

Forensic Psychology & Punishment
Ben Crewe, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge

When I started out as a prison researcher twenty years ago, based on what I had read (and seen on TV, and in movies), I was primed for prisoners to express hostile views towards prison officers. Hating – or not trusting – ‘screws’ was almost taken for granted as an element of what it meant to be a prisoner, even though many prisoners didn’t actually hate or mistrust screws to any meaningful degree.

I was less prepared for a rather different kind of hostility, conveyed mainly but not exclusively by prisoners serving indeterminate sentences, towards ‘psychologists’ or – maybe more accurately – ‘psychology’, with the term used to mean quite a broad range of interventions and practices, including incentive schemes, offending behaviour programmes and a range of written reports.

SLIDE

At the time, I concluded that psychologists were the new enemies of the prisoner community, or at best, and as we see here, regarded with deep suspicion. To quote from the slide:

They may isolate difficulties that you’re having, but they don’t help you with them. They will observe how you handle those difficulties, how you come to terms with them. You are given the opportunity to speak to a counsellor or somebody if you feel you’re having problems, but it will all end up in a report.

When I first came away, the psychologist was there if you’d got problems, to talk to. She wasn’t there to write reports, she wasn’t there to judge you, she wasn’t there to write reports and manipulate you, she was there to help you if you needed help. Now that attitude’s not there. They are there to write reports on you, they are there to judge you, they are there to fucking try and manipulate you. Your interests, your needs are pretty much last on the list. That’s the perception of it. This is why a lot of psychologists are held in nothing other than suspicion.

What I want to do in my talk this evening is try to pick apart the basis of these feelings, and, in doing so, think through the difficulties of making psychological practice legitimate in the eyes of prisoners. As a way of engaging with the task that Sophie set me – to think about the relationship between psychology and punishment – I then want to present a model which tries to differentiate between more and less legitimate kinds of psychological regimes, or between forms of psychological power (I’ll be using this term quite broadly) that feel helpful rather than punitive. I’ll raise more questions, I think, than provide completely practical solutions, but I’m hoping that Graham might do that work for me.

SLIDE

A good place to begin is to expand on the distinction I have already drawn between orientations to the power of psychologists compared to uniformed staff. Nathan expanded on this distinction as follows:

‘[In terms of] The day-to-day concerns, most prisoners know what to expect, they know the rules that they’re living within, so they accept that. They accept the day-to-day authority that they’re under. When it comes to probation and psychology, because it’s not to do with

the day-to-day things, it's to do with the effects on your *life*, the effects of you getting out, it's a deeper type of power: I think it's felt more profoundly.'

As this quotation indicates, the force of psychological power lies mainly in its capacity to determine future possibilities, rather than the kind of everyday power wielded by prison officers. More than any other staff within the prison at the time of that project (though offender managers now occupy similar terrain), it was psychologists who prisoners felt held the key to captivity or release. They were not regarded by prisoners as the deliverers of punishment, so much as the arbiters of freedom or captivity. But for men serving indeterminate sentences, who were desperate to move through the system, this distinction was rather fuzzy. Psychologists determined whether you got out, or stayed in, and therefore the amount of time for which your punishment ultimately lasted.

To try to unstitch some of the reasons for prisoners' attitudes towards psychologists, and psychological power more broadly, I want to spend a little time outlining the characteristics that prisoners attributed to them.

Nathan's observation – particularly his statement that...

SLIDE

... in their day-to-day lives, most prisoners 'know what to expect' – also signalled the difference between an everyday form of authority that was at least broadly **knowable and predictable**, and modes of power relating to risk that was much harder for prisoners to decipher. First then, prisoners described psychological practices as opaque and confusing.

SLIDE

Often, as we see here, prisoners' complaints were that they could not understand the basis on which risk decisions were made. Although some understood the factors that fed into assessments and parole decisions, such decisions *either* felt **imprecise** and **highly subjective**, or **excessively rigid**.

SLIDE

I'll return to rigidity shortly. To give an example of subjectivity, George pointed out the discrepancies between reports written about him at different establishments, presenting them as clear evidence of scientific fallibility:

A lot of [my reports/assessments] have been very contradictory: what was a problem in one prison isn't a problem in another prison. I'm not very communicative with staff here, really, but much the same as in [another prison]. But whereas down there it was seen as a major problem [and an] anti- authoritarian attitude, here it's seen very positively: I don't make unreasonable demands on the time of staff; 'very polite, gets on with his work, presents no control problems'. It's the same situation, just totally different interpretations. (George)

SLIDE

A second complaint was that psychological power was **unforgiving**, in the sense of being **petty, long-lasting or highly adhesive**. That is, many prisoners felt that minor things they had said, sometimes many years ago, were written up unfairly in reports by officers or psychologists or were just extremely difficult to shed, remaining in their files for years after they felt relevant. Alexis said.

'You have one minor incident and they'll go write it in the file. That's gonna catch up with you in two or three years time: a silly little incident, every few months, a minor indiscretion. [...] You're in prison! You've just got the hump, or you've slept badly. But you add em all together and they show a pattern of something that's not really there'

Another prisoner complained that:

'They twist everything, they ignore the constructive stuff you do. I made a joke about sedating my girlfriend to take her on holiday [as part of a course scenario] – in the report they gave no context, said that my idea of getting someone on a plane was sedating them! I got knocked back based on the psychologist's report'

SLIDE

As this second quote suggests, part of this complaint was that psychological discourse was **decontextualised**. This grievance took several forms. Often, prisoners disputed the idea that their behaviour within prison was a good basis for assessing their life chances on release. As Pete said:

I should be judged 'am I a threat to society?' I'm only a threat to the prison system. [...] What I am inside and outside are two different people. How I conduct myself in here, I have to conduct myself like this to survive. (Pete)

For these prisoners, the distorted environment of the prison made it a poor laboratory for assessing their behaviour. Indeed, as Shadd Maruna has noted, it might in itself contribute to many of the problems that prisoners exhibit.

Prisoners were also often sceptical of the expertise of course tutors who they felt had little life experience:

SLIDE

'they know nothing about drugs, or the reasons for taking drugs. They're trying to teach you something that you know back to front and they know nothing about' (Callum).

When prisoners complained that psychologists and tutors were '23 year old girls with degrees', putting aside some of the prejudices built into such statements, this was one of the issues to which they were drawing attention – 'you don't understand the context of my world'.

Similarly, prisoners often felt that the content of offending behaviour programmes, and the moral scenarios they presented, did not correspond with the realities of their lives in the community. Many prisoners held a kind of dual consciousness, in which they recognised what might be morally right, or right within the circumstances of 'straight' or 'middle-class' lifeworlds, but contrasted this with the normative universe of the milieu they inhabited outside. So, for example, in discussing role-plays relating to assertiveness and aggression, they pointed to the importance in their social networks of personal 'reputation' and the dangers of appearing 'weak' or passive. In debates about informing, they often recognised that turning to the authorities might, in principle, be the right thing to do, but said that doing so would threaten their safety and status. In sociological terms, these apprehensions were rational. Within the discourse of cognitive treatment, they risked being seen as 'distortions' or 'thinking errors'.

SLIDE

Here, then, as Den explained in the quotation on this slide, psychological discourse felt **rigid** or **unrealistic**, requiring prisoners to be or become almost inhuman—robotic prototypes of responsible citizenship.

They're trying to get you to act in a way that you would never act, that no human being would ever do. If you're put in a confrontational situation you ain't going to ask a man to stop because you don't want to fight him—he is trying to hit you! If you're backed in a corner you're going to have to fight your way out. They're trying to say 'no, you don't do things like that, you have to talk to this person'. And they can't get into their heads that you *can't do it*. It's not real. And they'll sit and argue with you. And they've got to be right, you can't be seen as being given your own view, you have to [take] *their* view. And I can't comply like that. There's too many ifs, whats, and buts to everything. There's too many questions for me to sit back and just accept that one person's opinion. If we lived like that, we'd be machines.

Den's quote alerts us to the two key concepts I want to move on to elaborate. The first relates to his insistence – echoed by many other prisoners – that there was simply no room in the psychological process to negotiate, to present alternative interpretations, or to challenge this regime of knowledge without it potentially counting against you.

SLIDE

The most useful term to capture this is 'epistemic injustice' or 'disadvantage', defined by Morten Bysskov as 'the idea that we can be unfairly discriminated against in our capacity as a knower based on prejudices about the speaker', that is, being untrusted or disregarded as credible as a knowledge-holder or witness.

To briefly repeat the last line of Den's quote, the closing line - 'If we lived like that, we'd be machines' - is significant, in the way that it corresponds with Miranda Fricker's observation that epistemic injustice is antithetical to humanity: 'to be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value'.

SLIDE

The second concept is 'misrecognition', by which I mean being *personally* seen or depicted in a way that is one-sided, negative or out of step with one's self-definition. So this relates not to disputes about appropriate forms of conduct, but the core of personal and ethical identity. Many prisoners resent being ascribed paper identities and 'criminogenic factors' that they consider highly spurious, that they think do not capture who they 'really are', or that fail to recognise aspects of their selfhood beyond their offending. In the following quotation, Gerry expresses frustration that his personal sense of self was bulldozed by psychological discourse, forcing him, like others, to adopt a kind of bi-focal view of himself:

'My life doesn't go parallel with theirs. The system has forced me to draw to their level, how *they* see things and deal with things, rather than helping me deal with things in my own way, in my own personality, in my own mistakes, weaknesses, difficulties. They've forced their opinion, their understanding onto me.... They're only interested in their own decision-making. You go through [your] sentence, and everybody's telling you to be open and honest, and when you do, they don't believe you. *Their* truth they can handle. Not the prisoner's truth'.

Another prisoner said

SLIDE

You're not listed as a person, you're not listed as a personality, you're not listed as likes and dislikes ... they're attuned to write negatively about you because they are writing about risk, so all they highlight is risk'

A prisoner could be a talented painter or a good father, but relative to psychological tags, such attributes were made to feel immaterial. For long-term prisoners, for whom maintaining some control over personal integrity and identity were paramount, this was a significant source of frustration.

Overall, the connection between psychology and punishment was expressed through phrases that described psychological power as a kind of weapon.

SLIDE

'They don't use the stick no more but they use the pen, you get me? [...] Once the pen has written down something that can be there for life'.

'The power of the pen rules. It rules the prison. They stab you in the back, with a keyboard'

SLIDE

The quotes I've provided so far alert us to some of the challenges for prison-based forensic psychology of trying to mitigate these sentiments. Several point to the significant and structural power disparity between prisoners and psychologists. Apart from everything else, this disparity may be a constant threat to the psychological endeavour. That is, psychologists need accounts of honesty and sincerity, but the power that they wield makes such accounts risky (from the point of view of prisoners), and hinders truthful disclosure. The disparity – the fact that, psychologists are often the arbiters of release – also makes the strength of feeling directed towards them all the more difficult to avoid. Some of the resentment that prisoners express about the youth and relative inexperience of psychological staff reflects this sense that the power to determine something of such significance as freedom should only be invested in people with the highest levels of experience and expertise. As one prisoner put it to me, pithily, 'They can ruin your life with the stroke of a pen'.

The issue of 'voice', one of the four pillars of procedural justice, is all the more complex in this context. I don't want to sound at all doubtful that having a chance to express one's views is likely to mitigate feelings of resentment, to some degree. As a number of practitioner-scholars have argued, including Gill Attrill and Glenda Liell, and, more recently, Jo Schingler and colleagues, there is a great deal to be gained from prisoners feeling less passive about the risk assessment process, and from having opportunities to engage collaboratively in the process.

But perhaps there are limits to voice in a context where (a) the stakes are so high, (b) there can be such discordance between the knowledge and theories used by psychologists and those used by prisoners, and (c) versions of what might be true can be so divergent, and sometimes impossible to reconcile.

One reason, then, why I titled a previous slide 'epistemic injustice' or '*disadvantage*' is that theorists in this area make a distinction between these two ideas, with disadvantage being the preferred term

when people may be misinformed or unreliable narrators. To quote Fricker again, '[a] credibility deficit might simply result from 'innocent error [...] that is both ethically and epistemically non-culpable'. This might not be relevant to all or even most prisoners, but it's not difficult to think of situations where people are in denial about their offence, or hold highly distorted perceptions of – say – sexual consent, and therefore are *not* wholly credible knowledge-bearers when it comes to their offence. But on the other hand, it is difficult to imagine epistemic injustices that would feel more unjust than having accurate knowledge about oneself, or an incident that determines one's loss of freedom, disregarded.

More broadly, and perhaps a good basis for some discussion later, I wonder if all four elements of procedural justice – (a) respectful treatment, (b) unbiased, transparent and consistent decision-making, (c) granting voice (d) and trust – are hindered by the characteristics of psychological practice and discourse that I have outlined so far. I should emphasise that I agree completely with Jo Shingler, Stefanie Sonnenberg and Adrian Needs, who propose that risk assessment interviews should try to be transparent, respectful, collaborative, individualised and humane. At the same time, psychological reasoning, and actuarial assessments, are not easy to explain, and explaining them might not enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of many prisoners ('we don't know if you will reoffend; we just know that 80% of people with your profile will do'); it might feel disingenuous to prisoners to offer them voice but to dispute or disregard their explanations; and the primary orientation of prison-based forensic psychology to public protection, rather than prisoner welfare, makes it difficult to persuade prisoners that decision-making is, on their terms, neutral or trustworthy.

SLIDE

Let me move on.

To capture the kinds of experiences and frustrations that prisoners had described to me, I began to develop the concept of 'tightness', setting it alongside the ideas of 'depth' and 'weight' to try to convey the texture of power and punishment. The term 'tightness' was an attempt to communicate this sense of power being almost like a web, or 'an invisible harness', gripping the prisoner and seeking to reshape him or her, into being a different kind of person.

None of this was intended as a criticism of prison psychologists, as such – its aim was to help describe the form of penal power in which their work was embedded. But at the time, the way that I used this term was rather pejorative, partly, I think, because of its connection to accounts, like those by Orwell, Kafka and Foucault, of the capacity of state power, knowledge and oversight to be oppressively invasive, to reach into the individual's subjectivity and psyche – to intervene at the deepest level of selfhood.

SLIDE

As expressed in the first quote here, from 1984, such texts consistently depicted the reach and gaze of the state as highly insidious. Yet, as Fred Alford suggested - in an article published in 2000 - many prisons are characterised more by coercion and neglect than by the forms of power I've described (frankly, the same could be said about most local prisons in England & Wales, to which a good deal of my analysis today does not really apply). Alford also suggested that while invasive penal practices might generate considerable frustration, they were preferable to institutional indifference:

SLIDE ... 'perhaps not being watched is even worse than being watched ... invisibility before god and man'

So while feeling misdescribed on file, forced to become a different kind of person, or, in Fergus McNeill's terms, both badly seen and seen as bad, might be painful, so too might institutional inattention and an absence or deficiency of grip.

The key point here is that prisons can be 'loose' or 'lax' as well as 'tight', and for my remaining time, I want to discuss these different modes of grip, as a way of working towards a model of psychological practice that might be more rather than less legitimate. And here I'm not talking just about forensic psychologists, but other staff involved in what we might think of a prison's overall psychological regime.

SLIDE

A first set of frustrations that prisoners express is that the risk-bureaucracy is inconsistent, inefficient or inadequate: incomplete paperwork; delays to parole hearings; inaccessible offender managers or psychologists; and being unable to get onto the courses that are required in order to progress towards release.

In the quote here, Russell explains the vagaries of sentence management practices.

Keeping me in for these last two and a half years has served no one any good whatsoever. [But] someone decided that they wanted me to do a course [which] two [other] facilitators said I *wasn't* suitable for. [That's] the only reason I didn't get to open prison. *And then have you ever done [the course]?*
No.
...
Because they never offered it to me. (Russell)

SLIDE

A similar complaint is that monitoring and assessment are *deficient* rather than excessive. Often, then, the criticism from prisoners is that prison staff are under-interested in them and their personal development, making little effort to engage with issues relating to their offending behaviour.

Do [officers] ever talk to you about your parole or your offence..?
No, they won't talk to you about it, they're not interested, they don't care. [...] All the staff are here to do is unlock you and lock you [...] they're not there to really sit down and listen to your life's deepest darkest ... they don't care. (Robert)

SLIDE

How does the prison try to shape who you are as a person?
They don't because they don't have anything to do with me. I'm left in my cell to rot basically. [...] There's no interaction for me with the staff; I wish I could say otherwise. (Kenny)

Robert's concern was that his progress was being slowed by a lack of systemic engagement: 'You've got no support', he added, 'you've got no one to help you move forward'.

Kenny's issue was his personal development. His issue was not that the prison was trying to reshape him, but that it was *indifferent* to him: that it was failing to assist him manage his feelings of shame about his offence, and that this inattention would lead to him re-offending.

SLIDE

Such issues were exacerbated by a lack of access to key decision-makers. In this quote, Joel explains that he had never seen or spoken to his offender manager, and knew her name only because he had resorted to sending his parents to the probation office to find it out. Again, his complaint was not that the authorities were policing his behaviour too closely or intrusively, but that they were too distant and poorly informed to make fair decisions about him.

SLIDE

I'm anxious and I'm stressed because at am going to be controlled by somebody that I have never spoke to, seen or had any interactions with. I just exist to them as a report on a table somewhere. They don't know who I am as an individual.

SLIDE

A third kind of complaint is being 'un-grippable' - not having the kinds of problems that the prison can work upon, or being too low risk to merit rationed interventions. Ricky said:

I can't progress to an [open prison] because I haven't done programmes. But I can't do programmes because I'm not the correct risk, or a low risk. [...] It is not that I haven't done any work [on my risk]; it's that the system has nothing to help me with. So it is quite depressing. I want to progress; I would love to do [courses], to make sure that I understand all of my triggers and all of my risks and that I have the correct tools to go forward with.

Within a system that works 'upon' people, and is attuned to particular forms of risk, it's a disadvantage to be invisible or un-fixable. To have some kind of problem or pathology makes you intelligible and treatable, and therefore minimises the risk of being overlooked and therefore 'stuck'.

SLIDE

One way of conceptualising this is through the image of the "fairground claw". To be 'liberated' from the machine requires that the item – in our case, the individual – is the right shape, size and angle to be gripped successfully. But the claw grips selectively, imperfectly and inconsistently, so that, even if selected, the item can slip from its grasp, and back into the pit.

SLIDE

In all the examples I have given, prisoners do not object in principle to taking courses, working on offence-related behaviour, or having to change. Their criticisms are *ensorious* rather than *oppositional* – on the side of the authorities, but critical of their inability to deliver. These criticisms are not that the prison is too psychologically tight or demanding, but that it is neglectful or *loose*.

For some prisoners, these objections are instrumental. They resent being unable to take programmes because they're aware that they have to do them in order to progress towards release. What they consider unfair is that, to secure their freedom, they have to conform to a set of institutional demands and expectations that they are not given the means to meet.

For others, the motivation is normative, based on values and beliefs. Such prisoners are remorseful about their offending, or believe there is something 'wrong' with them that the system might be able to remedy. They want the system to help them understand their personalities and patterns of crime, so that they can avoid engaging in activities of which they're ashamed, and which lead them back to prison; or they want help to improve their relationships with loved ones. A lack of attention or intervention abandons them to unwanted thoughts and feelings (relating to their offending, or to experiences of trauma, bereavement and abuse) and leaves them feeling unrecognised and unsupported.

SLIDE

This is particularly the case for prisoners convicted of serious violent and sexual offences, many of whom seek insight into their actions, or want to resist some part of themselves that they struggle to control. Frank, for example, explained that he

...recognised the need to change, because even when I was doing the things I was doing, I didn't want to do them; [...] I didn't want to be the person that I was'.

Jesse said:

No one is actually looking at why this has happened again. [...] If this is to be stopped I need support and treatment. [...] If you don't do anything, if you don't fix the problem, it's going to keep getting broken

Prisoners who express such concerns – including those with addiction issues or problems with impulse control – want help with much more than accommodation and employment, though of course these things are vital (and, for many prisoners, are more urgent than offence-related work). They welcome rather than resent the invasive institutional focus on cognition, selfhood and moral conduct.

SLIDE

Along with my colleague Alice levins, the way that we've tried to think through these issues is by developing a model representing different ideal types of institutional grip. The horizontal axis represents the extent to which the system or institution is psychologically demanding, exacting and invasive. The vertical axis represents the extent to which it is supportive and responsive *in relation to these demands*.

Like clothing, the grip of penal power can be either loose or tight in ways that are more or less preferable: a piece of clothing that is 'tight' might fit closely, comfortably and supportively, but tightness can also be uncomfortably restrictive. Likewise, clothing that is loose can be comfortable or uncomfortable, depending on whether it is carefully contoured or ill-fitting and baggy.

SLIDE

In the top-right quadrant, the prison is psychologically 'tight' both in what it requires of prisoners, and in what it provides to help them meet those requirements. Its grip is firm, so that it is bureaucratically thorough, providing the resources and interventions that prisoners need in order to become what the system insists they must be. But this form of tightness is likely to feel crushing and oppressive. As Dany Lacombe found in her study of a sex offender treatment programme in Canada,

nothing escapes judgment, normal behaviours are re-cast as expressions of pathology, and the authorities have almost unchallengeable power to define what is normal and abnormal. The prisoner's own judgment of need, and of who he or she should become, is over-written by the institution's judgments and its insistence on a particular form of change. As a result, the individual feels un-seen for who he or she is, and has to engage with a version of himself or herself that he or she does not recognise.

SLIDE

In the bottom-right quadrant, the system is demanding but is inconsistent or deficient. In ways that I've just spent time outlining, power is tight, in that the institution demands certain forms of psychological change and engagement, but it is lax in providing the means to allow prisoners to become what it insists upon. Prisoners are impeded or abandoned in their efforts to realise the version of selfhood to which they authentically aspire, but they are also unsupported in becoming the self that is mandated by the institution. This form of misrecognition is particularly egregious, because individuals feel misrecognised and at the same time are penalised for deficiencies in the system that are beyond their control: 'you need to do this course but this course is unavailable to you, and this means we can't yet release you'. As I hope my previous slides have shown, these are really acute frustrations, not least because they can amount to months of additional imprisonment.

SLIDE

Prison systems occupying the 'low demand', 'low assistance' quadrant (bottom-left) are 'loose' or neglectful, in that they demand very little from prisoners but also do very little *for* them. One version is the American super-max, in which prisoners are simply warehoused or contained, with little interest in changing them or helping them change themselves. These are such deep and heavy institutions that the idea of looseness feels counter-intuitive, but it communicates the way that, prisoners are left almost completely non-recognised as human beings: they are granted almost no agency is and their *moral* selfhood is completely disregarded.

A more benign version is found in some South American regimes. Prisoners have considerable autonomy to self-govern, are allowed extended family visits, and are neither tightly monitored nor required to remodel themselves as good citizens. At the same time, from the perspective of the prison, the offence itself, and the prisoner's desire to understand or overcome it, is irrelevant or disregarded. There are very few opportunities to process feelings of shame or access help in dealing with psychological issues or addictions that prisoners want to attend to.

SLIDE

In contrast, prisons in the top-left quadrant of the figure are supportive and responsive, without being overbearing or exacting. The institution offers help without excessive judgment, and does so in collaboration with the prisoner: when he or she is ready to discuss the offence, engage in therapeutic work, or build up relationships with staff. This is very tricky to get right – in a recent study of prisoners serving long life sentences, my colleagues Susie Hulley, Serena Wright and I found that prisoners wanted to engage with the meaning of their offence without being permanently hobbled by it. Dealing with shame meant fully acknowledging their crime, but being able to move on from it, rather than – as one prisoner put it – being repeatedly forced to 'pick off the scab' that it represented.

SLIDE

Here, a prisoner in Norway (where I've been doing some research in recent years), convicted of a serious sex offence, explains what happened following his decision to write a letter to a programme leader informing her that he was ready to discuss his offence:

She came as quickly as possible. I said 'I want to talk about something [...] I've wanted to [talk] a few times'. And she said 'Yeah, I understand that. You have something you want to tell me but you can't. Talk until you're done and I'll understand you'. So I told her about it. [...] Then she asked me some questions about it, and I answered, and she said 'Good job. Now I can help you move forward, before you lose any more time' (Ulrik)

This is the kind of 'sustained professional attention' and 'intensive individual input' that was sought by Marguerite Schinkel's sample of men serving life sentences in Scotland. These men were not hostile to offending behaviour courses, and wanted help with problems relating to addiction and coping with the world outside, but they criticised...

SLIDE

... 'the tension between the importance of attending courses and the unresponsiveness of these courses to individual timelines and needs' (p. 33). The system, they felt, was insufficiently responsive to their particular circumstances, engaging with their lives 'much too lightly' (p. 39).

Elsewhere in Norway, prisoners often described having 'the opportunity to work with yourself'. Within relatively safe environments, they were given headspace to reflect on their actions and lifestyles, and felt supported in these efforts by a relational culture in which uniformed and specialist staff engaged with them deeply and carefully, as full individuals rather than just bundles of risk. Moral dialogue – about their offences, and their future aspirations – was not limited to the risk-based logic of offending behaviour courses. In this model, then, the fit of power was snug, like a well-tailored piece of clothing that provides comfort without restriction. Prisoners are *recognised* on their own terms. The institution is responsive to their own sense of how they need to change, rather than imposing generic and pre-determined cognitive models. In its ideal form, then, the grip of power is supportive rather than constrictive, making its subjects feel held or contained.

SLIDE

Our findings provide an empirical echo of debates in penal theory. In a recent publication, Tony Bottoms probes an ongoing debate about the proper role of the state in seeking a commitment among prisoners to what he calls 'repentance', by which he means 'a change of mind or purpose' rather than a 'deeper' or more religious definition of this term. Bottoms steers a course between a disciplinary model of punishment, which subjects prisoners to invasive forms of intervention, and a rights-based model, which limits state interference into the prisoner's autonomy as a moral agent.

Our argument adds to a growing body of evidence that suggests that people in prison do not want to be subjected to interventions that either assault or neglect their moral agency, including their desire to change. To quote Tony Bottoms, 'it is actually more common for [offenders] to complain that criminal justice workers have provided *insufficient* help towards "going straight", than that the state has been intrusive'.

There are limits to this model, of course, for example, when prisoners believe they have done no wrong, misidentify their own needs, or seek to game the system. But I hope that the takeaway point is that many prisoners welcome institutional oversight and intervention when it recognises their integrity through authentic engagement with their full personhood. There is plenty here, then, for

forensic psychologists, and other practitioners, to build on. Many prisoners are crying out for forms of intervention and explanation, but are wary of a system that feels tin-eared to the issues for which they are seeking help, which sees them only partially, or engages with them too rarely (at too much distance), or which too readily transforms their problems into risks.

Thank you.