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Avoiding an EST Monopoly: Toward a Pluralism of Philosophies and Methods

Brent D. Slife, Bradford J. Wiggins, and Jason T. Graham

We contend in this article that the EST movement is becoming an ideological and economic monopoly through the exclusive use of one philosophy of science—empiricism. This epistemology monopolizes the methods that produce the EST's. We provide lists of the values and assumptions that other scholars have demonstrated is endemic to empirical research, and we provide here an in-depth discussion about one central, uninvestigated value of such research. We, then, show the impact of this value—bias and favoritism—not only on the research itself but also on what is deemed an EST. This is followed by a discussion of a non-monopolistic alternative, an alternative that disallows the relativism and “anything goes” of psychotherapy's history but avoids the dogmatism of an exclusive ideology.

KEY WORDS: EST; method; philosophy; empirical; pluralism.

To contend that the EST movement is becoming a monopoly, as our title implies, must seem provocative. After all, monopolies are usually associated with economic dominance, the exclusive control of a commodity or service. If anything, empirical support—the “ES” of “EST”—is typically viewed as antithetical to dominance or exclusive control because Enlightenment thinkers formulated empirical support to combat, in part, the monopoly of the church during the Middle Ages (Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003). Empirical research is more associated with egalitarianism than with monopolization. Moreover, the scientific method is considered the transparent revealer of the actual and the truthful, not the bearer of some ideological or economic monopoly. Yet, these types of monopolies are precisely what we are contending is the outcome of current EST advocacy.

As we will argue, empirical investigations, and thus empirically supported treatments, are far from being transparent and devoid of ideological and economic

Address correspondence to Brent D. Slife, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; slife@byu.edu.

implications. In fact, the noted philosopher of social science, Donald Polkinghorne (1990), considers empirical investigation to be “opaque” rather than transparent (p. 93). What Polkinghorne means is that the popular notion that empirical research is value-free, or even that it minimizes such values, is a myth. As we will show, the traditional scientific method is full of values, a fact widely recognized in the philosophy of science. Although we favor evidence-based research to justify the use of therapeutic treatments, we dispute the notion that there is only one particular philosophy of science to provide this evidence. We argue, instead, for a pluralism of such philosophies, and thus methods.

We begin by describing the dominance of the EST movement in psychology. Although EST advocates do not yet control psychotherapy, there is clear evidence they intend to, using one particular philosophy of science only. Next, we describe why empirical research is opaque rather than transparent. We provide lists of the values and assumptions that other scholars have demonstrated is endemic to this research, and we provide here an in-depth discussion about one central, uninvestigated value of such research. We, then, show the impact of this value—bias and favoritism—not only on the research itself but also on what is deemed an EST. This is followed by a discussion of a non-monopolistic alternative, an alternative that disallows the relativism and “anything goes” of psychotherapy’s history but avoids the dogmatism of an exclusive ideology.

THE EST MONOPOLY

The acronym “EST” actually implies the monopoly. Empirically supported treatments are those treatments that have been evaluated by methods that are undergirded *exclusively* with *one* particular philosophical epistemology—empiricism. This philosophy monopolizes the methods that produce the EST’s. Although many may consider the term “empirical” to mean factual or objective, in the sense of exposing what is actual or real, the term actually points to the epistemology that was and is used to formulate and guide these methods (Slife & Williams, 1995). Empiricism is the philosophy that the main or only source of knowledge is sensory experience (Jones, 1969). Although the term empiricism can mean experience in general, including subjective experience, enlightenment empiricism in the traditional sense of science has meant sensory experience exclusively, such as observation (Leahey, 1991).

Observation is frequently thought to avoid values rather than be a value. Yet, a value is something that indicates what matters—which things we should pay attention to and care about (the things that matter) and which things we should ignore and not care about (the things that do not matter). Empiricism, as the adjective in “sensory experience” implies, functions in just this valuing manner. It tells us which of our many experiences matter most in science. Rather than subjective

experiences—including opinions, emotions, and spiritual experiences—it tells us that sensory or objective experiences should matter most to scientists.

Moreover, and similar to other values, empiricists *assume* (rather than know) that sensory experiences are more important for science than other experiences. Because one must make assumptions about the world of investigation before a method can be formulated, empiricist values had to have been assumed before empirical methods were originally designed. Indeed, these values have to be continually assumed before each new investigation with a different population or location. We will take up this issue in more detail later in another form—the success of empiricism. At this juncture, the point is that empiricism, like other value systems, functions in current research as a pre-investigatory belief system rather than a scientifically proven set of facts. It is part of the method, not the results.

Nevertheless, as many have argued (Heiman, 1995; Capaldi & Proctor, 1999), the philosophy of empiricism has served science well. Empirical evidence is the cornerstone of traditional science and the EST movement. The necessity of such evidence was recognized at the beginning of EST advocacy as “not only desirable but ethically imperative” (Wilson, 1995, p. 169). Although the phrase “evidence-based” treatment is sometimes used in the EST literature (e.g., Kendall, 1998; Norcross, 2003), this phrase frequently indicates nothing broader than empirical in the traditional positivistic, “randomized clinical trials” sense (Kendall, 1998, p. 5). As Kendall (1998) clarifies, the phrase “evidence-based” therapy is intended to mean that “the evidence in question must be empirical in nature” (p. 5). And the phrase “empirical in nature” means “manualized psychological interventions for specific disorders based on randomized controlled studies that pass for methodological rigor” (Norcross, 2002, p. 3).

Calls for methodological pluralism have occasionally been heard in this literature (Bohart, 2000; Elliott, 1998; Norcross, 1999; Slife & Gantt, 1999). However, these calls rarely involve a pluralism of scientific philosophies (see Bohart, 2000; Slife & Gantt, 1999 for exceptions). Primarily, they have been calls for broader decision rules as to what qualifies as evidence (Elliott, 1998), such as including both effectiveness and efficacy studies (Norcross, 1999), or expanding the focus of what is empirically supported, such as relationship methods and therapist interpersonal skills (Norcross, 2003). All these inclusions and expansions, however, are still firmly entrenched within empirical and positivistic philosophies of science.

Alternative methods, such as qualitative research, are rarely mentioned in EST discussions. When they are mentioned, they are frequently understood as mere procedures (e.g., focus groups) that supplement the logic and philosophy of empiricism rather than replace it (see Bohart, 2000; Slife & Gantt, 1999 for exceptions). True qualitative research as an alternate philosophy of science rarely plays any part whatsoever in those treatments deemed “empirically supported” (Joiner, Sheldon, Williams, & Pettit, 2003; Sheldon, Joiner, & Williams, 2003). As Sheldon

et al. (2003) sum it up, “many research psychologists reject nonquantitative data as leading too often to unreliable, nonreplicable or nonfalsifiable conclusions” (p. 304). “What matters is what *works*,” according to Joiner et al. (2003), “and what works can only be discovered by careful quantitative measurement and by controlled clinical trials” (p. 318).

If these quotes are any indication, many might say that the philosophy of empiricism *should* monopolize psychotherapy investigation. After all, hasn't this philosophy proven the most successful? Isn't it the most objective philosophy? As these questions indicate, there are basically two reasons for investment in the empirical status quo: the assumed success of this philosophy and its presumed transparency. We review these reasons, each in turn, and expose their often unrecognized, value-laden difficulties.

The Success of Empiricism

The first reason may seem formidable, because there are many who seem to put their faith in and sing the praises of traditional empirical science. However, there are also many who have made similar declarations of success about any number of products and conceptions, from snake oil to a flat earth. One of the central features of science, we believe, is that it requires justification for such claims, including justification for the claims of those advocating empiricism. Just as EST advocates rightfully (in our view) question the popularity of specific, unjustified forms of therapeutic treatments, we believe it is important to have the same requirements regarding the popularity of empiricism.

In this sense, the call for justification is the strength of the EST movement. Our problem is that one particular philosophy has come to monopolize the mode of justification, as if it were the only acceptable mode. *We would argue that there is currently no justification for empiricism as the only mode of justification.* Popularity alone surely cannot be the justification for this monopolization because many conceptions, such as a flat earth, have been conceptual monopolies without being true. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence for empiricism. The epistemology of empiricism has never been scientifically compared to other epistemologies. Such a comparison would be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct. Some epistemology would have to undergird the method of comparison when it is the very issue in dispute.

There have been, of course, rare historical forays into this issue in psychology, such as Watson's (1913) arguments against introspectionism. However, arguments such as these are exclusively theoretical contributions, not scientific (in the conventional sense). Although we support psychology's historical move away from introspectionism, the point is that this move was not decided on empirical grounds (through empirical comparison). It was decided on theoretical and philosophical grounds (through conceptual comparison). As a result, the claim that empiricism is

successful is an unscientific claim, at least in the sense of not having been justified in the usual scientific sense. Also, empiricism's popularity should not hold much sway among critical thinkers, because popularity is rarely a crucial criterion for truth.

The Transparency of Empiricism

The second reason for the current investment in the status quo is far more important and formidable—its presumed transparency. By transparency, we mean that empiricism is presumed *not* to be a value-laden philosophy at all. If anything, it is presumed to be the opposite of value-laden, a transparent and objective window to reality, which is either value-free or a minimizer of values and biases. Nevertheless, philosophers of science have long recognized that all philosophies have values (Curd & Cover, 1998), though they are sometimes not acknowledged. Indeed, this lack of acknowledgement is an important peculiarity of empiricists: *they attempt to re-categorize their values as nonvalues*. As we shall see, this re-categorization leads to considerable confusion because empiricist values clearly indicate what matters, just as any value. As we shall also see, these hidden values lead to unrecognized biases and favoritism in the EST literature.

To evidence this favoritism, we point to one particular value of empiricism and describe its biasing effect on EST decision-making. Limited space prevents us from exploring all the values involved in empiricism, particularly as they may affect the EST movement. These values (or value assumptions) include: reductionism, naturalism, objectivism, determinism, quantification, and atomism. Descriptions of these values are available elsewhere (Bernstein, 1983; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2003; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife, 2004; Slife & Williams, 1995). Our purpose here is to develop one empiricist value in depth—observability—so that we can view its impact on psychotherapy research and thus the selection of EST's.

ONE EMPIRICIST VALUE—OBSERVABILITY

Similar to other values of empiricism, observability is not typically understood *as* a value. In fact, as mentioned, it is typically understood as something that specifically helps researchers to avoid values. Nevertheless, observability is the notion that what counts or matters most in scientific method is what is observable and thus able to be imaged on our retinas. We selected this value because of its obvious connection to empiricism and science itself. In fact, this valuing of observables is so common in method and so seemingly inherent in science that it may be difficult for many to understand how else method could be.

Qualitative investigators may serve as a useful contrast here because qualitative investigators are more interested in meaning than in observables (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2000; Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Slife & Gantt, 1999). Meaning is, at least in part, inherently *nonobservable* because it is the relation between observables rather than just the observables themselves. The printed words of a book, for instance, are clearly observable, but the meaning or story line of the book is the nonobserved *relationship among* the printed words. Although readers typically experience the meanings of the story, as they read, these meanings never fall on their retinas. This may seem strange to say, because experience is often equated with sensory experience or even observation. However, this equation is simply not true. As we shall see, meaning is just one of many experiences that do not fall solely on our retinas (or do not result solely from sensory experiences), and many qualitative methods have been specifically formulated to detect and study these nonretinal experiences.

Still, this valuing of observability in traditional methods does not necessarily mean that nonobservables are never valued in science. It is important to recognize that observability is a value of *method*, not necessarily a value regarding the *content* or topics of science. As such, it implies that nonobservables are not important to method. However, the content of science is another thing, with many nonobservables considered important to many psychotherapy researchers, including relationships, attitudes, motivations, memories, and emotions. In fact, this content/method distinction is the impetus for the notion of operationism, the notion that nonobservable content *should* (to denote its value-ladenness) be translated into observable method (Leahey, 1980), as we will detail below. Yet, it is important to recognize that operationalizations do not typically *make* the nonobservable observable (Koch, 1992). The nonobservability of a person's intelligence, for example, cannot itself become external and visible in its entirety. Rather, what is hoped for in an operationalization, such as IQ, is that important manifestations of the nonobservable are observable, so that inferences can be made about the nonobservable (Green, 1992).

Because of the observability value, operationism has come to monopolize psychotherapy research and by extension EST research. Three implications typically follow from any method value, and we review each of these implications as they apply to observability and operationism. First, we will see that this value results in a selective attention to (and a valuing of) certain treatment factors over others. Second, this value leads to problematic operationalizations that are only vaguely related to their nonobservable constructs. Third, the restriction to observables effectively rules out whole techniques and even schools of therapy.

Selective Attention

The first implication of the observability value is that it guides researcher cognition and behavior, like all method values. Because the epistemology of method values observables, the variables most studied and conceptualized in research are

the variables most easily observed and operationalized. One need only consider the school of behaviorism to see this value in action. This entire school of therapeutic thinking is organized around the valuing of observables in method—relating, as behaviorists do, the observable environment to observable behavior. It is also no coincidence that behavioral therapy techniques are regularly seen on the list of accepted EST's (Messer, 2001); behaviorism has the same epistemology (and values) as traditional science (Rychlak, 1981, 1988).

However, this similarity of epistemology does not account for therapeutic interest in *nonobservables*, such as cognitive and relational factors. Mind is perhaps obviously nonobservable, at least as conventionally understood, but relationship also does not fall solely on our retinas. Although the elements involved in relationships (e.g., people) may fall on our retinas, their “betweenness”—the relationship itself—does not. If method does not value such nonobservables, then how do we account for researcher interest in phenomena such as therapeutic relationship? The distinction between method values and content values in science is again pivotal in answering this question. With this distinction, psychotherapists can value nonobservables in content, such as therapeutic relationship, without valuing nonobservables in method.

For example, as Norcross (2002) attests, most therapists *experience* the importance of therapeutic relationship, even if, as we note, this experience does not fall solely on their retinas. Indeed, relationship is so important that Norcross has adapted Bill Clinton's unofficial campaign slogan: “It's the relationship, stupid!” (p. 5). Even so, the values of method have led to selective attention (or selective *inattention*) in the psychotherapy research conducted. Norcross (2002) confirms in his review that therapeutic relationship has been curiously absent from evidence-based guidelines: “No evidence-based guidance is offered on which therapists behaviors contribute to or cultivate [good therapeutic] relationship” (p. 5). Why would such a widely acclaimed and vital factor in therapy have been so ignored? He attributes this absence, at least in part, to the difficulties investigators have in operationalizing (making observable) therapeutic relationships. In other words, this absence is a clear case of selective *inattention* to an obviously important variable in therapy because it does not fit the observability values of method.

Problematic Operationalizations

Norcross (2002) attempts to remedy this inattention to therapeutic relationship in his book. Still, his subsequent struggle with operationalizing this phenomenon illustrates another implication of this method value—problematic operationalizations. Problematic operationalizations, we believe, evidence the tenuous relationship between the observed and the nonobserved. After all, *if we can only know the observed operationalization, according to empiricism, then how is it that we*

can know its relationship to the nonobserved construct being operationalized? Wouldn't this relationship itself be unknowable according to empiricism? How are inferences to the nonobserved construct of interest defensible, or even possible, from this perspective? As we address these questions, three varieties of problematic operationalizations will become evident: vague relationships to the nonobserved, confoundings with the nonobserved, and epistemologically illicit research practices. All three categories, reviewed in turn, are a consequence of the method value of observability.

The problem of *vague relationships* results from a values conflict—valuing the observable because of its apparent importance to method *and* valuing the nonobservable because of its apparent importance to psychotherapy. Norcross (2002) describes, for example, some of the extensive discussions and struggles that went into his operationalization of therapeutic relationship. He ultimately “defines” it as “the feelings and attitudes that therapist and client have toward one another, and the manner in which these are expressed” (p. 7). However, Norcross says little about his primary struggle—that he must operationalize a factor that is nonobservable, at least to some degree, in a completely observable way. He obviously knows that defining therapeutic relationship as he does allows him to observe these expressions and/or observe the ratings of feelings and attitudes.

What Norcross does not seem to realize is that this definition may not involve the therapeutic relationship at all. As already described, a relationship is inherently the betweenness of the people who have and express these feelings; it is not the feelings and expressions themselves, certainly not exclusively. Feelings could be measured that have no connection whatsoever to the relationship. Just as IQ is not identical with intelligence, and hugs are not identical with feelings of love, so too feelings and their expressions are not identical with therapeutic relationship. Could, for example, a therapeutic relationship *feel* (subjectively) healthy and good, but it not actually *be* healthy and good? Could self-deception occur in the therapist or client, or could the subjective, individual opinions of both parties be wrong?

If this is possible, and surely it is, then wouldn't it be better to say that one is studying the operationalization—feelings, attitudes, and/or their expressions—rather than the relationship per se? Of course, the fact that a relationship is operationalized as feelings is itself problematic, because feelings are not directly observable and must themselves be operationalized, such as rating behavior on questionnaires. If this is true, then the studies that employ Norcross's operational “definition” are at least *two steps* removed from the phenomenon they wish to study—relationship to feelings to ratings.

This issue has often been handled by *ignoring any differences between the observed and the nonobserved*, and thus effectively equating the two. In the case of therapeutic relationship, for example, researchers routinely refer to the operationalization—e.g., expressions of feelings—as the relationship (cf. Norcross, 2002). After all, we cannot know the differences between the observed and

nonobserved because the nonobservable is not observed anyway. Why not just equate the two, as if there are no differences? Isn't this what Norcross (2002) implies when he says that he "defines" therapeutic relationship as the operationalization (p. 7)?

As another example, consider how Burlingame et al. (2002) rigorously review many of the varied operationalizations of "group therapy cohesion" (p. 72), another relational phenomenon that does not fall solely on the retina. The investigators they cite refer to their different and observable operationalizations as cohesion, and Burlingame et al. appropriately express concern about the common label for such diverse operationalizations. Still, similar to other reviewers, their concern does not prevent them from drawing collective conclusions about cohesion, as if this common label makes these dissimilar operationalizations somehow completely commensurable.

The problem is that few researchers and reviewers provide any justification for this commensurability and equation. The operationalization simply *is* the nonobservable construct—by definitional fiat. Nevertheless, we have no way of knowing if this equation is true, which is neither scientific nor empirical. Moreover, our profession has had many bad experiences with equating the observed and nonobserved. The historic equation of IQ with intelligence is just one example of the disastrous effects (Eysenck, 1971, Howe, 1997). Could there be a similar problem with equating therapeutic relationship and cohesion with expressions of feelings and attitudes? We believe such problems are likely. However, even if they are not, this practice of equation is a clear problem for the rigor of research and a clear testament to the power of this method value.

The value of observability raises a final problematic operationalization—*illicit epistemological practices*. Many operationalizations cannot themselves be supported or justified by the epistemology of empiricism. How, for example, is group therapy cohesion operationalized? If cohesion is not solely a sensory experience, in principle, then how can *anyone* know about cohesion from an empirical perspective? Here, psychotherapists have routinely engaged in what could be considered illicit epistemological practices. That is, researchers use the nonsensory experiences of the participants of their studies to garner ratings, etc., that allow the investigator to comply with the value of observability in their methods. For instance, as Burlingame, Fuhrman, & Johnson (2002) describe, many measures of group cohesion are based on ratings of experiences that do not fall solely on their retinas, such as the "sense of acceptance and support that a member felt from his or her group" (p. 72; cf. MacKenzie & Tschuschke, 1993).

However, these measures raise an important question: how can group members validly know or rate the cohesion of their group when it is a nonsensory, nonempirical experience (e.g., acceptance, support)—something the investigators themselves cannot supposedly know from this epistemology? Why expect group members to know nonobservables when empiricism would say they cannot? It

may be that researchers postulate the significance of group cohesion but cannot themselves get to these nonsensory phenomena through conventional epistemological methods. Therefore, they have others—for example, the participants—violate these epistemic values while the investigators themselves remain empirically pristine. We should add that we do not question whether group members (or the investigators themselves) can have nonsensory experiences of cohesion (or acceptance and support); we only question whether the method practice of rating such nonempirical experiences complies with conventional scientific values.

Pre-investigation Rejection of Treatments

Could the method value of observability select against and ultimately exclude an entire school of psychotherapy, preventing it from becoming an EST *before* investigation even occurs? Consider, for example, how the existential therapist, Irvin Yalom (1980), clearly asserts the *nonobservability* of many existential psychotherapy processes. The empirical study of these nonobservable processes would require that it be made observable through operationalizations. At a minimum, such a study would require a disputation of Yalom's assertion, contending that Yalom is wrong about the importance of the nonobserved in existentialism, because only the observed is knowable through conventional empirical methods. Unfortunately, as traditional scientific method is currently conducted, few researchers provide any such justification for their "definitions," even when they violate the very tenets of the constructs they are defining—in this case, their observability.

What if, on the other hand, Yalom is right and important aspects of existential treatment truly do involve nonobservables? *The plain fact is that these aspects could never be studied through conventional empirical methods.* Researchers must either make nonobservable schools of therapy observable, and thus fundamentally change them, or they must consider them "unscientific," and thus assume that such schools are not needed in the science of psychotherapy. In either case, investigators would have ruled out an entire school of therapy, not because of empirical evidence, but because of their method values, which themselves are not grounded in empirical evidence.

A corollary is that psychotherapy theories that comply with the values of empirical methods (e.g., epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics) should be those theories that receive the most empirical support (Messer, 2001; Slife, 2004). Cognitive-behavioral therapy, for example, is considered to have fundamentally the same epistemological and ontological assumptions as traditional science (cf. Polkinghorne, 1983; Slife, 2004). Stanley Messer (2001) observes in this regard: "that the vast majority of studies that meet the criteria set forth by the [EST] task force are cognitive-behavioral in orientation, or what can be referred to as outcome-oriented therapies. . . . Almost totally absent are the psychodynamic,

experiential, client-centered, family, and existential therapies” (pp. 3–4). In this sense, the positive empirical evaluation of cognitive-behavioral therapy could be due to systematic empiricist bias rather than the “objective” effectiveness of treatment.

A TRUE MONOPOLY

The ultimate upshot of this discussion is that the institutionalization of EST’s would be an ideological, if not economic, monopoly. If the empirical method is the dominant method, then empirical values, such as observability, dominate the ideology—from the selective attention to certain therapeutic factors to the selective rejection of entire schools of therapy, *before* investigation. Although the particular value we have examined here pertains only to methods, methods are considered the ultimate arbiter of justified treatments. Perhaps more pertinently, methods values are often the least examined values, because methods have so long been assumed to avoid values, making their values the least recognized in treatment justification.

Could this ideological monopoly have practical, even monetary, ramifications in the sense of a conventional economic monopoly? As Norcross (2002) notes, EST’s are increasingly connected to major economic and political forces: “For better or worse, insurance carriers and government policymakers are increasingly turning to such guidelines and compilation to determine which psychotherapies to approve and fund” (p. 3). Sanderson (2003) concurs with Norcross and believes that the “implications are clear: Failure to provide an empirically supported treatment from these guidelines, when one exists, may constitute malpractice in the eyes of the payor. . . [giving] the guidelines the ‘force of law’ by protecting clinicians who follow the guidelines from malpractice litigation” (p. 294). Surely, the implications are plain for a potential monopoly of mental health economics.

AN ALTERNATIVE: PLURALISM

What alternative do we have? We would first agree with what we believe is the spirit of the EST movement. The alternative should not be a relativistic “anything goes” approach, which probably typifies much of the history of psychotherapy. Still, the avoidance of relativism should not require the monopoly of one particular ideology—a scientific form of absolutism. We recognize that our modern culture has set up this false dichotomy, as though we have only an either/or—either relativism or absolutism—with the critique of one supposedly implying the advancement of the other (Bernstein, 1983). We would argue, however, that a *pluralism* would not have to involve either of these positions. Indeed, there is

a substantial literature on these alternative or “middle” positions (cf. Richards, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Widdershoven, 1992). We have space to outline only one such position here, but we are not insisting on this position. We only wish to point in the general direction of where conversation and critical examination should go on this issue, while avoiding the Scylla and Charybdis of monopoly and anarchy.

A2 The pluralism we have in mind originates from several sources (Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992; Polkinghorne, 2004; Roth, 1987; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Slife & Gantt, 1999; Slife, in press; Viney, 1996) and has two main features. First, it is not theoretically or philosophically driven, but is instead practically driven, in the tradition of William James (1907/1975; 1912/1976) or even hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1995; Ricoeur, 1978). This is not to say that this pluralism is not ultimately underlain with a philosophy. Even the move to praxis is ultimately a type of philosophy. Still, this type of philosophy takes its cues from the practical context of research rather than the abstract propositions of epistemology.

More specifically, researchers would assume a practical rather than a theoretical objectivism. Instead of philosophical propositions, such as empiricism, dictating method, the actual object being studied would dictate method. The postulated characteristics of the object—whether, for example, it is observable or nonobservable—would inform the methods used to illuminate it. For example, if the object is behavior—something that is visible and countable—then quantitative methods might best illuminate it. If, on the other hand, the object is meaning—something that is rarely considered completely visible or countable—then alternative methods, such as qualitative methods, might be employed. The point is that the values which best reveal the object of study would be the values used to formulate the method and study the object. Researchers would be object-driven rather than method-driven.

The second major feature of this methodological pluralism is its active and ongoing dialogue about the method values needed to illuminate the objects of inquiry. Because such values always precede investigations, the assumption of these values could never be decided conclusively through scientific investigation. As discussed above, method values have always been required to formulate and guide *any* psychotherapy research. Various informal investigations and methods could aid in making these decisions, and some value systems even “tried on” to see how helpful they are. Still, the value systems and methods would themselves be continuously on trial and never concretized.

The problem with the EST movement is that one philosophy has monopolized the values “market” to such a degree that other values have been unjustifiably suppressed. Although this monopoly is surely appealing in that it appears to eliminate an element of subjectivity in science, this elimination is really the unjustified institutionalization of a particular subjectivity (philosophy). Of course, the avoidance of such a monopoly means the consideration of other values, raising

the specter of relativism. However, the practical objectivism of this pluralism precludes an “anything goes” approach. Practical objectivism would ground the deliberation of such assumptive values in the object to be illuminated. In other words, good or correct values would be those that best illuminate the object for the purpose of investigation. Some sets of method values would undoubtedly compete with one other, and some would complement one another (cf. Slife & Gantt, 1999). Still, the arbiter of this competition would be the illumination of the objects themselves, not some unrecognized set of propositions (e.g., empiricism) as to what is correct *before* the object is even considered.

Perhaps surprisingly, this type of methodological pluralism has actually been the informal guiding light of natural science research (Dupre', 1993; Feyerabend, 1975; Viney, in press). Physics, for example, has liberalized its methods over the years, and in some cases abandoned them entirely, because its objects of inquiry changed so radically (e.g., the determinism of Newton to the indeterminism of quantum mechanics). In other words, physics has been driven less by its philosophy of science and more by the truth of its inquiry (Walker, 2000), which is the essence of our alternative. Psychotherapy and EST research should be guided less by a particular philosophy or epistemology and more by the truth of its inquiry. Indeed, we believe this alternative actually plays into the strength of the EST movement. In the same sense that psychotherapies require justification, we are advocating that method philosophies and their concomitant systems of values require justification in terms of their ongoing objects of inquiry. A3

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Queries to Author

- A1: Au: Please verify Norcross 2003 not listed.
- A2: Au: Please update.
- A3: Au: Please update.
- A4: Au: Please update.
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