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I wish to address the question of how men achieve well-being in prison and how prison itself can and should promote this well-being. I shall also be trying to persuade you that what I have to say in this paper is the truth. Of course if this were an academic paper, which it is not, then I would rely on its formality of tone, its style, its openness to scrutiny, its respect for the systematic presentation of facts, theorems, networks of meaning to create in you that confidence of mind which we call knowledge. This is not the kind of persuasion that I shall be attempting. I shall be telling stories, reporting incident and snatches of dialogue. I shall be speaking to you with the voice of a most un-objective narrator who has a moral position into which he is trying to seduce you. This narrator, me if you like, has been sitting to just one side of things and watching the prison. Not the watching of, say, a sociologist making a set of propositions defined by scientific method but a journalist, a novelist on the look-out for a good story. Stories are not innocent, they deliver value and, as always, my intention is to persuade you of the goodness of men in prison.

'When they lifed me off,' said Steve, 'my dad said: "Listen son I know you'll look after your body but what you got to do is look after your mind."' Steve always looked to be in good shape and he had a job in the Engineering Shop but what he did to look after his mind was learn to speak French. Another chap I knew developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of Mythology. Some men write books, learn a musical instrument, do a university degree. Some men, of course, collapse into ruin. The very worst advice I ever heard given, although we all fell about laughing at the time, was when James, who had spent quite a lot of his life inside, said to a new boy: 'What you need to do to get through your sentence is become a heroin

addict as soon as possible.' This came up in the middle of a philosophy class and, now that I stop to think, it does have something of Schopenhauer about it.

'What the fuck are you telling the kid?' said Alistair.

'Think about it,' said James. 'You get into the smack and it's wonderful, can't beat it. Your time flies by. Then you're sick as a dog, cluckin, you've got to find the next lot and you're on a mission. Then you find some. You meet all sorts of interesting people you wouldn't have otherwise met. Then you're skint and so you borrow and then you're in deep shit and you have to duck and dive and scheme, maybe you get a terrible kickin and off you go to hospital. Maybe you sell your arse, do all sorts. You are constantly busy. Never a dull moment. And before you know where you are, times up and you can go home.' James smiled at us all, looked terribly pleased with himself.

Getting involved with drugs seems to me to be just about the worst way of making your way through a period of captivity. Easy to say of course if you've never been a captive. David had a history with heroin when he came to my class. He was perfectly open about this. The first I heard of him was when Leigh came over and said: 'Look at this.' He had the cardboard tube centre from a toilet roll, each end was stuffed with tissue. He eased out a small statue, about the size of my thumb. He put it on the desk: 'Go on, what's that then?' It was a young man: baggy jeans, baseball cap he had an uzzi in one hand an open book in the other. It was stunningly good. I've still got it on the piano at home. 'One of Plato's Guardian's innit.' And it was. A bit updated but there was the enlightened philosopher warrior that Plato writes about. This was David's bid to jump the queue for the Philosophy class. 'He does all sorts,' said Leigh. 'He's doin a chess set for

me. I'm payin him, course I am. David had a cottage industry going in his cell. He could do anything from porn to the Easter bunny. 'Guess what it's made of? Soap. He does everything in soap.' He came to class but no matter how talented he was, there was always heroin. 'I know, I know. I get to three days and just when I'm really down the bastards come and offer me a baggy and they know I can't say no and it all starts again.'

Most of the men in my class are very steady and they were appalled by the whole business. Casey was half way through a science degree and he had persuaded Tony into starting a degree himself. They were next door neighbours back on the wing. They decided to take David on. 'Yeah,' said Tony, 'David lives with us now. They had persuaded the officers to let David move cells. 'We've got a little run of three cells,' Tony told me, 'he'll be alright with us.' But he wasn't. Casey told me that Tony, who was really good at violence, would wait for the dealers to show up and then, 'he'd beat the shit out of 'em.' But, David and the dealers always found a way and as far as I know David was an addict when he finished his sentence and left.

Casey, on the other hand, has been a long time in jail and has made a positive forward looking life. Casey comes from Albuquerque, yes he does, and always bowls me over with his relentless new world optimism. I was sitting with him one Friday morning and we were talking about metaphysics. One of the orderlies came in on some errand and started to tell us about his hard time and the shit food and how unfair it all was. Casey jumped on him and even though I'm used to Casey I found it a bit intense. 'Stop fuckin whingeing. You're doing just fine. You're not being raped while you're out trying to find firewood so you can cook for

your kids who're starving in some fly blown shithole.' And that was just the overture. The other chap was not so much offended as baffled and slunk off. 'And the food,' Casey tells me, 'the food is just fine. Maybe there could be more of it but it's just fine. Better than the free school dinners I got when I was a kid in Orange County. Although I gotta say that the spag bol sometimes tastes just like Orange county. ' 'I thought they gave you sandwiches?' 'I love fuckin sandwiches. I buy nuts and fruit from the canteen.' 'Like Yogi Bear?' 'Yeah, just like Yogi fuckin Bear. There are guys buying candy and crisps. You know how much crisps cost?' I shake my head.

'I buy stuff from the canteen. I buy tuna fish. It's cheap. It's a balance between taste, protein and economy. I can get garlic and chilli peppers, fresh ginger, lemons. If I take a vegetarian curry from the servery I can mix in the tuna and the spices. It's fine. Some of these fools are buying tobacco and soda. I can get salads and fresh veg from the servery and it's good. They cook a lot of stuff now in the kitchens right here.' Casey has solved the problem of not having enough by operating a very discreet, modest banking operation. He sometimes helps other inmates with their letters and paperwork; there is quite a lot of illiteracy in the prison. He is offered payment in tobacco and so because he doesn't smoke he has working capital. 'One of the things I do is lend a packet of tobacco and in a weeks time I want from you a packet of a tobacco and a tin of tuna.' This is extraordinarily shrewd. The rate of interest is minimal and yet it makes a real difference to his well being without attracting attention. 'Don't people cheat you?' I asked him. 'What? You're joking; who's gonna stiff me for a can of tuna.' 'But when they do? When it all goes pear shaped?' I was curious because debt collection in the prison can be a

dreadful business. He shrugs: 'I just let it go and tell everyone that the guy's not to be trusted. You think I'm gonna beat somebody up for a can of tuna?' Casey lifts one cheek from his chair and lets out a long rolling fart. 'Maybe I'm taking too much of the vegetarian and bean options.'

Food in prison is really important. In the National Audit Office value for money Report March 2006 a Prison Governor is quoted as saying: 'Food is one of four things you must get right, if you like having a roof on your prison. The other three are: visits, mail and hot water.' The report goes on to estimate an average expenditure on food of £1.87p per day per man. The food that you put before a man is crammed with value. It tells him and broadcasts to everyone around what you think of him, how you value him. In the Audit Office report, six years ago, there was concern that prison food was frozen, tinned, pre-packaged and uniform. Today, working in the kitchen at HMP Wellingborough there are six civilian chefs. 'Before I worked here,' Andrew tells me, 'I worked on cruise ships.' He takes me through a menu card. There are five classifications: Standard, Muslim, Vegetarian, Vegan, Healthy Eating. This is made much more simple than it seems because all the meat is halal. When there is a demand the kitchen also caters for Celiac, Lactose intolerance, Ramadan, Sikh, Pagan, Mormon, Kosher and any special festivals that anyone comes up with. This is not so difficult; these people are professionals and they train the men who work in the kitchen to a professional standard. They cook from scratch, not much comes into the prison in a packet or a tin. 'Anyway,' says Andrew, 'it's cheaper. We used to buy in Yorkshire puddings. Scabby little things they were. Now we make our own batter, milk, flour, eggs. We make lovely puddings for a fraction of the cost. 'And', he says, 'Heidi does themes.

We might have an Indian week, a Caribbean week, a Chinese week. We go up on the wings and talk to the guys about the menus and get a bit of feedback.' Food in prison is a part of imprisonment, a part of that aspect of prison policy which addresses the question of what kind of a man will be released into society once his sentence is done. The kitchen at HMP Wellingborough speaks to that notion. On the whiteboard in the pastry area there are recipes for sponge cake, custard, cookie dough, shortbread it all has a softer domestic feel to it. The equipment gleams and there is a rack of large sharp knives. I point to the knives: 'What about discipline, Andrew? How many officers do you have in here? I mean there's a lot of dangerous stuff knocking about.' 'No,' says Andrew, 'there are no officers at all. We just have ordinary workplace routines. We have thirty five men working here and they all have a proper job description and, just like at work, if they don't do what they should they get a warning and then the sack. We advertise the jobs and guys apply and we give them interviews and a trial period.' 'But what if somebody really kicks off?' I ask him. He looks bemused; 'Well, I suppose I'd press the alarm button. 'Look,' he says, 'it's a question of respect.'

I know that Casey takes a lot of trouble to keep well. He goes to classes in Yoga and is in the prison gym three times a week. Casey's view is that yoga helps to keep him straight in his head and it keeps him fit and supple. In the gym some men make a hobby of their bodies and develop startling shapes and sizes. But men like Casey want something else. 'I'm forty; when I'm fifty I want to be fit enough to build a log house. So, I work all the major muscle groups and anatomy trains. It's not good to be aggressive in the gym, I want a calm, unstressed workout. Form is more important than strength, reps more important than weight.' He pauses, rolls

his shoulders; 'Although I like to have a little size, it's a deterrent.' Men serving long sentences have to plan their survival.

The gym is really important. Relationships with the officers who work in the gym are unlike those in the rest of the prison they are based on physical pride rather than hierarchy. One of my philosophers was a former paratrooper and he would make a point of wearing his Parachute Regiment tee-shirt to the gym. He knew that several of the officers were ex-marines. There were some quite intense encounters none of which had anything to do with prison at all. At the moment we are short staffed and so if there is any tension on the wings the gym officers are used to meet the situation. This means that the gym closes. Men who misbehave are under some pressure, the sort of pressure not available to the prison authorities, to be quiet and co-operative. 'If I lose my gym, you will lose some body parts.'

Many of the men who have been in my philosophy class have been to Liz's Yoga sessions and some officers and staff go as well. Prison is a noisy, intrusive place and yoga finds out quietness where men can slow right down. They take it very seriously and many practise daily in their cells. Malky told me that yoga had made him into a pool champion. 'When I'm playing I do my yoga breathin an I say to myself: 'I am at one with the cue, I am at one with the baize. My concentration is fuckin amazin. I am cleanin up. No fucker can get near me.' Nigel had similar success at poker but there were ugly rumours about how he had gone far beyond luck. He had to play with his sleeves rolled up and so on. 'I had to start losing a bit, Al, it was getting dangerous.' Most of the chaps in Lz's yoga class were quite clear that here was something which could take them out of the noisy intensity of prison



not simply for the duration of the class. Back in their cells they could achieve a degree of quietness and peace. Many of them were regular attenders at the gym and yoga was a way of keeping supple and balanced.

Matthew, one of the long-term students in my philosophy class, had spent most of his life addicted to opiates: except when he was in prison. In prison it was study, gym, yoga. 'Al,' he said, 'I need these walls around me.' It was a sad little moment. For some men well-being in prison is the only well-being that there is. In prison education it is realistic to accept that when some men's lives are transformed the transformation is only for the present. Sometimes men come to education and they are well groomed, polite, sociable; back on the wing another persona asserts itself. Jenny the Drama teacher lost one of her actors not long before her play was due to open and so she went down to the Segregation block where he was being held in solitary confinement. She thought that the officers might listen to her. They looked at her pityingly. 'I'm afraid Miss that we see another side of his character than the one he shows to you.' At least, I tell myself, they know now how they ought to conduct themselves even if they don't. They are at least ashamed enough to cover their tracks when they spend the morning with me and Aristotle. One morning in the office I was picking up my register when Liz said: 'Do you remember Craig?' Craig had been a regular in Yoga, a wry, witty, sensitive man. 'Well, he's dead.' 'What?' 'He was released last Friday, on Saturday he was dead.' She had that blank look on her face as she ploughed through her anger. 'His stupid mates had a party for him, lots of drugs of course. He O.D.ed and he's dead.' She shrugged: 'What can you do?' And off she went to Yoga class and off I went to Philosophy.

When I told Casey that I was coming to Albuquerque he was delighted and he sat me down and wrote out an itinerary of things I must do. He looked thoughtful and then said: 'Alan, I can git you laid.' It was very flattering. 'Well that's very kind Casey old chap, but, actually, I'm going with my wife.' 'I can git her laid too.' Casey dreams of being here: 'When I git off the plane at Albuquerque, first thing I do, any hour of the day or night, is git a cab to The Frontier Restaurant and eat the best tortillas in the world. And, oh, that Green Chillie Sauce.'