

## The evolution of the ape: Analytic philosophy of education in retrospect

J. C. Walker

Department of Education, The University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

### ABSTRACT

Except perhaps in the heyday of John Dewey, philosophy of education has rarely occupied pride of place in institutions devoted to the study of education. If represented at all, it has tended to take a minor role relative to other areas of study, especially educational psychology. Yet, around twenty years ago, it appeared to many people as though philosophy of education had finally “arrived”; and a decade ago it had gained, in the form of analytic philosophy of education (‘APE’) considerable prestige and influence, especially in the U.K., but also to a lesser extent in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Today, however, the early confidence has gone; there is a widespread suspicion that the much trumpeted arrival of APE heralded a false dawn; and general interest in philosophy of education appears to have waned. What went wrong? Although there has been criticism of APE from various quarters, it is not my purpose here to review or add to philosophical critique as such; rather, I shall attempt a very broad, and I hope not too rambunctious or sweeping, historical survey of APE’s rise and fall, mentioning philosophical criticism only where it appears to help in historical explanation.

The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes

Which is called civilization over there.

(A.D. Hope, *Collected Poems*, p. 13).

Except perhaps in the heyday of John Dewey, philosophy of education has rarely occupied pride of place in institutions devoted to the study of education. If represented at all, it has tended to take a minor role relative to other areas of study, especially educational psychology. Yet, around twenty years ago, it appeared to many people as though philosophy of education had finally “arrived”; and a decade ago it had gained, in the form of analytic philosophy of education (‘APE’) considerable prestige and influence, especially in the U.K., but also to a lesser extent in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Today, however, the early confidence has gone; there is a widespread suspicion that the much trumpeted arrival of APE heralded a false dawn; and general interest in philosophy of education appears to have waned.

What went wrong? Although there has been criticism of APE from various quarters<sup>2</sup>, it is not my purpose here to review or add to philosophical critique as such<sup>3</sup>; rather, I shall attempt a very broad,

and I hope not too rambunctious or sweeping, historical survey of APE's rise and fall, mentioning philosophical criticism only where it appears to help in historical explanation.

### **The Origin of Species: APE's Ancestry**

Within the APE framework there coexist various arguments, theories and "analyses". But dominant among these has been a philosophical position I call Liberal Rationalism ('LR')<sup>4</sup>, originating from the Philosophy of Education Department of the University of London Institute of Education. Its leading figures have been R.S. Peters and P.H. Hirst. Numerous other philosophers, more or less working out LR-APE ideas, or working out reactions to them, have been spread throughout the U.K. and other countries. Many of these received their initiation into monkey business at London. Other forms of APE have derived from the U.S., the hardiest specimens being descended from Scheffler at Harvard. Transatlantic bonds are strong though; and indeed Peters spent some time at Harvard before his appointment to the simian seat at London.

APE arrived as a force to be reckoned with in the early 1960s, with work published by Scheffler, Peters and others<sup>5</sup> after a relatively lengthy gestation period. Indeed, it had been a twinkle in its ancestors' eyes many years before<sup>6</sup>. Significantly, Scheffler and Peters were both "philosophers" in the twentieth century academic specialist sense before they were "philosophers of education", something usually uncommon, and associated with the development of new approaches within philosophy of education. (Dewey is an obvious precedent, not to mention, long before the modern period, Plato and Aristotle.) The institutional separation between philosophy "proper" and philosophy of education, and the integration of the latter into the professional side of teacher training and credentialing had long fostered condescension if not disdain on the one side and suspicion if not resentment on the other.

Scheffler and Peters came in consciously and explicitly introducing proper philosophy, from philosophy proper, into philosophy of education, with the degree of tact, naturally, necessary to prevent loss of the hearing and of the influence which eventually they won. They did so against a most unprepossessing background.

The 1950s were a period of some disorder and confusion in philosophy of education. Deweyan Progressivism and its offshoots, prominent in North America, were stagnating. Ismism, the smorgasbord approach in which Progressivism was lined up alongside various other isms (Realism, Idealism, Existentialism, Catholicism)<sup>7</sup> was so hyper-pluralistic or ultra-eclectic as to defy the demands of practicality mounting at the time, let alone to relate to rapid social change. "Principles of Education", a miscellany of philosophical tit-bits, including some isms, was at its worst a pretentious framework for maxims, nostrums and accumulations of picturesque mythology and cautionary tales about school teaching, easily caricaturable as "tips for teachers". Of course, both Ismism and Principles did afford an opportunity for a decent philosopher to teach some decent philosophy, like Plato or Dewey. But on the whole philosophy of education appeared to lack any clear relation to classroom practice, any precisely specifiable content, let alone a reputable academic identity.<sup>8</sup>

From APE's point of view, this decade was a time of build-up to the real thing. Not that it was clear to everyone, even to those who lived in hope, that the real thing would certainly arrive. And its arrival, indeed, took a little time to become acknowledged.

Prior to and during this period, developments of some force, interest and promise appeared to be occurring within philosophy proper. The "revolution in philosophy" (i.e. in philosophy of the ordinary language, non-formalised variety) spearheaded by Wittgenstein and Ryle, led to a new and self-conscious stress on philosophy as "analysis" and more particularly as "linguistic" or "conceptual" analysis. Yet voices urging philosophy of education to "go analytic" were few and lacking in authority and conviction. Certainly it took some time for the APE paradigm to take shape, sink relatively autonomous roots and establish its authority.

As early as 1942 C.D. Hardie had indicated some possibilities in the application of rigorous philosophical analytic techniques to the concepts and doctrines of “educational theory”.<sup>9</sup> His positivistic empiricism<sup>10</sup>, however, was too austere for the more epistemologically liberal and metaphysically chameleonic educational philosophers. Indeed one would assume that to them it would have appeared eccentric. In any case, Pragmatism-Progressivism was yet solidly entrenched, at least in North America, where Hardie’s work was published. Not only was it still capable of giving philosophy of education a sufficiently professional and scientific image, but Hardie was attacking some basic Progressive doctrines and so his position was incompatible with the dominant paradigm.

Matters were slightly different in 1954, when Scheffler made some more definite, practical and positive proposals.<sup>11</sup> First, by then Deweyanism was in obvious decline, Dewey’s death in 1952 finally putting an end to his capacity to discourage the propensity towards ossified, dogmatic and shallow appropriation of his ideas, the philosophy of Deweyan catechism. Amongst the faithful, uncritical veneration continued unchecked, at least by Dewey.<sup>12</sup>

Second and much more important, a new post war era of economic expansion was under way, an awesome long boom which, as well as accelerating certain economic tendencies, raised the economic and social expectations of all social groups. Let me touch very sketchily on some of these tendencies and expectations as they relate to philosophy of education.

(i) Possession and control of knowledge, technique and executive decision are being steadily shifted upwards into the hands of management and highly trained specialist professionals, and outwards into machines, most notably information-processing devices. The social and technical division of labour is parallel and related to the division of knowledge and expertise with, it has been argued, a growing bulk of jobs becoming less differentiable and requiring less knowledge of any sophisticated sort.<sup>13</sup>

(ii) In this context professionalisation becomes the order of the day for all occupations with any pretence to social status, outside the ranks of inherited or rapidly accumulated wealth. Demonstrable grounding of the occupation’s practices in a “body of knowledge” is the first necessary condition for recognition of professional status. The second is establishing that the performance of the practices requires a degree of autonomous decision possible only for those who have been trained and certificated in the body of knowledge and how to apply it. Some have professional status thrust upon them, especially when scientific advances in a given field yield readily and profitably applicable knowledge. Others, including teachers, usually--but not always -- have to struggle for it.<sup>14</sup>

(iii) Amongst bodies of knowledge the shadow cast by the natural science colossus puts all other knowledge in an inevitably altered light. The prestige of “science” and technology is enhanced as never before and, a fortiori, the prestige of occupations constituted by “scientific” practice. Misreading the nature and conditions of applicability of the scientific method, positivism encourages various absurdities and excesses in social and behavioural science; in ethics it boosts subjectivistic theories and individualism; and in public policy it ostensibly depoliticises issues by promoting “neutral”, “nonideological” and “expert” solutions.

(iv) Positivism permeates schooling. First, the positivist model of knowledge holds sway in overt curricular content. Second, there are alternative and sometimes conflicting professionalising pressures on teachers. The dispensers of knowledge and other educational commodities have never quite unanimously resolved the question of what constitutes their knowledge-base: whether teachers are simply masters of the items of knowledge they pass on, or whether they need a developed theoretical knowledge of child development, the sociology of schooling and perhaps philosophy of education; or, if both, in what sort of combination.

(v) Professionalism has an internal dynamic driving towards specificity, or rather, specificities. Teaching (now increasingly “education”) has to be distinguished from school counselling, and that

from social work, and that in turn from careers advisement, etc. The division of professional labour in the social science based professions creates theoretical demarcation problems. APE spends a considerable effort trying to solve these (by essentialising them into “concepts”: the concept of “education”, the concept of “mental health”, etc.<sup>15</sup>) Philosophy of education, too, has to clarify its position in Education<sup>16</sup> and in the academy as a whole.

## **Tile Arrival of the Fittest: APE’s Attributes**

### *(a) An APE Cleaving to Clarity but Careless of Content*

Scheffler’s prime suggestion was that “clarification” be taken up by educational philosophers as their central professional role. This was in perfect accord with philosophy proper, where the dominant set of practices was customarily dubbed ‘analytic philosophy’, as was Scheffler’s emphasis on technique rather than substance: “Critical precision rather than doctrine is the essence of such philosophy”.<sup>17</sup> It was also in accord with the broader trends in the social sciences and social administration, such as the faith in neutral professional management and the influential “end of ideology” thesis.<sup>18</sup> The position of Dewey in all this was sufficiently ambiguous for him to be identified with the socially dangerous ideologists and to become a posthumous scapegoat for the disgrace of the U.S.A.’s being pipped at the post when the U.S.S.R. launched the first Sputnik, thus proving dire shortcomings in the educational system of the U.S.A. These failures in scholarship, excellence and rigorous scientific research were in many minds to be laid at the doors of educators of a Progressive stripe, and Dewey was the best known. Unfair though it was in Dewey’s case, there was enough substance in conservatives’ allegations against Progressivist influenced and inspired curriculum and pedagogy for them to be further discredited in the public and academic mind. The case was reinforced by the position of the last notable variant of Pragmatism-Progressivism within philosophy of education, Brameld’s “reconstructionism”, which looked socialist in content and displayed vague affinities with Marxism. At the time, enough to prove Brameld part of the world communist conspiracy! (There are obvious parallels between the attack on Progressive education in the 1950s and attacks in the 1970s and 1980s.)

In the climate of the 1950s, then, a call for precision, technique and professionalism stood some chance of being well received, especially if free from doctrine (“ideology”). The payoff for philosophy of education, Scheffler suggested, would be threefold: (i) respectability in taking on a time-honoured “historical role” and performing it with freshly honed modern techniques; (ii) being productive in the contemporary setting since the clarificatory project “is proving increasingly fruitful and stimulating in wide reaches of current philosophy”. and (iii) contributing beneficially to educational practice since it “cannot fail to deepen our understanding of what we do when we educate”.<sup>19</sup>

Although it certainly turned out for philosophy of education that, in the words of one critic of analytic philosophy, “clarity is not enough”<sup>20</sup> and substantial doctrine had to be produced, it seemed good enough for a start. before APE had much impact, the clarion call to clarity helped get the enterprise launched.

So doctrine was necessary, whether other theoretical commitments allowed it to be acknowledged as such or not.<sup>21</sup> But not just any old doctrine would do. The doctrine would have to be appropriate not only to the general conditions of the period, but to the specific circumstances of education, Education and philosophy of education. This was demonstrated by the reception of D.J. O’Connor’s, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, published in 1957.<sup>22</sup> O’Connor’s severe dismissal of the entitlement of “educational theory” to the title of ‘theory’ was too negative a theme to give philosophy of education an impetus to new and academically valued tasks. (Once APE was established, O’Connor’s thesis provided a target to attack in the building up of the eventually dominant self-definition of analytic philosophers in relation to Education as a whole.) Nor did O’Connor’s bluff positivist blast integrate very well with the ineffectual prevailing breezes: it blew

them aside, assertively accomplishing passage along a narrow route through the middle, but hardly created, new prevailing weather. A super-robust positivism appeared to leave no room even for productive philosophising about doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

Although in his 1954 article Scheffler moved mainly within the more formal discourse of logical-empiricist dominated philosophy of science and related fields, it was not really until he turned his hand to more informal analysis of more ordinary language that he came to be seen as offering a programme that was worth taking up by others.

I do not mean, of course, to give the impression that Scheffler and Peters are to be credited as individuals with carving out a new order in philosophy of education. It should be stressed that at the time there were various people working on analytic projects in philosophy of education and that the number increased in the late 1950s. The outstanding individuals gave the clearest and most creative articulation of a position more or less waiting to be asserted. In Peter's case the continuing leadership depended on a continuing capacity to judge the most appropriate move to make next. So there had been various but relatively isolated attempts to establish the analysis of educational concepts during the 1950s.<sup>24</sup>

But Scheffler's *The Language of Education*, published in 1960<sup>25</sup>, was the first work to appear readily recognisable as offering an ongoing programme of analysis. There were no doubt many reasons for this. Two were as follows:

1. Scheffler chose to tackle one of the most central of the educational terms of ordinary language, namely 'teaching'. (Peters later got closer to the theoretical heart of the matter in fastening onto 'education' itself.)
2. Here at last was something that looked as if it had some systematic scope. But most important was what gave the work that scope: first, the outlines of a theory which latched onto the educational discourse from the inside, not just broadly characterising it from the outside, as O'Connor had done; and second, the theory was able to generate theses which matched the intuitions and concerns and met some of the anxieties of practitioners operating at certain levels in Education.

The theory was, roughly, that certain kinds of linguistic expression figure prominently in educational discourse (slogans, metaphors, persuasive definitions, etc.) and so the discourse could be clarified by identification and close-up analysis of such expressions. The techniques of analysis tended to cluster around the claim that certain uses of terms are correct or validatable usage, because they bear a certain relation to logical geography obtaining between concepts. There was a pleasing symmetry between the conceptual logical geography and the contours of what might be called desirable relations in formal schooling, for example establishing criteria that rule out behaviourist approaches to "teaching".

Thus Scheffler's analytic programme offered both detailed and disciplined applications of academically respectably based techniques and endorsement, albeit at an abstract level, of certain linguistic and, indirectly, pedagogical practices. My argument, of course, is that both these responses were necessary before a new programme could firmly establish itself in Education.<sup>26</sup> And in both these respects the developing style of the early APE stood in contrast with its competitors. Ismism, with its speculation on the "educational implications" of its isms, produced a notorious sub-literature on its theory-practice problem, to no real avail;<sup>27</sup> "Principles " might have now and then catered to practical problems in an unsophisticated way, but was notoriously under principled when it came to academically respectable techniques.<sup>28</sup>

#### *(b) An APE Enamoured of Education*

We have noticed the failure of hardnosed positivism to generate any momentum in philosophy of education and entertained the notion that the techniques of what has perhaps misleadingly been

called informal analysis were best suited to the arena of educational discourse as understood by people in Education. Educational discourse was, and is, a mixture of common-sense talk, vacuous Jargon, political polemic, pseudo-science and social science of varying degrees of sophistication. In short, it is a mess, and to the extent that it is theoretically developed at all, relatively speaking it is extremely underdeveloped.

In such a situation APE of a positivist bent had really only one programme for Education: scrap it. (Or most of it.) Clearly, however, professionalism was not to be bought at the price of self-destruction, nor was a new philosophy of education to be admitted by the rulers of Education if its admission meant their discrediting and disaccreditation. (Some such suspicion still conditions attitudes to educational philosophers among many others in Education.) The kind of philosophy which was accepted in fact guaranteed the place of virtually all theoretical practitioners in Education. (Virtually all, rather than all, because after all some standards had to be applied: it was APE's pretension to rigorous scrutiny of all educational discourse which was a large part of its claim to fame--and this had to have some real bite.) In particular, it guaranteed the major "contributing disciplines" including itself. It laid claim to a method which would enable philosophy to render useful public service in a professional rather than an amateur capacity. It was able, even if covertly, to propound substantive doctrine which was congenial to large numbers of practitioners and clientele.<sup>29</sup> One of the reasons for the pre-dominance of LR in APE, as I shall explain in a moment, is that it combined these three properties admirably.

But first I would like to note a sense in which APE is a paradoxical phenomenon: its pretensions can appear simultaneously negligible and considerable. On the one hand as, strictly, analysis, it can appear to lay no great claim to authority over practice or to advance any general view of the world which might constrain or condition our views of education one way or another. Its task is often presented as the menial one of tidying up, clearing the ground, in the tradition of the Lockean underlabourer in the garden of knowledge. In this guise it is modest, helpful and auxiliary, necessary for the basic health and hygiene of intellectual life but not much more momentous than brushing one's teeth. This becoming modesty is taken to be one of the academic graces bestowed on philosophy by what Peters, following Ryle, has been fond of referring to as "the revolution in philosophy".

This was, admittedly, fashioning virtue out of necessity. Yet the loveliest of virtues can in some circumstances seem an affront. Medical assistance may be resented by those addicted to or refusing to acknowledge their ailments the advice of dieticians spurned by those devoted to extravagant and unbalanced tastes, and attempts to clean up someone else's backyard, let alone wash their dirty linen, are naturally regarded as interference. And of course the task of linguistic clarification tends to fall out relative to prevailing degrees of vagueness and confusion. Discovery of "neglected meanings", exposure of "conceptual blunders", revelation of "erroneous lines of reasoning which result from failure to understand how language is used in a given situation", and the clearing away of "pseudo problems and pseudo questions that exist only as a result of confused and unclear conceptions, and the vague, ambiguous use of language" and so forth<sup>30</sup> can sound like rather threatening business in quarters where such intellectual horrors abound. It is therefore noteworthy that in the event the kind of scrutiny indulged in by APE (at least in published form) has been directed overwhelmingly to ordinary educational discourse, rather than to the professional discourse of Educational psychologists and others. The exceptions are few.<sup>31</sup>

How did APE guarantee Education? The provision of a theory of Education was a task implicit in the metatheoretical groupings of philosophy of education's search for an identity in the 1950s<sup>32</sup>; and it was a task that the new APE had to complete, not only to find itself but to understand its Educational relatives. And it defined itself in relation to its Educational relatives in a synoptic as well as an analytic way. It elaborated an ideologically acceptable (i.e. in view of prevalent assumptions) and academically respectable view of how Education related to other fields, such as philosophy, the sciences and the social sciences. The answer was simple, and though not new, armed with new

authority: Education was not a distinct discipline it was interdisciplinary. Scheffler proved the first point<sup>33</sup>; Peters and Hirst led an LR campaign to establish the second.<sup>34</sup>

*(c) A Logically Distinct, Academically Able and Epistemically Privileged APE*

Whereas Hardie and O'Connor had castigated educational theory for its general failure to live up to the kinds of standard evinced by the physical sciences, for Peters, and in terms of the academic ideological context he appeared quite right, the problem in Education was "undifferentiated mush".<sup>35</sup> A vigorous part of the APE programme became the elaboration of a conception of Education as both analytic and synthetic, as being composed "logically necessarily" of diverse elements but bringing them together in some sort of unifying structure provided by Education's focusing on a specific range of practical problems.

An attempt to tighten up the conduct of Education and the training of teachers was welcome during the period of APE's floruit. The 1960s were a period of educational boom in all western countries. In the U.K., for instance, this meant more schools, more university Education departments and more teachers training colleges and a lengthened period of training in the colleges. Postgraduate training was boosted. Not only was the time ripe for the building of empires, but scouts were out from the government and the bureaucracy looking for real academic talent to raise the standards of teacher training. Amongst those they found was Peters, whose talents had already commended themselves to the University of London. Thus the building of the LR empire was supported by her Majesty's Inspectors. Nor did the empire lack subjects, whose loyalty was fairly readily obtained, by compulsion. Philosophy of education became a compulsory subject in nearly all English diplomas and degrees in Education. At the height of the boom, I understand, Peters and Hirst were lecturing, weekly, to a captive audience of around one thousand in Beveridge Hall, London University. This represented massive power over students' examination, college curricula and the text book market.

But in many cases, no doubt, compulsion was unnecessary. Teachers and teacher-trainers, after all, have a certain amount in common. The sectional interests represented by their professionalist pretensions, and the difficulties experienced in establishing these, are politically and institutionally connected. In helping to secure the pretensions of Education as a whole, and of themselves within it, philosophers of education are helping teachers to secure their pretensions. Teacher trainers, needless to say, need trainee teachers; and trainee teachers need jobs if there is to be any point in training. Furthermore, as with everybody else, they would sooner decide what count as desirable conditions for work than have it decided for and imposed upon them. But, within professionalist ideology, this means that the teacher has to accept the broad definition of the role of the teacher sanctioned in Education, the professionalist knowledge base. This means, *prima facie*, more ideological power to the more highly qualified authorities, the Educationalists. Teachers, of course, are not always so weakly placed as to have to tolerate large doses of this sort of thing except in broadly formal terms (accepting the training course for the formal qualifications, etc.). In the uncertainties and tensions that exist between teacher /trainer and teacher, teacher trainers have to sell themselves or at least prove their worth to teachers on occasion, just as teacher trainees have to prove their worth to teacher trainers--virtually all the time. The Education/education axis is not straightforward top-to-bottom domination, but there is a top and there is a bottom.

One could hardly ask for a clearer statement of rationale for the Education/ education axis than that provided by monarchical APE and LR Educational potentate, R. S. Peters . And, given the conjuncture of ideological forces, Peters's case hits home. In the context of an argument concerning the place of philosophy and the human sciences in the training of teachers, Peters alludes to uncertainty about the aims of education--a favourite LR theme<sup>36</sup>:

The teacher can no longer rely on experience, commonsense and common room conversation about such matters, if he is going to hold his own against vociferous and intelligent parents and

against every type of “expert” who is advising him what should be done with children. A working knowledge of these sciences of man is becoming as essential to a teacher as a knowledge of anatomy and physiology is to a doctor. Education is becoming increasingly a matter of public concern and public scrutiny. Unless teachers are well versed in these sciences... there is little hope of their establishing themselves as a profession which can retain some kind of. authority in the community.

Peters Lakes pains to make it clear that he is not claiming merely that teachers must have opinions on psychological, sociological or historical matters. They must do better than that; everybody has such opinions. They must be able to hold their own, and authoritatively. These remarks have taken on additional force since they were written twenty years ago, as uncertainty about education has burst through several further take-off points into new trajectories of public preoccupation: from student unrest in the late sixties, through to current pressures from the economic crisis, unemployment, technological change, etc. Now educational agitation and recrimination has become something of a growth industry itself through the mass media and political organisation. Peters spoke wisely, but could scarcely have known in 1964 just how wisely that was.<sup>37</sup>

Just as standards for authoritativeness in the human sciences are laid down by the human scientists, so it is with philosophy. Aimless talk about the aims of education, and “woolly chatter” about “growth”, “wholeness”, “maturity”, “discipline”, “experience”, “creativity”, “needs”, “interests” and “freedom” had to be swept out of teacher training courses. Although they might be “aghast when they learn that students very often are brought up on an antiquated diet of Plato, Rousseau and Froebel—perhaps with a dash of Dewey [we are in England: a dash will more than do—J.C.W.] to provide a final obfuscation of issues”,<sup>38</sup> philosophers should face up to their own professional responsibility for the situation:

Of course lecturers in Colleges of Education and University Departments of Education are not greatly to blame for this, for the fact is that philosophers to date have done almost nothing to help matters.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the grim situation and the urgency for dedicated action...

...this will soon, we hope, be remedied.<sup>40</sup>

Peters goes on to mention (1964) various forthcoming publications which with any luck will help save the day, including the book he was at that time “desperately trying to write” (*Ethics and Education*). It might be added that certain other proper philosophers responded to the call and exercised their professional responsibility by writing papers in philosophy of education.<sup>41</sup>

With hindsight, this is ripping good stuff, and takes on the quality of *Biggies to the Rescue* or, earlier still, *Kipling’s white man’s burden*. Pleasant though it may be, however, to smile half-nostalgically, half-shamefacedly at the revolution in philosophy’s arrival in philosophy of education, we might remember that what W.E. Johns and Rudyard Kipling wrote about had its own reality and that their very writings had their own historical effects. The social relations of philosophers of education, others in Education, teachers and the sometimes puzzled sometimes vociferously assertive general public may be saturated with the ideology we are considering—indeed they metabolise it so that it becomes part of them and the necessity for professionalisation becomes self-evident—but the ideology survives precisely to the extent that it has worked in enabling people to address and solve problems in social reality as they perceive it. And (lest we forget) children still borrow *Biggies* enthusiastically and in great numbers from school and municipal libraries, while white men are still struggling with their burden here and there. In 1977 Peters republished his 1964 paper from which I have been quoting.

It remains to clarify the position of APE and Education in the highest of the realms of higher education, the 100% proof world of knowledge and research.

Traditionally, the public educational apparatus has of course been dominated, so far as determination of its educational “standards” is concerned, by the universities. Much ideological

struggle within the educational apparatus has revolved around challenges to the power of the professors. (I think the current debate, ostensibly about “standards” and “curriculum basics”, has much more to do with this than is commonly appreciated. The traditional academic elite has lost much of its power to educational bureaucrats and Educationists, and in the present economic/educational circumstances perceives an opportunity to win some of it back.) I want to stress here, though, and I think this has been reinforced rather than diminished in the period of APE’s career, that APE articulated to undifferentiated (or insufficiently differentiated) Education some necessary conditions for its acceptance by the academic establishment. That establishment, further, has a traditional ideology, which remains the framework within which very many debates about educational policy are conducted, and this is a sub-ideology of the overall ideology of liberal education: knowledge for its own sake, community of scholars, disciplined inquiry, theoretical foundations and so forth. At first, to be sure, APE did not articulate the substantive values of this traditional ideology of higher education --at least not as its central systematic task. It articulated certain concrete procedural conditions of legitimacy. The substantive ideology was articulated -- this was the mission of LR -- but even LR in its early stages (and even now for many educational philosophers) could not recognise itself for what it was.<sup>42</sup> Hence, once again, the characteristic differentiation/unification function of APE.

The conditions of legitimacy have not turned out to be monolithic: what I am depicting here is one trend among several but, I think, the dominant one. This is not an empirical survey as such, and I am not able to argue in detail for all my claims, including this one, but it is widely supported, and by people who do not share my theoretical perspective.<sup>43</sup>

As well as being consonant with the traditional academic ideology, the thesis of Educational differentiation was in line with the developing prejudice against “general theory” in philosophy and the social sciences, which was tied in with the “end of ideology” thesis of the 1950s and with the pretence to “neutrality”.<sup>44</sup> Differentiation into the foundational disciplines ( educational psychology, philosophy, etc.) was one step; but a further step, which was a consequence of the first, was the breaking down of “educational theory” into consideration of “educational problems” which came to be treated in isolated and fragmented fashion.<sup>45</sup> This appeared to be the only way, in the absence of some explicit general unifying theory, to produce and reproduce Education, to give its foundations something to hold up, its contributing disciplines something to which to contribute. Of course it was and is a self-contradictory approach, since problems cannot be identified in the absence of theories.<sup>46</sup> How the Educationists got around it, usually without mentioning it, and perhaps without being aware of it, is another interesting question. Very briefly, we can note that this was achieved by deriving the problem-selection criteria from, or reading them into, “commonsense”, which presents itself and is presented by APE as non-theory-laden. Commonsense being embodied, for most APEs and certainly all LRs, in ordinary language, it was the special task of the analyst of ordinary language to set up the criteria. The most famous set of criteria, of course, was discovered by Peters in his dogged unpacking of the concept of “education”. This, needless to say, was the LR answer to the problem of identifying the range of practical issues to which the disciplines constituting Education were to be brought together and synthesised in practical theorising. Thus APE both provided the legitimation for the assembling of the constitutive disciplines of Education and told them what their object of study was to be.

This epistemic authority of APE over the definition of the object, over the conceptual and linguistic proprieties of Education, is nicely supplemented by LR with the doctrine of the epistemic autonomy of philosophy, developed by Hirst. According to this view, philosophy as a form of knowledge has its own autonomous--“logically distinct”--criteria for truth and validity. In that, for philosophy, application of these criteria enables philosophers to pronounce on other disciplines and on commonsense, the position of APE is rendered doubly authoritative. Elsewhere I am developing a theory of epistemic privilege, which holds given the possession by an epistemic unit of both epistemic authority and epistemic autonomy.<sup>47</sup> On the LR account APE is, epistemically, very privileged. Clearly, such epistemic power, once recognized and accepted by others, translates into

considerable social power. (More precisely, epistemic and social power are here isomorphic.) The last refuge of the philosopher - ruler, given a putatively democratic society, is the school system.

### **The Innocence of Acquired Characteristics: APE's Ebb**

Generally speaking, two kinds of cause operate in the decline and demise of social institutions-- and of course it is as a social institution that r d ill vi e wing APE. First, there is degeneration and disease within; second, there is pressure and assault from without. When internal illness results in incapacity to respond effectively to external challenges, the stage is set for transition from decline to demise. But ailing institutions, including institutionalised philosophies, can linger on for some time without expiring completely. Expiry tends to happen when either the whole field as such--e. g. philosophy of education --fades away, or when a stronger competitor administers the coup de grâce.

APE, as we have noted, has never been without competitors; it has simply kept ahead of them up to date. Thus, although it has internal maladies which may turn out to be fatal, and although individual APE's are prepared to concede that all is not well<sup>48</sup>, the present situation is one of slow but steady ebb.

I have elsewhere<sup>49</sup> diagnosed and explained two theoretical maladies which I believe afflict APE. These also have fairly clear consequences for the strength of APE's academic and social position. I foresee no prospect of complete recovery from either.

The first is a flaw in conceptual analytic methodology itself and amounts to this: there are no criteria, internal to the analytic process, for distinguishing a correct, or good, analysis of a concept from a wrong or bad one. For such criteria, APEs have had to move, whether acknowledging it or not, outside strictly analytic considerations into explicit or implicit theorising or value judgements. But to do this is to admit the insufficiency of conceptual analysis in the performance of conceptual analysis. Peters virtually admitted as much in his middle-APE confession that "education" is a "very fluid concept" and that there may indeed be more than one concept of education.<sup>50</sup> This--and here is the practical cashing out of the philosophical weakness--does not assist the educator (or the Educationist) to choose among the several. To do this one needs a wider theory, something which mere analysis cannot produce. These points have been made forcefully by Colin Evers<sup>51</sup>, and the problem of what constitutes a correct analysis was pointed out as long ago as 1972 by Abraham Edel.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, they have not been squarely faced by APEs. Instead, APEs have tended to become less explicitly analytic, though continuing to rely on ordinary language and commonsense intuitions. As well as giving the impression that APE could not deliver the promised goods of authoritatively clarified concepts and untangled linguistic usage, this has considerably blurred APE's initial image of professional precision.

These sad developments were taking place against the background of a waning of analytic philosophy of the ordinary language variety in philosophy proper. To the extent that APE was unable or unprepared to abandon ordinary language and commonsense and opt for the formalised analytic approaches of the "regimentalists"--philosophers such as Davidson and Quine--and this was to a very great extent, it was left with nowhere to go without ceasing to be APE. The waning of ordinary language analytic philosophy was accelerated by increased interest in the 1970s in such strongly anti-analytic trends as Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology and other brands of continental philosophy. These have made their presence felt in philosophy of education in something of a revival of ismism, though not in quite the same smorgasbord format. It was becoming more apparent that APE was simply one approach to educational philosophy, with its own substantive and theoretical commitments, in competition with other approaches rather than being an atheoretical overall analytic methodology independent of competing theories and useful in choosing between them.

As a result, there is something of a malaise, a stagnation, as this internal malady immobilises rather than sharply and abruptly extinguishes the APE programme. The malaise is demoralising, as

it indicates a failure on APE's part to accomplish the APE task on APE's own terms, and has led at least one APE to concede that APE analyses have embodied values, theoretical commitments, and may have been biased towards sectional interests.<sup>53</sup> APE should have been able to deliver and philosophically authenticate its analyses.

The second ailment is more like a case of stunted growth due to congenital defects. LR APE, in particular, offered a conception of educational theory-- of Education-as interdisciplinary consideration of practical educational problems issuing in practical judgements for the guidance of educators. This conception was articulated in terms of Hirst's forms of knowledge thesis.<sup>54</sup> As the basis of a potential procedure for forming such judgements, this approach was doomed from the start. According to Hirst, each form had its own logically distinct criteria (or (at least) truth and validity. The obvious questions, then, were by what criteria is interdisciplinary inquiry conducted and according to what rules are practical judgements formed? Although Hirst spoke vaguely about "fields of knowledge" being hybrid applications of the elements of more than one form, and of "practical theories" as focusing several forms on practical problems, neither he nor anybody else to my knowledge has ever spelled out the procedures involved, and the whole business remains, in Hirst's own words concerning the formation of practical judgements, "a process which, for all its importance, is still little understood either logically or psychologically".<sup>55</sup> Thus the idea of Education as an academically sound synthesis of basic disciplines remained at the level of legitimating ideology, failing as a practical research programme capable of making any real difference to Educationists' and educators' approaches to educational problems. As a result, philosophy of education of the APE variety tended to remain compartmentalised and detached.

The position of relative detachment from the practical concerns of educational politics, curriculum, pedagogy, etc. is not a strong one in times of contraction in the educational system, which is of course the story of the late 1970s and the 1980s. There has been an overall weakening of Education's position, and with it, so far as APE is concerned, a weakening of philosophy of education's position within Education. APE has simply not been able to adapt to a changing environment, its genetic constitution, especially in regard to conceptual analysis, rendering it almost incapable of learning from experience. The consequent innocence of acquired characteristics renders it an endangered species.

### **Extinction? APE's Epitaph**

As I have already observed, ailing academic establishments tend to linger on until new generations with new ideas replace them in the due course of time. Otherwise, it takes a very robust challenger to undermine their authority. A leading English APE, R.F. Dearden, in his recent survey "Philosophy of Education 1952- 82" combines a quiet gloom about the future with a quiet confidence that

It is...most unlikely that a major alternative to the present broadly analytic style of doing philosophy of education will emerge in the immediate future, though the linguistic paradigm is likely to have increasingly restricted uses.<sup>56</sup>

Given the fact that most of the possible alternatives, such as Marxism, existentialism and the various strands of continental philosophy have been around for some time in philosophy of education without pushing APE aside, one can understand Dearden's holding this view. But what he has ignored is the possibility that solid technical work in the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy -- specially epistemology and philosophy of science -- might make some substantial difference to philosophy of education.<sup>57</sup> It would be unfortunate for APEs to infer, inductively, from the absence of strong competition to date to its continued absence in the future. In the words of Quine:

Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind.<sup>58</sup>

## Notes and references

1. Note that APE is almost totally an English-language phenomenon, although some APE works have been translated into other languages (e.g. Peters into Italian). There are important implications in this for the supposed connection between the “commonsense” APE articulates and the ordinary language in which APE believes commonsense is embedded. See Walker, J.C. “Commonsense, ordinary language and ‘necessity’ in Liberal Rationalist philosophy of education”, in Evers, C.W. and Walker, J.C. (eds.) *Epistemology, Semantics and Educational Theory*, Occasional Papers, No. 16, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983.
2. Evers, C.W., “Analytic philosophy of education from a logical point of view” , *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1979, pp. 1-16, “Extensional semantics and the epistemology of necessary truth”, in Evers and Walker, op. cit.; Walker, J.C., “Two competing theories of personal autonomy: A critique of the Liberal Rationalist attack on Progressivism”, *Educational Theory*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3-4, 1981, pp. 285-306; “Essentialism and dualism in liberal Rationalist philosophy of education”, in Evers and Walker, op. cit., “Some recent developments in philosophy of education”, in *Some New Perspectives in Philosophy of Education*, Occasional Papers, No. 14, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983; R.J. Haack, “Philosophies of education”, *Philosophy*, Vol. 51, 1976, pp. 159-76; Adelstein, D., “The Philosophy or Education, or the wit and wisdom of R.S. Peters”, in Pateman, T. (ed.) *Countercourse: A handbook for course criticism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972; Harris, K., *Education and Knowledge: The structured misrepresentation of reality*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979; Matthews, M.R., *The Marxist Theory of Schooling*, Brighton, Harvester, 1980. Adelstein, Harris and Matthews present Marxist critiques identifying APE with one form or another of ruling class ideology.
3. I do not mean to draw a hard and fast distinction between philosophical criticism, historical criticism and socio-historical explanation. For a discussion of the relations between these, see Walker, “Commonsense, ordinary language and ‘necessity’” (op. cit.)
4. For a discussion of the contents of LR see *ibid.* I use ‘LRs’ for ‘Liberal Rationalists’ and ‘APEs’ for ‘analytic philosophers of education’.
5. Especially Scheffler, I., *The Language of Education*, C.C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1960; Peters, R.S., “Education as Initiation”, in Archambault, R.D. (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis and Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965; Smith, B.O. and Ennis, R.H., (eds.) *Language and Concepts in Education*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1961; Komisar, B.P. and Macmillan, C.B.J. (eds.) *Psychological Concepts in Education*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1967.
6. cf. Hardie, C.D., *Truth and Fallacy in Educational Theory*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1942.
7. See, e.g., Henry, N. B. (ed.) *Modern Philosophies and Education*, The Fifty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1955.
8. See the review in Peters, R.S., “The philosophy of education”, in Tibble, J.W., (ed.) *The Study of Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966.
9. Hardie, C.D., op. cit.
10. For a characterisation of positivistic empiricism, see Evers, C.W., “Epistemology and justification: From classical foundationalism to Quinean coherentism and materialist pragmatism”, in Evers and Walker, op. cit., p. 26.
11. Scheffler, I., “Towards an analytic philosophy of Education”, *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1954, pp. 223-230, quoted here as reprinted in Scheffler, *Reason and Teaching*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973, pp. 9-17.
12. A relocation in and reconnection with the Quine-Rorty strand of contemporary philosophy may well serve to re-establish Dewey in the centre of philosophy of education. See especially Forty, R., *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979. For some preliminary speculations along these lines, see Walker, J.C. and Evers, C.W., “Towards a materialist pragmatist philosophy of education: From Dewey to Quine” (forthcoming).

13. Braverman, H., *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974.
14. See Walker, J.C., "Teaching: Professionalisation or deprofessionalisation?" unpublished paper, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983.
15. See Walker, "Commonsense, ordinary language and 'necessity'" op. cit., and "Essentialism and dualism", op. cit.
16. I use 'Education' for the study of the practice of education and 'education' for the latter.
17. Scheffler, op. cit., p.10.
18. Bell, D., *The End of Ideology*, revised edition, The Free Press, New York, 1962.
19. Scheffler, op. cit., p.10.
20. Lewis, H.D. *Clarity is not Enough: Essays in criticism of Linguistic Philosophy*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1963.
21. See the comments on form and content in Walker, "Commonsense, ordinary language and 'necessity'", (op. cit.)
22. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
23. See the comments on the Hirst/O'Connor debate about educational theory in Evers, C.W., "Educational theory: A non-foundationalist critique of the O'Connor/Hirst debate", unpublished paper, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983.
24. e.g. Archambault, R.D., "The concept of need", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 27, 1957, pp. 40ff; Frankena, W.K., "Towards a philosophy of moral education", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1958, pp. 300-113.
25. op. cit
26. The dovetailing of these two is nicely illustrated in reviews quoted by the publishers in later editions of the book. From *The Journal of Philosophy*: "...cannot imagine the book's being unsuccessful in reaching the goal set for it. It reveals a deep and basically sympathetic understanding of the often sad realities of educational discourse." From *Overview*: "Carefully written and closely reasoned...education research specialists and those who seek to link up research to good teaching will profit most."
27. See Evers, C.W., "Educational implications: Garrulous absurdities or practical necessities?" unpublished paper, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983.
28. Another contender was the history of educational ideas, which in practice frequently teamed up with ismism, but had at least equally modest claims to academic solidity and a similar theory-and-practice problem.
29. Consider the opinion of one philosopher of education, typical of the time in his uncertainty and hesitantly deferential attitude to the possibility of an APE: "Some of the particular distinctions, techniques and methodology of analysis, particularly of the logical empirical kind, though apparently well suited to the analysis of scientific language, might not be equally appropriate for analysis of the language of pedagogy or social sciences. One might suspect then that the informal logical and common language approach might have more to offer. (Reference here is made to the John Wisdom-Gilbert Ryle school of analysis.) On the other hand, the languages of education are not common languages, and the logic of educational discourse is a practical logic rather than an informal logic. It may be suggested then that an analytic philosophy of the social sciences and practical disciplines is needed. There seems no reason why the logical and linguistic methods of analysis cannot be modified so as to be more applicable to the kind of logical and linguistic problems found in the social sciences and practical disciplines. To this end, educational philosophers of an analytic persuasion might well devote considerable attention." (Newsome, G.L., Jr., "Analytic philosophy and theory of education", *Proceedings: Philosophy of Education Society*, June 1960; reprinted in Park, J. (ed.) *Selected Readings in Philosophy of Education*, Second Edition, Macmillan, New York, 1963, pp. 563-577.)

30. Smith and Ennis, *op. cit.*, p.v.
31. e.g. Komisar and Macmillan, *op. cit.* Indeed, not all these essays focus on academically developed concepts.
32. cf. some of the essays collected in Lucas, J.R. (ed.) *What is Philosophy of Education?* Macmillan, New York, 1969.
33. Scheffler, 'Is education a discipline?' in Walton, J. and Kuethe, J.L. (eds.) *The Discipline of Education*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963 .
34. e.g. Hirst, P.H., "Educational theory", in Tibble, *op. cit.*
35. Peters, "The place of philosophy in the training of teachers", paper read at the ATCDE-DES Conference, Hull, 1964; reprinted in Peters, *Education and the Education of Teachers*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977.
36. *Ibid.*
37. We can waive for present purposes the inconsistency between Peters' espousal here of the "human sciences" and the view he elsewhere embraces, that commonsense -- as explicated by philosophy -- provides the most authoritative knowledge of the sphere of normal, rational, human conduct. See Walker, "Essentialism and dualism in Liberal Rationalist philosophy of education", *op. cit.*
38. Peters, "The place of philosophy in the training of teachers", (*op. cit.*), p.142.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. e.g. Ryle, Phillips Griffiths, Passmore, Hamlyn, Passmore.
42. Walker, "Commonsense, ordinary language and 'necessity'", (*op. cit.*) and "Whatever happened to the concept of education? Reflections on the curious fate of conceptual analysis in philosophy of education", unpublished paper, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983.
43. See the Introduction, pp. 3-5, of Musgrave, P.W. (ed.) *Contemporary Studies in the Curriculum*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974: "this way of defining Education only became openly accepted and common during the 1960s"; Musgrave describes it as now being the "ruling view".
44. See Bell, *op. cit.* Popper's attacks on leading systematic philosophers, and on historicism and his advocacy of piecemeal social engineering did a lot to consolidate this position. (Popper, K.R., *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Fifth Edition, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, *The Poverty of Historicism*, Second Edition, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960).
45. The basis for this approach was laid down in Hirst, "Educational theory", (*op. cit.*).
46. The relation between knowledge, theory-development, and problems and solutions is discussed in Walker, J.C. and Evers, C.W. "Epistemology and justifying the curriculum of educational studies", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1982, pp. 213-29, Walker, "Materialism and the growth of knowledge in education", *Occasional Papers*, No. 14, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983, pp. 32-41, and "Dusting off educational studies: A methodology for implementing certain proposals made by John Wilson", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (in press).
47. Walker, "Philosophy, educational theory and epistemic privilege", unpublished paper, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983; Walker and Evers, "Professionalisation and epistemic privilege in the politics of educational research", in *Australian Association for Research in Education, Educational Research for National Development: Collected Papers*, AARE Annual Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, November 1983.
48. e.g. Dearden, R.F. , "Philosophy of Education, 1952-82", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1982, pp. 57-71.
49. Walker, "Some recent developments in philosophy of education", *op. cit.*
50. Hirst and Peters, *The Logic of Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, pp. 21-25.
51. Evers, "Analytic philosophy of education from a logical point of view", (*op. cit.*)

52. Edel, "Analytic philosophy of education at the crossroads", *Educational Theory*, Vol. 22, 1972, pp. 131-52.
53. Dearden, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
54. Hirst, "Educational theory", *op. cit.*
55. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
56. Dearden, *op. cit.*, p.70.
57. This possibility is explored in some detail in Evers and Walker (eds.) *Epistemology, Semantics and Educational Theory*, Occasional Papers, No. 16, Department of Education, The University of Sydney, 1983. See also McClellan, J.E., "The concept of learning: Once more with (logical) expression", *Synthese*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1982, pp. 87-116. For wider and more balanced views of the state of the art, see Phillips, D.C., "Philosophy of education", *International Encyclopedia of Education: Research and Studies*, 1983, and Soltis, J.F., (ed.) *Philosophy and Education*, Eightieth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.
58. Quine, W.V., *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969, p.126.