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Eclecticism and the Philosophy of Science

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Abstract

This paper addresses some of the main philosophical underpinnings of the eclectic movement. The evolution of eclecticism is first briefly reviewed, showing specifically how an original dissatisfaction with traditional, single-theory approaches resulted in early attempts at multiple-theory approaches. Problems with these multiple-theory approaches are described, leading a growing number of eclectics to a scientifically based approach known as technical eclecticism. We explain how technical eclecticism depends upon a particular philosophy of science, which has largely abandoned been by philosophers and creates several problems for technical eclectics. Alternatives to technical eclecticism are thus briefly explored. These alternatives are sensitive both to eclectics' dissatisfactions with single-theory approaches and to recent advances in the philosophy of science.

Eclecticism and the Philosophy of Science

As a therapeutic orientation, eclecticism's popularity has risen precipitously in recent years. Two of the more prominent observers of this rise, Bergin and Garfield (1994), have noted a decisive shift in orientations, with a continuing disaffection for traditional single theories and a movement toward eclecticism. The result is that "therapists [now] identify themselves as eclectics more frequently than any other orientation" (Bergin & Garfield, 1994, p. 7). Indeed, recent studies indicate that approximately two-thirds of therapy professionals now identify themselves as eclectic (Hollanders & McLeod, 1999; Jensen, Bergin, & Greaves, 1990; Poznanski & McLennan, 1998; Stone & Yan, 1997).

What is the nature of this movement, and what are the reasons for its popularity? We contend that a principal component of this movement as well as a major reason for its popularity involve the philosophy of science. That is, the nature and attraction of eclecticism entails the way in which science itself is understood, whether or not psychologists recognize that they have this understanding. The problem is that advances in the philosophy of science have dispelled many myths about this understanding and thus have cast doubt on recent formulations of eclecticism, particularly technical eclecticism.

Consequently, the main purpose of this paper is twofold: 1) describe how technical eclecticism has depended upon a particular philosophy of science, and 2) show why philosophers have largely abandoned this philosophy, leaving many problems for eclecticism. To this end, we first review the evolution of eclecticism, noting how the original dissatisfaction with traditional, single-theory approaches resulted in early attempts at multiple-theory approaches. Second, we explain how problems with early multiple-theory approaches led eclectics to a scientifically based approach that now dominates the eclectic scene. Third, we show how the philosophy of science that undergirds this scientifically based approach is outmoded, thus putting the whole eclectic

project in jeopardy. Finally, alternatives are briefly explored that are sensitive to the original dissatisfactions of eclectics but consonant with recent advances in the philosophy of science.

Dissatisfactions with Single Theories

A review of the eclectic literature reveals two basic and highly related dissatisfactions with traditional single theories – their limited comprehensiveness and their limited openness (Lazarus & Beutler, 1993; Norcross, 1986; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; also compare Held, 1995). First, singular theories are assumed to be inherently narrow in scope. As Wildman and Wildman (1967) described this dissatisfaction, “psychologists have not yet succeeded in formulating a single comprehensive and validated approach” (p. 294). Single theories are obviously only one theory and thus single theories encompass an inherently restricted set of categories and constructs for understanding clients. Given that “no one approach is suitable for all clients, problems, and situations” (Austen, 1997, p. 143), it is not surprising that many therapists have abandoned single theory orientations (e.g., Hollanders & McLeod, 1999).

Eclecticism offers an obvious solution to this lack of comprehensiveness, because it pulls together a number of theories into some sort of multi-approach eclecticism (Held, 1995; Lazarus, 1997; Patterson, 1989). After all, behavioral theories seem to deal primarily with categories of behavior, cognitive theories appear to deal mainly with categories of cognition, psychoanalytic theories seem to deal most profoundly with categories of the unconscious, and so on. In this sense, each set of categories – each theory – seems to emphasize and develop a different part of the person. Why not assemble them together, asks the eclectic, to understand the whole person (Goldfried & Castonguay, 1992; Leger, 1998)? The assumption is that multiple theories and categories are bound to be more comprehensive than any single theory alone (Austen, 1997; Lazarus, Beutler, & Norcross, 1992).

A related dissatisfaction with single theories is the closed-mindedness they seem to engender in therapists (e.g., Beutler & Clarkin, 1990; Jensen, Bergin, & Greaves, 1990). Single theories are thought to put “blindness” on therapists, so that therapists see only those features that are relevant to their specific theory (Leger, 1998). For example, if behavioral therapists emphasize categories of behavior, then behavioral therapists will be sensitized to only the “behavioral” aspects of their clients. Behaviorists may tend to overlook problems of thinking, just as cognitivists may tend to overlook problems of behavior. In this sense, therapists who adhere to a single theory are thought to see clients for what the theory makes them appear to be rather than for what they are. Indeed, the main fear of eclectics seems “to be that a theoretical system will bias their interpretations of clinical or empirical data and thus leave them inflexible and closed-minded” (Slife, 1987, p. 101).

This closed-mindedness makes it difficult to tailor treatment to the individual patient's needs. Thorne (1973), an early pioneer of the eclectic position, recognized that a single approach to therapy raises the “problem of matching suitable clinical methods to the needs of specific cases” (p. 445). Therapists with only a single theory appear to be handicapped in this sense. Because one theory has a finite number of categories in which clients can fit, as well as techniques by which clients can be treated, any eclectic combination of theories, and thus categories and techniques, would seem inherently superior (Starcevic, 1997). Put simply, an eclectic has more options, and consequently more opportunities to find the correct “match” to which Thorne referred. As Lazarus and Beutler (1993) stated it, eclecticism “promotes a less rigid adherence to delimited schools of thought, opens channels that promote flexibility and a relativistic approach to ‘truth,’ and underscores both the personalistic (or idiosyncratic) attributes of practitioners and the uniqueness of individual clients” (p. 381). In short, eclectics are in a better position to be more open-minded and effective with their clients.

Recent Developments in Eclectic Scholarship

So far, we have addressed eclecticism as if it were a unified movement. Different forms of eclecticism do share in their disaffection for single theories, and they do endorse a common definition of eclecticism, namely, “selecting what appears to be the best in various doctrines, methods, or styles” (Lazarus, 1986, p. 67). However, they disagree considerably in their reaction to this disaffection and their application of this definition (Arkowitz, 1997; Lazarus & Messer, 1991). Indeed, these disagreements have contributed to the evolution of contemporary eclectic psychotherapy (Newman & Goldfried, 1996). Consequently, we briefly review two major forms of eclecticism, unsystematic and integrative, and trace their contributions to the widely endorsed third form – technical eclecticism.

Unsystematic Eclecticism. The earliest form of eclecticism is by far the least systematic and probably the most criticized of the three. Indeed, this is the reason for its name – unsystematic eclecticism (Norcross, 1986). According to Gilliland, James, and Bowman (1989), unsystematic eclecticism assumes that “bits and pieces from different theoretical systems can be integrated within one counseling session with a client, to provide a stronger therapeutic treatment” (p. 294). These “bits and pieces” are not integrated in any theoretical or systematic manner, because unsystematic eclectics are wary that an integration would result in another single theory. That is, as comprehensive and innovative as this single system might be, it would still contain a coherent set of assumptions that would bias a therapist’s view of clients and limit a therapist’s ability to meet client needs. These biases and limitations would be self-defeating to unsystematic eclectics, because single sets of assumptions (single theories) were the original problem. Therefore, the primary attraction of unsystematic eclecticism is its openness to all theories, without any system for selecting the various components of these theories.

Unfortunately, the eclectic literature has not been particularly kind to this approach (see Held, 1995; Howard, Nance, & Meyers, 1986; Lazarus & Beutler, 1993; Starcevic, 1997). A crucial problem, from the perspective of this critical literature, is that the bits and pieces selected for an unsystematic eclecticism may themselves be incompatible (Lazarus, Beutler, & Norcross, 1992; Patterson, 1989). Techniques that are "directive" in nature are not compatible with techniques that are "nondirective," by definition (the "non" indicating their logical incompatibility). Case conceptualizations that presume a client's free will – being able to do otherwise – are not typically considered compatible with conceptualizations that presume some form of necessary determinism – not being able to do otherwise (see for example Slife & Fisher, 2000; Williams, 1992). These incompatible combinations would presumably lead to inconsistent, if not contradictory and irresponsible therapies. Yet, unsystematic eclectics are unable to prevent this.

Theoretical Integration. The crucial lesson taken by eclectics from this experience is that some sort of systematic integration of the various theories is required (Austen, 1997; Zhang, 1996). Proponents of theoretical integration believe that an integration across theoretical schools will provide the optimal match "between the intervention, the patient, the problem, and the setting" (Murray, 1986, p. 414). The integrationist posits an explicitly theoretical combination designed to avoid incompatibilities and yet meet the unique context of each client (Arnkoff, 1995; Austen, 1997). Some forms of common factors therapy are integrative in this sense (cf. Poznanski & McLennan, 1995), while other forms are better understood as technical eclecticisms, which are reviewed later in the paper.

Whatever is the type of theoretical integration, it begs the questions posed earlier on behalf of the unsystematic eclectic: How does one avoid incompatibilities and integrate various dissimilar theories without a metatheory to guide this process? And, if a metatheory does guide

this process, is not the resulting integration really only one theory? How, for example, does Freud's single theory differ from a theoretical integration? Freud took components from many divergent sources – philosophy, physics, and physiology, to name but a few – and integrated them all in one theoretical framework or metatheory, yet no one views him as an eclectic.

Critics of theoretical integration further contend that the “theoretical baggage” (Lazarus & Messer, 1991, p. 147) which individual theories bring into such integrative systems creates the problem of incompatibility (Lazarus & Beutler, 1993; Norcross, 1986). Poznanski and McLennan (1995), for example, discuss the integration of psychoanalysis and behaviorism in this regard, noting that “the introspective and metaphoric concepts of a psychoanalytic perspective are diametrically opposed to the extraspective and realistic concepts of a behavioral perspective” (p. 411; see also Goldfried & Castonguay, 1992; Patterson, 1989). In light of these difficulties, eclectics have learned that attempts at theoretical integration return them not only to the biases of a single theory but also to the original problems of incompatibility.

Technical Eclecticism The upshot of the problems inherent in these two types of eclecticism – unsystematic and integrative – is that a growing majority of eclectics now endorse some form of scientifically systematized eclecticism (e.g., Lazarus & Messer, 1991; Norcross & Beutler, 1997; Shoham & Rohrbaugh, 1996; Zhang, 1996), with the most popular form being technical eclecticism (Lazarus, 1967, 1995, 1997). Technical eclectics have attempted to learn two major lessons from the experience of their eclectic colleagues. The first is that an eclectic cannot be wholly unsystematic (Lazarus, 1996). Some sort of system is necessary to avoid a hodge-podge approach to therapy that is probably irresponsible, if not unethical. However, the second lesson is that this system cannot itself be another meta-theory or “any delimited school of thought” (Lazarus, 1995, p. 38; Lazarus & Beutler, 1993). Because a meta-theory or school of thought ultimately governs the explanations and techniques within it, and because this meta-

theory or school of thought must itself have a coherent (systematic) set of assumptions, the entire project can be said to be a single theory, with a single set of biases or "blindness," and thus vitiate the original reason for becoming eclectic.

Consistent with other forms of eclecticism, technical eclecticism champions the ideals of open-mindedness and comprehensiveness and disdains single theory approaches (Lazarus & Beutler, 1993). Unlike these other forms, however, technical eclectics integrate techniques rather than theories or aspects of theories. As Lazarus put it, "technical eclectics often work within a consistent theoretical framework (e.g., a broad based social and cognitive learning theory) but freely employ effective techniques from other disciplines without subscribing to the theories that spawned them. The fundamental principle is 'use what works'" (Lazarus & Messer, 1991, p. 145). In this way, the therapist has access to any effective technique that may work for any given client.

What gives the technical eclectic access to these techniques, and how might we know if they are effective? For technical eclectics, the answer to these questions as well as the solution to the problems of a single theory is to rely on science (Lazarus, 1967, 1995, 1997; Leger, 1998; Zhang, 1996). Lazarus, for example, contends that "the physical sciences model is necessary to illuminate those aspects of human endeavor that are open to the disciplined light of objective investigation" (Lazarus & Messer, 1991, p. 156), and that "the major question to ask is if there is any empirical warrant for the efficacy of a particular psychotherapeutic operation." (Lazarus, 1996, p. 63)

This reliance on science and its promise of empirical verification is attractive to technical eclectics for at least three reasons. First, science is considered to provide technical eclectics with comprehensiveness through its apparent universality – i.e., any therapy techniques can be tested and applied (Lazarus & Messer, 1991; Leger, 1998). Second, science is seen as systematic, without itself being subject to theoretical biases (Lazarus & Beutler, 1993). Third, science makes

possible the separation of therapy techniques from the theories that spawned them, so that the techniques are free from the biases and incompatibilities of these theories (Lazarus, 1995; Held, 1995).

These three reasons make clear the significance of science for the technical eclectic project. Science not only allows therapists to avoid the pitfalls besetting single theories and other forms of eclecticism; science also serves as a tool for selecting techniques without adopting the theoretical rationale behind them. Indeed, many of the main assumptions of technical eclecticism depend upon science – or, as we will contend, one particular formulation of science – for their validity. If science does in fact provide therapists with a relatively objective, value-free, and replicable means of separating techniques from theories and selecting the best techniques for each unique therapy session, then the other assumptions of technical eclecticism are also tenable.

The real question then, regarding the credibility of technical eclecticism, and perhaps the entire eclectic project, is the credibility of its grounding scientific assumptions. Specifically, do these assumptions allow for the comprehensive, open, and theory-free application of techniques that is necessary for the practice of technical eclecticism? Our basic answer to this question is affirmative, if one assumes a traditional, positivistic philosophy of science, broadly defined. That is, a broad positivism is the philosophical root of technical eclecticism's attraction for so many psychotherapists. We describe this root here to reveal its relation to the popularity of eclecticism. However, we later show how this philosophy of science has been criticized and disputed in ways that criticize and dispute the essential nature of technical eclecticism.

Technical Eclecticism and Logical Positivism

The philosophical grounding of technical eclecticism rests on three related assumptions of science: 1) its objectivity and value neutrality, 2) the comprehensiveness of its applicability, and

3) the privileged and distinct status it gives observable phenomena. Here we show why a traditional philosophy of science allows the technical eclectic to make these assumptions.

Objectivity and Value-Neutrality. For many philosophers and scientists, a commitment to objectivity and value-neutrality constitutes the very hallmark of modern science (e.g., Hempel, 1952; Nagel, 1986; van Frassen, 1980). As Heelan (1983) notes, “traditional realists will argue that the term ‘reality’ should be applied only to whatever is of its nature ‘objective’ in the special sense, that is, independent of human culture, history, and language” (p. 184-185; emphasis in the original). Although scientists are obviously human, with very human foibles and biases, they should nevertheless strive for bias-free findings, and the logic of science provides them a means of doing so. In this sense, the observations of the scientist can only be credible and accurate if they “do not distort or misread what they observe as a result of tradition, values, emotions, or other subjective influences” (Slife and Williams, 1995, p. 193).

Clearly, this notion of the need for objectivity and value-neutrality has played a major role in the evolution and increasingly widespread acceptance of technical eclecticism in contemporary psychotherapy. Technical eclectics have claimed that empirical science can free the therapist not only from the various assumptions and biases inherent in single theories but also from the individual biases that may influence the selection of techniques (Lazarus, 1995). The clinician can employ, as Held (1995) put it, “an expanding, scientific knowledge base about human problems and their solutions, without imposing on clients the theory and methods of any one school or system of psychotherapy” (p. 29). For this reason, many consider technical eclecticism the most ethical form of therapy (cf., Lazarus, 1996; Wilson, 1995). Technical eclectics defer to no single theory to justify their techniques, so they can claim to approach human psychological problems in an open and objective manner (Lazarus & Messer, 1991).

Comprehensive Applicability. Another central characteristic of the eclectic project is its commitment to examining whatever techniques work in therapy, regardless of the different theories that spawned them. This project requires a method that can keep this commitment. Such a method cannot be limited to a particular theory or time and place for its effectiveness; it would need to be universal to all important theories and situations – hence, the appellation the scientific method. Positivist philosophers of science believed they were able to accomplish this universality by wedding the early empiricism of the scientific method to rationalism (Slife & Williams, 1995). That is, one of the changes that has occurred in the evolution of positivism over the years is a recognition of the central role of reason or logic in science. This change is sometimes called logical positivism as an acknowledgment of this greater role (Polkinghorne, 1983). Logical positivism is viewed as universal to its subject matter because the logic of method is itself universal. Indeed, rationality in its most pristine form is often considered a universal and contextless process of thinking (e.g., transcendent of culture and historical context), so its incorporation in scientific method allows it to be applicable to all techniques and situations.

Clearly, this aspect of positivism is vital to the technical eclectic project. Recall that one of the major dissatisfactions of all eclectics was the limited range of any single theory. Adopting the assumptions of positivism ensures that maximal comprehensiveness will eventually be attained. All the techniques that are formulated can be tested, and all the principles that govern effectiveness can be discovered. This is not to say that eclectics claim to have already found these techniques and principles; it is only to say that these techniques and principles can and should eventually be found. No bias of method will prevent them from being found. This means, of course, that the comprehensiveness of science also depends on the first assumption, namely, that scientific method provides objective and unbiased access to reality as it is.

Privileging the Observable. A third major feature of a traditional philosophy of science is the status given empiricism, even over rationalism. Although positivistic science combines empiricism and rationalism – gathering observable data and analyzing it logically (e.g., statistics) – there is no doubt that the data, and thus the epistemology of empiricism, are considered the final and ultimate arbiter of knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1983). Empiricism holds that sensory experience is the only reliable source of knowledge. Historically, this philosophical assertion has led to the scientific notion that only that which is observable (a sensory experience) can be known with any degree of certainty (Holton, 1973). An empiricist can posit the existence of certain nonobservable and/or nonmeasurable phenomena – theories, attitudes, cognitions, etc. However, this epistemology requires that such phenomena be made observable (or operationalized) before experimentation can occur (Slife & Gantt, 1999). Carl Hempel (1952) was pivotal in formalizing these epistemological implications for scientific work. For him, the brute facts of data are not only primary to, but also independent of, any interpretations or theoretical accounts one might formulate to explain them.

This feature of positivism feeds directly into the project of the technical eclectic, because it allows a division between therapy techniques (what “works”) and the theories that generated them. In a clear Hempelian (and positivistic) spirit, Lazarus (Lazarus & Messer, 1991) has asserted that “Theories are essentially speculations that try to explain or account for various phenomena. . . . Observations simply reflect empirical data without offering explanations” (p. 147). That is, the separation of techniques from their theories is perfectly appropriate given the technical eclectic's belief that “however interesting, plausible, and appealing a theory may be, it is techniques, not theories, that are actually used on people. Study of the effects of psychotherapy, therefore, is always the study of the effectiveness of techniques” (London, 1964, p. 33). In this way, technical eclectics are able to focus exclusively on observables. The ideas that may underlie

or generate a technique are considered secondary to the observable aspects of the technique and their effectiveness with a particular disorder.

Technical Eclecticism and Post-Positivist Philosophy of Science

Recent advances in the philosophy of science have brought these three assumptions of scientific method into question. Previously considered to possess a bias-free logic of inquiry – allowing researchers to strive for objectivity – the scientific method is today recognized as being similar to other methods of analysis and evaluation, i.e., with its logic dependent on unavoidable biases, theories, and interpretations. Our purpose in this section, then, is to bring to bear the contemporary philosophy of science literature on those assumptions of the scientific method that are relevant to technical eclecticism.

Objectivity and Value-Neutrality. The most influential challenge to the positivistic model of science (presented above) is embodied in the work of such recent thinkers as James Bohman (1991), Paul Feyerabend (1988), Patrick Heelan (1983), Thomas Kuhn (1970), Stephen Toulmin (1972), Paul Roth (1987), and Richard Bernstein (1983). The central point of this philosophical analysis is that scientific progress is not driven completely by the scientific method, objective data, or an appeal to the canons of logic and rationality. Rather, change in scientific understanding is at least partially a product of social, cultural, and rhetorical forces – what Kuhn (1970) originally called a paradigm. As Gholson & Barker (1985) made clear, it is “impossible to claim the objective superiority of one paradigm over any other” (p. 755), because the paradigm dictates the criteria for what is acceptable. In other words, paradigms foster not only the theories tested by the logic of science but also the logic itself. As a philosophy of science, positivism is itself a paradigm of method. In this sense, scientists cannot get outside the dominant paradigm to examine it from some independent or objective grounds, so they can never know with certainty that their approach to studying the world is in any way superior to any other approach.

This lack of certainty would seem to raise the specter of relativism or subjectivism (e.g., Popper, 1970). In fact, the misconception that relativism arises at the slightest hint of a methodological paradigm has fostered the continued popularity of logical positivism. However, relativism only arises when cultural and rhetorical forces are thought to control completely the path of science. As Bernstein (1983) and others have shown (e.g., Bohman, 1991; Heelan, 1983; Roth, 1987), there are many other factors involved in this path, including the "stubbornness" of the data themselves (Slife & Gantt, 1999). The point is that cultural and philosophical biases are important factors in the methods of science. As researchers, we are guided in our data collection, analysis, and interpretation by a host of preexisting biases concerning what is interesting and relevant to our investigation. Likewise, what one sees in one's data is influenced by the preconceptions and biases that one brings to their interpretation (Slife & Williams, 1995).

What does all this mean for technical eclecticism? Foremost, it means that technical eclectics are not formulating therapy interventions that are completely objective and value-neutral. If the scientific method is itself guided by an uninvestigated framework that rules in and out certain topics a priori, then the results of this method are, in part, the results of a single philosophy that guides this framework. In this sense, technical eclectics are practicing forms of therapy and employing particular technical interventions that are rife with hidden assumptions, values, and philosophical biases – and, indeed, they may be doing so without fully realizing it. Despite its promise to “extrapolate empirically derived dimensions from existent literature and to create an objective theory of what changes can be expected under definable and controllable therapeutic conditions” (Beutler, 1989, p. 17), the scientific foundation of technical eclecticism is incapable of producing the objectivity and value-neutrality necessary for technical eclecticism to make good on such promises.

Comprehensive Applicability. Another problem with the positivist undergirding of science and technical eclecticism is its claim to comprehensive applicability. As described above, the notion that the scientific method can provide technical eclectics with a fully comprehensive approach to each client stems from their assumption that the scientific method is ultimately applicable to any theoretical or topical context (universal). This comprehensiveness means that no particular therapy is favored at the outset of investigation and that the data themselves (e.g., effectiveness) ultimately drive the experimental outcome.

However, several contemporary philosophers of science have taken issue with this assumption of comprehensiveness (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Bohman, 1991; Fuller, 1992; Heelan, 1983; Kuhn, 1970; Polanyi, 1962). Many contend that the formulation of the scientific method is inextricably connected to a particular context, with its own history, culture, and language. Indeed, many philosophers of science seem to ask, how could it not be historically and culturally derived? The scientific method cannot be empirically derived, because this would mean it was invented before itself to empirically derive itself – a “bootstrap” problem (see Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 4-5). Instead, the positivist philosophy of science that undergirds empirical methods was created by philosophers with philosophical axes to grind that stem in part from their culture and history (Slife & Gantt, 1999).

Positivist scientists view such philosophical axes as deleterious to science. As mentioned, the fear relativism and nihilism when the philosophical biases and assumptions of science are described. Consider, however, Paul Feyerabend (1988) as just one of many philosophers of science who see these philosophical biases and assumptions as themselves vital to scientific progress (see also Slife & Williams, 1995 for hidden assumptions in psychological research). Feyerabend (1988) contends, for instance, that scientific progress is not due to a neutral, unbiased, and rule-governed method. Rather, progress occurs precisely in spite of such

conceptions of scientific method. Feyerabend (1988) argues that scientific progress “occurred [historically] only because some thinkers either decided not to be bound by certain ‘obvious’ methodological rules, or because they unwittingly broke them” (p. 14). Although Feyerabend is known to be a bit of a philosophical maverick on some issues, he agrees with a number of prominent philosophers of science on this point – values and biases (informal philosophies) have a necessary and beneficial purpose. Informal philosophies of this sort not only cannot be avoided in the formulation of method, they should also be identified and appreciated for the role they play in a scientist’s pursuit of knowledge.

This conclusion has direct implications for technical eclecticism. Recall that this form of eclecticism prides itself in carefully and systematically selecting techniques for therapy, without the imposition of prior bias and theory (e.g., Held, 1995). If, however, the scientific method is not maximally comprehensive and does not apply to all contexts equally, but rather is rooted in a particular philosophy of the world, then technical eclectics are practicing a particular, theoretically driven eclecticism. We are aware that some therapists and researchers will claim that eclecticism is a more subsuming theoretical framework, one that is broader and more comprehensive than conventional single theories. However, evaluating such claims is a deceptively complex task (and certainly not a straightforward empirical enterprise; Kukla, 2001).

For example, there is surely no doubt about the subsuming properties of Freud’s framework, yet this framework is clearly not a universally endorsed model for theory construction. Moreover, Freud’s theory is frequently cited as a particularly biased approach in practice (e.g., Langer & Abelson, 1974; Liebert & Liebert, 1998, pp. 163-172; Torrey, 1992). That is, greater comprehensiveness is not necessarily the same as less bias. Just as with Freud’s theory, eclecticism has its own particular metaphysic, epistemology, and ontology (Gholson &

Barker, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1983) – among many that are possible – and garners its effectiveness from the therapists who apply these philosophical biases, however unknowingly.

This means, of course, that this particular philosophy of eclecticism inevitably favors more positivistic therapies over less positivistic approaches. For example, it is no surprise that Lazarus (1995,1996) operates primarily from within a cognitive-behavioral approach, an approach that is more amenable than, say, an existential approach to positivistic methods of science (cf. Baldwin & Slife, in press; Slife & Gantt, 1999; Slife & Williams, 1995). From a philosophy of science perspective, this is not a coincidence but is instead the manifestation of a pre-investigatory bias resulting from his (unacknowledged) endorsement of a positivistic worldview. For Lazarus and other technical eclectics, therapies that are less amenable to the scientific method (e.g., existentialism) are typically either dismissed as “unscientific” or transformed (via operationalization) to fit the positivist worldview (Lazarus, 1996; Lazarus & Messer, 1991).

It is thus no surprise that Lazarus (1996) concludes that “there are relatively few empirically validated treatments outside the area of cognitive-behavior therapy” (p. 63). With Messer’s (2001) recent review of empirically supported treatments concurring with this conclusion, there is the very real possibility that a great number of therapy techniques are being systematically excluded from the technical eclectic’s treatment repertoire, before their investigation has occurred. Moreover, the positive empirical evaluations of cognitive-behavior therapy may be the result of systematic bias rather than efficacy without such bias. Ultimately, then, technical eclectics have not escaped single theories, but remain bound to a single theory of science, a positivistic theory of science, which constitutes an institutionalized and perhaps unconscious bias that affects the practice of technical eclectic therapy.

Privileging the Observable. One of the more significant conclusions of contemporary philosophy of science is that observations are fundamentally dependent upon the shared

theoretical framework of the scientists themselves – the interpretive community. Indeed, as Heelan (1983) has noted, “Observations are clearly theory-laden – as Einstein and others have shown – since ‘it is theory that tells what scientific observation can perceive’” (p. 204, citation from Einstein, 1949, p. 13). In other words, not only do observable data not possess a uniquely privileged status as the final arbiter of truth, but what counts as observable is a function of one’s particular theoretical and interpretive framework (see for example, Kuhn, 1970; Robinson, 1998; Toulmin, 1972). Again, this dependence on theory does not have to imply relativism (or nihilism), because theory is also dependent on data (Bernstein, 1983). The point is that both theory and data are necessary and inextricably bound together.

Interestingly, even a philosopher of science as sympathetic to the positivist project as Karl Popper (1959) noted long ago that a simple inductive description of observables is prohibited by the very logic of positivistic science (i.e., the affirming the consequent fallacy; cf. Slife & Williams, 1995). Although Popper (1963) attempted to address certain aspects of this logic through falsification (Slife & Williams, 1995), his rejection of inductivism is generally accepted in the philosophy of science. Data cannot “speak” for themselves. Observables are not meaningful without some theoretical context in which to interpret them. Data cannot dictate or point to certain theoretical contexts, because, according to Popper, the logic of science makes many theoretical interpretations simultaneously plausible. Of course, this means that the interpretation of scientific observables can change as theoretical contexts change. Data originally interpreted one way can be later interpreted another way, if the interpretive community changes its preferred interpretive framework. This is not to say that the data can be interpreted in any way. It is only to say that more than one interpretation is always viable, and some interpretation (or re-interpretation) is always necessary for the data to be meaningful.

Clearly, this conclusion presents significant problems for technical eclecticism. Foremost perhaps, it prohibits observable therapy techniques from being viewed as a theory-free means of evaluating therapeutic effectiveness. As we have seen, technical eclectics have been most anxious to avoid the "theoretical baggage" that comes with these techniques (Lazarus & Messer, 1991, p. 147), at least as originally conceived. If they can assume that the original theories are divorceable from these techniques, then they can avoid the incompatibilities of these theories – when combined as eclecticism – as well as the single-theory problems that an integration of these theories might cause. The problem is that techniques cannot remain free from theory when severed from their original theoretical underpinnings. If the techniques are meaningful at all, and the fact they are considered "techniques" would lead one to believe they are, then they cannot and do not exist in a theoretical vacuum (Safran & Messer, 1997). Rather, in the process of separating them from their original theories, they have become connected to the theory of the person using them – in this case, the positivism of the technical eclectic.

One consequence of this theoretical transformation is that the techniques may become fundamentally dissimilar from what they were originally (see Messer, in Lazarus & Messer, 1991). That is, they are no longer the techniques of psychoanalysis, humanism, or behaviorism, because all these techniques require a theoretical framework to guide them. An attempt to divorce them from these frameworks ultimately means a new guiding framework, and not a simple combination of old frameworks (Safran & Messer, 1997). This new framework would presumably guide technical eclectics to perform these techniques in new ways. These new ways could be effective, but they may have little or no connection to the traditional techniques, as guided by the traditional theories.

A second consequence of this theoretical transformation is the exclusion of techniques that cannot be transformed to meet the assumptions of observability. If some therapies stress the

importance of unobservables, such as existentialism (e.g., Yalom, 1980), then the technical eclectic researcher must either make them observable (through operationalization) or view them as "unscientific" and exclude them from a discipline that considers itself scientific. In the end, technical eclectics fall prey to, rather than escape, the very criticisms they levy against single-theory approaches and other forms of eclecticism.

Technical eclecticism is not different, in kind, from any other single theory, with its own theoretical assumptions and biases and an exclusive set of techniques to fit such biases. The single theory of technical eclecticism is the philosophy underlying scientific method. This philosophy, like any single theory, is not universal, but is bound to the context of its particular culture, philosophy, and language of origin. This philosophy guides the practice of therapy in a theory-laden, rather than a theory-free manner, and may progress in spite of, rather than because of, its systematicity. Its criteria of effectiveness are decided before investigation, according to the biased goals of a "science-based" therapy, and the correctness of these pre-investigatory criteria are not themselves validated. Finally, techniques can never be meaningfully divorced from theory. Even if they are divorced from their originating theories, some theory is necessary for them to be viewed as therapeutic techniques. To assume that they are divorced from theory altogether is to practice an implicit theory that has not been empirically tested – in this case, the philosophy of positivism.

Prospects

The lesson to be learned from the philosophy of science literature is that some types of theory, bias, and values are unavoidable. No eclectic can avoid their own context and history, and so no eclectic can see the world in a neutral and unbiased way. Indeed, as many philosophers have shown, it would be a mistake even to try, because good theories and values are integral to good science and therapy. The problem is that there is an important sense in which some theories

and values can get in the way of good science and therapy. As the eclectic correctly senses, theories can sometimes constrain the therapist, closing off whole aspects of the client that may be important to recognize. Theories can also lead to client categorizing and labeling that restrict the therapist to a limited set of therapeutic techniques. In this sense, technical eclectics are rightly sensitive to the problematic effects of single theory approaches, but they are wrongly throwing the theoretical baby out with the problematic bathwater. That is, the technical eclectic rejects theory altogether when at least informal theory is inescapable.

How can the therapist avoid this dilemma? Philosophy is again an important resource for answering this question. Philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1995), Charles Taylor (1985), and Martin Heidegger (1962) describe another way to approach theory altogether (Slife & Reber, 2001). Their approach is in contrast to the quantitative approach of eclecticism. That is, the project of eclecticism is essentially a project of multiplication—either multiple theories (as in integrationism) or multiple techniques (as in technical eclecticism). As we have seen, the problem with this quantitative approach is that a single theory is always necessary to structure the multiplicity – a meta-theory for integrationism or a philosophy of science for technical eclecticism. This means that quantitative approaches always reduce to a single theory. They can never succeed in truly multiplying the number of categories available, because a single set of assumptions, and thus single set of biases, are necessary to provide coherence and systematicity.

On the other hand, the qualitative approach of Gadamer, Heidegger, and Taylor (among others) focuses on the quality of a theory vis a vis the qualities of the client (Slife, 2001). Although there is insufficient space to describe this approach here (see Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999), a brief sketch of some relevant characteristics seems in order. First, a qualitative approach requires therapists to recognize the inescapability of bias and the impossibility of neutrality. One consequence of this recognition is an attitude of therapeutic “humility.” Instead

of trying to avoid their biases (and striving to use the objective knowledge of psychology, as “experts”), therapists must humbly admit they have biases and values (to provide clients with a truly informed consent) and make every attempt to understand their consequences for the client (cf., Gantt, 2002; Kunz, 1998; Slife & Reber, 2001). This approach also sensitizes therapists to alternative values and biases that they can switch to and assume, depending on the context and case at hand.

Ultimately, this type of sensitivity (to the philosophical assumptions they hold and can hold) is a more sophisticated approach to the openness that eclectics have desired. Rather than assuming that true openness stems from a combination of all biases (unsystematic or integrative eclecticism) or from a suspension of all biases through science (technical eclecticism), this approach assumes that therapists should know their philosophical assumptions well and know of alternative assumptions to which they can move, if the therapy requires this.

This last phrase, “if the therapy requires this,” makes another assumption worth noting. That is, just because therapists are biased does not mean that they create reality and thus cannot be sensitive to the needs of clients and the context of the therapeutic situation. It is true that biases and values are a necessary component of the interpreted reality of therapy, but they are not the only component. Data, clients, and situations have their own impact on our perceptions, and thus can enable therapists and researchers to know which biases are the most meaningful or effective in any given situation.

A qualitative approach to theory, then, implies a sensitivity to the context of the therapy itself as well as a sensitivity to the biases and theory being used. By attending to these contexts, the therapist and the client can assess the extent to which their biases are impeding or facilitating therapy. An attitude of humility is paramount, because it allows one’s assumptions and theories to be wrong at any point in the therapy process. This attitude and sensitivity permit the possibility

of “surprise,” wherein therapists may unexpectedly find that their therapeutic orientation (or case conceptualization) is no longer appropriate to the therapy context. We believe this is already happening to a large extent in therapy practice. However, catching formal theory up to practice is vital to a discipline such as psychology, and a qualitative approach to theory is more consonant with contemporary philosophy of science in doing so.

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