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Chapter 1

Analytic eclecticism

In a *Washington Post* column titled 'Scholars on the sidelines,' Joseph Nye (2009) has lamented the growing gap between theory and policy in the field of international relations: 'Scholars are paying less attention to questions about how their work relates to the policy world.… Advancement comes faster for those who develop mathematical models, new methodologies or theories expressed in jargon that is unintelligible to policymakers.' Nye's fears are not unfounded. In fact, they are a stark reminder of the truth of Charles Lindblom's and David Cohen's (1979) observation made exactly three decades before: that there is a persistent chasm between what 'suppliers' of social research offer and what the prospective 'users' of this research seek. One reason for this has to do with the excessive compartmentalization of knowledge in the social sciences, and particularly in the field of international relations. Simply put, too much of social scientific research in the academe is divided across, and embedded within, discrete approaches that we often refer to as 'paradigms' or 'research traditions.' Paradigm-bound research provides powerful insights, but in the absence of complementary efforts to compare and integrate insights from multiple paradigms, the latter can become a 'hindrance to understanding,' as Albert Hirschman (1970) noted long ago.

Proponents of particular paradigms proceed on the basis of specific sets of a priori assumptions not shared by others. They pose research questions, establish boundaries for investigations, and evaluate research products in a manner that reflects these assumptions. Based on ontological and epistemological principles established by fiat, they posit clusters of theories or narratives that assign primacy to certain kinds of causal factors rather than others. In doing so, over time adherents of paradigms discover novel facts

and generate increasingly sophisticated arguments. But this is understood as progress only by the adherents of a given paradigm. It does not redound to progress that is recognized or appreciated, either by the discipline writ large or by those outside the academe who look to social scientists for usable knowledge. Instead, scholarly discourse risks becoming dominated by self-referential academic debates at the expense of addressing the complexities and messiness of everyday problems.

In this book, we aim to do more than show that paradigm-bound scholarship has come up short. We argue that it is possible, indeed necessary, for scholars to resist the temptation to assume that one or another research tradition is inherently superior for posing and solving all problems, and we maintain that we can and should do a better job of recognizing and delineating relationships between concepts, observations, and causal stories originally constructed in different analytic perspectives. At the same time, going 'beyond paradigms' does not mean discarding or ignoring the work being done by adherents of those paradigms. It means exploring substantive relationships and revealing hidden connections among elements of seemingly incommensurable paradigm-bound theories, with an eye to generating novel insights that bear on policy debates and practical dilemmas. This requires an alternative way of thinking about the relationships among assumptions, concepts, theories, the organization of research, and real-world problems. We call this alternative *analytic eclecticism*.[1]

We are not the first to note the shortcomings of paradigm-bound research or to make reference to eclectic approaches. However, our argument is distinctive in its effort to create a more coherent and systematic understanding of what constitutes analytic eclecticism, how it engages and integrates existing strands of scholarship, and what value it adds to academic and policy debates. This is more than a call for pluralism and tolerance. And it is more than a plea for more policy-oriented research at the expense of theory. Analytic eclecticism is about making intellectually and practically useful connections among clusters of analyses that are substantively related but normally formulated in separate paradigms. It rests on a pragmatic set of assumptions, downplays rigid epistemic commitments, and focuses on the consequences of scholarship for concrete dilemmas. It challenges the analytic boundaries derived from paradigmatic assumptions, and refuses to carve up complex social phenomena solely for the purpose of making them more tractable to

a particular style of analysis. Instead, it identifies important substantive questions that have relevance for the real world, and it integrates empirical observations and causal stories that are posited in separate paradigm-bound theories or narratives. In doing so, analytic eclecticism holds forth the promise of richer explanations. It also offers a means to reduce the gap between the practical knowledge required by policymakers and everyday actors, and the research products generated by academic disciplines and subfields. Since it depends heavily on the theoretical and empirical work generated within paradigms and research traditions, analytic eclecticism does not seek to displace them. The goal is not to synthesize, subsume, or replace paradigms. It is to demonstrate the practical relevance of, and substantive connections among, theories and narratives constructed within seemingly discrete and irreconcilable approaches.

In this chapter, we first lay out what we mean by paradigms and research traditions, and consider both their usefulness and their limitations. We then offer a more explicit definition of analytic eclecticism, and elaborate on the reasons that make it a valuable complement to paradigm-bound scholarship in the social sciences. We also address the issue posed by the supposed incommensurability of theories embedded in alternative research traditions, and we distinguish analytic eclecticism from unifying synthesis and from multi-method research and triangulation. We then identify three markers we employ to identify eclectic scholarship throughout this book.

Chapter 2 conceives of eclecticism in relation to paradigms in international relations, emphasizing the complex interactions among the distribution of material capabilities (privileged by realists), the interests and efficiency gains pursued by individual and collective actors (privileged by liberals), and the ideational factors that shape how actors understand their world and their identities within it (privileged by constructivists). Chapters 3 to 5 offer illustrations of eclectic work in the fields of national and international security (Chapter 3), global political economy (Chapter 4), and various forms of global/regional governance (Chapter 5). In the Conclusion (Chapter 6), we consider the lessons to be gleaned from these examples of eclectic scholarship in international relations. We do not offer a synthetic guide to eclectic research, which would run counter to the pragmatist ethos of analytic eclecticism. Instead, we emphasize the distinctiveness and usefulness of adopting an eclectic

approach to the formulation of problems, to the construction of explanations, and to the connection of theory to practice. We also consider the professional risks and trade-offs of eclectic scholarship for individuals, and argue that we should accept them in light of the limitations of paradigm-bound scholarship in reducing the gap noted by Nye (2009) between theory and policy. We also note the proliferation of parallel arguments in favor of eclectic styles of reasoning in other fields of scholarship and practice.

Paradigms and research traditions

Social science disciplines have witnessed many battles among contending approaches, each claiming to offer a superior analytic framework for making sense of core issues in various disciplines. What most consistently divides these schools of thought are not their substantive claims about specific phenomena but their metatheoretical assumptions concerning how such claims should be developed and supported. Although such foundational assumptions typically cannot be subjected to empirical tests, they influence many research tasks, including specifying whether the objective is to uncover general laws, develop deeper understandings of action in specific contexts, or encourage critique and political action; determining what aspects of phenomena are worth analyzing and how questions about these phenomena are to be posed; and establishing what types of concepts, methods, and standards are to be followed in developing answers to these questions, whether in the form of theories, models, narratives, or ethnographies.[2]

Following the seminal work of Thomas Kuhn (1962), some scholars have employed the concept of paradigms to characterize and distinguish approaches on the basis of their core foundational assumptions. Kuhn challenged Karl Popper's (1959) characterization of scientific knowledge, which treats falsification as the basis for continuous and cumulative progress. Kuhn interpreted the history of science as a sequence of discrete periods of normal science, separated by relatively short episodes of revolutionary science. A period of normal science is typically marked by the ascendance of a single dominant paradigm that determines the central research questions, the theoretical vocabulary to be employed, the range of acceptable methods, and the criteria for assessing how well a given question has been answered. When fully

institutionalized, the weak links of a paradigm are no longer recognized, its foundational assumptions are no longer questioned, and its anomalies are consistently overlooked or considered beyond the purview of acceptable research endeavors. Revolutionary science occurs in those brief interludes when scientific communities, frustrated by increasing numbers of anomalies, begin to focus on new problems and take up new approaches that help resolve such anomalies. Once a new cluster of questions, assumptions, and approaches has acquired large numbers of supporters, the door is open for the emergence of a new paradigm. Significantly, paradigms are assumed to be incommensurable with one another, making it impossible to integrate or compare theories developed within each of them.

Other scholars (Elman and Elman 2003) have employed Imre Lakatos' (1970) concept of research program to map diverse strands of scholarship and assess the possibilities for progress in a given field. Responding to Kuhn's rejection of objective markers of continuous progress, Lakatos sought to make room for a more pluralistic view of coexisting scientific communities, each with its own research program. Lakatosian research programs have a number of features – a 'hard core,' a 'protective belt' of auxiliary assumptions, and positive and negative 'heuristics' – which essentially perform the same functions as Kuhn's paradigms: they protect core metatheoretical assumptions from being challenged or subjected to empirical tests. Yet Lakatos extends the 'staying power' of a theory by giving proponents the opportunity to defend or refine their theories, rather than discard a theory at the first sign of disconfirming evidence or unexplained anomalies. This possibility is related to the distinction Lakatos draws between 'progressive' and 'degenerative' research programs. Progressive programs are capable of producing new theories that can surpass the explanatory power of past theories while striving to account for previously unexplained phenomena. Degenerative programs face a growing number of anomalies, and deal with these by offering ad hoc accounts that are only loosely attached to existing theories developed in a progressive phase. A Lakatosian view of science allows us to capture the varying trajectories of contending approaches in such fields as international relations. It still assumes, however, that substantive research proceeds forward within research communities whose members agree upon core assumptions, questions, methods, and standards of evaluation. Without such a consensus,

adherents of different research programs are not likely to hold common views on whether a given program is progressive or degenerating.

Whatever their utility in tracing the history of the natural sciences, both Kuhnian and Lakatosian models of scientific progress face limitations when it comes to capturing the enduring debates and intellectual shifts characteristic of international relations. The recurrent and divisive confrontations over various tenets associated with positivism are difficult to square with the notion of international relations as a 'normal' science with a single dominant paradigm. Lakatos does allow for the coexistence of research programs, but he does not envision entire disciplines marked by unending competition among rival approaches, each viewed by its proponents as 'progressive' and challenged by its opponents as 'degenerating.' Furthermore, various foundational assumptions can be weighted and prioritized quite differently by adherents of a research program; this can give rise to discrete strands of research that operate with their own 'hard cores' and 'protective belts,' as may be happening with various types of constructivism in international relations (Checkel 2006). Indeed, some of the most important foundational divides underlying inter-paradigm debates – for example, objectivism versus subjectivism, universal versus particular, agency versus structure, material versus ideational – have proven to be enduring 'fractal distinctions' (Abbott 2004, pp. 162–70) which generate and structure debates within the same paradigm or research program.[3] At the same time, certain ontological principles can be held in common by theories that originate in different paradigms – as evident in the fact that some constructivists accept the realist view of states as motivated by survival in an anarchic system, while others join liberals in emphasizing the emergence of institutionalized cooperation in international behavior (Chernoff 2007, p. 69). In short, while Kuhnian paradigms and Lakatosian research programs can be helpful in capturing some aspects of evolving debates in international relations (Elman and Elman 2003), rigid conceptions of either do not square with the complicated and contentious history of social scientific disciplines in general, and international relations scholarship in particular.

In this book, we employ a flexibly defined conception of paradigm, one that approximates the concept of *research tradition* as articulated by Larry Laudan (1977, 1996). Like Kuhn and Lakatos, Laudan recognizes the central role played by long-enduring episte-

mological commitments that govern the scope and content of scientific research in any given field. These commitments produce discrete research traditions, each of which consists of: '(1) a set of beliefs about what sorts of entities and processes make up the domain of inquiry; and (2) a set of epistemic and methodological norms about how the domain is to be investigated, how theories are to be tested, how data are to be collected, and the like' (Laudan 1996, p. 83). However, unlike Kuhn and Lakatos, Laudan offers no uniform model for how to track the progress or decline of successive or competing approaches. Instead, he suggests that different research traditions not only coexist, but frequently react to each other. He also observes that research traditions are not mutually exclusive when it comes to the empirical realities they interpret. Substantive theories from different research traditions can converge both in their findings and in their implications. Laudan goes as far as to acknowledge the possibility of a single scholar working in multiple research traditions even where their foundations are widely understood to be incommensurable (Laudan 1977, pp. 104–10).

Laudan thus offers us a view of social science in which intellectual history need not be neatly sequenced into a succession of Kuhnian paradigms. Moreover, at any given moment, diverse scholarly activities need not be shoehorned into one of a handful of Lakatosian research programs. Laudan's treatment of the varied and complex efforts to produce knowledge – with its attention to the possibilities of overlapping assumptions and converging substantive interpretations across research traditions – is much more realistic when it comes to mapping the diverse intellectual currents that have emerged in the field of international relations over the past half century. In acknowledging the possibility of scholars working across traditions, Laudan opens the door to the 'amalgamation' of theoretical constructs taken from diverse research traditions (1977, p. 104). We will use the terms 'paradigm' and 'research tradition' interchangeably throughout this book, and will understand both terms as referring to the latter, as characterized by Laudan.

Substantive research that is conceptualized and pursued within paradigms has much to contribute. For any given problem, before a more expansive dialogue can take place among a more heterogeneous community of scholars, it is useful to first have a more disciplined dialogue on the basis of a clearly specified set of

concepts, a common theoretical language, and a common set of methods and evaluative standards predicated on a common metatheoretical perspective. Such a set of initial shared understandings allows for focused empirical research that can be more easily coded, compared, and cumulated within distinct research traditions. This process also facilitates the generation of clear, parsimonious arguments as well as rudimentary stocks of knowledge that can help to operationalize and delimit further research without having to reinvent the wheel each time. In international relations, for example, the (neo)realist paradigm provided a common theoretical language and analytic framework for focused debates concerning such phenomena as the causes of war, patterns of alliance-building, and the logic of deterrence. Similarly, neoliberal theorists adopted a distinct set of metatheoretical assumptions as their starting point in order to develop a core literature on the definition and effects of interdependence and on the different routes to institutionalized cooperation. It is also worth emphasizing that 'creative confrontations' (Lichbach 2007, p. 274) between paradigms have often spurred intellectual progress within a paradigm by motivating its adherents to refine their theories and narratives in response to challenges from others.

These sorts of intellectual benefits are not, however, a guarantee of progress for any discipline writ large. Different paradigms adopt different strategies for limiting the domain of analysis, identifying research puzzles, interpreting empirical observations, and specifying relevant causal mechanisms. Given the emphasis on parsimony in the social sciences, adherents of paradigms also tend to rely heavily on simplifications that make it easier to problematize complex social phenomena and apply their preferred concepts and tools. Those aspects of reality that are not readily problematized and analyzed within a given analytic framework are often ignored, 'blackboxed,' or treated as 'exogenous to the model.' What makes this practice problematic is that the same empirical phenomenon may be parsed in different ways for no other reason than to enable the application of assumptions, concepts, and methods associated with a given metatheoretical perspective. And because each paradigm puts forward its own distinct criteria for evaluating the theories it engenders, there is no basis for shared criteria that a discipline as a whole can employ to compare the usefulness of theories for addressing real-world phenomena. As Ian Shapiro (2005, p. 184) notes, 'if a phenomenon is characterized as it is so as

to vindicate a particular theory rather than to illuminate a problem that has been independently specified, then it is unlikely to gain much purchase on what is actually going on.'

Thus, it is not surprising that there has been growing interest in alternatives to scholarship that is explicitly or implicitly designed to defend the core metatheoretical postulates of a paradigm or research tradition. Such alternatives focus on the practical utility of theories in relation to concrete problems in the real world rather than on their ability to meet the criteria established by proponents of particular paradigms. Within the context of international relations, a growing number of scholars (including those featured in Chapters 3 to 5 in this book) have chosen to bypass the paradigm wars. Instead, they address vexing issues of both scholarly and practical import through complex arguments that incorporate elements of theories or narratives originally drawn up in separate research traditions. Many of these works are also a response to the growing gap between self-contained, academic debates and broader public debates over policy and practice. What we call analytic eclecticism is intended to capture the contributions of, and provide a coherent intellectual rationale for, this relatively new movement that resists 'a priori constraints on the kinds of questions that social scientists ask of social life and on the kinds of theories they are likely to entertain' (Shapiro and Wendt 2005, p. 50).

What analytic eclecticism is and does

Simplifications based on a single theoretical lens involve trade-offs, and can produce enduring blind spots unless accompanied by complementary, countervailing efforts to 'recomplexify' problems (Scott 1995). Without such efforts, academic discourse risks becoming little more than a cluster of research activities addressing artificially segmented problems, with little thought to the implications of findings for real-world dilemmas facing political and social actors. This is where analytic eclecticism, despite its own limitations (noted below), makes its distinctive contribution as social scientists seek to contend with the complexity of social phenomena that bear on the practical dilemmas and constraints faced by decision makers and other actors in the 'real' world.

We define as eclectic *any approach that seeks to extricate, translate, and selectively integrate analytic elements – concepts, logics, mechanisms, and interpretations – of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance*. Paradigm-bound scholarship typically focuses on questions that conform to particular metatheoretical assumptions and lend themselves to the use of particular concepts and approaches. Analytic eclecticism takes on problems as they are understood and experienced by political actors, without excessively simplifying such problems simply to fit the scholarly conventions or theoretical boundaries established by any one tradition. Paradigm-bound scholarship typically assumes the ontological and causal primacy of certain types of phenomena, mechanisms, and processes while disregarding or marginalizing others. Analytic eclecticism explores how diverse mechanisms posited in competing paradigm-bound theories might interact with each other, and how, under certain conditions, they can combine to affect outcomes that interest both scholars and practitioners. In this section, we elaborate on the rationale for eclectic scholarship, consider the challenge of incommensurability, and sharpen the definition of analytic eclecticism by stipulating what it is not.

The rationale for analytic eclecticism

Even though there is no basis for definitively establishing whether one set of a priori principles is inherently more 'correct' than others, paradigms and research traditions proceed on the basis of a distinct set of foundational principles, and frame their problems and arguments accordingly. This means that the kinds of empirical observations and causal logics offered in defense of a theoretical argument developed in one paradigm will not have the same significance for a theoretical argument developed on the basis of a different set of foundational assumptions. Certainly, one can still work within a single paradigm to reveal its full potential. However, the reasonableness of the core foundational postulates identified with competing paradigms also justifies a more eclectic search for hidden connections and complementarities among theories embedded in different paradigms. In the context of the philosophy of science, this position is analogous to one invoked by John Vasquez (2003, p. 426) in defending his use of multiple frames of appraisal:

> Eclecticism is a well-known response to the quandary of having to adapt a philosophy when one finds all existing philosophies having some flaws but, at the same time, some elements worthy of adopting. This is the situation in all of the social sciences when we find ourselves confronting the fields of epistemology and philosophy of science. It is perfectly permissible to select one frame and apply it systematically, but given that there is no one single flawless frame, there is no reason that would logically prohibit the use of other frames as well.

There exists also a second and positive reason for making more space for analytic eclecticism: eclectic modes of inquiry increase the chances that students of world politics, and the ordinary actors they claim to study, might more frequently generate more useful theoretical and empirical insights. These insights can elude adherents of paradigms who view their problems through distinct lenses that are specifically designed to filter out certain 'inconvenient' facts to enable a more focused analysis. The very features that enable proponents of a paradigm to delimit the objects of their research entail that the research will not speak to a range of potentially relevant phenomena, processes, and mechanisms. This is precisely why analytic eclecticism is a vitally important complement to paradigmatic scholarship: it forgoes the simplifications required by paradigmatic boundaries and permits a more comprehensive assessment of the practical relevance and relative significance of findings generated within multiple paradigms.

This line of argument harkens back to Hirschman's (1970, p. 341) observation that experienced politicians, whose intuitions are more likely to take into account 'a variety of forces at work,' frequently offer more useful conjectures and forecasts in a given situation than do adherents of paradigms, who necessarily ignore some of these forces and run the risk of a high degree of error in their efforts to explain phenomena and forecast large-scale transformations. Paradigms may be 'useful for the apprehending of many elements' in the unfolding of significant transformations; but, for Hirschman (1970, p. 343), proponents of specific paradigms have little to offer to actors seeking to engineer social change:

> The architect of social change can never have a reliable blueprint. Not only is each house he builds different from

> any other that was built before, but it also necessarily uses new construction materials and even experiments with untested principles of stress and structure. Therefore what can be most usefully conveyed by the builders of one house is an understanding of the experience that made it all possible to build under these trying circumstances.

Echoing Hirschman's position, Philip Tetlock (2005, p. 214) contends that a single analytic framework 'confers the benefits of closure and parsimony but desensitizes us to nuance, complexity, contingency, and the possibility that our theory is wrong.' Utilizing differently calibrated tests of judgmental accuracy in a wide variety of settings, Tetlock's study of decision making demonstrates that grossly inaccurate forecasts are more common when experts employ a single parsimonious approach and rely excessively upon broad abstractions 'to organize messy facts and to distinguish the possible from the impossible' (Tetlock 2005, p. 88). Conversely, better forecasts are more likely when experts rely on various kinds of knowledge and information to improvise ad hoc solutions in a rapidly changing world. Adapting the famous reference from Isaiah Berlin's work, Tetlock suggests that, all other things being equal, 'eclectic foxes' tend to do better than 'intellectually aggressive hedgehogs.' What distinguishes the cognitive style of foxes and enables them to gain higher forecasting skill scores is their refusal 'to be anchored down by theory-laden abstractions,' along with their readiness 'to blend opposing hedgehog arguments' (Tetlock 2005, p. 91).

Analytic eclecticism represents such an effort at blending, a means for scholars to guard against the risks of excessive reliance on a single analytic perspective. This is particularly true when it comes to understanding intersections and interactions among multiple social processes in different domains of social reality. Peter Hall (2003, p. 387) notes that the ontologies guiding the study of politics are increasingly characterized by 'more extensive endogeneity and the ubiquity of complex interaction effects.' Accordingly, analytic eclecticism refuses to exclude certain aspects of social phenomena from the framework of analysis simply for the purpose of satisfying boundary conditions and scholarly conventions linked to a priori paradigmatic assumptions. Instead, it trains its sights on the connections and interactions among a wide range of causal forces normally analyzed in isolation from one another. This does not

guarantee consensus on forecasts or prescriptions that can assist policymakers and lay actors. It does, however, encourage a wider, more open-ended conversation about how the different causal forces identified by proponents of different paradigms might coexist as part of a more complex, yet usable analytic framework that helps in making sense of concrete social phenomena.

Analytic eclecticism is also a response to what Shapiro (2005, p. 2) refers to as 'the flight from reality' among academics, that is the growing gap between theoretical debates within the academe and demands for policy relevance and practicality outside it. We are not suggesting here that all academic scholarship be reorganized so as to cater to the existing agendas of policymakers. Indeed, as Anne Norton (2004) cautions, problem-oriented scholarship can end up enlisting scholars in the unreflective service of those exercising power. In this it often reinforces acceptance of particular worldviews and uniform modes of inquiry at the expense of critical thinking in relation to existing policy agendas and practices. At the same time there exists a very real danger of scholarship getting overly preoccupied with purely academic disputes that are hermetically blocked off from public discourse and policy debates about important issues of interest to both scholars and practitioners. Analytic eclecticism is part of a wider effort to restore 'the balance between detachment and engagement, between withdrawal behind the monastic walls of the university and the joys and dangers of mixing with the profane world outside' (Wallace 1996, p. 304).

The not insurmountable challenge of incommensurability

Trafficking in theories drawn from competing paradigms has its hazards. Most significant is the possible incommensurability across theories drawn from different paradigms. The incommensurability thesis has its roots in early twentieth-century philosophy, in the work of Pierre Duhem (1954) among others. In contemporary discussions, it is most famously associated with arguments of Paul Feyerabend (1962) and Thomas Kuhn (1962). The thesis makes a straightforward claim. Because they are formulated on the basis of distinct ontologies and epistemological assumptions, the specific concepts, terms, and standards used in one theoretical approach are not interchangeable with those used in another. There can be no

equivalence, either in the meaning of concepts used in different paradigms, or in the standards established by those paradigms to evaluate or compare theories. Theories cannot be validated or refuted on the basis of any one set of empirical observations. Simply put, there exists no agreed-upon understanding about the significance of specific observations or about the testing protocols followed by proponents of different theories.

The incommensurability thesis could be interpreted in such a way as to render futile any effort to integrate the concepts, analytic principles, and theoretical propositions formulated across different research traditions. As James Johnson (2002) notes, danger lurks when we move between research traditions founded on competing ontological and epistemological principles. Specifically, unrecognized conceptual problems are likely to subvert the explanatory objectives of a theory when we use its conceptual vocabulary unreflectively in a fundamentally different analytic framework. Moreover, there is the danger that attempts at integrating theories from different paradigms may superficially homogenize fundamentally incompatible perspectives at a higher level of abstraction without enhancing our ability to understand complex phenomena on the ground (Harvey and Cobb 2003, p. 146). The problem of incommensurability thus poses an important challenge for eclectic analyses. For two reasons, however, we do not believe that the problem is insurmountable.

First, the incommensurability thesis is most compelling when it comes to uniform criteria for evaluating diverse theories; it is much less constraining when it comes to integrating elements from these theories. Donald Davidson (1974) and Hilary Putnam (1981) have both noted that the incommensurability thesis would be valid only if it were completely impossible to translate terms expressed in the language of one theoretical scheme into the language of another. Putnam (1981, p. 115; see also Oberheim 2006, p. 28) argues: '[I]f the thesis were really true, then we could not translate other languages – or even past stages of our own language.' Others have suggested that a 'hard' version of the incommensurability thesis entails a narrow vision of science in which various theories are treated solely as mutually exclusive explanatory systems, when in reality key elements or terms within certain theories can be adjusted and incorporated into others (Hattiangadi 1977; Wisdom 1974).[4] In fact, Feyerabend himself was primarily concerned with the idea of neutral testing protocols that could be invoked to compare

different types of theories; he neither viewed incommensurability as implying untranslatability, nor assumed that translatability was a precondition for theory comparison (Oberheim 2006). The incommensurability thesis does pose a serious problem for the notion of objective criteria for *evaluating* theories drawn from different paradigms. When it comes to combining elements from different theories, however, the challenge is not as severe as is frequently assumed.

Second, within the context of the social sciences, it is worth noting that theories concerning substantive questions must ultimately rely on empirical referents to operationalize concepts, variables, and mechanisms. These referents provide a means for adjusting and integrating features of theories originally embedded in different paradigms. By focusing on the substantive indicators employed to apply concepts, it becomes possible to reconceptualize and partially combine specific causal links drawn from different paradigm-bound theories. Alternatively, as Craig Parsons (2007, p. 3) notes, it is possible to break down competing explanatory logics into modules in such a way that they become compatible at a higher level of abstraction, 'such that we could imagine a world in which all were operating while we debate how much variants of each contributed to any given action.' It thus becomes possible to temporarily separate foundational metatheoretical postulates from specific substantive claims or interpretations. This, in turn, opens the door to direct comparison between, and greater integration of, analytic elements drawn from casual stories embedded in different paradigms so long as these stories concer similar or related phenomena.[5]

These observations suggest that the problem of incommensurability is a relative one. Even within a single paradigm, the same term can be defined and used differently by different scholars offering different causal stories. Admittedly, the challenge is greater when traversing paradigms. But it is not insurmountable as long as proper care is taken to consider the premises upon which specific analytic components are operationalized. It is possible to ensure that concepts and analytic principles are properly understood in their original conceptual frameworks, and to adjust or translate these terms by considering how they are operationalized in the relevant empirical contexts by proponents of various paradigms. This does not guarantee theoretical coherence or conceptual equivalence in all

cases, but it does point to possibilities for limiting the problem of incommensurability.

Clarification: What analytic eclecticism is not

Analytic eclecticism is not intended as a means to hedge one's bets to cope with uncertainty, as Göran Therborn (2005, pp. 25–6) has suggested. We view eclecticism as focused on seeking the best answer for a problem at any given time, on the basis of relevant insights drawn from existing theories and narratives. We also see it as courageous in that it requires scholars to engage in research without the 'protective belts' and 'negative heuristics' (Lakatos 1970) that often shield scholars operating within the confines of a research program. In addition, eclectic scholars have to engage quite diverse cognitive styles while coping with wide-ranging challenges from those who have greater commitment to, and more command over, specific theoretical elements.

Analytic eclecticism is not predicated upon the idea that incorporating elements from diverse theories will necessarily provide a single 'correct' answer. A commitment to an eclectic approach leaves ample room for disagreement about the significance of particular configurations and the relative weights of various causal forces in relation to a specified problem. The point is not to insist on consensus on substantive issues by mechanically staking out an intermediate position between starkly opposed perspectives. Rather, it is to ensure that communities of scholars do not speak past each other when they simplify complex phenomena and slice up real-world problems in line with their preferred theoretical vocabularies and analytic boundaries.

Analytic eclecticism does not imply that 'anything goes.' In fact, the general definition of eclecticism as well as its utility in a specific context depends on the recognition that paradigm-bound research has generated plentiful evidence about the causal significance of various mechanisms and processes operating in some domain of the social world. In other words, analytic eclecticism requires us not only to appreciate the theories and narratives developed within different paradigms, but also to make the wager that they contain important causal insights that need to be taken seriously in any effort to make sense of complex social phenomena. It is entirely possible, indeed likely, that these insights might never have emerged

without the concerted efforts of researchers operating on the basis of paradigmatic assumptions and boundaries. The value-added of analytic eclecticism lies not in bypassing paradigm-bound scholarship or giving license to explore each and every imaginable factor, but in recognizing, connecting, and utilizing the insights generated by paradigm-bound scholarship concerning the combined significance of various factors when domains of social analysis are no longer artificially segregated. Both logically and temporally, analytic eclecticism follows paradigmatically organized efforts to develop insights and arguments about segments of social phenomena. As Parsons (2007, p. 43) notes, 'There is no solid middle ground without poles, no useful eclecticism without distinct things to mix.'

Analytic eclecticism is not theoretical synthesis. It is true that what we regard as 'eclecticism' is sometimes referred to casually as 'synthesis.' Gunther Hellmann (2003, p. 149) speaks of a 'pragmatic fusion of synthesis and dialogue' in promoting open-ended communication and combinatorial problem solving, both of which we associate with eclecticism. We view analytic eclecticism as a flexible approach that needs to be tailored to a given problem and to existing debates over aspects of this problem. As such, it categorically rejects the idea of a unified synthesis that can provide a common theoretical foundation for various sorts of problem. Genuine theoretical synthesis requires something very rare and extraordinary: a marked departure from the core ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with contending research traditions, followed by a convergence upon a new set of foundational assumptions that will bound and guide research on all kinds of substantive issues and problems. Without such a convergence, efforts at synthesis are likely to remain, at best, intellectually hegemonic projects that end up marginalizing the contributions produced by existing paradigms (Lichbach 2003).

Andrew Moravcsik (2003) offers a dissenting view. He recognizes that theories operate on the basis of different ontologies, but he views theoretical synthesis as both possible and desirable so long as elements of a synthetic argument are disaggregated and tested with specific methods. We share the pragmatic spirit of Moravcsik's argument, which downplays epistemic principles. However, we are not certain that it constitutes a move towards genuine 'synthesis' as the term is normally understood. Moravcsik implies that synthesis is additive, with each element constituting an independent

proposition and subjected to a specific type of test. However, different methods of theory testing are predicated on different epistemological assumptions linked to Popperian, Hempelian, and Lakatosian views on the role of empirical observations in the development of theory. In contemporary social science, while some are content with an exclusive focus on statistical tests, others are more concerned with internal logical consistency than with the results of any one particular form of external empirical validation. Moreover, the testing of different components of a 'synthetic' theory would require scholars to put the emphasis right back on the separate causal claims, drawing attention away from the complex interaction effects at play within a given context or problem. Eclectic work does need to be assessed in relation to available evidence and alternative arguments. Such work cannot, however, be evaluated solely on the basis of separate tests applied to discrete components; it is also necessary to consider the originality and utility of the whole as it relates to both existing scholarly debates and concrete issues of interest to policymakers or other practitioners.

Finally, analytic eclecticism is not coterminous with multi-method research or methodological triangulation (Jick 1979; Tarrow 1995; Lieberman 2005; Capoccia 2006). To be sure, analytic eclecticism benefits from the pluralistic impulse associated with multi-method research. Moreover, attempts to investigate the interaction between macro-level phenomena, micro-level decision making and context-specific processes will benefit from attention to findings generated through different kinds of approaches. Analytic eclecticism thus requires a broad understanding of the particular strengths, limitations, and trade-offs across different methodological perspectives. Yet it is important not to conflate analytic eclecticism with multi-method research. Analytic eclecticism is focused on the theoretical constructs that we deploy to capture the complexity of important social problems. The combinatorial logic of analytic eclecticism depends not on the multiplicity of methods but on the multiplicity of connections between different mechanisms and logics normally analyzed in isolation in separate research traditions. In principle, such a project can be advanced by the flexible application of a single method – be it game theory, regression analysis, case studies, or ethnography – so long as the problem and the emergent causal story take into account elements drawn from theories developed in separate paradigms.

Recognizing analytic eclecticism

Eclecticism can be pursued at many levels, ranging from the negotiation of competing strands of analysis within a paradigm to a more holistic search for interactions among theoretical principles found across disciplines as diverse as biology and sociology. In the particular context of international relations, we distinguish analytic eclecticism from paradigm-driven research on the basis of three markers. These are related to the manner in which problems are recognized and articulated, the complexity of the explanatory strategy and causal story, and the extent of pragmatic engagement with concrete real-world dilemmas and conditions (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 *The markers of eclectic scholarship*

- Open-ended problem formulation encompassing complexity of phenomena, not intended to advance or fill gaps in paradigm-bound scholarship.
- Middle-range causal account incorporating complex interactions among multiple mechanisms and logics drawn from more than one paradigm.
- Findings and arguments that pragmatically engage both academic debates and the practical dilemmas of policymakers/practitioners.

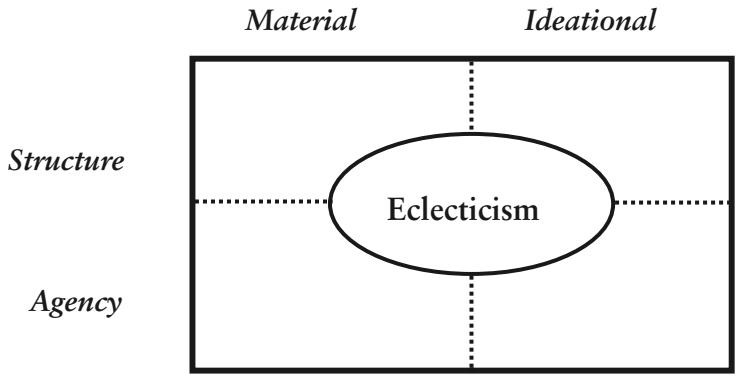
First, analytic eclecticism features the articulation of problems that reflect, rather than simplify, the complexity and multi-dimensionality of social phenomena of interest to both scholars and practitioners. Research questions within paradigm-bound projects tend to be formulated to test theories derived from that paradigm, to fill in gaps thought to exist among theories constructed within the paradigm, or to explore anomalies or new phenomena that these theories have yet to account for. That is not to say that adherents of paradigms are not concerned about concrete social phenomena or policy debates. However, the fact remains that the kinds of question privileged in paradigm-bound research rely on a set of cognitive structures – concepts, foundational assumptions, and analytic principles – to delimit and simplify complex social phenomena. Such simplification can be fruitful and is often unavoidable in light of practical research constraints, especially in relation to phenomena on which there is little existing research. It is also true that 'scientists always choose or sample a part of reality to

serve as the object of investigation' (Lichbach 2003, p. 135). However, the *extent* to which and the *manner* in which social phenomena are simplified in the articulation of research questions matter greatly in the evolution of our understanding. As Shapiro (2005, p. 184) argues: 'If the problems posited are idiosyncratic artifacts of the researcher's theoretical priors, then they will seem tendentious, if not downright misleading, to everyone except those who are wedded to her priors.' This is an especially serious limitation when research focused on such problems is in a position to influence the beliefs and actions of policymakers and thus have consequences beyond the confines of the academe.

Eclectic scholarship requires us to transgress paradigmatic boundaries. An eclectic approach seeks to identify and understand problems that, while of interest to scholars, bear at least implicitly on concrete challenges facing social and political actors. Because they subsume or combine substantively related aspects of questions that have been constituted within the analytic boundaries of competing paradigms, such problems are likely to have greater scope and complexity than conventional research questions. Analytic eclecticism thus does not exist in direct competition with research traditions. It does not seek to develop better answers to questions already identified by specific research traditions. Its value-added lies instead in expanding the scope and complexity of questions so as to facilitate a more open-ended analysis that can incorporate the insights of different paradigm-bound theories and relate them to the concerns of policymakers and ordinary actors.

A second distinguishing feature of analytic eclecticism is its attention to the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and interaction of causal mechanisms and processes that generate phenomena of interest to scholars and practitioners. Elsewhere (Sil and Katzenstein 2010), we have reviewed how current treatments of mechanisms differ on whether they are intrinsically unobservable entities, whether they must recur across a given range of spatio-temporal contexts, and whether their operation must be mediated by the cognition and behavior of individuals. Here, we simply note that different conceptions of mechanisms reflect fundamental differences in ontology and epistemology, which incline paradigm-bound theories to focus on particular domains of reality and to privilege causal forces whose effects are most obvious in those domains. This may be appropriate for tackling narrowly defined questions that are posed to illuminate certain aspects of social reality. But for the kinds of

Figure 1.1 *Eclecticism and the agency/structure and material/ideational divides*



Source: adapted from Sil (2000a, p. 360); see also Wendt (1999, p. 32).

open-ended problems on which eclectic scholarship trains its sights, we argue that a more expansive and flexible view of causality is indispensable for revealing those hidden relationships and complex interaction effects that tend to elude paradigm-bound research.

In practical terms, this requires careful attention to processes that cut across different levels of analysis and transcend the divide presumed to exist between observable material factors and unobservable cognitive or ideational ones. For the substantive questions on which analytic eclecticism is intended to shed light, assumptions concerning the ontological primacy of agency/structure or of material/ideational domains of social reality cannot be converted into a priori causal primacy of either agents or structures, and of either material or ideational factors (see Figure 1.1). Eclectic research considers the different ways in which individual and collective actors in world politics form and pursue their material and ideal preferences within given environments. It also draws attention to the manner in which external environments influence actors' understandings of their interests, capabilities, opportunities, and constraints. And it considers the extent to which the material and ideational components of these environments are reproduced or transformed as a result of those actors' varying preferences and varying abilities to act upon those preferences.

This also implies that eclectic research will typically produce neither universal theories nor idiographic narratives, but something

approximating what Robert Merton (1968) famously referred to as 'theories of the middle range.' Middle-range theories are specifically constructed to shed light on specific sets of empirical phenomena; as such, they do not aspire to offer a general model or universal theory that can be readily adapted to investigate other kinds of phenomena. At the same time, even the most idiosyncratic 'middle-range' analysis differs from a historical narrative in that it seeks to offer a causal story that can account for a range of outcomes across a limited set of comparable contexts. In addition, it incorporates cause–effect linkages that can, in principle, recur with some degree of frequency within contexts that possess certain conditions or characteristics relevant to the problem or phenomenon under investigation.

Finally, analytic eclecticism encourages the construction of theories or narratives that generate 'pragmatic engagement' with the social conditions within which prevailing ideas about world politics have emerged (Haas and Haas 2009, p. 101). Eclectic research is thus, at least in principle, cast in terms that explicitly or implicitly allow for the extraction of useful insights that can enrich policy debates and normative discussions beyond the academe. The point is not merely to articulate a new argument for the sake of novelty; nor is it simply to carve out a line of analysis that defies classification under an existing set of contending paradigms. It is also to explore how insights generated by paradigm-bound research may be used for the purpose of developing a causal story that captures the complexity, contingency, and messiness of the environment within which actors must identify and solve problems. Even when it is not offering explicit policy prescriptions, eclectic scholarship should have some clear implications for some set of policy debates or salient normative concerns that enmesh leaders, public intellectuals, and other actors in a given political setting. In the absence of a concern for framing one's research in such a way, eclectic scholarship will fare no better than paradigm-bound scholarship in terms of confirming Nye's fear that 'academic theorizing will say more and more about less and less.' Chapter 2 elaborates on this point in the context of the 'pragmatist turn' in international relations scholarship.

Certainly, this is not the first time that scholars have criticized paradigmatic boundaries (e.g. Hirschman 1970), promoted middle-range theorizing (e.g. Merton 1968), encouraged problem-driven research grounded in the real world (e.g. Shapiro 2005), or called

for a narrower gap between social-scientific research and public policy (e.g. Lindblom and Cohen 1979; Nye 2009). Our conceptualization of eclectic scholarship is distinctive in that it seeks to bridge *all* of these concerns, linking a pragmatist orientation towards the production of useful knowledge to problem-driven research aimed at a better understanding of real-world phenomena and to mid-range causal accounts that draw upon mechanisms and processes normally analyzed in isolation within separate paradigms. In contrast to past efforts to casually defend eclectic approaches (Evans 1995a), we have offered a clear rationale for analytic eclecticism, emphasizing its distinctive value-added in light of existing theoretical contributions and research practices. In addition, we have developed a set of criteria that are reasonably flexible and yet useful for consistently identifying eclecticism as a distinct, recognizable style of research as evident in the shared attributes of the varied scholarship showcased in Chapters 3 to 5. We view this style of research not as a substitute for but as a necessary complement to paradigm-bound research. As such, analytic eclecticism is in a position to open up new channels for communication among adherents of contending paradigms. It also increases the potential for creative experimentation with different combinations of concepts, mechanisms, logics, and interpretations in relation to substantive problems. And, in doing so, it increases the chances that scholars will be able to collectively generate more novel and more useful answers to questions that are of both theoretical and practical significance.

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