) conclusion that suicide is much more likely in the early stages of imprisonment. However, the impact of imprisonment varies and the ability of long-term prisoners to ‘psychologically survive’ the experience, and even grow and develop in the face of adversity, may speak more to the strength of the human spirit than the notion that prison is not damaging (see for example, O’Donnell’s *Prisoners, Solitude and Time* for a full discussion of this).

3.3 Culture, environment and relationships

Early studies of prisoners and prisons highlighted the role of relationships and prison culture in shaping prisoner experience. Clemmer’s (1958) *The Prison Community* introduced the term ‘prisonisation’ to refer to the individual becoming ‘assimilated’ to prison culture. Sykes’ (1958) *Society of Captives* outlined the ‘inmate code’ implying that prisoners form a cohesive group with a sense of solidarity. Other titles such as Toch’s *Living in Prison* (1977) and, more recently, Crewe’s (2009) *Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison* focus on prisons as a place in which people live, socialise, develop, and change over time.

Prisons are often characterised as places of intimidation and extortion. Over the last five years, I have spent time in a variety of male prisons where macho-culture presides, swagger and control of the informal economy carry currency, with prisoners adopting a hyper-masculine (Jewkes, 2005) ‘front’ as a means of survival. In entering prison, individuals must learn to navigate the complex social relations within it; a place where there is a ‘right’ way to behave (Liebling assisted by Arnold, 2004) and getting it wrong can lead to social exclusion, suspicion

and extortion. Tied up with notions of masculinity, solidarity, physical prowess, and reputation, prison communities traditionally revolve around hierarchies of power and influence related to status, control (of, for example, the informal economy) and gang allegiances. Sex offences and burglary ('don't rob from your own') carry a level of shame, whilst bank robbery (requiring courage and involving 'sticking it to the man') afforded respect (Crewe 2009). Regardless of index offence, 'grasses' and 'pad-thieves' sit at the bottom of the status hierarchy along with men who struggle with their incarceration. This includes the 'physically defenceless', those 'lacking in emotional fortitude', heroin users and self-harmers (Crewe, 2009, p. 251).

Within the vulnerable populations held in separate VPUs, the 'machismo' and 'banter' prevalent in mainstream population were not present. In their article on the moral community of sex offenders, Ievins and Crewe (2015) state that there was no struggle for power or hyper-masculinity, no 'gangster' culture, fewer drugs, and closer friendships. In the VPU at Albany, prisoners were seen as "more compliant" than the mainstream prisoners resulting in a "quieter, less pressurised, less dangerous, and less confrontational mode of working." (Sparks et al., 1996, p. 209). Although prisoners still raised issues around a lack of trust in the officers (they claimed that some staff clearly disliked sex offenders in general) the nature of these prisoners meant staff could, in some cases, build better interpersonal relationships with them, and in others, bully them. In contrast, at the time of the Sparks et al's study, the sex offenders in Long Lartin were mixed in with the mainstream population. The researchers stated that the mainstream population 'tolerated' these prisoners in exchange for the more liberal regime the prison ran, but that it remained unacceptable to be friends with them.

Despite the lack of a discernible hierarchy within the VPU of Full Sutton, their designation as 'vulnerable' signified the rank of this population. Sex offenders are at the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy. When held on 'normal' location among the mainstream prisoners, they are shunned and suffer verbal abuse and physical intimidation (Sparks et al., 1996). Internalisation of this social rejection can lead to low self-esteem and self-rejection (Wheeler, 1961). As such, the feeling of social rejection is particularly acute as sex offenders are rejected by wider society, by the prison community, and often have little to no contact with family and friends on the outside (Ievins & Crewe, 2015). Unlike other offences, being accused and convicted of a sex offence carries with it a high level of moral condemnation. Sexual offenders are shunned and ostracised from society more vehemently than other offenders and, once incarcerated, they often find themselves without any contact with those in the outside world, and without friends on the inside. My experience of teaching the vulnerable population confirms much

of what has been said here. The prisoners and atmosphere in the VP community was starkly different to that which prevailed among the mainstream population; VPs were quiet, calm, polite, and compliant. Issues of trust and stigmatisation still permeated our discourse but, in general, it was easier to manage the groups and form a positive working relationship. Chapter 5 provides a more detailed account of this experience.

Liebling et al's trust project (2016) provides a potential explanation for the lack of hierarchy in Grendon and the VPU in Full Sutton. They found that more co-operative environments allowed for respectful negotiation of acceptable behaviours. Grendon's structure, based on co-operative dialogue and community involvement, allowed prisoners to have a sense of ownership and responsibility over their community. Hierarchies and power-seeking becomes unnecessary as prisoners' have a voice in their community and a sense of control over their environment. In the VPU of Full Sutton, the co-operative culture related more to the passivity and compliant nature of the vulnerable population than to the cultivation of a sense of community in the prison.

However, among the Full Sutton mainstream population, hierarchies and masculine identities were evident. With swagger and machismo on display in the mainstream community, men marched down the corridor with over-developed muscles and projecting authority, sometimes with proudly displaying their faith identities through their clothing and general appearance. How these hierarchies worked, who was on top and how power was wielded, was hidden in the complexities of social encounter. The only real divide of which I was aware – and that became specifically relevant to this research project – was the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Resonating closely with my own experience, descriptions of the characteristics of the Muslim group in Whitemoor, Liebling et al (2011) argue that, although not ostensibly a 'gang' in the traditional sense, some pressures within the Muslim group did bear some 'gang-like' qualities. In Whitemoor, prisoners displayed their Islamic identity as a symbol of power, and the feeling among prisoners was that the Muslims should be joined in order to enjoy a 'quiet life' in prison. I had several conversations with staff around the issue of pressured or forced conversions. There seemed to be an understanding that some prisoners were converting to the faith due to bullying and threats of violence if they did not. I had some dealings with in-prison converts, some of whom discussed how other Muslims had told them they had to be either "with us or with them" – a 'proper' Muslim, or not – and that, as a result, they had begun to re-establish their faith. According to Liebling et al, in Whitemoor, there was an emphasis in the regime on "threats posed by terrorist risk, extremism and radicalisation" (p.124) leading to staff

fearing “conditioning and manipulation” (p.30). Prisoners in Whitemoor did not ‘trust the system’ – the risk assessments and procedures for progression – and became disengaged and frustrated. In discussing the issues of low levels of trust felt by prisoners towards staff, the authors conclude,

“...ethnicity was a ‘barrier to trust’; information sharing, report writing and the lack of confidentiality in the prison (prisoners felt ‘misrepresented’ on file); a (growing) prisoner culture of disengagement from staff; with negative peer perceptions of extended contact (‘screw-boy’); experiences of inconsistency in the rules/regime/staff attitudes and friendliness; the job description of an officer, which denotes that in some circumstances a good relationship is irrelevant and is over-ridden by security; and prisoners witnessing staff breaking the rules (for example, taking short cuts) or acts of ‘unprofessionalism’...”

(Liebling et al., 2011, pp. 124-125).

Liebling et al.’s research revealed that the rise in the Muslim population was countered in Whitemoor with a feeling that ‘they’ (the Muslims) had too much power and influence and that others (e.g. white Catholics) needed to muster support to counter this power relationship. Their research highlights the perception among non-Muslim prisoners that the Muslim group are in some way a unified collective. In reality, Liebling et al (2011) found them to be a fragmented community. However, the authors also point out that some among the Muslim community behaved somewhat like a gang, using violence and coercion to achieve their end but that the prison authorities were unable to distinguish between the supportive Muslim brotherhood and the suppressive Muslim gang. The Whitemoor study found evidence that faith was a proxy for power among Muslim prisoners; they watched each other, commenting if another individual was not being faithful enough. The authors state that “...faith following was becoming the organising principle around which violence was ‘justified’ within the prisoner community” (p. 101).

The truth of the issues of forced conversion, radicalisation and terrorist ideologies in prison is complex and confounded by narratives of fear and the current political climate. What was relevant to this study was not precisely what was going on, but how the low levels of trust and high levels of suspicion around Islam, conversion and TACT prisoners affected the dialogue, atmosphere and character of the prisoner society. The view of Islam by non-Muslims and staff, and the display of faith identities as a symbol of power by Muslims in Full Sutton, served to create a feeling of ‘us and them’, and a divisive atmosphere prevailed in the prison.

Fundamentally, these concerns led to a climate of suspicion and distrust that, arguably, focussed most powerfully on the Muslim population.

The descriptions of Whitemoor chimed with my own experience of working in Full Sutton. With respect to political climate and prison population, the Whitemoor study is the most comparable study to my own work published to date. Despite the fact that only five Muslim prisoners took part in my research, the role of faith in prisons formed a critical part of the understanding of the relevance of philosophy in prisons. The descriptions in the Whitemoor study of the relationships among prisoners, and between staff and prisoners, resonate. A key distinction was that, during my time in Full Sutton, there was an emphasis from the senior leadership team on a 'change in culture'. Although I personally observed staff-prisoner relationships to be distant and watchful, in speaking to staff they often had a positive attitude towards prisoners (although there was one incident that was an exception). Towards the end of my research, staff and prisoners in one wing had begun to set up a 'staff-prisoner relationship committee' which was central to the launch of a 'rehabilitative culture' in Full Sutton. Where staff-prisoner relationships at Whitemoor were at a low point at the time of Liebling et al.'s study, staff-prisoner relationships at Full Sutton, seemed to be at a turning point during my research, in part as a result of the findings of the trust project led by Liebling.

Thus far, I have focussed on the role of Muslims in the prison community and the suspicion under which they could be held. However, lack of trust was not just relevant to the Muslim prisoner. Sparks et al. (1996) noted the lack of trust many prisoners had in the regime, describing the suspicions prisoners felt towards the establishment's motivations. This echoed my experience of Full Sutton and, to a lesser extent, Grendon. Participants in the philosophy class, particularly among the VPs, would discuss the prison staff and management as a collective with specific motivations and untrustworthy actions. Participants would discuss their files and their disappointment and anger when discovering what staff had entered on them. Such occurrences served to undermine relationships and trust between prisoners and staff. The participants in my philosophy class used such examples to explain why they had to be constantly careful of what they said and be aware of how something, seemingly innocuous, could be perceived. One of the more well-known participants in my class had been the subject of several TV documentaries which showed staff discussing him when he was not present. What he saw them say, and the way they interpreted his actions and motivations, was a source of shock to him and he stated "*Well, if that's what they think then fuck 'em, I'll do my own thing.*"

Trust is a key aspect of fostering identity, personal development and friendship. People have to feel safe, and have a level of trust in their environment, if they are to be themselves.

Trust is rare in prison, and is difficult to cultivate when the only thing known for certain about a person is that they are convicted of an offence (Ievins & Crewe, 2015). Without trust, sharing of personal information is seen as ‘risky’, with socialising being suspicious (Liebling et al 2012, Sparks et al., 1996). In Whitemoor, relationships between prisoners were described as being underpinned by fear, with prisoners acutely aware of certain allegiances hindering progress (Liebling et al. 2012). These themes became most prevalent in Full Sutton due to the *lack of trust* in that environment whereas in Grendon, the community ethos meant that establishing trust and relationships was relatively straight-forward. However, the culture of a prison involves complex power-structures, negotiations of relationships and high levels of distrust. The following section goes on to discuss how individuals cope in such an environment.

3.3.1 *Survival, adaptation and coping*

“The individual’s picture of himself as a person of value ...
begins to waver and grow dim”
(Sykes, 1958, pp. 78-9).

The discussion so far has focussed on the effects of imprisonment. This section considers the question of how individuals who find themselves incarcerated cope with the environment. How do they react to the loss of personal safety, liberty and autonomy? The simple answer is that some do not: risk of suicide and rates of self-harm peak in the first few weeks of imprisonment (Liebling 1992) with prisons incorporating ‘first night centres’ in an effort to ameliorate the shock of imprisonment. The severity and reality of the prison experience means that in order to survive undamaged, or even positively change and develop, individuals have to develop ‘adaptations’ and ‘coping’ strategies. Prison sociologists develop ‘typologies’ to explain the different ‘types’ of prisoner and methods of adaptation. The nature of the environment means prisons provide opportunities to study power, order and resistance (Crewe, 2009). As such, typologies of adaptation often emphasise prisoners’ relationship with authority (see Cohen & Taylor 1972, Sparks et al., 1996, Crewe 2009). Although not a focus of this study, the role of power and the nature of prisoner relationships became relevant over the course of the fieldwork.

Cohen and Taylor’s typologies highlight the role of resistance in coping with prison. Some in their study engaged in a form of ‘self-protection’ consciously making sense of the environment and actively finding ways of dealing with the slow passage of time. Others used

more traditional forms of protest, engaging in campaigning, letter-writing, plotting escape, striking, and confronting authorities. According to Cohen and Taylor, prisoners had a variety of ways of dealing with their relationship with the prison regime: some actively resisted their adjustment to prison resulting in a series of run-ins with prison staff; others maintained substantial relationships with the outside, whilst others actively enjoyed the ‘contest of wits’ and the game of outward compliance. Crewe’s (2009) typology of prisoners discusses ‘enthusiasts’ who embrace the transformative experience; the ‘stoics’ who recognise the futility of resistance and bear the prison experience with dignity; and the ‘players’ who pay ‘lip service’ to the regime’s rules whilst engaging in subversive activities and the prison economy. These studies highlight the fact that there are different ‘types’ of prisoner. Individuals interact with, adapt to, and cope in the prison environment in a variety of ways.

Cohen and Taylor (1972) observe that individuals with consistent ideologies or philosophies are more able to maintain their integrity as a human being. Sykes (1958) argues that psychological survival involves developing a strategy for “rejecting his rejecters” (p.167) whilst Liebling et al. (2011) argue that finding an interest or passion is key. For some, prison results in the finding of an inner strength and engaging in a search for meaning (O’Donnell, 2014). Liebling et al. (2011) distinguish between those who can ‘bear’ the life and those who struggle. They highlight roles such as library or gym orderly and positive relationships with officers as contributing to a ‘bearable’ prison experience. For others, often early on in their long sentences, coming to terms with the length of their sentences was psychologically stressful. These prisoners described life as ‘stagnant’ ‘boring’ ‘frustrating’ and ‘unstable’ (Liebling et al., 2011 p. 27). Some, more recent studies have argued that coping with a sentence involves accepting the situation and limiting horizons to focus on life inside the walls of a prison (Schinkel, 2015). Liebling, Arnold & Straub confirm Cohen & Taylor’s assertion that prisoners need a “workable sustaining ideology in order to survive long-term imprisonment.” (p. 120). Education, workshops, the chapel and the gym can be sources of “hope, recognition and humanity” (Liebling et al., 2011, p. 39). Many prisoners realised the need to change their lifestyles and had been forced to “contemplate the meaning of their lives, the reasons for finding themselves in their current situation, and more existential topics like the finality and meaning of life” (Liebling et al., 2011, p. 33). However, prisoners were often unsure how to proceed; with limited options for self-improvement their self-reflection and search for meaning was stunted in the prison environment (*ibid.*).

For some, religion and faith provide opportunities for reinvention and offer a method of finding meaning in prison. The issue of faith and the use of religion to instil a moral framework among prisoners has a long history in prisons in the UK (Spalek & El-Hassam, 2007). In the 1700s, prisoners in England were kept in isolation to embark on a period of ‘self-examination’ (O’Donnell, 2014). Drawing on the Christian notion of ‘quiet contemplation’, prisoners were afforded space to have a ‘moment with God’ and reflect on their deeds (O’Donnell, 2014). For prisoners, faith can provide a route to finding meaning in life and an understanding of the reasons for imprisonment; it can provide a means of coping with the ‘existential crisis’ induced by the prison experience; or a source of care, protection and support (Liebling et al., 2011). Despite some alarmist groups focussing on the role of Islam in radicalisation, scholars argue that Islam in prison “...does more good than harm due to the *structure* and sense of *identity* it offers ...” (Hamm, 2013, p.48, italics in original). Although high rates of conversion to Islam have caused concern among policy-makers and media outlets, research indicates that religion, including Islam, acts as a coping mechanism by reducing aggression and engagement in illegal activities and increasing structure and self-discipline (Spalek & El-Hassam, 2007). Furthermore, religious conversion increases a sense of identity and belonging and a ‘brotherhood’ of care and protection (Liebling, Arnold, & Straub, 2011).

Prisoners describe the environment as ‘fake’ and can feel like there is some sort of ‘game’ between staff and prisoners (Liebling et al., 2011). Prisoners in the Whitemoor study discussed their inability to relax and be themselves for fear of being seen to be ‘having fun’ or being involved in gang-related behaviour. Echoing Crewe’s use of the term ‘players’ to describe some prisoners, Liebling et al. (2011) discuss the need for “strategies and game plans” (p.29) in order to survive everyday life. In such an environment, it is safest to be ‘reserved’ in one’s interactions. Identities are thereby suppressed, as individuality is impossible and opportunities for self-expression rare. Liebling et al argue that loss of liberty goes far beyond physical liberty discussed above, and constitutes a “deprivation of freedom of thought, action, and identity” (p. 29).

In such an environment, identity presentation and orchestration are tactics employed to survive the prison experience. Prisoners feel the need to present the image of a ‘tough man’ and to build up a ‘rep’ among the prison community (de Viggiani 2012). Tested on a regular basis, manliness and machismo are part of the ‘act’ (Toch, 1977), which involves not appearing weak, and standing your ground (Crewe, 2009). Crewe (2009) argues that ‘respect’ among prisoners comes from bravery, stoicism, criminal maturity, intelligence, honesty, and generosity, whilst stigma or dishonour comes from stupidity, naivety, cowardliness, disloyalty, and

instability. Prisoners who are either particularly persecuted or unable to live up to these expectations are separated (Toch, 1977). Research has demonstrated that men often engage in self-assessment and self-dialogue to reflect upon their identity *before* incarceration, then undergo a period of adjustment in their first few months, altering the way they walk and talk (Jones & Schmid, 2000).

Coping and adaptation strategies encompass a notion of survival. Developing strategies and personas that allow for safe navigation of the prison environment can lead to stagnation and, in the long run, have deleterious effects on the individual's sense of self. Research indicates that positive pro-social activities can lead to growth in the prison environment. The following section discusses the meaning of personal development and growth and the ways in which the prison environment can enable it.

3.4 Discussion: An enabling environment? Survival vs. Growth

“Activities were a catalyst for change, they gave prisoners a sense of purpose, built confidence, and developed talent”
(Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004, p.315).

The opening chapter of this thesis outlined perspectives on identity. Desistance literature places identity-work at the heart of the change process, recognising the need for the individual to take control of their lives and develop a positive, pro-social identity in their own time. However, this chapter has highlighted that the prison environment encourages the prisoner to develop an often anti-social, macho, ‘front’ that helps them ‘survive’ the prison experience. Giordano et al’s work emphasizes the need for exposure to ‘hooks for change’ or, in other words, for an ‘enabling’ environment that allows the prisoner to explore his or her interests and personally develop. The question for this section of the chapter is, what does such an ‘enabling’ prison look like?

The notion of an ‘enabling’ environment stems from work in mental health and, in particular, from an initiative set up Royal College of Psychiatry (Haigh et al., 2012). It is used to discuss and describe Psychologically Informed Environments or, as they are often known as in prisons, Psychological Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs). A variety of prisons have PIPEs which are “specifically designed, contained environments...designed to enable offenders to progress through a pathway of intervention, maintaining developments that have previously been achieved, and supporting transition and personal development at significant stages

of their pathway” (Turley et al., 2013, p. 2). Both PIEs and PIPEs “strive for greater psychological awareness of a setting, humane, and enlightened treatment, enhanced wellbeing for all involved, plus reflective practices and shared action learning in the staff team.” (Jordan, 2011, p. 1065). The term ‘enabling environments’ is used as a generic term for approaches that look to put relationships at the heart of practice and take a more humanistic stance to patients, prisoners and those accessing mental health services (Haigh et al 2012). In general, the concept of enabling environments is used most often in reference to psychological, mental health environments. However, the general principle of a humanistic approach and the focus on relationships as being at the heart of practice means the term has particular relevance in this thesis.

In discussing the idea of a prison environment that encourages personal development, transformation, and even human flourishing, it must be acknowledged that the fundamental nature of imprisonment works against this. As Jordan (2011) points out, the aims of the Prison Service and of the Health Service are often at odds. The same could be argued of the aims of a prison service and of an education department. As the discussion thus far has emphasised, prison removes autonomy with the culture underpinned by the coercive nature of enforced loss of liberty. How far can development, progress, and meaning-making go when a person is removed from their friends and family and denied their liberty? This is not a question that can be answered here. However, what is clear, is that the common environment of a prison is actively *disabling*, with some studies suggesting that overcoming the effects of institutionalisation is a key part of the desistance process (Terry with Cardwell, 2015). Prison encourages anti-social hyper-masculine identity-formation, promotes division and distrust, and is characterised by ‘pains and deprivations’. In recognising this, it is possible to discuss the ways in which the environment can sometimes ameliorate the impact of incarceration on the individual’s sense of self. Furthermore, we can at least consider how prison culture can be addressed to develop a more ‘enabling’ environment.

This brings the discussion back to the four key themes in this research – relationships, wellbeing, trust and open-mindedness. All four have an important role to play in developing a more positive experience for prisoners. To explore this, I return to Liebling’s definition of personal development in prison:

“The extent to which provision is made for prisoners to spend their time in a purposeful and constructive way, opportunities are available for self-development, and prisoners are enabled to develop their potential, gain a sense of direction, and prepare for release.”

(Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004, p. 318).

Liebling's most recent project around trust in a maximum-security environment builds on this, arguing that personal development involves meaning-making, helping others and exercising the positive attributes of their personhood (Liebling et al., 2016). However, for many prisoners, true personal development also involves personal transformation that fundamentally shifts their self-perception and their future imaginations of the self (see Chapter 1).

Prisons and Their Moral Performance (2004) offers an in-depth analysis of concepts relevant to life inside prison. Now widely used, this research outlines the foundation of the Measurement of the Quality of Prison Life survey (MQPL) “a ‘tick box questionnaire’ for prisoners ... designed and refined over several research projects aimed at improving our understanding of prison life and its effects.” (Liebling, 2014, p. 1). The research constituted the development of a comprehensive and grounded understanding of concepts including relationships, humanity, safety, and respect as they are specifically used and understood in prisons (Liebling, 2014). It seems prudent, therefore, to turn to Liebling's work as a means of defining and understanding the concepts that have arisen in this work. In particular, wellbeing, trust and relationships are all explored and defined in *Prisons and Their Moral Performance*. The fourth theme, open-mindedness, is explored and defined in Chapter 3 and is grounded in findings of this research project.

An important factor in a positive social environment, Liebling defines trust as “reliance on the honesty, reliability, and good sense of a person; the level of responsibility or confidence invested in and experienced by individuals.” (p. 248). This is underpinned by respectful treatment and grows out of social relationships. Prisoners need to feel that they can trust the prison officers to do what they say they will do, as well as needing opportunity for prison officers to demonstrate their trust in prisoners. This might mean taking on responsibility in their wings or communities. The authors point out that trust is built through meaningful experiences and cooperation between groups. As such, opportunities for positive, pro-social interaction are key in developing a trusting environment.

The nature of relationships within a prison is also important. A distant and punitive staff culture can mean that staff were not able (or willing) to positively interact with prisoners. Poor attitudes towards prisoners can create feelings of alienation and anger (characterised as ‘political charge’ by Liebling et al. 2016). Poor prisoner relationships can create complex power relations and hierarchies among prisoners meaning that prisoners are pre-occupied with survival as opposed to working on developing new opportunities. Liebling (assisted by Arnold, 2004) argues that respect and humanity are at the heart of staff-prisoner relationships. She defines a humane environment as being one that is “...characterised by kind regard for the person,

mercy, and activity, which inflicts as little degradation as possible” (p. 226) and respect as an “...attitude of consideration...regard for the inherent dignity and value of the human person.” (p. 212). Her definition of relationships relates primarily to staff-prisoner relationships (“the manner in, and extent to which, staff and prisoners interact during rule-enforcing and non-rule-enforcing transactions” p. 236). However it also relates to the interactions among the prisoner population. Relationships connect to issues around human freedom, seeing people as moral equals, acceptance of difference, the need for community living and sociability, meaningful activity and recognition that people ought to be reasoned with and not manipulated (Liebling 2004).

Wellbeing in prison relates to both these issues. Prisoners suffer a great deal of psychological stress in entering prison due, in part, to low levels of trust and complex social systems. Beyond this, boredom and stagnation lead to preoccupation with time. Prisoners need “something to think about” (prisoner, Low Moss Prison, pilot work) and some way of developing and growing in prison. Education can be a key part of this process. Liebling’s definition of wellbeing is “the condition of being contented, and psychologically healthy.” (p. 307). She argues that this involves “the provision of an environment in which welfare and adaptation of prisoners is achievable.” (p 307). Prisons ought to provide opportunity for positive, pro-social interaction that allows prisoners to present positive aspects of their personality.

Growth means developing, moving forward, finding and honing new interests, learning new skills, developing new world views, and understanding ourselves and our lives better. Education, religion, helping others, developing hobbies, and finding meaning in life have all been shown to be relevant to growth. Identity development involves knowing where we have been, where we are, and where we wish to be. Growth occurs when we have opportunity to move towards where we wish to be which can be articulated in light of a better understanding of who we are and the values by which we choose to live. Personal development therefore involves both understanding ourselves in our current situation – whatever that may be – developing a desirable ‘future self’ and taking steps towards that future self. A prison with an enabling environment will provide opportunity to both develop a positive sense of self and for the individual to move forward.

Finally, the work of Liebling and colleagues at the Prison Research Centre sheds some light onto what it means for a prison environment to ‘enable’ personal development. In her lecture to the Prison Phoenix Trust in 2012, Liebling states “how we feel connected to, and treated by, others in the world...makes a difference to our capacity to lives in it.” (Liebling, 2012, p. 3) and goes on to argue that some prisons are more ‘survivable’ than others. She

highlights acknowledgement, truthfulness and justice as fundamental to the human experience. Research from the MQPL correlates personal development with dimensions such as help and assistance, feeling treated with humanity, and staff professionalism – all dimensions that are related to relationships within the prison environment (Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004). Most importantly, in arguing that growth involves a ‘future oriented’ endeavour, Liebling argues that “a ‘conception of the self in a better future state’ is only possible when trauma is not present” (p.9). In other words, prison, as a traumatic experience, fundamentally works against growth and personal development.

3.5 Conclusion

This research took place in three distinct environments – Grendon, Full Sutton mainstream and Full Sutton VPU. These environments provided contrasting experiences and allowed for exploration of different aspects of a CoPI. The four themes discussed in this chapter – trust, wellbeing, relationships and open-mindedness – are relevant to all three places and to developing a ‘growth’ identity. This chapter provides the foundation for understanding the difference between a disabling environment and an enabling environment. It has highlighted the pains and deprivations inherent to incarceration – isolation, boredom, loss of autonomy, fear for personal safety – and discussed the social climate present in many prisons. I have introduced the three populations relevant to this thesis – the traditional prisoner, Muslim prisoners and vulnerable prisoners – and discussed how issues of hierarchy, trust, and masculinity contribute to prisons often being disabling environments. I have also discussed how prisoners adapt to, and cope in, prisons cultivating a ‘survival’ identity in order to psychologically survive the experience. This has provided the foundation for understanding the differences between an enabling environment that encourages pro-social, growth identities and a disabling environment that encourages survival identities.

The following chapter focuses on Grendon. As a therapeutic community, Grendon provided the most *enabling* environment with therapy often focussing on self-understanding, dealing with trauma, and providing ways for prisoners to come to terms with their crimes and their situation. In this context, prisoners in Grendon had established a level of trust towards the prison staff and each other, had developed positive relationships within the prison, and had a greater level of wellbeing and sense of purpose than is often found in the typical prison. Delivering philosophy in an environment such as this provided an opportunity to explore how the content and structure of the sessions was relevant to the lives of prisoners.

Chapter 5 focuses on Full Sutton. A stifling, stagnant environment in this prison allowed for exploration of how a CoPI develops trust, relationships, and wellbeing. The two halves of the prison provided very different atmospheres. In a reflection of the literature discussed here, mainstream prisoners were boisterous and lively and VPs were quiet and unassuming. However, both halves of the prison were characterised by distrust, and participants spoke openly about the lack of intellectual stimulation and their difficulties in developing meaningful relationships. These three themes manifested themselves in different ways in the two distinct environments. However, they provided opportunities to develop an understanding of how a CoPI establishes trust, provided a space to develop positive pro-social relationships, and enhances the wellbeing of the prisoners.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, ties these themes together, linking them back to the overarching theme of the thesis – identity. In this chapter, I have distinguished between a ‘survival’ identity and a ‘growth’ identity, highlighting the issues that come from allowing a disabling environment to develop. Drawing on the analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, I outline how a CoPI in a prison can contribute to the personal development of a prisoner. By encouraging self-reflection, establishing trust, providing a space for positive pro-social interaction with peers and developing an intellectual climate of philosophical inquiry, CoPIs can support (or enable) the development of growth identities.

Chapter 4

Grendon: It's all about content

4.1 Introduction

Delivering philosophy in Grendon proved to be a distinctive experience. Grendon's therapeutic environment offered a safe space to deliver the philosophy course with skilled and willing participants. This provided opportunities to 'dig deep' into the question of how philosophy, as a subject and a discipline, is relevant to these participants. In particular, with participants skilled in group dialogue with a developed sense of empathy and community due (in part) to their therapeutic work, I began to wonder what role philosophy had in Grendon. If skills of conversation, self-expression and listening are already developed, is there a place for philosophical dialogue? If so, how does philosophical dialogue differ from therapeutic dialogue? Does it complement, enhance, or detract from prisoners' therapeutic work?

Grendon's environment meant that exploring the role of CoPIs was less about feasibility and more about the content of the conversation. Although participants had little experience in philosophical dialogue, their experience of therapy meant they were, on the whole, very capable of engaging in group conversation. As facilitator, I rarely needed to actively manage participants; they tended to check themselves when they interrupted, encouraged each other to speak up, and (usually) maintained focus. Their listening skills and willingness to hear each other's point of view provided a comfortable environment in which to discuss philosophy and, within a matter of weeks, we had established a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI). Consequently, I spent the majority of my time actively participating in conversation rather than managing the dialogue.

To explore this, and the role of philosophy in a therapeutic community, I provide an overview of the therapeutic environment. Here, I 'set the scene' of the research and provide a more in-depth discussion of Grendon's practices to build on the brief overview provided in

Chapter 2. I also provide additional information regarding the demographics of the participants, the process of negotiating the field, and the methods of data collection. Findings are organised into two areas: ‘developing an open mind’ and ‘community and relationships’. I provide here an overview of the role of philosophy in opening minds and broadening perspectives before outlining how a CoPI contributed to community and improved relationships even when located in an environment with a strong community ethos. I distinguish between philosophy and therapy in an attempt to place philosophy alongside that which was already delivered in Grendon. This means I am able to discuss philosophy as a tool that could be embedded into such an environment, working with the existing strengths and picking up on some of the weaknesses of the therapeutic milieu.

4.2 The therapeutic environment

HMP Grendon opened in 1962 and was the first therapeutic community (TC) in the Prison Service in England and Wales (Shuker & Shine, 2010). Since then, use of therapy and other psychological interventions has fallen in and out of favour in response to the disappointing findings of research (see for example Martinson, 1974) and the changing political climate (McNeill, 2012). Throughout, Grendon’s status as a therapeutic community has endured. The purpose of this section is to describe the TC regime in Grendon, as it was when I conducted my research, and outline some of the outcomes participants were expected to gain.

Prisons offer a variety of psychological therapies to prisoners (Harvey & Smedley, 2010). These range from short-term programmes based on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (often enforced as part of the individual’s sentence plan) to immersive therapeutic communities. In an immersive TC, prisoners are members of, and live within, a community and engage in intensive therapy. Such communities are used in hospitals, drug rehabilitation centres and prisons (Harvey & Smedley, 2010).

The overarching aim of a TC is to provide an environment in which patients are able to challenge one another’s behaviour and explore actions through communal dialogue (Shuker & Shine, 2010). In the prison system, therapeutic communities must ensure sufficient attention is paid to the criminogenic needs of the prisoners (*ibid.*). As such, therapy delivered within the context of a prison tends to focus on anti-social behaviour linked to the individual’s index offence. In the more intensive therapy offered by TCs, although the primary aim is to tackle offending behaviour, this is done by considering the wider context of prisoners’ lives, tackling issues around identity, relationships and victim empathy.

The principles of a TC are based on the work of Rapoport (Shuker & Shine, 2010) and Maxwell Jones (Genders & Player, 1995). TCs follow the principles of permissiveness (minimum rules to ensure safety of members), democracy (decision-making is a community responsibility) and communalism (as much autonomy is given to the community as possible) (*ibid.* 1995). By framing therapy within a community, members regularly interact, creating a sense of personal investment that develops ties, shared assets, and a culture of collaborative activity (Toch, 1980). TCs are structured to place responsibility and authority with the community members which includes regularly held community meetings in which prisoners conduct wing ‘business’ and therapeutic dialogue (Jones, 1980). Jones (1980) highlights the importance of an ‘open’ system within TCs that involves two-way communication between staff and prisoners. Problems are solved through interactions and the existence of shared goals and systems for shared decisions-making.

Therapy is intended to be a ‘re-educative’ process (Genders & Player, 1995). As part of this process, residents become

“...very used to getting in touch with personal issues, with their past, with their actions, why they behave the way they do.”

(Tom, Grendon).

There are two key therapeutic tasks within a prison-based TC: to ‘reintegrate’ a person’s personality so they have a coherent sense of self and to establish the external and internal factors that led to committing a crime (Morris, 2001). In prisons, psychotherapy acknowledges the existence of prisoners who want to “create alternative ways of being and relating to the world, to challenge their own beliefs” (Saunders, 2001, p. 8). This leads to an emphasis on identity work, investigating past behaviours and understanding childhood experience as a means of understanding the current self.

Therapeutic methods also employ Socratic questioning (Kazantzis et al., 2014). As with philosophy, this involves “co-operative exploration” (Overholser, 1993, p. 67) via systematic questioning in order to facilitate independent thinking. The therapist serves as a “guide, facilitating a self-discovery process” (*ibid.* p.71). With Socratic questioning being a “defining attribute of the therapeutic relationship” (Kazantzis et al., 2014, p.2) the similarities between the methods employed in a CoPI and psychotherapy become apparent.

4.2.1 *HMP Grendon*

Grendon had six wings, each of which acted as an autonomous TC. At the time of the fieldwork, one of the six wings held prisoners whose crimes either directly involved sexual offences or had a sexual element to them; three of the wings held mainstream prisoners; one was for those prisoners with especially low IQ (less than 60) and one was the induction wing. Each wing held around 40 members (prison capacity = 238) and was run autonomously and independently, each with its own constitution and tailored methods of adhering to the general principles of democratic therapeutic communities. Within the communities, members were expected to take on responsibilities including acting as representatives and taking on work and education commitments. After discussion with the prison, the philosophy course was open to the four main therapeutic communities excluding those on induction and those in the specialist wing for low IQs.²¹

During participation, all twelve participants were engaged in therapy but were at varying points in the process. At the point the course started, six of the participants had been in Grendon for eighteen months or less; four had been there for between eighteen months and four years; and two participants had been in for over four years. This meant that half the participants were early in their therapeutic journey (Genders & Player, 1995). Two of my participants did not complete the therapeutic process and were, after completing the philosophy course, asked to leave the community due to behaviour considered to have breached the community's rules. A third participant did not find the therapeutic community to his liking and, throughout participation, discussed finding therapy difficult and inappropriate for his needs. He subsequently left the establishment. One third (4/12) were fully immersed in the therapeutic process whilst the final two participants, having been in Grendon for four and a half and six years respectively, were beginning to start the process of moving on from Grendon. At the time of writing, of the participants who were not deselected or chose to leave, all are either currently engaged in therapy or had completed the therapeutic process. Of those who had completed, some have now been released or are looking to progress to a lower category prison. Sadly, one of the participants who had been in Grendon for two years when he started the philosophy course was diagnosed with cancer and passed away less than a year later.

²¹ This was primarily the decision of the prison as I was happy to include any prisoners interested in attending. However, prisoners on the induction wing were involved in a specific orientation programme to ensure they understand the processes of a TC. With respect to the wing for those prisoners with low IQ, the prison felt a philosophy course would not be suitable.

Therapy in Grendon takes the perspective that identity is shaped by social interaction and that learning is a social experience (Genders & Players 1995). As such, therapy was delivered through groups. Within these group sessions, community members explored the reasons for established behaviour patterns, with a focus on those behaviours deemed anti-social (*ibid.*). Three of these sessions were conducted in small groups (of around 8 people plus one member of staff acting as therapist/facilitator) focussed on historical exploration, clarification and reconstruction of past behaviours (Morris, 2001, p. 90);

“[In therapy] we bring a subject... ‘this is the way I saw what happened in committing my offence.’ So, you tell people a, kind of, version of events or something. And they [other group members] explore and they bring what they think and it helps you to understand things from a different perspective. It helps you see things what you may not have seen.”

(John, Grendon)

Common themes addressed in these therapy sessions included self-esteem, identity, personal relationships, expression and control of feelings, interpersonal conflict and personal responsibility (Genders & Player, 1995).

The other two weekly group therapy sessions consisted of whole-wing meetings. I attended a session on each participating wing, three taking the form of wing business and one a therapeutic session. The wing business meetings all took the same form. All members of the community – staff and prisoners – attended and arranged themselves in a circle sitting around the edge of the room with staff sitting among the prisoners. The prisoners were headed up by a chair and vice-chair who outlined the order of business, facilitated discussion, and oversaw votes. First were ‘positive commendations’ – from prisoners to staff and staff to prisoners – followed by requests for ‘backing’ to proceed with a desired activity, and finally ‘negative commitments’ which referred to breaches of community rules. These meetings formed the backbone of the democratic process with each meeting involving over a dozen votes on a variety of issues.

The most relevant aspect of these meetings for this research was the process of obtaining ‘backing.’ In Grendon, in order for a member to participate in any activity, prisoners needed to obtain backing from their small therapy group, their wing and the staff. During my observations, prisoners requested backings from the community to apply for prison jobs, attend a cultural event, and particular staff members to a family day. In each of these cases, the community required the individual concerned to explain their reasons for seeking backing. Before the community voted on whether they backed the activity, they would engage in a dialogue around the

individual's progress in therapy and general engagement in the prison in order to determine the suitability of the activity. Once discussion had drawn to a close, the chair then moved to a vote and the wing voted on whether to 'back' the individual for the job, request or activity.

In addition to weekly 'wing business' meetings, each community held a weekly, whole-wing therapeutic meeting. They followed a similar agenda to the whole wing meetings. However, the bulk of the meeting involved a therapeutic session focussing on a specific individual. During the session I observed, the individual recounted in detail their index offence, the events leading up to it, and their perception of why the offence happened. The wing community then proceeded to ask personal and probing questions about the participants' motivations, truthfulness and actions. The individual defended his account to fellow prisoners who pushed him to reveal the truth of what happened. As an observer, I was both surprised and impressed at how the community conducted itself and the expression 'you can't con a con' came to mind as prisoners drew on their own experiences to encourage the individual to be honest with them;

"This work [therapy] is amplified by the therapeutic environment, providing the client with forty "therapists" (fellow inmates) who carry on psychotherapy in between the formal groups; these fellow inmates are able to challenge and ferret out evasions and dissemblings by the client with a tenacity and vigour that far surpasses what therapists can muster. As the inmates say "You can't con a con"

(Morris, 2001, p. 91).

During my time in Grendon, it became apparent that the TC environment encouraged honest, open and reflective dialogue among members. Prisoners discussed issues of a personal nature; aired grievances; challenged each other's points of view; commented when members appeared to be inconsistent in their views and behaviour; and were comfortable in taking issue with perceived unfairness in the way the regime was being run. Most importantly, participants were skilled in disagreeing with one another respectfully. "*People are more open to discussion and discursive debates*" (John, Grendon). In observing these therapeutic sessions and wing meetings, it was clear that just as a CoPI is built on the premise of a Socratic dialogue, so too is therapy.

"Like I said on the group. I think we philosophise [in therapy]...we have a small group where...I've got a target. Say, like, I've got a negative relationship with my mum or had an abusive relationship with my girlfriend. I'll bring it in there and I'll say this is what happened – we used to do this and we'd take drugs...People would bring a subject to the group and it is sort of explored...I think the mind-set and the nature of this place, it sort of fits in with the [philosophy] group anyway...that doesn't happen in other prisons."

(John, Grendon)

This meant that in general, participants were ready, willing, and able, to engage in philosophical conversation from the outset.

It is, however, important to distinguish between philosophical use of Socratic dialogue and therapeutic use. In therapy, dialogue starts from, and is about, the prisoner as a person in a therapeutic environment. In philosophy, dialogue starts from, and is about, the prisoner as a person in a learning environment. Philosophy “*fits in well with the ethos of what we are trying to do here*” (Charlie, Grendon). However, where therapy can be specific and personal, philosophy is abstract and impersonal with discussions centred on the ideas of a particular philosopher or philosophy (Szifris, 2016). Participants understood that the purpose of the philosophy sessions was to “*exercise your brain*” (Samir, Grendon) or to discuss “*what is reality and what do we know to be absolutely true*” (Alex, Grendon). This meant that the atmosphere in a philosophical dialogue was much ‘lighter’ as the discussions were, in general, intended to enhance the participants’ knowledge. This stands in contrast to the focus of the discussions in therapy where participants are expected to discuss their past, their crimes, and their problems. This “entails the exploration and expression of painful material and disturbing emotions” (Greenwood, 2001, p. 48) with the purpose of addressing participants’ criminogenic needs (Shuker & Shine, 2010). In philosophy, the purpose is educational.

The key distinctions between therapy and philosophy are best discussed in the words of those who have participated in both. These ideas are elaborated in the findings and discussion sections of this chapter. Before moving onto the outcomes of the fieldwork, I provide a brief account of the data collection in Grendon and outline the characteristics of the participants from this prison.

4.3 Data collection and course delivery in Grendon

Data collection and course delivery followed the structure set out in the methodology chapter. However, the democratic nature of the TCs meant the course was subject to deliberation and approval from the prisoners. The communities engaged “a discussion on the therapeutic communities about the research” so that the “staff and residents can start to consider whether it would be useful to take part” (senior psychologist, Grendon). Due to the system of ‘backing’ discussed above, the research representatives emphasised the expectation that community

members would complete the programme. As such, I could not guarantee that they could withdraw at any point without consequences. We agreed that a clear distinction be made between the course and the research; I would ensure participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the research aspect of the programme but that withdrawal from the educational course would result in the normal community sanctions that come from withdrawal from any activity that had received the backing of the community.

Each wing followed the same broad schedule for recruitment:

1. Expressions of interest made to the relevant research representative.
2. List of prospective participants given to the point of contact on the wing (either the wing psychologist or the wing therapist).
3. Participants obtain backings from their group, wing communities and staff.

In total, 17 participants received backing (at least two from each wing). Of these, 12 completed the course, engaged in the data collection and are included in this study. Of the five who were unable to complete the course, one had other educational commitments that clashed with the philosophy class; one was transferred out of Grendon before participating in the course; one had received backing but was unable to start because the education department felt he had too many commitments; and two started the course but were transferred before completion. A further participant, although backed in principle, was required to deal with a variety of issues with his wing community before he could finalise backing from the community. It was agreed that he would be allowed to participate in the course a few weeks late and he began attendance in Week 5. In total, twelve participants completed the course and are included in this study.

Each session was held in the afternoon and lasted two and half hours with a fifteen-minute tea break. The prison assigned participants to either the Wednesday or the Thursday session but they were able to switch if the philosophy class clashed with other commitments. Participants attended, on average, 9 sessions with classes having around 5 or 6 attendees. Reasons for non-attendance included illness, other commitments (e.g. work or a meeting relating to their sentence), lock-downs and, very occasionally, difficult personal circumstances that meant participants did not feel they were able to engage in the class.

Some of the participants already knew each other; however many did not. Despite this, participants quickly understood the purpose and expectations of the class. Due to the therapeutic environment, although I led the discussion and moved the conversation forwards to ensure it remained philosophical, much of my time was spent engaging in the conversation as a co-inquirer. Throughout, positive and social discussion ensued, albeit in intellectually challenging discussions at times. I soon felt able to introduce more controversial topics including issues

around race, religion and human rights, which the participants (on the whole) approached in a thoughtful and reflective manner.

At this stage, it is important to note that although many of the participants had been in prison for some time, I worked with them when they were in a supportive environment that encouraged self-reflection and growth. Issues discussed in the previous chapter, such as separation and mistrust of Muslims, the hyper-masculine culture of maximum-security, and the need to develop a front for self-preservation were not overtly present in Grendon. For example, there were two Muslim prisoners among the participants in Grendon, one of whom had converted to Islam during his time in prison. However, they did not emphasise their Muslim identity in the way they presented themselves, and faith and religion only became part of the discussion when appropriate. There were few underlying tensions within the groups that I could detect and, in reflection of their behaviour in wing meetings, participants were open and honest in the dialogue.

As a group we were able to have some complex and in-depth philosophical discussions. The participants in Grendon emphasised the role of these discussions in broadening perspectives and opening their minds. Consequently, I began to organise the data around this theme. In the following section, I explore how the specific subject matter and the orientation of the programme towards abstract, impersonal concepts broadened the thinking of my participants.

4.4 Developing a more 'open mind'

“...the philosophical point of view is to stay open minded, to look at both ends of an argument, to look at both sides of a coin and try and work out what is the best outcome, if there is a best outcome.”

(Charlie, Grendon)

During post-participation interviews participants made reference to “*becoming more flexible in the way I think*” (Samir, Grendon), “*opening my eyes*” (Phil, Grendon) and “*thinking more openly*” (Michael, Grendon). The notion of having an ‘open mind’ is a familiar concept that conjures up ideas of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. It is, however, a somewhat ‘loose’ term that requires exploration. Although concepts of ‘openness’ have been defined elsewhere (see Costa & McCrae, 1992, for example) the definition of openness employed in this research is grounded in the data, thereby reflecting participants’ use of the term.

Analysis of interview data involved a system of open coding and thematic categorisation. Descriptive codes categorised under the theme of an ‘open mind’ included ‘becoming more thoughtful’, ‘examining what you believe in’, ‘hearing other peoples’ ideas’, ‘learning that you can change your opinion’, ‘philosophy’s relevance to the world’, ‘abstract thinking’, ‘learning to listen/question/evaluate’, and ‘thinking beyond offending behaviour’. Using these codes as a guide I defined an ‘open mind’ as follows;

Being willing to critically reflect on your own opinion; being able to listen to others and incorporate new knowledge into your own understanding of the world; to appreciate different ways of thinking; being willing to change your mind; taking account of the wider society and community of which you are a part.

This definition resonates with ‘integrative complexity’ employed by scholars interested in the psychology and sociology of religious extremism. Like the definition of open-mindedness provided here, integrative complexity refers to a person’s way of thinking. Savage (2011) describes someone with high integrative complexity as being able to;

“...differentiate different perspectives on an issue, to perceive other viewpoints, and to find some validity in them...being able to identify shared values between conflicting viewpoints, being able to find win/win solutions to opposing groups’ goals, or finding some context that makes sense of why reasonable people can maintain opposite views.”

(Savage, 2011, p. 141)

Having high integrative complexity includes the ability to differentiate (perceive multiple viewpoints), apply value pluralism (incorporate a wide array of values into moral reasoning), and to integrate (understand why others hold different viewpoints) (Liht & Savage, 2013). Openness is discussed in terms of ‘openness to change’, and the ability to engage in more complex thinking (Williams, 2013). This perspective of openness is often studied from a political psychology perspective and, as such, has been used in the study of radicalisation, religious extremism, and interventions that address these issues. Previous research has made links between complex thinking and interpersonal prompting (Hunsberger et al., 1994) and the role of dialogue (Pratt et al., 1992). Furthermore, valid and reliable methods of measuring integrative complexity have been developed (Williams, 2013) which could be utilised in future research around philosophy in prisons.

Beyond integrative complexity, other areas of research relate to openness. For example, in positive psychology, the idea of broadening mind-sets relates to building enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001). In other areas, openness is described as being “characterised by curiosity about the inner and outer world, an active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, and wide-

ranging interests.” (Romero et al., 2003, p. 66) with others stating that “openness represents a tendency to be intellectual, flexible, and broad-minded, and involves divergent thinking and unconventional attitudes” (Butrus & Witenberg, 2013, p. 291). By using the participants’ feedback to define openness, the concept maintains validity for this research project as it directly relates to the experience of engaging in a CoPI. The following section explores this in more detail.

4.4.1 *Open-mindedness: In their own words*

“[Philosophy is] looking at why I’m thinking the way I am and being able to realise that I am able to change me mind.” (Phil, Grendon)

Philosophy encourages participants to recognise that issues can be complex and multi-faceted.

“...there are a lot of options to things rather than just one solution”

(Charlie, Grendon).

Although many of the topics focussed on complex issues, the dialogue made the subject-matter accessible;

“When we actually discussed it, although I realised how complex it is, at the same time I realised you could get your head round it.”

(Samir, Grendon).

Philosophical dialogue encouraged openness by exposing participants to a variety of points of view. All twelve participants made some reference to their enjoyment of hearing new ideas and other people’s perspectives. Some discussed how looking *“at other philosophical ideas and different thinkers and the way they saw things”* (John, Grendon) improved their understanding of philosophy, providing access to an area of thought previously unknown. For others, *“the discussion, hearing people’s ideas and...what they’re saying.”* (Tom, Grendon) proved the most enjoyable aspect of the course. Participants understood the purpose of the dialogue was to *“...try and build on other people’s arguments...Instead of dismissing theirs, it’s about seeing what they’re saying and seeing if I can add to it.”* (Michael, Grendon).

“The ability to actually say ‘what did that person really mean when they say that?’”

(Tom, Grendon)

“Taking other people’s views, their perspective, not seeing things with tunnel vision, slowing down, keeping it logical, going away, calming down, playing out scenarios in your head, this

way, that way and then you come to a resolution. It enhances your thinking, it enhances knowledge.”

(Cady Grendon)

“... now I can sort of, as we were having a discussion or whatever, and we say something my mind is thinking why are they saying that? What’s that sort of angle kind of, what is this argument they are coming at and it allows me to ask more questions – why do you think that? Is it because of this?”

(Michael, Grendon)

Through participatory dialogue, ideas are considered, discussed, analysed, and developed. Participants learned the value of stepping back and taking a moment to consider the underlying principles of an opinion. Both the ideas of the philosophers and the contributions of the CoPI members created an environment of learning and inquiry that demonstrated the value of listening to what others have to say and being open to examining an opinion before accepting it as true.

Several participants reflected on how this might affect their behaviours in day-to-day life;

“...if it broadens people's thinking, then people might be able to understand their behaviour; how they interact with society...have a broader range of feelings, responsibilities, to what you do in life – to be aware more. A lot of people, from what I see, their thoughts don’t usually extend beyond one, two, three people. If you go moving out from the centre – a bit like a chess player – just as a casual player will only think one or two moves ahead, a good chess player ten, twelve moves ahead. A thoughtful person will think more moves ahead in life and probably have an awareness of their behaviour and the impact it has on other people. And that might improve decision-making and that is what this place [Grendon] is all about. There’s a direct link between listening to alternative ways of reaching decisions and having substance to reaching that decision.”

(Phil, Grendon)

Interviewer: Do you think the philosophy classes can help you in your rehabilitation?

“Yeah. Analysing situations, because that directly links to my index...thinking I’d read a situation right and whether I did or didn’t, I’m never going to know, but definitely looking at things, whether it’s an argument or a situation from all different angles and then trying to assess the most appropriate approach, the best approach. That’s probably the biggest impact.”

(Simon, Grendon)

They also developed insights and opinions on the ‘big’ questions in life around society, human rights, how to live and demonstrated an ability to reflect on their own thinking;

“An understanding that a “perfect” society arrived at by consensus wouldn’t be any more workable than all the others if the masses weren’t on board.”

(Neil, fieldwork notes, session 2)

“It seems that most often when people discuss rights it’s only their personal rights that are affected or of concern, i.e. my rights and not the rights of all people.”

(Tom, fieldwork notes, session 9)

Philosophical discussion allows participants to engage in Socratic dialogue on topics that are of interest to all people wishing to develop knowledge. As such, philosophical conversations tend to focus on topics that are abstract and impersonal rather than focussing on specific and personal events in the participant’s lives. The aim in philosophy is to *“explore philosophical theory”* (John, Grendon) and *“openly discuss the topic of a philosopher”* (Peter, Grendon) and, in doing this, participants become more open. However, this leads to the question of how; how does a CoPI contribute to broadening the perspective of the participants?

4.4.2 *How does philosophical conversation develop an open mind?*

“I understood that I am expected to put my point of view across in a way that allows me to get involved with the discussion”

(Matt, Grendon)

Interview data and fieldwork notes suggest that both the structure of the classes and the content of the discussions were contributing factors in the course impacting on developing more open minds. Here I provide more in-depth examples of philosophy sessions in Grendon to explore how the course structure worked in the context of a therapeutic environment and in what ways the structure, content and nature of the discussions related to the participants’ definitions, or informal descriptions, of open minds.²²

To illustrate how the philosophy course ‘works’ in relation to open minds, I focus first on the sessions on Descartes and Hume followed by the sessions on moral philosophy which covered Kant, Bentham and Mill. The sessions on Descartes and Hume mirrored each other in

²² In describing the content of these sessions, I relate various summaries of philosophers’ arguments and work. I developed these teaching materials using a range of websites and books. Appendix I provides a list of sources used to develop these ideas.

structure but focussed on opposing perspectives on knowledge and identity. I designed the stages of each session to draw participants through the philosopher's thinking. Both sessions followed the same structure, first asking 'How do we know something to be true?' In the case of Descartes I initially presented participants with a series of optical illusions and asked whether our senses are reliable sources of information. I followed this by introducing Descartes' famous 'evil demon' scenario.

Session 5, Stage 2, Grendon

Descartes analysed the basis of knowledge. His first observation was that our senses sometimes deceive us. He went on to ask 'how do I know I am not dreaming?' Taking this thought further he considered the following scenario:

Suppose there exists an evil demon, god-like in its power that is intent on deceiving you. This demon might place all sorts of ideas and experiences into your head. It might cause you to think you are surrounded by physical objects when in fact nothing exists apart from you and this malevolent being. How can you know anything for certain?

Descartes notes that even if there is such a demon, this demon cannot deceive him into believing that he, Descartes, exists, when he does not. Descartes hits upon 'the cogito'. Cogito ergo sum: I think therefore I am. Even if the demon deceives him, still Descartes continues to think, and if he thinks then he must exist.

To counter this, the session on Hume also began with the question of 'What is knowledge?' (see overleaf).

Session 6, Stage 1, Grendon

David Hume (1711-76) claimed that knowledge comes solely from our sensory experiences. Basic knowledge of the material world comes from observation. We are also able to have knowledge of concepts or ideas, the basis of which he claimed are in experiences. (This is known as empiricism)

Over the course of these two sessions, the participants engaged in conversation around the difference between knowledge and belief; the purpose of gaining new knowledge; what empirical knowledge means; how this relates to imagination and creativity and what it means

to have doubt. Participants grasped these ideas enthusiastically and took a great deal of interest in comparing “*what we believe, what we know exists, and all we can say is that we personally exist.*” (Alex, feedback form, session).

Session 5, Stage 3, Grendon

Descartes’ other great insight along this line is that, while he could imagine himself in some strange situation existing without a body, he could not imagine being a body without a mind. Therefore, his mind or consciousness is fundamental to who he is with the body being secondary. His assertion of ‘I think therefore I am’, led him to the belief that the thinking mind must be the fundamental essence of the human being. This led him to state that the mind and the body are entirely separate beings. A human being consists of an immaterial mind united, somehow, with a material body. The mind does the thinking, feeling, desiring, perceiving and so on. The body does the moving around. This is known as ‘dualism’.

Hume rejected the notion of there being a single unitary self. Instead, he claimed that we are a bundle of thoughts, experiences and perceptions. He came to this conclusion based on his own beliefs regarding knowledge. He did believe that introspection was a valid sensory experience but claimed that when examining the inner self it wasn’t possible to ‘catch sight of the soul’. All you see are thoughts and experiences running through your mind, therefore, that’s all the self is; a bundle of thoughts and experiences.

The final stage of Session 6 brought in a modern philosopher’s adaptation of Hume’s ideas introducing a third perspective on personal identity (see below).

Both of these sessions used the philosopher’s ideas of knowledge to explore their different perspectives on personal identity. Whilst Descartes believed in a distinction between the mind and the physical self (known as dualism), Hume conceptualised the self as a ‘bundle’ of thoughts and experiences. Both philosophy sessions introduced ideas of personal identity as a logical extension of the two philosophers’ perspectives on knowledge:

Session 6, Stage 3, Grendon

Arendt agreed somewhat with Hume's Bundle theory of the self. At the very least, she agreed that there is no fundamental essence of the self. Instead, she claimed that each individual is born with the freedom to choose how to act; each new birth is a new beginning and each person has the capacity to change the world. However, she also stated that we do not act in isolation and it is important that we are part of society. We need our actions to be observed and approved of by others. It is in action and speech that the individual discloses who they are. Identities are developed through narratives that emerge from actions of the individual. She claimed that an individual's identity is self-constructed through representation of the self in society. This constructed identity is constantly renegotiated and developed through the individual articulating and defending different conceptions of themselves.

"Looking at Descartes' theory seems a bit nuts now after working through Hume, Arendt and then Baginni. The mind and body can't be separate as the 'ego', sense of self etc., influences our identity and embodiment happens, identity is portrayed through the body and the body influences our mind, ego, sense of self, personality etc."

(John, Grendon).

Over the course of two philosophy sessions, participants engaged in conversation around the nature of knowledge, the essence of a human being and the development of a person's identity. The structure of the sessions started at first principles before leading the participants through the logical steps of the philosopher's argument. This meant participants not only reflected on their own point of view of personal identity, but also considered where these views come from: What do they believe knowledge is and what does that mean for their view on personal identity? Are they consistent and coherent in thinking through these ideas? Importantly, instead of asking the participants directly about their own views, they were asked to think about a *philosopher's* point of view. Providing two competing theories of knowledge and three ways of thinking about identity, provided participants with a space in which they could think about these ideas for themselves:

Both of these sessions were intellectually challenging, for them and for me. Participants challenged Arendt's notion that everyone was free to act; they debated the question of knowledge; they appreciated the competing arguments around identity, the soul and truth. By allowing two sessions to mirror each other, participants could see how each stage built on the

last. Participants began to develop skills in understanding the foundation of arguments, and the structure of the sessions allowed for an accessible introduction to complex philosophies;

“I think that a lot of thought processes and a lot of thinking, in my view, has gone into the whole scholar's work...I mean people don't just wake up one day and have an idea, a philosophical idea, they must have to work through that theory and kind of test it as well to some point.”

(Charlie, Grendon)

“...the way you structured it as well, to look at one thing and then to expand on it with a recent idea from an old idea or whatever. You know, you sort of progress through it.”

(John, Grendon)

This was the intention of these sessions – to carefully illustrate how philosophers build their arguments. By introducing ideas and premises in stages, participants had opportunity to reflect on each stage and consider what their own opinions were before progressing on to the next step in the philosopher's line of reasoning. Participants developed a strong understanding of the philosophical arguments being introduced because they themselves followed the same process, analysing and critiquing the arguments as the sessions progressed.

The two sessions on moral philosophy followed a different structure. In these two sessions we tackled the question of morality by looking at Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism and Kant's categorical imperative. Although these sessions were paired and offered competing philosophies for the foundation of moral actions, each session presented arguments for and against those particular philosophies within one session.

The first stage in discussing utilitarianism presented Bentham's consequentialism. This states that the extent to which an action is morally right or wrong is determined by its consequences, with decisions being made according to that which creates the most happiness overall. The second stage presented Mill's extension of utilitarianism and included a discussion around the notion of happiness and the greater good (see Appendix I for sources used to develop stimuli). Participants discussed questions including “What is happiness?” “What is pleasure?” “What is pain?” and “What is suffering?” On the whole, participants broadly agreed with the principles of utilitarianism, though with some reservations. However, the session concluded by employing a classic counter-example of utilitarianism known as ‘framing the innocent man’ (McCloskey, 1972);

Session 4, Stage 4, Grendon

Suppose a black person kills a white person in an area torn by racial strife. As a result there are daily riots and escalating levels of violence leading to increasing levels of unhappiness. As a visitor to the area you know you could secure the arrest of an innocent black person for the original crime simply by testifying against them. The riots would immediately stop and further bloodshed would be avoided – a much happier outcome. A utilitarian calculation suggests that morally, the right thing to do is to frame an innocent black person. But surely, that would be very wrong indeed, whatever the consequences might be for happiness overall?

The purpose of using such an extreme example was to ‘shock’ participants into appreciating how far philosophical arguments can be taken. Again, mirroring the structure of the session on utilitarianism, the session on Kant began by introducing his ideas around moral action before countering it with an extreme example. Kant’s categorical imperative states that we, as people, should act in a way that we would wish others to act. In contrast to the utilitarian perspective, Kant emphasised duty and principle in his arguments around moral action. The final stage of the discussion described an illustration of this perspective (provided by Kant himself).

Session 3, Stage 4, Full Sutton

There’s a knock at the door. You answer. It’s your best friend who looks pale, worried and out of breath. They tell you someone is chasing them, someone who wants to kill them. He’s got a knife. You let your friend in, and they run upstairs to hide. Moments later, there is yet another knock at the door. This time it is the would-be killer and he has a crazy look in his eyes. He wants to know where your friend is. Are they in the house? Are they hiding in the cupboard? Where are they? In fact, your friend is upstairs. But you tell a lie, you say they have gone to the park. Have you done the right thing?

According to Kant, you have not done the right thing. It is morally wrong to tell a lie and this is always the case. Therefore, it is morally wrong to lie to the would-be murderer. This is an example that Kant himself used and demonstrates the length to which he took his ‘categorical imperative’.

In both the sessions on Kant and utilitarianism, as the discussion progressed through each stage, they changed their minds in light of what they heard; turned over ideas; considered them from different angles and took account of a variety of factors and perspectives. The first half of each discussion focussed on the arguments of Kant, Bentham and Mill with participants raising objections and criticisms but ultimately recognising the value in each of the philosophies. However, the final two stages introduced key counter-arguments that often shocked the participants. As such, they developed more nuanced opinions;

“There are basic principles one must rely on to guide your life but consequences matter. You have to think about consequences as well because if you don’t, you can end up committing a large wrong because you don’t want to commit a minor wrong. Sometimes, the right thing to do is commit a small wrong in order to ensure a greater wrong does not occur.”

(Alex, Grendon)

The ideas of Kant and Mill encouraged participants to consider the fundamental principles upon which to base a moral framework for actions. For the participants, these ideas raised a multitude of questions – is it our intentions or our emotions that make something a moral act? Or is it the act itself that is inherently moral? Does morality depend primarily on consequences?

At the end of each of these sessions there was a buzz or energy in the room, and I felt the weight of heavy intellectual discussion. The environment of a CoPI provided opportunity for stimulating conversation around a variety of issues. Participants made contributions and formed opinions, received feedback from their peers and gained new knowledge as the sessions progressed. The following section discusses the participants’ reactions to these sessions outlining what they felt they gained from participation.

4.3.4 *Abstract conversations and personal realisations*

“The subjects, I’ve never in my life ever thought about... even the most famous questions, I think therefore I am and all of that lot. Actually knowing where that came from and the fact that even something that I believe in very strongly can be flipped within a sentence.”

(Phil, Grendon)

In feedback forms, post-participation interviews, and during delivery of the course, participants related the impact the philosophy course had had on their way of thinking. They discussed how the content of the material had encouraged them to reflect on the foundation of their opinions and beliefs; how the process of dialogue had developed their appreciation for hearing a wide range of views before settling on an opinion; and how the abstract and impersonal nature of the discussion gave them the freedom to disagree. This section provides an overview of the participants' perspective of the course.

"...nothing's just black and white, nothing's just straight forward, you have to like analyse it to, kind of, some degree to get a better understanding of it."

(Charlie, Grendon)

By ensuring that I presented different points of view, either within a session or across sessions, participants learned to appreciate nuanced arguments;

"...the way you were putting things together...it kind of made you think, even if you agree with one thing you end up disagreeing with another thing or agreeing with one thing at the end of the session ..."

(Samir, Grendon).

"There were a few times when I was sitting and listening to people put their argument forward, when I thought, it makes a lot more sense than what I was thinking. So I get clearer understanding of the arguments which were put forward."

(Simon, Grendon).

The nature of a CoPI encouraged open dialogue with opportunity to put forward ideas and gain responses. The course allowed participants the space to listen to each other and develop their own understanding of a topic;

"It's not just about the philosophy, it's about other people's perceptions and views... we all digest and analyse what other people have said and think, 'well that's actually quite good why didn't I think of that' or 'I can use that later on in life'"

(Peter, Grendon).

The CoPI pedagogy encouraged participants to "actually try to break it down" (Samir, Grendon) and think about *their* philosophy of, for example, moral action. What do they base their decisions on? How do we – or should we – decide what is right or wrong?

“I’ve been considering how consequences may not be the only considerations in a decision. The motive can also be a deciding factor but this can be mollified by the ‘road to hell is paved with good intentions’. Ultimately a balance between the critique of pure reason [Kant] and purely consequences [Bentham and Mill] based on decisions is what I favour”

(Neil, Session 6)

Although the participants do reflect on their own opinions, beliefs and ideas, they are asked to do so in the context of the ‘ought’ – what should we all be doing to make society work, how should people behave in general? Using the established ideas of Descartes, Hume, Kant and Mill, philosophy provided “*a more structured approach*” (Alex, Grendon) when thinking about issues of morality and identity. Instead of just asking ‘what is your morality?’ the stimulus asked ‘here’s what this person said, what do you think about that?’ This provided participants with access to ideas that they could use and implement in everyday life and develop an opinion on how *they* think things ought to be.

For some, these reflections were personal and relevant to their therapeutic work in Grendon;

“After taking part in this session, it made me think about my own life experiences, especially the early trauma I suffered as a child and how this has impacted on my life. When doing some work on my therapy group ‘The Ship of Theseus’ came part of my reasoning and influenced my thinking about letting go of the past, and whether I can. Will past experiences always plague me, have power over me?”

(Michael, Grendon).

The above quote indicates the relevance of abstract discussion around an ancient philosophical problem to an individual’s self-reflection. For this particular participant, the discussion around Theseus’ Ship helped him consider his own life experience and identity in a different way. For others, philosophical conversation encouraged them to think about their behaviour in the context of wider society;

“In philosophy you’re standing back a bit more and looking at how your behaviour fits in with other people’s behaviour and how it fits in structurally rather than tactically. It gives you a sense of perspective that you wouldn’t get from anything.”

(Tom, Grendon)

Many of the participants discussed how the classes provided an “*...opportunity to involve discussion in a non-adversarial arena.*” (Neil, Grendon). There was a freedom to disagree in the

class, and an emphasis on asking each other questions as a mode of exploring a topic, thereby developing people's ideas instead of trying to prove each other wrong.

The content of the course was also relevant to encouraging open discussion. An example of this came in Stage 4 of Session 10 on freedom of speech.

Session 10, Stage 4, Grendon:

Salman Rushdie famously said

“What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.”

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie wrote on topics that many people in Muslim countries found offensive. This resulted in a fatwa being issued and Rushdie going into hiding for nine years. He himself escaped harm but a translator and a bodyguard both died as a result. Further to this, several people died in the violent protests that resulted from publication of the books. This has led some to ask whether freedom of speech in a case such as this is really worth it.

Freedom of speech was introduced in Session 10 and, by this stage, participants had a clear understanding of the expectations of a CoPI. Participants were able to discuss Salman Rushdie in an open and, what I felt to be, positive manner. They focussed on the principles that this scenario presents instead of the politics that surrounded this controversial individual. Do we have the right to cause offence? Does a government have the right to ban a book? What is an appropriate reaction? What was the purpose of writing something that caused such offence? Are all topics up for debate or is it not appropriate to discuss this?

“They enjoyed it, everyone joined in. It was lively and animated. But it was intelligent and constructive, albeit a bit heated, it was still respectful.”

(Szifris, fieldwork notes, December 2014).

All but one of the participants engaged in a lively debate from the outset. Cady, a Muslim who had converted whilst in prison, initially said “*Nah, I'm not going to debate on that*” citing his religion as a basis for his refusal. However, he respectfully listened to the conversation and, towards the end, started to engage in the dialogue. I suspect he was encouraged by the full participation of another Muslim, Samir, in the group. The latter happened to be of Iranian de-

scent and offered a fascinating insight into this discussion. During his post-participation interview I asked Cady, who had converted to Islam whilst in prison, ‘Did any of the topics we covered particularly effect you?’

“Just the Salman Rushdie thing. For me, that was the only one, that was the only thing you know... A few weeks ago I would have [a] different thing to say, I would either have got up, walked out of class, not wanted to partake because of religious beliefs. I would shut down other people because I would’ve thought they were being derogatory or disrespectful to my religion. Whether that was because of my immaturity or masculinity, bravado, vulnerability I don’t know. Whereas now, I was more comfortable sitting in a class. I’m having open debate...about something which, in my mind, goes to show the level of maturity that I’m at now, compared to where I come from, that I can discuss the topic that...I find offensive. But I can be professional in a classroom.”

(Cady, Grendon)

It is important to note that Cady does not attribute this change to the philosophy classes – in all likelihood it is a direct consequence of being in a therapeutic community. However, the environment of a CoPI allowed Cady to be more open to discussing controversial topics with his peers. The discussion around Salman Rushdie gave Cady insight into how he had changed since arriving in Grendon. Similar to Michael’s use of the Ship of Theseus to reflect on his progress in therapy, Cady’s engagement in philosophy provided opportunity to reflect on his progress and growth.

The structure and content of the stimuli, in combination with the pedagogy of a CoPI, provided a space for personal exploration and abstract thinking. The sequential nature of the stimuli illustrated the structure of philosophical arguments and allowed time and space for participants to reflect on the foundations of arguments. Hearing a variety of perspectives – of philosophers and participants – encouraged participants to consider different perspectives and ways of thinking. This meant participants had the opportunity to reflect on their own views and opinion, leading some to gain insights into their own way of thinking and the progress they had made in Grendon. Participants were also clear on the role of philosophy in encouraging them to recognise their place in wider society; participants reflected on their behaviour, choices and opinions by taking account of what these mean for society as a whole.

Philosophy, like therapy, engages participants in an open dialogue. However, philosophy broadens participants’ perspectives by asking them to consider questions of identity, society and morality from the perspective of how we should all behave, or how society ought to be

structured. The following section now turns to the question of how adding this broader perspective relates to the therapeutic environment in Grendon.

4.5 Philosophy in Grendon

I have defined openness as the ability to defend your own position without animosity and having a willingness to think about other perspectives previously discounted or unconsidered. According to the participants in Grendon, engaging in a 12-week philosophical dialogue group contributed significantly to gaining broader perspectives and developing a more open mind. In the introduction to this chapter I highlighted the *similarities* between the dialogue in group therapy sessions and the dialogue in the philosophy classes. In this section, I highlight the *differences* between the two types of dialogue and outline why providing a space for open, impersonal conversation is important for those engaged in ‘heavy’ therapeutic work.

Philosophy focuses on the individual as a person who is part of society. Instead of asking them how they would behave, they are asked how we, as people and as members of society, ought to behave. This means they have to “*take a step back and think more widely about things.*” (Michael, Grendon). The focus of philosophy on the person rather than the prisoner was a new experience in prison for Neil;

“...prior to this philosophy course, all my understandings and enquiries have been [as] an offender in various environments. Now I can see some of my decisions being selfish, not taking other people into consideration, and actually linking it in with philosophy.”

(Neil, Grendon)

The participants valued the opportunity to move away from the label of “offender” and engage in abstract philosophical conversation. For example, through the work of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, the participants reflected on morality and moral action. Instead of “*looking at how you respond to things on a day to day basis, to this event, that event*” participants considered “*what about your philosophy of life has led you to behave in certain ways throughout your life?*” (Tom, Grendon). In philosophy, participants were encouraged to reflect on their philosophies of life, rather than specific situations;

“The ethos of a therapeutic community...[is] about exploring what you already know, trying to break it down and to get a bit of understanding. Exploring things that have led to a lot of decision making, some of your beliefs, some of your values, and I’ve actually realised that in [the philosophy] course...we were talking about beliefs, values and some of the things that have

led us to making certain decision based on what we believe...this is exactly what we do in the [therapy] group but from the philosophy thing, it just comes from a different angle.”

(Samir, Grendon)

I asked some participants directly about the use of the word “open-mindedness”;

Interviewer: With respect to the idea of being open-minded, do you think you have been able to get that from philosophy in a way that you haven’t been able to get from the therapy that you do?

“I wouldn’t say that. I would say that it’s like we just discussed, it’s enhanced that; kind of like reinforced it and kind of put a bit of whipped cream and sugar on top. It’s made it a little bit more appealing to go that way about things. It kind of reinforced it, to say, you know what, maybe you do need to kind of like look at things from further away before and let them hit you in the face”

(Charlie, Grendon)

As opposed to philosophy being ‘better’ or ‘more effective’ than therapy, it was complementary and enhancing;

“In the [therapeutic] group discussions we have, things are very intense and personal, whereas in the philosophy you tend not to bring in the personal as such. You tend to look at it from a much more constructive way, a much more distant way than you would in the discussion groups. It complements, I think it does complement it, I think it helps to give it perspective.”

(Tom, Grendon).

Importantly, philosophical discussions focus on people, as individuals, as members of society, thereby providing a space for thinking through an issue. The abstract nature of the discussion provided a different perspective, one of contemplation of the personal:

“It’s helped me look at things from different point of view, it helps you see both sides of an argument, it helps you see sometimes a bigger picture that you are looking at rather than yourself...there are many dimensions...something that might just seem too deep at the start may have lots of different aspects that I tap into and think about. ...[Philosophy’s] changed worlds innit, it’s changed ways of thinking in whole continents. So, if we can learn to kind of like...make that a microcosm, we could do that in out our lives personally.”

(Charlie, Grendon).

Although the participants emphasise that therapy is the major factor in the changes that they have experienced since being in Grendon, they are clear that philosophy has contributed to their thought processes;

“[Philosophy is] not a major factor – I think being in therapy is a major factor but it’s definitely had an impact and it’s definitely added a bit more momentum to it [therapy]. ...It’s sped things along a little bit and it’s given me the ideas of the people to go on and it’s got me more used to thinking about myself in a more analytic way.”

(Charlie, Grendon)

“The thing is, it’s useful because in Grendon, you tend to talk about your feelings more, that sort of thing. But in the philosophy group you’re more likely to end up talking about more abstract things than your feelings, rather than personal. Looking to and talking about things in the abstract can help you to actually look again at the personal from a different point of view.”

(Tom, Grendon)

In philosophy, this is achieved through dialogue that focussed on the general rather than the particular;

“With the philosophy thing, I think is more focussed on life...and not just one aspect of your life. I think you can take the stuff that you learn in your discussions and you think outside the box into all aspects of your life, not just your offending.”

(Matt, Grendon)

This focus – considering the general rather than the particular, the person as a member of a society rather than the offender who needs to be corrected, and on principles of moral action as opposed to how to behave in a given circumstance – is what provides the broader perspective. Philosophy develops open-mindedness by encouraging the individual to consider themselves and their place in the world through a philosophical lens.

The period of fieldwork in Grendon provided opportunity to explore the role of philosophy in developing participants’ thinking. This has built on the findings from Low Moss prison where participants discussed the philosophy as a means of accessing wider conversations in society that had previously seemed obscure (see Chapter 2). The pilot research also developed themes of community, coping and self-reflection when engaging in a CoPI. The following section explores these aspects of a CoPI in more detail.

4.6 Community, coping and self-understanding

Philosophy focuses on the participant as a whole person, a member of society, and a community. The question remains, though, why is philosophy important to prisoners in particular? Why is a class, such as the one under discussion here, relevant to their incarcerated lives and their future, either post-release or as they work their way through the system? Beyond philosophy's relevance to participants' ways of thinking, three further themes emerged from Grendon fieldwork: community, coping and identity. All three of these themes were touched upon in the findings in Low Moss Prison and feature heavily in the findings from Full Sutton. Here, I extend the theory around philosophy's role in community, coping and personal identity as a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of these themes in Full Sutton.

I delivered the philosophy course in the form of a *community* of philosophical inquiry that encouraged communal dialogue. I have emphasised the ease with which this community aspect of the course was established in Grendon, highlighting the similarities between therapy and CoPIs in their use of Socratic dialogue. However, the shared purpose of developing communities of inquiry was also of key importance. Toch (1980) stated that communities are characterised by face-to-face interactions, personal investment, shared assets, collaborative activity, solidarity and egalitarianism. He states that a community must provide "an accepting, reliable, and supportive milieu." (Toch 1980, p.10). Philosophy complemented the community aspirations of Grendon by providing a "*chance to meet different people and discuss things with people that I don't normally talk to.*" (Tom, Grendon). Some participants suggested philosophical dialogue classes could play a role in giving people the chance to be more "*involved*" (Charlie, Grendon) in Grendon's community and get people "*talking to a wider group of people.*" (Alex, Grendon). Participants developed "*a working friendship with other people in the class*" (Cady, Grendon) that helped them move beyond their initial judgements of other people;

Interviewer: Why didn't you interact before?

"Different wings, stereotypes views, opinions on both parties. So once we get into working environment, you work together, you build things, you build a bond and a trust and a relationship with a group that you worked with. I kind of think that I've gone away judging them differently. And I prejudged them and they've gone away judging me differently to have prejudged me because we've worked together on a topic."

(Cady, Grendon).

This goes beyond the classroom and onto the wings with participants often discussing the topics in between sessions and passing on what they learned to others;

“He weren’t in this jail when you were signing people up, it was a real shame. I’ve took all the pieces back in the class I’ve took them out to him and he’s read them all.”

(Phil, Grendon).

Face-to-face interactions within a community and an emphasis on respect and shared interests do not necessarily lead to individuals liking each other. Several members of the philosophy class did not get on, with specific individuals “clashing” (Phil, Grendon). However, due in part to the environment of Grendon, participants remained polite and respectful during conversation. The nature of philosophical dialogue, in particular, developed participants’ skills in learning how to argue and how to put their point across. For one participant, this translated into tolerance;

“It was about tolerance...he got under my skin, he really did. You have to use tolerance – learn to be tolerant – so the class wasn’t brought down to my level of anger or frustration.”

(Peter, Grendon)

He goes on to discuss how philosophy “helps me understand [him] and his behaviour.” Participants had the opportunity “to get to know guys...and to actually find out what their opinions and ideas were and how it, kinda, formulated the basis for...people’s beliefs.” (Charlie, Grendon).

In philosophy, the collaborative activity of the shared dialogue meant participants worked together to develop understanding of a topic and their own opinion, as well as the opinions of others. In doing this, they are not only able to understand themselves better, but also accept other people’s flaws;

“I think being able to sit with my own contradictions had helped me to be less frustrated with other people’s. Some people can say one thing, they can say this is the right thing to do and then not do it and do the wrong thing. I can sit with other people’s contradictions more and I am more comfortable being able to explain to other people about their contradictions.”

(Alex, Grendon)

Through such collaborative activity, participants developed a respect for other people’s opinions;

“What I’ve got [from philosophy] is every opinion, no matter how crazy you may think it is in your mind, it’s exactly that – it’s someone’s opinions. They’re entitled to that opinion whether

or not it fits that way of thinking about things or not. I think that's really important as well though, I think there's a way to say to people 'ok I understand where you are coming from, but I disagree'."

(Charlie, Grendon).

"So I suppose, doing philosophy, it gives you a chance to think about others, think about what others may be thinking, why they may be thinking that, why people may appear a certain way, it gives you more understanding...Prior to being on the course, I judged them and I was surprised to hear some of them talking and some of their ideas. It kind of shocked me, which I suppose has kind of helped me in not judging people, talking to people more, letting people talk, working with them, that collaborative kind of thing, so that's helped me a lot as well."

(Michael, Grendon)

Participants discussed how they might previously have judged another person as being "*not the sort of guy who would come down here [to education].*" (Phil, Grendon). However, philosophy seemed to be a 'leveller'; participants realised that, despite their different levels of educational qualifications, everyone had something worth saying. For those with university level education, they realised that those with little or no formal qualifications "*had positive, strong contribution[s] to make*" (Tom, Grendon);

"You've got like, you've got a masters student in there and you've got some with minimal skills, but we all manage to interact."

(John, Grendon).

Further to that, they collaborated and worked to ensure everybody was able to access the discussion;

"I think people were trying to bring people up...to be batting on the same pitch."

(Matt, Grendon).

In developing new social networks, based on a positive, pro-social premise and a shared experience of philosophical dialogue, participants could be helped in moving away from their established friendships;

"If certain people are away from their circle, then they become different people...it gives people the chance to grow as individuals, rather than as a collective where you feel like you have to be someone and you are really not and you never have been."

(Charlie, Grendon).

For example, one of the participants, an ex-gang member, discussed how participating in Grendon and the philosophy course was about re-indentifying himself as an individual rather than a member of his gang.

In general, providing opportunities for self-expression encouraged participants to reflect on how others received their ways of expressing themselves. Participants enjoyed the “*good, open debate, structured conversation*” (Neil, Grendon). Several participants mentioned “*being able to communicate*” and gaining “*good communication skills, listening skills*” (Michael, Grendon) as one of the key benefits of the course;

“I think I’m more thoughtful as far as social interactions go, I think a lot more about the content of what I am about to say and whether or not it is relevant...to kind of articulate myself a lot better and to think about how much water my argument actually holds, or my opinion actually holds, before I say it. I think in the philosophy class there were a couple of times where I mentioned a couple of things and people looked at me like I’d just fallen out the sky. So I thought, even though what I was saying was relevant, the way I put it was a little bit mis-understandable. So I could’ve structured my response a lot better. I think that’s one thing I got from it, to kind of work out what I’m saying and deliver what I’m saying to an intelligible standard so people actually get what I’m trying to say.”

(Charlie, Grendon)

“My intention always was for philosophy to give me the ability to speak in groups again...I was struggling in the wing and...just after I had started philosophy I actually used a wing meeting, an open wing meeting, to discuss me and my whole childhood leading up to the crime. So, I sort of got the confidence from the philosophy, speaking in philosophy to put my words, my thoughts into words and vocalize them rather than just sit there nodding my head, perhaps, or just looking at the floor. For me it really was a good turning point.”

(Peter, Grendon)

For this participant, the abstract, impersonal content of a philosophical conversation provided opportunity to practice the skills required in the more difficult and personal dialogue in group therapy. For the more long-standing members of Grendon’s therapeutic community the philosophy sessions provided opportunity to “*put some of my skills into practice*” (Samir, Grendon). For these members, the philosophy class had a much more moderate impact. For them, the intellectual activity was primarily enjoyable. It served as a novel diversion where they could get to know new people and engage in lively and interesting discussions with people they would not necessarily know in normal circumstances.

The collaborative nature of philosophical inquiry enhanced the sense of community among the participants. The pedagogy of a CoPI “*gives the guys a chance to be able to feed off each other*” (Charlie, Grendon) in order to build understanding. Participants enjoyed the unusual situation of having the freedom to disagree with each other as “*just sitting down having a debate with people, it’s something that you really miss in jail.*” (Phil, Grendon);

“Being able to actually talk about something that is sensitive to some more than others. Being able to, actually, be mature about it and have an open discussion without insulting anyone’s belief or, that was actually, to realise that this could be done, that was good.”

(Samir, Grendon)

The philosophy class provided a bit of ‘light relief’ from the heavy therapeutic work in Grendon. As a group, we had fun. Although some of the topics were complex and difficult to understand, the purpose of the sessions was simply to understand what Descartes meant when he said *cogito ergo sum*; to join in the 2,000 year old discussion around Theseus’ Ship and to learn about philosophy;

“I went in with my eyes wide shut, I didn’t really know at all what it was about, philosophy. So it was very intriguing for me to find out that there were people out there with these ideas that are actually, kinda like, the cornerstone of thought processes.”

(Charlie, Grendon).

Where therapy “entails the exploration and expression of painful material and disturbing emotions” (Greenwood, 2001, p. 48), philosophy entailed the exploration of other people’s ideas. There is no expectation of revealing personal details beyond what one might wish to disclose in the course of the discussion; no requirement to explain the past or delve into deeply personal topics. However, although the philosophy classes did not set out to encourage personal self-reflection, for many the philosophical content did encourage this;

Interviewer: What role do you think philosophy can play in Grendon?

“Application to identity. That is something that strongly links into this place because of the work that we do in our groups. [In Grendon] we don’t go in and look at the whole part of ourselves...[philosophy’s] given it a more structured approach. Particularly Hume’s identity, that really struck a chord with me, about being different points of people.”

(Alex, Grendon).

In therapy, although there is a focus on a person's past and attributes beyond the offending behaviour, the reasons for participating centre on the criminal activity of the individual. Philosophy on the other hand considers the whole person;

“What sort of person would I like to be? Again I would like to be putting the majority of people first but would I do that at my expense? At our family's expenses – would I protect a family member if I done something wrong? What would I do if someone paid money into me house, if someone was ready to kill them?...Just this simple thing about lying, telling lies. When is it okay, when is it not okay? They are just the sort of things you do automatically, the sort of thing you do spur of the moment as and when they come up. But now [having been in philosophy], I think it's slightly more aware of what you are doing. It just, if your thinking process was a yard wide, mine's about a yard and a bit now so it's just added more to the thought processes. Which is good.”

(Neil, Grendon).

It is clear that the skills required to philosophise are very similar to those required for therapy. Philosophy, however, is much more light-hearted; it is abstract and impersonal and therefore easier to engage with. Participants discussed the role philosophy might play in Grendon arguing that it could be complementary to therapy; initially to serve as an enjoyable, non-threatening way of learning the skills required to engage in therapy and then, later, as a means to practice those skills in a more educational setting and in life generally.

The community aspect of a CoPI had a clear impact on this group. The men widely discussed their pleasure at being able to participate in discussions and self-reflect in a safe environment. Philosophy provided an opportunity to develop positive, pro-social relationships that could serve to help people break away from their usual circle, to learn skills, to improve therapeutic engagement, and as a positive intellectual diversion from the heavy work of therapy.

4.7 Discussion: Philosophy in the context of therapy

Although there are clear similarities between therapeutic dialogue and philosophical dialogue, philosophy asks participants to think in a different way. In philosophy, participants discuss issues such as morality, the good life and identity in the abstract and impersonally. In doing this, philosophy lends itself to ‘opening minds’ and ‘broadening perspectives’. In making such claims, it is important to be clear that there is no evidence that philosophy is necessarily

‘better’ or ‘more effective’ or, indeed, ‘preferable’ to therapy. Instead, the evidence here is that philosophy might offer something different: complementary but distinct.

In therapy, dialogue is underpinned by the fact that the participants are in prison. Although the discussions may not always focus on criminal behaviours, therapeutic work in Grendon was conducted with an underlying understanding that the aim was to reduce criminal tendencies. As a result, therapy starts from the point of an offender with criminogenic tendencies and anti-social behaviours that require addressing. In philosophy, participants entered the dialogue as people, members of society, ready and willing to discuss what that means to them. By starting from this perspective, participants were able to reflect on themselves without needing to reflect on their offending behaviour, though this could, conceivably, be an outcome.

Philosophy literally means ‘a love of wisdom’ (Butler-Bowdon, 2013). Providing a forum of philosophical inquiry in Grendon enthused participants encouraging them to think about why they held an opinion, to listen to new ideas and learn alternative points of view. By doing this, they developed a more open-minded way of thinking. Through philosophical dialogue, participants learned how philosophical ideas are developed. The carefully planned stages of each session meant that participants were able to grasp complex ideas and begin to consider questions such as ‘What is morality?’ ‘What is knowledge?’ ‘What makes us who we are?’ These questions were posed in a dialogic forum. By presenting counter arguments or other ways of thinking about things, they were able to form their own views on these important questions.

Participants formed considered opinions as a result of the philosophical dialogue. During the course of discussion, participants developed an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of taking a particular standpoint and they became more willing and able to defend their own point of view. During the course of a philosophical inquiry, the participants’ points of view have been subjected to questioning, have been amended in light of new information, and have emerged having heard, and often incorporated, a range of opinions and points of view. Participants leave the course with an opinion on how society ought to be; on how people ought to behave – or if they do not, they were more open to having a conversation on the matter.

In pulling these strands together, providing these forums for conversation, philosophy caters to a perspective that participants suggest is omitted from other courses available in prisons. Rather than focussing on the prisoner as an offender, philosophical discussion focuses on how we, as people, as members of society and a community, should behave; on how we might want our society, in an ideal world, to be and how we, as individuals, play a role in achieving that.

Philosophy encouraged reflection on the ‘big’ questions in life. In so doing, the participant is asked to think beyond their immediate circumstances, to the wider perspective. By keeping it impersonal, I was able to broaden perspectives and open minds to new ways of thinking. Importantly, we conducted our philosophical dialogue in the context of a community. As such, participants were able to forge positive pro-social relationships. They got to know new people, not because they were in their therapeutic group, or have a cell next door, but because they had a shared experience in philosophy.

Initially, in Grendon, the philosophy classes were an intellectual diversion. Participants attended for the sake of attending – not to get time off their sentences, or to get a qualification. This was an intellectual exercise engaged in for its own sake. In some cases, bringing people together in such circumstances served to break down stereotypes; in others it served as means of equalising participants. Despite different personal and educational backgrounds, they were able to develop a mutual respect for one another. In particular, participants began to understand each other – where another person was coming from, and why they thought the way they did.

Finally, participants enjoyed the course. This might seem a trivial observation. However, the value of this in the context of a prison should not be overlooked. In Grendon, participants were engaged in difficult and complex therapeutic work. To provide a space in which they could engage in something similar – to either practice or learn skills – that is interesting, and enjoyable, provides an important break in this context. For some, the classes highlighted how far they had come; for others this served to help them engage more fully in therapy, and, for others still, learning of the teaching of philosophers served as an interesting framework in which to think about their therapeutic journey.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the therapeutic environment of Grendon. All participants were actively engaged in therapy during participation in this research and, as such, this chapter has explored and articulated the distinctions between Socratic dialogue in the therapeutic environment and Socratic dialogue in the philosophical environment. The research has demonstrated that philosophy can be complementary to therapy by providing a different perspective to that which therapy offers. In particular, where therapy engages the prisoner in specific and often personal dialogue with an aim to address criminogenic issues, philosophy engages the participant in abstract and impersonal dialogue with an aim of participants’ *learning*.

This chapter also provided an in-depth exploration of how philosophical dialogue can broaden perspectives and develop more open minds. CoPIs achieve this by exposing participants to different points of view, encouraging them to critically analyse their own thoughts and think beyond their own perspective. Both the structure and the content of the CoPIs are relevant with the dialogic nature of the class providing a space to articulate and test out personal ideas. Furthermore, the research in Grendon has demonstrated the role a CoPI might be able to play in engendering community and encouraging self-understanding.

Where Grendon allowed exploration of the way in which philosophical conversation encouraged a broader way of thinking, Full Sutton provided opportunity to consider how the community and social aspects of a CoPI develop trust and respect among participants providing opportunity for positive pro-social interaction. Here, I have begun to explore the role of philosophy in developing relations, community, and improving wellbeing among prisoners. The following chapter discusses these themes in more detail.

Chapter 5

Full Sutton: It's all about context

5.1 Introduction

Where Grendon was a story of philosophical exploration, Full Sutton was a story of perseverance. In Full Sutton, I had to work to establish trust and respect in the classroom, with participants challenging my skills at every turn. Despite the difficulties of trying to establish a safe, non-adversarial environment to discuss philosophical ideas, Full Sutton proved ultimately rewarding. The backdrop of a maximum-security prison allowed for exploration of different aspects of a CoPI from those explored in Grendon, and I draw here on the themes established in Chapter 3. Wellbeing, relationships and trust emerged at the heart of the data from Full Sutton. The divisive and suspicious atmosphere of Full Sutton meant the process of delivering the philosophy course focussed on developing the *community* aspect of a CoPI.

This chapter outlines the experience of and outcomes from delivering a 12-week philosophy course in Full Sutton. In Chapter 3, I focussed on the extant literature. Here, I am more explicit in my descriptions of Full Sutton and my account of what happened during the course of fieldwork. I then move on to a discussion of the findings of the research, providing an account of the mechanisms of a CoPI and an exploration of participants' perspectives. I discuss the need to develop trust and relationships in order for a community to emerge, and relate how I went about achieving this. I outline the relevance of this to prisoners' wellbeing before going on to discuss the way in which the CoPI provided opportunity for self-expression and positive social interaction. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of personal identity. I use the participants' own observations and comments to discuss the role of philosophy in developing a positive sense of self and how philosophical education contributes to an 'enabling' environment for a 'growth' identity.

5.2 HMP Full Sutton

The prison was a story of two halves – the mainstream prisoners held on ‘normal location’ and the vulnerable prisoners (VPs) held in the vulnerable prisoner unit (VPU). The two populations rarely met and, in many ways, the prison operated, and felt like, two separate communities co-existing but never interacting. The two halves differed in atmosphere and population, with issues of trust, hierarchies, relationships, and wellbeing taking different forms. Some of these differences seemed to be due to the nature of their specific populations (recall Chapter 3’s discussion of the compliant nature of the VP population) whilst others related to the complex hierarchies that prevailed in the estate (similar to the issues raised by Liebling et al., 2011). The result of these different atmospheres and circumstances were two distinct experiences of teaching philosophy in the prison. To understand this, and to investigate the themes raised in the interviews and fieldwork notes, I provide here a brief overview of Full Sutton prison as it was when I conducted my fieldwork.

Full Sutton is a public sector, high security prison in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Its operational capacity is 616 with 6 main wings (3 for mainstream and 3 for VPs), a close supervision centre (CSC), an induction wing and a drug treatment unit. The prisoners have sentences of more than 4 years, with 64% of the population serving life, and a further 28% serving 10 years or more (at the time of the 2013 Inspectorate Report). VPs made up around half the population accommodated in three separate wings. Around 60% of the VPs in Full Sutton had been convicted of sexually motivated crimes or crimes of a sexual nature. The report from HM Chief Inspector of Prison (2013) described the atmosphere in the prison as “calm”, with low levels of violence and drug use and a “range of good quality, well-managed purposeful activity available” (p. 5). The report uses terms such as ‘innovative’ and ‘effective’ to describe the regime structure and services on offer.

In 2012, the education department at HMP Full Sutton was praised for its range and quality of delivery. In 2014, an MQPL+ report also praised the positive attitude of staff towards educational opportunities, and highlighted prisoners’ praise for the work of the education department despite limited funding and reduced provision. During my time in the department, the education staff (along with the writer-in-residence and the library staff) demonstrated positive and enthusiastic attitudes towards prisoners’ learning. They also expressed their disappointment in the limited opportunity to deliver higher levels of education, supporting the observation by Liebling’s Cambridge team that “the withdrawal of support for more advanced qualifications [left] more able prisoners feeling stagnant.” (Liebling, et al., 2014). Due to changes in

funding, by the time I arrived, staff were only able to deliver courses up to Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE Grade C or above) and were clearly frustrated. The education department was doing all it could to maintain an interesting range of courses and, beyond basic numeracy and literacy, there was art, cookery, woodwork as well as a writer-in-residence who delivered book groups and held chess clubs.

There were mixed reports of staff-prisoner relationships, with some indication of ‘good’ relationships overall (see the Inspectorate Report 2012). Discipline staff, who maintained order and supervised movements and activities, indicated a lack of trust in the prisoners, and doubted that they could be rehabilitated, whilst prisoners had little faith in the official procedures in the prison (Liebling, et al., 2014). Black and minority ethnic prisoners, and Muslim prisoners, felt their treatment was worse than the treatment of white prisoners. Evidence suggested a ‘lack of cultural sensitivity’ with clear statistical evidence to support the perception of black prisoners regarding their treatment (Liebling et al., 2014). Relationships between Muslims and prison staff were described as ‘hostile’, with communal activities among Muslim prisoners being treated as ‘suspicious’ by staff. Racial issues in Full Sutton had also been affected by a hostage-taking incident in 2013 involving 3 Muslim prisoners taking a non-Muslim member of staff hostage (Liebling et al., 2016).

Despite the clear problems of trust between staff and prisoners, staff were, overall, supportive of my work and seemed to appreciate the importance of providing activity for prisoners. At the same time, I always felt under surveillance. The systems and structure of a maximum-security environment required staff to be on constant watch over the prisoners, with the risk-averse culture meaning that interactions between prisoners and staff were seen as a potential opportunity for prisoners to ‘groom’ staff.

The mainstream half of the prison was closer to the classic description of the prison environment discussed in Chapter 3. Men projected a macho ‘front’, prison officers watched the prisoners from a distance, and power, authority and distrust flowed through the prisoner society. Unsurprisingly, Liebling et al.’s (2011) descriptions of Whitemoor offered the most useful point of comparison due, in part, to their study being one of the few studies of a maximum-security environment reporting in a risk-averse, post-9/11, political climate. Full Sutton mainstream included overt and distinct religious groups, and, evident from the outset, the strained relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims formed the undercurrent of relationships in the prison.

On the whole, the mainstream consisted of more prisoners convicted of more violent offences, characterised by a divisive, macho culture. My experience echoed the notion of ‘hyper-masculinity’ described by Jewkes (2005). Some of the participants explicitly discussed the existence of different groups within the wings (particularly on the mainstream side) and the way in which power flowed among the prisoners. Although on the fringes of my experience in Full Sutton, the claims of power struggles and hierarchies became relevant to my delivery of the course, and go some way towards explaining some of the key differences in outcomes of the course for the two populations. I recorded my observations of this complex hierarchy in fieldwork notes and I developed my understanding of these issues by talking with other prison staff and consulting relevant literature.

The VPU had a more compliant population, with quiet and more unassuming prisoners. I observed that VPs, particularly sex offenders, often behaved as though they were attempting to shrink into the shadows and stay under the radar. Despite their outward compliance, the nature of their crimes led to suspicions among staff around grooming and manipulation. When commenting to a member of education staff on the co-operative nature of the VPs, compared to the mainstream, it was quickly pointed out that they were “much more manipulative though” with staff stating that they would much prefer to work with the mainstream because at least “you know where you stand” (education staff member).

Prisoners and staff also casually discussed power and forced conversions to Islam, with propaganda and misinformation circulating about different religious groups within the prison. The Chaplains (which included both Imams and Christian ministers) openly discussed the difficulties of working in Full Sutton and their experience largely reflected my own. The Imam revealed how some members of the Muslim population’s interpretation of scriptures differed from his teachings. However, the prisoners would not raise this with him but, instead, returned to their wings to discuss their issues with his interpretations among themselves. This meant he had difficulty openly challenging alternative interpretations.

Non-conventional interpretations of scriptures were not limited to the mainstream Muslim population. A member of the VP philosophy group brought a series of pamphlets to my attention circulated on the wings by a number of Christians. These pamphlets outlined the ‘lie of evolution’ and, to my mind, constituted misinformation and propaganda. On one occasion, when discussing the idea of a philosophy group for the over-60’s with one of my participants whilst in his workshop, a prisoner said that he was not interested in the teachings of philosophers because, as he understood it, “philosophers are largely Godless people”.

In this section, I have highlighted some of the political and religious issues circulating in the environment of Full Sutton. Before moving on to the findings of this course, I provide an overview of the particular participants in Full Sutton and the methods of data collection. The following section discusses attendance, recruitment, delivery and data collection.

5.3 Participation and recruitment

Attendance varied between the two groups. Among the VPs, attendance remained stable with 5/6 attending all 12 sessions and the 6th member of the group being transferred after attending 7 sessions. Among the mainstream prisoners, attendance fluctuated. The volatile nature of the philosophy class, and three participants walking out of a session half way through (discussed below), severely limited the number of participants from the mainstream wings in the first few weeks. However, I took a more flexible approach to attendance, allowing prisoners to ‘sit in’ on the philosophy class (with permission of their teachers) if they showed an interest. Among the mainstream, half those who completed the course came to attend in this manner, with the other half signing up prior to attendance.

For those who did not just ‘wander in’ to see what was going on, attending the course involved a process within the prison of application and acceptance into the classroom. A staff member advertised the course around the prison with posters and, I discovered later, the writer-in-residence – who attended the philosophy sessions with the mainstream prisoners – had encouraged many of those who attended to sign up. For these prisoners, having applied, a variety of checks took place: the education department checked whether the course would affect the prisoners’ learning plans; security checked that the applicants were ‘safe’ to be in a room together and with me; and the prison checked that the participants were free to be in the classroom at the time specified. If the individual prisoner ‘passed’ all of these checks, they could join the class list.

Initially, I had a class list of 18 prisoners, 9 of whom went on to complete the course. A further three participants joined the course halfway through having taken an interest from hearing about it around the prison. This meant that in total 12 prisoners completed the course (6 mainstream and 6 VPs) and 9 prisoners ‘dropped out’. However, only one of these nine attended any of the sessions with the other 8 dropping out between recruitment and the start of the course. Most of those who did not turn up when the course commenced had completed the pre-participation interviews (leading me to wonder whether it was something I had said). However, on further investigation I found one had decided against participation due to concerns

around the impact it might have on appealing his conviction, and another chose not to participate because he felt philosophy might involve learning things that went against his Islamic beliefs. Sadly, one of the prisoners in the VPU had a heart attack and passed away between interview and the start of the course, whilst another VP did not attend without providing explanation. In the mainstream, two decided they wanted to stay in cookery and two were sent to another prison. The final participant to 'drop out' attended three and a half sessions, walking out of the fourth after an altercation with one of the other participants and what I consider to have been my mishandling of the situation. Unlike two others who walked out of a session, he did not return.

In addition to the 12 men who took part in the research and the course, several others attended a few philosophy sessions on an ad hoc basis. All of these men came from the mainstream side of the prison. Within a couple of weeks of the course running, several men enquired about attending the course. Due to low numbers, and having checked with security staff in education and the other participants in the group, I allowed several of these men to sit in on a philosophy session. In total, 10 men passed through the mainstream philosophy classroom over the course of delivery with 6 engaging fully in the research. Although there was a core to the group from the outset, others came and went, which meant the classes varied in conversation and atmosphere week to week.

The 12 participants who took part in the research are included in the following statistics (6 from the mainstream population and 6 from the VP population). Despite the small number of participants, both of the classes were ethnically and religiously diverse. Ethnically, 5 described themselves as 'white', 1 as black, 3 as dual heritage/mixed race, 1 as Asian and 2 as 'other'. In terms of their religions, 3 of the participants were Muslims, 3 had no faith or were atheist, 4 were Catholic/Christian, 1 was Buddhist and 1 was 'spiritualist'. Cultural diversity ensured a range of views was represented in both halves of the prison. For example, one of the participants among the VPs was Eastern European, highly educated and had been raised behind the Iron Curtain under the Soviet Union. A second participant, although raised in England, also had Eastern European roots, whilst a third had mixed-race heritage and had spent much of his adolescence in the United States. Several discussions were enriched by the breadth of the experiences of living in different cultures and societal structures.

The diversity in the group meant that a range of perspectives and ideas were represented in the discussion. However, due to the racial and religious tensions in the prison described above, it also meant that underlying issues between participants proved both difficult to understand and complex to mediate. Although I consciously avoided raising issues of religion or

God directly in my teaching materials, religious topics came up in the conversation as participants drew on their own life experiences to make sense of the philosophies being introduced. In the early stages, raising issues around religion and politics was often the catalyst for aggressive contributions and personal comments. However, as participants' understanding of my expectations and the purpose of the inquiry grew, discussions became more respectful and cooperative. This was hard work.

The diversity of the two groups in Full Sutton represented the diversity of the wider prison. Each of the philosophy classes became a microcosm of the issues that prevailed in the wider prison community. It meant I had a rare opportunity to bring together groups of people who, in other circumstances, may not have interacted or even actively avoided each other. However, such diversity also meant establishing a CoPI involved overcoming differences. The following section describes how this was achieved and relates what happened over the course of 12-weeks teaching in Full Sutton.

5.4 Course delivery

“It was great last week miss, really enjoyable, one of the best days I have ever had in prison.”

(Jonny, FS, mainstream, Week 1).

I am clearly tired, frustrated and a little worn out after this session.

(Szifris, session 1, mainstream, fieldwork notes).

To understand how a CoPI is relevant in a maximum-security environment characterised by distrust, division and poor relationships, it is important to understand what happened in the two classes. The development of the dialogue, the changing attitudes towards philosophical content, and the growing sense of community and shared experiences provided insight into how philosophical dialogue relates to the emerging outcomes. In this context, what happened in the philosophy classes provides the backdrop to understanding why philosophical dialogue and the techniques of a CoPI might be relevant to the wider issues of a prisoner society.

5.4.1 Developing community through contribution and collaboration

The experience of teaching in Full Sutton's two distinct communities highlighted the importance of trust and relationships in the successful delivery of a CoPI. Both halves of the

prison lacked a sense of community. A climate of distrust and a divided, oppressive atmosphere prevailed in Full Sutton. I draw primarily on Toch's (1980) ideas of community introduced in Chapter 4. He states that community means working together, having shared interests and personal investment. However, as I observed in Full Sutton, developing such principles takes on a distinct meaning when presence in a community is beyond the control of the individual.

The majority of participants had little experience of Socratic dialogue or collaborative conversation. As facilitator, I took an active role in managing discussion and emphasising the purpose and nature of philosophical dialogue. In doing this, I encouraged participants to listen to each other and explain their point of view in an articulate and succinct manner. Whereas in Grendon, philosophical dialogue came easily and the community ethos established reflected the wider prison community, in Full Sutton I had to use the basic principles of the CoPI pedagogy (discussed in Chapter 1) to establish the 'safe' space for dialogue. In such circumstances, the process of facilitation, along with the content of the material, became more relevant to the experience.

Among the mainstream population, early discussions were characterised by aggressive outbursts, confrontational dialogue and boisterous conversation. However, as the classes progressed, the nature of the challenge also changed. The mainstream class went from being personally challenging – with participants testing my views and skills as a facilitator – to being intellectually challenging – with participants questioning everyone's views and interrogating the subject at hand. Over time, participants' skills in dialogue improved as they began to listen to each other and engage in inquiry in a more co-operative and collaborative manner.

Unlike the VPs, who took some encouragement to engage, participants in the mainstream class were quick to offer an opinion and confident in participating. However, the conversation would take unpredictable, and sometimes confrontational, turns as participants expressed an opinion without listening to, or engaging with, the statement made by the previous contributor. Some participants were prone to aggressive outbursts, passionately stating their case without taking heed of the nuanced arguments under discussion, and demonstrating a clear lack of respect for their fellow participants. Some seemed to enjoy 'needling' others, undermining their statements and fostering discord. Power relations and masculine 'fronts' flowed through the conversation and I found myself in the middle of (or, more accurately, on the outside trying to find a way into) a battle for authority and intellectual superiority that I scarcely understood.

Standing in stark contrast to the atmosphere in the mainstream philosophy class, VPs engaged in calm and respectful dialogue from the outset. The class had a positive, co-operative

atmosphere with participants eager to comply and make a good impression. As with the mainstream prisoners, VPs engaged in the dialogue from the beginning. However, they required more specific encouragement to contribute. Initially, participants answered the questions I posed, when directed at them, and looked to me to find the ‘right’ answer. As they developed an understanding of what was expected of them, and the purpose of the discussions, the participants grew in confidence. The sessions became more lively and interactive with participants engaging with each other, challenging both their own and each other’s contributions.

Participants from both sides of the prison initially had difficulties in engaging with the broader philosophical questions the topics posed. The unpredictability of the conversation among the ‘mains’ in particular indicated inexperience in engaging in abstract thinking among some of the participants. To tackle these issues, I focussed on the purpose of the underlying philosophical conversation. I tried not to be drawn into specific or unrelated arguments (which sometimes proved difficult when participants proffered prejudiced and controversial views).

Week 2 involved a particularly tangential conversation which caused me to have a period of reflection on the ultimate purpose of the philosophy class. During the session in which participants discussed Plato’s Republic, I asked what it meant for a society to be ‘just’. In response, participants began to discuss issues around what a government can or cannot tell their people to do. However, within a couple of sentences, they had descended into a debate around whether it would be acceptable for a parent to smoke in a car with a child – a topic some distance away from the original question around how society ought to be structured. To address this, I reflected on my role as facilitator, returning to the fundamental principles of a CoPI. I reconstructed my role so that it involved a constant, careful method of posing questions in an attempt to draw the participants back to the stimuli and develop *philosophical* conversation. I asked questions such as ‘What does that example tell us about our identities as people?’ ‘What does that tell us about how to decide if something is right or wrong?’ ‘How would a utilitarian respond to that example?’ Drawing on the principles of Socratic dialogue techniques, through systematic questioning, I gradually encouraged participants to engage in philosophical conversation.

Over the course of the twelve sessions, in both groups, we made clear (albeit slow) progress towards a safe, non-adversarial dialogue. VPs became livelier and engaged in the conversation and we became more equal as a group of people (as opposed to them always looking to me for answers and confirmation of what they had said). In the mainstream, in the first few weeks I often stayed outside their adversarial and complex conversations, desperately trying to encourage them to engage in co-operative and respectful dialogue. Even in the final

two sessions, there were moments of volatility but, gradually, participants began to understand the process of philosophical dialogue, and of engaging in rational and calm discussions often involving controversial and personal topics.

In both groups, the CoPI served as a means of developing not only the dialogic skills of the participants, but the relationships between them. Over time, the ethos of a community began to emerge, with participants having a shared experience of philosophical exploration and developing a personal investment in the group (Toch, 1980). The mainstream group made clear progress towards more positive relations and a community atmosphere. Although in Weeks 10 and 11 my fieldwork notes still include comments on their ‘sniping’ and the need to remind participants of respectful discussion, there were some indications of a community atmosphere. It was not until Week 7 that there was clear indication that participants were learning from each other and beginning to respect the insights of their fellow participants.

Right at the start of the session Jonny said that he thought Martin’s points last week had been really interesting and he had gone away and written them down and thought about them and felt Martin had come up with some really good ideas.

(Szifris, session 7, mainstream, fieldwork notes).

By this stage, participants seemed to be laughing ‘with’ each other, as opposed to ‘at’ each other and contributions became less adversarial and more co-operative. There was even a development of a shared terminology that only those in the class would understand. In an early session, during a particularly tangential contribution by a fellow participant, one of the participants had pointed at his thumb and stated that “some questions are not worth considering” as we “may as well ponder the existence of our own thumbs.” (Tony, Full Sutton, mainstream). In later sessions, this became shorthand for contributions or tangents that were deemed irrelevant to the core questions. Participants would comment saying, “Well it’s the thumb argument again, isn’t it” or just pointing at their thumb. This not only highlights the development of a shared terminology but also indicates the growing support for philosophical conversation among the participants. By the end of the course, several of the participants had begun assisting with facilitation by respectfully encouraging others to précis their points and stay on topic.

In the CoPI, through emerging relationships and growing trust, participants established the ethos of a community; the CoPI provided a rare, safe-haven where participants had invested time and energy into a project with others. As the course progressed, evidence of such an

emerging 'community' became more common. The nature of the dialogue became more collaborative, the focus of the conversation more philosophical, and the interactions between participants more respectful.

However, a true CoPI involves *collaborative* exploration of an idea. This involves participants working together to develop knowledge and understanding of a particular concept. This is a key characteristic of the community aspect of a CoPI and, although both groups progressed towards it, collaborative conversation was always somewhat lacking on both sides of the prison. Among the mainstream prisoners, although the discussions did become less ego-centric, adversarial and personal, it was rare that participants actually managed to work together to build understanding.²³ Among the VPs, there was more evidence of this. They were more willing to listen to each other and, as the course progressed, they became more skilled at questioning each other's statements.

5.4.2 *Fostering positive dialogue*

Fundamental to the development of philosophical dialogue within both groups was the participants' changing attitudes towards me. In the first few weeks, participants on both sides of the prison challenged my background and my beliefs. Some struggled with my admission of being a feminist ("*Does that mean you hate men, miss?*") whilst others aggressively challenged my lack of belief in God. This was more vociferous among the mainstream.

[Whilst pointing a finger at my face and openly mocking me] "*You're an atheist? Ha. Believe me, when you are on that plane, and it comes down, believe me, you will pray to God, you will pray to God.*"

Such challenges felt personal and challenged my fundamental sense of self. I had stated explicitly from the outset that I would not debate religion directly with them and, although when relevant religious beliefs and teachings could become part of the philosophical discussion, I would not persuade them that there is no God, if they would not attempt to persuade me of God's existence. In this, I was clear throughout. I responded to the challenge described above by saying "I won't question your beliefs if you won't question mine", highlighting the need for them to respect me for my lack of belief if they wished me to respect them for their faith. By maintaining this attitude, I demonstrated to the participants that my aim was not to get them to

²³ It should be noted that although this was achieved at points in Grendon, even in an established therapeutic community, this kind of sophisticated philosophical discussion could not be achieved in every discussion.

change their beliefs or opinions but instead to explore different ideas as a means of understanding the range of beliefs and opinions more fully.

The style of the challenges differed between the groups. Where the VPs asked questions in a polite, enquiring manner, the mainstream could often be aggressive, accusatory and confrontational. Although I did not always maintain a calm and professional manner (when one of the participants aggressively argued that homosexuality and paedophilia were the same, I lost my cool and stated outright that such an opinion was unacceptable, bluntly disagreeing with the point of view and failing to model philosophical, non-adversarial dialogue), I endeavoured to respond to these confrontations by being open and honest with my opinion, reminding the participants that this space was intended to be a safe environment.

In teaching the mainstream, the first half of the course felt like a battle. The lack of positivity meant that I left the prison at the end of each day feeling exhausted and emotionally drained. Although my supervisor supported me emotionally throughout my time in Full Sutton, I found these first few weeks difficult. For the first time in delivering philosophy in prisons, I was not enjoying the experience and fundamentally doubted my ability to establish a *Community of Philosophical Inquiry* among mainstream prisoners;

I found the session so upsetting and difficult that I am typing these notes two days later. I couldn't bring myself to dictate or write anything about it afterwards at all...this is hard work and very emotionally draining. Maybe running a class like this in a maximum-security prison just doesn't work, or maybe it needs more time to be established or maybe I need to rethink my materials, do things a bit differently and think more carefully on the topics that I am covering. This requires reflection.

(Szifris, session 4, mainstream, fieldwork notes).

Self-doubt in these early weeks was compounded by my mishandling of a couple of situations that had undermined individuals' (more fragile than I realised) egos, and failed to take into account the environment in which I was working. In total, three people walked out of the mainstream sessions half way through with one choosing not to return. However, the turning point came in Week 7;

This was a really nice session. For the first hour and half everyone did really well at having a really positive conversation.

(Szifris, session 7, mainstream, fieldwork notes).

Among the mainstream, by Week 7, the issues of self-doubt had disappeared and, although there were still issues around people failing to listen to each other and being disrespectful in

their contributions, the underlying atmosphere had changed. The classes became much more manageable and enjoyable. Participants seemed to gain a level of respect for each other, and me, and comments and personal attacks disappeared. By Week 11, I was feeling ‘supported’ by the participants in my endeavours to maintain a philosophical atmosphere, and the final two weeks involved some excellent philosophical conversation. I felt at the time, and still do, that the participants had somehow tested me and, without anyone explicitly saying anything, I had finally ‘passed.’ They relaxed, taking the classes for what they were meant to be – a place to engage in open, philosophical conversation. The negativity had gone, and the lack of trust in me, the process, or each other, dissipated.

Among the VPs there was also evidence of changing relations. Although always polite and respectful towards me, they were guarded in their opinion and there were indications that they, too, were suspicious of my motives. However, particularly after my open attitude towards sharing my own views and opinions around feminism, participants relaxed in my presence. Dialogue became open and often personal. In Week 9, we had a clear indication that we had developed a ‘safe space’ in which participants felt comfortable in airing their views. One of the participants openly discussed how uncomfortable he was with homosexuality despite the rest of the group clearly being accepting of it (another contrast to the mainstream group). He knew we would all disagree with his point of view but proceeded to explain his standpoint and why he felt the way he did. The group accepted this view without judgement and discussed with him the reasons why they disagreed. A safe, comradely conversation ensued, free of accusation or insult, instead characterised by reflective input and careful choice of language.

Although work with the mainstream was particularly difficult, the battle (and, at times, it felt like a battle) that I had to develop a CoPI meant more to me than the work with the other groups. As a group, we had overcome the complex characteristics of the participants, the division between some of the men, and had discussed difficult and sometimes controversial philosophical ideas. Although the mainstream were made up of two Muslim TACT prisoners, an aggressive anti-religious individual, a Muslim convert, a Catholic and a ‘spiritualist’ career criminal plus me – a liberal, left-wing, feminist, pro-LGBT, pro-choice, non-religious female – we eventually found some common ground. As a non-participant prisoner on one of the wings said to me *“They used to come back from philosophy separately, but now they come back together, like a unit. You have done something here.”* In the following section, I discuss trust in more detail.

5.5 Trust

Understanding the interactions within the philosophy classroom proved complex to understand. As such, I occasionally sought the advice of the Chaplaincy and teachers in the prison, discussed my experience at length with my supervisor, and returned to the prison sociology literature discussed in Chapter 3, which could now be read in light of personal experience. Rather than having a theoretical understanding of how prison culture encourages hyper-masculine fronts and aggressive macho culture (and having seen it only in Louis Theroux documentaries and fictional TV programmes) I had now seen it first-hand. Not only that, I had sat in the middle of it, attempting to encourage a group of men – including some hyper-masculine, macho characters alongside some of the more pious, calm, and careful Muslim prisoners – to sit in a circle and discuss Kant’s categorical imperative and Plato’s notion of Philosopher Kings in a calm and sensible manner. There were moments of surrealism in this situation where, if I thought too much about who these men had been or what they had done, I would wonder what I thought I was trying to do. In the midst of these complex hierarchies of power and fragile egos, I had to develop some form of collaborative working relationship with and among the participants. This began with, and developed through, the establishment of trust between us.

The issue of trust did not become apparent until I worked in Full Sutton. In hindsight, (and a little speculatively), the reason for this may be that Grendon’s therapeutic communities had mechanisms of establishing, developing and maintaining trust. As such, because trust existed in Grendon, I did not have to work to establish it within the CoPI. In Full Sutton, the divided, distrustful atmosphere both within the community of prisoners and in the interactions between prisoners and uniformed staff meant I had to work to build trust within the CoPI. To explore this issue, I draw on Liebling’s definition of trust as a “reliance on honesty, reliability, and good sense of a person; the level of responsibility or confidence invested in and experienced by individuals.” (Liebling, assisted by Arnold, 2004, p. 248).

Underpinned by issues of shame and guilt, issues of trust for the VPs related to their status as sex offenders and vulnerable prisoners. As discussed, VPs (and sex offenders in particular) are subject to particularly acute levels of social exclusion (see Cohen & Taylor, 1972, for example). Such feelings of rejection meant participants seemed guarded in their interactions and suspicious of my motives. The mainstream participants reflect the prisons literature, with their interactions being characterised by bravado, one-upmanship and competition (see Crewe, 2009, for example). They came from different socio-demographic groups in the prison and some of the more heated interactions, I was later informed by one of my participants, related

to specific ‘power-plays’ between prisoners. It was evident from the outset that these men did not respect each other and that I would have to earn their respect and trust if I was going to attempt to maintain order in the classroom.

The data highlighted three type of ‘trust-relationship’;

- trust by the prisoner-participants in me and my motivations,
- my trust of the prisoner-participants,
- trust between prisoner-participants.

Throughout delivery of the course, there were clear indications that teaching philosophy constituted a suspicious move in the context of Full Sutton prison. Issues of trust in my motivations, and me, although present in both populations, were particularly acute among the VPs. They seemed to be concerned about my judgment of them as people, with some, for example, not wishing to state their index offences. For the first few weeks, among the VPs, participants maintained a guarded attitude towards the discussions that belied their uncertainty regarding my place in the prison and my motives in the course. As a 30 year-old, smartly dressed female in the prison, I was easily mistaken for a prison psychologist (a group particularly distrusted in the prison environment) and participants (particularly the VPs) seemed to suspect that I might be passing on information to the governor or other areas of the prison. Early on, in some of the feedback forms, participants would make comments such as “This has really helped me reflect on my offence and my future” as though I had some role in prison and that their comments might form part of some record relevant to the sentences. My participants informed me that some prisoners had declined to apply because they were concerned about philosophy being ‘anti-religion’, ‘pagan’ or that it was really a ‘ruse’ to establish an accredited course relevant to conditions and parole.

Further to this, one participant pulled out of the programme because he was concerned that he would learn something that would be ‘contrary to his religious beliefs’. The explanation for this, not uncommon, attitude from Muslim prisoners only came during my feedback session some months after delivery of the course. One of my Muslim participants explained that his branch of Islam taught that philosophers between 6th and 11th centuries had “taken Muslims away from the teachings of the Prophet” and were therefore not to be trusted. Despite this, he and two fellow Muslims successfully completed the course and engaged enthusiastically in the

conversation, with several others coming in for odd session on an ad hoc basis.²⁴ Such perceptions of philosophy contributed to the prisoners' suspicions of me and my motives.

It was not until the eleventh week that I realised that the required level of trust worked in both directions. In Grendon, because the class was comfortable in the dialogic environment and used to dealing with controversial topics in a community setting, I had had confidence in their ability to discuss sensitive and controversial topics. Due to the difficulties in having a calm and controlled dialogue among the mainstream in Full Sutton, I had been quite sure that I would not discuss a topic such as human rights with this group of participants.²⁵ However, in Week 10, the class had engaged in an excellent dialogue around the role and purpose of art that had been deep, exploratory, considered and respectful. After this discussion, I decided that I could trust these participants to handle a potentially controversial discussion around rights. On reflection, it seemed that I had not only earned their trust, but they too had earned mine.

The issues of trust and respect underpinning the mainstream discussions related to the complex social world within the prison. The distrust of each other went far deeper than the suspicion that is part of the 'normal' prisoner experience. Issues among the mainstream related to the complex position of being a Muslim in British society and what has become known as the 'problem of Islam' in British prisons. The issue of trust among the mainstream population can be tracked through the fieldwork notes which, upon reflection post-delivery, provided a clear story of the development of trust over the period of the classes.

Week 9 represented a turning point in relations with mainstream prisoners. The session focussed on identity, with an aim of building on understanding of Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self. I started the session by asking participants to complete a 'Diamond Nine' task. This involved participants being given nine diamond-shaped pieces of paper, six of which had something already entered on them – culture, upbringing, genetics biology/DNA, social environment, experiences, memories – and three left blank to allow participants to add their own contributions. Participants were asked to consider what factors they felt had been most important in making them who they were today, and to rank them in a diamond shape. This meant they had to choose one for the top, two for the second row, three for the third and then two and one again for the least important factors. This is a common teaching tool, used to encourage learners

²⁴ The truth of his assertion is not relevant here. What is relevant is that within the prison, Muslim prisoners were particularly uncomfortable with the idea of philosophy.

²⁵ In my experience, discussing human rights with prisoners often becomes heated. This is perhaps because their rights have been stripped from them by the state and, within prisons, prisoners often have to argue for what they perceive to be their rights within the establishment. However, I did not investigate reasons for this formally and, as such, cannot be certain as to why human rights always represents a controversial topic to cover.

to consider their own point of view, and engage in a dialogue justifying their positioning of different pieces of the Diamond Nine. In both Grendon and the VP group in Full Sutton, this task had been very successful, with the participants quickly going about the task with enthusiasm. In fact, the VPs seemed to enjoy the opportunity to explain their background;

A very personal discussion today... Each took time to explain their rankings and seemed to use it as a time to explain who they are and tell the group a little about their background.

(Szifris, session 9, VPs, fieldwork notes).

However, the mainstream prisoners in Full Sutton were immediately suspicious of the task, stating that it was like “something you’d do in psychology”, and they seemed uncomfortable discussing personal issues with each other. I therefore explained the purpose of the exercise, reiterating my own motivations and background to reassure them that this was not an exercise intended to psychoanalyse or psychologise their way of thinking. After some reassurance participants agreed to take part in the task and the dialogue that ensued was engaging and positive.

On reflection, this incident represented an interesting turning point. On the one hand, it demonstrated participants’ scepticism and wariness about engaging in philosophical discussion. On the other, it demonstrated the progress we had made as a community in developing a level of trust in the process and purpose of the class. Whether they would have agreed to take part in the Diamond Nine exercise in an earlier session cannot be known, but the fact that they did can be taken as an indication of trust having developed.

Establishing trust in the motivations of the course could only be achieved over time. Through open, non-judgmental and fair treatment, participants came to realise that I had no ulterior motives; I did not wish to change their opinions or persuade them away from their religion and took no interest in their past deviance or criminal activities. The pedagogy of a CoPI allowed me to demonstrate that, as a teacher, my aim was to encourage critical and open conversation. I introduced conversational topics through the work of specific philosophers, some of whom I agreed with, whilst others went profoundly against my own views of the world. I demonstrated that my aim was to introduce a range of ideas and thinkers (not simply those that fitted with my own biased worldview) and, by being clear about my standpoint on each philosopher, I modelled my expectations of open, non-judgemental dialogue.

Confirming that I did not wish to persuade them to my way of thinking did not mean I shied away from challenging (what I perceived to be) unpalatable or controversial world views. Furthermore, by challenging their worldview I demonstrated they could equally challenge

mine. On the whole, I received their challenges calmly, responding openly and honestly and admitting when (to their great delight) one of them managed to ‘stump’ me with an insightful riposte to my contribution. By being open, honest and consistent in my views of the world, as well as having the humility to admit when a participants’ contribution had effectively challenged my own, participants developed trust in me.

In general, then, my experience of the course at Full Sutton was strongly underpinned by this suspicion of me, and of my motivation. On one hand, for VPs it was concern about being judged and ostracised. On the other, for the mainstream, it was much more closely entangled with the religious narrative within the prison. In both groups, I worked hard to develop trust and comfortable relationships between the participants and me.

As Liebling (2004) points out, trust is generated through relationships. By developing relationships, getting to know each other and understanding each other’s motivations and backgrounds, we learned to empathise with one another’s positions. Through such interactions, we can begin to establish trust as we begin to understand why someone behaved in a certain way or their reasons for holding a particular point of view. Working simultaneously, relationships can be built or formed by establishing a level of trust between two people. The dialogic nature of the philosophy class allowed participants the space to interact, and therefore get to know each other.

5.6 Relationships and community

The nature of social interaction in prison is underpinned and explained by the prisoner’s incarceration. Prisoners are not brought together on the basis of their shared interest in a particular type of music, sport or hobby, but because they have been convicted of a crime. One of the most powerful aspects of a CoPI (and education more generally) is the provision of an environment where the individual’s past, and reasons for imprisonment, are irrelevant. In Full Sutton, the teachers often did not know what their learners’ index offences were, and did not care. Their role, and mine, was to teach their students and improve skills in cookery, art, maths, literacy or philosophy. This meant learners enter the classroom on an equal footing – as people rather than prisoners, as learners rather than offenders – in an activity that revolved around intellectual inquiry as opposed to meeting targets and working on ‘criminogenic deficits.’

In post-participation interviews, participants in both groups discussed their enjoyment of the social aspect of the course. For the VPs, this seemed to be more about inclusion and acceptance whilst the mainstream discussed issues around building bridges, learning “*to be*

more tolerant” and to “*exercise more patience*” (Jason, mainstream) with their fellow participants. They enjoyed hearing other people’s views, recognised the need to be understanding of people whose views differed from their own and, importantly, the dialogue helped them recognise that not everybody thought the way they did. Part of this shared experience relied on participants recognising their own biases and intolerances.

Interviewer: So do you think you can apply what you’ve learned to your everyday life?

Martin (mainstream): *Yeah, of course.*

I: In what way?

M: *As in sometimes you’ve got to agree to disagree and keep it moving.*

I: ... Do you think that’s something that you weren’t able to do before the philosophy class?

M: *I could do it before, but now, like, sometimes it’s good to do certain things that make you experience it a bit more often, ‘cause then it gives you a bit of a reminder.*

“I think I’m pragmatically learning through these sessions ... learning more tolerance. Because for me, [another member of the group] really pushed my tolerance level at times...I have to broaden my horizon[s] even more, understand people more, why, who, how, feelings, all of them stuff, which I, kind of, closed off.”

(Jason, mainstream)

In general, the relationships between the participants improved over time. As they developed respect for, and trust in, each other, the relationships between them also improved. In the mainstream group, this was evident in that the dialogue became calmer and less volatile. Many of the earlier discussions were fraught with difficult dynamics and over-enthusiastic members of the group, but by Week 6 participants had turned a corner in their interactions with each other.

For the VPs, social interaction had a personal and profound impact on their psychological wellbeing. As discussed in Chapter 3, these prisoners suffer particularly acute levels of social exclusion (see Ievins & Crewe, 2015, Cohen & Taylor, 1972). The CoPI presented a space in which they could be “*normal...and be meself, not have to watch me tongue or anything*” (Paul, VP). They discussed finding “*people who are actually that deep...I’ve opened more possibilities of spending my time well...*” (Steven, VP). As with the mainstream, the participants in this group were intelligent and, for the most part, engaged in some form of self-

exploration, personal improvement or education outside of the philosophy classroom. The CoPI therefore gave participants the opportunity to meet other prisoners also interested in intellectual conversation, and provided the time and space to engage in abstract philosophical conversation that reminded them of their place in the world beyond their immediate environment.

Overall, the distrustful and divisive atmosphere in Full Sutton provided an interesting and informative context in which to explore the role of a CoPI in developing a community. It became apparent that achieving a CoPI meant developing positive relationships, respect and trust among participants. The progression of the participants became clear with the benefit of hindsight, and comprehensive and detailed fieldwork notes. The experience provided opportunity for in-depth exploration of the way in which a CoPI can prevail even in the face of difficult circumstances. The question to address now is, “How does the pedagogy of a CoPI achieve this?” I have discussed how I went back to the fundamental principles of a CoPI when I was struggling with the complex relations prevalent in a maximum-security environment. I now go on to discuss *how* these principles helped me develop trust, relationships and community within my philosophy course.

5.7 Dialogue and philosophical content

I have argued here that in establishing the community ethos of a CoPI participants build trust and develop positive relationships. However, the CoPI focuses on participants’ philosophical thinking and dialogue skills. By developing these, as opposed to explicitly encouraging relationships, community evolves naturally and at a pace suitable to the particular group. Trust cannot be forced. It develops over time. However, *through* philosophical thinking and practiced dialogue, participants are able to gain the skills that *allow* for trust and relationships to be built. This section explores how philosophy might achieve this.

Dialogic inquiry involves learning to listen to others, being able to express oneself clearly and succinctly, and being willing and open to new ideas and evolving opinions. Developing a community atmosphere goes hand in hand with developing philosophical thinking. This involves abstract thinking, analysing underlying principles, and interrogating conclusions. To understand the progress participants made in these areas, I use an example from the discussion in Session 2, which highlights the difficulties some of the participants had in early sessions in grasping abstract and theoretical concepts. This stimulus seeks to encourage participants to

consider how they would organise a fledgling society, what would they do to ensure the survival and safety of the shipwrecked people?

Session 2, Stage 1 stimulus

Imagine you are travelling across the Pacific Ocean 2,500 years ago (around the time of the Ancient Greeks). Your transport is a large wooden ship which has been travelling for weeks across a featureless sea. A darkly powerful storm whips up and rages for days. The storm eventually capsizes your ship ... The following morning the storm has subsided and you find that you have been washed up on a beach of a tropical island ... You discover ... there is plenty here for you to live on. When you have returned from your exploration of the island, you find that there are some other survivors from the wrecked ship. There are not many survivors, less than twenty. You gather together and discuss what you should do.

In the mainstream group, several participants initially focussed on the specific wording of the text. They reminded the group that it was set “2,500 years ago” trying to point out the facts of what life would have been like then, drawing on their knowledge of the geography of the Pacific Ocean and the history of migration and sea travel in the region. To encourage the participants to start thinking about the story in its abstract sense, I asked the participants to consider what the author’s motivations might have been for describing the scenario in such a way. Why did he set it 2,500 years ago? What did they think the author was asking the reader to consider? Eventually, after some discussion and questioning, we were able to come round to the idea that the story was a ‘scene setting’ exercise to help us consider the question of societal structure;

They were not so good about talking about the ‘ought’ [how things ought to be and how we ought to behave] they spent more time thinking about the reality and drawing on historical and current examples, rather than thinking about the ‘right’ way of doing things in principle.

(Szifris, session 2, mainstream, fieldwork notes).

Among the VPs, dialogue also focussed more on the practical skills required to survive on a desert island. As we progressed through the stages, participants began to discuss society, the need to ‘belong’, the role of vocation, and the importance of having a voice. However, their

opinions were often pre-conceptions that lacked nuance. They made sweeping statements: “You have it easy over here” (in reference to the UK benefits system); “You’re a feminist miss? Doesn’t that mean you hate men?” (in response to my acceptance of the label feminist upon questioning from one of the participants). Although participants were capable of having an intellectual discussion around different ideas and concepts, they were not used to looking deeply at the reasons behind a certain point of view. Particularly among the mainstream but also among the VPs, there was a constant need in those first few weeks to push them towards thinking about questions philosophically. The technique of Socratic questioning proved valuable in this context;

I had to try hard to keep coming back, pushing them to the philosophical point...The bigger, more abstract picture is much more difficult to get them to focus on, they focus on the minutiae, the detail. So I had to keep pushing them and say, ‘well I think the question that underpins this idea is, what is a just society?’ or ‘How do we judge whether a society is fair?’

(Szifris, session 2, fieldwork notes, mainstream).

Participants made clear progress in their philosophical thinking skills. In Chapter 1, I outlined what it means to ‘think philosophically’, highlighting the use of accurate and clear language (Thompson, 2003). Examining an issue with a structured *philosophical* approach involves interrogating questions and ideas systematically and openly (see Law, 2007 for example), and developing thinking through reflection and inquiry (Grayling, 1995). In early discussions, participants had struggled to discuss abstract or hypothetical ideas. In both groups, some participants achieved some philosophical dialogue even in the first session. However, it was short lived and sporadic with participants returning to more comfortable topics of conversation. During my time with the participants, philosophical dialogue became more common as in each session they developed more sophisticated and nuanced conversation than the session before.

Reflecting on my role as facilitator served as an indicator of the progress and development of philosophical thinking among the participants. In Grendon, I acted as a ‘co-inquirer’ from the outset, with the majority of discussion involving only passive facilitation as the group monitored themselves (see Chapter 4). This reflected the participants’ skills, not only in respectful group dialogue, but also their careful approach to a topic and their skills in reflecting on the thoughts and opinions of other members the group. In Full Sutton, I had to engage in active facilitation in both groups. Among the VPs this involved encouraging discussion by asking questions and gently pushing participants to interrogate the question more deeply and thoroughly. Among the mainstream group, I focussed on encouraging participants to listen to

each other, to reflect on their own point of view and develop their opinions in more subtle and nuanced ways. By Week 3, the VPs had begun to engage in more active dialogue and, by Week 5, we had achieved an excellent philosophical discussion where I felt able to participate as a co-inquirer, as opposed to facilitator. Among the mainstream, it was not until Week 7 that participants began expanding on philosophical points of view and exploring complex philosophical ideas. However, even at these later stages, I rarely relaxed, always feeling the need to engage in active facilitation. Characterised by a lack of fluidity in the conversations, mainstream participants struggled to work *together* to build understanding.

In the later weeks of the course, participants began to demonstrate a level of philosophical thinking previously missing from the dialogue. The method of a CoPI provided opportunity for participants to explore and understand philosophies at their own pace, and discuss the ideas in their own words. The facilitator can use open questioning techniques to help participants develop their understanding of the topics and the meanings behind the stimuli. In both groups, as participants grew in confidence, they began to put forward their own philosophical ideas, became more skilled at reflecting on material, and started to discuss how the philosophies related to themselves. Through the Socratic method, participants improved their own knowledge of philosophy, became more sophisticated in how they integrated their knowledge into their own ways of thinking and their lifestyles; and how they developed skills in assessing knowledge for accuracy, relevance, meaning and implication;

“I had a different direction of articulating it, so what I thought I knew I didn’t quite know. What I knew, I could, sort of, say in a better way.”

(Jonny, mainstream).

The key mechanism in the class was philosophical dialogue. The learning took place within social interaction that was centred on the material and topic at hand. Mainstream participants discussed both their enjoyment of this interaction and their frustration with the difficult dynamics of the class. They also discussed what they gained from this type of interaction – what they learned about themselves, other people, and society as a whole;

“Well, I think, because of the mechanics of the group...I met people there who I respect and would have plenty of time for, who I might just have said hello before...it made us as a group more positive towards each other.”

(Jonny, mainstream)

Among the mainstream, Session 7 provided the first clear indication that one participant had reflected on the philosophical content, and had developed his own perspective on what he had heard;

“When it comes to morality there are three levels – some things are clear cut, you don’t murder, you don’t steal. And that’s clear-cut. And then, some things are about experience – you learn from experience that certain things are right and wrong. And then, other things come from interpretation – it’s the way you interpret things that help you figure out what’s right and wrong.”

(Martin, mainstream).

By Session 7, participants had discussed various aspects of morality including the ideas of Kant, Bentham and Mill. This session constituted a turning point in the nature of philosophical dialogue. As participants’ knowledge of different philosophical ideas increased, their ability to offer a nuanced view improved;

“...we don’t have to be that extreme. As always, we can take the middle road and recognise that there is a value in thinking about our past to make sense of who we are today but it doesn’t mean we should do it all the time.”

(Peter, mainstream, session 10).

Through emphasis on philosophical conversation and careful facilitating, participants began to appreciate the importance of listening to each other. They learned that working together to understand what Kant, Descartes or Plato were saying was more fruitful than trying to outdo each other (mainstream) or simply saying what they thought I expected them to say (VPs).

In the mainstream group, in Week 11, participants were able to discuss Mill’s ideas on liberty, and appreciate the distinction between individual choice and what a government has the right to legislate upon. Mill’s Harm Principle took the participants around to the topic of the teachings of Islam,

We discussed how in Islam you are taught not to engage in behaviour that will harm yourself. They agreed on the point that this is your personal choice to follow that doctrine but also that there is a distinction between moral guidelines and legality – you might agree that this is a good rule to follow but it does not mean the government has the right to legislate on such matters. This is Mill’s principal point. It is only harm to others that matters.

(Szifris, session 11, fieldwork notes, mainstream).

Participants both understood the philosophy of Mill and the context in which it was meant. They appreciated the subtleties required in understanding and properly critiquing his philosophical point of view. Despite the complex religious backdrop of Full Sutton, by Week 11, participants engaged in thoughtful conversation involving religious content, accepting differences of opinion and reflecting on different contributions.

In the mainstream group, breaking down barriers between the prisoners proved a difficult and complex task. Over the course of delivery, I maintained a ‘no nonsense’ attitude whereby I was willing to engage in conversation and state my point of view regardless of whether it went against the grain of the conversation. I was also consistent in my insistence upon respect for one another’s opinions, allowing participants to speak, and encouraging an open and honest dialogue. This is not to say that I maintained a perfect attitude throughout – the volatile nature of the mainstream group and the difficult, ‘larger-than-life’ personalities I had to deal with meant that I often felt frustrated, struggled to maintain order and made errors in the way I handled some of the incidents. However, over the course of delivery, participants came to realise that my ultimate goal was to get them to think philosophically, to enjoy learning and to work together to improve our understanding of the ideas of the philosophers presented.

“This is what struck me...everyone had something to say and we was all on equal terms. It didn’t matter if someone was a little bit cleverer than the next...I might have been a little bit more efficient when I was making my point sometimes than maybe one or two others, but only ‘cause I was aware that that’s how you should be...what I was thinking...with all your knowledge you just argued at our level, and I don’t say that our level is below your level. What I’m trying to say to you is you argued at the same level, you argued in the same way, that’s what I mean... I kind of, felt it was, kind of, like that with everyone. Everyone was valid.”

(Jonny, mainstream)

I have stressed that a key part of developing a community atmosphere involves developing an environment where everyone felt like they *could* join in and that they were part of the community of inquiry. This had a humanising affect that involves developing a ‘safe’ space to discuss controversial topics. In theory, this meant participants were able to express their point of view without fear of personal insult or prejudices being formed.

Further to this, participants articulated the benefits of being in an educated circle. Through the constant dialogue with different people voicing their opinions, ideas, and perspectives on the material presented, participants developed a sense of being part of the community;

“In an educated circle...you can learn enough...And that was the first and foremost reason why I started...Then, seeing the subject matters as well as the diverse amount of thinking, ... people’s rationale and that, I thought yeah, I think I should stay here, I’ll definitely benefit by opening up my horizon, expressing my ideas, taking in new ideas. Because I think everybody takes ideas from everybody ... I think, [the] majority of people, they learn from other people, innit, and then they define themselves. So if I’m in an educated circle I think that’s gonna have a good reflection on me. Whereas if I was in a criminal circle, that’s gonna have a reflection on me. And to a certain extent, depending how strong the person is, but, yeah, it’s something that I’d like to always get engaged in, definite educational circles.”

(Jason, mainstream).

Despite their difficulties in grasping the method of philosophical inquiry, over time, participants developed an appreciation of the value of listening to each other. By getting to know each other, they began to understand one another’s perspectives more fully. In Week 10, I described mainstream discussions as “vibrant” and “lively” and in Week 11 I was excited and impressed by participants’ ability to discuss controversial and sensitive issues in a calm and controlled manner. In this late session, we discussed the question of Art and the participants and I enjoyed the discussion immensely. At the end of this session, the atmosphere in the classroom ‘buzzed’ with excitement as the participants stated that they had appreciated hearing each other’s views.

Chapter 3 highlighted the ways in which prisons have a damaging effect on prisoners and how this relates specifically to feelings of isolation and segregation. The following section discusses the relevance of a CoPI to the wellbeing of my participants.

5.8 Improved wellbeing and self-expression

In Chapter 3, I highlighted the issue of ‘psychological survival’ during imprisonment and the need for prisoners to engage in meaningful activities (see, in particular, Cohen & Taylor, 1927). I argued that if a prison is to have “psychologically healthy” prisoners (Liebling assisted by Arnold, 2004, p. 307) then provision of a space for positive, pro-social interaction is essential. This section explores the way in which provision of a philosophy class can promote wellbeing among the participants even – or perhaps especially – when those participants are confined to a maximum-security environment.

“I just think it gives people opportunity to do something different. ‘Cause to me, it’s, like, a little bit of a getaway, a little bit...And I think that’s needed sometimes.”

(Martin, mainstream)

“Flipping heck, there’s a definite need for it [intellectual stimulation]. We’d be all buggered without it, you know, like you say, I’m crying out for it...I’d rather have me education than me gym sessions, if I have something to do with all that. Oh, it’s very much just as important.”

(Paul, VP)

Participants described the dialogue as a ‘*break from the drudgery*’ or as a form of ‘*freedom*’ not found elsewhere in the prison. The participants, on both sides of the prison, appreciated being given the opportunity to be in an ‘*educated circle*’. They referred to the intellectual climate, as opposed to the levels of formal education, among the participants (as discussed, some had few or no qualifications). As with other forms of educational experience, in the classroom they could be, for a short time, ‘philosophers’ as opposed to ‘offenders’ or ‘prisoners’. Using Goffman’s (1969) terminology, in philosophy they could present a different ‘front’.

Participants found that the classes involved engaging and stimulating conversations that exercised their brains and made them think. They engaged in the course purely for pleasure – the classes would not affect their conditions or parole, they would not gain a qualification. Instead, they were engaging for the sake of engaging;

“Just, like I say, you know, having an intelligent conversation with people and learning other people’s views and other people’s points of view on life, and these unanswerable questions, isn’t it, that’s interesting me.”

(Harry, VP)

Interviewer: What did you personally get out of being in the class?

Paul (VP): *Entertainment’s the wrong word, just...*

I: I think it’s a good word.

P: *Freedom. Freedom and bit of...a bit of freshness. Stimulus, a break from the banality, the drudgery of everything.*

For some of the vulnerable prisoners (3/6), the opportunity to be defined as ‘learners’ and ‘philosophers’ as opposed to sex offenders was the most important aspect of the course. The profound gratefulness of the participants towards me for coming to the prison to deliver this course, and treating them with humanity, was surprising and unparalleled in the other participants. It seemed that the class meant a great deal to them and they all expressed sadness at its end;

“...normalise people and everything. Maybe it gets people thinking and everything. ...Positivity. A positive outlook, you know, and they have a voice. They do matter, they do care, as well, you know. Their thoughts are everything and all that....It gives me something to say to me wife when I ring up.”

(Paul, VP)

“Seriously, from...Monday night, there was anticipation of the class. Tuesday morning, up until twelve o'clock, you were outside the prison, because you were doing something that was...it's very, very seldom that you get time to be able to think on a higher level, if that makes sense.”

(Keith, VP)

In the context of a prison, where many people struggle to cope with the realities of prison life, providing something on which participants could focus their energy could have an impact on their wellbeing. In fact, one of the participants went as far as saying the content of some of the materials helped him *“sleep a bit better”* (Bruce, VP).

In an environment where a person's every comment can be subject to analysis, where their behaviour and associations can come under scrutiny, and autonomy stripped from them, freedom of expression is both rare and important. A CoPI provides a safe space for this to occur. Participants enjoyed feeling able to disagree without fear of recriminations; where they could be open and honest with their fellow participants, and where they trusted that the conversation would not be discussed beyond the classroom;

“You got the opportunity to express what you thought, even if it was wrong and everybody else thought it was wrong, it was a situation where you could do that openly and feel confident that what you were saying wasn't gonna be vilified, it wasn't gonna be repeated everywhere, and that's rare in here.”

(Keith, VP)

In an environment characterised by hierarchies based on masculinity and physical prowess, the ability to disagree with each other held particular significance for these participants. Unlike other areas of the prison, in the philosophy classroom, each participant's contribution had equal worth. Regardless of background or education, everyone was able to make a point that was relevant. The ability to express themselves, and have a *“platform”* for discussing their worldview, was rare in the lives of these men. Participants discussed becoming more articulate in expressing their opinions and more able to take a specific standpoint without alienating others;

“I wouldn’t say we all agreed on everything, but it was just nice to have a chat about things...and disagree with people and know that there’s no hard feelings and you could just talk to people and just get ideas, I think.”

(Dave, VP)

“The engagement with everybody, the ideas swimming around, and the fact that everybody’s idea is valid. That there was no well, no, ‘that’s wrong’ and ‘you shouldn’t be thinking that way.’ It was...even the more right wing, left wing views aren’t shattered down, but explored and opened up. And it allowed us to open up into different areas, where people were talking about how they felt personally about things, and we were able to challenge their negativity towards that. Loved that.”

(Keith, VP)

“But you also get...got out from people for good articulation, and other little skills like that, the socialising, being part of those mechanics in the group. But I thought you got from people, whether it was you or your simple idea, the mechanics of it works, is what I’m saying. There’s an efficiency there. Get something from people.”

(Jonny, mainstream)

For one of the participants, the interactive nature of a CoPI provided an insight into his own behaviour. This was particularly important for this participant because his passion often overrode his social skills. Although the participants recognised that his ‘heart was in right place’ they (and I) struggled throughout with his passionate outbursts that often disregarded what others said, failed to take account of previous comments, and could be interpreted as disrespectful. During the post-participation interview, I was stunned by the following comment;

“For me, learning to present my views in a more moderate fashion, because I realise I lose listeners by how I present my case, or my opinion. So for me it has been an education in seeking to understand how to point, how to put a point across without losing the audience, without being misunderstood. And that has been crucial for me, because I’m extremely poor in that area.”

(Tony, mainstream)

The ability to present oneself openly is an important skill in social interaction. Not only does it allow for better interpretation and understanding of other people, but it also makes it easier to understand how others are interpreting you. For this participant, this encouraged reflection

on how to say things more accurately. Part of the process of learning to articulate oneself better is developing a more sophisticated language for self-expression that can be used in daily life;

“What I’ve learned, I practice in daily life, yeah, definitely. Especially in prison, ‘cause there’s always problems, in prison, you know. Whether that’s people being rude to staff or staff being rude, or just people being inefficient, you know, in what they’re doing. So people, like, crying over something that they can’t change. You know, I try and teach them the Stoic method, you know, or maybe you need to write your own paper and stop moaning about it, you know. Because you’re moaning all the time, maybe it’s time to take some action, affirmative action.”

(Peter, mainstream).

Engaging in philosophical dialogue allowed for engagement in conversations previously inaccessible to them. Participants began to appreciate the role philosophy has played in developing ideas relevant to society today and understand what philosophers have said, and form their own opinions;

“I think, for me, yeah, it’s to learn people’s diverse thoughts. That was one of the main reasons why I came to the class, to see the diverse amount of thinking. I think generally, the subject, history, kind of, is the subject of my interest as well, yeah. I like to know about civilisation and the contribution and this sort of thought, yeah. And philosophy, to me it seems like philosophy’s contributed a lot to the betterment of humanity. I think I find modern philosophers more related to my life than classical philosophers, although they can have a lot of wisdom in their statements. Like that one you just mentioned, about Socrates. That’s gonna stay with me, and it’s always gonna resonate in anything I do, and it’s gonna always have that effect on me to ask questions and whys, hows, I can understand something better, you know. And I’m glad you did say that ‘cause I didn’t know that.”

(Jason, mainstream)

“I think I’ve learned about philosophy that I’d never heard of. If someone mentions their names now, I can say I’ve heard of them now. I can take it outside. I want to turn my life around. The positive things are learning how to treat people properly and what is a just society.... The Socrates thing. What makes you happy? I thought it was 75% inside, 25% outside and I thought everyone would just agree with me but others thought different. It comes from within – happiness comes from within yourself. I wondered why others thought differently about it”

(Tony, mainstream)

For prisoners, this latter point is particularly important. The participant was one of the youngest in the class and, when asked to describe different aspects of his personality had responded by

saying, “*What you mean, who I am? Because who I am is a criminal. That’s all there is.*” For those who have engaged in criminal activity most of their life, appreciating that there are different ways of thinking and living is important. For this participant, realising that there was more to him than this simple label, and being able to access philosophical conversations was particularly important.

Similar to Grendon, providing opportunity to discuss the ideas of philosophers allowed for self-expression around abstract and impersonal topics. These topics and conversations could have relevance of a deeply personal nature. However, the ‘safety’ of the conversation revolves around its abstract content. This provided a freedom of self-expression not often achieved in a prison environment. In Full Sutton, the atmosphere that prevailed in the general prison environment meant participants had to be on their guard, take care in what they said, be cautious of who they associated with and felt the constant, watchful gaze of the prison regime. Within the prisoner community, talk such as that which was had in the philosophy classroom could be dangerous on the wings. Where overt religious identities were displayed as a sign of authority, it is difficult to raise fundamental questions of how to live, morality, and personal identity.

In the philosophy classroom, as we developed the community atmosphere, these issues slowly dropped away. There, in that space, participants were all equal and opinions could be expressed. However, participants also had to accept that, in such an environment, all opinions were also open to scrutiny. Only when trust and relationships had been built were these participants able and willing to express themselves openly and accept critique of their opinions without feeling that it was a personal affront. Once this had been established and the premise of a CoPI understood, the participants enthusiastically engaged in personal self-expression.

Overall, the class constituted a rare opportunity to engage in an intellectual activity for the sake of interest and self-improvement. Providing a space in which prisoners are able to build on their strengths rather than ‘work on their deficits’ could have a profound impact on a prisoner’s frame of mind as they worked their way through the system. Some participants stated that programmes currently available to address ‘criminally-relevant deficits’ have often been useful and meaningful to them. However, building a positive self-image and an optimistic outlook among prisoners could be relevant to their engagement in the regime and their engagement with opportunities available.

5.9 Towards an enabling environment and a growth identity?

I now come to the overarching theme of this thesis – the role of philosophy in identity formation. Teaching philosophy in Full Sutton highlighted the role of philosophy in developing trust and relationships among participants which, in turn, relates to participants' wellbeing. The dialogic nature of the class allowed for pro-social interaction and positive self-expression. In Chapter 3, I introduced these themes in the context of the 'typical' prison environment, emphasising the debilitating effect of a disabling prison on a person's sense of self. Living in a constant state of distrust, in fear of the ever watchful eye of the prison officials, brings with it issues of isolation, wellbeing, and both mental and physical deterioration. Such an environment can lead to the development of a 'survival identity' often characterised as a hyper-masculine 'front' for personal protection. In Chapter 3, I also outlined what a 'growth identity' might look like. Furthermore, drawing on existing prison sociological literature, I discussed how an enabling environment might promote such an identity. A key part of this involves providing opportunities for prisoners to develop understanding of themselves, their lives, and their place in the world. In doing this, the prison allows space for the individual to develop and grow despite their incarceration. The findings demonstrate that a CoPI can contribute to this. The question for this section is 'How might a philosophy course encourage a growth identity and personal development in the context of Full Sutton?'

The interactive and community aspects of a CoPI allowed participants time to reflect on both the behaviour of others and themselves. Arendt (1958) said that we form our identities in a social world and adjust our behaviours according to how others react to them. This is what happens in a CoPI. Behaviours are emphasised and brought to the fore, peers react to one another – negatively and positively – and, if conversation is going to be fruitful, participants develop skills in presenting their case in a manner conducive to positive interaction. For some participants, this meant learning about their own behaviour, for others engaging in philosophical dialogue shone a light on their weak arguing skills or inappropriate behaviour. Open conversation provided participants with the opportunity to rationally discuss each other's points of view and have others reflect on their own. Such conversation and learning not only encouraged participants to reflect on appropriate behaviour, but also developed participants' self-worth. With a platform where others would listen to, and reflect upon, their contributions, they realised they had something worthwhile to contribute:

"Learning how to listen or how to pick up on people's behaviours. Knowing when to be rude to someone and when not to – knowing when being rude might get you beaten up, or when it

will teach someone. And asking the right questions; sometimes...I might ask a question, not because I have to understand, but because I know someone else is embarrassed to ask the same question."

(Peter, mainstream)

"It's helped me understand that the way I've been expressing myself, whatever the idea, however fruitful or non-fruitful it is, my attitude has pushed people away, the loudness, the pantomimic aggression, 'cause I'm not really aggressive...it's just pantomimic. And it's not worked."

(Tony, mainstream)

"I feel like I've opened up because I feel more confident with myself about what I stand for, and the philosophy sessions, for instance...Stoicism, where we only worry about...what we can control, I think that has affected me, and now I'm able to sleep a little bit better...I think maybe it was a confidence thing, and for me, I was listening to other people, you know, especially... 'cause there was a couple of people on the course that are quite outspoken, are quite confident with what they were saying, so I was quite happy sitting there and listening to them...But now, I think I've gained a little bit of confidence. I think that as the weeks went on, I was giving more, I was adding more to the conversation."

(Bruce, VP)

In contrast to these statements, one of the participants voiced some concerns. He discussed the problem with having an open way of thinking and a willingness to engage in questioning when in an unstable and potentially violent situation (such as prison) and he discussed the need to develop mental techniques to cope with the pains of imprisonment. This raises the question of the role of philosophy for those who have yet to develop a survival strategy in prison. In order for prisoners to participate, do they need to have a level of resilience to the environment in the first place? The participants in my philosophy class – those who had the confidence to sign up in the from the outset – included those intertwined with the prisoner hierarchy, those from educated and skilled backgrounds, and those who were trying to make the 'best' of their situation in prison. Further research would be required to determine whether the philosophy class would be suitable for those more vulnerable in the prison community.

In addition to the environment providing reflection on 'presentations of the self,' the CoPI was also relevant to the participants' personal philosophies. Philosophy involves 'thinking about thinking' (Honderich, 1995) and, engaging in philosophical conversation, encouraged participants to reflect on their own opinions and beliefs. In Full Sutton, participants discussed how they incorporated other people's (and the philosopher's) point of view into their

way of thinking. Philosophy seemed to enrich participants' philosophies of life, adding new dimensions, developing understanding and encourages reflection on the reasons behind a point of view. Through a constant expression of thoughts, and hearing different views on how we ought to live, participants reflected on how *they* lived.

Philosophy asks fundamental questions about actions, morality and identity. The social process and interaction within the class highlighted participants' own behaviours with respect to their interaction and contribution in the dialogic setting. They noticed traits about themselves – that they contribute more than others, or that they contribute less than they thought they would, or that their confidence grew over time – which encouraged them to reflect on their behaviour in the classroom and consider what it means for who they were;

“What I’m thinking is, if I’m talking to somebody and I’ve got my rigid views, and they say something that I think maybe gets me to wake up about them...wake up may be the wrong word, but snap out of my rigid views.”

(Dave, VP)

“Just exercising my brain. You know, like, asking questions, debating about it, and them [other participants] sometimes reanalysing what I thought, and then changing my own original thoughts. You know, like, little things like that, and interacting with other people. That’s about it, truthfully.”

(Martin, mainstream)

“I would say I have insights into things that really matter...It was the mechanics of the group, it was you with your silly little four questions, the simplicity of it.”

(Jonny, mainstream)

“I like the topics about how you should be in life – interesting how others say you should be.”

(Tony, mainstream)

“Because it questions your morals...it questions your integrity. It questions you basically. I mean, by putting these subjects and everything you, sort of, argue the toss and listen to other people’s point of view that what you might have thought of as being the wrong thing in the first place might be in question, basically, if you know what I mean.”

(Harry, VP)

“How do people perceive me? How do I...do I perceive myself in the right way?”

(Paul, VP).

Complementing this was the subject matter and materials of the course. As discussed in the previous chapter, several weeks focussed on theories of moral action, asking participants to consider how we, as people and members of society, *ought* to behave. Participants were explicit in discussing how this encouraged them to reflect on their own behaviour – past and present – and consider how certain behaviours might affect others around them.

“I’ve looked at my behaviour and I’ve introspected, and it’s made me question, what am I doing here? ...what is the purpose of my existence here? And I’ve looked back at my life and I’ve thought to myself right...I’ve just bobbed along with my actions, ... not followed people, as such, I’ve just tried to lead this life where you get a job and you settle down with someone, you have children, and it, you know, ‘cause that’s, like, acceptable, that’s, like, the norm. And I’ve just, kind of, like, followed it with actually no plans really.”

(Bruce, VP).

He went onto discuss how this reflection also helped him highlight positive traits in himself as well as negative;

“Here’s some things that I have come to realise since doing these sessions ...some of these traits I do have already. I have ambition, and I do have commitment. I’m not one of these that goes round and says ‘oh, I can do that,’ ...If I say I’m gonna do something I’ll do it...I find that that’s a good trait. But there’s other traits in me which I’ve come to understand in these philosophy groups, that...maybe sometimes I’ll say something and not understand how it can affect others...I think I’ll stand for something, you know, like violence against people, yet I will come down if someone upsets me, or something like that. So these philosophy sessions have...made me realise and come to understand that living a morally right life and sticking to these things that hopefully will make me...well, I can become...I don’t know, what’s the word, a man of integrity, maybe, or something like that.

What did I personally get? I think my confidence has grown. I think that I’ve started to look at myself and understand myself a lot more, and following more, and more introspection from each individual session, it’s given me a path to go down. Like I’ve said before, moral, right path, a path to find the truth. You know, goals, and I’ve looked at my life and I can see now where life’s a bit of a journey, it’s a bit of a path. There’s minefields, and there’s things to avoid, and things like that. And maybe on the outside I was quite materialistic and the fact that I thought that maybe accumulating wealth and materialistic things and, you know, like cars and motorbikes and stuff, that would give me ultimate happiness. But now I’ve started to look, I think ‘hang on a minute, no, no that’s not what life’s about.’ Life’s about helping people and going to work and sharing good times with people. It’s about memories and being with your

children and...discovering the world and discovering truths about things, and you know, like...opening your mind, exploring, like.”

(Bruce, VP)

Several of the participants were already on a path of self-exploration. Prison constituted a shock to them, having never thought they would find themselves there. Therefore, they used the time to understand how they got there, what it meant for who they were as people, and how they could move forward. Participants discussed how the philosophy classes encouraged and supported this self-exploration. For some, it helped them develop a better understanding of themselves and how others perceived them. As the philosophy class is an educational class focussing on development rather than deficit, participants identified positive attributes that they had either forgotten or not realised before.

5.10 Conclusion

Full Sutton provided an environment to ‘dig deep’ into the role of a CoPI in prisons. Where Grendon allowed for comparison of different types of Socratic dialogue and reflection on the content of discussion, Full Sutton allowed for closer scrutiny of the *process* of philosophical inquiry. In this chapter, I have provided a detailed description of how the philosophy course developed over time in the two halves of Full Sutton. In an environment characterised by division and distrust, Full Sutton provided opportunity to test the pedagogy of a CoPI in establishing community and co-operation among participants. The findings presented here demonstrate that providing a space for self-expression based on a shared experience of philosophical conversation can develop trust and relationships.

The research also demonstrates how a CoPI achieves this. By encouraging philosophical thinking, participants were given the opportunity to hear other people’s point of view and learn to appreciate what they can learn from each other. They developed skills in articulating themselves and critically reflecting on each other’s views without resorting to adversarial dialogue. The course built the participants’ confidence and provided a place where they were free to disagree.

The work in Full Sutton develops the thesis around a growth identity. It highlights the way in which providing a space for positive interaction allows prisoners opportunities to practice and develop alternative presentations of the self. Furthermore, the philosophical focus of the dialogue encouraged participants to engage in reflexive activity, providing insights into

themselves and others' ways of thinking. The following chapter takes this argument further, relating the findings from Full Sutton to those from Grendon, to produce a model for a growth identity in the context of prison.

Chapter 6

Philosophy and personal development

6.1 Introduction

This research constitutes the first in-depth study into the use of philosophical dialogue in the prison environment. The fieldwork has allowed for a comparison of philosophy education in two distinct environments – a therapeutic community (Grendon) and a maximum-security prison (Full Sutton). I have delivered two 12-week courses in philosophy, acting as a teacher within the education departments of the two participating prisons. The philosophy course took the form of a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI) which encourages *active* philosophising among participants. As the research progressed, common themes emerged and the two periods of fieldwork allowed for a systematic analysis of the role of philosophy in prison education. My findings have been enhanced and consolidated by prison sociology, desistance theory and CoPI pedagogy.

In addition to delivering the philosophy course, I also conducted the research. The dual-roles of teacher/researcher meant I drew on the ethnographic tradition of participant-observer (Schensul et al., 1999) conducting a primarily qualitative and exploratory piece of research (Bachman, 2007). I have employed Derek Layder's (1998) adaptive theory as the methodological framework that has allowed me to move between emergent theories and extant, relevant literature. This research contributes to prison education research by providing a deep and authentic description of philosophical teaching in prison and a reflexive account of its relevance to the lives of prisoner-participants.

I begin by outlining the underlying premise of my thesis and reiterating my perspective on identity. I then outline the methodological approach that I have taken before describing the development of a CoPI in Grendon and Full Sutton. I go onto discuss the four main themes in the research – wellbeing, trust, relationships, and open-mindedness. This provides the context

for the final thesis of this research – a model for personal development in the context of philosophy education in prison. I also articulate the possible mechanisms of the philosophy classroom which serves to illustrate the ways in which philosophy education can contribute to growth identities. I conclude the chapter by discussing the role of dialogue and philosophy in developing growth identities. Throughout this chapter, I also reflect on the limitations of the findings presented in this thesis and discuss potential ‘next steps’ for future research. Finally, I reflect on the contribution this thesis makes taking account of a range of intended audiences.

Before embarking on the final summary of findings, it is important to reiterate what this research has aimed to achieve. From the outset, I have emphasised that I have been working in a new and emerging field – that of philosophy education in prison. When I began, there was no research into philosophy education in prison and only limited studies of philosophy education more generally. I therefore started with a ‘blank slate’ necessitating an open, exploratory study. This research has been guided by my own subjective perspective passing, as it does, through the ‘interpretive filter’ of the researcher (Foster, 2006). The conclusions I have drawn from this perspective are therefore tentative and preliminary; the model this chapter offers requires refinement. However, the conclusions are also robust, grounded in systematically collected data and enhanced by established theories in criminology. The result is a provisional theory of the role of philosophy education in the personal development of prisoners.

6.2 Identity, identity formation and the ‘person in context’

This research introduced a community of philosophical inquiry (CoPI) to men who were in prison. The experience of delivering such an educational course was informed by, shaped through, and emerged from the people who engaged in the course and the environment in which the course was taking place. Through this, I have explored personal development through two sets of opposing concepts: ‘survival’ versus ‘growth’ identities, and ‘disabling’ versus ‘enabling’ environments. In this section, I define the concept of personal development reiterating the perspective on identity and change that I have taken throughout. I also provide some context for the way in which I use these terms before articulating how a ‘man in prison’ shapes the notion of a ‘person in context’.

The term ‘personal development’ has a variety of meanings in a variety of contexts. In this research, I use the term to refer to the process of growth an individual undertakes during their life course. As this research took place in the prison environment, I refer explicitly to Liebling and Arnold’s (2004) definition of personal development,

“The extent to which provision is made for prisoners to spend their time in a purposeful and constructive way, opportunities are available for self-development, and prisoners are enabled to develop their potential, gain a sense of direction, and prepare for release.”
(p. 318).

As such, I recognise personal development as being dependent on an environment that provides ‘purposeful and constructive’ activity but such that the individual can develop his or her own potential.

In the context of this research, and in line with use of the term in mental health (Turley, et al., 2013) the extent to which an environment is ‘enabling’ refers to its ability to support personal development. In this section I explore and reflect upon the prison environments in which I worked. With similar populations, but contrasting characters, Grendon and Full Sutton have formed my understanding of the prison context. Enriching, deepening and broadening this understanding, prison sociological texts have provided the foundation for understanding emerging themes.

A forthcoming paper from the Prison Research Centre, Cambridge demonstrates the important role of prison social climate in the rehabilitative efforts in prisons. Auty and Liebling’s (submitted) paper states:

“Moral climates in prison impact on the possibilities of survival, change and growth.”
(p. 3).

Their analysis constitutes a comprehensive statistical study of the relationship between prison social climate and post-release outcomes of recidivism. They conclude,

“Our findings seem to suggest that where prisoners feel safe, feel treated fairly, and where their relationships with staff are proactive, they feel able to make progress, or get onto a positive trajectory according to their own understanding of their condition.”
(p. 27).

Their findings therefore support the focus of this research in understanding the role of education in the personal development of prisoners *within* the context of their environment.

In reality, the prison experience involves a preoccupation with physical and psychological survival (Cohen & Taylor, 1972). It has been described as a ‘radical shattering’ of routine (Liebling, 1992) involving isolation from friends and family (Cohen & Taylor, 1972), loss of autonomy and agency (Sykes, 1958), loss of personal safety (Jewkes, 2005), and boredom and stagnation (O’Donnell, 2014). The prison environment is such that prisoners rarely feel like they can be themselves or relax. Instead, they employ strategies or game plans as a means of

orchestrating personal and psychological survival (Liebling, Arnold, & Straub, 2011, Crewe, 2009).

Broadly speaking, Grendon provided an enabling environment with prisoners provided the space to self-reflect, engage in self-improvement and participate in the wider prison community. Compared to the participants in Full Sutton, participants in Grendon had relatively open dispositions. This reflected the structured programme of a therapeutic community (Genders & Player, 1995). However, prisoners in Grendon were subject to different types of pressure with the expectations of the therapeutic community providing its own challenges. For example, prisoners were expected to engage with the therapeutic process if they were to maintain their place in the community (with some of my participants leaving Grendon due to non-compliance with community expectations). Therapeutic dialogue often “entails the exploration and expression of painful material and disturbing emotions” (Greenwood, 2001, p. 48). Although prisoners were more open and personable in their interactions, the environment did not necessarily lend itself to encouraging prisoners to ‘be themselves’. Instead, a different ‘front’ is played out in the therapeutic environment albeit one that is arguably more oriented towards growth.

Full Sutton, on the other hand, had a more *disabling* environment. In the mainstream half of the prison, a macho culture prevailed, with prisoners being boisterous and lively and staff maintaining distance. Among the VPs, the prisoners were quiet and unassuming: they looked to demonstrate compliance, while the staff saw manipulation and dishonesty in their behaviour. Across both halves of Full Sutton, prisoners suffered from boredom with little intellectual stimulation and a prison social climate characterised by division and distrust.

The disabling-enabling dichotomy is, in reality, a dimension. Although Grendon was, in general, more enabling than Full Sutton, this does not mean Grendon’s environment was enabling for all its residents. Four out of the twelve participants in my philosophy group left Grendon without completing their therapeutic journey. In particular, one participant chose to leave the therapeutic community as he did not feel the environment could help him progress. On the other hand, in Full Sutton, some of my participants preferred to stay in the maximum-security environment despite being potentially eligible to move to a lower category (and lower security) prison. Among my participants, for some of those on fixed term sentences, the need to progress within the prison system was not relevant²⁶ and the atmosphere of Full Sutton suited them. In

²⁶ For those on a fixed term sentence, the majority will be automatically released from prison after serving a specific number of years. However, those on life sentences can only be released from open conditions, i.e. when

Full Sutton they had their own cell, could cook their own food, and, as the prison was primarily made up of long-term prisoners, could ‘do their own time’ as they could find their ‘place’ in a reasonably stable prison population. However, their desire to stay may reflect more on a ‘fear of the unknown’ that moving to another prison would involve than it does on the prison social climate.

Underlying much of the discussion throughout this thesis has been a recognition of the interactive process of internal self-reflection and social presentations of the self. Identity formation, as defined in this thesis, is both a private endeavour and a public demonstration of the self. It is a lifelong process of personal development, conceptualised as an internal narrative of the self (in the tradition of Giddens and McAdams) that is constructed in public, presented and re-negotiated through reflection and feedback from others (Arendt, 1958). To discuss this perspective of identity in a way that is relevant to this research and the prison context, I have employed a distinction between identity formation based on ‘survival’ and one based on ‘growth’. Both recognise that identity reflects both a personal endeavour and the social context of a person’s life, and the distinction allows for a discussion of how social context can inhibit (in the case of survival) or develop (in the case of growth) a person’s potential.

The prison experience is often discussed in terms of ‘survival’ (see, for example, Cohen & Taylor, 1972). Prison sociology scholars employ Goffman’s perspective of the dramaturgical self to describe the conscious effort many prisoners make to project a particular front in order to successfully navigate prisoner society (see, for example, Jones & Schmid, 2000). His theory of the self is discussed in terms of ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’ selves whereby a ‘front’ is constructed in order for the individual to successfully negotiate a social situation. In Goffman’s theory, the ‘backstage’ self is revealed only when the individual is comfortable and inherently represents the individual’s ‘true’ self. I argue, as others have also done (see Crewe et al, 2013, for example), that this is somewhat oversimplified, and that an individual has a range of ‘selves’ that present in different circumstances. These selves are not necessarily dissonant, nor are they necessarily a departure from the true self. Rather, they reflect different aspects of a person’s identity, with different versions of the self being allowed to come to the fore according to that which is appropriate in a given social setting. As such, conceptualising different presentations of the self as modes of ‘survival’ is, as I point out in the Chapter 1, something of a leap. How-

they have reached category D status. For those on a life sentence in this study it was therefore necessary to ‘progress’ through the system and move on from Full Sutton.

ever, it is an appropriate leap in the context of a prison environment given prisoners' preoccupation with personal safety and the need to negotiate the complex and unwelcoming environment of the prison.

What, then, might a 'growth' identity look like in the prison environment? To answer this, I have drawn on desistance literature which recognises the active role an individual plays in deciding their life course. According to research in the desistance field, identity change involves a process of reflection. Some researchers frame this as an 'appraisal of life choices' that are available (Bottoms & Shapland, 2016), others a comparison of possible selves (Vaughan, 2007) and others as a 're-biographing' process (Maruna, 2001). This process involves asking and answering two fundamental questions: 'Who do I want to be?' and 'How do I want to live?' As such, I define a 'growth identity' as being future oriented (Farrall, 2016) and grounded in autobiographical continuity (McAdams, 2009) allowing for a projection from past, to present, to 'credible and meaningful' future selves (Healy, 2014).

Desistance research also recognises the limitations an individual's social context will place on their access to opportunity (Giordano, 2016). Renegotiation of the self occurs in the public sphere, and relies upon a realistic expectation of opportunity that can take account of both the self and the social environment. However, desistance research recognises the *active* role an individual can play in 'hooking' onto opportunities that present themselves (Giordano et al, 2002). Change is recognised as being underpinned by cognitive transformation (Giordano, 2016), supported by human and social capital (McNeill, 2016), and developed through access to opportunity (Soyer, 2014).

A key mechanism for such processes of change is language. According to Arendt (1958), it is through actions and speech that we reveal ourselves to the world. Giddens (1989) argues that language mediates identity formation. In renegotiating identity, it is important to develop a 'vocabulary for alternative self-definition' which allows us to articulate new selves, either to ourselves or to others (Szifris, 2017). As an educational course based on dialogue, the role of language in identity development is of particular relevance. The philosophy course provided opportunity for participants to articulate their thoughts to others and listen to the response these thoughts elicited.

In this section, I have articulated and defined the survival-growth dichotomy that serves to structure the discussion around the role of philosophy in the lives of prisoners. Before moving on to the findings of this research, I provide a brief overview of the methodological approach taken during the data collection and analysis. I then go on to discuss the findings of this research. In this Chapter, I take my discussions of these findings further than in preceding

chapters by introducing statistical data where relevant and reflecting on the meaning of my findings in the wider context of prison education research.

6.3 Methodological approach

With an aim of building theory, this thesis has taken an open and exploratory approach. I delivered an education course entitled '*An Introduction to Philosophy*' in two prisons in England. I drew on the pedagogy of a community of philosophical inquiry (CoPI) which focusses on developing skills in active philosophising through the techniques of Socratic Dialogue. Two primary research questions have driven the research and analysis from the outset,

- How is engaging in a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI) relevant to a prisoner's personal development?
- How does the environment of a prison impact the role of a CoPI in the lives of the participants?

Using methods of progressive focussing (Foster, 2006) I developed more context specific questions. In Grendon, the research explored the difference between philosophical dialogue and therapeutic dialogue. Subsequent research in Full Sutton focussed on questions around personal development, wellbeing, trust, building relationships and the humanising impact of the course. The research drew on ethnographic techniques of participant-observer data collection, and involved taking extensive fieldwork notes, interviewing participants and administering pre and post questionnaires (Schensul, et al., 1999, Murchison, 2010, Bailey, 2007, Bachman, 2007, Morse, 1991). I used Layder's (1998) adaptive theory framework to move between relevant literature and emergent findings to produce an exploratory account of the role of philosophy in the personal development of the prisoner-participants.

This research has taken an iterative approach (Layder, 1998). Building on pilot work in Low Moss prison (Szifris, 2017), the course was delivered first in Grendon and then in Full Sutton. As an exploratory piece of research, and following the adaptive theory framework, stages of data collection, analysis, theory-building and consulting literature occurred concurrently, cyclically and iteratively. Techniques of triangulation, reflexivity and validation have been built into the methods of analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2011, Murchison, 2010, Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, Morse, 1991,). This approach has served to produce rich and detailed findings that have been refined and refocussed as each stage of the research progressed.

The participants comprised a range of individuals. Among the 24 men who completed the philosophy course, educational background, ethnicity, religion and criminal histories varied. Such a range of individuals ensured philosophical dialogue was varied and stimulating with different participants representing distinct points of view. Most of my participants had been convicted of serious offences that were reflected in their significant sentences (8 'lifers', 3 with indeterminate sentences, 12 fixed term sentences of more than 10 years and 1 with fixed term of less than ten years). This allowed for a focus on the role of education in the lives of the prisoners whilst they were in prison (as opposed to post-release outcomes).

During delivery of the course, I became a teacher in the respective prisons. I sat in the staff rooms, chatted over cups of tea with fellow teachers, visited the wings to discuss educational progress with my participants, and spent time in the workshops, libraries and chaplaincies thereby immersing myself in the field. I engaged prison officers, chaplains, members of the senior leadership team, librarians and teachers as well as prisoners in conversations around education, life in the prison, social climate and the experience of working with (and, in particular, teaching) prisoners.

Throughout, I have consciously reflected on my position as a teacher and a researcher, and sought to use the immersive experience as part of the data collection and analysis process. In particular, I have clearly articulated my position on the purpose of education, what a positive learning environment looks like, and what role a teacher can play in encouraging personal development. My perspective is grounded in my professional background as a teacher but chimes with the humanistic position on education and research. As LeCompte (1987) argues, bias in ethnography stems from both "personal experience and professional training" (p. 44). Although this is by no means a full ethnography, the methods of ethnographers have provided important guidance (along with my supervisor) in understanding the sources of my bias (see section 2.12 in Chapter 2).

The findings of this research offer a particular perspective on the role of philosophy in prison – of a (former) professional teacher, a criminologist-in-training (as a PhD student), and an amateur philosopher. However, following the methods of adaptive theory, this perspective has also been carefully placed alongside current relevant research which has served to illuminate, consolidate and enhance the findings of this research project. I intend these findings to act as a starting point for research in this field.

Having reiterated the methodological approach taken in this research, I now move onto the research findings. I begin by providing an overview of the course before moving onto summarise and discuss the four key themes in the data – wellbeing, trust, relationships and open-mindedness.

6.4 Delivering a CoPI: Growing community and emerging dialogues

The aim of the philosophy course was to develop a community among prisoners that would allow for safe, non-adversarial, philosophical dialogue. Although I delivered the course in two prisons, in reality, I delivered the course in three distinct environments – a therapeutic community, a maximum-security mainstream prison, and a maximum-security vulnerable prisoners unit. The nature of the three populations with whom I worked presented distinct challenges to the CoPI pedagogy. Furthermore, the different environments in which the course took place became relevant to the role of philosophy to the participants. This section provides an overview of these challenges. I also reflect on how and why the environments were different and what that meant for developing community and encouraging dialogue among the participants.

Grendon, in many ways, represented a 'safe' space for me as a researcher. The prisoners were unchallenging, forgiving, sympathetic and willing to engage. I could test out my materials and engage in conversation without being concerned with aggressive, confrontational contributions or tangential discussions. This is not to say that the course was easy; these men intellectually challenged me through these discussions in ways that far outstripped most of my experiences from ten years as a student of higher education. Although at the time I did not fully appreciate it (as it was necessary to experience Full Sutton before I could assess this), the community ethos of Grendon meant participants were open to my presence and willing to engage in the process. They were, to varying degrees, skilled in Socratic dialogue and group conversation and had a clear understanding of how to go about disagreeing with a point of view without causing offence. They were also able to show humility, happily changed their minds, and enthused about how philosophy had developed their thinking through introduction to new ideas. For these participants, the content of the conversation, the actual *act* of philosophising in a group, provided the context for their reflections on the impact of the course.

In Full Sutton, delivering the course became a story of two halves. The VPU and the mainstream halves of the prison provided distinct environments. In Full Sutton in particular, but also in Grendon, issues of trust permeated the social environment with relationships being

negotiated in an environment where there was a ‘right way to behave’ (Liebling assisted by Arnold, 2004). Among the Full Sutton mainstream population, this manifested itself most overtly around the Muslim population. With talk of forced conversions and radical ideologies, staff (and prisoners) were suspicious of the motives of all Muslims, regardless of the truth of their involvement in such issues. Among the VPs, prisoners were suspicious of the motives of the regime, ever cautious to speak openly for fear of statements being recorded and taken out of context. This meant I observed (and discussed directly with my participants) prisoners in Full Sutton presenting carefully orchestrated fronts in response to their environment and as a means of self-protection.

Over the course of the 12-weeks in each of the prisons, the CoPI proved to be an appropriate framework to develop community among prisoners. As the philosophy course progressed, the nature and content of dialogues changed. The aim was for all participants to engage with each other and for the conversation to flow naturally among the group. In Grendon, this was achieved almost from the outset. In Full Sutton however, it was necessary to encourage participants towards this type of conversation. Among the VPs, conversation initially flowed through me; participants directed all their comments to me and tended to seek approval for their contribution. Over time, as their confidence grew, they began to relax and engage in group conversation. This took longer in the mainstream group as participants, in early sessions, talked among themselves, often veering off topic and taking little heed of my attempts to steer the conversation back to philosophy. In the early stages, I often felt myself to be on the outside of their conversations with a group of men who clearly knew (or at least knew of) each other.

However, the pedagogy of a CoPI proved to be both appropriate and effective at encouraging community dialogue. The methods employed in a CoPI, as it was delivered in this research project, places language and collaborative conversation at the heart of the philosophical process. My method involved developing stimuli based either on a particular philosopher’s ideas or on a school of philosophy (see Appendix I). Some sessions employed well-known paradoxes (such as The Trolley Problem), whilst others focussed on more general subjects (such as human rights or art). Through careful and considered questioning, my role as facilitator (in addition to keeping the conversation on track) was to encourage participants to evaluate their own opinions, and the opinions of others, in a collaborative, non-adversarial manner. The aim was to engender community and respect between participants, and allow for a space for personal and social exploration of ideas.

Thus far, I have described the research process, articulated the methodological and theoretical foundation of the thesis and discussed the prison context and participants. This research

has demonstrated that a CoPI is relevant to the wellbeing of its participants, as well as being a space to grow trust and develop positive, pro-social relationships. However, the research showed that successful establishment of a CoPI also *relies* on the development of trust and respectful relationships. For this reason, CoPIs take time (and perseverance) to establish. This proved particularly true in the context of a prison environment that was characterised by low levels of trust and division among the prison community. This following section discusses these findings in more detail.

6.5 Findings: Wellbeing, trust, relationships and open-mindedness

In delivering a CoPI in two contrasting prisons, I have developed an initial model of how the emerging themes relate to one another (see Figure 2). The focus here, as articulated above, is on the role of the CoPI for the person-in-context, i.e. the prisoner in prison. I also introduce the quantitative findings from the questionnaire data. This data offers a further point of triangulation and an extension of the ‘sense-checking’ process I undertook throughout qualitative data collection and analysis. Including some limited quantitative measures of relevant constructs has allowed for an exploration of whether the constructs developed in previous chapters are meaningful. Further, it starts a discussion around how progress *might* be measured. Analysis of the quantitative data occurred after full analysis of the qualitative data thereby offering a final point of reflection and refinement.

To organise my findings, I have employed four key ‘orienting concepts’ – wellbeing, relationships, trust and open-mindedness. Three of the terms (wellbeing, relationships and trust) are discussed in detail in *Prisons and their Moral Performance*, and I make use of the definitions supplied by Liebling and Arnold (2004). These themes are also directly related to the prison context. The fourth theme, open-mindedness, has been formerly defined in the course of this research and related more to the focus on philosophy. As an emergent theme from the Grendon data, I grounded the definition of this term in the comments of the participants. I also drew on psychological research around ‘integrative complexity’ and Mezirow’s (1990) transformative learning to understand the meaning of becoming more ‘open-minded’ and the role education might play. The following subsections explore each of these themes in turn.

6.5.1 *Wellbeing*

Fundamentally, a CoPI offers an enjoyable and engaging intellectual diversion. Throughout my work in prisons, participants have articulated the relevance of CoPIs to wellbeing. For many, it was simply about activity and stimulation. With prison being characterised by boredom and stagnation (O'Donnell, 2014) the opportunity to exercise intellectual capacity proved particularly relevant in the prison environment. For some, the subject matter itself seemed to have an impact. Many discussed taking the ideas back to their cells and thinking over the discussions taking time to reflect on the moral lessons and ideas presented. Finally, for others, it went deeper, with the space in a CoPI providing a humanising environment, where prisoners could be themselves and be treated as an equal and a person. This was particularly relevant to the VP population in Full Sutton who, as has been discussed previously, can be subject to acute stigmatisation and social rejection within the prison community (Cohen & Taylor, 1972, Ievins & Crewe, 2015). For these participants, the opportunity to engage in dialogue, around something not related to their offence or life in prison, presented an opportunity to engage in an activity as people as opposed to 'sex offenders' or 'prisoners'.

Six (out of 12) participants completed pre and post questionnaires of wellbeing in Full Sutton. The measure for wellbeing produced mixed results with four out of six participants showing a slight increase in wellbeing pre and post participation. However, two of the six reported a slight decrease. The measures for distress were slightly more promising, with five out of six participants reporting reduced distress post-participation compared to pre-participation scores. However, it is worth noting that participants engaged in the CoPI for between 2 and 4 hours per week for twelve weeks constituting only a small part of an individual prisoner's time over the course of a week. Arguably, without a more comprehensive set of engaging activities and a positive culture within an environment, such a class is unlikely to be powerful enough to overcome all the pains and deprivations of long-term confinement.

With evidence of high suicide and self-harm rates (Ministry of Justice, 2016), psychological distress (Liebling, 1992), and prison environments being characterised by 'pains and deprivations' (Sykes, 1958), understanding how and why educational programmes can ameliorate these problems is both relevant and important in the prison context. In this research, participants clearly articulated that the CoPI provided a space to express themselves, opportunity to interact with others in a pro-social manner, and to engage in a programme for self-improvement. A CoPI provided an environment for philosophical conversation and provided opportunity to explore and learn. For my participants, such opportunities were rare.

How then might a CoPI improve wellbeing? Participants clearly articulated that a CoPI develops space in which participants feel comfortable ‘dropping the mask’ and speaking their minds. This, in turn, provided a space for self-reflection allowing trust to develop and relationships to form. Further research is required to understand how self-reflection, trust, relationships and wellbeing interact. However, an article by Vanhooren et al. (2015) provides a potential framework for understanding how philosophy might relate to prisoner wellbeing. They discuss the importance of ‘meaning making’ and its relation to distress for prisoners. They argue that dissonance between previous understandings of the world and new understandings brought about by an alien environment causes distress and go on to claim that the new situation individuals find themselves in when entering prison threatens their understanding of the world. This may contribute to the existential crisis that can occur when entering prison (see Liebling et al., 2011). To explore this, they quantitatively measured ‘loss of meaning’ through a self-report questionnaire and found that loss of meaning did positively predict stress. However, these findings must be received with caution as their article presents a new way of measuring ‘loss of meaning’ that is yet to be validated (Vanhooren et al., 2015). Furthermore, a more developed and in-depth account of the concept of ‘loss of meaning’ would be required to strengthen their findings. However, their discussion provides a possible way forward for future research into philosophy in prisons with their conceptualisation of ‘loss of meaning’ having the potential to provide a structure and a language to think about the connection between philosophical thinking and wellbeing in the prison environment.

6.5.2 *Trust*

Although trust features in a range of prison sociological texts, it did not become a relevant feature of the prison context in this research project until the fieldwork in Full Sutton. I have described Full Sutton as having a ‘divided’ atmosphere with relations underpinned by suspicion and mistrust. It was the *absence* of such trust that meant it became relevant to the research. In entering such an environment, it became necessary to use the methods of a CoPI (and rely on techniques of Socratic questioning) to establish trust.²⁷ Through this, I have been able to articulate how philosophical dialogue can flourish among a group of people. In other words,

²⁷ On reflection, it seems likely that the therapeutic community developed trust within the general environment, allowing delivery of a philosophy course with ease. However, with trust not being relevant to the fieldwork in Grendon, it was not investigated as a theme in this environment rendering such reflections speculative.

Full Sutton provided opportunity to investigate how to establish the *community* aspect of a CoPI.

The deep-rooted suspicion many prisoners have for the motivations of the prison regime has been well documented (see Sparks et al., 1996 for example). My entry into the field constituted a suspicious move in the eyes of many in the prison with several of the prisoners unsure of my motives and unsure of my status. As a result, three types of ‘trust-relationship’ became relevant: participants’ trust in me, participants’ trust in each other, and my trust in the participants. Trust developed through the nature of the encounters. In entering my classroom, the participants were, first and foremost, people – they entered as co-philosophers as opposed to teacher-students, or researcher-participants which allowed for the establishment of trust both in me and in the aims of the course.

In addition to the pedagogy of a CoPI, my professional perspective played a part in establishing trust. Discussed in detail in chapter 2, my perspective resonates with humanistic values of facilitating a learning space that allows learners time and space to pursue their interests in their own time and at their own pace. Maintaining this perspective proved key in developing a CoPI as participants, particularly among the mainstream Full Sutton participants, challenged my skills as a teacher. In order to successfully overcome these challenges, I returned to the fundamental principles of a CoPI and its pedagogy, which served to re-establish the aims of my educational course in my own mind and emphasise the teaching techniques in which I had trained. Importantly, I re-established in my own mind what a ‘good’ CoPI ought to look like and then used principles of Socratic questioning. I found that maintaining a clear perspective of what philosophy, as a subject and a discipline, is and responding to participants’ contributions with a question that aimed to encourage philosophical thinking served as important techniques in the prison classroom. For example, in Full Sutton, contributions would often move into political discourse or issues of current affairs (often somewhat unrelated to the original topic). In these situations, instead of dismissing such a contribution I would attempt to link their comment to a philosophical idea. In response to the comment ‘women going to work is the reason why we’ve got all these feral children running around’, I responded by asking whether that meant the participant felt strong family values were integral to a positive, functioning society. Overtime, I found the focus on philosophy and CoPI pedagogy to be a positive mechanism for establishing trust in me from my participants.

It was also necessary to establish trust *between* participants. On reflection, the structure of a CoPI involved an unfamiliar environment for interacting with other prisoners, which may

have ‘unnerved’ some of the participants. In order for participants to engage openly and honestly in conversation, they had to trust that their fellow participants would not judge them for their comments and that any contributions made would be treated with respect. Analysis of fieldwork notes and conversations with prisoners provided some insights into development of trust between participants over the 12-weeks. However, I also had to understand *why* these participants seemed initially uncomfortable openly discussing their opinions. Prison sociological literature, in conjunction with analysis of fieldwork notes from conversations with staff, revealed a complex hierarchy within the prison community (see, for example, Crewe 2009). Prisoners had to learn to listen to contributions in an open, non-judgmental manner in the context of a prison social climate that encouraged a particular persona to develop. Again, the pedagogy of a CoPI proved helpful in this regard. With a focus on abstract and impersonal topics, there was no need for participants to reveal personal stories. Furthermore, the basis of an exploratory inquiry and community dialogue provided a structure to the conversations that allowed for trust to flourish.

Finally, in both prisons, it also took time for me to trust my participants. I began the philosophy course with ‘safer’ topics, looking to develop participants’ understanding of the process of philosophical inquiry and their skills in dialogue before introducing ideas that are more controversial. Although I did learn to trust my participants in Full Sutton, due to the complex religious overtones within that particular prison community, I chose to shy away from some topics, (for example, Salman Rushdie and freedom of speech), that I had covered with the men in Grendon. For me to trust participants of a CoPI with such controversial topics I learned that I needed them to demonstrate that they had the necessary skills to approach any topic in a philosophical and inquiring way. In Grendon, as I have previously discussed, participants entered the philosophy classroom with many of these skills already developed. In Full Sutton however, it was left to the techniques of a CoPI and my own skills as a teacher to develop dialogic skills. The research indicates that, with the right teaching tools, a CoPI can (and did) develop the dialogic and philosophical skills required to establish trust within the community of inquiry.

Overall, trust came from taking an open, non-judgmental and fair stance with all my participants. In line with the humanistic approach, I endeavoured to treat my participants with respect and courtesy, approaching them as human beings with opinions and worldviews that were interesting to me. This was successful because it was true; I was interested in what they

had to say and I would actively reflect on their statements both during and after the conversation. Even now, nearly two years after completing delivery in Grendon, I regularly quote one of my participants.

“It’s not about everyone having the same start, but everyone ending up in the same place.”

This comment was in reference to social structure and access to opportunity. The participant observed that we tend to discuss people having a fair *start* in life, when what should really matter is that everyone, regardless of where they began, has the opportunity to get to the same place. I had not considered this perspective before and his words have reshaped my understanding of what it means to have opportunity.

Having only delivered the course in two prisons, these findings require development through further research conducted in a wider range of prisons. In particular, I have argued here that the status of Grendon as a therapeutic community and Full Sutton as a maximum-security dispersal prison directly relates to the relevance of trust in the two prisons. However, further research is required to confirm that TCs more generally do establish trust such that it is possible to develop a CoPI in a similar manner to that which has been described in this thesis. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate whether the features of Full Sutton described throughout this research are features of dispersal prisons *in general* or of Full Sutton in particular, of even just of the particular group of individuals with whom I worked.

The pedagogy of a CoPI served to bring together people of different backgrounds, with the two groups in Full Sutton being a ‘microcosm’ of the overarching culture of prison life. Through a shared experience, the CoPI ‘grew’ trust among the participants. The community ethos of a CoPI emerged over time as participants moved from laughing ‘at’ each other, to laughing ‘with’ each other, and the course became a rare safe haven characterised by freedom of expression and a shared endeavour. Trust also involves developing relationships. The following section moves on to discuss how the CoPI developed relationships among the prisoner-participants.

6.5.3 *Relationships and emergent community*

In the pilot work, in Grendon, and in Full Sutton, nearly every participant discussed the role of a CoPI in providing opportunity to get to know and interact with people with whom they would not normally associate. The CoPI, with its focus on community dialogue, provided a space for participants to get to know each other. The participants in this research discussed

forming new relationships as a result of engaging in the course. These relationships were based on positive, pro-social interaction in a learning environment.

The diversity of the groups meant the CoPI provided a platform for putting forward particular ways of thinking, allowing participants the time and space to have a dialogue. In a therapeutic community, engaging in Socratic dialogue in a learning environment provided opportunity to interact without the expectation of personal exploration that can accompany such interactions in therapy. In a divided prison society underpinned by religious tensions (in Full Sutton), the opportunity for a range of individuals to come together and discuss philosophical ideas was rare. It also proved to be a challenge, although one that was ultimately rewarding. The first time a participant highlighted the relevance of this aspect of a CoPI was in the pilot phase in Low Moss Prison. As a predominantly white population, with only a handful of non-white or Muslim prisoners, a Muslim participant of Asian descent discussed how the philosophy course delivered there provided a space to explain what Islam really meant to him;

“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...I had to explain to them, ‘you guys look at Muslims and you think that’s terrorism and that their views are terrorists but terrorists are frowned upon in our religion as well’...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.”

For the mainstream prisoners, the CoPI environment provided a context to overcome difference. As discussed at length in Chapter 5, the mainstream group was comprised of men placed within different ‘factions’ of the divided prison society. However, over time, we developed a community, and participants began to come together in the shared endeavour of philosophical inquiry. The CoPI offered a safe space that did not directly address their differences, nor challenge them personally regarding their behaviour or attitudes, but instead focussed on encouraging participants to engage positively in discussion allowing time and space to build a shared experience. The CoPI provided an environment that allowed positive relationships between these very different participants to develop and grow. They began to understand, and therefore tolerate, each other as they heard and reflected upon each other’s reasoning and thinking.

Among the Full Sutton VPs, the exclusion and stigmatisation suffered by those who had committed sexual offences meant participants particularly enjoyed the time to be in a space where these labels and issues could fall away. The VPs carried the label of their crime with them; sexual offences are seen as a fundamental part of the offender's personality and identity, with interactions in the prison being underpinned by the knowledge that they are there for sexual offences (Ievins & Crewe, 2015, Sparks et al., 1996, Cohen & Taylor, 1972). In the philosophy classroom, participants' crimes became irrelevant as they got to know each other, not because they resided in the same block, or had attended the same behavioural therapy programme, but because they had discussed Socrates' ideas of the 'good life', and Plato's arguments around the dangers of free-thinking artists and playwrights (see Appendix I).

Grendon participants also clearly articulated the enjoyment they got from being allowed the time to listen to others and consider different points of view on the topics presented. The philosophical content provided a place for presentations of the self in a safe environment focussed on abstract, impersonal subjects. Unlike in therapy, no participant was expected to reveal an aspect of their past or personal circumstances if they did not wish to, and their engagement in the dialogue was voluntary. Ultimately, in Grendon, the CoPI provided a different perspective from which participants could get to know and understand each other (see, also, Szifris, 2016).

It is difficult to measure the development of relationships on an individual level. However, relationships involve being able to understand and empathise with other people. Empathy, as a construct, can be measured. There are two distinct 'types' of empathy – cognitive and affective empathy. In brief, cognitive empathy refers to the ability to *understand* what another is feeling whilst affective empathy the ability to *feel* what another is feeling (see Maibo, 2014 for a full discussion). Many scales measure both affective and cognitive empathy separately, as well as providing a mechanism to combine the scores for an overall measure. I make use of the Basic Empathy Scale developed by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006). For this measure, 8 out of 24 participants completed both pre and post measures. The majority of participants (6/8) had an improved 'total' empathy score. Breaking this down into the requisite constructs of cognitive and affective empathy, there are similar trends.

As with other scales, there were not sufficient return rates (or participant numbers) to apply statistical measures of significance. However, there appears to be a trend towards increased empathy. Again, this is in line with qualitative findings indicating that exploring empathy

through philosophical dialogue may prove interesting. The pedagogy of a CoPI provided insight into specific mechanisms that could work to improve the empathy of participants through community dialogue, and by learning to value the opinions and feelings of others.

This research has demonstrated that a CoPI can provide an appropriate mechanism for developing positive relationships between prisoners within the CoPI. However, further research is required to understand how developing such relationships can be relevant to the wider prison community. Can engaging in such a course impact prisoners' interactions with others in general or is it only relevant to interactions with their fellow philosophy participants? Could more extensive provisions of such courses effect the overall prison social climate? If so, in what way? How might educational courses relate to behaviour within a prison? Future research may wish to build on these initial findings and begin to consider their relevance in the wider prison context.

6.5.4 *Open-mindedness*

Throughout interviews, feedback forms, and informal conversations, participants discussed how the subject matter of, and dialogue in, a CoPI 'opened their minds.' This final theme emerged primarily in Grendon, although it built on the work from Low Moss, and became relevant to the work in Full Sutton. In general, the philosophy course provided participants with the opportunity to develop a better understanding of how philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill understood society and what it means to be a human being learning to navigate the world. Participants enjoyed being able to place themselves on a spectrum of philosophical ideas, aligning themselves with different philosophers. The structure of the course materials also served to highlight the shortcomings of taking a particular stance. The focus and structure of a CoPI allowed participants to recognise that their discussions, in the prison classroom, formed part of a long line of philosophers who have argued over these ideas, sometimes for millennia, discussing the same issues and contemplating the same paradoxes. This understanding – of being part of a greater whole, of recognising your place within the history of humans – seemed to provide foundation for more nuanced thinking about the world.

This theme is grounded in the data of this research. Interviews and observations with participants in Grendon included comments about how philosophy had 'opened my mind' which lead to a systemic analysis of data that sought to define this concept from the words of the participants. This led to the following definition of open-mindedness,

Being willing to critically reflect on your own opinion; being able to listen to others and incorporate new knowledge into your own understanding of the world; to appreciate different ways of thinking; being willing to change your mind; taking account of the wider society and community of which you are a part.

Having defined the theme, in line with the adaptive theory method, I turned to extant literature to look for similar constructs that might prove relevant to my understanding of this construct. Integrative complexity provided the most insight into this area. Within this literature, scholars distinguish between *what* people think and *how* people think, a distinction, which illustrates a key attribute of philosophical dialogue. At the outset of this thesis, I defined philosophy as an ‘activity of thought’ (Law, 2007) or ‘thinking about thinking’ (Honderich, 1995). To engage in active philosophising is therefore less about discussing opinions and conclusions and more about exploring how and why these opinions have been formed. This subtle but key distinction lies at the heart of the idea of *collaborative* (as opposed to adversarial) dialogue; we are not there to make people think the way we think nor ought we enter philosophical dialogue with such an agenda. Instead, philosophers look to enter dialogue with the intention of taking an interest in our fellow participants’ worldviews and seeking to understand the reasoning and principles that lie behind them. This perspective of philosophy provides a space for participants to explore ideas and, in part, serves to create an environment that allows trust and relationships to flourish. However, it also serves to encourage participants to be more open-minded by encouraging listening to others, self-reflection, and critical thinking.

This focus on *how* people think, as opposed to *what* people think, also contributed to the CoPI as a ‘safe’ space for dialogue. The dialogue did not challenge the particulars of the participants’ beliefs but instead encouraged more developed or complex ways of thinking. The abstract nature of the course content – on philosophers’ ideas as opposed to individual opinions – meant discussions could focus on the ‘ought.’ How ‘ought’ we to behave? How ‘ought’ society be structured? What principles ‘ought’ to underpin our theories of moral action? Participants were encouraged to *understand* a philosopher’s point of view and offer an opinion where they could. They were exposed to a range of views and opinions that allowed for a broad discussion of ways of thinking, and engaged in discussion that analysed, considered and developed a range of ideas.

The question of how to measure open-mindedness remains difficult to address. The construct relates somewhat to self-reflection and insight. I therefore use the self-reflection and

insight scale (SRIS) to reflect on the role of philosophy in developing an open mind and consider whether these constructs are related. In total, 12 participants completed a pre and post SRIS questionnaire. The two constructs, self-reflection and insight, are measured within the scale and scored separately. Despite the consistent qualitative data pointing towards philosophy encouraging self-reflection, only 6 of the participants reported an increase in their self-reflection skills with 7 of the participants having a measurable increase in insight. It is difficult to discern the reasons for these mixed results. However, as a self-scoring questionnaire, it is possible that the scores reflect the participants' perception of their own self-reflection and insight as opposed to their actual skills in these areas. In other words, could engaging in a philosophy class increase participants' awareness of their activities in insight and self-reflection? In engaging in philosophy, increasing awareness may encourage participants to be more cautious in arguing that they are self-reflective or insightful. Further research is required in this area to investigate the connection between education and self-reported measures of self-reflection and insight.

Finally, open-mindedness also resonates with Mezirow's perspective of transformative learning in adult education (Mezirow, 1990). According to this perspective, education serves to alter our 'frames of reference' by challenging our assumptions and beliefs. Education should encourage learners to be open to new ideas, and develop their ability to integrate new knowledge into their worldview (Mezirow, 1990). Education can achieve this through self-reflection and meaning-making activities to enable the learner to understand how new knowledge relates to old knowledge. Mezirow (1990) argues that critical reflection is fundamental to this process and, as such, education is important to self-understanding. Although I did not consciously engage in a form of 'transformative learning,' Mezirow's work provides a clear theoretical framework for understanding how education might develop open-mindedness.

Although this research provides insight into the relevance of a (philosophical) educational course, there is not sufficient evidence to determine how *much* philosophy impacts on the mind-sets of participants. The field of integrative complexity has developed some metrics around this (see Williams, 2013, for example) that future researchers might consider utilising. The principles of transformative learning have only been touched upon in this research with further theoretical and empirical work required to integrate this learning perspective into a theory of philosophy education and identity formation.

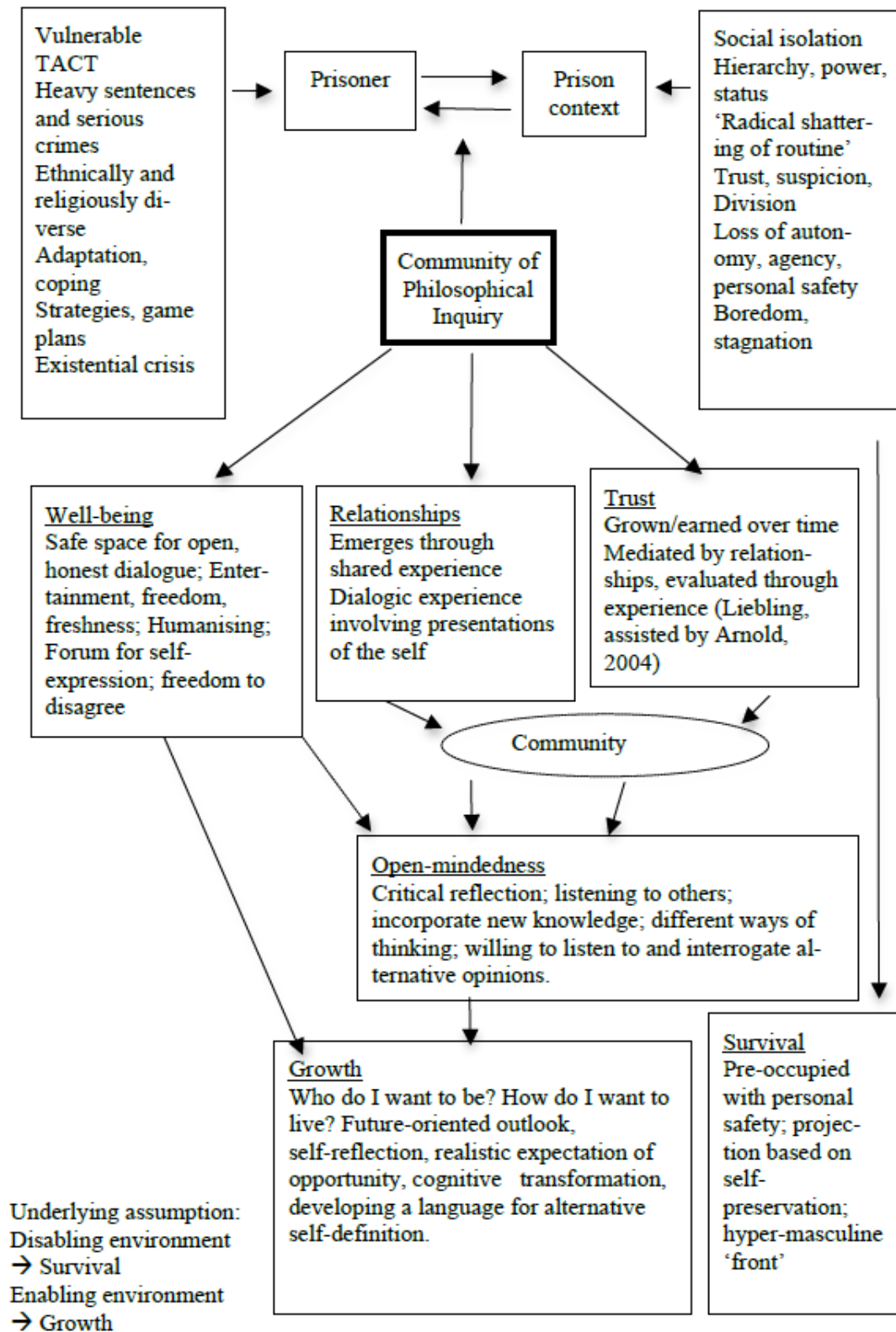
This final theme also serves to create the link between the themes of trust and relationships and the argument that educational courses can encourage growth identities. This research indicates that philosophy can encourage self-reflection and cognitive transformation by developing

more open minds. The following section summarises my research findings and discusses the model for education and identity change that this thesis has developed.

6.5.5 *Summary of findings*

The diagram overleaf provides an illustration of the findings of this research. In the centre of the diagram is the CoPI. The upwards pointing arrow indicates that I delivered the philosophy class within a particular context (prison) and to a set of people within this context (prisoners). Flowing from a CoPI are the four key themes that emerged from the data: wellbeing, trust, relationships and open-mindedness. They have been arranged in two ‘stages’ indicating that relationships and trust need to be established *before* it is possible to engage in open, collaborative, philosophical dialogue which can develop minds that are more open. The dotted line from wellbeing and open-mindedness indicates a more tentative relationship between these two themes. There was some indication in the findings of this research that the wellbeing of the participants relates to the ability of a CoPI to develop the open-mindedness of the participants (in that the more comfortable environment of a CoPI meant participants felt more able to engage) but the relationship was less clear. In other words, this research highlights clear mechanisms that served to illustrate how developing trust and relationships leads to more open and collaborative conversations (and therefore more open minds) but was less able to articulate how wellbeing relates to open-mindedness.

Community has featured throughout this thesis. In Chapter 4, I articulated and discussed the definition of a community with reference, in particular, to Toch’s work in this area. Toch’s definition of community highlights interpersonal relationships, personal investment, and collaborative activity as being key to community relations (Toch, 1980). Most importantly, he states that a community ought to provide “an accepting, reliable, and supportive milieu” (*ibid.* p.10). This research has demonstrated that the pedagogy of a CoPI can go some way towards developing such a milieu and that to do so involves allowing the space and the time to develop relationships and trust among individuals.



At the bottom of the diagram are 'survival' and 'growth' identities. These encompass the premise of this thesis: that prisons, in general, are disabling environments that encourage survival identities. However, educational spaces that allow for personal exploration and self-

expression could support the development of a growth identity. This research indicates that this can be achieved through the development of relationships and trust, by opening the minds of prisoners, and by promoting wellbeing. Current research in prison sociology and desistance literature also supports these findings, and I have used these areas to understand why these themes were particularly important in the context of this research. However, this research has taken these discussions into a new area by reflecting on how an educational course, based on the principle of philosophical dialogue, can provide a space that serves to promote an enabling environment, even in the context of a wider prison culture that is actively disabling.

6.5.6 *Content, structure and philosophical dialogue*

The diagram above provides an overview of the key themes of this research. It also illustrates how these themes link to the focus of the research problem (a person in the context of a prison) and identity construction ('survival' versus 'growth'). However, between these boxes lie arrows and within these arrows lie mechanisms. How does a CoPI, in the context of a prisoner-in-prison, engender wellbeing, relationships and trust? In turn, how do these relate to developing an open mind? Finally, how does their presence promote 'growth', whilst their absence relate to 'survival' behaviours?

The findings of this research indicate that a CoPI employs three key mechanisms for promoting a 'growth' identity. The first is the content of the course, which relates to the subject matter of philosophy. The second relates to the structures of how I introduced this subject matter to the participants, i.e. through stages that served to build understanding and introduce competing ideas. Finally, language and the dialogic nature of the classes was the third mechanism identified in this research. I discuss each in turn.

The work in Grendon in particular, and to an extent in Full Sutton, allowed for an exploration of the specific role of *philosophy* in relation to the four themes that emerged from my findings. Through philosophy, participants were able to discuss fundamental questions of how to live, who to be, and what it means to be human, in an abstract and impersonal fashion. The research indicates that this created a 'safe' space for prisoners, which proved particularly relevant to the context of a prison for both the therapeutic community and the maximum-security environment. In Grendon, participants welcomed the 'break' from the heavy therapeutic work (promoting wellbeing) whilst in Full Sutton it served to provide an area of 'common ground' on which participants could engage (promoting relationships). The subject matter served to

encourage self-reflection without directly challenging participants sense of self and with a focus on ‘us’, how we, as people and members of society, *ought* to live.

Turning now to the *structure* of the sessions, throughout this thesis I have provided illustrative examples of the philosophy classes that have served to develop the reader’s understanding of the techniques I employed in delivering the course. The stages of each of the sessions were organised in such a way as to demonstrate how philosophers build their arguments from first principles. Each session introduced counter arguments and different schools of thought on the same idea. This contributed to encouraging more complex ways of thinking as new stages would challenge the opinions offered during the previous stage’s discussions. This was no accident. I took time and care to plan the structure of the sessions to almost ‘trick’ the participants into agreeing with a certain point of view. I would do this by providing a robust foundation, argument and conclusion from a particular perspective that, at first glance, would seem logical and obvious. I would follow this by introducing a classic and well-known counter-example that would force the group to reconsider and reflect on previously stated points of view. In general, the participants enjoyed these ‘tricks’ and, over time, their skills of critically reflecting on philosophical ideas improved as they learned how to question a position before accepting a conclusion.

In delivering the course, I used careful methods of posing questions that served to draw participants through the philosophical content and encourage philosophical thinking. The course focussed on encouraging participants in active philosophising, which involved recognising, articulating and interrogating underlying principles. Therefore, in response to a participant’s comment, I would endeavour to ask a question that would encourage them to clarify what *their* principles were, or upon what principles participants based the opinion that they had just offered. This method of teaching is based on the principles of Socratic dialogue, a widely recognised form of encouraging learners to engaging in thinking through problems (Kennedy, 1999). It proved a particularly useful technique in the context of philosophy in prison as it allowed participants the time and space to put forward their own thoughts, interrogate them and respond to each other through collaborative exploration.

I also encouraged respectful dialogue. This proved a complex and difficult process in some instances, and involved a consistent and fair approach in my own dealings with each of the participants. In Full Sutton, I was challenged and tested but, by staying the course, I felt I *earned* their trust and respect. To do so, I had to develop a deep understanding of the fragile egos, complex hierarchies, and difficult environment in which the participants resided. In both

halves of the prison, there were clear turning points. Fieldwork notes proved particularly insightful in tracking the changing attitudes of the participants. Over time, participants relaxed and recognised that there was no ulterior motive, and that the purpose of the class was to do what I had stated it was to do – to engage them in active philosophical discussion on a range of topics.

On reflection, part of the process involved demonstrating humility. Coming in as a Cambridge graduate, participants received me with previously conceived (and often incorrect) notions of my background, my privilege and my attitude. Over time, by treating all participants as equals and demonstrating a willingness to recognise when they had ‘outfoxed’ me, participants began to realise that, despite my education, my opinions were no more valid than their own. This was confirmed when two colleagues from Cambridge sat in on one of my classes and one of my participants observed that their contributions were no more illuminating than any others. The pedagogy of a CoPI proved an *equaliser* where sex offenders, convicted murderers, and repeat prisoners could go toe-to-toe with a Cambridge graduate, a Cambridge research associate and a Cambridge professor. I also demonstrated a human-side to myself by my consistent failure to spell check or read through my teaching materials (see appendix I). Participants would good-naturedly laugh at my mistakes, which I would take with humour, admitting my weakness and demonstrating that this did not diminish my confidence or reflect on my ability to deliver the programme.

Through the dual roles of teacher and researcher, I have been able to articulate some clear mechanisms that explain how philosophy relates to the themes in the research. This has served to support my conclusions and the theories that have been explored over the course of the research. However, further research is required to investigate these suggested mechanisms. Future researchers might wish to develop research methods that would explicitly test whether the mechanisms I have articulated lead to the outcomes as I have argued here. Reflecting on these mechanisms could also prove useful in developing data collection tools to measure more explicitly the impact of a programme such as a CoPI.

6.6 Discussion: Internal articulation and external validation

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the aims of the research, summarised the research process and discussed the findings of the data collection and analysis. In this section, I take the discussion further. Here, I articulate my conclusions around identity formation and discuss how

education and, in particular, dialogic, philosophical education, can contribute to encouraging a 'growth' identity.

This thesis has clearly articulated the role of the social climate of a prison in shaping the experience of incarceration. I have further argued that this experience can have a clear impact on a prisoner's identity, with a preoccupation with survival in a potentially dangerous environment, leading to the forming of hyper-masculine 'survival' identities. I have developed these ideas from Goffman's dramaturgical self as well as other prison sociology literature. However, I also base this on my own experience of conversing with and teaching prisoners. My participants clearly articulated their need to construct a front, their lack of trust in their fellow prisoner as well as the staff, and the difficulties they had in forging relationships whilst in prison. Some also discussed their fear that they would spend so much time projecting these 'fronts' that they would lose their backstage selves and become the macho personas that they projected.

It is unsurprising that the key themes in this research are wellbeing, trust, relationships and open-mindedness. The participants of a programme, residing in prison as they were, articulated these as outcomes because they were lacking in their general environment. Full Sutton was austere and overbearing, the prisoners' lives lacked intellectual stimulation and 'normal' interpersonal interactions. Grendon involved engaging in difficult and heavy therapeutic work to which philosophy provided a welcome contrast. These themes were relevant *because* of the context in which this research took place. Among an established friendship group, the role of a CoPI in developing, for example, trust and relationships is likely to be less important (as the experience in Grendon demonstrated to an extent).

In some ways, the theme of open-mindedness is the most interesting as it speaks to the potential of the subject matter. This theme came directly from my data whereby participants used the term 'open minded' (or something similar) frequently enough to warrant deeper investigation and analysis. This theme relates to the purpose of education as a tool for personal development and understanding the wider world. The nature of the philosophy classroom, the subject matter, and the open dialogue all served to encourage participants to reflect on their own opinions and ideas. Furthermore, during the 12-weeks, participants were exposed to, and discussed, a range of ideas both from the works of distinguished philosophers and from the contributions of their fellow participants. All of us, myself included, were confronted with ways of thinking that we had not come across before. We all, at some point, heard an opinion that caused us to reflect on our own thinking and reassess an opinion as a result.

This research makes clear that some prisoners welcome the opportunity to engage in philosophical dialogue. However, this is not simply about demonstrating that prisoners *want* such courses to be made available. This research has demonstrated that philosophical education can (and did) have a real and profound impact on participants' sense of self. Within a prison social climate characterised by hyper-masculinity, suspicion or expectations of discussing personal emotions, prisoners need opportunity to present different fronts – one of learner, philosopher, classmate – and to have space for self-reflection. In the philosophy classroom, participants took the opportunity to articulate and express themselves and were given time to listen to others' reactions to their self-expression. If identity, as Giddens (1989) and Arendt (1958) argue, is mediated by language, and identity change involves self-reflection, then there is clear indication that philosophy could play a vital role in reshaping prisoners' internal and external identities.

Many of my participants will not be released from prison for a significant period. The relevance of this course is therefore about survival – survival of one's identity in the face of a complex and volatile prison culture. It is in this, that the 'survival versus growth' dichotomy takes relevance. In the context of prison, survival *requires* opportunity to grow. Without it, in the harsh and austere prison environment, prisoners stagnate, suspended in time and space with little stimulation. Education therefore takes a particular meaning in the prison and is, arguably, not simply desirable, but necessary.

6.7 Contribution and relevance

In coming to the closing sections of this thesis, I reflect here on the relevance of this work to both scholars and practitioners. This study speaks to two academic audiences – prison sociology and desistance – and, I hope, provides an analysis of interest to both by offering a unique perspective of the person-in-context. Further, I hope that the research will be of use, interest and relevance to a more policy-oriented audience.

Throughout, and drawing in particular on Arendt, I have highlighted the 'interaction' between the internal self-reflections of the individual and social presentations of the self. The idea of a 'person-in-context', presented in this thesis, emphasises the relevance of the wider environment to a person's identity. This perspective draws together dialogues in two fields – desistance and prison sociology. Stemming from the work of Sykes and Clemmer, prison sociologists seek to describe prison society as a whole, offering descriptions and typologies that help us understand how the 'society of captives' organises itself and what strategies prisoners

employ to survive. Juxtaposed to this is the work of the desistance scholar, much of which has focussed on the individual – their trajectories out of criminal activities, their personal interpretations of the past, and the means by which the individual can harness opportunities to forge a new life. In this thesis, I have explored what it means to be an individual seeking to grow and develop in the context of two different prison environments.

For the prison sociologist, I offer a distinct method of engaging with the prison environment, providing rich and detailed description of encounters and dialogues that serve to illuminate and develop previous works in this field. Throughout, I have endeavoured to authentically describe what happened in the philosophy classroom thereby offering an insight into the way in which an educational course might be able to shape the prisoner society. This also highlights some of the implications of distinctive prison cultures for the success or ‘reach’ of philosophical dialogue. In particular, I explore how trust can be cultivated even in the context of a high security prison, how a shared experience can provide space for positive pro-social relationships to emerge, and how dialogue and education can improve the well-being of participants. Finally, I have demonstrated how different social environments can shape the content and direction of philosophical dialogue. The next step in this process might be to consider how an educational course, such as that described in this thesis, might support the development of an ‘enabling prison environment’ (Haigh et al., 2011, Liebling, 2012).

For the desistance scholar, I offer reflections on a programme that has the potential to apply theories of desistance to a specific prison setting (the classroom). Recent discussions in the desistance field articulate a need to develop a ‘meaningful and credible future self’ (see Healy, 2014). I offer here an exploration of *how* this might be achieved in the context of a prison. The findings support the importance of education for education’s sake; the power of an individual prisoner engaging in a programme for personal self-improvement alone cannot be overstated. Scholars in the desistance field discuss the need for ‘strength-based’ programmes (see, for example, McNeill & Weaver, 2010) to enhance our understanding of the process of growth and change. In general, desistance research has yet to be fully ‘operationalised’, and this study highlights a need to ensure these efforts do not lead to the instrumentalisation of programmes for the express purposes of achieving desistance. By taking a ‘whole person’ approach to this research, and considering personal development as prisoners undergoing study-for-its-own-sake experience it, I offer an insight into how this type of growth might be cultivated in the context of a prison educational classroom.

This brings me to the third important audience – practitioners and policy makers. Through the educational course, it has become apparent that the need for intellectual stimulation, and programmes that address the whole person, are essential to the psychological wellbeing of prisoners. The findings of this study highlight the importance of access to opportunity – or ‘hooks for change’ in the language of Giordano et al (2002). However, it is important to take a broad understanding of the word ‘opportunity.’ Although access to jobs, qualifications, and housing are important, so too are access to community and activity. This study argues that a CoPI can provide a mechanism for building community, relationships and trust within an environment that works against growth and change. Furthermore, in developing programming, it is important to recognise that the individual who obtains employment or gets married has agency, interests and talents. To access the ‘bigger’ opportunities of a family life and stable employment, opportunities are required for the individual to engage in activities that help them understand themselves, their place in the world, and their role in a wider community and society. As I articulated at the outset of this thesis, desistance involves asking and answering two fundamental questions – ‘Who do I want to be?’ and ‘How do I want to live?’ These are, fundamentally, philosophical questions.

Finally, this study argues that if we wish people to grow and develop during a prison sentence, rather than stagnate and merely survive, then they must be provided with enabling environments that allow for personal development. I contribute to the discourse in prison sociology and desistance by providing a detailed account of a course that can contribute to the development of such an enabling environment. This account also provides direction and insight to practitioners and policy-makers. It highlights the importance of ‘whole person’ programmes, and offers a clear framework for an educational programme that could be delivered in a prison education department.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview and summary of the findings of this thesis. It has articulated the research focus, discussed how the research proceeded and articulated a theory of how philosophy education relates to personal development. Throughout this thesis, definitions of identity, understanding of context, and investigations of the mechanisms of a CoPI have been explored, developed and refined. This chapter has presented these ideas in their polished form. Through systematic use of recognised methodology, a nuanced and careful account of my own experience, and consultation with extant relevant literature, the findings of

this research present a detailed and developed understanding of the role of philosophical conversation in the lives of prisoners.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the role of philosophy, delivered through the medium of a community of philosophical inquiry (CoPI), in the lives of prisoners. To do so, I have engaged prisoners in philosophical dialogue, exploring what it means to be a person, the principles of moral action, and justifications for the different structures of society. We explored these issues through the teachings of Socrates, Descartes, Kant, Mill, Hume, and Arendt among others. Over time, we were able to work together to engage in dialogic inquiry to explore complex questions, and develop a shared experience of philosophical exploration and personal reflection.

Since embarking on this research project over 5 years ago, the landscape of prison education has changed significantly. When I first entered the field, in 2010, conversations with prison and education staff revolved around the process they were undertaking to ‘narrow’ delivery of prison education courses. In response to this, a range of innovative projects that sought to provide access to higher level learning to prisoners has developed. For example, New College North Lanarkshire delivers philosophy in a range of prisons in Scotland (see Szifris, 2017), Kings College London are working with Belmarsh to deliver philosophical dialogue groups to high security prisoners, and a range of ongoing projects are up and running in Wales between the University of Cardiff and prisons in the local area. Other projects involving university-prison partnerships such as Inside-Out (with Fiona Measham at University of Durham) and Learning Together (with Ruth Armstrong and Amy Ludlow at Cambridge University) are flourishing across the country.

In 2016, there was a renewed focus on the role of prison education following the publication of the Coates Review (2016). There was also substantial media attention in the latter half of 2016 that focussed on the problem in prisons around reduced staffing levels and an increase in prison violence and incidents of self-harm (Collaboration, 2015). Since the publication of the Coates Review there has been a sustained focus on prison education as being integral to a prisons rehabilitative regime. As such, it has never been more important to understand what education in prison can and cannot do, how it can contribute to development and

progress, and the limitations of education in the context of a prison. In the current policy climate, it seems this research holds particular relevance.

Despite this growing interest in learning in prisons, prison education remains an under-theorised and under-researched area. Even with the publication of the Coates Review, the purpose of education in prison remains vague and unstated. It is not clear whether the Government's renewed focus on education as a means of 'reform' refers to education's role in increasing employability, for reducing recidivism or as a tool for personal development. Furthermore, there is little research that serves to indicate *how* education is supposed to achieve these aims and no research into the role of philosophy or dialogic inquiry in a prison education department.

This research has attempted to address the paucity of prison education research by focussing on the delivery of a philosophy course in two prisons in England. It has produced a rich and detailed exploration of philosophy education with respect to the personal development of prisoners. It constitutes a unique piece of research that provides a new and important perspective on the role of prison education by drawing on the experience of researcher-as-teacher and articulating the experience of prisoners in engaging in philosophical conversation.

Over the course of this research project, I have found that my prisoner-participants were deep thinkers, fully capable of intellectually challenging conversation, and with perspectives that often proved insightful. Many were earnest in their attempts to find meaning in the prison environment and engaged in philosophical conversation with a passionate interest in self-improvement. The importance of trust, the relevance of relationships and the provision of a safe space for self-articulation in a prison environment are all present in literature around the prison experience. In this research project, I have discovered that this type of education holds significant value to the individuals residing within the prison community. Furthermore, there is some indication that allowing for open, non-adversarial conversation around neutral and abstract topics could hold relevance to a prison social climate.

I have articulated the fundamental principle of this research as being about the development of a *person* within a *context*. Existing literature and criminological theory has enriched this discussion. To understand the *personal* aspect of personal development, I have drawn on desistance literature. To unpick the *contextual* relationship between the person and their development, I have turned to prison sociology. Finally, to understand *how* a CoPI can encourage personal development of a person within a context, I have drawn on CoPI pedagogy and my own practitioner expertise in delivering the philosophy course as part of this research.

The three phases of research (pilot, Grendon and Full Sutton) allowed for an in-depth analysis of what was required for a CoPI to be successfully established (in the context of a

prison and in relation to prisoners) and, once established, what impact the content of the discussions can have on participants' identities. Identity, in this thesis, is seen as being in a constant state of development, an interactive process between the internal narrative and the external environment. I have drawn, in particular, on Arendt's (1958) recognition of identity-construction as a private endeavour that shapes, and is shaped by, the public domain. I recognise therefore that identity needs to be internally articulated but externally validated and that the medium of identity formation is language (Giddens 1989). Identity development involves a constant re-negotiation of the self, both in private and in public. For this to occur, vocabulary for self-definition is relevant, the opportunity to 'try out' fledgling identities and potential future selves particularly important, and the ability to express oneself accurately and articulately is key.

This research has delineated between a 'survival' identity and a 'growth' identity. At the outset of this thesis I related the 'survival' identity to social identity, drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical self. Goffman's discussions around presentations of the self postulates that a 'frontstage self' is performed according to the social expectations of particular situations. The 'backstage self' is reserved for when the individual feels comfortable and allows themselves to drop the 'mask'. In this thesis, and in wider prison research, this idea is used to articulate prisoners' methods of 'survival' within the context of a complex prison social system, with presentations of the self being steeped in the complexity of human emotions that arise in the face of the prison environment. 'Growth' was related to personal development and the thesis drew on desistance literature's discussions of the change process.

The notion of presenting a 'front' is not unique to prisons. In everyday life, the idea of presenting a front, or version of the self that is suitable to a given situation, is something that is familiar to us all. However, in prison (and other environments), the survival 'mask' all too often involves developing a hyper-masculine sense of self that shows no fear, emotion or distress in the face of the prison community; that takes violence, bullying and deprivation in one's stride, relying on no-one but oneself to get through the prison day. The fear, expressed by some of my participants, is that this cultivated 'macho' self gradually becomes who they are; no longer a front but an expression of the fundamental self, because, after ten, fifteen, twenty years in prison without spaces in which they can present different, more pro-social, versions of the self, this macho front becomes all they know.

As the research and this thesis have progressed, my understanding of identity has been developed by, and through, philosophical conversations with my participants, and in consultation with a range of literature. The dichotomy of 'survival' versus 'growth' among prisoners

relates directly to the type of prison environment in which they find themselves (see Liebling, 2012). Prisons can be, and usually are, *disabling*. Prison sociologists discuss stagnation, marking time and social isolation as elements of the reality of prison life (see O'Donnell, 2016). Hierarchies, power relations, and fear all serve to encourage a 'survival' identity (see, for example, Sparks, et al., 1996). An enabling environment, on the other hand, provides opportunity for personal development with a focus on relationships and a humanistic approach to the individual (Haigh et al. 2011).

From the outset, I framed prison education as a 'tool for personal development', arguing that this is in line within adult education pedagogy, and a range of other prison education research. I have drawn on adult education pedagogy that sees education as a self-directed activity. Adult-learners' experiences of education are steeped in past experiences and personal philosophies, with education often developing an understanding of the self within a community. Education in this thesis is seen as a means of developing the *whole person* (in line with liberal and humanist traditions) and I have argued that this can be achieved through provision of a broad curriculum.

Finally, the research has been shaped by my own subjective experience of delivering philosophy in prisons. By drawing on ethnographic techniques of data collection and analysis, I have been able to work with my biases to produce rich and detailed findings. Throughout, I have engaged in reflexive practice, refining research questions through a system of progressive focussing, sense checking emerging themes by returning to the field and asking for participant feedback. With an iterative research process involving stages of data collection, analysis, theory-building and literature searching, validation and triangulation were built into the research process. Furthermore, throughout (and in particular in the Chapter 1), I have articulated and justified the perspective from which I am working. In doing this, my biases and interests have been actively used to shape the thesis and direct the investigation.

The research in Full Sutton revealed that the CoPI provided a space to cultivate relationships and trust, and to promote the wellbeing of the participants. This research also demonstrated that it was only when trust and relationships have been established that philosophical conversation could flourish. The work in Grendon allowed for an exploration of this aspect of a CoPI, and the construct of 'open-mindedness' emerged from the work there. I argue that, in developing more open-minded dispositions, growth identities are given the space to emerge.

In general, the community aspect of the philosophy course proved to be complementary to the ethos of Grendon, but counter to the prevailing culture of Full Sutton. In both environments, the course successfully established a sense of community that was based on the positive,

shared experience of philosophical inquiry. Importantly, this shared experience was *not* based on their status as prisoner but instead allowed them to engage in an activity as a person, a learner and as an amateur philosopher. Such an environment served to breakdown stereotypes, promote tolerance and understanding, and develop different social networks. For some, this meant they could grow as individuals away from the influences of their normal social circles.

The dialogic nature of the class provided a space for participants to communicate with each other and articulate the self in a safe environment. In Grendon, the ‘safe’ environment refers to the distinction between the dialogue engaged in therapy and dialogue in philosophy. Whereas therapy can be personal, specific and often involves the exploration of disturbing emotions, philosophy can be abstract and involve the exploration of a philosophical idea. The outcome of interest in therapy is psychological change, whilst the outcome of interest for a teacher in a philosophy setting is that their students have simply *learned* something. Both these attributes of philosophy contributed to developing a ‘safe’ space for open dialogue.

In Full Sutton, the philosophy classroom provided a space to overcome complex interpersonal relationships that are formed by the underlying prisoner ‘society’. Participants were able to drop the ‘mask’ and engage in the dialogues as educational and stimulating activities. However, this took time to establish. I had to develop trust and respect among participants before relationships could emerge and participants could ‘relax’ and be themselves. With trust in place, there was indication from this research that philosophical dialogue could serve to ameliorate the impact that imprisonment can have in contributing to survival identities. There is some suggestion, from this research that education, and in particular philosophical dialogue, can contribute to a growth identity, and to the personal development of the individual participants. In particular, philosophical dialogue seemed to provide the space in which explorations of the self can occur.

Philosophy means a ‘love of wisdom’. Through the Socratic method and the development of a community of philosophical inquiry, this research has shown that philosophy can encourage people to ask questions and consider principles that lie behind an opinion. Prisoners followed in the Socratic tradition exploring complex ideas in the company of others. With language being the medium of philosophy, my participants articulated their arguments, expressed their thoughts and feelings, and engaged in critical reflection on the thoughts and feelings of others. Through these interactions, my participants got to know, and learned to tolerate, each other. They became more willing to listen to different points of view and to express our own views in the company of others and learned to trust the environment of a CoPI as a safe space

for open, honest dialogue. This research provides the foundation for understanding how education, and in particular philosophy, can promote and facilitate personal development by providing a space for self-expression and opportunity to develop a vocabulary for alternative self-definition.

In the year since I completed my fieldwork, I have had some contact with my participants. Some have written letters to update me on their work and others have written brief notes to thank me for the time I spend with them. Some of these letters have served to highlight the ongoing relevance of the course to my participants. One wrote to me to relate an argument over an over-crowded fish tank in his wing. He related how too many eggs had hatched in the tank meaning the whole community of fish would be at risk if nothing were done. He was disappointed that his fellow prisoners could not understand his perspective that it would be better for the whole community if some of the eggs were removed so that a smaller number are allowed to survive. He used utilitarian arguments to make his case and lamented the lack of philosophical understanding among his fellow prisoners, as they could not appreciate the argument he was making. A second prisoner wrote to thank me for the ‘head start’ philosophy had given him in his Critical Thinking A-level and discussed how he could apply some of the lessons he had learned with me in further studies. In both cases, I was delighted to hear that the course had taken relevance beyond the classroom.

Finally, it is important to reflect on what I have learnt through this research project. In these concluding comments, I have discussed the findings of the research and the theoretical principles upon which I have based my arguments. However, I wish to end this thesis by acknowledging what the participants themselves taught me about philosophy, life, and how to live. During the CoPI sessions, I engaged in philosophical exploration with the prisoner-participants. I reflected on the materials alongside them, listened to their points of view, and, through this dialogue, developed my own views and understandings of the topics. In Grendon in particular, the participants articulated what it means to actively philosophise in clear and eloquent terms. Through their descriptions of the experience of philosophy, I improved my own understanding of what philosophy is for and what it means to philosophise. In Full Sutton, they helped me understand why these philosophical conversations are important in the context of a prison. For these men, this was about freedom; freedom of self-expression, freedom to disagree, and freedom to engage. I hope that for the short time I worked with these men, I was able to provide a space outside and beyond the prison walls, where they could be philosophers for a time.

A final word

The final word of my thesis I leave to one of my participants. A thoughtful and engaging participant, always concerned with others, and earnest in his passionate attempts to reform and rebuild his life, he sadly passed away in prison less than year after engaging in this research. I was fortunate enough to see him again before his passing and it seems fitting to close this discussion in the way that I opened it, with his words;

“I saw a different side to the people I already knew. And it gave me more, it made me see other people in a different way. Because, before, I’d never heard other people’s opinions. Being able to work together, being able to argue together, develop ideas together; it’s always been ‘You’re right, I’m wrong, this is the way it is, no it ain’t’ etc.’ To see people work on the thing together, to build and come to some sort of conclusion together, in some cases, it was enlightening to see that. And, I suppose, that’s sort of rubbed off ... I listen more to people because I realise people have got their own ideas and they can think about things logically. So I’ve given other people more time as well and I’m more interested in what other people have got to say as well rather than, well, you’ve got nothing to say.”

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Appendices

Appendix I: Teaching Materials

Teaching materials were developed and adapted during the course of delivery. Some were used in both prisons, others just in one prison. The appendix here serves to illustrate teaching materials and includes examples of the stimuli used. I have maintained some of the errors in spelling and grammar from the original stimuli I used in the classroom as these errors served to humanise me as a teacher and became a source of entertainment for my participants.

The following books were consulted regularly in developing these stimuli:

- Dave Robinson & Chris Garratt, (1996) *Introducing Ethics*
- Christopher Hamilton (2003), *Understanding Philosophy for AS Level*
- Nigel Warburton (2004), *A Little History of Philosophy*
- Stephen Law (2007), *The Great Philosophers: The Lives and Ideas of History's Greatest Thinkers*
- Philip Stokes (2010), *Philosophy: The Great Thinkers*
- Peter Worley, P., (2011). *The 'If' Machine: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*
- Stephen Trombley (2012), *Fifty Thinkers Who Shaped The Modern World*
- Tom Butler-Bowdon (2013), *50 Philosophy Classics: Thinking, Being, Acting, Seeing*
- Gary Hayden (2014), *You Kant Make It Up! Strange Ideas From History's Great Philosophers*

I also consulted the following websites:

- The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy', <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
- Aeon, <https://aeon.co/>

Ship of Theseus: A Philosophical Paradox

A philosophical problem posed by the Ancient Greeks

Stage 1 (Plutarch's version, late 1st Century AD)

Theseus returned to Athens from Crete in a wooden ship. The ancient Greeks kept the boat and every time a piece of the ship needed replacing it was replaced by a new wooden piece. Eventually, the entire ship had been replaced, piece by piece.

Stage 2 (Hobbes' version, 1588-1679)

A young sailor worked on the ship and really wanted to own his own ship but could not afford it. He came up with a plan: every time Theseus replaced a part the young sailor would keep the old part. Eventually, he had enough parts to build his own ship out of the discarded parts of Theseus' ship.

Stage 3 (Personal Identity and Change)

Like Theseus' ship, the body is changing constantly. Cells die and are re-made, we grow and mature. Although we are physically different as adults compared to when we were children, what makes us the same person?

Stage 4

The Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) believed that we are linked by memory to our past selves. So, for Locke, it is not our physical body that makes us the same person because this is constantly changing. It is our mental selves that last through change.

Compassion, Kant and the Categorical Imperative

Stage 1; an example

It's wartime and two women volunteer to be nurses. Anne is motivated by compassion; by nature she is sensitive to the suffering of the wounded and she feels a mild personal satisfaction in helping someone's recovery. Sue, by contrast, lacks compassionate sentiments (she has lost a close relative and is consumed with grief). Nevertheless, Sue rouses herself and works just as hard as Anne because she can see that there are important reasons for tending the wounded that have nothing to do with her personal feelings. (She has worked as a nurse before and knows that anyone with her background would be useful to the community in this situation).

Stage 2; Kant's Response

Kant claimed that if you do something just because of how you feel that is not a good action at all.

Therefore, although it is of benefit that both women have volunteered only Sue can be said to have acted out of moral motive because her actions have nothing to do with her feelings.

Stage 3: The Categorical Imperative

Kant thought that morality should be based on rational thinking. As rational beings, we have certain duties. These duties are categorical which means they are absolute and unconditional; they apply at all times and in all circumstances and to all people.

This is what Kant called the 'categorical imperative' □–□moral rules that an individual is obliged to do as their duty.

“Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 1781

So, Sue is acting morally because she has volunteered as a result of her duty to do so. In other words, she has acted in a way that all people should act given the same situation.

Stage 4: An example

There's a knock at the door. You answer. It's your best friend who looks pale, worried

and out of breath. They tell you someone is chasing them, someone who wants to kill them. He's got a knife. You let your friend in, and they run upstairs to hide. Moments later there is yet another knock at the door. This time it is the would- be killer and he has a crazy look in his eyes. He wants to know where your friend is. Are they in the house? Are they hiding in the cupboard? Where are they? In fact, your friend is upstairs. But you tell a lie, you say they have gone to the park. Have you done the right thing?

According to Kant, you have not done the right thing. It is morally wrong to tell a lie and this is always the case. Therefore, it is morally wrong to lie to the would-be murderer. This is an example that Kant himself used and demonstrates the length to which he took his 'categorical imperative'.

Bentham, Mill, and the Happiness Machine

Stage 1: Bentham's Utilitarianism (1748-1832)

Utilitarianism is a one form of a broader theory called consequentialism which says that the extent to which an action is morally right or wrong is determined by its consequences alone. Nothing else matters.

Jeremy Bentham was a key figure in the development of utilitarianism as an ethical system. He claimed that we should aim to act in such a way that maximises pleasure and minimises pain. In fact, he went further and stated that it was our moral duty to alleviate the suffering of others where possible. Bentham's utilitarianism stated that we should seek to act in a way that would result in the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

Central to Bentham's theory was the idea that all types of pleasure are equal and the happiness of each person should hold equal weight regardless of their background or status.

Stage 2: Mill's adaptation

John Stuart Mill was a pupil of Bentham's and broadly agreed with the idea of utilitarianism. However, he disagreed with the idea that all pleasure's held equal weight. Famously, Mill asked whether you would rather be a 'happy pig' or a 'sad human'. For Mill, you are better off being a sad human because the pleasure that humans can derive from life, even if in small amounts, far out-weigh the primitive pleasure a pig might enjoy. Mill categorised pleasures as being lower or higher - lower pleasures are those that can be enjoyed by animals and humans alike (such as food, warmth etc) whilst higher pleasures can only be enjoyed by humans (such as music and literature).

An example

Which is best - Dan Brown or Shakespeare? According to Bentham, Dan Brown is better because it produces pleasure for more people than Shakespeare. Bentham felt very strongly that there were no higher or lower quality pleasures; pleasure is pleasure. However, Mill would say Shakespeare is better because it evokes higher quality pleasures than Dan Brown could.

Stage 3: The Pleasure Machine (a critique)

Utilitarianism insists that happiness is what we ought to aim for. But, is happiness what

we do, or should, value most?

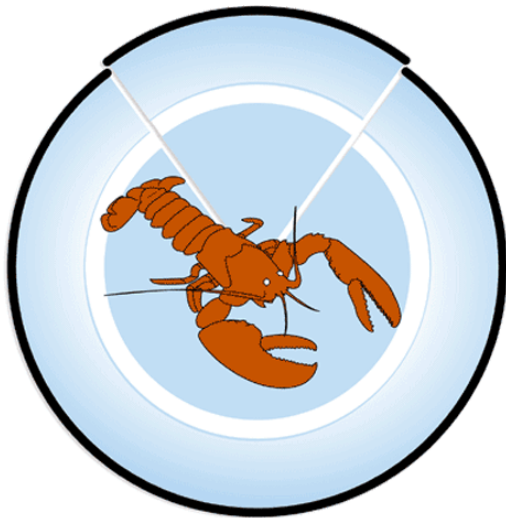
The following thought-experiment is used to test the suggestion that happiness alone is what ultimately matters. Suppose a new machine is built –□the pleasure machine. The device can replicate perfectly any experience you like. Do you want to know what it is like to climb Mount Everest, to converse with Aristotle, or to enjoy a romantic evening with a supermodel? The pleasure machine can now show you. Just strap on the helmet, and a vast computer will stimulate your brain in order to induce any experience you desire.

What if you were given the opportunity to permanently immerse yourself in the pleasure machine’s virtual world? Would you do it?

Stage 4: A classic counter-example (Frame the innocent case)

Suppose a black person kills a white person in an area torn by racial strife. As a result there are daily riots and escalating levels of violence leading to increasing levels of unhappiness. As a visitor to the area you know you could secure the arrest of an innocent black person for the original crime simply by testifying against them. The riots would immediately stop and further bloodshed would be avoided –□a much happier outcome. A utilitarian calculation suggests that morally, the right thing to do is to frame an innocent black person. But surely, that would be very wrong indeed, whatever the consequences might be for happiness overall?

Descartes

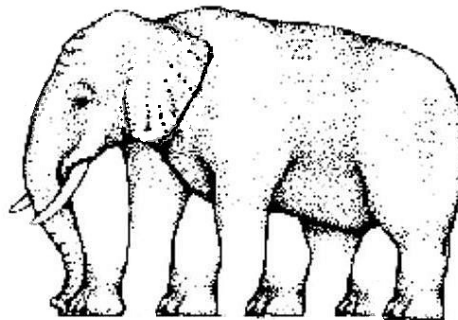


Stare at one of the lobster's eyes. After a while it will seem like the plate has repaired itself.

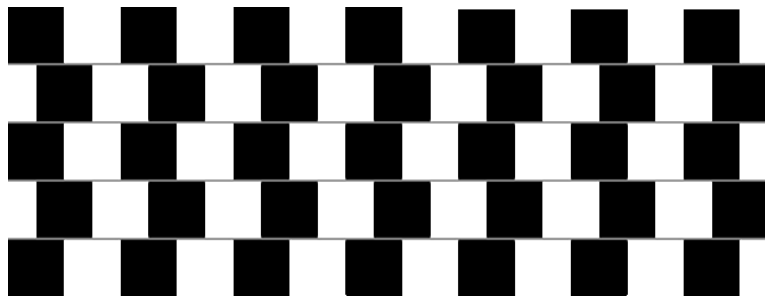
©G. Sarcone, www.archimedes-lab.org

How many legs does the elephant have?

Are these lines parallel? Use a ruler to



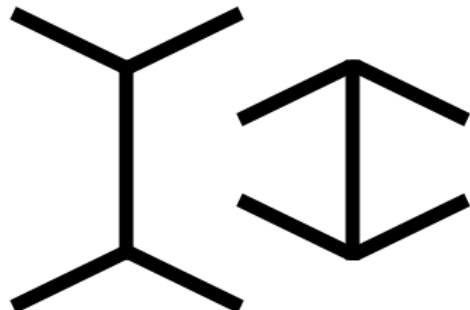
check.



Are the vertical lines in these two same length?

Questions

does this say about our senses? How can we be that we are not deceived?
What do we know to be real?



What sure

Stage 2: Descartes, Cogito Ergo Sum

Descartes analysed the basis of knowledge. His first observation was that our senses sometimes deceive us. He went on to ask ‘how do I know I am not dreaming?’ □ Taking this thought further he considered the following scenario:

Suppose there exists an evil demon, god-like in its power, that is intent on deceiving you. This demon might place all sorts of ideas and experiences into your head. It might cause you to think you are surrounded by physical objects when in fact nothing exists apart from you and this malevolent being. How can you know anything for certain?

Descartes notes that even if there is such a demon, this demon cannot deceive him into believing that he, Descartes, exists, when he does not. Descartes hits upon ‘the cogito’. Cogito ergo sum: I think therefore I am. Even if the demon deceives him, still Descartes continues to think, and if he thinks then he must exist.

Stage 3: Dualism and Descartes’ □ Theory of the Self

Descartes’ □ said that while he could imagine himself in some situation existing without a body, he could not imagine being a body without a mind. Therefore, his mind or consciousness is fundamental to who he is. His assertion of ‘I think therefore I am’, led him to the belief that the thinking mind must be the fundamental essence of the human being. This led him to state that the mind and the body are entirely separate beings. A human being consists of an immaterial mind united, somehow, with a material body. The mind does the thinking, feeling, desiring, perceiving and so on. The body does the moving around. This is known as ‘dualism’.

Stage 4: Gender dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is the term used for those who feel they are trapped in a body of the wrong gender. Some people feel this so strongly that they are willing to undergo major surgery and alter their hormones such that they entirely change their image and gender as a result. The relationship between body and identity in gender dysphoria is paradoxical. Having the right body is seen as absolutely central to sense of self, but it is possible to have a sense of self in the wrong body. Gender dysphoria seems to demonstrate both that our bodies are central features of who we are; and that our personal identity can be separated from our bodies, if they are the wrong gender.

Hume, Arendt and Baginni

Stage 1: Hume's ideas of knowledge

David Hume (1711-76) claimed that knowledge comes solely from our sensory experiences. Basic knowledge of the material world comes from observation. We are also able to have knowledge of concepts or ideas, the basis of which he claimed are also in experiences. (This is known as empiricism) Hume said that every concept we have is ultimately furnished by experience. Hume divided the mind's contents into impressions and ideas. Impressions are perceptions we have when the world impacts on our senses. Hume said concepts or ideas are copies of impressions. For example, I cannot have a concept of the colour red unless I have experience of it.

An example

When I see an apple sat on a table in front of me, it produces in my mind certain sensory impressions – of colour, shape. If I were to bite into the apple, more impressions such as taste, texture and smell will develop.

We can combine our impressions to make ideas of things we haven't seen directly. For example, we can have a concept of a gold mountain because we have a concept of gold and of a mountain that we can combine to have an idea of a gold mountain. Without the concepts of gold and mountain, we cannot have an idea of a gold mountain.

Stage 2: Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self

Hume rejected the notion of there being a single unitary self. Instead, he claimed that we are a bundle of thoughts, experiences and perceptions. He came to this conclusion based on his own beliefs regarding knowledge. He did believe that introspection was a valid sensory experience but claimed that when examining the inner self it wasn't possible to 'catch sight of the soul'. All you see are thoughts and experiences running through your mind, therefore, that's all the self is; a bundle of thoughts and experiences.

“Personal identity is nothing but the continuous succession of perceptual experiences.”

Stage 3: Arendt

Arendt agreed somewhat with Hume's Bundle theory of the self. At the very least, she agreed that there is no fundamental essence of the self. Instead, she claimed that each individual is born with the freedom to choose how to act; each new birth is a new beginning and each person has the capacity to change the world.

However, she also stated that we do not act in isolation and it is important that we are part of society. We need our actions to be observed and approved of by others. It is in action and speech that the individual discloses who they are. Identities are developed through narratives that emerge from actions of the individual. She claimed that an individual's identity is self-constructed through representation of the self in society. This constructed identity is constantly renegotiated and developed through the individual articulating and defending different conceptions of themselves.

Stoics

Stage 1

Today, ‘to be philosophical’ □ about something, means learning to accept what you cannot change. This comes from the philosophy of the Stoics. The founder of Stoicism is Zeno of Citium (c. 334-262 BC) who said that we should only worry about the things we have control over and not get worked up about any thing else. Stoics maintained that we are responsible for what we feel and think and we should control our emotional responses. For example, Cicero, another well-known Stoic, said that we should not worry about old age but rather accept it as a natural process. Rather than worrying about being able to do less, we should recognise that because older people are more experienced, any work they do is more effective. Therefore, they are able to do less to achieve the same results. The idea is that we should recognise that it is not growing older that is the problem, but our attitudes towards growing older. If we control our emotions, we can have an optimistic view of old age.

Stage 2 The Stoical lifestyle

Stoic philosophy provides a □ guide to life □ or a lifestyle for people to follow. Seneca (4BC-65AD), an early Stoic, believed in a simple life devoted to virtue and reason. This meant a quiet life devoted to improving one’s wisdom through the study of philosophy. A key proponent of Stoicism was Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor. He claimed that happiness depends upon the quality of your thoughts. Being stoical means accepting one’s misfortunes without complaint – □ you should strive for simple living and be content with your lot in life.

Stage 3 □ An issue with political Quietism

Some have criticised Stoicism as it seems to promote ‘political quietism’. In other words, if people accept stoicism, and become content with their lot in life, this will lead to people being less likely to engage in political affairs. (this results in less trouble for the emperor which some cynics have suggested was Aurelius’ □ goal).

Art (FS only)

(Stage 1 involved showing a range of pictures of different types of art)

Stage 2 □ Iris Murdoch

Whilst Wittgenstein, and Hannah Arendt, said that our actions are the most important part of our moral selves, Murdoch disagreed stating that our inner struggles are more important. The constant struggle to ‘perfect’ □ ourselves is central to being human.

Literature is the lens through which we can see and understand all human efforts. She said ‘Moral change and moral achievement are slow’ □ but that life must be about making ourselves better – □ seeking perfection. To do this we must reduce our egos so that we are able to see others and the world more clearly. Art is able to present perfect ideas or forms. Through contemplation of such art, moral good is revealed to us – □ through the appreciation of beauty and truth in nature, art and literature.

According to Murdoch, good art “affords us pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent”. She also says, "We can be saved without seeing the Alps or the Cairngorms, and without Titian and Mozart too" but goes on to point out that "great art points in the direction of the good".

Stage 3 □ Plato

Plato had a love-hate relationship with the arts. He must have had some love for the arts, because he talks about them often, and his remarks show that he paid close attention to what he saw and heard. He was also a fine literary stylist and a great storyteller; in fact he is said to have been a poet before he encountered Socrates and became a philosopher. Some of his dialogues are real literary masterpieces. On the other hand, he found the arts threatening. He proposed sending the poets and playwrights out of his ideal Republic, or at least censoring what they wrote; and he wanted music and painting severely censored. The arts, he thought, are powerful shapers of character. Thus, to train and protect ideal citizens for an ideal society, the arts must be strictly controlled.

Plato argued that art is threatening because it merely ‘imitates’ □ reality; therefore taking us away from the truth of things. Furthermore, that art perverts and corrupts: being simply "imitation", it makes us attached to the wrong things - things of this world rather than eternal Forms - and depicts vile and immoral behaviour on the part of the gods and humans as if it

were normal or admirable. It implants the wrong values.

Stage 3 □ Hegel (1770-1831) and Tolstoy (1828-1910)

For Hegel, art is an end in itself. Art sits alongside religion and philosophy as a mode of expressing the best of humanity. A key difference for Hegel, is that art is nearer to nature and more sensitive to our emotional sides –□as well, of course, as being appealing to the senses. He argued that it is through art that we are able to bring our inner consciousness to the surface and present it externally.

Tolstoy went further claiming that art is not simply pleasure but something that unifies us as people. It allows us to come together with the same feelings and therefore move forward towards an idea of well-being of individuals and of humanity.

All human life is filled with art. True art demands the union of all people without exception –□it should set brotherly love to all men as the highest virtue.

Free Speech

Stage 1 □ *John Milton*

John Milton was one of the first philosophers in the modern age to discuss the rights of free speech. Arguments for free speech gained more prevalence as a result of the invention of the printing press in the late-1400s. This technology meant that ideas could be disseminated on a large-scale, some of which went against the teachings of institutions at the time. As a result the Catholic Church produced a list of banned books that included the works of Hume, Descartes, Locke and Voltaire. The British Government brought in a law that all those who wished to print works required a licence, which effectively meant the government was able to deny licences as a form of censorship.

In response to this, John Milton (1608-1674) wrote a pamphlet that was published in 1644. In this he laid out several key arguments against ‘pre-publication censorship’. The two arguments that he described were as follows:

If something is to be rejected, it should be examined, refuted and condemned in public rather than simply prohibited before ideas have the opportunity to be expressed.

By reading what is ‘wrong’ we are able to confirm what we know to be right. As a religious man, he argued that God gave human beings free will and reason. As such, they should be allowed to judge expressions of ideas for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

Stage 2 □ *Mill and* □ *The Harm Principle* □

John Stuart Mill wrote extensively on the rights of the individual. He said that free discussion is necessary to prevent the “deep slumber of decided opinion”. Most of what he said boils down to the idea that everyone should be able to do what they like, so long as it doesn’t harm anybody else.

With respect to free speech he said that freedom of expression should only be curtailed if there is a clear and direct threat. To explain this he gave an example of a corn dealer who is accused of starving the poor by keeping prices high. Mill said that in this situation you

CAN: make this accusation in written form. Even if this results in financial hardship for the corn dealer.

CAN’T: Shout this in front of an angry mob who might be ready to take out their anger on whoever they feel is to blame as this might result in physical harm coming to the corn dealer.

He said this was the difference between ‘legitimate’ □ and ‘illegitimate’ □ harm.

Stage 3 □ The Westboro Baptist Church

The Westboro Baptist church believes that homosexuality is a grave sin. They also believe that the death of American service men and women is ‘divine message’ □ indicating God’s disapproval of America’s tolerance of homosexuals. These beliefs have led them to protest loudly at the funerals of soldiers shouting hate slogans.

Families and friends have found this extremely upsetting. One father of a deceased soldier took the Westboro Baptist church to court arguing that he has a right to mourn for his son in peace. However, the USA Supreme Court held-up the Westboro Baptist Church’s right to free speech as protected in the first amendment.

Many people have stated that if we are to truly protect free speech, we must uphold that right even for those we disagree with. For many, the actions of the Westboro Baptist Church test their belief in free speech to the limit.

Stage 4 □ The right to cause offence

Salman Rushdie famously said

“What is freedom of expressions? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.”

In the Satanic Verses, Rushdie wrote on topics that many people in Muslim countries found offensive. This resulted in a fatwa being issued and Rushdie going into hiding for nine years. He himself escaped harm but a translator and a bodyguard both died as a result. Further to this, several people died in the violent protests that resulted from publication of the books. This has led some to ask whether freedom of speech in a case such as this is really worth it.

Appendix II - Qualitative data collection tools

Pre-course Informal Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background? Both prior to coming to prison and since being in prison.
2. What do you understand by the word philosophy?
3. Do you have any experience of philosophy? Either studying it formally, reading philosophy books or taking part in philosophy sessions.
4. Why have you decided to do the course?
5. What are you expecting from the philosophy sessions?
6. What do you anticipate you will get out of the course?
7. Are there any topics or particular philosophers you would like to cover in this course?

Post-participation Interview Schedule

Part one

Aim: This part of the interview aims to openly explore their experiences and thoughts of taking part in philosophy classes in the prison. It is essential during this stage the questions are open, neutral and allow participants to bring forward ideas without hint.

1. What has been the best thing about these philosophy classes in your opinion?
2. I am particularly interested in your personal experience of the philosophy classes. Can you tell me a bit more about your involvement in the classes?
3. What attracted you to the philosophy classes in the first place?
4. Thinking specifically of the Philosophy classes, I'd like to know more about what you personally get out of attending the course.
5. It is important that I understand where these classes fit in with respect to your personal experience of education both prior to coming to prison and whilst being here. Can you tell me about this?
6. What role do you think the philosophy classes can play in FS in particular?
7. The philosophy classes are not the only educational opportunity in prison, and I understand that there are other courses and activities available. Is there anything that you have had experience of whilst in prison that you would say is similar to the philosophy classes?

8. This next question is particularly difficult to answer with certainty, but I would like to get your thoughts on it. In thinking about how you've changed since you started taking the class, how much have the philosophy classes triggered those changes compared to other influences on your life at this time?
9. What have you learned from taking part in the philosophy classes? Why?
10. Okay, following on from that, do you think you can apply what you have learned in these classes to your everyday life?
11. If I were to ask you to recommend this class to three fellow prisoners, how would you decide who to recommend this class to?

Part 2

12. Has philosophy prompted you to think more about yourself – who you are and how you see yourself?
 13. Do you think philosophy has helped you express your feelings differently?
 14. Can you explain how this class has affected the way you behave towards other people?
 15. Can you describe a time when a philosophy discussion has changed the way you think about something?
 16. In what way has this class affected the way you view other people?
 17. Since being part of the course, how has your attitude towards education changed?
 18. Do you think the philosophy classes can help you in your rehabilitation?
 19. That brings us to the end of my questions. Do you have anything you would like to add?
- Thank you for your time. I may be interested in following up with you on some of these insights. Would you be happy for me to do this? Do you have any further questions for me?

Feedback forms

Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry Feedback form

Did you understand what was expected of you? Yes/no

Please explain _____

Did you speak up as much as you wanted to? Yes/no

If no, why not?

What was the most interesting part of the discussion?

What did you personally get out of today's discussion?

Did you feel comfortable with the discussion? Yes/no

Please Explain _____

Is there any way the discussion can be improved?

Any further comments?

Please feel free to discuss any issues that have arisen as a result of taking part in the discussion today and in the course overall. This may include comments on how it has affected you personally; whether you feel it has had an impact on your engagement in therapy or your interactions with others in the wings; or how it may have impacted on

Appendix III – Quantitative data

