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Commentary

Richard Peters and his legacy

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Abstract

Richard Peters's contribution to teaching and research in philosophy of education after 1962 until the mid-1970s was immense, as this piece by two of his colleagues from that period shows. He brought the prevailing emphasis on conceptual analysis in general philosophy to bear on creating a new way of philosophising about education. He worked tirelessly both to expand the teaching of the subject at Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and especially at in-service levels, and to reform teacher education at the University of London Institute of Education and its associated colleges more generally. He also founded the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and its journal. Despite health difficulties, problems in his analysis of the concept of education, objections to the academic overloading of the PGCE, and the later decline of government funding of in-service courses in the 1980s, much of Peters's original vision for philosophy of education thrives to this day.

Keywords philosophy; philosophy of education; conceptual analysis; the concept of education; initial teacher training; in-service courses; University of London Institute of Education; student funding

1.

This is a story which begins halfway through the first 120 years of the IOE (Institute of Education), UCL's Faculty of Education and Society (University College London, UK). It is about the dramatic changes that Richard Peters set in motion 60 years ago. It is the story of what some of those who worked with him at the time referred to as 'The Mission'.

In 1947 Louis Arnaud Reid became the first Professor of the Philosophy of Education at the University of London Institute of Education. Before that time, well-known Institute figures such as Sir John Adams and Percy Nunn had often written philosophically about education, but Reid was the first to hold a chair in the subject. Since the early 1920s, the latter had had a long and distinguished career in general philosophy, focusing on epistemology and aesthetics, in which field he had become a leading figure. During his Institute career he sought to change the philosophy of education from a study of great past educators to 'sustained questioning and reasoning about educational aims and values and the activities of teaching' (Hirst, 1998: 4). His preferred style of teaching included lengthy extempore elaboration of his thoughts. Many beginning teachers tended to find this off-putting and irrelevant (Aldrich, 2002).

Richard Peters succeeded Reid in 1962. He differed from Reid in many ways. A Quaker youth worker during the war, and after it a philosophy teacher at Birkbeck College, where he set up and ran a new joint BA degree in philosophy and psychology, he was far more practical in his outlook – an ambitious person totally focused on his work and with little interest in the arts or in aesthetics, either in life or in philosophy. In his inaugural lecture, 'Education as Initiation' (Peters, 1964: 8), he described Reid as 'sympathetic to the layman's view that the task of the philosopher is to provide some kind of synoptic directive for living'. He felt himself to be, in contrast, 'a very mundane fellow whose eyes are more likely to be fixed on the brass-tacks on or under the teacher's desk than on the Form of the Good'. Once at the Institute, he sidelined Reid's legacy of a discipline rooted in earlier schools of philosophising and set about recreating philosophy of education on the basis of the philosophical approach of conceptual analysis which was becoming dominant in anglophone philosophy at the time. In his retirement, Reid found a greater welcome in the Institute's Art Department than in the Philosophy Department. He taught there, and continued to write until his death at 90. In his first years at the Institute, Peters also somewhat sidelined Reid's colleagues who were still in the department, but whose interests lay elsewhere than in conceptual analysis, Klaus Neuberger and Leslie Perry (who went on to become Professor of Education at the University of Warwick and King's College London). At the same time, he appointed several of his recent students, Patricia White from the Institute and Joan Cooper, Terence Moore and John White from Birkbeck.

2.

By 1962 conceptual analysis as a method of tackling philosophical questions had yielded interesting results, not least in areas of general philosophy of particular interest to Peters, such as social philosophy and especially philosophical psychology (see Peters, 1958). Influenced by the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, and by contemporary philosophers at the University of Oxford such as Gilbert Ryle, the approach examined the meaning of philosophically interesting concepts by looking at logical distinctions and connections that can and should be made between them and other concepts with which they may sometimes be confused – all this in order, if possible, to establish the necessary and sufficient conditions of their use. Sometimes the term 'ordinary language philosophy' has been applied to this way of philosophising, as if the task of the philosopher is no more than lexicographical, to do with separating and defining the often multiple meanings of words as they are ordinarily used. But this is a misunderstanding. Analytical philosophy was intended to throw light on ideas that had puzzled thinkers sometimes since the days of Plato, and empirical enquiry into dictionary meanings could not take one far, if any distance

at all, in that endeavour. 'Meaning as use', as post-Wittgensteinian philosophers understood this, was not at all the same as 'meaning as usage'.

Analytical techniques were applied in different areas of the discipline: to the concepts, for instance, of *knowledge, belief, causality, morality, duty, pleasure, aesthetic experience, democracy*. This sometimes involved freeing the use of such terms from association with misleading images enshrined in common ways of understanding them. In his work *The Concept of Mind*, for example, Ryle (1949) tried to disabuse the reader of the deep-rooted but false notion of a dichotomy between mind and body that saw the former as an immaterial entity lodged in a material substance, or, as he famously expressed it, 'the ghost in the machine'.

Following the lead of Israel Scheffler, with whom he spent part of the 1961/2 session in the USA, Peters's ambition, once at the Institute, was to apply the techniques of conceptual analysis to the field of education. He hoped thereby to create a new sub-branch of philosophy comparable, for example, to philosophical psychology or philosophy of religion. In his eyes, within a few years, his hopes were realised. He wrote that:

In the past decade the philosophy of education has been steadily establishing itself in Britain as a branch of philosophy. It is beginning to appear as an option in philosophy departments as well as one of the main disciplines contributing to educational theory which is studied in education departments. (Peters, 1973b: 1)

The year 1973 also saw a conference on philosophy of education organised by the Royal Institute of Philosophy and held at the University of Exeter. Of the 16 participants, 14 were well-known figures in general philosophy who taught in or, like Peters and his Institute colleague R.K. Elliott, had taught in, departments of philosophy (Brown, 1975).

Peters saw the acceptance of his subject as a new field of philosophy as requiring conceptual analysis of the central concepts of the field, parallel, for example, to the concepts of *God, faith and reincarnation* in philosophy of religion.

At the core of the new sub-discipline was the concept of education itself. Peters had already begun to explore this before he came to the Institute in several radio talks between 1956 and 1959, published in his *Authority, Responsibility and Education* (Peters, 1959). He pursued the topic further in his inaugural lecture of 1963, in which he examined what distinguishes the concept of *education* from those of *teaching, instruction, training and growth*. He argued that education has no ends beyond itself, but is a form of initiation by those who are already adept in them into worthwhile activities and forms of conduct. He built on this in Chapters 1 and 2 of his classic text *Ethics and Education* (Peters, 1966), and in Chapter 5, he spelt out his views on which activities are intrinsically worthwhile and especially on what makes them so.

This book also included chapters on concepts in social philosophy which are important in thinking about education, such as *equality, freedom, respect for persons, authority, punishment and democracy*. Around the same time, Peters encouraged both eminent colleagues in the world of general philosophy and members of his own department staff to publish articles and chapters on other educational concepts. The former group, writing in his edited collection *The Concept of Education* (Peters, 1967a), included David Hamlyn and Godfrey Vesey on aspects of *learning*, Gilbert Ryle, Israel Scheffler and John Passmore on aspects of *teaching*, and Michael Oakeshott on both concepts. The departmental colleagues, writing mainly elsewhere, were Joan Cooper on *teaching*, Terence Moore on *punishment*, John White on *indoctrination* and on *creativity*, and Patricia White on *socialisation*. Robert Dearden, another new member of his staff, who had spent several years as a primary teacher, was persuaded by Peters to write a complete book on the topic, *The Philosophy of Primary Education* (Dearden, 1968). As we will see in Section 3 below, this was especially urgent for Peters in connection with another part of his overall project. In his book, Dearden (1968) devoted most space to clarifying concepts of especial relevance to primary teachers, such as *needs and interests, growth, play, learning, experience, activity, moral education*. Peters's close associate Paul Hirst, a former colleague of Reid's who was appointed as professor at King's College, London, in 1965 and had already used broadly conceptual techniques in his celebrated work on 'the forms of knowledge' (Hirst, 1965), also wrote on *logical and psychological aspects of teaching a subject and on language and thought*.

All this was one aspect of a drive on Peters's part in the mid- to late 1960s to build up his new subject. As we have seen, he had to do this – at least in his eyes – virtually from scratch. He was in a hurry to do so, as he revealingly explained in the Preface to *Ethics and Education*. He said there that a valid criticism of

the book 'is that it has been written too soon and too quickly' (Peters, 1966: 7). He explained that 'one of the main reasons for publishing a book somewhat prematurely' was:

to provide a few signposts for others and to map the contours of the field for others to explore in a more leisurely and detailed manner. The important thing in the philosophy of education is that something should be there to indicate what it is and to provide a determinate structure on which students can train their critical faculties. The philosophy of education is in too undeveloped a state to delay much longer the publication of such a work. It will only develop as a rigorous field of study if a few philosophers are prepared to plough furrows which run more or less in the right direction. (Peters, 1966: 8)

(Interestingly, the Australian philosopher of education Kevin Harris also beams on to the phrase 'in the right direction' in a critical passage in his *Education and Knowledge* [Harris, 1979: 79–80] on what he saw as Peters's new orthodoxy.)

Ethics and Education was 'meant to serve as an introductory textbook in the philosophy of education in the field of ethics and social philosophy', as well as being of interest, Peters hoped, to those working in philosophy (Peters, 1966: 7).

3.

The reference to 'textbook' brings us to a second component of his grand project. When he joined it in 1962, the Institute ran courses at Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) level for recruits to teaching, Diploma and MA courses, and offered MPhil and PhD supervision and seminars at in-service level for serving teachers, as well as for others working in education.

Apart from teaching practice, the PGCE course included lectures and seminars in branches of educational theory – including the psychology, sociology, history and philosophy of education – as well as in 'subject methods'. The former provided an excellent opportunity for Peters to present his new subject to a mass audience. He, Paul Hirst and his other colleagues took part in the programme of Friday morning lectures in educational theory given to a packed Beveridge Hall in Senate House, as well as overflow halls. At Peters's insistence, lectures – already for many years a staple of the PGCE course – were now followed by seminars in smaller groups. He also introduced a further optional seminar in more advanced philosophy of education for interested students. At the end of the PGCE year, the written examination consisted of several three-hour papers for all students. These were in philosophy of education, as well as in other branches of educational theory and the principles of teaching (Aldrich, 2002).

How much the average PGCE student understood or appreciated the subject is unclear. A few found it eye-opening, while the greater number, who were preoccupied by more immediate problems of classroom management, were less involved. They probably included several students whose PGCE exam papers in philosophy of education the authors of this paper marked, and whose answers on punishment in schools discussed whether capital punishment (a careless variant on *corporal* punishment) could justifiably be the last resort of the head teacher. And they may well have included Nick Otty, a trainee English teacher, who wrote in his Penguin book *Learner Teacher* (Otty, 1972) about the whole programme of educational theory lectures, not just the ones in philosophy. Here is his account of students' experience in one of the overflow halls mentioned above:

There is a whirling storm of jargon every Friday morning. It seems as though the whole of the student-teacher world converges on the Institute for this barrage of lectures. There are far too many students for the decayed cinema of a lecture hall, so they are dispersed about the building in dimly-lit caverns and the lectures are relayed by loudspeaker systems. I have never felt so disconnected from the source of the educational spring! We sit in rows facing nothing. People do crosswords, drink coffee and chat because that mechanical bellowing can drown and ignore everything. (Otty, 1972: 15)

Apart from the PGCE, Peters and his staff spent the greater part of their – onerous – teaching week with in-service students specialising in philosophy of education. Academic Diploma courses were popular, and many of those completing them went on to the MA course and some, after that, to MPhils or PhDs. Numbers on every type of course – in both part-time and full-time versions – increased year on year. They

included a sprinkling of overseas students, from places as far away as Australia, Canada, Nigeria, South Africa and Taiwan.

One reason why courses became so full had to do with what was called at the time 'the wider Institute'. This was the Area Training Organisation (ATO), which mainly consisted of a large group of over 30 ex-training colleges now called 'colleges of education', all in the London area and linked with the Institute in its narrower sense like spokes around a hub. These colleges, which had traditionally offered two-year, and as from 1960 three-year, Teacher's Certificate courses for trainee teachers in primary schools and non-selective secondary schools, had all been affected by government reforms in the wake of the Robbins Report of 1963 to further the ambition that teaching should become an all-graduate profession. The three-year and four-year Bachelor in Education (BEd) courses, which they were now beginning to teach from the mid-1960s, were more theory-rich than the old Teacher's Certificate courses, especially the pre-1960 ones, and this meant that college lecturers had to be further upskilled, among other things in philosophy of education, which as a new discipline lacked the already stronger presence among college staff enjoyed by psychologists of education.

This added to teaching commitments in Peters's department. The growing number of students taking in-service courses after 1962 owed much to an influx of college lecturers, some of them funded to study full-time. They were joined by teachers in school, aware of the high demand for philosophically equipped lecturers in the colleges and ambitious to move into that sector. So great, in fact, was the national need to upgrade college lecturers so that they could teach the subject, that the new Labour government, elected in 1964, arranged with Peters and the Institute to fund a new, tailor-made, full-time and later part-time course for college lecturers and teachers intending to become college lecturers, to be called the Diploma in Philosophy.

Pressure on Peters and his staff did not stop there. As well as participating in an annual IOE staff weekend away, the department ran weekend conferences each year for its students, in addition to the annual Easter School of Philosophy that Peters had taken over from Louis Reid, upgrading it from an informal reading group to an intensive one-week course. Intended mainly for teachers with an interest in general philosophy, it was held at a college of education in south-east England and became a recruiting ground for future Institute students, as well as catering for those already studying there. Pairs of well-known general philosophers such as Anthony Quinton, Ninian Smart, Bernard Williams and Peter Winch shared the week, each of the pair giving lectures for half of it. Each lecture was followed up by a seminar taken by a member of Peters's staff.

The latter's workload, taking all their various commitments into account, was extraordinary. It was no surprise that the authors of this paper, exhausted after one Easter School, having taken many seminars, discussed philosophy with participants during every meal and every evening until 10 p.m., and having had to take one of the guest lecturers for a ramble one 'free' afternoon around Beachy Head, dropped everything on arrival back at their flat and indulged themselves by buying their first – in those days, black and white – television set.

4.

Staff were also expected to attend the regular London meetings, held at the Institute, of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, as well as its Annual Conference that took place for many years at Froebel College, a member of the ATO. It was Peters, working as usual with Hirst, who set up the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) in 1965. He modelled it on the prestigious Aristotelian Society in general philosophy, in 1967 adapting the name of its journal *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* to create *The Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, of which he was the first editor. (After 1977, *The Proceedings* changed its name to *The Journal of Philosophy of Education*.) This was, among other things, a vehicle by which general, often well-known, philosophers with an interest in education could share their ideas. As many as 17 per cent of its 100 articles in those years between 1967 and 1977 are of this sort, including pieces by R.M. Hare (on the Humanities Curriculum Project), David Hamlyn, Alan White, Robin Downie, Michael Oakeshott, D.J. O'Connor, Anthony Quinton, John Plamenatz and two each by Martin Hollis and Gilbert Ryle.

We have seen in this Section 4, as well as in Sections 2 and 3, the various ways in which, by the mid-to late 1960s, remarkably few years after his appointment in 1962, Peters had laid down the building blocks of his new discipline – publications, courses at pre-service and in-service levels, a learned society

and a journal. Although he expected a lot of his staff, he expected even more of himself. Indefatigable in all these ways, he added to his workload the membership, sometimes involving his chairing, of more than 40 Institute committees, not least those concerned with the post-Robbins reorganisation of the ATO.

5.

In the light of his manifold commitments, it is perhaps not surprising, as Cuypers and Martin (2013) point out, that *Ethics and Education* (1966), Peters's most celebrated work, was also his only single-authored book in the field. They explain that because of his limited time for reading and writing, 'he had to confine himself to publishing collections of lectures or shorter articles that were first published elsewhere' (Cuypers and Martin, 2013: 22). This last remark is not quite accurate, since he also collaborated with Paul Hirst on what also proved to be a much-read and much-cited book, *The Logic of Education* (Hirst and Peters, 1970), in which both authors committed themselves – Peters for the first time – to accepting Hirst's well-known 'forms of knowledge' theory of a curriculum appropriate for a liberal education. But apart from that, the claim is accurate enough: Peters co-edited *Education and the Development of Reason* (Dearden et al., 1972) and solely edited books mainly of others' work on the Plowden Report, John Dewey and the role of the head teacher and the education of teachers, as well as collections of his own essays or lectures in moral education, philosophical psychology and the education of teachers. One of these, his short book *Reason and Compassion* (Peters, 1973a), contains a lecture delivered to the Quakers on 'The Religious Dimension of a Rational Morality', to which we will be returning.

What comes over from a review of Peters's writings is how relatively small is the sum of his original contribution to philosophy of education, given his towering presence in the field. This is even true of his best-known work, *Ethics and Education* (Peters, 1966). As he acknowledges in the Preface, very many of its chapters – on equality, freedom, respect for persons, authority, punishment and democracy – draw heavily on the book in social philosophy that he wrote with Stanley Benn before coming to the Institute, *Social Principles and the Democratic State* (Benn and Peters, 1959).

Another reason why Peters was unable to break more new ground, apart from his crushing workload in the decade or so after his arrival at the Institute, is illness. There is every reason to think that his achievements in every field – scholarship, teaching, PESGB and its journal, administration, strengthening links with general philosophy, lecturing abroad (he had already visited the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) – would have continued well into the 1980s at least, had he not been struck down in or around 1974 – it took some time to diagnose it – with the bipolar disorder which effectively ended his career at the Institute only a dozen years after it began. Steps were soon taken to treat his illness with some discretion at the Institute and more widely. With the assistance of R.K. Elliott, he remained titular Editor of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* until 1982. He was also titular Head of Department until 1983, the Institute's director, William Taylor, twice asking Patricia White to step in as Acting Head for periods of a few months.

6.

Peters's post-1962 project of remaking the philosophy of education quickly became the target of criticism. At a conference at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto, in 1965, at which Peters gave the lead paper, in five devastating pages his standard analysis of the concept of education as initiation into a worthwhile form of life came under fire from the Canadian philosopher, W.H. Dray. His central concern was about 'the job of the analytical philosopher' as Peters conceived it, and his main question here was about 'whose concepts the philosopher conceives himself as analysing' (Dray, 1973, as cited in Peters, 1973b: 36). Dray produced several imaginary examples of people talking coherently about education in a very different way from Peters, without implying, for example, that education is necessarily desirable, or that it requires commitment to something worthwhile into which one has been initiated, or that it has no extrinsic aims. At the end of his short paper he suggested – but refrained from actually saying – that what Peters was really doing was '*fabricat[ing]* a concept of education out of his vision of what people ought to become, and then hop[ing] its circulation may have a beneficial effect upon the schools' (Peters, 1973b: 39; emphasis in original).

Dray's paper was not published until eight years later, and then – ironically, perhaps – in a volume that Peters edited in the prestigious Oxford Readings in Philosophy series (Peters, 1973b), the

culmination in his own eyes of his ambition of establishing his subject as a branch of philosophy (as seen above). In that same year, Peters's more specific claim, embedded in his account of the concept of education, that education is initiation into intrinsically worthwhile activities, also came under the spotlight, as we will now see.

In this paper so far, the 'analytical philosophy' of that time has been presented as having to do with conceptual analysis in the strict sense, of exploring the *meaning* of philosophically interesting terms – in the shape of logical distinctions and relationships between them, and the necessary and sufficient conditions for their proper use. Peters's own analytic approach went beyond this in laying especial stress on the need to *justify* the positions one adopts, that is, to provide good grounds for them. In his inaugural lecture of 1963, he described professional philosophy as consisting in 'a rigorous explanation of questions to do with the disciplined demarcation of concepts and the patient explication of the grounds of knowledge' (Peters, 1964: 7). (Or, as he sometimes more catchily put it, philosophising is about the two questions 'What do you mean?' and 'How do you know?')

In some cases justification became especially salient. This applies to Peters's analysis of the concept of education. Since on his view this means initiation into activities worth pursuing for their own sake, the onus was on him to say *which* activities were intrinsically worthwhile and *why*. On the former question he excluded playing games and enjoying physical pleasures, for instance, and argued for theoretical activities such as the pursuit of science or philosophy, and pursuits such as literature which also throw light on the nature of the world and our place in it. On the latter, the justificatory question, he adopted a Kantian, or 'transcendental' mode of argument to the effect that the sceptic who might ask, in his terms, 'Why do this rather than that?' – 'Why pursue poetry rather than bingo?', for example – is committed, by asking for good reasons, to wanting:

to acquaint himself as well as he can of the situation out of which the question arises and of the facts of various kinds which provide the framework of possible answers. The various theoretical enquiries are explorations of these different facets of his experience. To ask the question 'Why do this rather than that?' seriously is, therefore, however embryonically, to be committed to those enquiries which are defined by their serious concern with these aspects of reality which give context to the question which he is asking. (Peters, 1966: 164)

John White (1973) was not convinced. He was willing to admit that the questioner is committed to the pursuit of truth if this is merely a highfalutin way of saying that he wants a true answer to his question, but he denied that it was true in the far richer sense that Peters had in mind, that is, committed to the pursuit of theoretical enquiries. If the questioner is indeed a *sceptic* in asking 'Why pursue poetry rather than bingo?', he is by definition *not* so committed. Peters was not happy with this argument of White's and his further elaboration of it in the same chapter. In defence of his own position, he drafted a paragraph for White to include in the published text (see White, 1973: 14, first full paragraph).

By the early 1970s, therefore, doubts were being expressed about the sturdiness of central pillars in Peters's most original contribution to philosophy of education. It did not help that in co-writing *The Logic of Education* in 1970 he had also committed himself, as we saw above, to Paul Hirst's theory of the 'forms of knowledge', close as it was to his own views on curricular content in terms of intrinsically worthwhile activities. For Hirst not only also had to face demands for a justification of his position, but the justification he favoured was very close to Peters's, a 'transcendental' argument about the presuppositions involved in asking a question. It was open, accordingly, to a similar criticism as that levelled against Peters's version (White, 1973).

7.

By the early 1970s, too, how philosophy of education was taught at the Institute was also under challenge. This did not apply to in-service teaching, where specialised lectures and seminars were clearly appropriate. But rumbles of discontent continued over the Friday morning mass lectures and seminars in educational theory in the Beveridge Hall. In 1975 the newly formed Education Course Curriculum Development Group, whose three organisers included a philosopher of education, produced a Course Book that included short items drawn from classroom experience and from across the educational disciplines, to accompany a new, more involving, course with many films and videotapes as well as lectures. The 1980s saw further moves towards a more student-friendly Education Course under the dynamic leadership of Peter Mitchell, previously head of a London comprehensive school.

The 1980s also saw a change – a far more dramatic one – in another part of Peters’s legacy, as far as the teaching of the subject at the Institute was concerned. In-service courses in philosophy of education – at Diploma and MA levels, and in the supervision of research students for MPhil and PhD degrees – had always been more successful and trouble-free than its PGCE teaching. Students typically specialised in these courses out of a genuine interest in philosophical thought and discussion, but also often with an eye to professional advancement by becoming teachers of the subject themselves. Some of them, especially in Peters’s heyday, came from abroad, not least from Canada. Most, however, were from Britain. For the many schoolteachers among them, financing their studies had not been a problem. Costs involved in releasing them to undertake full-time in-service courses (all UK full-time university students were exempt from fees between 1962 and 1998), as well as fees and travel costs for part-time students, were paid under a ‘pooling’ system by which Local Education Authorities (LEAs) shared costs among themselves. In 1985, midway through Margaret Thatcher’s years as prime minister, the White Paper *Better Schools* (Education in England, 2017: para. 173) pointed out defects it saw in the system: its favouring of longer courses, and insufficient attention to the question of value for money. The White Paper went on to suggest replacing ‘pooling’ by giving new powers to the Secretary of State for Education to make grants to LEAs for usually shorter in-service training in areas that he or she approved, for example, national priority areas or those meeting specific local needs (Education in England, 2017: para. 176). This passed into law in 1986.

The effect on in-service provision in philosophy of education at the Institute – as in other branches of educational theory and at other universities – was immediate and devastating. Since nearly all part-time teachers now had to pay their own fees, and teachers wanting to study full-time could no longer be easily released by their schools, courses were hard hit. Staff numbers in the Philosophy Department dropped to 2.5; in their heyday under Peters, they had risen from 3 to 10 (Hirst, 1998). Until the millennium and beyond, what saved the discipline and enabled it to flourish – in the country as a whole as well as at the Institute – was the arrival of the Research Assessment Exercise, also in 1986. This led to a greater emphasis on publishing articles and books as compared to teaching. Like other outlets, *The Journal of Philosophy of Education* that Peters had founded flourished under the new regime. The two issues a year that it contained in 1985 had doubled to four by 2000.

8.

It is time to sum up Peters’s scholarly contribution to the discipline that he had done so much to create. His project, so prominent in the 1960s, of using and encouraging others to use techniques of conceptual analysis to map an array of central educational concepts, lost much of its impetus in later decades. As Cuypers and Martin (2013) remark, according to his own testimony in 1983 (see Peters, 1983), Peters himself had by 1975 become somewhat dissatisfied with the analytic approach as it had come to be practised. He saw it as having turned into something rather scholastic and pedestrian, following too piecemeal an approach. The analytic approach, in Peters’s view, had put too much emphasis on examining verbal usage, and should shift the focus to genuine problems. In Cuypers and Martin’s words (2013: 224), Peters thought that the subject should engage with ‘more substantive issues in moral, social and political philosophy, albeit through an identifiable, coherent, and explicit philosophical position’. This does not imply, of course, that Peters *rejected* the analytic approach, not least as he himself had practised it, only that he regretted what he saw as its increasing scholasticism.

Cuypers and Martin (2013) go on to note the post-Peters growth of alternative paradigms to the analytic in philosophy of education, such as existentialism, postmodernism, phenomenology, Marxism and critical reason. They hold, however, that the analytic paradigm is *primus inter pares* among them. This is because although the analytic paradigm does not depend upon the alternative ones, the reverse is not true. All of the alternative approaches depend upon the two main features of Peters’s kind of analytic philosophy: conceptual clarification, and justification. They need a clear view of what central educational concepts such as education, learning and knowledge involve; and they need to back up their claims, about the aims of education, for instance, with solid reasoning.

Whether or not one is sympathetic to the view that in philosophy of education one should be happy to ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’, or concerned, as the two authors are, at the arcaneness of some recent writings in the field, there is much to be said for a continued reliance, as at least part of the *desiderata*, on Peters’s two requirements. They come into play along the whole gamut of philosophising about education, from the most fundamental reflection, for instance, on what its aims and the ethical

values on which they rest should be, to policy critiques of assessment arrangements or the place of climate change in the school curriculum. Whether the subject should remain a totally mono-disciplinary endeavour, or welcome interdisciplinary perspectives as part of its work, the same demands for clarity of conceptualisation and convincing reasoning apply.

To pick up the point just made about the whole gamut of philosophising about education, there is a case for seeing Richard Peters's own work as taking place along that spectrum. At the policy end, there is the critique of the 1967 Plowden Report in his edited book *Perspectives on Plowden* (Peters, 1969), as well as the discussion of the powers of head teachers in English schools in another of his edited collections, *The Role of the Head* (Peters, 1967b). At the level of fundamental reflection on the nature of education, no one has written a more profound and thought-provoking account of Peters's contribution to this than his colleague at both Birkbeck and the Institute, R.K. Elliott. This is found in the latter's essay 'Richard Peters: A philosopher in the older style' (Elliott, 1986).

Elliott's (1986) view is that Peters did not adequately characterise, or indeed adequately understand, the *kind* of work he was doing in philosophy of education. As indicated in the first section of our paper, Peters contrasted his own sort of philosophising with that of Louis Arnaud Reid, who in his eyes was 'sympathetic to the layman's view that the task of the philosopher is to provide some kind of synoptic directive for living'. He saw himself, by contrast, as 'a very mundane fellow whose eyes are more likely to be fixed on the brass-tacks on or under the teacher's desk than on the Form of the Good' (Peters, 1964: 8). Elliott (1986: 42) writes:

I would not say, however, that his chief contribution to Philosophy of Education is to be found either in his treatment of relatively concrete issues or in his use of the analytical method. It is located, rather, in his reflections on the general nature of education and its relation to very general questions concerning 'the human condition', the nature of truth, the meaning of 'God', and the nature of the world; and, against this metaphysical background, in his reaffirmation of the Stoic ideal as the most appropriate attitude to life. In short, his work is most memorable and most stimulating insofar as he philosophizes according to the layman's conception of philosophy, rather than the professional philosopher's.

Elliott shows how these sentiments are expressed in Peters's Swarthmore Lecture on 'The Religious Dimension of a Rational Morality', delivered to the Society of Friends in 1972. They come out, for instance, in this passage:

For a rational person this dimension [which enables the religious person to understand the facts of a more mundane level of experience in a new light] is provided by the background awareness of the situation of man in the world which has awakened his awe. Thus particular chains of cause and effect, which he discerns in the natural world, will be haunted by the awe which he feels for the contingency of the natural order. Heracleitus's saying that character is destiny will not be just a psychological generalization but an awesome fact about man's position in the world. (Peters, 1973a: 112)

A lengthy section of Elliott's (1986) paper is an extended comparison between Peters's ideas and Heracleitus's. Importantly, Elliott also shows that Peters's central texts in philosophy of education from his inaugural lecture of 1963 (Peters, 1964) onwards often echo the attitude to human life just presented.

Elliott's (1986) summing up of Peters's legacy is thus very different from that of Cuypers and Martin (2013). A critic might say of it that it lays too much emphasis on the Swarthmore Lecture, since this was not about education and, as Elliott admits, was delivered to a group of non-philosophers, and so written in a different way of presenting a case. At the same time, one cannot deny that similar attitudes to human life and its place in the universe colour some of his most memorable work in his own discipline. This thought reconnects us with Dray's (1973, as cited in Peters, 1973b: 36) critique, above, of Peters's 'analysis' of the concept of education, that Peters is '*fabricat[ing]* a concept of education out of his vision of what people ought to become' (see also Elliott, 1986; emphasis in original).

In defence of Cuypers and Martin's (2013) position, that Peters's legacy lies in the analytic approach to philosophy of education as *primus inter pares* among paradigms, one could well point out that, in a broader sense of legacy, what Peters has bequeathed to us is not only his own body of work, but also – via his indefatigable efforts of the 1960s and early 1970s in urging others to write in the field, in his expansion of in-service teaching, and in his creation of PESGB and its journal – a whole new discipline

devoted to the broadly analytic study of educational ideas and underlying values. We think there is much in this, whether these concepts and values remain firmly within the compass of general philosophy like the writings by David Hamlyn, Michael Luntley, Jan Derry and David Bakhurst, for instance, on the growth of human understanding from infancy onwards, or are found in work that applies philosophical thinking to education in families, schools and post-school institutions. Those studying and writing in different areas of analytic philosophy of education today are deeply indebted to Richard Peters's original vision of it as embodied in his 'Mission' of 60 years ago.

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