

THE DEWEY FAMILY REUNION: KELLY'S MAN-THE-SCIENTIST MEETS RORTY'S IRONIST

Vladimir Miletić*, Dušan Stojnov**

*Association for Mental Health Promotion, Belgrade, Serbia

**University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

Kelly and Rorty share similar and compatible philosophical positions, based on their common pragmatic ancestry, particularly due to influences of John Dewey's thought. We will show how, based on these similarities, we can draw parallels between Rorty's conception of the eternally self-doubting ironist and her constructivist counterpart, Kelly's man-the-scientist. Understanding liberal irony may prove fruitful in explicating and developing a constructivist theory of the subject; several features of the ironist will be considered as potential constituents of subjects created in personal construct psychotherapy. Goals of the psychotherapeutic process will be reconsidered in the light of these findings.

Key words: *personal construct theory, subjectivity, neopragmatism, relationality*

As a complete philosophical program, pragmatism originated in the United States, and has been described by Georg Simmel (Rorty, 2007, p. 915) as nothing more than “what Americans could get out of Nietzsche”, a claim that clearly illustrates the dismissive way in which pragmatism was treated in the continental philosophical tradition for well over a century. Names most frequently associated with pragmatism are Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. With the rise of analytic philosophy in the first half of the 20th century, pragmatism lapsed into obscurity and has not undergone a philosophical revival until the 1970s when philosophers such as Brandom and Rorty began rediscovering it.

Today pragmatism is widely recognized as a major American contribution to philosophy. Pragmatic ideas can be found scattered among works by figures such as Vattimo, Habermas and Sartre in the continental tradition. Analytic philosophers such as Quine, Kuhn and Putnam have also been heavily influenced by pragmatism even though all of them commonly reject the label. The continuing ambivalence towards pragmatism is reflected in the controversial and polarizing acceptance of contemporary pragmatists, most notable of which is Richard Rorty,

who, despite his enormous success and wide readership, remains a kind of philosophical *enfant terrible* whose influence is more palpable in circles of literary theorists than among philosophers.

George Kelly's personal construct psychology is heavily influenced by pragmatist ideas, the works of John Dewey, especially *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1919), and *Quest for Certainty* (1929). Recent research into the origins and influences on Kelly's work suggests that C. S. Peirce also played a major role in the development of Kelly's theory, directly as well as through his influence on subsequent pragmatists (Procter, 2014). Much like pragmatism, the fate of personal construct psychology has been to remain outside of the psychological mainstream for much of its existence, frequently miscategorized as being cognitive, humanist and psychodynamic.

DEWEY'S INVISIBLE PRESENCE

John Dewey is an important but quiet presence in personal construct psychology. In Volume 1 (Kelly, 1955) Kelly recognized his influence by

writing that Dewey's ideas can be read between many of the lines of personal construct psychology. The details of Kelly's connections with Dewey's pragmatism have already been precisely outlined by Butt (2008) and Warren (2008).

For his part, Richard Rorty has repeatedly insisted that his philosophy is fully continuous with Dewey's (Rorty, 2005), except perhaps with regard to some aspects of political philosophy but which is not the focus of this article (Shusterman, 1994). Rorty's major contribution to pragmatism is a linguistic reinterpretation of Dewey's ideas, aligning him with contemporary understanding of naturalism and pragmatism.

Rorty's brand of pragmatism eliminates the notion of experience, which both Rorty and Brandom consider obsolete and as better replaced with linguistic terms (Shusterman, 1994; Rorty, 1989). Kelly used the term 'experience' in a similar way to Dewey's, we will see in a later section of this article that both Rorty and Kelly made not dissimilar advances. Where Rorty talks about language and vocabularies, Kelly talks about meaning and systems of constructs. Rorty's view on selfhood, language and subjectification are fundamentally historicist, similar to Kelly's proposal that the person is "best viewed in the perspective of centuries rather than in the flicker of passing moments" (Kelly, 1955, p. 3). Kelly's sensitivity to context, historical, cultural, and familial, is also seen in his attentive examination of the ways these factors are constitutive of the client's identity and how norms of the epoch and the society are intricately connected to the possibilities and limits of reconstruction (Miletic, 2016).

Although Rorty and Kelly are both intellectual descendants of Dewey, their respective fields of professional interests are significantly different. This accounts for major differences between them both regarding the directions in which Dewey's thought was elaborated. Whereas Rorty's project concerns abandoning epistemology and redirecting philosophy to the search for a just society, Kelly's focus is on the individual and his or her psychology, and ways of optimizing human functioning in psychotherapy. Even though Kelly's psychology of personal constructs is not a comprehensive philosophical system (Warren, 2008), Kelly touches on epistemological issues, as well as problems of

language and community (Kelly, 1955; Kelly, 1969). His elaboration of these subjects is only to the extent that it is useful for clinical work. On the other hand, Rorty touches on the psychological issues of great concern for Kelly, such as the relationship between personal and public meaning, subject constitution in language games, as well as cultural and historicist problems in subject formation (Rorty, 1989).

In a sense, Kelly and Rorty are complementary to each other, as they start from similar foundations but elaborate them in different directions. Individually, we may look to Rorty for the political, and to Kelly for the psychological. If one is to elaborate Rorty in the field of psychology, Kelly could be a valuable resource. Conversely, if one wishes to expand personal construct psychology in the direction of social science and political action, Rorty could offer a ready-made compatible platform. Together, these two men give us the complete pragmatic picture of the person in relation to society.

TRUTH AND LANGUAGE

Rorty claims that what pragmatism tells us about truth is very simple – there is nothing at all constructive or useful to be said about it, other than that it is a property of sentences and not of things. Widely criticized as reductionist, Rorty's view is that truth is a function of vocabularies that we use to describe the world but has no direct relation to the world itself. Vocabularies are sets of words that we use to describe the world. Vocabularies are generated in our interaction with other humans and used to paint a much larger picture when the world interacts with them, causing us to have beliefs and, in turn, act in the world based on those beliefs. Humorously, Rorty insists that truth is nothing more than what our contemporaries let us get away with, alluding to the interpersonal, relational nature of the vocabularies we use (Rorty, 1989).

A similar view of truth can be found in personal construct psychology. There is no way to say if our system of constructs mirrors the world in any way because we can never step outside of that system to compare. To construe anything, including the system of constructs, Kelly claims, is to place an interpretation. Therefore, any "objective" view of a system of constructs is never

possible, because interpretation is unavoidable. Instead of seeking to find correspondence between reality and constructs, man-the-scientist attempts to see if results of his experiments compare to subjective criteria for validation and invalidation that he set up to evaluate the results of his actions in the world. Truth, in personal construct psychology, is exclusively a property of the system of personal constructs, and not of the reality it tries to anticipate and control (Kelly, 1955).

Rorty's view of truth as language games our contemporaries let us get away with is derived from his relational view of how language and personal vocabularies develop. Whereas explicit relational elaboration of personal construct psychology and its clinical application is of a newer date (Stojnov & Procter, 2012), relationality is implicit in Kelly's theory, particularly reflected in Sociality and Commonality Corollaries (Kelly, 1955). Kelly himself began elaborating the relational aspect of personal construct psychology in some of his less known works by Kelly where the system of constructs is not seen as an exclusively private venture, but rather as belonging to a wider web of public constructs, all in constant interaction (Kelly, 1969; Miletic, 2016).

In the first pages of *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Rorty makes a claim that bears striking resemblance to Kelly's philosophical position of constructive alternativism:

The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that. (Rorty, 1989, p.6).

What we can do, Rorty asserts, is investigate different consequences of using different languages to describe *the* world and then estimate the value of holding on to a specific language in each context. But we cannot say anything about the world *objectively* because we can never speak independently of a vocabulary. We can, however, use different vocabularies for different purposes and use them to talk about specific topics, thereby reaching different goals. World, existing in its fuzzy, indefinite way is pliable to numerous redescriptions (reconstructions). As it

was pointed out above, this is in agreement with Kelly's view on how constructs relate to the world. Both Kelly and Rorty converge in their view of the universe. Without tools, such as constructs (Kelly) or words (Rorty), the world would be an undifferentiated homogeneity out of which we could make no sense. World in-itself exists in a rather vague, indeterminate way. There is in fact nothing we can say about the world outside of a certain framework, for Kelly that framework is the system of constructs, for Rorty it is vocabulary.

FINAL VOCABULARY

An important construct for Rorty is *final vocabulary*, a set of words that people use to justify their actions, beliefs, and more widely, their entire lives (Rorty, 1989). These sets of words are the ones used to justify actions in which people engage as well as those they purposely never engage in, to disparage and define their enemies, words in which people define their life roles or personal philosophies. The final vocabulary is what is used to put together a narrative of one's past, and to predict narrative directions in the future. When Rorty uses the word 'final', he does not imply permanence or even stability. A vocabulary is termed 'final' because it is ultimate, fundamental for a person, at a given time.

The final vocabulary is a subset of a person's entire vocabulary, but a particularly important subset for the way in which people construe themselves. In fact, the self is constituted by the final vocabularies persons use, and properties of such vocabularies give them an amount of space for adjustment and change. There is a recursive relationship between the person and his or her vocabulary – the vocabulary is used and revised by people, but they are, in turn, used and revised by the vocabulary they use. All other parts of a person's vocabulary can be changed without changes in the final vocabulary, but the final vocabulary tends to exert change in other relevant parts of the vocabulary in question. In other words, Rorty implies a rough hierarchy of words that reveals itself in how people change.

Another aspect of the fundamental nature of the final vocabulary is that it represents the end of argumentation. If a person tries to go beyond his or her final vocabulary in search for justifica-

tion, he or she can only resort to circular argumentation. The final vocabulary, therefore, is not a person's entire language, it's only its focal point, one that holds all the other parts of the vocabulary in their place and one that is inextricably linked to societal contingencies, language games *du jour*. In this sense, a final vocabulary is neither private nor public, but includes both components. The end of argumentation mentioned by Rorty is clinically very easily observed when the PCP laddering technique is used (Hinkle 1965). As we approach core constructs, the client is usually unable to go farther upward and frequently resorts to circularity in his or her answers (Fransella, 2003).

There are two important notions from Kelly's theory that are related to Rorty's view of vocabularies i.e. Kelly's dichotomy of core vs peripheral; and his view of possibilities of change as stated in the Modulation Corollary (Kelly, 1955).

It is not difficult to spot a parallel to Kelly's notion of *core constructs*, those constructs that govern our maintenance processes and make up identity. The opposite of core constructs are peripheral constructs, the difference between them being that core constructs necessitate change in peripheral parts of the structure, whereas the reverse is not mandatorily true. In his Organization Corollary, Kelly offers a far more nuanced view of superordination/subordination relationship of constructs within the whole personal system, as well as more complex tools for identifying and working with core constructs, important for his goal of setting up a psychological theoretical system that facilitates change. Rorty is content with the term *final vocabulary* and is not particularly concerned with its formal properties or even its content, a common lack of concern that he shares with Kelly.

In his elaboration of final vocabularies and ironist subjects (the term will be clarified below), Rorty (1989) discusses such diverse people as Proust, Heidegger, Derrida, Nabokov and Orwell. The *contents* of their final vocabularies at times diverge drastically, especially in the political domain. All their differences aside, for Rorty they are all the same kind of a subject, even though it is unlikely that they would have agreed on many of the values they held individually. Whereas Proust was unconcerned with

daily politics and ideology altogether, Orwell and Derrida were on the left part of the political spectrum, with Nabokov and Heidegger occupying the right, and at the same time, a different kind of right. Whereas Nabokov had to flee Berlin in the wake of Nazi rise to power because of his wife's Jewish origins, Heidegger has infamously supported the Nazi party all through the war. We are emphasizing this point because it represents yet another similarity between Kelly and Rorty. Both thinkers are less concerned with content of any particular vocabulary or a system of constructs, and emphasize the process, formal properties and structure as more relevant features.

Kelly's Modulation Corollary states: "The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie" (Kelly, 1955, p. 73). With this theoretical supposition Kelly provides a framework for constructing ways and limits of change. Permeability as a determinant of a system's potential for change is also emphasized in Volume 2, where he sketches out requirements for reconstruction and outlines the goals that a therapist ought to accomplish to set up his client for creating significant therapeutic change. Rorty lacks the precise psychological terminology, but he implies the same thing. All the ways in which a person can talk about the world (and ourselves) are limited and determined by his or her final vocabulary. In personal construct psychology constructs are guides for action. In Rorty's neopragmatist theory vocabularies determine our actions.

Both Rorty and Kelly subscribe to the same theory of change. When our constructs fail to accomplish tasks they were designed to accomplish we resort to reconstruction, to finding a new dimension which will construe existing elements in such a way that it opens up novel alternatives and new avenues of understanding and untested possibilities for action. Similarly, Rorty proposes redescription as means of improving and changing vocabularies.

MAN-THE-SCIENTIST¹

¹ In contemporary PCP literature, 'man-the-scientist' is usually renamed 'person-the-scientist', for obvi-

Science has a privileged place in Dewey's philosophy, which is at once a place where he has common ground with Kelly, and where Rorty would have likely opposed both men, as Rorty's relationship with science is best described as ambivalent. He refuses to privilege science over other forms of human inquiry, and indeed as a mere business of anticipating and controlling events. He largely sees science as useless for any other sort of inquiry, most importantly, for philosophy (Shusterman, 1994). Elsewhere, however, Rorty allocated a great deal of space to outlining an alternative picture of scientists as intellectually virtuous. It appears that even though the power and privilege that science enjoys is something Rorty objects to, science can serve as a useful model of rationality after all (Rorty, 1991).

Influenced by Peirce's concept of abduction, Dewey summed up his pragmatic epistemology as relying on experimental knowledge and what he termed the experimental type of mind (Dewey, 1931). He found an exemplary model of this type of mind in science of his day, which he saw as the carrier of progress in the society. Similarly, Kelly sees science as the blueprint of human progress and proposes that we turn to the metaphor of science and the prototype of the scientist as the chief starting point of his new psychology, rather than focusing on the biological foundations of personality (like psychiatry of his and our day) or early developmental aspects (like psychoanalysts of the time). Kelly's initial metaphor is, therefore, a progressive one, and it integrates agency and movement, rather than passivity and intrinsic or extrinsic limitations of an individual's possibility for change and optimal functioning.

Kelly, therefore, begins his theory building from two notions (Kelly, 1995, p. 3):

- (1) viewed in the perspective of centuries, he sees man as an incipient scientist who works out and improves different methodologies of doing his science;

ous reasons. Kelly's original wording is left here in order to contrast it with Rorty's ironist, because Rorty conceived of his subject as female, no doubt a subtle political gesture on his part.

- (2) every individual scientist makes his own little theories (constructs) through which he views the world.

Science is done to predict and control events in the world, a definition that both Rorty and Kelly inherited from Dewey. Scientists are quick to test their constructs to see how well they work, and it is this testing that we label as behavior in personal construct psychology. Indeed, for Kelly, everything we do or say can be construed as scientific work, every aspect of our behavior, verbal or otherwise, is an act of testing scientific hypotheses. The metaphor of man-the-scientist is useful in the clinical setting. On the one hand, it provides the clinician with an efficient working model for understanding their clients' behavior, a metaphor that works across the degrees of cognitive awareness and is thus applicable to all human processes, and on the other hand, it is a metaphor easily understood by clients themselves, which facilitates development of reflexivity and insight in clinical practice.

In his *opus magnum* *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (1955) Kelly convincingly worked out an entire baroque structure centred around this metaphor, a structure that, among other things, supplies clinicians with a meta-language for construing the processes of all those we can see as scientists and lays out a comprehensive technology of change based on the metaphor and the theory derived from it.

Kelly's theory was developed before the important insights of French poststructuralists regarding the way we are shaped by discursive practices and the way such practices speak through us (Foucault, 1971). Perhaps most importantly for the field of psychotherapy, personal construct psychology was formulated independently of and prior to crucial insights of psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan, emphasizing the inherently multilayered nature of discourses and registers through which subjects are constituted as well as ways in which psychoanalytic discourse itself constitutes specific subjects in therapy, subjects that do not occur naturally (Fink, 1997). Relational foundations of Kelly's therapy, however, offer plenty of space for any such future elaborations.

In Volume II (Kelly, 1955) Kelly offers a rather minimalist view of what he sees as the goal of psychotherapy, quite in line with the

demands for practicality and efficiency that urged him to develop personal construct psychology in the first place, and especially its features such as fixed-role therapy (Fransella, 1995). For Kelly, psychotherapy aimed at no more than alleviation of complaints presented by the client at the onset of psychotherapy. He anticipated, quite rightly, that some may not be too happy with this definition, indicating that he was well aware that what he proposed was a rather simple solution for what we know experientially to be a complex, non-linear process. Since the system of constructs never rests (and neither does the social fabric in which it is situated), there are always possible complaints to work on. Therefore, therapy is either a short-term affair or it is interminable.

The important insight of theorists such as Lacan and Foucault is not incompatible with Kelly's minimalistic notion of psychotherapy as a tool for removal of complaints. Rather, it enables us to build upon this simplistic notion. Perhaps in Kelly's time certain questions could not be asked in the right way, as he lacked the appropriate vocabulary to formulate these concerns, but building upon above mentioned theoretical developments they can be (and must be!) asked. When we convey and, through the experience of psychotherapy, teach clients how to live with the metaphor of person-as-scientist and the related theoretical structure that we transfer actively and tacitly imply with our choice of questions and ways of facilitating change, what kind of a subject do we help create? What is the subject constituted by the personal construct psychotherapy?

To look for an answer there is no need to resort to any of the poststructuralists or psychoanalysts mentioned. Particularly in the case of Lacan, problems may not be so much situated in the realm of epistemological incompatibility, as much as they arise in the divergent vocabularies Kelly and Lacan use. Rorty, on the other hand, offers a worked-out vocabulary largely commensurable with personal construct psychology, in large part thanks to the common intellectual ancestry of the two men. Rorty's pragmatism, as a younger cousin of Kelly's pragmatist psychology, is linguistically and conceptually fully equipped to deal with the conundrums created by the postmodern revolution and its important theoretical advancements.

IRONY AND METAPHYSICS

We can call a subject an ironist if she fulfills three conditions:

1. She has radical doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses;
2. Nothing within her vocabulary can underwrite nor dissolve her doubts;
3. She does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others' (Rorty, 1989, p. 73)

Probably the most important insight the ironist subject has is that anything can be made to look good or bad if it is redescribed in a certain way, which leads her to reject the distinction altogether. Because there is no good or bad, an ironist can never select and hold on to a definitive final vocabulary. She has been impressed by other vocabularies and by different possibilities they create. Unable to step outside of her vocabulary and verify its veracity, she continuously brings it into question and reflexively follows on its developmental pathways and various changes. This puts her in the position that Rorty calls "meta-stable". An ironist is always subject to change, always haunted by the knowledge of the contingency and fragility of her current final vocabulary and, therefore, herself. If she is a political liberal, she subscribes to Judith Shklar's definition that cruelty is the worst thing we do to others and she seeks to filter her vocabulary through this credo (Rorty, 1989).

Precisely because she does not know if her vocabulary is good or bad, and because she has given up on the quest for the criterion that would provide her with certainty in this regard, she spends her time wondering about the consequences of the language games she is playing. An ironist thinks nothing has an intrinsic nature, no real essence. There is a fundamental uncertainty in her because she is ungrounded in essentialist notions and must resort to the use of terms such as 'perspective', 'dialectic', 'conceptual framework', 'irony', etc. The most that she can do in response to criticism of her vocabulary is to attempt its redescription, and after that another re-redescription, etc.

Common sense is the opposite pole of irony. Common sense leads a person to unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary he or she has grown accustomed to using. Common sense means that a person has reified his or her core constructs (fi-

nal vocabulary) and treats them as something that truly, objectively exists out there in the world.

Common sense dictates that vocabularies are used to judge the beliefs, actions and lives of others, those that may use other final vocabularies, very much unlike our own. Common sense is characteristic of the subject Rorty calls the metaphysician. He is concerned with questions about the intrinsic nature of the human being, of justice, morality, etc. The metaphysician assumes that an element of his or her final vocabulary must be referring to something that is *actually* out there in the world. So, when the metaphysician talks about scientific laws, they are thought of as existing in nature merely because science belongs to the vocabulary in use.

When the metaphysician is confronted with ironist beliefs they are usually labelled as “relativistic”, because language is not important to the metaphysician, but the truth, and the truth is to be found out there in the world. The metaphysician believes in human nature which incorporates the view that all humans mandatorily desire to know and that the vocabulary this knowledge brings is the picture of reality. Unlike the ironist, the metaphysician doesn’t believe that things can be made to look good or bad by using methods of redescription, because things *are* either good or bad, they are objectively, essentially such, outside any and all languages that humans may use to make sense of the world.

In the most general terms, an ironist is on the mission – as the poet Coleridge recommends – to create the taste by which she will be judged, except that she is her own judge, and she looks to see how well her final vocabulary does what it was designed to do. She wants to redescribe the cannon which constituted her current final vocabulary so that it loses power over her. She is in the constant search for emancipation from circumstances that constituted her and, indeed, emancipation from her own self-constitution, much like Kelly’s man-the-scientist who must make a brave leap forward to transcend the obvious, all for the noble goal of not being the victim of his own biography. Man-the-scientist and the ironist have the same mission. Much like the ironist’s constant redescribing of her own final vocabulary, during their lives, the clients we work with as therapists face numerous limitations of their constructs and eventually have no

choice but to reconstrue and create new constructs which will enable them to have broader, more useful anticipations of the world.

Rorty strongly emphasized the priority of democracy over philosophy. A book of interviews with Rorty is famously titled *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself* (2005). The constant emancipatory and reconstructive (redescriptive) efforts the ironist undertakes are attempts to give this freedom to herself, by bravely becoming something she has never been before. Her reflexivity allows her to be free from the categories in which she is construed in the public discourse by virtue of knowing how they operate and how they constitute her identity. This freedom comes from and with the awareness of contingency of such final vocabularies, her own as well as those of others. The ways in which she is redescribed in other final vocabularies, therefore, say not so much about her, but about those other vocabularies. She can learn to speak those languages, but does not necessarily need to accept them as true.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF THE CONSTRUCTIVIST SUBJECT

Rorty’s ironist is an excellent candidate for a constructivist subject. We use the term candidate because Rorty hasn’t elaborated the ironist sufficiently to make her fully useful for the study of the subjectification process that take place within the boundaries of the constructivist psychotherapeutic relationship. He rather outlined the ironist in broad, poetic brush strokes, quite enough for his own purposes, but not enough for our agenda. In the context of psychotherapy, Rorty is best understood as offering a rough draft and a set of useful linguistic tools that need to be elaborated in more detail and included in a more comprehensive framework. Except for structural similarities between Kelly’s man-the-scientist and Rorty’s ironist, there are several other aspects that merit a prominent place in any future theory of the constructivist subject:

1. Reflexivity – reflexivity can be said to be a general consequence of long-term engagement in psychotherapy that is not necessarily a specific feature of constructivist psychotherapy. The specific type of reflexivity that

is developed in constructivist psychotherapy involves mastery (not necessarily above tacit levels) of certain constructivist presuppositions. Clients' insights are always mediated by therapeutic tools and these are, in turn, mediated by the theoretical orientations that the therapist draws from Kelly's work. Therefore, a constructivist subject's specific reflexivity would involve knowledge of behaviour as a kind of scientific endeavour and central framing of his or her experience through the metaphor of person-the-scientist. Constructivist subjects apply the metaphor of person-the-scientist on other human beings as well as on themselves with full awareness of its hypothetical nature. The constructivist subject can, therefore, understand that other human beings can be seen as scientists, because it will provide him or her with a way of understanding the behaviour of others. Indeed, when Kelly proposes that we see people as scientists he rightly doesn't imply that all scientists must be reflective about their own methodology. In fact, most professional scientists are not, and neither are personal scientists. Therefore man-the-scientist is not a complete constructivist subject, rather a useful metaphor the constructivist subject uses to understand his or her own behavior as well as behavior of others. The constructivist subject is a scientist who can reflect on his own scientific work.

2. Meta-stability is an aspect of the constructivist subject that arises from his or her own awareness of the contingency of the vocabulary he or she uses. The constructivist subject can look at others and subsume their systems of constructs, to understand their occasionally vastly different semantic systems. Being reflexive, the constructivist subject is aware that his or her system of constructs never stands still, that it is *existing* (Kelly, 1955), always changing and never quite achieving stability. Meta-stability is the result of awareness of constant change. Because the constructivist subject has a well-defined meta-language that can be used to observe and follow modifications, transitions and reconstructions of their own system of personal constructs. Paradoxically, the constructivist subject achieves a kind of stability through awareness of its central, fundamental instability.

3. Uncertainty is a consequence of the previous two. Because the constructivist subject is interacting with other subjects, he or she knows about the wealth of different systems of constructs out there in the world and is puzzled, impressed or appalled by them. The constructivist subject, like the ironist, lives with the constant doubt regarding the validity of his or her core constructs. The constructivist subject is aware that every construct is merely an interpretation, one coloured by the current core constructs within the system, but also determined by historical, cultural or any other kind of contingency, and informed by the awareness, at the end of the day, there is no objective meta-perspective that will resolve doubts about the veracity of either of these. Uncertainty comes with having to act without knowing if the act is justified and, at times, living with the knowledge that in many other systems of constructs it is not.

The above-mentioned criteria by no means represent the final or even a complete draft of what a constructivist subject should look like. In Volume 1, Kelly (1955) proposes that in conceptualizing personal construct psychology he did not intend to give a logically-tight, fully elaboration of a model of human psychology. Rather, his intent was to provide a theory that would give fertile ground, that could be elaborated in different directions and used creatively in numerous contexts. Similarly, we have proposed here several features of a subject that is constituted through long-term constructivist psychotherapy. We don't assume these to be a complete picture, nor the only possible picture.

If this work can serve as a starting point for dialogue, as a useful idea that evokes new questions – more questions than answers, let's hope! – then it has fulfilled its purpose. Constructivist theory mandates that we write with full awareness of the hypothetical nature of our theorizing. In that sense, this paper is an invitation to think about the constructivist subject as a kind of ironist, but not necessarily as only that or even completely that.

RETHINKING THE GOALS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

By applying the postmodern insights about interpersonal meaning-making processes and power relations, we began to look at psychotherapy as the process of subject-constitution, in which the therapist is an active participant, and very frequently the only knowledgeable participant. Afterwards, we have used Richard Rorty's views on irony to illustrate how a constructivist subject might look like. Now, let us address Kelly's minimalistic notions of psychotherapy and propose something else as the goal of long-term constructivist therapy. We propose that the end of psychotherapy is not only the alleviation of complaints, but also the constitution of the constructivist subject.

The ironist is not a person without problems, she is not perfectly mentally healthy, nor necessarily "normal", whatever we mean by that word. She is a person of flesh and blood with an imperfect system of constructs, a system that, like any other, has a limited range of convenience and, likely, its own set of difficult implicative dilemmas. However, the ironist does not need to come to therapy because her final vocabulary is that of a therapist. She knows that her problems are only real because properties of her current language game give them existence and she ventures to redescribe her final vocabulary in order to extend and redefine it and so bypass the troubles that arise from her current language game. She is the postmodern subject par excellence. Her meta-stability gives her the ability to sustain and cope with her transitions, her reflexivity enables her to pinpoint the part of the system that currently fails to accomplish its purpose, and other aspects of her therapeutic experience give her sufficient technology to initiate change if she wishes to do so. At this point, whatever the content of her core constructs may be and whatever the problem may be, she will likely have tools, theoretical and practical, to deal with them without a psychotherapist. It is not when the complaints are alleviated that we can say the therapy is over, it is when the therapist becomes unnecessary. The birth of the constructivist subject signifies this moment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vladimir Miletić, M.D. is a Belgrade-based psychotherapist and research director at the Association for Mental Health Promotion. He has pub-

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lished numerous articles in the field of psychiatric epidemiology and is the co-editor of the Handbook of LGBT Psychology (2015). Since 2015, he teaches at the *Serbian Constructivist Association*.

Contact: vdmiletic@gmail.com.

Dušan Stojnov, professor at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Belgrade. He is currently

a member of editorial boards of *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* & e-journal *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*. He served as a member of editorial board in *Serbian Journal for Educational Research* from 1996 to 2010. He is also a founder and president of *Serbian Constructivist Association* (SCA) from 1995 to date.

Contact: dusanstojnov@sbb.rs.

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