

Transaction or Transformation: Why do Philosophy in Prisons?

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Abstract

Why do public philosophy in prisons? When we think about the value and aims of public philosophy there is a well-entrenched tendency to think in transactional terms. The academy has something of value that it aims to pass on or transmit to its clients. Usually, this transaction takes place within the confines of the university, in the form of transmission of valuable skills or knowledge passed from faculty to students. Public philosophy, construed within this transactional mindset, then consists in passing on something valuable from inside the academy to the outside. In this paper, we reflect on our experiences of taking philosophy into prisons and argue that making the case for public philosophy in general, and philosophy in prisons in particular in these transactional terms risks obscuring what we take to be a distinctive and valuable outcome of public philosophy. Importantly, it risks obscuring what those who participate in a particular kind of public philosophy – including the professional philosophers – experience as valuable about the activity: its transformational potential.

1. Introduction

Why do public philosophy in prisons? In our experience, when academics and administrators think about the value and aims of public philosophy – here used as our catchall term for any philosophical activity led by professional philosophers outside the context of a university – there is a well-entrenched tendency to think in transactional terms. This is perhaps not surprising given the tendency to think of university education in general in transactional terms. In academia, this transaction usually takes place within the confines of the university, in the form of transmission of valuable skills or knowledge passed from faculty to students. We might call this kind of intra-university philosophical activity *private* philosophy. *Public* philosophy, construed within this transactional mindset, then consists in passing on something valuable from inside the academy to the outside.

In this paper, we share our perspectives on this issue drawing on our experiences as practitioners taking philosophy into public venues such as prisons, youth centres, and schools. We will argue that a specific, widespread, and valuable alternative way of doing public philosophy should not be assimilated with this transactional methodology. We call this alternative, for reasons we explain below, *transformative* public philosophy. This way of doing public philosophy we have in mind involves facilitated, semi-structured discussions that explore some philosophical question or stimulus without a specific set of answers or discursive direction in view. In this latter kind of public philosophy, there is no "sage on the stage" sharing their knowledge and wisdom in an asymmetric transaction. Rather, the practitioner stimulates and helps maintain a dialogue with the participants as they *do philosophy* together. It is likely that some knowledge may be transmitted during these sessions, and that the skill of 'philosophising' will be developed through this practice, both of which could be understood in transactional terms. However, we contend that a valuable aspect of this kind of public philosophy, namely its capacity to induce transformations of perspectives, is, importantly, not characterisable in transactional terms. This has consequences for how we view ourselves as public philosophers, for how learners view themselves as participants, and for how we view the role of public philosophy more generally.

2. Transactional Public Philosophy

Our case relies on reflections based on our experiences as practitioners, taking philosophy from the university into prisons and other community settings. These experiences have led us to draw a contrast between two ways of doing public philosophy, one which we believe to be valuable in thinking about its value and aims. One way of doing public philosophy is informed by the kind of 'transactional' mindset that we have just sketched and essentially consists of transposing how philosophy is taught and practiced in a university setting to some public context – we call this *transactional* public philosophy. Transactional public philosophy can be characterised as assuming that the role of public philosophers is to share certain goods, i.e., their knowledge and skills, with people outside of the university community for whom these will also be valuable.

Couching answers to questions about the value and aims of public philosophy in transactional terms makes them nicely comprehensible to administrators, managers, policy-makers, and funding bodies. In the case of philosophy, there are plenty of candidates for what this valuable thing might be – critical thinking skills, metacognitive abilities, or a body of knowledge and techniques for thinking about questions of moral, political, and existential importance, or some package of these items. It is tempting, then, to answer questions about the value and purpose of public philosophy by pointing to one or more of these goods. It is intuitive to many that these goods are desirable, and that engaging with philosophy might be an efficient way of transmitting them. Managers of public institutions (such as administrators of prison education programmes) are faced with the difficult task of deciding whether, how, and to what extent they should engage with the multitude of programmes and activities that claim to have important benefits for their members. If the value of engaging in philosophy consists in the transmission of some readily quantifiable skill or body of knowledge, and if this skill or body of knowledge is deemed valuable by society, then it will be easier for philosophers to make their case to these administrators for bringing philosophy into their institution.

Transactional thinking also makes it easier to demonstrate whether what we are doing is working. We simply need to decide what quantifiable good we aim to transmit, find a way to measure it, and gather the results – perhaps a metacognition test, a quiz about whatever body of knowledge has been deemed valuable, or a questionnaire about whether participants feel their critical thinking abilities have improved. For the same reasons, a transactional mindset makes it easier for philosophers to justify what they are doing – in the language of university mission statements, impact agendas, and government targets – to their own institutions when they make their case for financial and institutional support.

We recognise that this kind of transactional thinking has its necessary place and that it is often expedient or unavoidable to make the case for public philosophy in these terms (see e.g. Szifris 2017; Pritchard 2019). In our experience, the administrators who have made it possible for us to run philosophy projects in prison have been incredibly positive and supportive about the value of doing philosophy. Nevertheless, just as is the case when arranging projects to take philosophy into schools, there is always a feeling that the projects need to have some kind of reportable outcome. Indeed, we acknowledge that it would often be irresponsible for education administrators, funding bodies, and policymakers *not* to require a case from philosophers

couched at least partly in these terms. They are quite right to demand more than hand-waving and good vibes. Moreover, we agree that the goods listed above are valuable, and are optimistic that engaging with philosophy in certain ways does indeed promote them (though there are reasons, explored well by others to be cautious about claiming too much here – see e.g. Huber & Kuncel 2016). However, our experiences lead us to think that making the case for public philosophy in general, and philosophy in prisons in particular, in these transactional terms risks obscuring what we take to be a distinctive and valuable outcome of public philosophy. And, importantly, it risks obscuring what those who participate in a particular kind of public philosophy – including the professional philosophers – *experience* as valuable about the activity. To the extent that this is true, there will always be an element of inauthenticity and self-deceit in any rationalisation of the value of this kind of public philosophy in purely transactional terms, and an imperfect fit between how the nature and purpose of philosophical activity are described and the participants’ actual experience of the activity and its results.

3. Dialogical Public Philosophy

There is an alternative way of doing public philosophy that does not necessarily presume that philosophers are engaged in a knowledge transaction with the public. This way of doing philosophy will be familiar to those who have encountered the various philosophy for/with children (P4C) techniques that are currently very popular. For example, those developed and promoted by *The Philosophy Foundation*, *Philosophy Circles*, or *SAPERRE*. On these kinds of approaches, the discussions are *facilitated* by someone who is responsible for guiding the discourse in philosophically interesting and productive directions and who draws out contributions from participants which illuminate the range of issues and contrasting positions that emerge from the discussion. Discussions are *semi-structured* insofar as there is some organization imposed on the activity by the facilitator that is designed to accentuate philosophically important aspects of the participants’ activities, or to otherwise structure their thinking in productive ways. This imposed organization can take a non-exclusive range of forms, from minimal to maximal. Minimally, it might consist in using guiding questions at relevant points to prompt the participants to explain the reasons behind the claims that they make, or in chunking the activity into different subsections, each aiming to foster or develop

specific sorts of interactions among the participants. Less minimally, it might require that participants' contributions to the discussion fit some specific schema, examples of which themselves can be more or less prescriptive. While a minimal schema might require only that participants offer reasons for the positions they express or relate them to the contributions of other participants, more prescriptive schemas might specify particular ways in which this should be done, such as: 'I agree/disagree with [participant] when they said [reconstruction of participant's claim] because [reason for agreement/disagreement] – as employed in some ways of CoPI (community of philosophical inquiry) style facilitating. Alternatively, the organization might be imposed only by the way the facilitator directs the discussion – the way in which they foreground some aspects of the participants' contributions, or the dynamics of their interactions over others, by calling on different contributors, asking for clarifications, or otherwise fostering specific interactions among participants and discursive directions over others.

Perhaps most importantly, though, on this way of doing philosophy, there should be *no fixed discursive ends in view* for the facilitator as they go into the activity or participate in it. This contrasts with philosophy as practiced within the university (or indeed in public lectures) where the teacher gives clear direction towards what are standardly considered to be the philosophically "interesting" questions, has the explicit intention to convey a particular set of historical and contemporary responses to those questions, and conveys the expectation that listeners critically engage with the question on the basis of those historical and contemporary responses. Of course, if the public philosophy facilitator is a trained philosopher, they may well have their own stance on the theme or topic under discussion, likely including their own sense of the aspects of the theme it might be most beneficial or interesting for the group to pursue. But, on this model of facilitating enquiry, this stance should not inform the way they facilitate the discussion. The direction and focus of the discussion should develop organically from the way the participants engage with the activity, rather than being bent by the facilitator to fit a preconceived mould or to hit pre-specified talking points. This is, in our experience, the most challenging aspect of facilitation for many philosophers – we will have more to say about the nature of this challenge and the importance of meeting it below.¹

¹ We do not mean to claim that this dialogical way of engaging in philosophical enquiry is the only one that is not happily assimilated into a transactional mindset, or the only one better captured by the 'transformative' alternative we here propose.

This generic way of doing public philosophy and its broadly Deweyan roots will be familiar to many. It is often referred to under the generic term "P4C" (i.e., "philosophy for children") because it is the form most often used when practitioners take philosophy into schools. But it is not a childish way of doing philosophy, and so is certainly not just philosophy "for children". These methods are suitable for doing philosophy with children because they do not require a particular educational background or a pre-conceived interest in "philosophical issues". They do not require the participants to be able to do prior reading (or indeed any preparation) nor do they require the participants to learn complex terminology or be able to regurgitate what other people have said on the topic. While the training in these techniques often does involve games to keep participants alert and interested (and to build a sense of community) these are not essential to the methods themselves. Just as the same core methods of promoting philosophical dialogue can be used with both 5-year-olds and 18-year-olds in schools with only slight adaptations to the running of the sessions, they can also be used with adults aged 18+. It is what the participants bring to the sessions in terms of their concepts and reasoning that shapes the "maturity" of the dialogue.

We will therefore refer to any way of doing public philosophy that is facilitated, semi-structured, and has no discursive ends in view as a *dialogical* model. We have already mentioned perhaps the best-known and most influential instance of such a model – Lipman's Dewey-inspired CoPI methodology – above (see Kennedy 2012 for discussion of Lipman's programme and its relationship to Dewey's philosophy). In what follows, we focus exclusively on the CoPI-style approach we have just outlined.² Why focus on this way of doing things? One reason is that this is the general form that public philosophy in schools and prisons often takes – and, as we will subsequently suggest, it is particularly easy to see why this mode of public philosophy is better construed as transformative than transactional.

4. Philosophy in the University vs. Philosophy in the Prison

Why not teach philosophy in prisons in the same way that we teach philosophy in the university?

² Various approaches with potentially important methodological divergences conform to these generic conditions, but we don't aim to distinguish or adjudicate between these here. See e.g. Williams (2016) for a partial, UK-centric survey.

Our experiences as both university teachers and facilitators of philosophy dialogue in prisons and youth settings have given us the opportunity to see philosophy done in both settings in transactive and dialogical ways. Moreover, we believe that there is a place for both ways of "doing" philosophy in these settings. For example, there are a number of learners in the prison setting who are keen to take national qualifications in academic subjects and who undertake Open University degrees. These learners are understandably interested in a form of transaction of knowledge about philosophy as well as engaging in doing philosophy. Similarly, even though in a standard university degree course there is an expectation of knowledge transaction, dialogical approaches can also be introduced within tutorials and seminars to encourage participation and learning to "philosophise". Nevertheless, our experience has led us to believe that there are important differences between the two settings which are worth cashing out.

Doing philosophy in a university is what most professional philosophers are mostly paid to do. They have invested time learning about some particular canon of texts and ideas (or several) and learning a specific set of methodological and discursive skills for engaging with them and contributing to current scholarship. The students who they teach have (hopefully) knowingly and voluntarily invested time and financial resources to have some of this knowledge and some of these skills transmitted to or inculcated in them. And the success or failure of the academic's interactions with their students is measured in part according to quantifiable scores according to metrics that have been settled in advance – such as achievement of pre-specified learning outcomes, student performance with respect to a grading rubric, and instructor performance with respect to student evaluation metrics. These institutional features of professional philosophy can make the transactional mindset so pervasive as to be invisible. If all your philosophical interactions are with students and colleagues who have already bought into the value of philosophical knowledge and skills, it is easy to forget about the question of how or why such knowledge and skill might come to seem valuable in the first place (or might fail to do so). And, if the assessment of your professional performance and value tends to be couched exclusively in terms of the kinds of metrics we just mentioned, it becomes easier to overlook the possibility that these metrics obscure other ways of articulating the purpose and value of philosophical activity.

These institutional features and the mindset they encourage can make a particular way of doing and thinking about public philosophy seem natural or unavoidable – simply take what one does

in a philosophy classroom and transpose it to a public setting. Some modifications might be necessary, such as tinkering with content and delivery in ways tailored to the likely skillset and interests of your audience (strip out some jargon, make things a bit chattier, focus preferentially on aspects you think will resonate with your audience) but the essential structure and aim of the activity remain the same. When justifying the value of what one is doing, simply pick one or more items from the laundry-list of institutionally-sanctioned benefits of academic philosophy (desirability to employers; general-purpose reasoning skills; understanding of civically important issues, etc.) most likely to appeal to your audience or whoever is granting you access to them. When assessing the efficacy of what you have done, pick the appropriate institutionally legible metric and apply it (perhaps: administer general-purpose reasoning quizzes before and after the activities; track subsequent employment or access to further education; or simply look for indicators of approval and tell-tale buzzwords in post-participation questionnaires).

This way of doing public philosophy understands the nature, value, and aims of public philosophy in terms of a kind of 'transactional' ideology fostered by aspects of professionalised academic philosophy. Public philosophy here simply consists in transposing some of the kinds of transactions and modes of evaluation that occur within universities to a public setting. This is what we call *transactional* public philosophy. As we intimated above, we do not wish to disparage colleagues who practice public philosophy in something like this transactional way, nor to reject the claims that any of the particular quantifiable goods we've mentioned above are valuable or that engaging in philosophy is a way of acquiring them. But, as we also noted, we do not think that this is the only way of doing or thinking about public philosophy. An important reason for this is that many of the institutional features that make transactional thinking (and the corresponding ways of doing philosophy) distinctively appropriate within a university are simply not found in most public institutions and contexts.

While we think this point has broad application (a case we hope to develop elsewhere) we restrict our reflections here to philosophical activity within prison education based on our experiences in these projects. Some of the institutional features common to universities (at least in the UK) rest on a presumption of homogeneity in respect to the students' educational preparation and ambitions. Although many different kinds of people study at universities, a university's student population is homogeneous at least insofar as it is reasonable to expect that

each student has a broadly positive experiential history with the metrics and incentive systems of institutional education and a broadly positive valuation of the outcomes that it claims to promote. We should not expect the same kind of homogeneity within a prison population. Our own discussions with prison learners and prison educators and administrators suggest that many of the people within the current UK prison context have had a rather negative experience of institutional education. A university population is also reasonably homogeneous with respect to its level of past educational attainment. In the projects we have been involved in participation has been voluntary and therefore the participants have for the most part been a self-selecting group. They have comprised learners with university degrees (or studying towards Open University degrees) as well as learners with few or no qualifications and poor literacy skills but who have curiosity and a hunger for mental stimulation. Often these learners will have already indicated some interest in the educational offerings of the prison, but we also get those with no previous experience in the learning centre who have been persuaded by their peers or by prison staff to come along and try it out. Therefore, in our sessions, a wide range of experiences with and attitudes towards the value of institutional education will be present. Finally, a university population is also reasonably homogeneous with respect to the skills and dispositions required to engage with the institutional structures of higher education. Again, there is no reasonable expectation of such homogeneity in a group of prison learners. The fact that professional academics are a self-selecting group whose lives have been pervasively and positively shaped by institutionalised education, and who spend most of their time in and around that institutional context, can make this disanalogy easy to miss. It is easy for a career academic to forget, for example, that the capacity to sit attentively while a stranger talks at length, only partially *to* you, about some specialised interest of theirs is a strange one that must be cultivated, and that many people have no occasion to cultivate.

5. The Dialogical Model in the Prison

These differences between university and prison populations raise the question of whether a transactional model is the best way of understanding what public philosophy in prisons should aim to achieve and how it should be done. As we have noted, there are many cases where a straightforward transposition or adaptation of university teaching methods and content is appropriate, as in cases in which the prison learners have indicated that they want to engage in

university-style education and work towards school or university qualifications. While there is an important place for offering philosophy as an academic subject to prison learners who want it, this would be the remit of the colleges running the educational programmes within the prison rather than the role of university academics engaging in public philosophy. And, in our experience, only some of the participants of our philosophy sessions have indicated an interest in taking this orthodox academic route into philosophy. The particular kind of model we favour for doing public philosophy – a dialogical model that consists in programmes of facilitated semi-structured philosophical discussion – helps to address the challenges posed by working with groups with diverse attitudes to the structures, values, and norms of institutionalised education, and diverse academic skills and dispositions.

In our experience, one advantage of the dialogical model that makes it particularly suitable for use in the prison context is that, unlike transactional models, it does not have a hierarchical power structure baked into it, wherein the success or failure of participation is ultimately measured in terms of the extent to which participants have listened to and absorbed what the educator has to teach them. Instead, the discussions that result have a cooperative and communal structure, as the group progresses together towards an understanding of the conflicts or complementarity between their evolving perspectives on the topics discussed. The fact that the facilitated discussions have no pre-specified learning outcomes or success conditions – beyond producing and discussing ideas of philosophical interest – means that the contributions of participants are not being evaluated according to some independent metric which they might or might not buy into. And, importantly, a good facilitator functions as an active *participant* in the dialogue – not (usually) by explicitly offering their opinions on the topic at hand or the merits of the participants' contributions, but by participating in and channelling the dynamics of the interactions between participants and their viewpoint, sharing in their perplexity, surprise or excitement, and using their own experience of this participation to help the interactions of the participants flow down whatever philosophically interesting paths are opened up by the discussion. Instead of explicitly aiming to transmit skills or content to the participants, then, the facilitator attempts to clarify and help participants navigate the intellectual landscape that organically arises from their contributions and interactions. As a participant themselves, the facilitator is not a dispassionate observer of this landscape, but a fellow traveller.

In addition to the flattening of the hierarchical power structure that is implicit in most

institutionalised teaching, this dialogical mode of philosophical interaction requires less in the way of the idiosyncratic set of dispositions that are presupposed or cultivated by institutionalised education. We mentioned above the disposition to attend carefully and at length to a monologue delivered by a stranger on an unfamiliar and complex topic. Whilst the practice of transposing a lecture or undergraduate society talk to a prison context implicitly relies on the (implausible) assumption that most participants will share this disposition, the dialogical model we are considering builds on more generic and widely shared social dispositions and capacities, such as engaging with the opinions and points of view of one's discussion partners, tracking a discussion's ebb, flow, and overall structure, and attuning oneself to the changing mood of the group. Of course, there will be variation in the distribution of these dispositions and capacities within any given group – but they are undoubtedly more widespread than the specialised set of dispositions implicitly presupposed by the structure of university education. And, as the feedback from the prison learners who participated in one of the University of Edinburgh philosophy in prisons projects shows, the development of these skills transfers to life contexts that the learners themselves value (see Bovill & Anderson 2020; Pritchard 2019; Pritchard [this issue]; Stapleton 2020).

The dialogical model we favour does not presuppose any positive evaluations of the power structure or incentive systems of institutional education, nor the idiosyncratic set of dispositions and capacities presupposed by standard methods of university teaching. It is, in this sense, more widely accessible than transactional models that simply transpose aspects of institutional education into a public setting such as public "knowledge exchange" lectures. This accessibility also gives the dialogical model the important benefit of opening up positive experiences of education systems to a wider range of participants. While the kind of dialogical philosophy we advocate here has no prespecified learning outcomes or topic-specific success conditions, participants will still differ in the extent to which their contributions shape the direction of the conversation and resonate with the mood or interest of the group. One intriguing feature of the kinds of philosophical discussions we favour that has consistently emerged in our practice is that it is often difficult to predict in advance who will engage most thoughtfully and productively. When conducted in institutionalised educational contexts these dialogues often upend usual classroom hierarchies. After most of the discussions we have facilitated with school classes, for example, teachers have expressed surprise at which of their students have contributed the most insightful and provocative ideas. And we, in turn, were initially surprised

to learn that what we perceived to be some of the most philosophically valuable and productive contributions to the discussions often came from pupils who were usually disruptive or disengaged. This same dynamic was evident in our practice in the prison context, with valuable and articulate contributions coming from participants who did not consider themselves to be "academic" and who would surprise the education centre staff with the depth of their thinking when they observed sessions. As a result of witnessing this again and again in different projects, we are convinced that dialogical philosophy can often give positive experiences of shaping the thoughts of one's peers and the dynamics of a classroom to new sets of students, and these experiences can, in turn, be valuable nudges towards more positive attitudes to education in general.

6. Philosophical Dialogue, Perspectives, and Transformation

So far we have given some instrumental reasons in favour of a particular dialogical approach to public philosophy, and philosophy in prisons in particular. This dialogical method has fewer barriers to full participation, opening up positive experiences of philosophical activity to a wider range of participants than a straightforward transposition of institutional teaching to public contexts. We have not explained, however, why we deny that this dialogical mode of philosophical activity can be fully assimilated by a transactional ideology. That is, why the benefits of facilitated philosophical dialogue cannot be fully captured in terms of the transmission of valuable knowledge, skills, and dispositions. To see why this is so, we first explain, drawing on previous work by one of us (Stapleton 2020) the sense in which we think the kind of philosophical dialogue sketched above can be 'transformative' for its participants.

The term "transformative" is commonplace in education studies, but we use it to refer back to the line of research initiated by Jack Mezirow and colleagues in the field of adult education. In the 1970s there was a surge of adult women returning to college and university having previously left formal education to become wives and mothers. Mezirow noticed that this population of students not only learnt new content and skills but for many the process seemed to also awaken new perspectives, both on the world and themselves and their place in the world. Mezirow's key insight was that there is a difference between developing new perspectives as a result of learning new things – what we might think of as broadening our perspectives – and

the development of new perspectives as a result of revealing and potentially undermining the habits of mind through which our perspectives are structured. When we become aware that our perspectives are structured through these habits of mind, and that these habits of mind are contingent (they are not necessarily shared by others, and we might not have had them ourselves if we had a different temperament, upbringing, or life experience) this shakes that perspective enough that we are less entrenched in it. While we might still take that perspective we come to recognise it *as* a perspective and recognise that we *could* have another one. Under the right conditions, this opens the space for moving towards another perspective that better attunes the person to the world as they can make sense of it now (see Stapleton 2020). This is transformational learning.

Based on our experiences as facilitators of philosophical dialogue, we think that the dialogical philosophy described above is particularly good at bringing about this kind of perspective-unsticking. This might seem to be a similar kind of process to that which people undergo when they are in therapy when for example they are guided to uncover their "core beliefs" and consider whether they are justified or helpful. It also might seem similar to the kind of directed meta-cognition exercises that we do in the school or university classroom when we encourage students to consider the hidden assumptions behind arguments (including their own) and whether these assumptions are warranted. But there are key differences between dialogical philosophy and these other ways of bringing habits of mind to awareness. While they each might aim to unstick us from unwarranted or unhelpful beliefs, dialogical philosophy does not rely on an asymmetric power relationship whereby the practitioner (be they teacher or therapist) "knows better" than the student/client about human psychology or critical thinking and therefore already has in mind that the student or client has hidden assumptions/core beliefs, what those might be, and instructs them to identify and express them. In dialogical philosophy, the practitioner is a participant themselves in this process via their facilitation, with their perspectives as open to being shaken and "unstuck" as much as any of the students in the group. Moreover, dialogical philosophy does not require that participants are able to access these core beliefs, hidden assumptions, or habits of mind themselves. Participants do not need to deliberately or explicitly focus on their own beliefs or perspectives. The dynamics of the discussion separates out the ideas expressed, and the assumptions behind those ideas, from the people who raise them. This allows participants to be free of the feeling that they need to defend their opinion or stick by what they have said previously, even so much that they can play at

being the devil's advocate.

It is this space of dialogical enquiry and the dynamics that emerge from genuine shared engagement with the ideas that participants raise, that provides the conditions for participants to become aware of the contingency of perspectives. Importantly, this is done without being forced to reflect on the contingency of their own perspective. While reflecting on the contingency of one's own perspectives might seem to be the most efficient route to unsticking people from their entrenched perspectives there are reasons to think that this direct route might not always be the best approach. We think this is true for participants in general, but especially salient for participants within the prison context. It is not uncommon in any domain for the direct questioning of someone's assumptions (especially when these assumptions are core beliefs/habits of mind) to lead to a defensive rigidifying of their perspective in order to protect their sense of dignity and self-respect. In a context in which the participants may feel insecure about their academic background as compared to the facilitator's, may worry about potential loss of status within their peer group, or who may come to the project suspicious of the motives of the programme, this may present even more of a risk. Moreover, when working with participants who are in a psychologically vulnerable situation – as many of those in prison are (even merely in virtue of being imprisoned which can be a traumatic experience in and of itself) – we need to be aware that directly and purposefully shaking the foundations of the participants' psychological structures could trigger a traumatic collapse of their mental security.

In our experience dialogical philosophy provides a safe space in which perspectives can be unstuck indirectly. We see this at first by an increase in the tendency of participants to play devil's advocate over the course of the programme; the increased willingness to say something that they do not believe to see where that will lead the dialogue. At the same time, we have observed an increased tendency among participants to disagree with what they themselves have said previously. When using the CoPI method outlined above this is done by explicitly saying "I disagree with myself when I said that...". This can provoke good humour and laughter in the participants and brings in a 'lightness' to the discussion that seems to help other participants to become less committed to staunchly defending what they themselves had expressed earlier.

By providing a structured forum for discussion that allows participants to engage with each other and try out ideas and arguments without having to be personally invested in them, and to

see how they and others think and talk about their and others' ideas, what lies behind them, and what follows from them, dialogical philosophy provides an indirect means to unsticking people from their perspectives. When participants are able to see the contingency of other people's perspectives, this opens up the space for them to see other possibilities than they saw before. This may – in and of itself – be enough to start the work of unsticking their own perspectives without deliberately or explicitly engaging in self-directed critical scrutiny of their past or present assertions and beliefs.

7. Dialogical Philosophy: Transformation or Transaction?

It is this "perspective unsticking" feature of facilitated philosophical dialogue that we aim to draw attention towards when we label it a kind of 'transformative' public philosophy. But, as noted at the outset, our main claim here is that the nature and value of this dialogical kind of philosophical activity cannot be fully articulated within the kind of 'transactional' mindset we sketched above. Thus far, you might wonder why not – we have spoken about the valuable experiences of philosophical activity (and education more broadly) that dialogical philosophy can bring about, and valuable skills and capacities to flexibly shift between perspectives in thinking that we believe it helps foster. If these were the only salient virtues of dialogical philosophy, it could indeed be assimilated into a transactional mindset – dialogical public philosophy could be understood merely as a transaction in which these valuable experiences, skills, and capacities are sold or donated by the university to a public institution. But this picture, we think, obscures what ultimately allows dialogical philosophy to be experienced as valuable by its participants. Our case for this claim about the experienced value of dialogical philosophy is, in large part, phenomenological – drawn from our own experiences of these dialogues, and our sharing in the experiences of our dialogue partners, as well as discussions with the learners after the sessions.

We propose that the key features that prevent dialogical philosophy from being fully assimilated into a transactional mindset are the distinctive experience of having one's perspective transformed or unstuck and the way in which this experience is brought about by genuine participation in the affective and inferential dynamics of the conversation. The playful way that dialogical philosophy is structured and run, with the facilitator being a genuine

participant (even if one who tries to interject only minimally in order to make space for the other participants to be engaged) provides a way to disagree with others and oneself without needing to be defensive. When this defensiveness is lost, having one's perspective – one's particular way of thinking about some issue or topic – unstuck, upended, or transformed can be pleasurable and moreish. It can be experienced as having a value that is independent of the truth or utility of the way it opens up or closes off particular thoughts, and of the way in which it exemplifies and strengthens particular habits and dispositions of thinking and interacting. Of course, not everyone experiences this kind of perspective transformation as intrinsically pleasant or valuable – but, we submit, most of those who are drawn to philosophy do. Our experience observing the increased levity and joy that are expressed by the participants during the sessions as the programmes progress as well as the persistent enthusiasm for more sessions to be run after each session finishes convinces us that the experience of doing dialogic philosophy leads participants in the prison sessions to also experience these perspective transformations as intrinsically valuable.

The experience of having one's intellectual bearings shifted and reset, and the resulting intellectual disorientation and reorientation, is an essential aspect of philosophy – part of what is alluded to in well-known epigrams like 'philosophy begins in wonder' (Plato), or that 'the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it' (Russell). One striking feature of engaging in dialogical philosophy is how quickly and easily such experiences come, even (perhaps especially) for the professional philosopher facilitating. Dialogical philosophy often involves thinking outside of the familiar matrices of positions, terms, arguments, and counterarguments within which professional philosophers spend their time (indeed, one of the challenges of facilitation is to resist the impulse to squash the contributions of participants into some familiar matrix or steer the discussion back towards one), and this is part of what makes the experience of participating in the dialogue exhilarating for the facilitator. What university-based philosopher, for example, would have seriously considered the idea that a forged work of art by a renowned forger might be considered more valuable than the original? Yet, this was almost unanimously the case in one of the sessions we participated in. In that group, respect for the skill and ingenuity of the forger outweighed more orthodox attributions of value related to provenance and prompted the facilitators to reconsider their own positions.

Speaking for ourselves, these experiences of exhilarating disorientation, reorientation, and transformation are important reasons why we are drawn to do philosophy in non-university contexts. They remind us of the fundamental place of these experiences in philosophical activity, something that can often be obscured by the amount of time professional philosophers must devote to teaching, writing, and thinking within pre-specified intellectual and argumentative frameworks. This, we think, is why facilitators frequently report that their experiences of the dialogues transform their own teaching practice, and often their own thinking. Speaking for ourselves again, participating in these dialogues has certainly reshaped our teaching practice in several ways. It underscored to us, for example, the importance of letting our students' engagements with the material we are working with shape the way that we teach it, rather than focusing from the outset on nudging students into sharing our own preferred theoretical concerns and priorities.

We thus submit that the experienced value of perspective transformation is, for many, a main impetus for participating in dialogical philosophy. Just as is the case for practitioners, many of the participants also experience these perspective transformations as valuable. In our experience prison staff have regularly expressed surprise at the high rate of participation in the projects as they are going on and have noted how much the participants say they enjoy the sessions and how some of these participants subsequently engage differently in other classes. Participants also regularly request for projects to continue or to be allowed to participate again in the next project. Some of the responses to interview questions conducted with participants and prison educators after the pilot of the Edinburgh University project in 2014-15 also strongly suggest that participants found value in their perspective changes (see Bovill & Anderson 2020; Pritchard 2019; this issue; Stapleton 2020).

Because these experiences of perspective-change are brought about by *shared participation* in the dialogue, and because the facilitator is as likely as other participants to have their perspective disrupted, unstuck, or transformed, this ensures that the interaction between the academic and the prison learners here cannot be understood in purely transactional terms. The academic facilitator does not have some experience, knowledge, or skill that they aim to transmit to the participants – rather, they are cooperatively engaging in bringing about a shared process of interaction via which the perspectives of any or all participants might be transformed in ways that cannot be articulated or predicted by the facilitator in advance.

The genuinely egalitarian and open-ended character of dialogical philosophy is thus what makes it *transformative* rather than transactional, in the senses we have articulated here. As far as the experienced value of perspective-transformation is concerned, all participants in the dialogue stand to gain equally from the activity, and no one participant has a privileged understanding of exactly how things will unfold. This in turn makes clear why this kind of dialogical philosophical activity is not an impure, watered-down, or patronising version of the professionalised kinds of activity we find in a university context. The experienced perspective transformations that participants might undergo in public and private contexts might differ in terms of the particular thoughts and topics involved, but they are experiences of the same qualitative kind. And, in particular, the perceptible manifestations of these experiences on the part of the facilitator – the way in which they are visibly absorbed, disoriented, or excited by the shared discursive process in which they are participating – are not faked or watered-down versions of reactions that occur more fully or authentically in a university context.

8. Conclusion

We have argued here that one popular form that public philosophy can take – the kind of facilitated, semi-structured and open-ended conversations that we here labelled 'dialogical philosophy' cannot be adequately understood merely in terms of a transaction of knowledge or skills from an academic to the public. This is because a main source of the experienced value of dialogical philosophy for its participants is the positive experience of having one's perspectives and habits of thoughts disrupted, unstuck, or transformed. But these valuable experiences (and the capacities for flexible and creative thinking that they involve and help to develop) are not goods that a professional philosopher is in a position to sell or donate to the participants, as a transactional model would have it. Rather, these experiences and perspectival transformations emerge from the shared activity of the group in ways that cannot be reliably predicted in advance or fully controlled by the professional philosopher. With respect to their knowledge of the direction the activity should or will take, or their chances of having their perspective productively disrupted or transformed by the activity, the facilitating philosopher is in no better or worse position than any other participant.

We think that this resistance of dialogical philosophy to transactional models is important for several reasons. To the extent that it is true that the experienced value of engaging in this kind of philosophy stems from positive experiences of communally engendered perspective-shifting, rationalisations, or justifications of dialogical philosophy in transactional terms will always be partial and incomplete at best, self-deceiving and inauthentic at worst. We also think that seeing this aspect of dialogical philosophy is necessary for a clearer view of its strengths and limitations. Dialogical philosophy is usually, we submit, experienced as valuable to the extent that participants are receptive to perspective shifts or transformations brought about by open-ended discussion of philosophical issues. Needless to say, this is not for everyone. For those less keen on such open-ended discussion, who would nonetheless value or benefit from having their perspectives on the world flexed or challenged, other avenues – art, drama, learning new physical skills – might be better suited. Above, we also mentioned several instrumental benefits of dialogical philosophy that are closely entwined with its non-transactional character and which might make it particularly refreshing, and therefore appealing to learners in the prison context—its lack of reliance on the standard hierarchies and incentives of institutionalised education, its comparative lack of barriers to full participation, and the ways in which it thus opens up positive experiences of education to a broad range of potential participants. Perhaps most importantly, though, seeing the anti-transactional character of dialogical philosophy gives us a clearer and better picture of the relationship between universities and public institutions that public philosophy can involve. The public philosopher here does not adopt the posture of a sage or saint who temporarily steps out of their ivory tower to share their knowledge and skills with the lucky public. Instead, they are an active and equal participant in a shared activity, from which they stand to gain as much as the learner in prison.

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