

# On the Comparison of Gadamer's and Rorty's Ideas of Indoctrination

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**Abstract:** Gadamer's hermeneutics is also called the hermeneutics of indoctrination, indoctrination is quite important in Gadamer's hermeneutics, and indoctrination is the starting point and beginning of Truth and Method. Rorty absorbed and developed Gadamer's idea of indoctrination to form the philosophy of indoctrination. There are certain similarities between the two ideas of indoctrination, but there are also differences. This paper will focus on five aspects to compare the two indoctrination ideas, namely, the theoretical background and direct origin of indoctrination, the concept of indoctrination, the concept of truth in indoctrination, the epistemological problem of indoctrination, and the orientation problem of indoctrination. By comparing the above five aspects, a clearer perception of Gadamer's and Rorty's ideas of indoctrination is gained.

**Keywords:** Indoctrination; Gadamer; Rorty

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## 1. Introduction

Rorty tapped into the idea of indoctrination in Gadamer's hermeneutics and saw indoctrination as the most important concept, thus developing Gadamer's indoctrination into a philosophy of indoctrination with a pragmatic flavour. However, it was Rorty's emphasis on the importance of Gadamer's idea of indoctrination that drew scholarly attention to Gadamer's idea of indoctrination, and thus led to a shift in the study of Gadamer's hermeneutics of indoctrination. Rorty's and Gadamer's indoctrination ideas have certain commonalities, but more than that, they are two different hermeneutical ideas, and Rorty also has certain misinterpretations of Gadamer's indoctrination ideas. Therefore, this paper will make some comparisons between Rorty's and Gadamer's indoctrination ideas.

## 2. The Theoretical Background and Immediate Origins of the Idea of Indoctrination

It has already been pointed out by the scholar Mr He Weiping that "Indoctrination is the starting point and beginning of Truth and Method."<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, to explore Gadamer's thought on indoctrination, one needs to focus on the work Truth and Method. Truth and Method was published in 1960, during the period in which Gadamer was writing, "the logical self-thinking of spiritual science that accompanied the actual development of spiritual science in the nineteenth century was entirely dominated by the modes of natural science."<sup>[2]</sup> During this period, scientific thinking prevailed, natural science was considered a reliable source of truth,<sup>[3]</sup> and the methodology of natural science was extended to the field of humanities, constantly squeezing the living space of spiritual science, causing people to doubt the legitimacy of the truth of spiritual science, and shaking the foundation of spiritual science. As Huang Xiaozhou pointed out, "Since modern times in the West, the concepts of method and technology have replaced the concept of practice as the only ideal model for the functioning of human society, thus leading to the loss of practical wisdom and the loss of the legitimate foundation of spiritual science."<sup>[4]</sup> And modern epistemology

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has shifted from the realm of the natural sciences to the realm of the spiritual sciences, the epistemology of the spiritual sciences is thought to have originated with Schleiermacher, the forerunner of modern hermeneutics, and in the middle passed through the Historical School, which Dilthey developed to greater perfection. From this line, hermeneutics developed. Gadamer argues that Schleiermacher's to Dilthey's exploration of hermeneutics was merely at the methodological, epistemological level. Gadamer was again influenced by Husserl and Heidegger to establish philosophical hermeneutics at the ontological level. Gadamer wanted to re-explore the question of truth in the field of spiritual science and to defend the legitimacy of spiritual science. Whereas spiritual science arose with indoctrination, it is only in indoctrination that spiritual science can establish the premises of its existence. Therefore, Gadamer's idea of indoctrination arose in such a background. Gadamer's idea of indoctrination is directly related to Helmholtz's concept of "sensitivity". Helmholtz distinguished between the natural sciences and the spiritual sciences in terms of induction; logical induction was used in the natural sciences, whereas in the spiritual sciences it was the induction of artistic intuition. Helmholtz sees the difference between natural and spiritual science and relates intuition and feeling to spiritual science. "The inductive procedure of spiritual science is then associated with a unique mental condition which demands a sense of mechanism."<sup>[5]</sup> This explains that the artistic intuitive induction of spiritual science requires "sensitivity". And what is "sensitivity"? Gadamer also gives a definition: "By sensitivity we understand a particular sensitivity and capacity for feeling the situation and the behaviour in it, and how this sensitivity and capacity for feeling work, we cannot know according to general principles."<sup>[6]</sup> How sensitivity and sensibility work is discussed accordingly by Gadamer: "What Helmholtz describes about the mode of activity of the spiritual sciences, and especially what he calls the artist's emotion and sensitivity, is in fact predicated on the element of indoctrination."<sup>[7]</sup> Thus, this "sensitivity" stems from indoctrination.

In the preface to the Chinese translation of *Philosophy and the Realm of Nature*, Professor He Lin writes: "This book is the product of the author's critical rethinking of the traditional mainstream philosophy of the West and the contemporary mainstream philosophy of the United States. This book dissects and criticises a number of basic principles of logical empiricism."<sup>[8]</sup> The traditional mainstream philosophy in the West is the traditional metaphysics of the subject-object dichotomy model since Descartes, which treats the human mind as a mirror that can correctly and objectively reflect the objective object, and believes that there is an essence in the world, and that human beings are meant to reflect this essence. Therefore, man's way of knowing is to passively reflect the external objective world through the "natural realm" of the mind. Rorty also criticised: "The Kantian school attempted to make all claims to knowledge measurable by the same standard, i.e., to become metric. This has so greatly fettered our ideas today about what makes a philosopher that it is difficult to conceive of a philosophy without epistemology."<sup>[9]</sup> However, traditional metaphysics has also suffered a certain amount of impact in modern Western philosophy, and a situation has arisen in which "one is on the one hand sceptical of and resistant to the temptations of metaphysics, while on the other hand one is doing so in the context and presuppositions of metaphysics. On the one hand, one believes that it is impossible and unnecessary to seek and know the ultimate meaning of the world and of human existence, while on the other hand, the precariousness and contingency of one's present life often make one feel the existence and irreversibility of destiny and try to hold on to it."<sup>[10]</sup> And 20th century Anglo-American philosophy has its tradition of philosophy of science as the mainstream, from logical positivism, logical empiricism to Popperian rational criticalism, all of which can be described as traditional philosophical ideas of science. Logical positivism restricts all human knowledge to the realm of experience and rejects things outside the realm of experience, especially metaphysics. Logical positivism promotes scientism and extends the methods of the natural sciences to all fields, including the humanities. The central claim of logical positivism is the principle of empirical confirmation, which asserts that all scientific propositions should be confirmed. This was criticised by Popper, who argued that scientific allomorphic propositions could not be proved, e.g. it could only be proved that this swan is white, but not that all swans are white. Therefore, Popper proposed the principle of falsification, in which he argued that we can falsify the

universal theory of science by falsifying individual propositions. At the same time, the 20th century in the United States, the rise of pragmatism, pragmatism, the positivist action of utilitarianism, the emphasis on "life", "action", "effect", the truth is reduced to usefulness. It is against this theoretical background that Rorty puts forward his philosophy of indoctrination. Rorty's idea of philosophy of indoctrination has its direct origin in Gadamer's hermeneutics of indoctrination, as he mentions in *Philosophy and the Realm of Nature*, "The use of the word (meaning hermeneutics, author's note) for this purpose derives mainly from Gadamer's book *Truth and Method*"<sup>[11]</sup>, "Gadamer discusses truth and method at the beginning of his book *Truth and Method* begins by discussing the role of the humanist tradition in giving meaning to the concept of *Bildung*."<sup>[12]</sup>

### 3. The Concept of Indoctrination

Gadamer defines the general nature of indoctrination, "The general nature of human indoctrination is to make oneself a universal spiritual being."<sup>[13]</sup> Indoctrination is about overcoming one's individuality and ascending towards the universal. Only the unindoctrinated dwell on individuality. Gadamer also points out that overcoming one's individuality or particularity is a negation, i.e., the restraint of one's own desires, "and the consequent freedom from the object of desire and the freedom to harness the object of desire to objectivity."<sup>[14]</sup> Overcoming individuality, particularity, and ascending toward the universal does not mean completely obliterating individuality and particularity and then becoming the same universal. "Indoctrination is, in the final analysis, the active pursuit of a higher universal spiritual existence by the self as a subjective, conscious being."<sup>[15]</sup> Indoctrination is when the individual ascends towards the universal, and the universal in turn moulds the individual, and this universal is the universal that implies individuality. Thus, indoctrination is not closed, but is an open, dynamic process. As one scholar points out, "Gadamer's *Bildung* is not a passive acceptance of the influence of the external environment, but rather the individual's proactive surrender of particularity and assimilation of strangeness through interaction with the external environment, and then return to the self, ultimately achieving an 'elevation beyond the self into the universal.'"<sup>[16]</sup> In Gadamer, indoctrination is further divided into theoretical and practical indoctrination. Theoretical indoctrination consists in "learning to tolerate what is alien and to seek the universal point of view in order to grasp things without personal self-interest, to grasp the 'independent and self-contained object.'"<sup>[17]</sup> Practical indoctrination manifests itself in "people engaging in their professional activities throughout and in all respects. But this also involves people overcoming that which is rusty to their particularity as human beings and making that something entirely his own."<sup>[18]</sup> Theoretical indoctrination consists in going beyond one's own individual experience to pursue universal knowledge, such as cultural education. Practical indoctrination is social, overcoming one's individualistic desires in occupational activities, or rather labour, to transcend one's particularity and reach the universal, or one can say that practical indoctrination takes place in the community. In short, for the concept of indoctrination, Huang Xiaozhou has sorted out the most comprehensively, and he believes that Gadamer's indoctrination has five levels of meaning. First, the level of existentialism: "The so-called indoctrination is to go to existence, to survive, to build up the nature of man himself." Second, the level of practical philosophy: "The practical activity of indoctrination has the pursuit of goodness" and "requires man to mould himself into a virtuous and good person in the concrete practice of life." Third, the dialectical level: "Indoctrination, as a plastic practical activity, cannot therefore be static, and the nature of dialectics lies precisely in making what is fixed and unchanging fluid," and "the laws of logic manifested in the process of change." Fourth, the linguistic level: language is the most ideal medium for indoctrination. Fifth, the teleological level: culture and education are the most basic purposes of indoctrination, enlightenment on the basis of indoctrination is the second level of purpose, and the ultimate purpose of indoctrination is freedom."<sup>[19]</sup>

Rorty's concept of edification is defined in *The Realm of Nature and Philosophy* in one place: "The word edification comes to stand for the idea of discovering new, better, more interesting, and more productive ways of speaking."<sup>[20]</sup> Rorty uses the term "Edification" instead of Gadamer's term "*Bildung*". Rorty's indoctrination has a pragmatic

flavour and he uses the term "more productive" to describe the way of speaking. Indoctrination is the involvement of more people in the conversation, in which everyone can find newer, better, more interesting, more productive ways of speaking and can be indoctrinated in the dialogue. Thus, indoctrination is not "constructive" but "perverse". It is "perverse" in the sense that it is not merely a matter of knowing the normal results of the contemporary natural sciences, but of preventing education from being reduced to a kind of dictation to the human being because of the normal results of the natural sciences. If one is educated under such a command, everyone becomes a rigid individual. Therefore, indoctrination is to save man from this rigidity. The usual dichotomy between values and facts in education is disastrous for education, and Rorty believes that the discovery of facts should be treated as one of the endeavours in the planning of indoctrination. Thus, Rorty's indoctrination is "perverse" in the sense that he believes in educating the human being to become a new human being.

#### **4. The Concept of Truth and Epistemology in the Thought of Indoctrination**

Gadamer does not deny truth, and in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer begins by exploring the question of the truth of artistic experience, using that question as a point of departure for exploring the truth of spiritual science. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes: "The starting point of this book's enquiry lies in the confrontation that is to be found in such a way as to resist the universal demand for a scientific method within the context of modern science. The concern of this book is therefore to search for that experience of truth which is beyond the control of scientific methodology, in all places where it is within the reach of experience and can be pursued for its legitimacy."<sup>[21]</sup> What Gadamer opposes is the truth of natural science as it unfolds within the realm of the spirit of science, and he argues for going beyond the realm of the natural sciences and pursuing truths about spiritual science in the realm of the spiritual sciences. Because natural science has the truth of natural science and spiritual science has the truth of spiritual science, Gadamer only defends the truth of spiritual science. As Professor Peng Qifu said, "However, the 'truth' in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not the 'truth' in the general scientific sense, but a kind of 'goodness' intertwined with the 'goodness' in human life. 'A truth' that is intertwined with the 'good' of human life, a 'truth of life'."<sup>[22]</sup> Mr He Weiping even understands the truth that Gadamer seeks to be related to practical wisdom, and Huang Xiaozhou agrees that the essence of Gadamer's truth is actually Aristotle's practical wisdom. "The so-called 'truth' in Gadamer's classic is in fact similar to what Aristotle said in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is not the eternal truth of unchanging things that embodies necessity, but the kind of truth that is relatively mutable, relates to the concrete existence of human beings, and is grasped by human practical wisdom, and is a kind of 'opinion'; a kind of 'truth' that is related to the practical wisdom. a kind of truth in the sense of 'opinion'." Concerning practical wisdom, Mr Ho Wei-Ping considers it to be moral knowledge that does not forget, that has no individual purpose but aims at the whole activity itself, that is variable, non-precise, intuitive, and intrinsic, that explores particular, specific knowledge, and that is connected with the activity of human goodness as a whole.<sup>[23]</sup> Overall, Gadamer does not address truth very clearly in *Truth and Method*, and therefore, there is not a very clear definition of what Gadamer's truth is.

Gadamer's idea of indoctrination does not exclude epistemology, as he writes in *Truth and Method*, "Spiritual science also arose along with indoctrination, for the existence of the spirit is essentially linked to the idea of indoctrination."<sup>[24]</sup> Epistemology also belongs to things within the field of spiritual science, and spiritual science arose with indoctrination, so indoctrination must contain epistemology. Mr He Weiping thinks: "In a broad sense, hermeneutics can be included in epistemology, but in a narrow sense the two are separate, and there exists a kind of relationship between them that is not inseparable, if that is the case."<sup>[25]</sup> It can be seen that Gadamer did not completely dissolve epistemology as Rorty did, but also did not equate hermeneutics with epistemology. Mr. Ho Wei-Ping thinks that when we talk about indoctrination, we must talk about the sense of communion, and when we talk about the sense of communion, we must also talk about judgement and interest. Therefore, when talking about

indoctrination, it is always necessary to talk about the sense of communion, judgement and interest, which together with indoctrination form the four major concepts in the field of the humanities, and are the foundational types of knowledge, even with a little bit of foundationalism. This is in contrast to Rorty's dissolution of epistemology and his opposition to foundationalism.

Truth in the subject-object dichotomous model since Descartes is purely objective, independent of man and not subject to human consciousness, and Rorty rejects this objective truth. Rorty misinterprets Gadamer's view of truth by arguing that Gadamer's desire to indoctrinate is antithetical to the desire for truth, and that the quest for truth is only one of the many ways of being indoctrinated. In Rorty's view, the pursuit of truth sometimes hinders indoctrination instead. But Rorty does not deny the existence of truth outright, and his view of truth has a pragmatic flavour. "We see truth as - in James's words - 'something more expedient for us to believe' rather than as 'an accurate reproduction of reality'. Or to put it less provocatively this line of thought proves to us that the 'accurate reproduction' view is merely an unconscious and empty tribute added to beliefs that succeed in helping us to accomplish what we want to accomplish."<sup>[26]</sup> That is, truth is nothing more than empty praise for helping us get things done, and in this way, truth becomes a tool.

Rorty divides philosophy into indoctrination philosophy, which is centred on epistemology, and systematic philosophy, which departs from sceptical epistemology. He refers to mainstream philosophers as systematic philosophers, such as Plato, Descartes, Locke, and Kant, and peripheral philosophers as indoctrination philosophers, such as Goethe, Kierkegaard, Santayana, James, Dewey, late Wittgenstein, and late Heidegger. Rorty opposes systematic philosophy to the philosophy of indoctrination; Rorty opposes the former, identifies with the latter, and states that he wants to dissolve epistemology with hermeneutics. Thus, Rorty is not unlike Gadamer, whose hermeneutics of indoctrination encompasses epistemology, whereas Rorty stands against epistemology and wants to use hermeneutics to dismantle epistemology.

## 5. Orientation to the Idea of Indoctrination

Mr He Weiping argues that Gadamer's edifying hermeneutics cannot derive such a direction as relativism.<sup>[27]</sup> What Gadamer opposes is the logical positivism that takes scientism to the extreme, encroaches on the field of spiritual science, and puts everything under the method of natural science and the so-called truths of natural science for scrutiny. Gadamer does not deny that there are truths in natural science, but the truths of natural science are not the same as the truths of spiritual science, for, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explores the pursuit of truths in spiritual science. As discussed above, indoctrination is the elevation of the particular to the universal, so indoctrination is to ask each member of the community to overcome his or her own desires and individuality, to elevate himself or herself to the universal, and to mould himself or herself into a human being with a universal, which can be said to be the common "good". In Gadamer, the purpose of indoctrination is the pursuit of truth, and truth is the "true" that is intertwined with the "good" of human life. Therefore, Gadamer's hermeneutic of indoctrination is not oriented towards relativism, nihilism and scepticism.

Rorty's philosophy of indoctrination is finally orientated towards a post-philosophical culture. Post-philosophical culture is a pluralistic and open-ended culture, because there neither priests nor poets, nor physicists, nor leaders of political parties are considered more rational than others; post-philosophical culture is the alternative to a culture of diversity. Everyone is equal and can participate equally in dialogue, working together to constitute a synergistic aspiration. In which truth is nothing more than an assertiveness, i.e. a language game in the dialogue of all. Yet the purpose of dialogue is not so much the pursuit of truth as it is to increase the diversity of human dialogue. On this basis, Rorty is moving towards a pluralistic and non-centrist post-philosophical culture.

## 6. Summaries

Gadamer's and Rorty's ideas of indoctrination are more in different aspects, Rorty transformed Gadamer's ideas of indoctrination into the pragmatic style of indoctrination, and thus the colouring of pragmatism can be seen in Rorty's concept of indoctrination, his concept of truth. In a certain sense, in contrast to Gadamer's concept of indoctrination, Rorty's concept of indoctrination appears to be somewhat thin. Gadamer pursued truth in the field of spiritual science, whereas Rorty, from a pragmatic standpoint, saw truth as nothing more than a tool to help people achieve their desires. Gadamer is not opposed to epistemology, co-ordinating it in the field of spiritual sciences and defending truth in the field of spiritual sciences, whereas Rorty divides epistemology into the field of systematic philosophy and advocates the dissolution of epistemology by hermeneutics. In the end, Gadamer does not orientate towards relativism, and then Rorty moves towards a centreless post-philosophical culture.

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