



The Tyranny of Science

Paul Karl Feyerabend

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Paul Feyerabend is one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century and his book *Against Method* is an international bestseller. In this new book he masterfully weaves together the main elements of his mature philosophy into a gripping tale: the story of the rise of rationalism in Ancient Greece that eventually led to the entrenchment of a mythical scientific worldview'. In this wide-ranging and accessible book Feyerabend challenges some modern myths about science, including the myth that science is successful'. He argues that some very basic assumptions about science are simply false and that substantial parts of scientific ideology were created on the basis of superficial generalizations that led to absurd misconceptions about the nature of human life. Far from solving the pressing problems of our age, such as war and poverty, scientific theorizing glorifies ephemeral generalities, at the cost of confronting the real particulars that make life meaningful. Objectivity and generality are based on abstraction, and as such, they come at a high price. For abstraction drives a wedge between our thoughts and our experience, resulting in the degeneration of both. Theoreticians, as opposed to practitioners, tend to impose a tyranny on the concepts they use, abstracting away from the subjective experience that makes life meaningful. Feyerabend concludes by arguing that practical experience is a better guide to reality than any theory, by itself, ever could be, and he stresses that there is no tyranny that cannot be resisted, even if it is exerted with the best possible intentions. Provocative and iconoclastic, *The Tyranny of Science* is one of Feyerabend's last books and one of his best. It will be widely read by everyone interested in the role that science has played, and continues to play, in the shaping of the modern world.

The Tyranny of Science Details

Date : Published April 25th 2011 by Polity Press (first published 1996)

ISBN : 9780745651903

Author : Paul Karl Feyerabend

Format : Paperback 153 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Science, Nonfiction, History Of Science

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From Reader Review The Tyranny of Science for online ebook

Sharad Pandian says

Through stories of the ancient Greek philosophers and dramatists, Feyerabend makes a case that there's a foolish tendency to equate the highest form of knowledge with bland abstract theorizing that leaves out the variety of senses and practices that actually sustain knowing in the real world, in every domain from art, craftsmanship, to science.

It's an informal series of lectures and gets his point out well, but for one, I don't quite yet buy the historic relationship between modern science's tendency to abstract and Parmenides. Also, his views are by this point (Clinton was president when these talks were given) not particularly novel, and were worked out in greater detail and subtlety by people like in the Edinburgh school. So although he might very well be right, the wonderful edginess that laced his older works is long gone by now.

Jake says

Interesting ideas, but the format was a little weak. It's the text of lectures he gave at a university. The ideas are similar to those in his great book *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. He puts forward an epistemological anarchism, which means pretty much "anything goes" as long as it works practically or brings insight. Obsessing over a grand super theory of the universe is futile. Learn from whatever you can and throw away the rubbish. The method used is irrelevant. Would it be a good thing to have all encompassing scientific explanation of love? Or would it be ruined?

Marc-André says

A collection of lectures that are purposely confusing, because Feyerabend wants to challenge conventional scientific method and discourse. Masterful in the sense that he does indeed manage to form a critique of the scientific method, but he shows all the limit of critique at the same time, as it doesn't convey much info and just raises more questions.

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In Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method*, he says of the ancient Greeks, "I wanted to know what it is that makes people who have a rich and complex culture fall for dry abstractions and mutilate their traditions, their thought, their language so that they can accommodate the abstractions." In the *Tyranny of Science*, based on transcripts of a series of lectures he gave shortly before his death in 1992, Feyerabend examines the historical development of abstract intellectualism in ancient Greece from Homer to Parmenides, Protagoras, Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, and in the process tries to show how it is that through the use of 'objectivity' and generalization we have come to believe that what is real is ultimately an inaccessible abstraction.

Despite the title, he is not 'anti-science' -- and his philosophy applies to all abstract thinking and thus virtually every aspect of the modern world -- but he goes to great lengths to show that the idea that 'science is successful' is largely a myth and that the objective worldview was unsuccessful for millennia before it bore any practical fruit. The 'tyranny' of the title refers to the way in which theory and abstract objective generalization tend to impose themselves upon us, obviating the free play of ideas and unrestricted creativity which is necessary for scientific advancement (his subject in *Against Method*), and ultimately for any rationalization of scientific 'progress' with the practical needs of real people.

Feyerabend's books tend to be fiery, unyielding manifestos. One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the measured and careful (not to mention deeply articulate) way he responds to audience questions during the Q+A at the end of each lecture. There is real wisdom here, sometimes more than in the lectures themselves. The tone of these sessions has much in common with dialogues I've read from David Bohm, another great 20th century thinker with whom Feyerabend shares more than a passing affinity.

Frederick says

This is a remarkable collection five essays originally entitled, "What is knowledge? What is science?" Thought-provoking and stimulating in a way that makes you think and consider what you've been taught and what it really means. I intend to use this as the beginning of an exploration into the bigger questions of human knowledge, what it is and what it implies.

Wylz says

transcript of a series of lectures PKF gave...

Ed Erwin says

Not sure how much I agree with, or even understand, Feyerabend's arguments. But I enjoyed reading this. Since this is transcriptions of lectures, it is probably not as well organized as one of his proper books, so I might need to give one of those a try some day.

Brooks says

Alternating between infuriating and very interesting, it was a series of lectures that raises some important questions about how much faith should we actually put in "science" and how much we gloss over the human element, human bias, and human interpretation in what is portrayed as a cold, calculating discipline.

There was a lot I didn't agree with in Feyerabend's approach, but it was still a well argued perspective with some worthwhile points.

Doctor Moss says

Although I'm giving this book a high rating, this is not the best representation of Feyerabend's thought. The text is taken from a series of lectures he gave in 1992, in Italy, to a public audience, with a question and answer section at the end of each lecture. Although Feyerabend never, on principle, constructed and delivered arguments in the standard style and technical precision of academic philosophy, these lectures lack the sustained development and argumentation that you see in, for example, *Against Method*.

The positions Feyerabend takes in this book are familiar ones -- he argues that there are many legitimate ways of acquiring knowledge about the world, with "scientific method" providing only one, limited way (often with its practitioners holding gross misconceptions of their own methods). He argues against both scientific reductionism and, within science itself, slavish adherence to "method."

Feyerabend was a historian as well as a philosopher of science, and he could call upon a detailed knowledge of how science actually happens in order to develop his arguments and convince his readers. Much of that detail is missing in this book -- we get much more of what Feyerabend thinks than we get of why he thinks it. Hopefully, readers who are intrigued by what he does say here will be motivated to read his other work, especially *Against Method*, to find out why he thinks what he thinks.

All of that said, I think that one story that Feyerabend tells more effectively in this book than in others is the continuity between the scientific worldview and the attacks on experiential knowledge in the pre-Socratics. He deftly ties Parmenides' argument denying the reality of change, despite appearances, to the scientist's dismissal of all the messy details that get in the way of observing and describing the real phenomena behind appearances -- the abstractions necessary to give us a view of only the details that count to the scientific mind. As he says (p. 40), "We have to conclude that science did not start from experience; it started by arguing against experience and it survived by regarding experience as a chimera."

For anyone who finds this book interesting and enjoyable, I'd also recommend that they read more from Feyerabend to get a fuller picture of his thought -- *Against Method*, for sure, and possibly *Science in a Free Society* or the much later *Conquest of Abundance* as well.

Matt says

This is a collection of transcripts from a series of lectures that Feyerabend gave in the early 90s. Consequently there is no systematic philosophical account, but given the anti-method "anarchist" views of the author, the conversational style fits thematically (as well as making this an easy read).

Best known for his work *Against Method*, Feyerabend is best described not as a skeptic, which would imply a disbelief in science as the word is typically used, but an anarchistic critic of scientific methodologies. This is a compelling alternative to the widely-held view of an infallible, Truth-wielding science as the one and only means of establishing knowledge.

Note here that I'm using "science" in the most abstract, mainstream, golden-ideal sense of the term -- the definition you'd receive when asking someone who has spent little or no time wrestling with the

underpinnings. The fact that not all types of science are created equally is one point of contention.

Feyerabend is clearly in what we might call the empiricist camp, though he is far from starstruck by what he sees as an emphasis on abstraction and theory to the exclusion of practical forms of knowing. The "anarchism" comes from Feyerabend's "anything goes" quote, meant not to throw out scientific methodologies but rather to step away from the Platonism -- the need to quantify and categorize -- and adopt an approach that is less method-driven and more pragmatic. The question should be "does it work?" rather than "is this what the book says?" In this he finds institutionalized "science", as often as not, to be more problematic than the process itself.

Feyerabend's philosophy is not above criticism, to be sure, but given the growing dominance of scientific (and scientific) thought in our society, it's more important than ever to realize the limits of knowledge produced by the sciences -- and most important of all, what we do with that knowledge. With that goal in mind, this is a good introduction to sorely needed criticism.

Konstans says

Kitabın bir yerinde (s.86) Feyerabend diyor ki; " Birisi anlamsız bir şekilde konuymaya başlayabilir ve yeterince boş laf ürettikten sonra yeni ve derin bir anlamı kaçıfı olarak takdir edilebilir."

Bu kitabın bu cümle kadar iyi tanımlayan hiç bir cümle yok. Evet Feyerabend bilimin tiranlığını, daha doğrusu teorilerde dahil bilim kapsamına girdiği kabul edilen herşeyin gündelik hayatın pratik amaçlarına hiç bir şekilde ilim mesele de çok değerli olduunu anlayın reddediyor. Yani umarım doğru anlamımdır. çünkü o kadar çok kendini tekrar ediyor, o kadar uzatıyor, o kadar daldan dala atlıyor ki, neyi ne için reddediyor belli değil. Konu bütünlüğü yok, kısaca ve net bir şekilde meramın ifade etmek yok. Evet bir sav var ama bir türlü ileri sürülemiyor. Bir fikri var ama ifade edilemediğini anlamlandırmak değil. Ne bir bakış açısı, ne bir fikir ne de bir bilgi kattı :(

Zor bir metin :(

B says

This seems to primarily operate on the assumption that because some theories and some experiments do not line up, science is always a form of deception. Feyerabend also seems to assume that because scientists dominate in questions related to science, they hold some sort of immense cultural power. I think he overstates his case in these areas and could have made a much more potent attack if he were less tied to theory.

For whatever reason, though, the iconoclastic and somewhat rambling style made for a good time.
