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# The Tyranny of Science

Brian Martin <sup>a</sup> <sup>a</sup> Arts Faculty, University of Wollongong

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The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material. not undermine its importance, which for me rests on the advances it does make to the understanding of scientific representation and to the explanatory pathway that it opens up to scholars in philosophy of science—who, I'm sure, will find in it a fertile ground for further research programmes into the nature and function of representation. For this reason it is, I believe, essential reading for scholars and students in the relevant field.

> KATERINA BANTINAKI Department of Philosophy and Social Studies University of Crete © 2012, Katerina Bantinaki

### The Tyranny of Science

PAUL FEYERABEND Edited, and with an introduction, by ERIC OBERHEIM Cambridge, Polity, 2011 xii + 153 pp., ISBN 9780745651897, £45.00, €54.00 (hardback); ISBN 9780745651903, £12.99, €15.60 (paperback)

Paul Feyerabend (1924–1994) occupies a distinctive position in the philosophy of science and in the wider politics of science. Building on a series of long essays, his 1975 book *Against Method* challenged the conventional idea that a universal scientific method was the way scientists did, or should, carry out their work. That book's sub-title, *Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, suggested an epistemology with political implications.

The impact of Feyerabend's work outside philosophy can be understood in relation to two approaches to science. The first is the traditional view, held by most scientists and members of the public, that science provides a uniquely valid road to truth based on the ideal of objectivity. Therefore, society should welcome scientific findings and associated technological developments because they derive their authority from nature, of which scientists are the authorised interpreters.

The second approach to science involves a political challenge to the scientific establishment that first became prominent in the late 1960s. Activist critics, many from the political left, questioned the way corporations and governments steered research to serve vested interests, and advocated a liberated science built on popular input into the direction of research, or even the doing of research. The magazines *Science for the People* in the US and *Science for People* in Britain, among other publications, presented this critique of science through treatments of current issues ranging from the sins of corporatised science to the benefits of community technology.

The political critique of science needed to confront claims that establishment science was uniquely objective; for this, new developments in the history, philosophy and sociology of science proved valuable. With his concept of paradigms, Thomas S. Kuhn had punctured the belief that scientists were on a one-directional road to the truth. Kuhn pulled back from the wider political implications of his analysis of the history of science, but others were less reluctant. Objectivity became a target for attack, seen as a cover for the illegitimate imposition of an otherwise arbitrary set of research directions and conclusions.

In this context, Feyerabend was the joker in the pack, an epistemological trump card against scientific traditionalists, who was welcomed by some political critics of science. At the same time, Feyerabend could be seen as a sort of clown who did not play the philosophical game in the traditional way: if every card was a joker, the game might fall apart.

In retrospect, the political critique of science never relied heavily on an epistemological challenge. Activists can readily confront the nuclear, chemical, pharmaceutical and other industries without questioning the basics of scientific method; they can and do point to biased agendas, censorship, distorted protocols and the like. Activists, in many cases, argue for research done more rigorously, in accordance with the highest precepts of science, taking into account the human interest, rather than undertaking a critique of scientific method. Meanwhile, sociologists have probed into the way scientists actually carry out research and negotiate the meaning of findings, showing how knowledge is socially constructed using a variety of context-specific, practical rules of thumb.

Feyerabend's critical comments about social arrangements, for example in his 1978 book *Science in a Free Society*, positioned him as a politically inclined philosopher, willing to speak to wider audiences, with a broader message. He criticised experts, supported a multiplicity of traditions of thought, and favoured popular participation as a counter to 'know-it-alls'.

Feyerabend did not live long enough to see how some techniques used in the radical critique of science are regularly turned to other purposes, for example by industries that selectively promote doubt in orthodox research as a means of continuing with dangerous but profitable products and practices. Climate change sceptics today delight in challenging climate scientist 'know-it-alls'.

In 1992, not long before his death, Feyerabend gave a series of five lectures to general audiences at the University of Trent, Italy. These were published in Italian in 1996, but only now have they appeared in English, under the title *The Tyranny of Science*. The lectures, followed by question-and-answer sessions, provide a window into Feyerabend's style and thinking. The editor, Eric Oberheim, has done an excellent job in providing an introduction and annotations concerning sources and points raised in the lectures.

Feyerabend lives up to his mystique by providing content that exemplifies his approach. Much of the lectures deal with ancient Greek philosophers, such as Thales and Parmenides, and the way they approached the world and foreshadowed the dominance of rationalism. Feyerabend also includes observations about contemporary society, weaving these elements together to comment on science and philosophy.

For example, in the opening lecture Feyerabend first notes a recent news story about the big bang theory of the universe, the recent (1992) riots in Los Angeles, and the wars in former Yugoslavia. He then asks whether there is any connection between these things. Science—cosmology in the case of the big bang—can provide an overarching

view about the universe, but does not address human affairs. (Feyerabend's interest is in natural science, not human sciences.) Feyerabend canvasses religion and the artistic temperament as potential sources of a general picture, coming to the conclusion that there doesn't seem to be any all-encompassing framework and asking whether this matters. He then discusses some ancient Greek thinkers and the relevance of their ideas to these issues.

Some members of the audience expected Feyerabend to provide a framework for the critique of science, namely to spell out his approach. Feyerabend does not do this. Indeed, he states, 'I shall not give you a "systematic" presentation' (12). He goes to some pains to explain why not. The absence of a clearly articulated framework can make it difficult for audience members to grasp Feyerabend's approach because like most scholars they have been taught to think in terms of frameworks, systems, theories, and the like. Feyerabend is not so much presenting a framework as demonstrating a way of dealing with frameworks.

Feyerabend ranges far and wide to make points, for example drawing on the poetry of Czesław Miłosz and Xenophanes, as well as using examples from painting, drama, politics and engineering. If there is a common theme, it is against the privileging of theory. In most fields, theoreticians have more status. Feyerabend says that what theoreticians have to offer is really not all that useful unless combined with practical skills and insights. This view is not likely to endear him to philosophers, many of whom operate at the theoretical end of human experience.

Feyerabend's final lecture, with a long question-and-answer session, is especially illuminating about some of the issues that interest those who have followed Feyerabend's intellectual trajectory. In response to a questioner who asked what to do with a theory—decision theory under uncertainty, to be specific—that is interesting but clashes with observations, Feyerabend notes that he had once advocated using many points of view, in other words proliferating theory and method, as a means of making more discoveries. Now, he says he does not mean to interfere in the work of scientists, who 'have their own ways of doing things'. Instead, 'the only interference that counts is interference by the people on the spot' (126). This illustrates Feyerabend's opposition to the privileging of theory.

In response to a question about his famous slogan 'anything goes', Feyerabend explains that he really just means 'don't restrict your imagination' (130). This includes not being inhibited by logic, because many fruitful theories contain logical contradictions. With this clarification, Feyerabend is happy to adhere to his slogan.

Feyerabend is known for advocating an anarchist approach to knowledge. In response to a question about the subtitle of *Against Method*, Feyerabend says, 'The whole thing is a joke. Look, it says "outline of an anarchist theory of knowledge." Now, what is anarchism? Disorder. What is theory? Order. Combining both is a Dadaist trick addressed to those anarchists who want to be anarchists and have a theory, too—an impossible undertaking' (129–130).

Although anarchism is widely interpreted among the public and media as meaning disorder or chaos, among well-read anarchists it is understood as a political philosophy involving the collective, participatory organisation of society without rulers—a type of order, not disorder. Does Feyerabend not realise how anarchists understand anarchism, or is he playing an intricate game over the dual meanings of anarchism? Whatever the answer, one message is not to take Feyerabend too literally, and to loosen up and think for yourself.

BRIAN MARTIN Arts Faculty University of Wollongong © 2012, Brian Martin

#### Science Studies as Naturalized Philosophy

FINN COLLIN Dordecht, Springer, 2011 xiii + 247 pp., ISBN 9789048197408, €104.00, US\$139.00 (hardback)

Finn Collin's book is yet another attempt to debunk social constructivism. His thesis is that the constructivist commitments of science studies conflict with its naturalistic scientism. He begins with a sweeping history of philosophical naturalism, beginning on page 1 with Plato and already reaching Mach by page 4. I admire the ambition, but this is just too quick. Things become more interesting when Collin slows down, tracing the course from the Vienna Circle through to the Strong Programme in the sociology of scientific knowledge. This is a lamentably unexplored topic, and Collin is to be commended for, however briefly, taking it on. I add two thoughts. First, as George Reisch (2005) and Alan Richardson (2007) have shown, and as work by Elisabeth Nemeth and Thomas Uebel, among others, also suggests, we have forgotten what the early logical empiricists were actually all about. Second, David Bloor (2011) has recently argued that the relativism of the Strong Programme fits hand in glove with the relativism of Philipp Frank. Who was Frank? A member of the Vienna Circle, a physicist who succeeded Einstein in his chair in Prague, and the first president of the Philosophy of Science Association. Was Frank a forefather of the Strong Programme? Discuss.

Let me turn now to Collin's criticism of the Strong Programme. On behalf of 'the majority of scientists', and against the Strong Programme and its fellow-travellers, Collin argues that 'science is not a confidence trick, but enjoys genuine and wellearned authority' (203). Strikingly, no member of the Strong Programme has ever admitted their desire to put the hatchet to science, but this fact slows Collin down no more than it has critics in the past. On Collin's reading, members of the Strong Programme must keep their hatchet hidden well under their coats, lest they undermine their own cynical attempt to acquire influence by applying the very methods of the science whose authority they secretly reject (199). Referring specifically to the work of Bloor, Collin writes that 'there was clearly from the outset a whiff of incoherency in the Strong Programme. Science is invoked for the purpose of undermining science' (200). According to Collin, the hatchet job on science, pursued in underhand fashion by members of the Strong Programme, 'is testified to by the fervour with