

INTRODUCTION

While commentators have found much that is valuable and acceptable in the philosophy of the early Feyerabend – for example, Couvalis (1989), and Preston (1997a) – the misconstrual of Feyerabend's later, post 1970, philosophy has been ubiquitous, and no book-length studies have been devoted to explicating this phase of Feyerabend's philosophy.

The popular conception of Feyerabend's later philosophy has him ascribing to complete anarchism, universal relativism, the denial that there is anything that could be called rationality or reason and, consequently, the contention that the world of knowledge is completely dominated by power, propaganda, subjective feelings and prejudice. A lot of the words and terms that I just used are indeed used by Feyerabend when describing his own thoughts and writings; so it might seem paradoxical to assert, as I will, that these terms, taken in their usual sense, do not describe Feyerabend's philosophy. The popular image of Feyerabend is a completely misleading one. It is based upon a too fleeting reading; a more thorough reading of his writings produces a very different vision of Feyerabend's philosophy.

In this book I discuss and critically examine Feyerabend's later philosophy. More specifically, I argue that Feyerabend is presenting a new conception of rationality. This conception of rationality should be seen as contrasting with the standard conception of rationality, a position I have labelled 'Rationalism', which is characterised by the algorithmic application of a set of universal, a-temporal, necessary and objective rules of rationality. Feyerabend rejects this account, instead seeing rationality as being inherently historical and flexible: ascriptions of rationality are dependent upon the context under consideration. Much of the misunderstandings of Feyerabend's philosophy can be seen to arise from the perception that Feyerabend is attacking rationality absolutely, that he is not suggesting that it is only one conception of rationality which is being attacked, but that it is a universal condemnation of the very idea of rationality.

If I am to say that Feyerabend is in fact a rationalist of some sort, then I must produce the version of rationality which Feyerabend would uphold, or should uphold. This is not an easy task, for Feyerabend's writings have been primarily destructive. But contrary to some commentators who have only seen the negative in Feyerabend, a closer look reveals that he does provide some suggestions as to what rationality would be in a non-absolute sense. According to Feyerabend, the way in which rationality can be assessed in

different contexts is achieved with the help of two heuristic principles: tradition and plurality. It is my contention that if we examine these two principles and place them in the context of values-based judgements, then we are led to a vision of rationality wherein rationality is not something reducible to formal logic and unequivocal, but which still preserves rationality as something identifiable and prescriptive.

In chapter 1 I discuss Feyerabend's *reductio ad absurdum* of traditional interpretations of science. It is Feyerabend's contention that if we accept traditional interpretations of science, which incorporate 'Rationalist' conceptions of rationality, then we must label prominent episodes in the history of science as irrational. But this does not imply that Feyerabend himself believed science to be irrational. Feyerabend's use of words such as propaganda, irrational, subjective wishes, and so on, should be understood in terms of his *reductio* of 'Rationalism': as attributes of science only if we accept 'Rationalism'.

In chapter 2 I examine Feyerabend's putative anarchism. Feyerabend's 'anarchism' forms part of his *reductio*, that is, a 'Rationalist' must label any episode in science which does not conform to their standards of rationality as anarchistic: as not governed by the rules of rationality. However, this is not to say that Feyerabend's theory is anarchistic in any real sense. Feyerabend's anarchism amounts to the claim that there are no universal, atemporal rules of rationality. This type of 'anarchism' does not preclude an account of rationality which is prescriptive; it simply contends that prescription is itself contextual.

In chapter 3 I respond to the contention that Feyerabend believes scientific theories to be incommensurable. According to Feyerabend, certain types of theories are incommensurable when interpreted realistically, and in a manner consonant with 'Rationalist' standards of theoretical comparison. If we drop 'Rationalism' and its associated standards of theoretical comparison, then theories are, in fact, commensurable in many ways.

In chapter 4 I discuss the charge of relativism which is often levelled at Feyerabend. It cannot be denied that Feyerabend is a relativist, of sorts, but his relativism is not of the holistic self-defeating variety. More importantly, once we realise the importance of Feyerabend's interpretation of quantum physics as a background for his later philosophy, then we can see that Feyerabend's relativism is compatible with a version of realism I have labelled 'process realism'.

Chapter 5 constitutes a 'hinge' chapter: the first four chapters primarily dealt with the rectification of misunderstandings of Feyerabend's philosophy; in this chapter – through an examination of the idea of

pluralism, an idea which Feyerabend systematically supported throughout his career – I begin the process of presenting Feyerabend's positive philosophy.

In chapter 6 I discuss the crucial step in Feyerabend's philosophical development from his initial acceptance of theoretical pluralism, to his realisation that theoretical pluralism requires methodological pluralism. Feyerabend thus indicts Popper's philosophy as internally inconsistent, in that Popper supported theoretical pluralism, but not methodological pluralism. I go on to discuss the ramifications of methodological pluralism and the possibility of placing such a pluralism within the context of a values-based approach to rationality, as opposed to a rules-based approach.

In chapter 7, in order to understand the structure of a values-based approach to the understanding of rationality, I discuss the transformation of Kuhn's philosophy from the initial formulation in the first edition of his (1970), to Kuhn's reformulation explicitly based upon the idea of scientific values. This examination of Kuhn's conception of values-based rationality provides valuable insights into the detailed structure required of a values-based approach. If Feyerabend is supporting a values-based approach to rationality, then he should also support the general structure as presented in this chapter.

In chapter 8 I pull together the strands of arguments so far presented and, through a close textual analysis of a number of Feyerabend's writings, show that there is an implicit values-based approach to rationality in Feyerabend's later philosophy. Thus I contend that Feyerabend supported the idea that there are universal and a-temporal *values* of rationality – which I here name comprehensiveness, empirical accuracy, fruitfulness, and testability – but no *rules* of rationality. Moreover, these values are inherently irreconcilable; the ultimate practical necessity of rationality is to attempt to balance the irreconcilable demands of the values of rationality, hence the title: tightrope-walking rationality.

In Chapter 9 I explore some of the ramifications of the alternate vision of rationality which thus emerges. I show that Feyerabend's views concerning scientific rationality are not limited to science: they point towards a general vision of rationality, one which breaks down the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical reason, but which can still account for the idiosyncrasies of individual disciplines. I also, with the help of Dewey's 'empirical naturalism', place Feyerabend's philosophy within a metaphysical context which explains Feyerabend's criticism of science, as a whole, and his statements concerning the viability of happiness, forms-of-life, and 'social voluntarism', as alternative accounts of man in the universe.

This book, dealing as it does with the post-1970 philosophy of Paul Feyerabend, fills a glaring gap in the Feyerabend literature. Though I have mitigated the perception of Feyerabend as a radical philosopher of science, Feyerabend's persistent and systematic advocacy of pluralism, and his thorough presentation of the implications of fallibilism, remain of contemporary interest and will continue to engender debate. Moreover, the idea of values-based rationality is one which is relevant to current debates on the rationality of science; it remains a live option not yet fully explored.



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