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Pluralism and Mysticism in the Thought of Paul K. Feyerabend

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Abstract: Feyerabend's positions regarding methodological pluralism and the consequent critique of the monism of Method proposed by the Popperian school are well known. Less analyzed is the significance of his scientific pluralism and the idea that a multiplicity of cognitive approaches to reality is possible, especially in relation to its "abundance" — the many ways in which it presents itself, its complexity, and the fact that consequently it can be approached and interpreted from different points of view. This aspect has led Feyerabend's reflections to emphasize what is typically relegated to the realm of the irrational, and has enabled him to discover the extent of the unspoken and implicit aspects of scientific knowledge, thereby emphasizing the mystical dimension of humanity's relationship with the world, which usually escapes rational analysis.

Keywords:

Feyerabend;
mysticism;
pluralism

Feyerabend's role in shaping the discourse on science since the dissolution of the Popperian approach and the crisis of the so-called Received View ¹ is well known. Therefore, in this essay I will not focus on his contributions to the discussion of problems in the theory and methodology of science. Instead, I will explore the phase of his thought that marks a gradual shift of interest from them ² to an ever more careful exploration of both the rich material to be found in the history

¹ See, for this expression, Hilary PUTNAM, "What Theories Are Not", in: Ernest NAGEL, Patrick SUPPES, and Alfred TARSKI (eds.), *Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Sciences*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1962, pp. 240–251.



of science (in order to show the narrowness and myopia of any methodological rule) and in the cultures considered “non-scientific” (in order to critique the claims to absoluteness of contemporary science and Western rationality). This transition is a manifestation of the “turn towards history”³ that has characterized epistemology since Kuhn. In this way, Feyerabend reveals a vast culture that extends beyond his previous specialist field; he is now able to master with admirable competence areas such as general philosophy, anthropology, history (not exclusively related to science), politics, as well as sectors traditionally alien to the rationalist approach, such as myth, art, religion, esoteric doctrines, etc., towards which his colleagues in philosophy of science departments are — in his opinion — “donkeys with shoes”.

Therefore, this study will relegate to the background Feyerabend’s well-known critical positions on the specialized and “internal” issues of the philosophy of science, and concentrate on his mature thought, beginning after the death of Imre Lakatos in 1974.

In fact, Feyerabend’s intellectual development can be divided into three phases. In the *first*, his interest was directed toward the “internal” problems of philosophy of science and Popperian rationalism. His critical engagement with these issues led him to develop an increasingly critical attitude, which he further refined after meeting and becoming acquainted with the work of Lakatos. This marked the beginning of what might be called the *second phase* of his thought. The work that marks the culmination and at the same time the conclusion of this second period is represented by **Against Method**, published in 1975 but written in the years 1972–1974, before the death of Lakatos, and conceived as the first part of a book on rationalism, the second part of which would have to must be written

² “[G]radually I became suspicious about regulating knowledge from afar, with the help of principles and abstract models. The world and human lives especially, I thought, are much too complex for that”. (Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Concluding Unphilosophical Conversation”, in: Gonzalo MUNÉVAR (ed.), **Beyond Reason: Essays on the Philosophy of Paul Feyerabend**, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., Dordrecht 1991, pp. 492 [487–527]).

³ See Hans-Jörg RHEINBERGER, **On Historicizing Epistemology: An Essay**, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010; John H. ZAMMITO, **A Nice Derangement of Epistemes: Post-positivism in the Study of Science from Quine to Latour**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 2004, pp. 90–111.

by the friend, in the meantime deceased.⁴ The death of Lakatos, »one of the best friends I ever had«,⁵ marks the beginning of the *third and final phase* of his thinking, which has a turning point since Lakatos, as long as he was alive, had ensured Feyerabend's closeness to the Popperian group at the London School of Economics: "If Feyerabend before had defended science against philosophy of science, he now criticizes mainly science itself because it would be a main obstacle on the road towards a free society",⁶ threatened above all by the power of the experts. During this last phase Feyerabend underwent a gradual radicalization and a broadening of horizons: works like "Erkenntnis für freie Menschen"⁷ and "Farewell to Reason"⁸ were published, reaching a climax in the last works, especially the posthumous **Conquest of Abundance**.⁹

This periodization — which differs from the others proposed¹⁰ — is primarily characterized by the transition from critique of methodology, with the subsequent advocacy of pluralism, to the critique of science itself and the questioning of the notion of scientific monolithicality. As a result, Feyerabend increasingly delves into topics that extend beyond the boundaries of the philosophy of science. How-

⁴ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Against Method. New Edition**, Verso, London — New York 1993, p. vii. A first exposition of the ideas presented in this volume can be found in the long essay Paul K. FEYERABEND, "Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge", in: Michael RADNER and Stephen WINOKUR (eds.), **Analyses of Theories and Methods of Physics and Psychology**, Vol. 4, *Minnesota Studies in Philosophy of Science*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1970, pp. 17–130.

⁵ FEYERABEND, **Against Method...**, p. vii.

⁶ Werner DIEDERICH, "Obituary on the »Anarchist« Paul Feyerabend", in: Gonzalo MUNÉVAR (ed.), **Beyond Reason: Essays on the Philosophy of Paul Feyerabend**, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., Dordrecht 1991, p. 214 [213–224].

⁷ See Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Erkenntnis Für Freie Menschen**, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1979; this is the German version of **Science in a Free Society**, New Left Books, London 1978, but very different, being in some respects expanded and in others reduced; I will therefore quote from one or the other as needed.

⁸ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason**, Verso, London — New York 1987.

⁹ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 1999.

¹⁰ See Matthew J. BROWN and Ian J. KIDD, "Reappraising Paul Feyerabend", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 2016, Vol. 57, p. 3 [1–8], <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2015.11.003>; John PRESTON, **Feyerabend: Philosophy, Science and Society**, Polity Press, Cambridge 1997, *passim*; Eric OBERHEIM, **Feyerabend's Philosophy, Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie**, Band 73, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin — New York 2006, *passim*.

ever, it is essential to acknowledge that this schematization is a rough approximation and is often problematic, as Feyerabend, in the more mature stages of his thought, takes up, reuses and recontextualizes arguments from earlier phases.

1. Methodological Mysticism

Feyerabend's critique of the methodology of science, influenced also by authors outside the mainstream of epistemology such as Michael Polanyi and Ludwik Fleck¹¹ (the latter very influential on Kuhn), particularly emphasizes the contrast between concreteness and abstraction, between the richness of the historical process and the poverty of methodological reflection. This critique leads Feyerabend to formulate the slogan that made him famous: "Anything goes".

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assume that Feyerabend is thereby claiming that "we must live without rules".¹² On the one hand, because this statement "was meant for the sciences, but not for everything",¹³ and on the other hand, because it would be a mistake to think that scientific research proceeds haphazardly, without any guidelines or rules, or to suggest that there are no rules and norms that are respected in certain periods, sectors, or traditions of research: "anything goes — anything, that is, that is liable to advance knowledge *as understood by a particular researcher or research tradition*".¹⁴ What Feyerabend is committed to, at heart, is the rejection of two typical theses of Popperianism and the Received View:

- (a) *Firstly*, the belief that science is guided by universal standards that remain constant across time and space. These standards are viewed as defining science and serving as a kind of identity card, in line with the old traditional Cartesian project and the thesis of so-called »methodological monism«,¹⁵ which implies the detachment and superiority of science relative to research traditions that do not apply the »scientific method«.

¹¹ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, pp. 190, 282.

¹² Paul K. FEYERABEND, "Die »Rationalität« der Forschung", in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, *Der wissenschaftstheoretische Realismus und die Autorität der Wissenschaften*, Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, Braunschweig — Wiesbaden 1978, p. 345 [339–350].

¹³ Renato PARASCANDALO and Vittorio HÖSLE (eds.), "Three Interviews with Paul K. Feyerabend", *Telos* 1995, p. 129 [115–128].

¹⁴ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, p. 36 [emphasis added].

For advocates of methodological monism, abandoning or denying it is tantamount to embracing relativism and thus descending into irrationalism: the development of science is no longer explained in terms of rational progress. Feyerabend, on the other hand, advocates for “methodological pluralism”: methods are always context-dependent, possess different ranges of application, are historically determined and evolve across different research traditions.

- (b) *Secondly*, Feyerabend argues that these criteria are often difficult to formulate explicitly anyway, whether they be the universal and normative methods envisioned by the rationalists or the contextual and historically evolving methods he advocates, as well as the Popperian “rules of thumb”.¹⁶ Therefore, there is no comprehensive “Methodology” or Theory of Science that gathers them together and makes them available to researchers, ready to be applied like instructions on how to use a microwave oven. Just as the meaning of concepts and ideas arises from examples (or their use, as argued by Wittgenstein¹⁷), similarly, it is the examples and the concrete practice that provide the majority of the method’s principles, which are immanent to it and are learnt automatically by living within a tradition. Consequently, they possess an inevitable “existential” component:¹⁸ “to do scientific work one has to immerse oneself into the relevant research situation”.¹⁹

In short, although Feyerabend acknowledges that there are rules governing science followed by “real” scientists, these rules cannot be “codified”. It is impossible to construct a comprehensive “theory of science” or “method” based on them. What guides the scientist is a “practical logic”, capable of producing results,²⁰ but one which cannot be understood by the scientists themselves who want to pontificate on the correct method. It is even more obscure to philosophers of science,

¹⁵ See, in this regard, one of the founding fathers of the Vienna Circle, Moritz SCHLICK, **General Theory of Knowledge**, Springer-Verlag, New York — Vienna 1974 (First edition 1925), pp. 326–327. At the same time, the idea that it is possible to apply in any field, even that of the humanities, the same method that is used in the natural sciences was one of the most deeply rooted ideas of the RV, including Popper.

¹⁶ See FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason...**, pp. 38, 281–283; FEYERABEND, **Conquest...**, p. 265; PARASCANDALO & HÖSLE (eds.), “Three Interviews ...”, p. 119.

¹⁷ See Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Problems of Empiricism: Philosophical Papers**, Vol. 2, Cambridge, pp. vii–viii.

¹⁸ See Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Rationalism, relativism and scientific method” (1977), in: Paul K. FEYERABEND (ed.), **Knowledge, Science and Relativism. Philosophical Papers**, Vol. 3, Cambridge U.P., New York 1985, pp. 210–211 [200–211].

¹⁹ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 503.

²⁰ FEYERABEND, **Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...**, p. 242.

whom Feyerabend describes as “timid academic rodents”²¹ practicing a “disreputable profession”²² and populating modern universities, “who sing airs about rationality and have no idea of concrete problems”.²³ It is, instead, a distinct sensitivity, akin to a flair or “tact” that can be cultivated in the concreteness of practice:

the knowledge we need to understand and to advance the sciences does not come from theories, it comes from participation. The examples, accordingly, are not details that can and should be omitted once the “real account” is given — they are the real account.²⁴

So, “[i]n the case of science the necessary tact can be developed only by direct participation”.²⁵

Finally, Feyerabend asserts that the initiation of new researchers into the realm of science does not occur through abstract rules governing what one should or should not do to become a “good” scientist. Instead, it transpires through hands-on training. The art of “doing science”, known as “know how” or expertise,²⁶ is acquired solely through practical experience alongside other scientists. Just as Zen wisdom cannot be acquired through precepts but exclusively through

²¹ FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...*, p. 252.

²² Paul K. FEYERABEND, *The Tyranny of Science*, Polity Press, Cambridge — Malden 2011, p. 64. This work is the translation of the first Italian edition, Paul K. FEYERABEND, *Ambiguità e armonia: Lezioni trentine*, edited by F. Castellani, Editori Laterza, Rome — Bari 1996. (In the English version, however, all the chapter titles have been changed). It collects the lectures held by Feyerabend at the University of Trento in May 1992, which were recorded and transcribed, and then revised by the author. Therefore, it can be said to represent Feyerabend’s final word (with the exception, of course, of the autobiography, on which he worked even on his in deathbed).

²³ FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...*, p. 262.

²⁴ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, p. 284.

²⁵ FEYERABEND, “Against Method...”, p. 19.

²⁶ As regards these concepts, and the connection between “tacit knowledge”, expertise and “know how”, the literature is now conspicuous. For a first and more comprehensive approach I refer to classic works such as those by Harry COLLINS, *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 2010; Harry COLLINS and Robert EVANS, *Rethinking Expertise*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 2007; Jason STANLEY, *Know How*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011. I have provided some insight into these issues, in relation to the so-called “knowledge society” and the importance of these concepts in contemporary economy, in Francesco CONIGLIONE, “Science and the Knowledge Society in Europe”, *Nauka* 2015, Vol. 2, pp. 7–23; Francesco CONIGLIONE, “Quale conoscenza per la »Società della conoscenza«?”, *Bollettino della Società Filosofica Italiana* 2015, Vol. 216, September-December, pp. 3–24.

firsthand encounters with concrete and paradoxical scenarios under the guidance of a master,²⁷ Feyerabend's viewpoint highlights his awareness of the "tacit dimension" — a concept inherent in Kuhn's paradigm and explicitly explored by other authors whom he was studying contemporaneously, such as the aforementioned Michael Polanyi.²⁸ This aspect is illustrated by Feyerabend in relation to experimental situations, providing an illuminating example:

Every experimenter dealing with an instrument has a lot of what Polanyi calls "tacit knowledge", like a racing car driver: he could not tell you in detail all the things he knows; he can show you by driving in certain extreme situations. The same happens with scientists.²⁹

Therefore, tacit knowledge is an integral component of that "concreteness" that Feyerabend aims to juxtapose with the caricature of science constructed by the rationalists. It is precisely tacit knowledge that delineates a field of research,³⁰ transcending any conceivable manual-like definition.

What has been said so far leads me to the conclusion that it is more accurate to describe Feyerabend's position as "methodological mysticism" than "methodological anarchism", as it is commonly labeled.³¹ The method is, in fact, something ineffable — neither communicable nor rationalizable, but nonetheless existing, to which one is led by a personal approach, a direct involvement in laboratories and interactions with eminent scientists. In essence, it is akin to a "practical initiation" rather than a theoretical one, resembling the journey of a Zen monk more than that of someone trained through manuals and methodological indoctrination.

²⁷ See Fritjof CAPRA, **The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism**, Shambala Publications, Boulder 1975, pp. 121–129.

²⁸ See Michael POLANYI, **Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy**, Routledge, London 1962; Michael POLANYI, **The Tacit Dimension**, Doubleday & Company, New York 1966.

²⁹ PARASCANDALO & HÖSLE, "Three Interviews...", p. 122. The text says "tested knowledge", but this must surely be a transcription error, as can be inferred from knowledge of Polanyi's work and the example given, which refers precisely to "tacit knowledge". See also FEYERABEND, **The Tyranny of Science...**, pp. 106, 123; FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", pp. 492, 498, 501.

³⁰ See FEYERABEND, "Misera dell'epistemologia", *Lettera internazionale internazionale* 1991, Vol. 30, p. 58 [55–60].

³¹ See Francesco CONIGLIONE, "La ragione ineffabile di Feyerabend e il destino dell'epistemologia contemporanea", in: AA.VV., **Oltre la crisi della ragione. Itinerari della filosofia contemporanea**, Galatea, Acireale 1991, pp. 71–118.

This represents a dimension of knowledge (or would it perhaps be more appropriate to call it “wisdom”?) that had been marginalized as a result of the rise of the Greek *logos*. It has been partially recognized (we do not know with how much awareness of this more general theoretical framework) in Kuhn’s concept of “paradigm”, as well as by Ludwik Fleck³² and in Polanyi’s “tacit” or “unspoken knowledge”. It has been hypothesized³³ that Feyerabend was influenced by the mysticism found in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s work on the **Divine Names**,³⁴ particularly concerning the concept of the ineffability of God, which transcends all possible discourse and, as a result, cannot be adequately encapsulated within concepts and language: “According to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite [...], ultimate reality (God, Being) is ineffable. Trying to grasp it directly we face darkness, silence, nothingness”.³⁵ This thesis undoubtedly possesses true merit, though there is a noteworthy point to consider: the reference to Pseudo-Dionysius emerges much later than the diagnosis of the ineffability of method. While this ineffability is already clearly present in **Against Method**, Pseudo-Dionysius is briefly alluded to in a somewhat insignificant way.³⁶ His name is more extensively used in Feyerabend’s final posthumous work, **Conquest of Abundance**, specifically in two essays contained therein.³⁷ The incidental nature of Feyerabend’s encounter with Pseudo-Dionysius is confirmed by the fact that there is no mention of it in his au-

³² See Ludwik FLECK, **Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv**, B. Schwabe & Co. Verlagsbuchhandlung, Basel 1935; Robert S. COHEN, Thomas SCHNELLE (eds.), **Cognition and Fact — Materials on Ludwik Fleck**, Reidel, Dordrecht 1986.

³³ See Ian J. KIDD, “Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius, and the Ineffability of Reality”, *Philosophia* 2012, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 365–377, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-011-9322-9>.

³⁴ See PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, **The Divine Names**, in: PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, **The Complete Works**, trans. Colm Luibheid, Paulist Presse, New York — Mahwah 1987, pp. 47–131.

³⁵ Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Art as a Product of Nature as a Work of Art”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, pp. 233 [223–241].

³⁶ See FEYERABEND, **Against Method...**, pp. 248, 272.

³⁷ Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Realism”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, pp. 195–196 [178–196], Paul K. FEYERABEND “What Reality?”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, p. 214 [206–216]. A positive mention of Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart is also included in FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 516.

tobiography or in his unfinished work, **Naturphilosophie**.³⁸ In fact, it seems that Feyerabend had an indirect acquaintance with Pseudo-Dionysius through a work by Erwin Panofsky.³⁹

My opinion is therefore that the direct influence of Pseudo-Dionysius primarily served to strengthen and substantiate positions that Feyerabend had developed earlier in his intellectual journey by giving them metaphysical support. The distinctive form of methodological mysticism that Feyerabend developed had already taken shape through personal inner reflection and his familiarity with the works of Kuhn and Polanyi. It was further enriched by the extensive range of readings he had delved into, covering philosophy, religion, and mythology.

As his thought matured, Feyerabend eventually adopted an attitude toward science similar to that of the mystic toward the totality of the world. The key distinction lies in the nature of Feyerabend's mysticism, which is predominantly immanent and doesn't overtly propose a transcendent reality or a God forever beyond reach, as in the case of Pseudo-Dionysius. On this matter, Feyerabend's thoughts appear to have been somewhat indefinite, and it seems that only in the final stage of his life did he pose the problem of theism or the existence of God. In fact, when directly questioned about his belief in God he responded in an interlocutory manner:

I don't know. But I'm certainly not an atheist or a conceited agnostic; it takes a whole lifetime to find out these matters. I have a feeling that some kind of supreme bastard is around there somewhere. I'm working on it.⁴⁰

However, he seems to have labeled himself a Catholic to his closest friends, including Paul Hoyningen-Huene and Gonzalo Munévar.⁴¹ This stance was

³⁸ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Naturphilosophie**, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2009 (English trans. **Philosophy of Nature**, Polity Press, Cambridge — Malden 2016). This work was written in the 1970s while he was working on **Against Method** and appears to have been conceived as its companion. Its writing was later abandoned, and its manuscript seemed to have been forgotten by Feyerabend himself. For further information on this see Helmut HEIT and Eric OBERHEIM, "An Introduction", in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Philosophy of Nature**, Polity Press, Cambridge — Malden 2016, pp. Vii-xxvii.

³⁹ KIDD, "Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius...", p. 366.

⁴⁰ FEYERABEND, **The Tyranny of Science**..., pp. 26–27.

⁴¹ This is attested by Eric C. MARTIN, "Late Feyerabend on Materialism, Mysticism, and Religion", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 2016, Vol. 57, pp. 134 [129–136], <https://doi.org/>

markedly different from the position he had embraced in his youth, during which he expressed a different view: “[w]hen somebody was talking about God or beauty or truth, I usually got up and told him he did not know anything about science, that all he said was nonsense. I also admired the positivism of the Vienna Circle”.⁴²

It is important to note, however, that Feyerabend does not deny the existence of science as a “reality”, just as he does not reject the idea of an independent reality outside of the human mind.⁴³ In fact, he only denies that it is possible to have adequate knowledge of the method of science, which he claims is not fully accessible through rational means. Similarly, in mysticism reality — whether it be the Absolute, God, Nothingness, or any other superordinary entity — can be grasped through such experiences as *nirvana*, *satori* or mystical illumination that can be found in many Eastern and Western religious doctrines. This reality undeniably exists, and individuals can directly experience it. It is attainable by progressing through increasingly higher levels of perfection, a journey undertaken by both great mystics and, according to Feyerabend, exceptional scientists like Einstein, Galileo, and Boltzmann, who perform a role akin to the gurus of Eastern mysticism. Still, despite its accessibility, it remains indescribable. Feyerabend makes a clear distinction between

[T]he practice of science, which is complicated, not entirely transparent — but seems to get results and philosophical ideas about it which may be right, which may be wrong, but which have no influence whatsoever on that practice.⁴⁴

Science is, for Feyerabend, a text that discloses its meaning only to those concretely engaged in it, rather than to those who engage in philosophical discussions about it. This mirrors the nature of sacred texts in Zen practice:

They have the peculiarity of disclosing their life-giving meaning only to those who have shown themselves worthy of the crucial experiences and who can therefore extract from these texts confirmation of what they themselves already possess and are, independently of them. To the inexperienced, on the other hand, they remain not only

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⁴² PARASCANDALO & HÖSLE (eds.), “Three Interviews...”, p. 116.

⁴³ See KIDD, “Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius...”, p. 369.

⁴⁴ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 491.

dumb — could he ever be in a position to read between the lines? — but will infallibly lead him into the most hopeless spiritual confusion, even if he approaches them with wariness and selfless devotion. Like all mysticism, Zen can only be understood by one who is himself a mystic and is therefore not tempted to gain by underhand methods what the mystical experience withholds from him.⁴⁵

In essence, science can only be understood by those who are active scientists themselves. But this understanding is primarily *tacit*, more an effective exercise based on examples than the ability to articulate a rational discussion. Any rational discourse on science is, in fact, impracticable, much like trying to verbally articulate the experience of mystical enlightenment. It is only acceptable to actively engage in science, much like practicing yoga, rather than constructing rational theories about its structure and development.⁴⁶ In sum, there exists an insurmountable divide between the language of the methodologist and the practice of the scientist, similar to the gap observed in Zen or Pseudo-Dionysius and other mystics from both Eastern and Western traditions. It is noteworthy that this same critique of the scientific method is found within Zen, echoing Feyerabend's perspective:

The main distinguishing feature of science's attitude towards reality is to describe an object, talk about it, walk around it, record everything that excites our senses and our minds, abstract it from the object itself and, when it feels it has finished, synthesize these analytically formed abstractions in order to consider the result as the object itself.⁴⁷

In Feyerabend's specific type of immanent mysticism, the "ineffable" is not associated with a reality separate from the world as it is in certain (though not all) types of mysticism, but rather with the concrete practice of scientists and the methods they actually use. It is the latter that are ineffable, and any theorization that seeks to grasp this discursively ends up perverting and deforming it, leaving us with only a pale phantom.

Feyerabend does not merely signify the culmination of an epistemological tra-

⁴⁵ Eugen HERRIGEL, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, first edition 1953, Vintage Books, New York 1971, p. 24.

⁴⁶ See FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 503.

⁴⁷ Daisetz T. SUZUKI, "Über Zen-Buddhismus", in: Erich FROMM, Daisetz Teitaro SUZUKI, and Richard DE MARTINO (eds.), *Zen-Buddhismus und Psychoanalyse*, first edition 1960, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1971, p. 21 [9–100].

dition founded on specific ontological and methodological assumptions: he also embodies a broader disposition of the human spirit, which finds its purest expression in the manifestations of Eastern and Western mysticism, and its “impure” and philosophically tainted forms in various classics of Western thought (Bergson, Husserl and so on). However, Feyerabend’s journey, which in other thinkers unfolded along more internally philosophical paths, has followed the original route of contemporary epistemology: he first delegitimizes this field by exposing its inherent contradictions and then emphasizes an aspect of it — the unspoken and indisputable dimension — whose delegitimization has always been considered by scientific rationalism and the founding fathers of modern epistemology a prerequisite for a scientific approach to reality.

2. Cognitive Mysticism

The questioning of a general theory of science gradually led Feyerabend to realize that it is science itself, understood as the capacity to grasp and describe the structures of reality — in other words as its “knowledge” in the most profound sense of the term — that falls short in relation to its self-assigned task.

A good vantage point for understanding Feyerabend’s critique of the very possibility of science is the distinction he draws between “abstract (or theoretical) traditions” and “historical (or empirical) traditions”.⁴⁸ By the former Feyerabend refers to “those traditions in which the logical aspect stands out”; by the latter he denotes traditions with local laws that often allow for exceptions and are influenced by random elements.⁴⁹ To the question of how the distinction between them, i.e. between “pure” reason and “irrational” material that needs to be processed and “rationalized” (material that could be identified as “praxis”) originated, Feyerabend answers that “reason” is not a natural phenomenon, but rather a tradition that has imposed itself on other traditions, ultimately assuming a hegemonic function. In particular, reason and praxis are not two fundamentally different realities, but two different types of tradition.

⁴⁸ See FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, pp. 118–119, 166 and *passim*.

⁴⁹ FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...*, p. 49.

Traditions of the first type exhibit clear and easily reproducible formal aspects, which sometimes lead us to overlook the intricate and poorly understood processes that ensure this simplicity and reproducibility. In contrast, traditions of the second type are much more complex, both on the surface and in depth; their formal features are covered with all kinds of casual cloths, so much so that they seem not to exist.⁵⁰

Now, while the historical traditions, which rationalists often oppose, have concepts that are well suited to the circumstances of everyday life, on the contrary

[a]bstract traditions, on the other hand, have no such concepts. They may enhance the situation in specific, limited fields, like mathematics and astronomy (and even here only after much difficulty), but in politics, art, ethics, religion, and the doctrine of the soul, they only create confusion.⁵¹

An effort to bridge the gap between appearance and reality and, in a way, to give reason to the realm of experience by recovering typical instances of the archaic tradition — aiming to “reconcile the abstract schemes of Parmenides (and Plato) with the richness of everyday experience”⁵² — was pursued by Aristotle’s scientific approach grounded in common sense. The underlying cosmology that underpins his scientific perspective is rooted in a fundamental harmony between man and the cosmos, a harmony that is disturbed only in specific instances, without globally undermining perceptual knowledge.

The consequence of the victory of the abstract tradition over the historical ones has been that just as any methodology distorts the actual process of science and cannot fully capture its effective mode of inquiry, so any scientific theory is a distortion or a deceptive alteration of the empirical material it seeks to explain; just as the theory of science is a caricature of science, science itself (and especially its queen, physics, and in any case the science that has developed since Galileo) is now considered a caricature of reality. The methodological anarchism expressed in “anything goes” thus presupposes “scientific anarchism”, and while the former had its outcome in methodological mysticism, the latter leads to the mystical contemplation of reality. It is important to note that these two facets of inquiry (com-

⁵⁰ FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen* ..., p. 48.

⁵¹ FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen*..., p. 223.

⁵² Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Nachtrag 1977” to “Realismus und Instrumentalismus: Bemerkungen zur Logik der Unterstützung durch Tatsachen”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND (ed.), *Der wissenschaftstheoretische Realismus und die Autorität der Wissenschaften*, Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, Braunschweig — Wiesbaden 1978, p. 109 [339–350].

paring methodologies and science, and comparing science with reality) are frequently interwoven in Feyerabend's works: established inadequacies in methodology serve to highlight deficiencies in science and vice versa. However, for the sake of conceptual clarity we will address them separately here.

In order to show the inadequacy of methodologies Feyerabend employed a rich array of materials available from the history of the sciences (which we have refrained from citing here for the sake of brevity). In this second undertaking pursued in his thought he performs a comparison between scientific theory and reality, using as a benchmark alternative worldviews and cognitive approaches to reality — ones usually considered unscientific or pre-scientific by the Western scientific tradition. The result of this approach is a re-evaluation of alternative sciences, “knowledge” and cultures, which often prove better suited to the complexity of human experience.

Of course, Feyerabend does not want to deny the fact that science “works”: it cannot be denied that it enables accurate predictions and serves as the basis for a multitude of practical applications, a point often emphasized by its defenders when countering criticism.⁵³ In other words, Feyerabend is not claiming that science does not allow the human mind to “get at reality”: the need for an open-minded approach to cultural traditions and cognitive practices does not imply a discrediting or delegitimizing of Western science, as if it were regressing to pre-Enlightenment superstitions. Rather he is always careful to emphasize that such knowledge is, *first of all*, always “local”: both because it is specific to a tradition (in that science has an “exceptional role in the West as being best adapted to the situation here”⁵⁴) and because it involves limited parts of space-time and, moreover, is very deformed and simplified; scientific laws are, in fact, “abstractions” and “idealizations” that have little to do with reality. *Secondly*, Feyerabend emphasizes that “there are other ways of living in this world”,⁵⁵ so it is completely wrong to believe that only “scientific objects” are real, while those belonging to other cultures are mere illusions: one cannot make the “success of science a measure of the reality of its ingredients”,⁵⁶ adopting a form of “theoretical monism” or “scientific

⁵³ FEYERABEND, *The Tyranny of Science...*, pp. 35–36.

⁵⁴ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 516.

⁵⁵ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 516.

⁵⁶ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, p. 125.

imperialism”: “[...] the idea that there can be only one science — one physics, one biology, one chemistry [...] is again but a result of insufficient analysis”.⁵⁷ Feyerabend thus seeks to evaluate the epistemic value of the different modes of inquiry that have emerged from different cultures throughout history.⁵⁸

For example, his defense of astrology does not stem from a particular love for the discipline, but rather serves as an illustration of “the way in which scientists treat phenomena that fall outside their sphere of competence: they do not study them, but simply swear at them, insinuating that their imprecations are based on strong arguments and are purposeful”,⁵⁹ which is the true essence of fanaticism.⁶⁰ Furthermore, this defense of alternative traditions to science, such as alternative medicine, is part of the usual strategy of giving the various approaches time to prove their worth, rather than dismissing them on the basis of prevailing biases:⁶¹ “one should not deny the factual content to a point of view that seems to fall under the section myth-invention-religion-fables”,⁶² and “is it not the case that the revival of such traditions has on occasions shown their superiority in domains in which science makes definite claims (acupuncture, Taoism as a philosophy of science and a social philosophy, etc. etc.)?”⁶³

Feyerabend’s considerations regarding the alternative cognitive traditions have a dual aspect. On the one hand, he claims that these traditions can lead to

⁵⁷ FEYERABEND, “On the Critique of Scientific Reason”, in: Colin HOWSON (ed.), **Method and Appraisal in the Physical Sciences: The Critical Background to Modern Science, 1800–1905**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976, pp. 309–339.

⁵⁸ Ian J. KIDD, “Feyerabend on the Ineffability of Ultimate Reality”, in: Jeanine DILLER and Asa KASHER (eds.), **Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities**, Springer, Dordrecht — Heidelberg — New York — London 2013, pp. 849–850 [849–859].

⁵⁹ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Dialogo sul metodo**, transl. by R. Corvi, Laterza, Rome — Bari 1993, p. 41. Although the Italian translation states that this dialogue reproduces the “Dialogue on Method”, that can be found in: Gerard RADNITZKY, Gunnar ANDERSSON (eds.), **The Structure and Development of Science**, Reidel, Dordrecht 1979, pp. 63–131, it is, however, very different from the English original, containing additions and expansions; hence I prefer to quote from the Italian version.

⁶⁰ FEYERABEND, **Dialogo sul metodo**..., p. 42.

⁶¹ FEYERABEND, **Dialogo sul metodo**..., pp. 21–32, 38–42.

⁶² FEYERABEND, **Dialogo sul metodo**..., p. 75; see also FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason**..., p. 33.

⁶³ Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Life at the LSE?”, *Erkenntnis* 1978, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 298 [297–304] (published under the pseudonym “Fantomas” and later included in **Science in a Free Society**..., pp. 210–217).

forms of knowledge comparable to that of science, contributing to its development and valuable from a “scientific” point of view; in essence, the alternative traditions can prove to be a forerunner of new advances in science, expanding its field of application much as many scientists and philosophers had already emphasized, first of all Popper. On the other hand, Feyerabend notes how science has been judged by rationalists on the basis of the adequacy of the results it achieves with respect to the objectives it has set for itself — namely, the increase in cognitive content and the possibility of manipulating nature. But this kind of evaluation cannot always be extended to other cognitive practices, like the wisdom of witches and wizards, who set themselves other goals, different from those of science. In fact, the presumed excellence of science in all contexts and throughout history remains unproven, accepted only on the basis of the *opinio communis* of the majority of scientists (their “basic scientific wisdom”). Philosophers of science (even the more “sophisticated” ones, such as Lakatos and his followers ⁶⁴) merely strive to rationally reconstruct this practice and then assert, in an imperialistic manner, that it must be universally applied to all other areas of human activity, on the assumption that they have the same goals as science.

The liability of this approach is, I think, valuable in so far as it warns against the danger of conflating and overlapping different forms of local knowledge produced throughout history. We cannot replace scientific methods and their capacity to address specific phenomena with astrological practices, which have their own domains and types of relevance. In the same way, we cannot expect to solve a mechanical problem by applying the formulas of electromagnetism, and we cannot defend ourselves against the bullets of colonial armies with tribal totem-pole dances. An example that highlights the need to separate different domains of reality and address them with distinct, non-interchangeable methods can be found in the case of Galileo. He employed astrological methods to elaborate genethliacs, ⁶⁵ but was meticulous in distinguishing between different fields: he rejected the idea that planetary influences affected the motion of physical bodies, which he believed should strictly adhere to mechanical causes (as exemplified in the fourth day of the **Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems**). At the same time, he recognized the planets’ influence on the individual’s character (*mores*) and mind (*in-*

⁶⁴ FEYERABEND, “On the Critique of Scientific Reason...”, p. 319.

⁶⁵ See Darrell H. RUTKIN, “Galileo Astrologer: Astrology and Mathematical Practice in the Late-Sixteenth and Early-Seventeenth Centuries”, *Galilæana* 2005, II, 2005, pp. 107–144.

genium). In essence, astrology should confine itself to its own realm, the spiritual domain, a view supported by Galileo, who was a believer himself, and it should refrain from encroaching upon the territory of natural science, which is concerned with the mechanical interactions of physical bodies, understood through mathematics. This separation is analogous to distinguishing between iron bullets and magical rituals.

The interpretation of Aristotle and the critique of abstract traditions embodied in modern science is noteworthy because it sheds further light on Feyerabend's mysticism, which we have so far associated with his views on methodology. In fact, for the mystic as well, knowledge possesses an entirely empirical nature, meaning it is not filtered through abstract conceptual frameworks. The quieting of the rational mind leads to a state of awareness in which the environment is perceived directly, without the interference of thought. In this state, the mind "also takes in all the sounds, sights, and other impressions of the surrounding environment, but it does not hold the sensory images to be analyzed or interpreted".⁶⁶ Essentially, this aligns with the paratactic approach to experience that Feyerabend advocates, contrasting it with the formal thinking of modern science.⁶⁷ The latter replaces the world of perceptions with an artificial world, leading to the disarticulation of the various spheres of human experience, hindering the emergence of a complete human being and giving rise to a new groups of specialized individuals, such as theologians, intellectuals, artists, scientists, each of whom has "developed fragments of their being to a high degree of perfection".⁶⁸

Now Feyerabend expands his mysticism by not only claiming the pluralism and ineffability of method, but also by underscoring the existence of a multitude of cognitive approaches to a reality that is, as a whole, ineffable. As he puts it, "[s]cience speaks in multiple voices, and is comprised by a changing constellation of theories, practices, and institutions [...]".⁶⁹ Despite being a realist (in the sense of not considering reality an objectification of the mind or ego), he argues that

⁶⁶ CAPRA, *The Tao of Physics*..., p. 40.

⁶⁷ See FEYERABEND, *Conquest of Abundance*..., pp. 21–35; FEYERABEND, *The Tyranny of Science*..., pp. 84–85.

⁶⁸ Paul K. FEYERABEND, "In Defence of Aristotle", in: Gerard RADNITZKY, Gunnar ANDERSSON (eds.), *Progress and Rationality in Science*, Reidel, Dordrecht 1978, pp. 70 [143–180].

⁶⁹ MARTIN, "Late Feyerabend...", p. 131.

there is no singular path by which to approach reality because nature responds in many ways to our inquiries, including the non-scientific approaches found in various cultures and traditions. This concept aligns with the idea that, as in Pseudo-Dionysius' conception of the divine names, God manifests Himself with a plurality of attributes and in various ways, all of which are intelligible to humanity. However, He remains "forever shrouded in darkness"⁷⁰ because no single attribute can encompass the entirety of His being.⁷¹ This is also true for the physical world: "[w]e never have an overall view of reality, not even approximately for this would mean that we have gone through all possible trials, i.e. that we know the history of the world before the world has come to an end."⁷²

In this manner, Feyerabend's mysticism — as well as that of numerous other mystics, including Pseudo-Dionysius himself — does not lead to cognitive nihilism or absolute silence. Instead, it encourages the proliferation of endeavors, the promotion of methodological pluralism, and the coexistence of diverse worldviews. None of these perspectives, on its own, provides an exhaustive understanding, but each captures some facet or small fragment of reality. While comprehending the entirety of Being (God, Reality) remains an insurmountable challenge, in that "[t]he being as it is, regardless of any kind of approach, can never be known [...]",⁷³ it is nevertheless always possible to attain local, partial knowledge of it:

Ultimate Reality, if such an entity can be postulated, is ineffable. What we do know are the various forms of *manifest reality*, i.e., the complex ways in which Ultimate Reality acts in the domain (the "ontological niche") of human life. Many scientists identify the particular manifest reality they have developed with Ultimate Reality. This is simply a mistake.⁷⁴

In this context, we witness the profound essence of the pluralism advocated by Feyerabend: it does not function as a heuristic strategy aimed at a potential and easier convergence towards the True; it is not merely a catalyst for creativity to discover theories that asymptotically approach the Truth or progressively ap-

⁷⁰ FEYERABEND, "What Reality?...", p. 213.

⁷¹ FEYERABEND, "Realism...", pp. 195–196.

⁷² FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 516.

⁷³ PARASCANDALO & HÖSLE (eds.), "Three Interviews...", p. 205.

⁷⁴ FEYERABEND, "What Reality?...", p. 214 [emphasis in the original].

proximate it in a Popperian manner. Instead, it highlights the unattainability of such an ideal and the limitation of all human cognitive efforts by an insurmountable partiality:

Knowledge so conceived is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing *ocean of mutually incompatible alternatives*, each single theory, each fairytale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of our consciousness.⁷⁵

Therefore, we can only grasp a fragment of the Truth, as the complete Truth can only be unveiled through a mystical vision of reality. This vision can only be attained when we learn to relinquish our cognitive endeavors and acknowledge their inherent partiality and paradoxical nature. In the end, Feyerabend's continuous shifting of positions, his chameleon-like nature akin to Woody Allen's Zelig,⁷⁶ appears to serve the purpose of dismantling dogmatic structures and revealing the potential for alternative perspectives, akin to the *kōan* of Zen.⁷⁷ This, in turn, opens the mind to a vision of method and reality that only intuitive knowledge can provide.

In the end, science is only one of the many possible ways to approach and understand the world, existing alongside countless other modes of engagement with it that have been preserved in the various traditions and diverse cultures that have shaped human history. The arrogance of scientists, much like that of any particular culture, lies in the belief that there is only one path to grasp reality — their own — and that it is both correct and universally applicable in the realm of knowledge and in ensuring “progress” and human happiness. This is the central flaw in Platonism: the inclination to absolutize a particular perspective as the only

⁷⁵ FEYERABEND, *Against Method...*, p. 21; see also FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 514. OBERHEIM (*Feyerabend's Philosophy...*, p. 83) shows that “the pluralist conception of scientific knowledge Feyerabend made famous in *Against Method* is basically the same pluralist conception of knowledge from his pre-1970s publications. [...] The real difference between Feyerabend's pre- and post-1970s views is that he drastically increased his rhetoric and tried to base his points more firmly on historical considerations, and less so on abstract methodological considerations” [emphasis in the original].

⁷⁶ See OBERHEIM, *Feyerabend's Philosophy...*, p. 24.

⁷⁷ See SUZUKI, *The Zen Kōan as a Means of Attaining Enlightenment*, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Boston — Rutland — Vermont — Tokyo 1994, p. 85.

valid one. Moreover, it is where Feyerabend and Pseudo-Dionysius find their deepest resonance:

Feyerabend clearly concurred with Denys' pluralistic emphasis upon the receptivity of Being to multiple, mutually-incompatible "approaches" (or epistemic activities). This chimed well with his longstanding commitment to pluralism. [...] Such epistemic pluralism also indicates the "manifold" and "abundant" character of Being, especially considering its amenability to a multitude of mutually-incompatible "approaches" [...]. The point that Feyerabend emphasises is that any given epistemic activity can only disclose or provide knowledge of certain aspects of the world. Therefore one must employ a plurality of epistemic activities to maximise our epistemic engagement with the world.⁷⁸

Mysticism (in its dual sense of the ineffability both of reality as a whole and of method) and cognitive/methodological pluralism are thus closely intertwined in Feyerabend's thought: "Reality should be construed as »ineffable«, insofar as it is understood to be amenable to representation by multiple concepts or theories".⁷⁹ Furthermore, the awareness of the infinite "abundance" of reality, with the consequent impossibility of capturing it within a single theory — the mythical "theory of everything"⁸⁰ — and hence its ineffability, aligns with the idea of broadening and expanding the typologies of our cognitive engagements, without being limited to a single type.⁸¹ This is a "perspectivist" view that rejects the claim to find a harmony in the multiplicity of reality, a coherent and unitary description in which everything fits together perfectly,⁸² and is somewhat akin to the Hindu *darśana* conception,⁸³ as well as to Taoism or, in the Western sphere, to Nietzsche's concep-

⁷⁸ KIDD, "Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius...", pp. 370–371.

⁷⁹ KIDD, "Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius...", p. 375.

⁸⁰ See FEYERABEND, "Historical Comments on Realism", in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 1999, p. 204 [197–205]; John PRESTON, "Introduction to Volume 3", in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Knowledge, Science and Relativism. Philosophical Papers**, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, New York 1999, p. 5 [1–15].

⁸¹ See FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 514; also Ian HACKING, "Screw You, I'm Going Home", *London Review of Books* 2000, Vol. 22, No. 12; Daniel D. HUTTO, "Review of Paul Feyerabend **Conquest of Abundance**", *Philosophical Investigations* 2002, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 365–370; KIDD, "Feyerabend on the Ineffability...", p. 855.

⁸² See FEYERABEND, **The Tyranny of Science...**, pp. 9–10.

tion of knowledge — and, more recently, even Cassirer's insights regarding quantum mechanics.⁸⁴

This inclination towards mysticism is explicitly acknowledged by Feyerabend in a letter he sent to Isaac Ben-Israel in 1990, in which he emphasizes his general metaphysical conception of reality, which developed in his later years, underscoring its connection to mysticism and pluralism:

My argument is a metaphysical argument: reality (or Being) has no well-defined structure but reacts in different ways to different approaches. Being approached over decades, by experiment of ever increasing complexity, it produces elementary particles; being approached in a more "spiritual" way, it produces gods. Some approaches lead to nothing and collapse. So I would say that different societies and different epistemologies may uncover different sides of the world, provided Being (which has more sides than one) reacts appropriately. I know, all this sound quite mystical but I think it can be worked out to sound more plausible.⁸⁵

This acceptance of mysticism within the context of pluralism is even more evident in the "Letter to the Reader" intended for inclusion in **Conquest of Abundance** but not published until 2000, when it was included in an issue of the *London Review of Books*. It is now reproduced in Ian Hacking's "Introduction" to the fourth edition of **Against Method** and is virtually Feyerabend's spiritual testament:

Reality, or Being, or God, or whatever it is that sustains us cannot be captured that easily. [...] Is there a way of identifying what is going on? There are many ways and we are using them all the time, though often believing that they are part of a stable framework which encompasses everything. Is there a name for an attitude or a view like this? Yes, if names are that important I can easily provide one: mysticism, though it is

⁸³ See René GUÉNON, **Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines**, first edition 1921, trans. Marco Pallis, Luzac and Co., London 1945, pp. 230–238; Leonardo V. ARENA, **La filosofia indiana**, Newton Compton, Rome 1995, pp. 1–3; Jay STEVENSON, **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Eastern Philosophy**, Alpha Books, Indianapolis 2000, p. 79.

⁸⁴ See Ernst CASSIRER, **Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics**, first edition 1937, Yale University Press, New Haven 1956, pp. 189–192.

⁸⁵ FEYERABEND, quoted from Isaac BEN-ISRAEL, "Philosophy and Methodology of Military Intelligence: Correspondence with Paul Feyerabend", *Philosophia* 2001, Vol. 28, No. 1–4, 2001, pp. 97–8 [71–101], <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02379770>.

a mysticism that uses examples, arguments, tightly reasoned passages of text, scientific theories and experiments to raise itself into consciousness.⁸⁶

The fact that reality reacts differently to different human cognitive endeavors shows that it still presents resistance, which can vary in intensity, and thus may mark the dissimilar effectiveness of different approaches.⁸⁷ While this may result in the decline of certain cognitive practices and cultures,⁸⁸ it does not rule out the existence of a multitude of them. These practices and cultures may be more or less suitable for different life contexts and may respond more or less effectively to the various value requirements embraced in a particular lifestyle, since “nature seems to respond positively to many approaches, not only to one”.⁸⁹ With this kind of ineffability of Being, nothing more can be said except that it presents different levels of resistance; this “surely suggests that certain manifest realities closer resemble »ultimate reality« than others”,⁹⁰ but it does not exclude the possibility that humans can experience and weave various relationships with reality. This lends support to a substantial realism in Feyerabend’s later work,⁹¹ for “[n]ature is not something formless that can be turned into any shape; it resists and, through its resistance, reveals its properties and laws”.⁹² His realism, however, is not conceived as the ability of science or any of its theories to describe reality by reaching some ultimate level of it, but rather as the simple acknowledgment of the presence of a reality independent of human beings, the full disclosure of which is possible only through a mystical vision. Within science, or any other knowledge that can be articulated in discourse, we can only have multiple possible perspectives on it.

It is in the context of this overarching framework that one can adequately un-

⁸⁶ Paul K. FEYERABEND, *Against Method*, New Edition, introduced by I. Hacking, Verso, London — New York 2010, p. xvi.

⁸⁷ FEYERABEND, “Historical Comments...”, p. 204; FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 516.

⁸⁸ FEYERABEND, “Art as a Product ...”, in: FEYERABEND, *Conquest...*, p. 240 [223–241].

⁸⁹ FEYERABEND, “What Reality?...”, p. 212.

⁹⁰ KIDD, “Feyerabend on the Ineffability...”, p. 856.

⁹¹ See Luca TAMBOLO, “Pliability and Resistance — Feyerabendian Insights into Sophisticated Realism”, *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 2014, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 197–213, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-014-0082-9>.

⁹² FEYERABEND, “Art as a Product of Nature...”, p. 238.

derstand what has been most vehemently criticized by Feyerabend's rationalist detractors as his primary flaw: relativism.⁹³ This charge finds ample support in Feyerabend's works prior to **Farewell to Reason**. However, he later claims to have changed his views, so that by August 1989 he is prepared to state that "[l]ots of things have changed, and my opinions have changed with them".⁹⁴ The relativism he now feels comfortable endorsing is closely tied to the acceptance of pluralism, meaning the idea that reality itself encourages multiple approaches, one of which is indeed science.⁹⁵ Just as, for rationalists, science justifies its excellence on the basis of the fact of its existence and success,⁹⁶ relativism is grounded in the existence of pluralism: "It is an attempt to make sense of the phenomenon of cultural variety".⁹⁷ The discovery of the undeniable discord between method and the history of science, and the presence of multiple scientific theories and diversified scientific approaches, imply the necessity of accepting a form of relativism. In this way, the latter is not a thesis to be rationalized or justified (with the inevitable consequence of its self-refutation),⁹⁸ but a consequence to be accepted on the basis of an existing fact and the acknowledgment of the diversity of traditions. It is precisely this phenomenon that makes the thesis of epistemic relativism possible. It is therefore not possible to conceive of the existence of ideas and conceptions in terms not linked to specific human cases: there "exist many different ways of living and of building up knowledge"⁹⁹ each depending on a particular context or "tradition". Thus, "the idea of a situation-independent objective truth has limited

⁹³ See Lisa HELLER, "Between Relativism and Pluralism: Philosophical and Political relativism in Feyerabend's Late Work", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 2016, Vol. 57, June — Special Issue: Reappraising Feyerabend, pp. 96–105 and 106–113; Martin KUSCH, "Relativism in Feyerabend's Later Writings", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 2016, Vol. 57, June — Special Issue: Reappraising Feyerabend, pp. 106–113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2015.11.010>.

⁹⁴ FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 507. The date in the text indicates the time when the fictitious dialogue, published two years later, was written.

⁹⁵ FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 519.

⁹⁶ See John H. ZAMMITO, **A Nice Derangement...**, pp. 118–189.

⁹⁷ FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason...**, p. 19. The entire first chapter of this work is devoted to discussing relativism. See also FEYERABEND, **Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...**, pp. 54–64, 118–141.

⁹⁸ "[I]f all truth is relative to system, scheme, paradigm, form of life, then the status of the relativistic claim itself is problematic" (Robert P. FARRELL, **Feyerabend and Scientific Values. Tightrope-Walking Rationality**, Kluwer, Dordrecht 2003, p. 103).

⁹⁹ FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason...**, pp. 74–75; FEYERABEND, "Concluding...", p. 516.

validity [...]; it rules in some domains (traditions), but not in others”.¹⁰⁰ The typical skeptical conclusion that follows is that “for every statement, theory, point of view believed (to be true) with good reasons, there exist arguments showing a conflicting alternative to be at least as good, or even better”.¹⁰¹ This kind of relativism logically entails the equivalence of traditions belonging to different cultures. They cannot be judged according to the criterion of one being superior to the other, because “[t]raditions are neither good nor bad, they simply are. [...] [R]ationality is not an arbiter of traditions, it is itself a tradition or an aspect of a tradition. It is therefore neither good nor bad, it simply is”.¹⁰² Ultimately, this culminates in “political relativism”, advocated particularly in *Science in a Free Society*. It involves criticism of the power of experts, and a demand for democratization and discussion of the various solutions being proposed.

Epistemic relativism is not absolute, however. Later, recognizing the resistance that nature offers to human attempts to intervene in it, Feyerabend argues for a form of relativism where “[there] is more than one way of living and, therefore, more than one type of reality”.¹⁰³ Whilst it is true that not every way of life succeeds in being effective and receiving positive feedback from nature, there is always a wide variability of perspectives compatible with nature’s responses. Thus, “despite first appearances, epistemic relativism in **Conquest of Abundance** is not rejected in favor of a stronger realistic standpoint”.¹⁰⁴ This is a kind of relativism that harmonizes with ontological relativism; it entails the rejection of any fundamental distinction, for instance, between the realms of art and science. On this view, “different worlds, such as the world of the Homeric gods or the world of quarks, are equally real because they have been originated and are sustained by the same nature”. This follows from the fact that “it is impossible to unravel the mechanism or the laws, and on their basis nature, or Being, or God — or whatever one wants to call the interlocutor of our actions. This interlocutor, fundamentally, is unknown and will always remain so”.¹⁰⁵ The existence of a multitude of “points

¹⁰⁰ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, p. 73.

¹⁰¹ FEYERABEND, *Farewell to Reason...*, p. 76.

¹⁰² FEYERABEND, *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen...*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ FEYERABEND, “Historical Comments on Realism...”, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ HELLER, “Between Relativism...”, p. 103.

¹⁰⁵ FEYERABEND, “Dialogo con la natura”, *Prometeo* 33, 1991, p. 13 [6–13].

of view” is, of course, what emerges from the pluralism of different worldviews — itself motivated by Feyerabend’s concept of the “disunity of science” (the impossibility of a single theory). This, however, need not prevent one from considering these different approaches (within epistemic relativism) equally real in the sense of their being capable of grasping aspects of reality that are not merely illusory and that impact and influence human life in its entirety. Nor does it exclude the possibility of a total and complete view of this reality, itself partially reflected in these various epistemic approaches and arrived at through an extraordinary vision accessed via the mystical dimension proposed, though not fully developed, by Feyerabend in his later writings. In this way, the various forms of relativism advocated by Feyerabend come together harmoniously only within the framework offered by the mysticism of his final works.

3. Beyond Mere Reason, Toward a Non-Unidimensional Man

The criticisms directed at the Method and science on the grounds of their partiality and abstraction led Feyerabend to broaden his perspective to a more comprehensive consideration of man, no longer conceived solely as, according to famous Aristotle’s definition, the “rational animal”. The expansion of his horizons becomes evident for the first time in “On the Critique of Scientific Reason”,¹⁰⁶ where, alongside the traditional question concerning the nature of science and the critique of Lakatos’ conceptions, another more radical question is posed: “What is so great about science?” Here, “greatness” refers not only to its cognitive content, but also to other values deemed essential for a meaningful life. In essence, Feyerabend raises the question of whether the emphasis on the preferability and excellence of science is indeed well-founded and can be better justified than other forms of life and alternative cognitive approaches, such as those exemplified by Aristotelian science or Azande conceptions.¹⁰⁷ This newfound interest is particularly evident in his posthumous work **Conquest of Abundance**,¹⁰⁸ where he aims to illustrate

¹⁰⁶ See FEYERABEND, “On the Critique of Scientific Reason...”, pp. 309–339.

¹⁰⁷ See FEYERABEND, “On the Critique of Scientific Reason ...”, p. 310.

¹⁰⁸ FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance...**

how specialists and common people reduce the abundance that surrounds and confuses them, and the consequences of their actions. It is mainly a study of the role of abstractions — mathematical and physical notions especially — and of the stability and “objectivity” they seem to carry with them. It deals with the ways in which such abstractions arise, are supported by common ways of speaking and living, and change as a result of argumentation and/or practical pressure. In the book I also try to emphasize the essential ambiguity of all concepts, images, and notions that presuppose change. Without ambiguity, no change, ever.¹⁰⁹

In this way, Feyerabend turned his back, so to speak, on his fellow philosophers of science, also as a result of the criticism and misunderstandings that followed the publication of **Against Method**, thus seeing his fortunes decline among the “philosophers”.¹¹⁰ However, simultaneously, he gained significant success and provided support to various forms of relativism in numerous other domains,¹¹¹ especially in the social sciences, archaeology and the emerging field later recognized as “Science and Technology Studies”.¹¹² This new perspective is supported by an interest directed towards other disciplines (such as anthropology, art, politics and history in general). Within this meta-scientific dimension,¹¹³ questions regarding the meaning of man’s life, happiness, and the possibility of a free society come into play, and alternative modes of accessing reality outside of science, such as myth, tradition, and so on, are explored with empathy. This becomes possible

¹⁰⁹ Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago — London 1995, p. 179. See also FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 515.

¹¹⁰ See Jamie SHAW, Karim BSCHIR, “Introduction. Paul Feyerabend’s Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century”, in: Karim BSCHIR and Jamie SHAW (eds.), **Interpreting Feyerabend: Critical Essays**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, pp. 5 [1–10].

¹¹¹ See PRESTON, **Feyerabend...**, *passim*.

¹¹² See Ulrike FELT, Rayvon FOUCHÉ, Clark A. MILLER, Laurel SMITH-DOER (eds.), **The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies**, The MIT Press, London 2017; Sergio SISMONDO, **An Introduction to Science and Technological Studies**, Blackwell, Oxford 2010.

¹¹³ See Daniel KUBY, “Decision-Based Epistemology: Sketching a Systematic Framework of Feyerabend’s Metaphilosophy”, *Synthese* 2021, Vol. 199, pp. 3271–3299, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02934-3>, who highlights Feyerabend’s general metaphilosophical approach, where this first and foremost concerns decisions regarding epistemological problems that are basically to be traced back to choices that lie outside of methodology. That is what Feyerabend explicitly states: “[...] the »facts«, »laws«, »principles« of science and, for that matter, of any system of knowledge are the results of practical decisions, or simply of living in a certain way — not of theoretical insight alone” (“Concluding...”, p. 508). This is all the more valid when it comes to choosing between science and the other ways in which humanity relates to reality.

by moving from the narrow field of epistemic evaluation of theories (i.e. *from within* science) to a broader view in which different worldviews, including science, can be compared and evaluated not only on the basis of their cognitive performance, but also for their contribution to human happiness. Indeed, human life is not characterized solely by a cognitive relationship, but expresses a complex style involving other values and aspects of human personality, of man as a whole. Man is not only *logos*, but is also composed of feelings and passions, engaging in a dialectic of reasons of the heart and the intellect, as “knowledge without a heart is an empty thing”.¹¹⁴ It is funny that Pascal is unjustly overlooked in this regard.

The undeniable “achievements” of science are not necessarily capable of giving sense to human life; the “wonderful products” that technology offers us are not the ultimate goal in which Feyerabend is now interested. Instead, the focus is on questions such as the following: Will this lead to greater happiness? Do these advances contribute to a better humanity? What is preferable? Which way of life should we choose — the one that Aristotle’s conception of science presupposes or the one that modern science leads us to? Similarly, in the journey of spiritual elevation through yoga, the practitioner attains many abilities (levitation, the ability to move objects and other “magical” phenomena). While these are remarkable discoveries, they are merely signs of the progress being made, indications that one is on the right path, not the ultimate goal to be reached.¹¹⁵ Both in Feyerabend and in yogic spirituality the methodological and pragmatic aspects of (scientific and yogic) techniques are subordinated to an axiological perspective.¹¹⁶ When this is dominant, Feyerabend recognizes that

[m]any traditions and cultures, some of them wildly “unscientific” (they address divinities, consult oracles, conduct “meaningless” rites to improve mind and body) succeed in the sense that they enable their members to live a moderately rich and fulfilling life.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ FEYERABEND, “Dialogue on Method”, in: Gerard RADNITZKY and Gunnar ANDERSSON (eds.), **The Structure and Development of Science**, Reidel, Dordrecht 1979, pp. [130] 63–131.

¹¹⁵ See Mircea ELIADE, **Yoga: Immortality and Freedom**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Carter Lane 1958, pp. 52, 85–90.

¹¹⁶ See KUBY (“Decision-Based Epistemology...”, pp. 3275), who claims that Feyerabend never made a clear distinction between methodology and axiology. However, while this undoubtedly holds true for theorizing of the kind proper to science, it appears to miss the mark once Feyerabend extends his interest to values outside of the narrow domains marked out by the latter.

So, we are faced with a choice: either we accept science with all its shortcomings and the ensuing consequences, or we rely on a mode of experience that is part of alternative traditions that are in alignment with it. And this is not a decision that can be made based on rational standards or by applying a particular methodology (none of which exists); it is a genuine “life choice”.¹¹⁸ In the end, this is precisely what Tolstoy had observed when he argued that we cannot find in science answers to the fundamental questions of human life, such as how we should live and what choices will lead to a peaceful and happy life — unless, of course, we accept as the only values the ever-increasing accessibility of material goods and technological products, just as the prevailing “unique thought” gently advocates.

If we acknowledge that these are indeed the crucial questions, then the appropriate attitude towards science aligns with what the Buddha indicated for his own teaching: it is only a raft that allows us to cross the river and thus lead us to salvation, but which must be thrown away once we have reached it.¹¹⁹ Similarly, this is in line with what Wittgenstein also says when he wants to summarize the meaning of his **Tractatus**: it is a ladder to reach the vision of the Mystic, and thus we are to regard as nonsensical the propositions uttered to reach it, and then discard them.¹²⁰ This means that the “ladder” — the Buddhist teaching, as well as science — is only valuable to the extent that it enables us, and as long as it does, to arrive at the objectives mentioned earlier. They have no value in themselves, they cannot be fetishized as “doctrines” containing wisdom about the world. Instead, they possess instrumental value, serving as a means to other ends (happiness, *nirvana*, ataraxia, etc.). Furthermore, this also implies that there can be more than one “ladder”, as Kidd emphasizes with regard to the infinity of God’s names in Pseudo-Dionysius.¹²¹ In the Eastern religious tradition this leads to mutual tolerance across and between various techniques for salvation and spiritual elevation, all of

¹¹⁷ FEYERABEND, “Realism...”, p. 195.

¹¹⁸ See FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason...**, pp. 28–30, 32.

¹¹⁹ See Majjhima NIKĀYA, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya**, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Teachings of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville 1995, pp. 228–238 (i135–i144).

¹²⁰ See Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, **Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus**, first edition 1921, trans. David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuinness, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell, Routledge, London — New York 2001, § 6.54.

¹²¹ See KIDD, “Feyerabend, Pseudo-Dionysius...”.

which are suitable means for the purpose, with the choice depending solely on the specific inclinations of the practitioner. Similarly, in Feyerabend's mysticism there initially arises a position of methodological tolerance, followed by an aspiration towards the proliferation and acceptance of diverse cultural traditions accompanied by a firm belief in their equal dignity, where this stands in opposition to the hegemonic claims of Western science and culture.

Science and technology can thus be an instrument of human liberation, but only on condition that they are not understood as the sole dimension within which human life is confined and the reason of which they are realizations is not construed as the only aspect that makes man a worthy being — that one-dimensional thinking “in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe”.¹²²

Feyerabend did not hold Marcuse in high regard, and he rejected the juxtaposition of his own thought with the latter's, yet there can be no doubt that he also reflected the influence of the cultural climate underlying youth rebellion and counterculture — something with which Feyerabend had sympathized during his years at Berkeley and of which Marcuse had been the tutelary deity. In addition, Feyerabend's critique of the abstractness of science and the crudeness of the concepts established within abstract traditions was countered by the revival of Hegelian dialectics, which seemed to provide a more comprehensive and expansive conception of rationality than the rationalistic methodological approach and which he surely became acquainted with by reading Marcuse's **Reason and Revolution**.¹²³

After abandoning his fascination with Hegelian thinking¹²⁴ and limiting science to “local knowledge” as the sphere in which it can fully express its efficacy and productivity, Feyerabend was able to embrace a vision that encompasses the whole range of phenomena and experiences that engage human life in its entirety

¹²² Herbert MARCUSE, **One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society**, first edition 1964, Routledge, London — New York 2002, p. 14.

¹²³ See FEYERABEND, **Against Method...**, p. 18.

¹²⁴ On the meaning and limits of this fascination, see Francesco CONIGLIONE, “Hegel in Feyerabend”, in: Annamaria ANSELMO and Francesco CRAPANZANO (eds.), **La presenza di Hegel nei pensatori contemporanei**, Vol. I, Armando Siciliano Editore, Messina — Vittoria 2023, pp. 239–273.

and totality. He was thus gradually led to be interested less in “theories” (scientific or otherwise) and more in comprehensive “worldviews” that express different ways of life and are less amenable to rational arguments.¹²⁵ This led him to a careful examination and evaluation of the implications and benefits that science has brought to modern society since its inception.

The critique of what Kidd calls “scientific modernity”¹²⁶ now takes on a meta-scientific character, insofar as it questions the impact of science on people’s lives and society as a whole. It highlights the negative effects of science on the cultures of other peoples, its impact on the destruction of the natural environment, its turn toward scientism with a consequent disregard for art and human culture in favor of what is useful in the sense of being economically productive. (Here the influence of the later Wittgenstein’s thought is evident,¹²⁷ as Feyerabend himself admitted on several occasions.¹²⁸) Moreover, science is the source of the disenchantment of the world and its loss of everything not reducible to brutally manipulable physical naturalness: the destruction of the connection with the totality has led, in Monod’s words, to the end of the animistic alliance between man and nature and has produced a “cold universe of solitude”. The question then arises as to whether, and to what extent, this destruction in the name of scientific progress “helped humanity (or a privileged part of it), how much damage was done, and what is the balance”.¹²⁹

Even so, this critique of “scientific modernity” gains full meaning only in the context of a complex, multifaceted view of reality with its infinite aspects: one which, above all, is not deprived of spaces for imagination, fantasy, and emotion, all of which science has traditionally exorcized because of their perceived threat

¹²⁵ See MARTIN, “Late Feyerabend...”, p. 134.

¹²⁶ KIDD, “Feyerabend, Science and Scientism”, in: Karim BSCHIR and Jamie SHAW (eds.), **Interpreting Feyerabend: Critical Essays**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, pp. 181–184 [172–190].

¹²⁷ See Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, **Culture and Value**, Georg Henrik von WRIGHT (ed.), Blackwell, Oxford 1980.

¹²⁸ See FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 489. On this see also Ian J. KIDD, “Reawakening to Wonder: Wittgenstein, Feyerabend and Scientism”, in: Jonathan BEALE and Ian J. KIDD (eds.), **Wittgenstein and Scientism**, Routledge, Abington — New York 2017, pp. 101–115.

¹²⁹ Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Introduction”, in: Paul K. Feyerabend, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, p. 6.

to its objectivity and pursuit of abstract truth. This vision of reality characterizes the thought of the last Feyerabend: much like the God of the mystics, it responds in various ways to our inquiries, whether they be of an epistemic-cognitive nature or centered on values crucial for spiritual well-being (of a kind not limited to its material aspects) and the overall happiness of human communities. Compared to the “abundance of reality”, the concepts developed by abstract traditions, and accordingly by scientific rationalism, are reductive, approximate, unrealistic, coarse, and insensitive to nuances and all those “subtle” aspects that carry significant weight in human life and human experience. This is the shortcoming of materialism, which Feyerabend, after supporting it at the beginning of his intellectual career, came to criticize intensely in his later works, with reference to scientists like Monod or Weinberg. Materialism assumes a monistic and one-dimensional view of reality and consequently excludes those facets that make it interesting and livable for human beings. Hence Feyerabend’s radical question: “Are we prepared to view ourselves in the manner suggested by scientists, or do we prefer to make personal contact, friendship, etc., the measure of our nature?”¹³⁰ Essentially, the defense of alternative knowledge systems (such as astrology, non-scientific approaches to medicine, etc.) can only be understood when placed within this broader context. It doesn’t just refer to physical health, for instance, but encompasses overall well-being within a tradition. It is within this frame of reference that health and illness take on precise and concrete meanings, directly related to the entirety of an individual’s life.¹³¹ Philosophy, too, is not exempt from criticism, since throughout its history and right from its inception it has sought to supplant the infinite abundance of life with objective and stable knowledge, often disregarding the diversity and multiplicity of human experience and excluding poetry and art (as with Plato).

Among the elements that Feyerabend considered “important ingredients of a rewarding human life”¹³² are poetry, common sense, the world of emotions,

¹³⁰ FEYERABEND Paul K., “Has the Scientific View of the World a Special Status, Compared with Other Views?”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, p. 157 [223–241].

¹³¹ See FEYERABEND, **Dialogo sul metodo...**, pp. 41–42.

¹³² Paul K. FEYERABEND, “Concerning an Appeal for Philosophy”, in: Paul K. FEYERABEND, **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1999, p. 269 [269–273].

love, and mystery. Mystery, in particular, serves as a reminder that our capacity for understanding falls infinitely short of the “abundance” of reality, which we can never fully fathom. The compulsive pursuit of truth can “make us forget that a life without mystery is barren and that some things, for example our friends, should be loved rather than understood completely”.¹³³ On the other hand, love and emotion provide us with insights into reality, especially the human experience, that go beyond what scientific knowledge can offer. Empathy between human beings gives us access to dimensions of reality that sterile descriptions based solely on rational arguments cannot provide.¹³⁴ It is not a matter of rejecting rational discourse, but rather about recognizing its limitations and demonstrating that it cannot always comprehend everything or completely replace an empathetical approach to reality. In particular, this approach helps us to recognize that

[E]motionally decontaminated “objective” knowledge is only one form of knowledge and by no means the most important. Human relations are created and maintained by empathy which, to please objectivists, might be regarded as a special operation, like the use of a microscope, leading to special insights not available to other operations [...] Arguments do have power — I admit this — but they affect only a small minority and they affect their brains not their heart unless we find ways to combine reason and emotion...¹³⁵

Otherwise, “[t]oo much “rational”, i.e., emotionally decontaminated discourse endangers the subtle connections that exist between knowledge, emotion, action, hope, love, and fragments our lives”.¹³⁶ Feyerabend is particularly intrigued by these “subtle connections” in the final phase of his life. It is no coincidence that the last word in his autobiography is “love”, the only legacy he wishes to leave of his ideas.

What has been said so far highlights the centrality of the idea of the inexhaustibility of Being in Feyerabend’s thought: something which makes it elude all discourse and logic, but which from time to time takes on forms historically shaped within traditions and among people in their mutual interaction and daily connection with the abundance of a world in which “[t]here are trees, dreams,

¹³³ FEYERABEND, “Dialogue on Method”, p. 68.

¹³⁴ See FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 497.

¹³⁵ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, pp. 500, 512.

¹³⁶ FEYERABEND, “Concluding...”, p. 499.

sunrises; there are thunderstorms, shadows, rivers; there are wars, flea bites, love affairs; there are the lives of people, Gods, entire galaxies”.¹³⁷ All of these events are equally real “in the sense that they occur, are noticed, and have effects”, just as the ancient Greeks considered their gods to be “as “real” as dreams and rainbows”, without any “grand dichotomy, with a solid, trustworthy, genuine reality on one side and deceiving appearances on the other”.¹³⁸ The boundary between reality and non-reality cannot be defined simplistically, but is something fluid, dependent on cultures and traditions. “There are many different types of events, and »reality« is best attributed to an event together with a type, not absolutely”.¹³⁹ Each culture and tradition has its own ontology, consisting of different entities that interact with each other and have an impact on individuals and society. Even dreams, with their supposedly illusory nature, as well as other aspects excluded from the scientific view such as “pain, the feelings of friendship, fear, happiness, and the need for salvation”,¹⁴⁰ affect reality. However, this need not preclude distinguishing them from events in the waking state or differentiating their different ways of interacting with the human world. Some cultures even explain this diversity by invoking different levels of reality.¹⁴¹ The crucial point is not to deny their influence and importance in human life, discrediting their role to the extent that that life is considered all the more rational the less it is influenced by them.

Feyerabend’s entire discourse is evidently motivated not only by intellectual considerations but also by humanitarian and ethical concerns. It aims to acknowledge the full dignity of human beings as complete entities, encompassing both *logos* and *pathos*, reason and emotion, as well as imagination. Such a perspective consistently guided his life’s work and is also evident in his empathetical and open approach to other cultures: “[...] his aim was to challenge the displacement and destruction of the ways of life of global indigenous peoples by Western scientific and political agencies”.¹⁴² This aspect of his thinking has significantly influenced the field of thought known as “postcolonial science and technology studies”.

¹³⁷ FEYERABEND, “Introduction...”, p. 3.

¹³⁸ FEYERABEND, “Introduction...”, p. 9.

¹³⁹ FEYERABEND, “Introduction...”, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ FEYERABEND, **Farewell to Reason...**, p. 259.

¹⁴¹ See FEYERABEND, “Introduction...”, p. 9.

¹⁴² KIDD, “Feyerabend on the Ineffability...”, p. 851.

However, this goal, in my opinion, does not amount to delegitimizing science as a form of knowledge with a well defined scope in respect of its efficacy and application, focusing on a particular type of reality — what Wittgenstein referred to as the “world of facts”. Instead, it questions the imperialistic assertion of science’s universal validity for every type of reality, to which its method should exclusively be applied.

The fact remains that in his final reflections on these issues Feyerabend remains rather rhapsodic, failing as he does to develop a coherent and well-argued stance capable of engaging with the other positions that were developing concurrently in the culture and philosophy of his time. He could be criticized for failing to engage with feminist and social epistemology, postcolonial theories of science, or thinkers such as Heidegger and Horkheimer-Adorno (and thus with the continental European tradition). His later reflections are more like hints at a path he was about to take but did not have enough time to fully explore, given how long he lived for. Nevertheless, his reflections have opened up a vast terrain of new and intriguing cultural experiences, so that one could say that “many contemporary movements in philosophy of science have been in the direction of this sort of project. If that is so, perhaps much of philosophy of science today is, to the surprise of many, strikingly Feyerabendian”.¹⁴³

In conclusion, Feyerabend’s mature and late thought includes four basic motifs: (a) the thesis of methodological pluralism (going back to his Lakatosian phase) and the “disunity” of science, dependent on a socio-political context imbued with values, which remains a legacy inherited from contemporary philosophy of science and many schools of thought; (b) the linking of this at a certain point, also, to the thesis of scientific pluralism claiming that there are multiple ways to model and scientifically study reality, with diverse theories that cannot be reduced to a singular framework; (c) its being accompanied by the idea that it is not possible either to fully grasp and articulate the method applied (since it largely results from tacit learning) or to exhaust the abundance of reality (this being the realm of his mysticism, directed both toward method and toward the world); and, finally, (d) the idea that science alone does not encompass human existence, as there are possible forms of life and communities that are more reward-

¹⁴³ KIDD, “Feyerabend, Science and Scientism...”, p. 190.

ing and make people happier even without it. This is the final outcome of his intellectual journey.

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