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Introduction

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Paul K. Feyerabend is both one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century and a thinker who is difficult to interpret. He worked for almost forty years, changed his views, and did not seek to present them systematically. He has been labelled in various ways, ranging from “logical empiricist” to “postmodernist,” from “scientific realist” to “scientific anti-realist,” from “rationalist” to “irrationalist,” from Popperian to Wittgensteinian, and from neo-Kantian to neo-Hegelian or Marxist.

For some, Feyerabend was the worst enemy of science, whilst for others he represents the worst enemy of the scientific establishment — the fiercest critic of all shades of conformity and of the *status quo*. This diversity of labels and assessments suggests that one cannot encounter his philosophy while remaining indifferent. Such a conclusion is borne out by the enormous amount of literature devoted to him, along with discussions and controversies, divergent interpretations, and hasty judgements.

Feyerabend’s work has been the subject of many studies and polemics, both because of the issues he addressed and the way he wrote, which is often rather obscure and not very attentive to detail. As a philosopher of science, he challenged the idea of its cumulative development, questioning the hitherto commonly accepted assumption of its rationality, along with the convictions that modern theories are better than their predecessors because they are devoid of superstition, broader because they cover a wider range of phenomena, and deeper because they explain those aspects of the world into which research is conducted with



fewer, more basic principles. He defended the position that some successive theories, which he called “universal theories”, are incommensurable: that is, incomparable in some important respects.

Feyerabend interpreted many important episodes in the history of science in ways that sparked controversy. He maintained that traditional approaches to scientific knowledge and methodology are flawed, because scientists do not act “rationally” as philosophers construe this word.

He demanded that science, like other institutions of a free and democratic society, should be subject to democratic control. He argued that cultural diversity brings benefits, while monotony limits humanity. As a philosopher, Feyerabend searched throughout his life for a worldview in which pluralism and diversity of ideas would play a significant role, calling in this context for a reshaping of society.

The 100th anniversary of his birth offers an appropriate occasion for revisiting his philosophy and highlighting its most valuable aspects.

In preparing this volume, we noticed that, in principle, the common denominator for all the texts presented here is the idea of understanding reality. Feyerabend’s propagation of pluralism, his emphasis on the importance of diversity, his constant readiness to change his own beliefs, his justification of the conviction that there are satisfactory forms of knowledge other than science, his attempts to defend science against various ideologies that impose a single understanding on it can be read as extravagant philosophy. However, they can also be read as attempts to eliminate all those constraints that attempt to reduce reality, expressed in various forms of knowledge, science and culture, to some single idea representing the favoured beliefs of those who promote that idea.

This richness of Feyerabend’s philosophy is also evident in the texts presented in this volume.¹ They are divided into four sections.

The first section — **Interpretations** — consists of five texts.

Francesco Coniglione, in his paper “Pluralism and Mysticism in the Thought of Paul K. Feyerabend”, proposes a new and different periodisation of Feyerabend’s

¹ One of the texts was extensive, we decided to publish it as a separate special issue. The essay by Eric Oberheim, titled: “On the Limited Validity of Falsificationism: Feyerabend’s Theoretical Pluralism and its Relation to Popper, Wittgenstein and Bohm” will soon be available to our readers.

oeuvre from those commonly known. This interpretation of Feyerabend's work supports Cogniglione's justified thesis that Feyerabend's mature and late views focus on four issues: (a) the thesis of methodological pluralism; linked to this thesis is (b) the thesis of scientific pluralism (there are many ways of modelling and scientifically investigating reality); (c) the thesis of the impossibility of fully understanding and articulating the method used in scientific research; (d) the thesis of the existence of many forms of life that do perfectly well without science.

Gonzalo Munévar in his paper "Feyerabend: The Most Valuable Philosopher of the Twentieth Century" justifies the thesis that Feyerabend is such an important philosopher in the 20th century because he offered the fullest understanding of how science is practised and also explained the impact of science on the rest of culture. Of critical importance in this regard is Feyerabend's case for theoretical pluralism, which overturned key ideas from analytical philosophy by demonstrating that all scientific rules, no matter how sound and empirically fruitful, must allow for exceptions. Munévar compares Feyerabend's achievements with those of other important philosophers such as Thomas S. Kuhn, Karl R. Popper, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, John Rawls, Rudolf Carnap, Willard Van Orman Quine, Bertrand Russell and John Dewey.

Matteo Motterlini in a letter to the editor entitled "The Legacy of Paulus Empiricus" presents a philosophical profile of Paul K. Feyerabend, demystifier of three idols: the idea of fundamentalist epistemology; the idea of practising science according to a historically immutable set of rules; the idea of the unity of science.

Yuanlin Guo and Chubi Yan in their paper "Paul Feyerabend and Marxism" discuss the relationship between Feyerabend views and Marxism. The authors juxtapose Feyerabend's views with those of many Marxists and leftists. They also attempt to answer the questions: was Feyerabend a Marxist; was he a dialectical materialist? The authors present arguments for the thesis that Feyerabend was primarily a Dadaist, which allows them to argue that he could have been both a Marxist and an anti-Marxist.

Donald Gillies in his paper "Feyerabend's Criticism of Kuhn", argues that this Feyerabendian critique is largely valid, while Kuhn failed to answer all of Feyerabend's fundamental objections. The author also responds to Feyerabend's critique by reviving the empiricist idea of the inductive justification of scientific theories by observation statements. This allows him to argue that there are rational

reasons for choosing among competing paradigms. In turn, this leads him to the thesis that scientific revolutions are rational.

The second section — **Early Philosophy** — consists of two texts.

David Lamb in a letter to the editor entitled “Feyerabend Letter: Some Thoughts on the Two Context Distinction” analyses Popper’s and Feyerabend’s positions on distinguishing the context of discovery from the context of justification.

George Couvalis, in his paper “Riffing on Feyerabend: Direct Observation, Paraconsistent Logic, and a Research Immanent Account of the Rationality of Science”, analyses some of the themes in Feyerabend’s early writings and in his *Opus magnum* that have not been analysed in detail before. These analyses are enriched by references to those authors (Jerry Fodor, Dudley Shapere, Chris Mortensen, Willard Van Orman Quine) in whom considerations very reminiscent of those of Feyerabend can be found. Couvalis also presents the thesis that Feyerabend never succeeded in answering the challenge to his relativism posed by Shapere, and the latter’s work “The Character of Scientific Change” provides a well-worked out alternative to Feyerabend’s relativism.

The third section — **Mature Philosophy** — consists of two texts.

Sergio Benvenuto, in his paper “Paul Feyerabend’s Contribution: the Anarchic Sunset of the Philosophy of Science”, presents arguments in favour of the thesis that Feyerabend contributed to overcoming two opposing models of knowledge; one, the contemplative one, which assumes the objectivity of knowledge and the other, which makes knowledge a very human tool for power, domination and survival. Benvenuto also argues that Feyerabend’s significance lies not in the fact that he proposed a new account of the philosophy of science but in the fact that he led to the collapse of the most influential current of twentieth-century epistemological thought marked by names such as Mach, Popper, Quine, Kuhn and Lakatos.

Krzysztof J. Kilian, in his paper “What is Epistemological Anarchism?”, substantiates the thesis that epistemological anarchism is methodological fallibilism, i.e. an approach according to which all scientific knowledge is not only provisional, but so are the methods of acquiring it. Not only are we doomed to a provisional character of knowledge, but that we have no permanent guide to this provisional knowledge.

The fourth section — **Late Philosophy** — consists of three texts.

Ian James Kidd, in his paper “Feyerabend on Pluralism, Contingency, and Humility” substantiates the thesis that throughout the writings of Paul Feyerabend, there are constant references to the historical contingency of the scientific enterprise, often accompanied by philosophical claims about the significance of that contingency. Kidd’s paper presents those contingentist claims, situates them in the context of more recent work on the contingency of science, and offers an interpretation of their significance. The author suggests that Feyerabend’s sense of contingency was connected to his defences of pluralism, and also to the “conquest of abundance” narrative developed in the very late writings.

In a letter to the editor entitled “We Can Choose to Live in a World that Makes Sense to Us”, Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend writes about how the publication of Paul K. Feyerabend’s latest book **Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstract versus the Richness of Being** came about and the role Bert Terpstra played in its publication. Feyerabend did not complete the writing of this book. This unfinished manuscript was supplemented by several other texts written by Feyerabend that dealt with the issues raised in the book **Conquest of Abundance**. It tells the story of certain particular moments in evolving Western culture, times in which complex worldviews, filled with an abundance of possible interpretations of being – and thus of reality – gave way to a few abstract concepts and stereotypical descriptions.

Paul K. Feyerabend in his paper “Knowledge without Epistemology” substantiates the thesis that knowledge without epistemology is possible. According to the author the universality of scientific principles, theories, laws is never purely “objective”, it has a strong anthropological component. A theory of knowledge invoking transhistorical agencies is therefore not only dead — it was never alive; its so-called successes are nothing but an immense chimera. Scientific research knows no universal boundary conditions or standards whether of a conventional, aprioristic, or empirical kind but uses and invents rules according to circumstance without regarding the selection as a separate “epistemic” act and often without realising that an important choice is being made.

Gonzalo Munévar
Krzysztof J. Kilian
Grzegorz Malec