

RICHARD RORTY'S CONCEPTION OF
PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION REVISITED

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ABSTRACT. In this essay Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast argues that, by focusing on acculturation and edification, Richard Rorty has provided a promising view for education because without acculturation, education turns into a destructive endeavor, and without edification, education risks the danger of being repetitive and reproductive. However, Rorty's view is problematic in terms of the characteristics he holds for acculturation and edification, as well as the incommensurable relation he maintains exists between the two. Noaparast asserts that there are three unnecessary dichotomies in Rorty's educational view: sentiment versus argument, solidarity versus objectivity, and acculturation versus edification. In the case of the first dichotomy, Noaparast contends, one should combine sentiment and argument or else embrace arbitrariness in dealing with different frames of reference. As for the second dichotomy, since solidarity is vital in providing us with scientific consensus, it cannot be the alternative to objectivity. Finally, the third dichotomy would make the very idea of edification impossible to realize unless there can be a relation between the two phases of education. Noaparast concludes that Rorty's view on education holds great promise if we can find a way around these dichotomies.

INTRODUCTION

Some might consider it inappropriate to call Richard Rorty a philosopher and, for that matter, to expect that a philosophy of education can be derived from his views. What might appear to support this suspicion is twofold. On the one hand, Rorty himself denies that he is a philosopher who deals with metaphysical or epistemological matters; instead he prefers to label his domain and interest as cultural politics: "In short, my strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which 'the Relativist' keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemological and metaphysical to cultural politics."¹ On the other hand, Rorty has undermined the attempts of philosophers of education who try to provide educators with implications derived from philosophical views. Rorty explicitly did so in response to René Arcilla's and Carol Nicholson's efforts to derive implications of his views for education.² According to Rorty, philosophy and education each belong to a distinct realm and discourse, and it is futile to bridge the chasm between the two since philosophy, being theoretical, has nothing to suggest for education, which is practical.

However, neither of these two reasons provides a convincing case for denying the educational relevance of Rorty's views. Concerning the first one, the rejection

1. Richard Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," *Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 9 (1993): 457.

2. See Richard Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication: Reply to Arcilla and Nicholson," *Educational Theory* 40, no. 1 (1990): 41–44; René V. Arcilla, "Edification, Conversation, and Narrative: Rortyan Motifs for Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory* 40, no. 1 (1990): 35–39; and Carol Nicholson, "Postmodernism, Feminism, and Education: The Need for Solidarity," *Educational Theory* 39, no. 3 (1989): 197–205.

of philosophy in Rorty's statements should be understood as the rejection of a rigidly defined duty for philosophy and philosophers. Instead, Rorty is ready to accept, along with Ludwig Wittgenstein, that philosophy is what philosophers do without limiting it to epistemological or metaphysical matters. If, for instance, one takes the task of philosophy and philosophers to be redescribing social and cultural situations in order to provide us with new vocabularies, then Rorty is ready to admit the necessity of philosophizing. Thus, he states,

Only a society without politics — that is to say, a society run by tyrants who prevent social and cultural change from occurring — would no longer require philosophers. In such societies, where there are no politics, philosophers can only be priests in the service of a state religion. In free societies, there will always be a need for their services, for such societies never stop changing, and hence never stop making old vocabularies obsolete.³

As for the second reason — namely, Rorty's negative view regarding the implications of philosophy for education — one should take note of two points. First, Rorty holds that in concrete cases one should see what works in practice rather than trying to infer what to do from a preceding theory. Thus, regarding Rorty's view on social justification of belief, when a question was posed to him as to whether it is better to have small discourse groups in a classroom, he answered that in such a concrete case one should see what works in practice:

Q. So you would suggest that *praxis* precedes theory?

A. Well, obviously they play back and forth, but in as concrete a case as this it seems to me that you can just see whether a pedagogic experiment succeeds; if it doesn't, that may leave the theory intact or it may not, but the thing to do is find out whether it actually works.⁴

When Rorty rejects drawing implications from philosophy for education, he means that decisions about concrete educational problems depend on experiment rather than philosophy. Nonetheless, he holds that philosophers can provide a "suitable rhetoric" for educational changes. In his reply to Arcilla and Nicholson, for example, Rorty mentions very concrete examples about which philosophy can be of no help without negating the idea that philosophy can offer another kind of help: "A good new way of setting college entrance exams or of licensing teachers is the sort of thing which advances education. The best that us philosophers can do is to develop a suitable rhetoric for the presentation of these new suggestions — making them a bit more palatable."⁵

3. Richard Rorty, "Philosophy and the Future," in *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Replies to His Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), 198.

4. Gary A. Olson, "Social Construction and Compositional Theory: A Conversation with Richard Rorty," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 9, no. 1/2 (1989): 4.

5. Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication," 41.

Second, the denial of implications of philosophy for education by itself does not prevent one from being a philosopher of education. This has been clear in the case of the well-known analytic branch of philosophy of education in which it is explicitly, even though not necessarily implicitly, denied that drawing implications for action is the duty of a philosopher of education. Thus, Rorty can at best be understood as saying that the philosopher should not be expected to give a formulaic account of implications for educational action, as action requires engagement with ongoing and changing matters. However, one needs to take note of two points: (1) that this does not prevent a philosopher from dealing with a practical matter at a higher level, as in the case of analytic philosophers, who consider their task to be a second-order activity dealing with the discourse of educational action rather than with the action itself;⁶ and (2) that given Rorty's emphasis on the dynamic characteristic of action being the realm of education, one can take Rorty's critique to be launched specifically at *naïve* implications rather than at any act of drawing implications. Distinguishing between mature and naïve implications, we can hold that Rorty abandons the latter, in which philosophy is expected to play an experimental role. However, developing a "suitable rhetoric" for educational change is a mature form of drawing implications that Rorty affirms. Rejecting the distinction between mature and naïve implications and taking Rorty's statement at its face value, one might insist that Rorty abandons drawing implications altogether. If the latter is the case, then it follows that Rorty is incoherent since his own educational views are implications that he has drawn, knowingly or unwittingly, from his philosophical viewpoints. Put another way, his philosophical viewpoints can be taken as a suitable rhetoric for an education with two phases of socialization and individuation. Showing this suitability — or mature implication — is one of the aims of this essay.

Having considered the preceding points, not only can one talk about Rorty's philosophical views, but one can also consider Rorty's speculation regarding education as being inspired by his philosophical views. Now, the question is this: why should we deal with Rorty's speculated "philosophy of education" at all? The answer is that Rorty's speculation is promising even though it is problematic due to some ambiguities. While Rorty inclined in the first place to the analytic tradition in philosophy, under the influence of his continental heroes — namely Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein⁷ — he took culture as the core of his philosophical thought. Consequently, he reinterpreted the work of his other hero, John Dewey, in terms of culture and considered Dewey's

6. Paul Hirst points to this distinction when he contends that Wilfred Carr, in pursuing his practical philosophy, conflates the discourse of action with action *per se*; see Paul H. Hirst and Wilfred Carr, "Philosophy and Education — A Symposium," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 4 (2005), 615–632.

7. This understanding of Wittgenstein's later work is based on some interpretations, such as those by Georg Henrik von Wright, "Wittgenstein in Relation to His Times," in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); and Allan Janik, "Wittgenstein: An Austrian Enigma," in *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts*, ed. János Kristóf Nyíri (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1981).

mature thought to be dealing with culture rather than scientific method. What is important in Rorty's view is that Dewey puts culture at the core of thinking about education. Being a good candidate for the title of "philosopher of culture," Rorty considers acculturation as the building block of education, and he can be understood to take the edifying of culture as the climax of educational endeavor. By taking both acculturation and edification of culture into account, he has provided a good start for thinking about education. This is because, without acculturation, education turns into a destructive endeavor, if it occurs at all, and, without edification, education risks the danger of being repetitive and reproductive. In treating both of these two elements as central, Rorty gets at the heart of the oxymoron of education: "we" educate our kids for a "different time" than our own. It seems that in order to resolve the oxymoron, there is no path except the one Rorty has taken: to look for a combination of acculturation and edification. This indicates that his view is promising even though it suffers from problems that need to be overcome. In particular, what makes revisiting Rorty necessary is the question of how to deal with the two quintessential elements of education. He seems simply to juxtapose the two elements while their relationship is much more complicated. His concept of edification is promising for the philosophy of education, provided that it is extended from the realm of philosophy, being Rorty's main concern, to that of education and is properly placed in it.⁸

The literature on Rorty's educational view tends either to deny its promising aspect or to ignore its problematic aspects. Michel Peters, for instance, takes Rorty's conception of culture to be biased toward liberalism, which leads to a hegemonic relation to other cultures:

Rorty's ethnocentrism and "loyalty" to the North Atlantic liberal bourgeois democracies would be very foreign, and even odious, to Wittgenstein. My guess is that he would not see any grounds for hope in Rorty's redescription of the sociopolitical culture of American liberalism as a universalising first-order narrative of world progress and freedom.⁹

Peters's dubious view of Rorty's conception of culture might be justified with regard to the fact that Rorty overemphasizes liberalism as the best outcome of human culture. However, what can modify this hard talk is Rorty's declaration that he is ready to accept any rival conception that can suggest a better way for organizing society. This is mentioned in the very Rorty quotation Peters cites in making his point: "From our standpoint, nothing could refute that doctrine except some better idea about how to organize society. . . . Only another, more persuasive, utopia can do that."¹⁰ Peters, however, does not seriously address this point.

8. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979). This work will be cited in the text as *PMN* for all subsequent references.

9. Michael Peters, "Wittgenstein and Post-analytic Philosophy of Education: Rorty or Lyotard?" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 29, no. 2 (1997): 15–16.

10. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 220; cited in Peters, "Wittgenstein and Post-analytic Philosophy of Education," 15.

On the other hand, some scholars have observed the promising aspect of Rorty's view but have not taken note of its problems. For instance, Al Neiman, John Quicke, and Gert Biesta have pointed out that what Rorty refers to as edification is vitally needed in education.¹¹ However, unlike Rorty, they hold that irony can be integrated into liberal culture. Neiman, for instance, states, "I want to suggest not merely that the ironic temper can coexist with liberalism, but that it can be seen as an important part of a liberal political temperament." According to Neiman, the deficiency in Rorty's account of irony is due to his reliance on "anti-liberals like Nietzsche and Heidegger as paradigmatic ironists" who led Rorty "in the sort of nihilism characteristic of continental irony."¹² Neiman looks for a remedy to this problem by returning to liberals, such as William James, and an irony compatible with liberalism. Yet, if irony is confined to the content of a culture without any access to its basic assumptions, then what remains from irony but a superficial matter? It seems that, compared to Neiman, Rorty is right in holding that irony should mark it permissible to go beyond the very horizon of one's own culture. Accordingly, to shed some light on his view of irony, Rorty appeals to Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," a topic I will return to later in the essay. Thus, Neiman has incorrectly identified the problematic aspects of Rorty's view. These aspects will be referred to subsequently as three unnecessary dichotomies between sentiment/argument, objectivity/solidarity, and acculturation/edification.

Nicholson admires Rorty's concept of solidarity, which she understands as encompassing objectivity. Referring to this point, she holds that Rorty has moved us beyond Jean-François Lyotard's view regarding the death of the professor in a postmodern condition in which no grand narratives are admissible. Rorty resists taking Lyotard's view through appealing to solidarity: "Thus Rorty answers Lyotard's charge that the teacher and the university no longer have a function which could not be performed by libraries and computers by arguing that the purpose of the teacher is to serve as a potential romantic object in order to 'seduce' students into a community."¹³ Even though Nicholson aptly points out the Rortyan insight that opposes Lyotard's view, she does not take note of the tension within Rorty's own view that needs to be overcome. This tension will be discussed later in the essay as an unnecessary dichotomy between solidarity and objectivity.

Arcilla points out that Rorty's edification is helpful in dealing with education and philosophy of education and further expresses his belief that this view can

11. Alven M. Neiman, "Rorty, Irony, Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 12, no. 2-4 (1993): 205-209; John Quicke, "Individualism and Citizenship: Some Problems and Possibilities," *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 2, no. 2 (1992): 147-163; and Gert Biesta, "Postmodernism and the Repoliticization of Education," *Interchange* 26, no. 2 (1995): 161-183.

12. Neiman, "Rorty, Irony, Education," 207 and 208.

13. Nicholson, "Postmodernism, Feminism, and Education," 200.

articulate “a strong program for philosophy of education” — a phrase that Rorty no doubt considered too strong.¹⁴ However, like Nicholson, Arcilla does not look for the inner tensions of a Rortyan philosophy of education. In particular, the tension between edification and acculturation that is the focal point of this article does not attract Arcilla’s attention. He makes a statement that seems to undermine the experimental aspect of education, or what might be called the science of education. Referring to Rortyan motifs, Arcilla states, “They put in question the truism that education undertakes first and foremost to secure and to transfer knowledge and that its methods for accomplishing these ends are themselves grounded on some ‘knowledge base’.”¹⁵ This relates to what I have critiqued as the unnecessary dichotomy between objectivity and solidarity in a Rortyan philosophy of education. The preceding review of literature shows that it is necessary to embrace the promising part of Rorty’s view while also looking at its problematic aspects.

Having explored these introductory points, and before going into the details of what this article is going to put forward, it seems necessary to introduce Rorty’s works that have particular educational relevance. First, his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* should be mentioned, as it is in the final chapter of this book that he suggests the concept of “edification” as an alternative for education (*PMN*, chap. 8). Edification is interesting to Rorty because it implies that people can free themselves from the dominance of current normative discourses and communicate with other paradigms to find new and better ways of talking. Even though in this book edification functions in the context of a critique of epistemological, systematic philosophy, it is a concept that can be fleshed out as an educational view. Second, Rorty’s view on the contingency of language, as laid out in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, is worth mentioning because of its important consequences for educational matters.¹⁶ Referring to Donald Davidson’s analysis of metaphor, Rorty regards it as a procedure for creating new ways of seeing the world and human relations. According to him, this kind of basic change and challenge could be expected in tertiary education since the university is a suitable ground for individuation. Third, in his article titled “Education Without Dogmas,” which was republished later under the title “Education as Socialization and as Individuation,” Rorty deals more explicitly with education and demarcates two phases for it: one being the realm of socialization, and the other — namely university — a period for individuation and an ironic engagement with established thoughts and views.¹⁷

14. Arcilla, “Edification, Conversation, and Narrative,” 39.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

17. Richard Rorty, “Education Without Dogmas: Truth, Freedom, and Our Universities,” *Dissent* (Spring 1989): 198–204; see also Richard Rorty, “Education as Socialization and as Individuation,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 114–126.

This article concentrates on Rorty's educational views, but because of the parallel relationship between his philosophical and educational thought, it is useful to take a look at the philosophical thinking that runs parallel to his educational views. Thus, in what follows, the first section is devoted to Rorty's educational theses traced back to his philosophical perspectives. The second section raises some challenges to Rorty's educational theses in order to pave the way for materializing their promising potential.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF RORTY'S NEOPRAGMATISM

Rorty can be considered a neopragmatist because he never changed his mind in considering John Dewey as his hero with respect to philosophical thought. However, the addition of "neo" to pragmatism indicates where he differs from Dewey, for instance, in emphasizing language instead of experience, and in preferring the concern with culture to the concern with method and science that was dominant (according to Rorty, at least) in Dewey's early writings. But as far as antiessentialism and contingency are concerned, Rorty observes himself to be in accord with Dewey's pragmatism.

As for the educational views inspired by his philosophical views, Rorty holds that education has two distinct phases: one dealing with acculturation and the other with edification. Thus, his educational view can be considered as acculturation–edification. There are three components of this educational thesis: (1) that acculturation is the first phase of education; (2) that edification is the second phase; and (3) that there is an incommensurable relation between the two. There are questions that need to be answered in delineating these three points: Why does Rorty view acculturation as the basis of education? Why does he posit a long period for the phase of acculturation? Why does he give precedence to acculturation in relation to edification? Why does he embrace only edification after a long period of acculturation has occurred? Why does he hold that the periods of acculturation and edification are incommensurable? These questions are addressed in the remainder of this section.

ACCULTURATION

The reason Rorty takes acculturation to be the first phase of education can be traced to his philosophical principles of solidarity and conversation. Acculturation is what can pave the way for solidarity and make conversation possible. Let us deal briefly with these two principles.

Rorty takes solidarity and social cohesion as a fundamental principle because, for a pragmatist, the social life of human beings is central in terms of determining which problems can be addressed. This priority of social life leads Rorty to view language as merely an instrument for communication. Thus, for him objectivity is replaced by solidarity. When language is not understood to represent reality as such, then looking for objectivity is a futile endeavor. Language allows us to communicate with each other. On this view, what is meant by objectivity is just social agreement. Thus, Rorty states, "For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity ... [is] the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible,

the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can."¹⁸ It follows that the Platonic distinction between "knowledge" and "opinion" should be replaced by the distinction between issues upon which it is easier to reach agreement and consensus and those upon which it is more difficult and that, hence, should be approached with tolerance.

As for conversation, it should be noted that Rorty's emphasis on social solidarity not only has a consequence for science in undermining objectivity, but it also has a consequence for morality in rejecting a Kantian sort of ethics that relies on "categorical imperatives." In his article "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," Rorty contends that this way of looking at morality will result in erasing the distinction between morality and prudence.¹⁹ He tries to remove the boundary between morality and prudence and, in fact, to reduce the former to the latter. From his point of view, pragmatists support prudence; thus, he argues, Dewey's thought is incongruent with Kantian foundationalist morality and is more congruent with Aristotelian expedient morality.²⁰

Rorty's reliance on solidarity and conversation leads him to place acculturation at the center in the first phase of education since acculturation makes them possible. Thus, if one takes solidarity and conversation to be incompatible with acculturation, he or she is misinterpreting. According to Rorty, Dewey is misunderstood by those people who think that children, from their early years of education on, should be consulted in a "democratic" way as to what they should learn; rather, Dewey holds that children should first be socialized in order to acquire cultural values: "Dewey wanted the inculcation of this narrative of freedom and hope to be the core of the socializing process."²¹

When it comes to the question of why Rorty holds that acculturation requires a long period, it can be claimed that in this regard he is more under the influence of E. D. Hirsch than Dewey. Referring to Hirsch's critique of Dewey, Rorty admits that Dewey did not notice the extent to which this socialization depends on acquiring information. Thus, Rorty follows the preceding quotation with this caveat: "As Hirsch quite rightly says, that narrative will not be intelligible unless a lot of information gets piled up in the children's heads."²²

Hirsch places emphasis on content in education. Lamenting the focus on method by proponents of progressivism, Hirsch holds that content and core knowledge, along with direct teaching, offer the greatest promise for reform

18. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.

19. Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 175–196.

20. Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 23.

21. Rorty, "Education as Socialization and as Individuation," 122.

22. *Ibid.*

in education. Referring to Core Knowledge schools and traditional schools, Hirsch states that coherent, step-by-step building of skills and content "is a predictably important feature of an educational system, given that academic skills are cumulative and content dependent."²³ Congruent with Hirsch's emphasis on content, Rorty puts forward the idea of "pragmatism without method," noting that he considers the obsession with method as a mark of Dewey's early pragmatism.²⁴ It seems that this convergence has led Rorty to take Hirsch's emphasis on cultural literacy seriously and thus to view acculturation as the bedrock of education. He acknowledges his total agreement with Hirsch in his interview with Gary Olson:

Q. Do you share E. D. Hirsch's desire for increased "cultural literacy," a sharing of a common vocabulary and a common body of knowledge?

A. Yes, I think he's perfectly right about that. The effect of the present system is to keep education for kids from relatively well-educated, middle-class families who pick up the common knowledge of society as a whole.²⁵

This observation shows why Rorty holds that education necessarily involves a long period of acculturation. Inspired by Hirsch's emphasis on content and information, Rorty even criticizes Dewey, implying that he did not realize how long the socialization process would take if we want to successfully acculturate our children into our ways of talking, judging, and hoping. It should also be pointed out that Rorty's reliance on Hirsch's view of "core knowledge" introduces a contradiction because when it comes to the second phase of education — edification — whatever has been learned in the previous phase, according to Rorty's view, is subject to change through exposure to new ideas: "higher education is a matter of being told about all the alternatives to that tradition, to that discourse."²⁶

Concerning the precedence of acculturation to edification, it seems that Rorty's emphasis on acculturation and solidarity led him to take them as preconditions for critical engagement with one's own tradition. Referring to this point in his interview, Rorty states,

I think that you have to have some sort of loyalty to the, well, it really comes down to the nation, in order to care enough to vote, to care about who's elected, to care about what policies are adopted, to think of yourself as a citizen. Without that sense of the tradition to which you in your political role belong, I don't see how anybody is going to take social criticism or suggestions for reforms seriously.²⁷

Rorty attributes such importance to this process of taking up our cultural traditions that one is inclined to term it a logical precedence. In a similar vein, Rorty states

23. E. D. Hirsch Jr., "Education Reform and Content: The Long View," in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2005*, ed. Diane Ravitch (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 184.

24. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 63–77.

25. Olson, "Social Construction and Compositional Theory," 7.

26. *Ibid.*, 8.

27. *Ibid.*

that education cannot begin in irony, since irony is essentially reactive against certainties.²⁸

Even though Rorty is right in putting acculturation in the first phase of education and even in according it temporal and perhaps logical precedence, it seems that his reliance on Hirsch makes his view problematic. To expect that “a lot of information gets piled up in the children’s heads” by means of inculcation, rather than in “democratic” ways, and in as lengthy a period as Rorty posits (namely, through the end of secondary education), overemphasizes sentiment and undermines the role of reason and argument. This brings us to one of the problematic aspects of Rorty’s view: an unnecessary dichotomy between sentiment and argument.

EDIFICATION

The second phase of education, edification, reflects some of Rorty’s philosophical principles, including the instrumental characteristic of language; the contingency of self; the contingency of society; and, finally, irony. Edification is not possible unless one presupposes the instrumental, rather than representational, role of language; the contingency of both self and society; and an ironic engagement with the existing social order and ideals. Let us briefly deal with each of these principles before going into the details of edification.

First, Rorty supports a philosophy of language in which language is understood to be an instrument. In other words, language is there to help us fulfill our needs and intentions. Accordingly, language should be considered a toolbox rather than a photograph that provides us with a “representation” of reality. Rorty’s renowned work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is an attempt at criticizing the representational view of language. What follows from this standpoint is recognition of the contingency characteristic of language. When language is tied up with the needs and interests of its users — and, further, when we acknowledge the fact that these needs and interests are subject to change — we must conclude that language is far from being capable of providing a final vocabulary that mirrors reality once and for all.

Second, as an antiessentialist, Rorty holds that the human self is contingent, too. In harmony with Nietzsche, he believes that the individual’s identity is not fixed and preexisting, but is always in the process of being built. There is no such thing as “human nature.” A concept such as “self-creation” can give a proper image of the individual’s identity — one that shows its contingency.

Third, human society is also contingent.²⁹ Accordingly, human society does not have specified and fixed laws for motion or progress; rather, its future developments depend on probability and possibility and are not predictable. Some

28. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 87.

29. Rorty explores the contingency of language, the human self, and human society in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

have named this Rortyan view "historicism."³⁰ However, it should be noted that Rorty's historicism is different from what Karl Popper meant by the term. In the latter case, historicism is associated with decisive laws of history's motion.³¹ Rorty, however, considers historicism as indicative of specific situations — that is, each society is in a specific situation and has its own particular values and interests, and thus general paths of development are unnecessary.

Fourth, Rorty's ideal human is a liberal ironist. This, in fact, reflects the juxtaposition of the two incommensurable realms of public and private. While the liberal dimension of the ideal human refers to the person's engagement with social and cultural affairs, the ironist dimension shows the private realm of the person, in which he or she can undermine any current vocabulary. Rorty admired both hermeneutic and therapeutic activities, identifying these as the main functions of edifying philosophers, and contrasted them with the work of constructive philosophers, who try to build a coherent system of thought (see *PMN*). However, in suggesting ironism, Rorty undermines the hermeneutic activity in which there is a remnant of epistemology and instead emphasizes the therapeutic activity that shakes the foundations of conventional thinking.³² Thus, in this period, Rorty prefers Jacques Derrida to Gadamer;³³ however, he views the inspirations of figures such as Nietzsche, Derrida, and Michel Foucault as limited to the private realm, whereas in the public realm he appeals to Dewey and John Rawls whose work rests on and refers to the public vocabulary. In the liberal ironist, these two dimensions are gathered together without any blurring of their borders.

The philosophical principles just delineated provide Rorty with a background for talking about edification as the second phase of education. When students reach college level, their individuation requires that they edify their cultural traditions through exploring aims that differ from, and perhaps even call into question, their past aspirations. This requires that college students get ironic and, if necessary, undermine the social conventions they learned previously. Thus, Rorty states,

It seems to me that the normal division between secondary and tertiary education is and should be the line between getting in on the normal discourse of the tradition in the nation and the community to which you belong, and higher education is a matter of being told about all the alternatives to that tradition, to that discourse.³⁴

However, according to Rorty, administrators cannot be consulted about the process of edification, let alone be regarded as people who can bring about edification. In fact, not only is edification the phase of individuation, but it

30. See, for example, James Conant, "Freedom, Cruelty, and Truth: Rorty versus Orwell," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Brandom, 276.

31. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

32. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

33. Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, 1982), 89–109.

34. Olson, "Social Construction and Compositional Theory," 8.

also can only be achieved in an individuated manner rather than as a social endeavor. This is apparent in Rorty's answer to a question about whether the education system has any responsibility to teach abnormal discourse:

Q. So you don't really see the role of education as trying to teach people to engage in abnormal discourse?

A. That isn't the way I'd put it. I think higher education should aim at fixing it so the students can see that the normal discourse in which they have been trained up to adolescence (or up to age eighteen, or something like that) is itself a historical contingency surrounded by other historical contingencies. But having done that, whether [students] remain happily embedded in the normal discourse of their society or not is something teachers can't predict or control.³⁵

Let us deal with edification a bit further. Rorty is in full agreement with Gadamer in questioning the view that method provides a clear path to truth, as well as with his revolutionary treatment of the longstanding philosophical tradition in the West.³⁶

With respect to the first point — namely, method — Rorty regards Gadamer as comparable to Paul Feyerabend.³⁷ Accordingly, just as Feyerabend rejected the tight rationality of positivism with his famous “anything goes” view, Gadamer undermines hermeneutical attempts (such as that of Wilhelm Dilthey) to follow the methodological rigor of the natural sciences in the humanities (*PMN*, 358).

Concerning the second point — namely, the revolutionary effort — Rorty sees Gadamer as playing a significant role in providing a paradigmatic distance from the long tradition of philosophy in the West. According to Rorty, from Plato on the main aim of philosophy has been “knowledge,” but Gadamer offered a new possibility when he introduced *Bildung* as the aim of thinking. Rorty is not, of course, certain about Plato's position with regard to the idea of the human as knower. Thus, he states that after millennia of commentary on Plato's dialogues, it is not still clear whether Plato was a systematic revolutionary philosopher or an edifying revolutionary philosopher (*PMN*, 369). Rorty considers “education” and “self-formation” as possible English translations for Gadamer's *Bildung*, but he finally settles on “edification” as the preferred translation. Thus, according to him, Gadamer belongs to the small cadre of new philosophers who have tried to shift the philosophical paradigm of the human as knower:

In the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, this paradigm has been *knowing* — possessing justified true beliefs. . . . On the periphery of the history of modern philosophy, one finds figures who . . . distrust of the notion that man's essence is to be a knower of essences. Goethe, Kierkegaard, Santayana, William James, Dewey, the late Wittgenstein, the later Heidegger, are figures of this sort. (*PMN*, 366–367)

Rorty's use of the term “knowing” is not suitable since, at least for Dewey, knowing is much less problematic than “knowledge,” which refers to the

35. *Ibid.*

36. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

37. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1978).

"achievement" idea of traditional epistemology.³⁸ However, Rorty's addition of the phrase "a knower of essences" to elaborate on his meaning might remove this problem. In any case, if one asks what these philosophers sought to substitute for "knowing," Rorty's answer is "edifying," by which he means using practical wisdom. Thus, when Rorty talks about "wisdom as something of which the love is not the same as that of argument," he considers it to be "the practical wisdom [that is] necessary to participate in a conversation" (PMN, 372).

In clarifying edification in terms of practical wisdom, Rorty does not mean what, for instance, Kant meant by the term, which he distinguished from pure reason. This is because Rorty thinks that such distinctions, like the positivist distinction between fact/value, presuppose the representational mind and seeking the truth. Rorty's aim, in contrast, is to put edification at the center, and he regards the factual discourse as just one kind of edification. In this approach, he is in full agreement with Gadamer: "This is why Gadamer devotes so much time to breaking down the distinctions which Kant made among cognition, morality, and aesthetic judgment" (PMN, 364).

To consider the factual discourse of empirical sciences as just one feature of edification requires that we refuse to reduce education to instruction. Again, Rorty aligns himself with Gadamer — and against John Stuart Mill and Rudolf Carnap — in fending off the demand for objectivity in the *Geisteswissenschaften* and considers this an attempt to "prevent education from being reduced to instruction in the results of normal inquiry" (PMN, 363).

In fact, Rorty not only seems intent on rejecting any attempt to reduce education to instruction; moreover, he seems to want to reduce instruction to education. In other words, he wants to say that instruction about facts, provided in the course of normal inquiry, should be considered as just one feature of a broader human attempt — that is, edification. While the fact/value distinction restricts value to noncognitive matters, Rorty, in contrast, attempts to render the factual discourse as a feature of the value domain. That is why he says that the final result of the attempts of admirers of empirical method and science — such as C. S. Peirce, Dewey, and Popper — is solely some ethical values, namely those of an open society.³⁹

Edification being so central to human activity and thought has, in addition, a linguistic feature. It is, in fact, a kind of *description* of things and human situations that should be assessed in terms of its effectiveness for coping rather than in terms of its representation of reality. Referring to this linguistic aspect of edification, Rorty says, "I shall use 'edification' to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking" (PMN, 360). The words "better" and "more fruitful" indicate his pragmatic concern with coping rather than representing reality.

38. I owe this point to the review feedback received during the editorial process.

39. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 36.

A further characteristic of edification derives from its intercultural and interdisciplinary dimension. In seeking "better" ways of speaking, it might be necessary to edify one's own cultural or disciplinary limitations by means of incorporating the strengths of other cultures or disciplines. Rorty views this as a hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic cultures, or between our own discipline and other disciplines. While these cultures or disciplines might, at first glance, seem to pursue incommensurable aims in terms of incommensurable vocabularies, the "hermeneutic activity" can in principle be expected to remove these barriers (*PMN*, 360).

In addition, Rorty goes beyond Gadamer and this hermeneutic activity to forge another path for edification by means of "therapeutic activity" or "poetic activity," which he describes as an inversion of the hermeneutic process. Specifically, Rorty believes that edification through hermeneutic activity should be "followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics: the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions" (*PMN*, 360). That is to say, while in hermeneutic activity one tries to make the unfamiliar familiar, and hence make a strange text understandable, in therapeutic or poetic activity the familiar is rendered unfamiliar by using an invention that is strange to our conventions. One might term the hermeneutic activity familiarization and the poetic activity *defamiliarization*.

A Gadamerian can object that in the "fusion of horizons" not only does a strange text get familiarized, but also the interpreter's horizon is defamiliarized to some extent in the act of approaching the text's or the writer's horizon. However, Rorty seeks a more profound defamiliarization than Gadamer's fusion of horizons entails. That is why in this period of his thought, Rorty appeals to Derrida and his deconstruction and Davidson and his radical version of metaphor.⁴⁰ Using Davidson's conception of metaphor, Rorty regards the therapeutic activity as a metaphorical way of thinking.⁴¹ Davidson criticized the dominant conception of metaphor for reducing metaphorical meaning to the literal meaning, with the only difference being that in metaphor this meaning is hidden. Instead, Davidson holds that metaphor is indeterminate in meaning and, thus, can endlessly be created again and again. According to Rorty, the therapeutic or poetic version of edification, being ironical and radical in nature, can only be expected in higher education.

Rorty's conception of edification is interesting and ambitious since a culture's basic assumptions are rarely subject to scrutiny. The poetic edification, however, invites individuals to go beyond their culture's horizon and imagine new possibilities. This endeavor cannot be advanced unless the individual acquires a comparative cultural consciousness. How can an individual who has no lived

40. Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing."

41. Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

experience in a different culture get outside of the predominant horizon of his or her own culture? Educationally speaking, providing students with such an intercultural consciousness can lay the groundwork for a rich imagination of alternatives. This requires, no doubt, taking other cultures seriously without giving them a secondary status compared to one's own culture. This is a hard job for educational institutions because cultural chauvinism always threatens these institutions. Even Rorty has been accused of such chauvinism: as noted previously, Michael Peters charged him with "ethnocentrism," which refers to a loyalty to the sociopolitical culture of liberalism and indicates the superiority of Western culture to other cultures.⁴² Rorty can be defended since he admits that a kind of lived experience is required in dealing with other cultures: "We cannot leap outside our Western social democratic skins when we encounter another culture, and we should not try. All we should try to do is get inside the inhabitants of that culture long enough to get some idea of how we look to them, and whether they have any ideas we can use."⁴³ This defense from Rorty, whether one accepts it or not, does not by any means decrease the elegance and difficulty of encountering other cultures.

There is another point in Rorty's edification about which we should be cautious. This is Rorty's treatment of empirical science as just one feature of edification. Insofar as this inclination rejects a positivistic conception of bare facts, it sounds good, but when it is understood in a way that reduces facts to values, it requires caution. This point will be critiqued below as the second unnecessary dichotomy between solidarity and objectivity.

THE INCOMMENSURABILITY OF ACCULTURATION AND EDIFICATION

Finally, the third point of Rorty's educational thesis concerns the incommensurability between the two phases of education. This point reflects another philosophical principle Rorty holds, according to which the public and private realms are incommensurable. The root of this view can be found in Nietzsche. He also believed that the basis of social relation is power, as it can be said that "'exploitation' does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of being alive," whereas the individual's private world is a place for autonomy and self-creation.⁴⁴ Rorty also holds that vocabularies related to self-creation (such as autonomy) cannot be exchanged or discussed with others, but require ignoring others, while vocabularies related to the public sphere (such as justice) concentrate on relations with others. Rorty considers these two kinds of vocabularies to be two different kinds of tools, which generally are neither comparable nor combinable, just as any two different kinds of tools — a balance and a ruler, for instance — cannot be compared to or combined with each other.

42. Peters, "Wittgenstein and Post-analytic Philosophy of Education."

43. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 212.

44. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 153.

This philosophical view supports Rorty in asserting the incommensurability of the two phases of education. This is reflected in his "Education as Socialization and as Individuation," where he states that "the word 'education' covers two entirely distinct, and equally necessary, processes — socialization and individuation."⁴⁵ This sentence reminds us of Rorty's assertion of an incommensurable relationship between the public and the private realms, since the two phases of education are regarded as "two entirely distinct, and equally necessary, processes." Rorty refers to the first phase of education as socialization, or acculturation, and to the second phase as individuation, or edification.

The reason Rorty maintains a clear distinction between the two phases of education, and between the public and private realms in his philosophical thought, is that his term "liberal ironist," referring to the ideal human, seems to be oxymoronic given that some critics, such as Jürgen Habermas, see irony as destructive of liberal ideals. The force of this kind of critique has led Rorty to talk about a sharp distinction between ironic self-formation and participation in the public realm of politics. Thus, he contends that irony is "'invaluable in our attempt to form a private self-image but pretty much useless when it comes to politics."⁴⁶

The gulf between the private self-image and the public participation in politics sounds like a schizophrenic division in Rorty's educational thought derived from his philosophical perspective. How would it be possible for the liberal ironist to live with two distinct personalities, each with its own set of characteristics, kept separate from each other? Is it really possible to put aside our self-image when we want to play our political role and to neglect our political role when we come to build our self-image? This brings us to a third unnecessary dichotomy in Rorty's view, which is addressed below as the dichotomy between acculturation and edification.

Having considered the implications of Rorty's philosophical view for education, now we turn to a critical analysis of the problems his view contains.

RORTY'S UNNECESSARY DICHOTOMIES

As has been established in the preceding discussion, Rorty's views regarding education contain three unnecessary dichotomies: (1) sentiment versus argument, (2) objectivity versus solidarity, and (3) acculturation versus edification. Rorty's view of acculturation, which exemplifies his philosophical concern with solidarity, mostly involves the transmission of culture by the old generation and the absorption of culture by the new generation. This understanding leads Rorty to the first dichotomy, in which he holds on to sentiment rather than argument in the acculturation phase, given that there is a vast room for argument during the edification phase. Again, the acculturation phase is taken to be congruent with solidarity rather than objectivity, which leads to the second dichotomy:

45. Rorty, "Education as Socialization and as Individuation," 117.

46. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 87.

Rorty sees objectivity as incongruent with both solidarity and acculturation since, according to him, objectivity is concerned with reality while solidarity is based on intersubjectivity and consensus. Finally, the incommensurable relation that he holds exists between the private and public realms is exemplified by the incommensurability between acculturation and edification, which is the third dichotomy. In what follows, I elaborate on each of these three points, respectively.

SENTIMENT VERSUS ARGUMENT

Rorty's reliance on acculturation as one period of education led him to resist any conception of education that incorporates argument or discussion as a constitutive element, such as the definitions inspired by Habermas's notion of communicative action.⁴⁷ Rorty distinguishes between argument and education as follows:

Let me use the distinction between *arguing* with people and *educating* people.... If all education were a matter of argument, this distinction would collapse. But, unless one broadens the term "argument" beyond recognition, a lot of education is not. In particular, a lot of it is simple appeal to sentiment.⁴⁸

This way of equating sentiment, void of discussion and argument, with education reminds us of the well-known dichotomy of emotion versus reason in the realm of education. Rorty is, of course, right in claiming that education should not be limited to argument and that sentiment is also an important dimension of education. However, he is not quite right in drawing a clear-cut distinction between sentiment and argument. In education, we should seek some combination of sentiment and discussion, mixing different degrees of each along a continuum. To put it in Kantian terms, sentiment without argument is blind and argument without sentiment is empty.

The problem with Rorty's view is that he is looking for a clear-cut distinction between socialization and individuation, or acculturation and criticism. He suggests the dividing line is when students enter college:

Things get difficult when one tries to figure out where socialization should stop and criticism start. This difficulty is aggravated by the fact that both conservatives and radicals have trouble realizing that education is not a continuous process from age five to age 22. Both tend to ignore the fact that the word "education" covers two entirely distinct, and equally necessary, processes — socialization and individuation. They both fall into the trap of thinking that a single set of ideas will work for both high school and college education.⁴⁹

If entering college really is the point at which criticism suddenly emerges, then one might ask where did this disposition develop if not during the period of acculturation. No doubt, critical engagement should be expected to peak during college education, but reaching this peak requires a steady climb. It is an

47. Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, volume 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

48. Rorty, "Universality and Truth," 19.

49. Rorty, "Education as Socialization and as Individuation," 117.

oversimplification to think that there is some golden point in the process of education when criticism appears out of nowhere.

At the same time, Rorty's notion of sentiment blurs the longstanding distinction philosophers of education have made between indoctrination and education.⁵⁰ Of course, there is a very short period during early childhood in which reason and criticism, along with language, are absent, but it does not extend through all education prior to college. In suggesting that this period lasts so long, Rorty blurs the border of education and indoctrination in order to provide a particular conception of education. This is evident in his recourse to the stance of the victorious Allied armies in Germany and Japan in the following quotation:

It seems to me that the regulative idea that we — we wet liberals, we heirs of the Enlightenment, we Socratists — most frequently use to criticize the conduct of various conversational partners is that of “needing education in order to outgrow their primitive fears, hatreds, and superstitions.” This is the concept the victorious Allied armies used when they set about re-educating the citizens of occupied Germany and Japan. It is also the one which was used by American schoolteachers who had read Dewey. . . . It is a concept which I, like most Americans who teach humanities or social science in colleges and universities, invoke when we try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views like our own.⁵¹

Here, Rorty uses “education” to refer to the function of making people similar in their viewpoints. That is why he uses the phrase “we try to arrange things so that,” indicating that this kind of education is merely emotional without the ingredients of argument and discussion. It is very strange to hear Rorty negate even “the possibility of reformulating” his views when teaching religious fundamentalists:

When we American college teachers encounter religious fundamentalists, we do not consider *the possibility of reformulating* our own practices of justification so as to give more weight to the authority of the Christian scriptures. Instead, we do our best to convince these students of the benefits of secularization.⁵²

It seems that by rejecting the possibility of reformulating his views, Rorty, in fact, rejects some logical consequences of his own views. In his clarification of edification, for example, he states that “the attempt to edify (ourselves or others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture” (*PMN*, 363). This statement requires him to accept the possibility of reformulating his views in order to see and verify their strengths and weaknesses; otherwise, it would lead to a kind of dogmatism, and Rorty aims for education without dogmatism.⁵³ What makes his remark about religious fundamentalists stranger still is that he is speaking as a college teacher, and in the very same article he describes university education

50. Paul A. Hirst, *Moral Education in a Secular Society* (London: University of London Press, 1974).

51. Rorty, “Universality and Truth,” 21.

52. *Ibid.*, 22 (emphasis added).

53. Rorty, “Education Without Dogmas.”

as a period for individuation and taking an ironic view of any kind of final vocabulary.

Rorty considers his way of confronting such students as the best approach, and he maintains that admirers of transcendental reason and discussion, such as Hilary Putnam and Jürgen Habermas, are unable to handle them:

I think that the handling of such students is a problem for Putnam and Habermas. It seems to me that I am just as provincial and contextualist as the Nazi teachers who made their students read *Der Stürmer*; the only difference is that I serve a better cause. I come from a better province. I recognize, of course, that domination-free communication is only a regulative ideal, never to be attained in practice.⁵⁴

When Rorty claims that the only difference between him and Nazi teachers is that he comes from a "better" province, one might ask whether this judgment that it is "better" refers merely to an inner psychological sentiment or if there is public evidence to show why it is better. If it is merely an inner sentiment, then one can counter that Nazi teachers hold such sentiments about their province as well. And if there is public evidence to consider, then Rorty has to follow the path that Putnam and Habermas suggested in terms of engaging in a reasonable discussion. In such a case, Rorty should not distinguish between the *education* of fundamentalist parents' children and *discussion*, and thus he should not try to make their views seem silly rather than discussable. Referring to those parents, he says,

You have to be *educated* in order to be a citizen of our society, a participant in our conversation, someone with whom we can envisage our horizons. So we are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours.⁵⁵

Even though Rorty is so intolerant and exclusivist with regard to the nonmembers of his society, he looks for solidarity and consensus among its members. This brings us to the further dichotomy he draws between objectivity and solidarity.

SOLIDARITY VERSUS OBJECTIVITY

In parallel with his rejection of representationalism, Rorty rejects objectivity as an ideal in science, and hence in science education.⁵⁶ In the same vein, he undermines the epistemological trend of looking for research methods and replaces it with conversation, just as he replaces objectivity with solidarity.

Referring to the central position of conversation in inquiry as a requirement of pragmatism, Rorty defines pragmatism as "the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones."⁵⁷ By this, he means there are no constraints for inquiry that, as might be supposed, derive from the nature

54. Rorty, "Universality and Truth," 22.

55. Ibid.

56. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*; and Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

57. Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing," 165.

of the objects studied, or the minds, or the language itself. The only reasonable constraints, according to Rorty, are the ones rooted in our conversation with fellow inquirers.

This insistence on the central role of conversation in science and inquiry shows Rorty's reliance on Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic view, particularly that phase of normal science during which consensus among scientists draws the boundaries around science and the scientific. That is why Rorty defines pragmatism as a "left-wing Kuhnism."⁵⁸ In other words, according to him, pragmatists are even more radical than Kuhn in their reliance on consensus and in cutting the relation between science and reality. Thus, Rorty draws a sharp distinction between conversation and research: he supports the former because of its reliance on consensus, and he rejects the latter for being concerned with "method." However, it seems that Rorty's enthusiasm about consensus has led him to overestimate the role of the normal science phase in Kuhn's view and to overlook what Kuhn refers to as "revolution" in science, which is associated with an abnormal discourse. There is no doubt that a revolution paves the way for a new consensus, but the starting point is a break in the old consensus. So far as consensus is concerned, then, it is important not to neglect the crucial role abnormal discourse plays in the development of scientific findings. As Paul Roth points out, according to people like Feyerabend, if we understand the role that innovative reasoning plays in scientific findings, then "this is sufficient to establish that abnormal discourse is a pervasive and integral part of the research process."⁵⁹

At a deeper level, we need to think about the dichotomy of objectivity versus solidarity or consensus. Rorty's attempt to avoid representationalism is, of course, a reasonable endeavor — that is, it is reasonable, even vital, insofar as it prevents us from taking our conjectures as the picture of reality. Rorty goes too far, however, in cutting the relation between science and reality and considering science as a merely linguistic device without taking into account the requirements of scientific method. His "pragmatism without method" is far from pragmatism as Dewey understood it. For Dewey, method matters because it provides us with knowledge as "distinguished from opinion, guesswork, speculation, and mere tradition."⁶⁰ Rorty, in contrast, tries to blur the distinction between knowledge and opinion by undermining the scientific method. According to him, pragmatists — including Peirce, James, and Dewey — have sometimes pushed the pendulum toward the science side while at other times they have pushed it toward the

58. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 38. See also Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

59. Paul A. Roth, *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences: A Case for Methodological Pluralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 107.

60. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2004), 204.

culture side.⁶¹ That is to say, they have sometimes tried to make culture scientific and at other times to make science cultural. Rorty himself is an enthusiastic proponent of the latter tendency. However, contrary to the reified conception of scientific method that Rorty rejects, Dewey brings the scientific method down to earth and takes into account its context in human life. Making us aware of the abstract characteristic of science, Dewey states, "the fact that science marks the perfecting of knowing in highly specialized conditions of technique renders its results, taken by themselves, remote from ordinary experience — a quality of aloofness that is properly designated by the term abstract."⁶² While Dewey invites us to use scientific method, he cautions that science should not be understood merely as an abstract endeavor. Thus, contrary to what Rorty holds, Dewey does not put forward an abstract understanding of science, but he nevertheless urges us to have a scientific viewpoint. Rorty, on the other hand, is too quick to push us toward an emphasis on language, as required by the linguistic turn in philosophy, when he states: "I linguisticize . . . in order to read [philosophers] as prophets of the utopia in which all metaphysical problems have been dissolved, and religion and science have yielded their place to poetry."⁶³

ACCULTURATION VERSUS EDIFICATION

The third dichotomy deals with the either/or relationship Rorty attributes to acculturation and edification, so that one can be either in the process of acculturation or in the endeavor of edification. This dichotomy is in fact inspired by Hirsch rather than by Rorty's pragmatist hero, Dewey. As explained previously, Hirsch's concern with cultural literacy led Rorty to hold that education begins with a long period for acculturation, and because of his own interest in undermining a final vocabulary, Rorty adds to this a period of edification. Dewey, however, would reject such a dichotomy, just as he rejected the dichotomy of training/education.

Dealing with acculturation versus edification requires us to articulate what acculturation amounts to. This process can help us to decide about the supposed contrast between the two poles. Some hold that initiation into culture is indoctrination rather than education because of the passivity of students, on the one hand, and the leading metaphor of transmission of culture, on the other.⁶⁴ Of course, there is no agreement on what exactly indoctrination is, even though this topic was the subject of heated debates during the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁵ Four criteria

61. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, 63.

62. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 205.

63. Richard Rorty, "Response to Hartshorne," in *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, ed. Saatkamp Jr., 35. I owe this point regarding Dewey to the review feedback received during the editorial process.

64. Gert Biesta, "Education, Not Initiation," in *Philosophy of Education Society Yearbook 1996*, ed. Frank Margolis (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 1997), 90–98.

65. Ivan A. Snook, ed., *Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

have been suggested for delineating indoctrination: method, content, intention, and result.⁶⁶ While the first two criteria bring to the fore the method of teaching and the content of what is taught, the latter two concentrate on the intention of the educator and the end result of the process of education. However, all of these suggestions have faced challenges. For instance, in the case of content, it has been made clear that even subject matter such as science can be taught in an indoctrinatory way.⁶⁷ Indoctrination is in fact more related to the attitude one takes toward something. Whatever is taken to be beyond question and critique is rendered indoctrinatory — for instance, the experimental method of teaching can become indoctrinatory if students are urged to take an uncritical attitude toward it.

Even though he considers acculturation inevitable as the first step in education, Rorty might not have much concern about the accusation of indoctrination since he preserves a significant place for edification at the right time — namely, during college education. However, other scholars have addressed this issue by drawing a distinction between initiation and indoctrination: they have tried to show that initiation, contrary to indoctrination, can and should have some reflective and critical components in order to be differentiated from indoctrination. Paul Smeyers and Nicholas Burbules, for instance, hold that initiation into the existing social practices can have a liberating outcome instead of being merely indoctrinatory. Emphasizing the inevitability of initiation, as does Rorty, they maintain that “one cannot *not* be initiated” because initiation is the precondition of being in human relationships.⁶⁸ Unlike Rorty, though, they take note of the difference between initiation and indoctrination, specifically that in the former some components of criticism can and should be involved.

Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor, Smeyers and Burbules concentrate on practice as an important clue to understanding education. Education as initiation into practice does not, however, mean that the student is passive or that education is solely a reproductive endeavor. According to Smeyers and Burbules, interpretation is involved in practice: “What for one person is a practice may for someone else merely be a ritual. At heart is the issue of how practices are reproduced and sustained over a period of time.”⁶⁹ In this way, narrative comes to play an important role in interpreting practice because some narratives can provide one with a more critical and reflective relation to practice. This understanding of practice and initiation into practice is far from being indoctrinatory.

66. See, for example, Antony Flew, “Indoctrination and Doctrines,” in *Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Ivan A. Snook (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 65–71.

67. See Wolff-Michael Roth, “Enculturation: Acquisition of Conceptual Blind Spots and Epistemological Prejudices,” *British Educational Research Journal* 27, no. 1 (2001): 5–27.

68. Paul Smeyers and Nicholas C. Burbules, “Education as Initiation into Practices,” *Educational Theory* 56, no. 4 (2006): 442.

69. *Ibid.*, 449.

Tim McDonough tries to provide a rather more extensive arena for initiation than initiation into a discipline or a particular culture. Appealing to the meaning of initiation in anthropology, he holds that initiation can involve facing grotesque phenomena rather than merely becoming familiar with a culture's heritage straightforwardly:

Anthropology defines initiation as a rite of passage in which an individual, or rather, a group sharing a common status within a society is temporarily exiled, subjected to grotesque or sacred normative representations, and then re-integrated into society as members holding a new status, a new identity, and authorized to perform new roles.⁷⁰

Thus, according to McDonough, initiation is different from both indoctrination and critical pedagogies since the former prevents creativity and the latter "are handicapped in their dealings with issues of cultural belonging."⁷¹ Referring to initiatory pedagogy, he contends that

It is a pedagogical means to both transmit a knowledge of a tradition by teaching students to master a symbolic code and repertoire, and also to engage them in the development of their own capacities to manipulate that code to create alternative pronouncements and judgments in the face of historical and normative challenges to the system.⁷²

Through their analyses, Smeyers and Burbules and McDonough have tried to make initiation into practice compatible with reflection and critical engagement. This sort of relation between acculturation and reflection is necessary in order for edification to be achievable. However, Rorty leaves his two phases of acculturation and edification, being incommensurable, unbridged. Effectively, his "two phases" model becomes self-defeating since acculturation, void of argument, prevents students from reaching the edification phase because they are so accustomed to the existing culture.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that there is a parallel relationship between Rorty's philosophical and educational thought. This assertion might appear contrary to Rorty's denial of looking for such a relationship between philosophy and education. As I have shown here, however, Rorty's view of the contingency of the human self, language, and society, along with his emphasis on consensus and conversation, have led him to suggest implications for education. Accordingly, Rorty offers a reinterpretation of education in terms of two distinct, successive phases: acculturation (pre-college) and edification (college level).

I have argued, further, that Rorty's view is promising because he takes into account these two vital elements of acculturation and edification. Without acculturation, we would not have education at all, and without edification, education risks the danger of being repetitive and reproductive. In particular,

70. Tim McDonough, "Initiation, Not Introduction: Confronting the Grotesque in Cultural Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43, no. 7 (2011): 706–723.

71. *Ibid.*, 721.

72. *Ibid.*

Rorty's conception of edification in terms of poetic activity is promising and ambitious.

Finally, I have shown that the philosophical view from which Rorty derives his educational thesis has led to three unnecessary dichotomies: sentiment versus argument, solidarity versus objectivity, and acculturation versus edification. Moreover, I have provided a detailed account the problems associated with each of these dichotomies, leading to the following conclusions. In the case of the first dichotomy, it is necessary to have some combination of sentiment and argument, or else we will be forced to embrace arbitrariness in dealing with different frames of reference. As for the second dichotomy, solidarity cannot be the alternative to objectivity because it is vital to providing us with scientific consensus. Finally, the third dichotomy makes edification impossible to achieve unless there can be a relation between the two phases of education. As noted at the outset of this essay, we must acknowledge these problematic dichotomies and find a way to address them in order to realize the promise that Rorty's educational thesis holds.