Socratic Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, and Inmate Education

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Abstract

This article explains and analyzes the practical application of the Socratic method in the context of inmate education, and identifies core critical thinking elements that emerge from four transcribed Socratic discussions with prison inmates. The paper starts with a detailed examination of the stages of the Socratic method as practiced by the historical Socrates, and then provides a definition and an explanation of critical thinking. The reader is then guided through an in-depth analysis of transcriptions of Socratic conversations with inmates, and is shown both how these conversations fit into a Socratic template, and which of the core critical thinking elements is most prominent in each discussion.

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Researcher: What is justice?

Inmate 6: Standing up for what you believe in.

Researcher: What if you believe weird stuff? Like one of those lunatics who wants to kill Americans? Or what if you're a pedophile?

[A 20-second silence.]

Inmate 6: I think if you can stand on your own two feet and not care what anyone else thinks about you, and you're willing to fight for it and die for it or whatever, that makes you a man. Whether it's right or not.

Researcher: So being a man would mean to be resolute in your beliefs no matter what? What if you're in the military, like in Rwanda, and you're told to butcher all these people, and you have this skewed idea of loyalty. And you stand up for what you believe, for your country or tribe or whatever, and you just start butchering civilians? Hutus' or Tutsi's or whoever. Is that just? Does that make you a man?

Inmate 5: Yeah, good point. It happened in Nam [Vietnam].

Inmate 4: What are you saying? That justice isn't standing up for what you believe in?

Researcher: I'm not saying, I'm asking. What is justice? [Inmate 6] said it's standing up for what you believe in. But is it really standing up for what you believe in? Don't you have to believe the right stuff, then stand up for that? No?

Inmate 6: Yeah, maybe. Maybe.

Introduction

There is a growing body of educational, philosophical, and even popular literature that explains the Socratic method (Boghossian, 2005; Garlikov, 2005; Strong, 1997) and its epistemological and educational ambitions (Abbs, 1994; Phillips, 2001; Vlastos, 1971). Unfortunately, however, there is almost no literature on the use and analysis of the Socratic method in the context of correctional education. This is significant because educational interventions designed either around the Socratic method, or interventions that use the Socratic method as an adjunct pedagogy, may have the potential to be more effective and less expensive than the two foremost cognitive treatments, Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) and Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R), in improving the critical thinking and moral reasoning of inmates (Boghossian, in press). This, in turn, is important for two reasons 1) because faulty reasoning/thinking often leads to criminogenic behavior (McGuire, 1995), and many offenders have difficulties with problem solving, reasoning, and understanding the most appropriate solutions to problems (Porporino, Fabiano & Robinson, 1991) and 2) because there is an urgent need for less expensive treatments.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and explain Socratic conversations with prison inmates, and to identify the critical thinking core elements most evident in these Socratic discussions. To do this, four transcriptions of Socratic conversations with inmates are broken down and examined, and I show how each conversation fits a Socratic template. At the end of each conversation, I explain briefly which of the six core elements of critical thinking are most apparent. I begin, however, by examining the Socratic method as practiced by the historical Socrates, and then by providing a definition and an explanation of critical thinking.

The Socratic Method

Historically, the Socratic method, found in the Platonic Dialogues, dates back more than 2,500 years. In these dialogues, the historical Socrates engages participants by going through several conversational stages. The stages Socrates uses are (a) Wonder, (b) Hypothesis, (c) Elenchus (refutation and cross-examination), (d) Accept/reject the hypothesis, and, (e) Act accordingly (Dye, 1996).

In the first stage, wonder, Socrates asks a philosophical/moral question, such as "Why obey the law?" (*Crito, Republic*) or "What is it to be virtuous?" (*Apology, Meno*) or "What's worth dying for?" (*Apology, Crito*) or "When is punishment justified?" (*Gorgias, Crito*) or "What's the best life to lead?" (*Republic*) or "Should you harm a bad man?" (*Republic*) or "What is justice?" (*Republic*). Questions are asked in order to further define the idea in question; that is, Socrates seeks definitions for the terms about which he inquired, starting with general questions and systematically narrowing down the inquiry.

In the second stage, hypothesis, responses to the question are offered by one or more participants. Using example questions from above, "Should you harm a bad man?," several responses could follow, such as, "Yes, because it will teach him a lesson," or "No, because you could get caught". Possible responses to the question, "What's worth dying for?" could be, "Nothing," or "Respect," or "Honor." This second stage is fairly straightforward. Only the response in question is addressed, there is no evaluation of the response.

The third stage, elenchus (or elenchos), is at the heart of Socrates' practice. Through discourse (sometimes referred to as "cross-examination") Socrates offered counterexamples to the hypotheses of his interlocutors. For example, if the question being examined was, "Should you harm a bad man?" and the hypothesis or response was, "Yes, because it will teach him a lesson" then a possible counterexample to this would be, "But what if harming a bad man

makes him a worse man? What if the lesson he learns is to become more angry, more bitter, and more resentful? Like a lot of the guys on this cell block. Should you still harm a bad man?" This is a counterexample because it provides an example or instance that may make the hypothesis offered false.

The elenchus has several related purposes. One purpose is to examine whether the entire set of beliefs (or a particular belief) held by the participants are mutually consistent. According to Carpenter (1999), "By highlighting inconsistency, the elenchus would force its participants to sharpen and refine their moral concepts" (p. 7). Carpenter goes on to write, "it would show the interlocutors the inadequacy of their ordinary moral training and it would teach them the extent to which their ordinary moral beliefs are unstable and are in need of radical revision." Question and answer and counterexamples are the defining characteristics for this stage of Socratic practice.

At this juncture in the conversation, the counterexample is either accepted or rejected. Continuing with our example from above, possible responses to whether or not a bad person ought to be harmed are, "Are you kidding me? If he becomes worse then he deserves it. Next time he'll think twice," or "Yeah, maybe you're right, but he has to be harmed nonetheless. You have to harm him because if you don't then you'll lose respect."

This segues into the fourth stage, accepting or rejecting the hypothesis. If the counterexample is accepted, then the discussion goes back to the second stage and another hypothesis is elicited (Dye, 1996). For example, the counterexample would be accepted by someone who said, "Yeah, you're right. But maybe you should harm a bad man for other reasons, like letting other bad men know that you're not to be messed with." Alternatively, the counterexample could be rejected by both parties who agree that it was neither necessary nor sufficient to undermine the hypothesis. If the counterexample is rejected, then the hypothesis is accepted as being "provisionally" true. If there are other counterexamples that could show the hypothesis to be false, then Socrates returns the discussion to stage three. After this process of examining claims had been exhausted, then one could act accordingly, namely, one could act on the findings of one's inquiry. Hence we have a "formula" and a working definition for the Socratic method that was practiced in the Platonic dialogues by Socrates.

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is characterized as the cognitive process of forming reasoned and reflective judgments about what to believe or what to do (Facione, 2000, p. 4).

Two successful cognitive behavioral programs, MRT and R&R, both aim to improve the reasoning and critical thinking abilities of inmates, but it is not immediately evident what reasoning and critical thinking are, and how they are defined (R&R uses the term critical thinking) (Ross & Fabiano, 1991). While it is certainly true that these concepts are difficult to define, this does not mean that there are no adequate definitions. The largest and most comprehensive study to date on critical thinking and reasoning was published by the American Philosophical Association (hereafter APA) in 1990 (the APA is the main professional organization for philosophers in the United States) (APA, 1990). While there is no evidence that the creators of MRT or R&R had access to this study, it is clear that the language and the referents are the same, and that the concepts detailed in this study provide a clear explanation about what qualities in inmates MRT and R&R wish to improve.

The study used a Delphi Technique to reach consensus about the definition of critical thinking. A Delphi Technique has a fairly simple methodology. Facione (1996) best explains the Delphi Technique methodology as it was used in this APA study:

> A central investigator organizes the group and feeds them an initial question. [In this case it had to do with how college level critical thinking should be defined so that people teaching at that level would know which skills and dispositions to cultivate in their students.] The central investigator receives all responses, summarizes them, and transmits them back to all the panelists for reactions, replies, and additional questions ... the central investigator summarizes the arguments and lets the panelists decide if they accept them or not. When consensus appears to be at hand, the central investigator proposes this and asks if people agree. If not, then points of disagreement among the experts are registered. (p. 8)

In a research project that lasted approximately two years, the APA chose their panel of experts from among "forty-six men and women ... in the United States and Canada. They represented many different scholarly disciplines in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and education" (Facione, 1996, p. 7). Moreover, all 46 scholars were "widely recognized by their professional colleagues to have special experience and expertise in CT instruction, assessment or theory" (APA, 1990, p. 4).

At the end of the study, the experts came to a consensus about what critical thinking and reasoning are, how critical thinking can be defined, and

what its core elements are. (Definitions of the core elements can be found in Appendix A.) The report describes, defines, and details the ideal critical thinker, and what the core elements of critical thinking are. (The APA's report does not make reference to how critical thinking can be taught; it only states what it is.) The following is the consensus statement regarding critical thinking and the ideal critical thinker:

> We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. (APA, 1990, p. 3)

Breaking this definition down may make it more clear. Critical thinking is judgment that is purposeful and self-regulatory. This judgment then results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference of evidence, concepts, methods, criteria, and contexts.

The APA's (1990) Delphi Report also went on to detail what it termed central or core critical thinking skills. The consensus among the experts was that critical thinking has six core elements:

1. Interpretation: comprehend and express meaning or significance
2. Analysis: identify the intended and actual inferential relationships
3. Evaluation: assess logical strength
4. Inference: draw reasonable conclusions
5. Explanation: state the results and justify one's reasoning
6. Self-regulation: monitor one's cognitive activities

Each of these elements of critical thinking corresponds to some part of the consensus statement of critical thinking given in the APA's (1990) Delphi Report (a further breakdown of these elements can be seen in Appendix B). These six categories are considered to be core or central categories that the ideal critical thinker would possess.

Socratic Conversations Analyzed

The following transcribed conversations are from a mixed methods research study conducted at Columbia River Correctional Facility in Portland, Oregon in 2003 (Boghossian, in press). The educational intervention, called Introducing

Socrates, was attended by 10 inmates, Monday through Thursday, for 2 hours each day. The class was structured in 30 minute segments, using a 25-on 5-off timetable; that is, every 30 minutes a new question was examined. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new Socratically-based curriculum on raising inmates' critical thinking and moral reasoning skills, and on identifying early indicators for treatment compliance (e.g., whether or not inmates enjoyed their treatment, were engaged by it, etc.).

In the four conversations that follow, I ask inmates an open-ended question, drawn primarily from the Platonic dialogues (Plato's works), and then I use the Socratic method to guide them thorough a process of systematic examination of their responses to those questions. The purpose of this process is linked to the purpose of the study: to teach inmates how to engage ideas, how to increase their critical thinking and moral reasoning ability, and ultimately how to decrease criminogenic needs and thereby decrease recidivism. At the end of each conversation I show briefly how the conversation elicited or strengthened one or more of the six core elements of critical thinking.

Finally, the following Socratic conversations were chosen because each illustrates a slightly different aspect of the Socratic method. The first conversation matches strictly, and even formulaically, individual comments to stages of the Socratic method. It is a good conversation for understanding a "by the book" Socratic discourse. The second conversation shows "horizontal learning," or how inmates learn from each other, and not just from the facilitator (Boghossian, 2002). The third conversation shows that dialogues do not have to end in personal or communal revelation to be successful. The fourth conversation shows that through the Socratic method inmates can reinforce what they already know.

Conversation #1 "What is it to be virtuous?"

In the following dialogue we see the application of each stage of the Socratic method.

Researcher: "What is it to be virtuous?" ...

Inmate 1: My ultimate thing in my life is to always be true to my family and the people I call friends. To hold that above all else. And if I call a person my friend, you know, that takes it to a whole new level.

Researcher: What if one of your friends comes to you and says, "Dude, I've gotta dispose of this dead body, you've gotta help me."?

Here we see the first three stages of the Socratic method. It begins in wonder, with an initial question. In this case that question is, "What is it to be virtuous?" A hypothesis is then offered, "To be true to my family and the people I call my friends. To hold that above all else." This is the statement or the thesis that becomes targeted for refutation. Next, there is an attempt at an elenchus, a "what if" or counterexample statement or series of statements. However, in this example the "what if" statement was not sufficient to either secure agreement to further premises or to make the inmate reevaluate his initial response. Because I could not get the inmate to agree to what I thought was an eminently reasonable premise, I could not secure agreement with further premises, and I could not get him to agree that the hypothesis that he offered was suspect.

Inmate 1: Hey, it's simple for me, right, wrong or indifferent. If I'm calling them my friend, what do we gotta do? Where do we gotta go?

At this juncture another inmate targeted the hypothesis by offering his own counterexample.

Inmate 2: [To Inmate 1] What if he says, "Dude, we gotta go rape this girl?" Look, I need you to hold this girl down while I rape her.

Inmate 1: [to Inmate 2] You're on your own, brother.

Inmate 2: [to Inmate 1] But he's your friend.

This was an effective counterexample because it showed the limits of friendship while calling into question the initial hypothesis. Inmate 1 does not revise his hypothesis at this juncture, but clarifies what he meant.

Inmate 1: Still. If I'm gonna call a person a friend, first of all, I know he's not gonna go out and rape no girl. I'm gonna make sure when I choose someone as a friend it's not gonna happen like that [snapping]. I look to my life to find a couple of friends throughout my whole life. And to be that they'd have to share some of the same virtues I hold.

Researcher: So if somebody does come to you and ask you to do something like this then they're not really your friend?

Inmate 1: No.

Researcher: No? Is that right? Friends don't ask friends to dispose of dead bodies for them.

Inmate 9: You don't know none of our friends.

This last comment was, perhaps, a reason why my initial "what if" was not effective. It is far from my life situation for anyone to ask me to dispose of a dead body, but it is not far from their life situations. This is also a good example of why one cannot learn the Socratic method by using "stock" or "canned" examples. What works in one context or in one conversation may not work in another.

What follows is an outstanding illustration of a counterexample. Inmate 5 gave a far more effective counterexample, and even made my pedestrian example seem anemic. It was this example that was effective in causing a reevaluation of the initial response, and Inmate 1 finally calls his hypothesis into question. What is interesting about this is that this is not my example. I was at a loss regarding what direction I could move the conversation, and what proposition I could offer to either call into question the hypothesis immediately, or build a case against it by securing agreement to further premises. Moreover, this is also an example of how a Socratic teacher knows that students are learning how to examine ideas by making effective counterexamples—when other students apply what they have been learning.

Inmate 5: What if your best friend was married to your sister and in a rage he killed her? Then he said, "Hey, look brother I screwed up big-time, I need you to go help me bury this body."

Researcher: Boy, talk about what's one instance of a thing, that's really better than I could have ever done.

This counterexample, offered by Inmate 5, ultimately dissuaded Inmate 1 about the truth of his hypothesis. The conversation went on to more directly

focus on the question of virtue. There was no final agreement about what virtue is and how it relates to friendship.

This example illustrates a Socratic way to examine ideas, through the systematized process of question and answer that seeks to cast doubt on claims to moral knowledge. It illustrates the examination of ideas by showing a transparent and easy to use process. Finally, while these examples may seem remote or even alien, they are not out of the arena of life possibilities for the men in this group. With any luck, none of the inmates will ever be in the position to decide whether or not they will help their friends dispose of a dead body. If this situation, or one like it, does arise, however, both this conversation and this way of subjecting moral decisions to a critical thinking process may prove to be invaluable.

Conversation #1 Critical Thinking Core Elements

The two critical thinking core elements most evident in this dialogue are 3) evaluation, and 4) inference. The first core element, evaluation, is seen in subsequent responses to the initial claim, and particularly in Inmate 5's response regarding burying one's sister. Discreet examples of inferences can be seen throughout the dialogue, especially with regard to the relevant assent to propositions at each stage of the discourse (e.g., when clarifying the demands of friendship). Throughout the discourse inmates drew "reasonable conclusions" that allowed the conversation to proceed with new, set or established conditions. These conclusions then formed the basis for assent to further propositions, in which evaluative judgments were once again brought to bear (e.g., raping a girl or telling the researcher that he does not know any of their friends).

Conversation #2 "What's the best life to lead?"

In the beginning of this conversation, 9 of the 10 inmates believe that the type of life Mother Teresa led is morally equivalent to the type of life led by Adolf Hitler. By the end of the discussion there is an agreement that not all lives are morally equivalent.

Researcher: What's the best life to lead?

Inmate 5: To die with all your goals accomplished.

Researcher: Then one must have set one's sights too low.

[Inmates talk among themselves.]

Researcher: Are there certain types of lives that are better than other types of lives? Can we all agree that the life of Mother Teresa is better than the life of–

Inmate 4: Hitler

Researcher: Yeah, Hitler.

[Nine inmates respond "no," one says "yes."]

At this point in the discussion it is important to note that the inmates provided the example. I did not offer Hitler's life as an example of a bad life; in fact, it did not occur to me to suggest such an extreme example. This is important because the inmates are evaluating whether or not there is a way to make a judgment about moral equivalency, and their interest is amplified because it is their example that they are defending–not that of the researcher. They have a vested interest in defending their claim.

Researcher: No? We can't agree to that?

Inmate 7: Bulls***.

Inmate 2: It depends who we're asking.

Inmate 3: It's biased because it's your opinion and your opinion is always biased.

Researcher: Is the life of the tyrant the best life?

Inmate 2: Depends.

Researcher: If you ask a warlord if he's a warlord he'll say no. If one really is a tyrant, one will never refer to oneself as a tyrant.

Inmate 9: True.

[Inmates nod in agreement.]

Researcher: How do you make a judgment about what's right or wrong?

Inmate 2: Common sense.

Inmate 7: What about morals?

Researcher: I hate to plug it, but don't you have the process now [the Socratic method], counterexample, instances of a thing that make statements false, and if you can think of them then it's probably not the best idea.

Inmate 10: Which is a kind of common sense.

Researcher: Yeah, codified or formalized.

Inmate 5: What's the justification for being a tyrant?

Researcher: Well, my question is, is there a way to step outside and say, hm, bad to be a tyrant good to be this. You said common sense, but his common sense is different from his, and from his, and from Hitler's.

Inmate 9: True.

Researcher: OK, well maybe there's not a best type of life to lead, but isn't leading certain types of lives better than leading other types of lives?

Inmate 9: No.

[Nine inmates shake their heads to indicate 'no.']

Researcher: You don't think so? Like [Inmate 4] said the other day, you don't think it's better to be kind to somebody than to be mean to them?

Inmate 7: No.

Researcher: I can't even get you guys to agree to that?

[Nine inmates say no, one says yes.]

The next comments exemplify responses from people who have been steeped in the Socratic process. There is a series of counterexamples and counterexamples to those counterexamples. An additional thing to note about the discourse thus far is that five of the inmates are actively participating. What this dialogue does not show is the development of prosocial modeling (Barton & Osborne, 1978; Boghossian, 2004; Rex & Crosland, 1999); the other inmates are extremely attentive to the conversation, nodding their heads and indicating support for the comments of others. By the end of the conversation 8 of 10 inmates have participated, but the discourse itself stands as a Socratic model for all the inmates.

Inmate 3: Isn't it false to walk through life lying? Even if you don't like that person just to make them feel better? Why not just be the way you are to every person?

Researcher: And what if you're a nasty bastard to everybody?

Inmate 1: Isn't it better to be raised rich than poor?

Researcher: It's certainly better to not be raised hungry.

Inmate 7: But doesn't adversity build character?

Inmate 2: Would you rather be spoiled and full or starving and mean?

Researcher: Aristotle says you can't even talk about being virtuous until you have the basics: food, shelter, clothing. Unless you have food shelter and clothing the whole concept of being good doesn't make any sense.

Inmate 5: Survival.

Researcher: Exactly. If you're starving then of course you're gonna steal.

Inmate 5: That goes with everything.

Researcher: OK, so then we can agree that the beginnings of a good life are food, shelter and clothing.

[All the inmates nod or say "yes."]

Inmate 2: Survival is everything.

Researcher: OK, so why can't we then construct another tier above that, and say food, shelter, clothing is on the bottom of our edifice, our foundation, then the next level is ...

Inmate 4: Self-respect.

Again, here the inmate provided the response. Inmate 4 was not told that self-respect was an intrinsic good, and that a life with self-respect was better than a life without self-respect. He generated this example entirely on his own.

Researcher: Yeah, or to be a nice guy, or to have a reasonable job, or good friends, or whatever.

[The inmates talk among themselves.]

Researcher: OK, so then we can say that there are certain types of lives that are better than others.

Inmate 5: Yeah, I guess so.

They arrived at this conclusion by force of reason and by reasoning from their experiences. I wanted the conversation to continue with a Socratic question that morally compared the life of Adolf Hitler to Mother Teresa, but unfortunately time ran out. Inmates were not told that certain types of lives were better than others, but they arrived at this conclusion through directed questions. After the discussion, if asked whether or not one type of life is better than another, they would undoubtedly respond "yes," and would mean it.

Conversation #2 Critical Thinking Core Elements

The two critical thinking core elements most evident in this dialogue are 3) evaluation, and 5) explanation. This can best be seen in the dialectical exchange among Inmates 3, 1, 7, 2, and the researcher; in particular, participants were able to assess the strengths of claims made by both the researcher and their peers, and articulate coherent and pertinent responses to those claims. Each question is responded to with another relevant question, and each response deepens and further challenges the initial hypothesis—walking through life lying, being raised rich rather than poor, adversity building character, and being spoiled and full rather than starving and mean—all demonstrate strongly the ability to assess the logical strength of a claim. Finally, these articulate and salient responses also comport thematically with the broader discussion, further indicating that at each stage of the discussion inmates are engaged in the ongoing process of evaluation.

Conversation #3 "Was Jesus clever?"

A common misunderstanding of Socratic practice is that it necessarily ends in a personal revelation, or that the initial question is solved to everyone's satisfaction. Not all discussions end with inmates experiencing moral clarity, or causing moral and intellectual growth, but not all have to for the treatment to be considered successful. Depending on the individuals involved, and the persistence of the teacher, there may be no resolutions to questions. The following is an example of an unresolved conversation with one of the inmates during the 5-minute break in day three of the treatment:

Inmate 6: You made a comment about Jesus needing to be clever.

Researcher: I was asking, was Jesus clever?

Inmate 6: He chose to die. He was God incarnate. His purpose was to be the sacrificial lamb for all sinners.

Researcher: OK, so would you consider Him a greater man for having made that sacrifice?

Inmate 6: Absolutely.

Researcher: OK, so what if the lesser men around Him were actually clever and prevented Him from achieving that mission?

Inmate 6: The lesser men didn't want Him to achieve His purpose.

Researcher: Yeah, but if the lesser men, who were clever, prevented Him from achieving His purpose, then couldn't ya say that the virtue that He should have had was cleverness because that would have enabled Him to achieve His purpose? I mean it couldn't have been a sacrifice unless He chose it, and in order for Him to have chosen it He had to have the possibility of choosing otherwise. Therefore He could have not chosen it and failed.

Inmate 6: He achieved His purpose.

Researcher: Could He have failed, or was He destined?

Inmate 6: He could have failed. He had a choice.

Researcher: So then He might have needed cleverness to increase the likelihood of success.

Inmate 6: Go back and read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Researcher: That doesn't answer the question.

The inmate later told me that he had been thinking about that conversation for 2 weeks. When asked if he had come to any new conclusions, he said that he was not sure. So while the discussion did not end conclusively with an agreement on whether or not Jesus needed to be clever, or whether cleverness is a virtue, the conversation did morally, philosophically and intellectually engage the inmate.

It is important to note that lack of a definite resolution does not mean that the discussion was useless, or that it would translate into moral ambiguity, or that the treatment was a failure. Part of what it means to have a successful treatment is to get inmates to think about and engage critically these sorts of questions, and ultimately translate this into moral action. The process of

thinking about these questions, and leading more examined lives, may not just have the practical consequence of decreasing recidivism. The act of moral engagement is itself a type of transformation, or evolution, with profound implications for making choices about the sort of life one leads. Even if there is no definitive answer to moral and philosophical questions, the examined life is worth living, and an enormous body of corrections literature points to the fact that a reflective and contemplative life is less likely to lead to criminal behavior (Blud & Travers, 2001; D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971; Freedman, Rosenthal, Donahoe, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Porporino & Fabiano, 2000).

Conversation #3 Critical Thinking Core Element

The critical thinking core element most evident in this dialogue is 1) interpretation. Certainly Inmate 6 thought about, clarified, articulated, and defended his beliefs about a subject for which he had a great deal of passion. But moreover (perhaps as an initial condition for exhibiting these core components) he displayed a moderate degree of interpretation at each stage of the brief conversation, comprehending and expressing meaning or significance in the researcher's objections and comments. This is most evident in the middle section of the dialogue, where he responded, "The lesser men didn't want Him to achieve His purpose." This response indicates that he is both following the dialogue and finding or constructing meaning in the researcher's responses.

Conversation #4 "Can a greater man be harmed by a lesser man?"

Socratic conversations may not change or even challenge people's beliefs, but reinforce what is already known. This also does not detract from the treatment, and depending on participants' interest in the subject, may still be engaging. For example, the following is the transcription of a conversation that took place on day three:

Researcher: Can a greater man be harmed by a lesser man?

Inmate 7: Only physically.

Researcher: What about morally? Pure virtues [relating to an earlier discussion]. In a moral arena can a greater man be harmed by a lesser man?

Inmate 7: No.

Researcher: What if the greater man is a completely virtuous man, but he's just not that smart? But the lesser man is a very clever, manipulative, and devious man? Cannot the lesser man harm the greater man?

Inmate 2: If he was clever wouldn't he be the greater man?

Researcher: Is being clever a virtue?

[All the inmates nod or say "yeah."]

Inmate 3: To be truly virtuous one would have to exhibit some standard of cleverness.

Inmate 8: Yeah, we're surrounded by that every day.

[Inmates talk among themselves.]

Inmate 7: A lesser man can hurt a greater man physically, but a greater man, who's virtuous, cannot be hurt any other way by a lesser man.

Inmate 9: Yeah, the lesser man has no ammunition. He has nothing.

Inmate 2: Yeah, physically he's able to hurt you, only then.

Researcher: So now that we've examined this we can have more confidence in our belief that a lesser man cannot harm a greater man.

In this conversation, while there was an agreement about the initial claim, the fact that other questions were generated from the inquiry shows that 5 of the 10 inmates were engaged. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this conversation took place on day three. From our previous conversations on days one and two, I can state with a high degree of confidence that inmates would never have arrived at this conclusion at an earlier point in the treatment.

Conversation #4 Critical Thinking Core Elements

The critical thinking core elements most evident in this dialogue are 2) analysis and 4) inference. For the latter, inference, Inmate 2 infers that cleverness makes

one a greater man. (Note that inferences do not have to be logically necessary, merely reasonable or sensible conclusions that follow from given premises). Inmate 3 adds support while refining the claim in his next response, "To be truly virtuous one would have to exhibit some standard of cleverness." This exchange demonstrates that the participants have drawn reasonable conclusions both from the initial question presented by the researcher, and from the responses of their peers. Furthermore, analysis can be seen in the participants' ability to identify the inferential relationships throughout the dialogue. Again, this is most clearly seen in the succinct exchange between Inmate 2 and Inmate 3.

Conclusion

Hopefully, through analysis and explanation of these conversations, correctional educators will have a better understanding of the application of the Socratic method, and how it can improve inmates' critical thinking skills. While there is an enormous corpus of correctional, educational, and even philosophical and psychological literature documenting the importance of learning how to think critically and reason morally, it is unfortunate that the Socratic method is not employed more frequently to achieve this within the context of correctional education. (Socratic conversations may also provide a welcome relief from formulaic curricula found in some existing treatments and interventions). Ultimately, it is my hope that Socratic pedagogical elements can be incorporated structurally into the curricula and the learning objectives of existing correctional educational programs, and that correctional educators can add Socratic techniques to their daily lessons to foster inmates' critical thinking skills.

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APPENDIX A. Core Critical Thinking Elements: Definitions

Interpretation: "To comprehend and express the meaning or significance of a wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures or criteria" (APA, 1990, p. 13).

Analysis: "To identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, conceptions, descriptions, or other forms of representation intended to express beliefs, judgments, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions" (APA, 1990, p. 14).

Evaluation: "To assess the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions or a person's perception experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion; and to assess the logical strength of the actual or intend[ed] inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions or other forms of representation" (APA, 1990, p. 15).

Inference: "To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to educe the consequences flowing from data, statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation" (APA, 1990, p. 16).

Explanation: "To state the results of one's reasoning; to justify that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based; and to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments" (APA, 1990, p. 18).

Self-regulation: "Self-consciously to monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results educed, particularly by applying skills in analysis and evaluation to one's own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results" (APA, 1990, p. 19).

APPENDIX B. Critical Thinking Core Elements: Subcategories

1. Interpretation	Categorization Decoding Significance Clarifying Meaning
2. Analysis	Examining Ideas Identifying Arguments Analyzing Arguments
3. Evaluation	Assessing Claims Assessing Arguments
4. Inference	Querying Evidence Conjecturing Alternatives Drawing Conclusions
5. Explanation	Stating Results Justifying Procedures Presenting Arguments
6. Self-Regulation	Self-examination Self-correction

From the American Philosophical Association Delphi Report (APA, 1990, p. 12)

Biographical Sketch

Dr. **PETER BOGHOSSIAN** is a philosophy professor and teaches moral reasoning and critical thinking to inmates in the State of Oregon Department of Corrections prison system.