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Special Issue

Paul Feyerabend and the History and Philosophy of Science

Introduction:

Pluralism, Dissent, and the Living Legacy of Paul Feyerabend¹

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Initial Remarks

Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994) remains among the most controversial and innovative figures in twentieth-century philosophy of science. Initially trained as a physicist, he later turned to the philosophical and historical foundations of physics, becoming a prominent critic of methodological monism and a strong advocate of theoretical pluralism. His early work, which revised Karl Popper's falsificationism and drew heavily on Wittgenstein's reflections on meaning, culminated in *Against Method* (1975) and subsequent essays. The slogan "anything goes" attracted significant attention and frequent misunderstandings. Feyerabend argued that general methodological rules cannot adequately capture the complex, historical, and contextual character of scientific practice, and he therefore promoted a more tolerant, open, and pluralistic conception of science as an ever-expanding ocean of alternatives (1993).

Feyerabend's significance extends beyond his methodological interventions. His later writings addressed broader cultural issues, including skepticism toward science, support for non-Western knowledge traditions, advocacy for alternative and so-called "fringe" sciences, and the assertion that science is only one among many human activities. These positions have made his legacy influential in debates on science policy, democracy, pluralism, and the nature of knowledge. In an era when the authority of science is under renewed scrutiny and questions about expertise, epistemic diversity, and the relationship between science and society are increasingly urgent, Feyerabend's work provides a provocative and valuable framework for inquiry.

¹ For all academic purposes, we would like to highlight that Leandro Giri and Deivide Oliveira have contributed equally for this paper as authors and for the special issue.

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This special issue seeks to delineate the scope of Feyerabend's influence, revisit his central themes, and explore new perspectives, including his relevance to non-Western epistemologies, his critique of scientific imperialism, the prospects for pluralist science in a global context, and even artificial intelligence. We invite readers and contributors to engage with Feyerabend not merely as a historical figure, but as a resource for reimagining the theory, methodology, history, and politics of science in the present.

We trust that this volume will inspire lively discussion, foster new scholarship, and sustain Feyerabend's radical provocations for future generations of historians and philosophers of science.

Paper Contributions

The opening paper, “Find men: Paul Feyerabend and Richard Feynman on the Limits of defining science and methodological prescription” by Ben Trubody, presents a comparative analysis of Feyerabend and Richard Feynman, emphasizing their shared critique of methodological rigidity in science and their view of scientific practice as inherently human, creative, and pluralistic. The author demonstrates how both thinkers reject universal methodological prescriptions and affirm epistemic freedom as essential for scientific progress. The article skillfully combines philosophical analysis with historical context, drawing insightful parallels between Feyerabend's pluralist epistemology and Feynman's experimental, anti-dogmatic stance. This contribution is particularly valuable for illuminating an underexplored connection between two figures who, despite differing traditions, shared a profound skepticism toward attempts to standardize scientific practice.

The second contribution, “The anthropocene goes” by Rangga Kala Mahaswa argues that the Anthropocene cannot be captured by a single scientific or conceptual framework. Drawing on Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism, it defends methodological and epistemic pluralism as essential for understanding human–Earth transformations. By reframing “anything goes” as “Anthropocene goes”, the paper proposes a transdisciplinary approach capable of addressing the complexity, uncertainty, and multispecies entanglements of the current epoch. The Anthropocene thus emerges as a plural, collective, and open-ended project rather than a unified geological category.

The third paper, “Feyerabend on Mach and Einstein: Theory proliferation and the idea of ‘free creations’”, presents a detailed reconstruction of Feyerabend's engagement with the intellectual legacies of Ernst Mach and Albert Einstein. Miguel Agustín Aguilar Sandoval examines how Feyerabend appropriated and reinterpreted Mach's empiricism and Einstein's creative theory-building to advocate for theoretical pluralism in science. Rather than viewing theory proliferation as anarchic or destructive, the paper demonstrates that Feyerabend regarded it as a methodological prerequisite for scientific progress and freedom. The discussion situates Feyerabend's position within the broader context of early twentieth-century philosophy of science, showing how his concept of “free creations” reframes both Mach's positivist restraint and Einstein's inventive boldness. This contribution deepens our understanding of the epistemological foundations of Feyerabend's pluralism and underscores its lasting significance for debates on creativity and autonomy in scientific practice.

The fourth contribution, “Anything goes’ under the sky: The Harvard computers and the Feyerabend's epistemological pluralism in action” by Camila Sitko, Bárbara Silvério, Michel Batista, and Indianara Silva, provides a vivid historical account of the “Harvard computers” as an empirical realization of Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism. Focusing on women astronomers such as Williamina Fleming, Annie Jump Cannon, Henrietta Leavitt, and Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, the paper illustrates how their creative and often unconventional practices embodied key Feyerabendian principles: counterinduction, methodological pluralism, and the productive use of “forbidden resources”. By connecting



the microhistory of women's scientific labor to Feyerabend's advocacy for epistemic diversity and resistance to methodological dogma, the author demonstrates that the advancement of astronomy relied on heterodox and marginalized practices often excluded from official narratives. The article thus revitalizes Feyerabend's "anything goes" as a feminist and historically grounded epistemology, linking scientific pluralism to recognition, creativity, and justice in knowledge production.

The fifth paper, "Cosmological counterinduction: Feyerabendian explorations in anthropology" by Philip Swift, offers an original analysis of Paul Feyerabend's sustained yet understudied engagement with socio-cultural anthropology. The author contends that anthropology was central to Feyerabend's project of cosmological criticism, a radically comparative strategy for challenging entrenched epistemic and ontological assumptions. Drawing on figures such as Evans-Pritchard, Whorf, and Lévi-Strauss, the paper situates Feyerabend's "counterinduction" within anthropological practices of fieldwork and cross-cultural translation, demonstrating how his philosophy anticipated later developments in science and technology studies and ontological anthropology. By tracing Feyerabend's dialogue with anthropologists and contrasting it with thinkers like Latour, Duerr, and Viveiros de Castro, the essay reframes *Against Method* as a form of ethnographic inquiry into Western rationality – an experiment in learning from other cosmologies to challenge the assumed "mono-realism" of modern science.

The sixth contribution, "Error and the progress of science: An analysis of the philosophies of Karl Popper and Paul Feyerabend" by Lilia Queiroz, presents a systematic comparative study of how both thinkers conceptualize the epistemological role of scientific error. The article distinguishes between "traditionalist" and "progressivist" responses to error, placing Popper and Feyerabend in the latter category. Through a detailed reconstruction of Popper's fallibilism and his view of conjectures and refutations, the author demonstrates how error serves as a mechanism for learning and scientific progress. In contrast, Feyerabend's pluralism treats error not as something to be eliminated, but as a constitutive element of epistemic diversity and theoretical proliferation. By highlighting Feyerabend's notion of "cosmological divergence", the paper argues that apparent deviations or "mistakes" are vital for the dynamism of science. The result is a compelling argument that reframes error as a productive engine of knowledge growth, offering a nuanced dialogue between Popperian critical rationalism and Feyerabendian anarchism.

Invited Contributions

We express our deep gratitude to Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, Paul's widow, for her contribution, "The Paul K. Feyerabend Foundation: in line with Paul's work?", a remarkable and rare text. Borrini-Feyerabend, who has seldom written publicly about Paul's intellectual legacy, offers a moving reflection on the ethos that inspired Feyerabend's work and continues in the Paul K. Feyerabend Foundation. Her essay illuminates key ethical and political dimensions of Paul's philosophy – pluralism, solidarity, and respect for the abundance of life – while also denouncing the troubling circumstances that have forced the Foundation's dissolution due to opaque financial and political pressures. This testimony carries both philosophical and civic significance, reminding us that the pursuit of diversity and justice, central to Feyerabend's thought, remains an urgent and unfinished endeavor.

Another important contribution is an extensive interview with Eric Oberheim, a leading scholar of Feyerabend's philosophy. Conducted by Deivide Oliveira and Leandro Giri, the conversation addresses key aspects of Feyerabend's intellectual development, from his early engagement with Popper and Wittgenstein to his later reflections on pluralism, incommensurability, and happiness. We extend our sincere gratitude to Eric for his generosity, collegiality, and the depth of his responses. His insights provide readers with both



a detailed reconstruction of Feyerabend's intellectual journey and a vivid sense of the philosophical and personal tensions that shaped his thought.

The final contribution, a note titled “On farewell to abundance? A Feyerabendian critique of AI algorithmic homogenization, and the battle for human cognition” by Deivide Oliveira, critically examines the expanding influence of Artificial Intelligence, particularly generative AI (large language models, LLMs), through the lens of Paul Feyerabend's philosophy, especially his advocacy of pluralism and the “conquest of abundance”. The central argument is that AI, by creating an “AI-driven world”, threatens ontological and epistemological diversity, resulting in the homogenization of reality. The author investigates how algorithms shape reality, leading to a “cognitive debt”, a measurable reduction, as demonstrated through an experimental study presented in the paper. Consequently, the paper moves Feyerabend's defense of abundance from an abstract philosophical position to a critical and ongoing struggle over the nature of human consciousness and reality, demonstrating that this abundance is directly threatened by certain approaches of AI and Big Tech.

Final Acknowledgements and Remarks

We, Deivide Oliveira and Leandro Giri, begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to *Transversal: International Journal of Historiography of Science* for entrusting us with the stewardship of this special issue. Curating a volume dedicated to Paul Feyerabend on the centenary of his birth (2024) and the fiftieth anniversary of *Against Method* (2025) is a distinct privilege. We are also deeply appreciative of the authors for their research contributions, the peer reviewers for their careful evaluation of submissions, and the editorial chiefs, Marina S. Duarte, and, especially, to Fábio Rodrigo Leite, for their unwavering support throughout this process. We hope this collection honors the depth, provocations, and enduring relevance of Feyerabend's work.

Each contribution broadens, from a unique perspective, the horizons of research on Paul Feyerabend's thought, revealing the richness, vitality, and ongoing relevance of his legacy for contemporary philosophy of science. We also extend our thanks to the readers of *Transversal: International Journal of Historiography of Science*, whose interest and engagement sustain the ongoing dialogue about one of the most provocative and influential thinkers of the twentieth century. We are confident that the works collected here will be essential for anyone seeking to understand the complexity, originality, and philosophical courage that characterize Feyerabend's intellectual journey.

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