How is it Going When Anything Goes? Reflections on Paul Feyerabend and the Postfactual

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In his seminal book Against Method Paul Feyerabend demanded that "science should be taught as one view among many and not as the one and only road to truth and reality". Given the recent backlash against scientific authority, which includes persisting denial of climate science, vaccine scepticism and the wider debate about the dawning of a postfactual era, it seems that Feyerabend had his will. However, scientific authority was never unchallenged and in particular contemporary discussions about an alleged coming of post-factual times create the chimera of an enlightened era in which reason and facts dominated. In my paper I will reengage with the history of facts (Poovey) and address some of the problems that occur when scientific and non-scientific facts clash in the public realm.

Ключевые слова: Classical conception of knowledge , post-truth, social constructivism, scientific authority

Как обстоят дела, когда все дозволено? Размышления о Поле Фейерабенде и постфактическом

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В своей основополагающей книге «Против метода» Пол Фейерабенд потребовал, чтобы «наука преподавалась как одна точка зрения среди многих, а не как единственный и неповторимый путь к истине и реальности». Учитывая недавнюю реакцию против научного авторитета, которая включает в себя продолжающееся отрицание климатологии, скептицизм в отношении вакцин и более широкие дебаты о наступлении постфактумной эры, кажется, что Фейерабенд добился своего. Однако научный авторитет никогда не был бесспорным, и, в частности, современные дискуссии о якобы наступлении постфактумной эпохи создают химеру просвещенной эры, в которой господствовали разум и факты. В своем тексте я вновь обращусь к истории фактов (Пуви) и рассмотрю некоторые проблемы, возникающие при столкновении научных и ненаучных фактов в публичной сфере.

Ключевые слова: классическая концепция знания, постправда, социальный конструктивизм, научный авторитет

Introduction

In a 2017 interview with *Science* late French Sociologist and agent pro-vocateur of the "Science Wars" [Aronowitz, 1996] of the 1990s; Bruno Latour was asked about his opinion on the problem of "climate change denial" in particular and "post-truth" in general. Rather than doubling down on his critique of (blind faith in) scientific authority, Latour distanced himself from the science warriors:

> Some of the critique was indeed ridiculous, and I was associated with that postmodern relativist stuff, I was put into that crowd by others. I certainly was not antiscience, although I must admit it felt good to put scientists down a little. There was some juvenile enthusiasm in my style [DeVries, 2017].

Youthful (not juvenile) enthusiams was surely also a characterisict of Paul Feyerabend's philosophy. A staunch critic of dry scholasticism and secptical of philosphical traditions that portrayed science and reason as the pincale of strive for knowledge, his procative ideas have instigated, influences and irritated debates about the epistemological state of science as well as the social status of scientists. In particular Feyerabend pointed call for methodologcial anarchism expressed in his "trademark" slogan *anything goes* has resonated with philosphers of science and sociologist of knowledge and helped diminushing the position of scientfic realists in recent decades [Boghossian, 2008].

In this contribution I will relfect upon the consequnces of Feyer-abend's appeal to science warriors of the 1990s and raise the question whether (and to what degree) his philosophical arguments are (ab)used by contemporary proponents of anti-scientfic views. I'm not arguing that Feyerabend intended to provide intellectual ammunition for radical social constructivists, relativists or, outside of academica, culture warriors and prophets of a coming post-truth era. I'm rather asking the question of what we can learn for contemporary debates about the "proper place of science in democratic societyes" [Shaw, 2021, p. 37], scientific freedom and scientfic authority and whether we can use Feyerbabend to raise important questions about the limits of scientfic authority without decending into polarising disputes about the epistemological and ontological status of facts.

To adress these issues we have to approach Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism from two different angles: First we have to ask what exactly is meant by "anything goes". This implies that we should focus on the interpretation and the impact of the concept of contemporary debate rather than marveling about what Feyerbabend (might have) meant when he formulated his "only principle that doesn't inhibit progress" [Feyerabend, 1975a]. This being said, it will be important to contrast the specific social context in which Feyerabend formulated his critique

of science and scientific authority with contemporary debates and to acknowledge that anti-scientfic positions have shifted from being liberal-leftist stand against "big scinece" which was seen in kahoots with conservative political forces and the military [Ruser, 2021] and are now increasingly adopted by conservatives and other defenders of a "status quo".

Secondly, we need to interrogate Feyerabend's undertstanding of being a/intellectual to understand why his philosphical ideas could become influential in contemporary attacks on science but most importantly, how he could have envisioned a response. Feyerabend's main objection towards science was its depiction as a somehow aseptic enterprise and correspondingly scientists as producers and conveyors of neutral, objective knowledge. In contrast, he argued for the social engagement of science and scientists, envisioned a (healthy) comeptition between ideas about and interpretations of the world and rejected the idea of an "important distinction between science and non-science" [Shaw, 2021, p. 37]. This perspective on scientists, I will argue, is clearly an imposition on scientists who cannot claim that "facts speak for themselves" or monopolize reason [Feyerabend, 1987]. However, at the same time it is also an invitation to scientists to play an active, important role in social and politcial debate and clearly sets Feyerabend appart from anti-scientific stance.

The Making of Rebels, Feyerabend, Postmodernists and the Fight againts "Big Science"

To begin with it is important to understand the context in which Feyerabend developed his "anarchistic" philosphy and became to some the "worst enemy of science" [Preston, 2000]. To do so, we should briefly return to the interview with Bruno Latour mentioned in the introduction and ask why he felt the need to emphasize that he "was not antiscience" and didn't see himself intellectually connected to climate change deniers. Much like Feyerabend, Latour and postmodern thinkers of the 1970s and 80s were part of intellectual traditions which concerned with "Big Science" and the instrumentalization of scientific and technological research and inventions by the cold-war power blocks for building ever more destructive military capacities [Ruser, 2021]. Likewise, the "youthful enthusiasm" first of Feyerabend and later of Latour and other postmodern critics of science was stemming from the conviction that science couldn't and shouldn't be left in the hands of powerful elites and that scientists be allowed to hide "behind methodology" and the alleged objectivity and neutrality of their findings [Andreski, 1972, p. 108].

Attacking the objectivity and neutrality of scientific method and consequentially the social role of science was a common trait of French Postmodernist and Paul Feyerabend. However, in contrast to his French

counterparts, Feyerabend's was less interested in criticizing the social conditions and political implications of science directly but was directing his critique more narrowly on scientific practices and "methods". The political impact of Feyerabend's thought, for instance his objection to scientific chauvinism which conceived of Western scientific knowledge as a superior form of knowing [Shaw, 2021, p. 27–28] was rather an indirect consequence of his core conviction that there is no "fixed method, or (…) a fixed theory of rationality" that can provide a coherent, objective basis for a scientific production of knowledge. Consequentially, for him scientific progress and breakthroughs do not occur by applying carefully tested methods and standardized ways of reasoning but, in his view, "have been the products of bold pioneers, prepared to ride roughshod over every sacred canon of careful and rigorous reasoning" [Laudan, 1989, p. 300]. Feyerbabends main concern to deconstruct the myth of orderly scientific progress and replace principles of philosophy of science with a pluralistic understanding of knowledge and in essence epistemological anarchism [Feyerabend, 1975a, p. 14; Kulka, 1977, p. 277]. It is therefore fair to say that unlike postmodernism in the 1970s which was mainly a *social critique* [Aronowitz, 1996; Collins, 2017; Dawkins, 1998] Feyerabend's radical approach was first and foremost *philosophical*. Rooted in ancient skepticism [Kulka, 1977, p. 278] Feyerabend rejects the idea that we can identify universal principles and methods for advancing knowledge and opts for an anarchistic perspective according to which the only principle that can facilitate progress in knowledge is "anything goes" [Feyerabend, 1975a, p. 19]. For Feyerabend the rejection of this anarchistic principle and any "idea of a fixed method, or of a fixed theory of rationality, rests on too naive a view of man and his social surroundings" [Ibid., p. 18]. It is important to stress that for Feyeraend these "too naïve of view" manifests itself in the oversimplification of the process of coroboration and in consequence an overstatement of the significance of facts. In contrast to, for instance Kuhns prinicple of falsification, according to which theories should be confronted with "hypotheseis which are inconsistent" to them [Ibid., p. 20], he insists that this model has a too narrow understanding of the confrontation of theories with social realities: Instead of comparing theories (ideas) with evidence (facts) to find inconsistencies (which could only be interpreted within the framework and against the background of the cognitive architecture of said theory), Feyerabend argues in favor of a "pluralistic methodlogy" that compares "ideas with other ideas" [Ibid., p. 21]. Feyerabend taks this idea to the extreme, arguing that the acceptance of pluralism in approachs to producing knowledge leads to the rejection of any methodological standards and thus the abandonment of the conception of scientifc reasoning as a privileged or preferred way of acumulating knowledge. For him the history of scientifc discoveries proves that "there is not a single rule (…) that is not violated at some time or another" [Ibid., p. 23].

We can clearly see that Feyerbabends main concern was the internal, in a literal sense "academic" debate. That is why the initial criticism of Feyerbaends contemporarys such as Tomas Kulka or Larry Laudan focused on the epistemolgcial and logical aspects rather than the politcal implications of his anarchistic approach.

Tomas Kulka for instance insisted, that "Feyerabend's philosophy seems to be based upon the following fallacy: Since we cannot know anyting for certain, we cannot know anything at all and therefore *all ideas have the same epistemic value* [emphasize added]" [Kulka, 1977, p. 270–280]. Kulkas continues to stress that even if one agress with Feyerabend that scientific methods, theories and procedures to scrutinize knowledge claims are imperfect [Ibid.] it is not justified to conlcude that scientfic methods are on par with any other way of of accumulating knowledge.

Likewise, Larry Laudan objected Feyerabend's conclusion "that the whole enterprise of delineating the rules of scientific methodology is ill-conceived" [Laudan, 1989, p. 305] as a "monumental non-sequitur" [Ibid.] and accused him of a "naïve inductivism" [Ibid., p. 306] that leads him to the false generalisation that, because some methodologies are flawed all methodologies are insufficient.

Kulka and Laudan criticize Feyerabend's philosophy of science and thus locate their arguments within the wider academic debate about epistemology and methodology. However, their critiques hint at a particular problem of Feyerabend's philosophical arguments and that is their inescapable intertwining with social and politcal debates about science.

If (Wetsern) science cannot claim to operate on the basis of any specific, objectvie and rational methodolgcial or epistemolgcial standards it indeed cannot be separated from other forms of knowledge and should be considered to be historically and socially contingent. Such a claim inevitably exceed the boundaries of philosphical and academic debate. Feyerabend himself, despite mainly concerned with the philoosphical debate, was keenly aware of this and frequently criticised the chauvinism of Western science and the political consequences of marginalizing other forms of knowledge. Jamie Shaw for instance demonstrates that Feyerabend was concious about the contribution of Western science to colonialism by drawing attention to his defence of traditional Chinese medicine [Shaw, 2021, p. 2].

However, Shaw also shows that Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism and reduction of scientfic knowledge to just another narrative lead him to embrace other forms of knowledge (for instance, magical practices, faith healers etc) and put them on par with scientifc knowlegde. I would argue that, at this moment, Feyerabend's philosphical conclusion have far-reaching social and politcal consequences. Moreover, when Feyerabend formulated his core principle fo "anthing goes" and attacked the science by equating it with all kinds of other forms of knowledge, his

arguments and rhetoric might have been the strategy of a self-proclaimed thorn in the side of the scientfic/philosophical establishment and as an expression of his provocative style [Laudan, 1989, p. 300].

However, the non-academic consequences of Feyerabend's anachism, intended or not, foreshadow how his philosophical ideas could become in socially and politically motivated attacks on science and current debates of post-truth. In a way it shows that Feyerabend was a philospher of science and emphatically not a sociologist of knowledge since him debates about epistemological pluralism take place against the highly idealized backgroudnm of a "genuine democracy" populated by "mature people" [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 87; Shaw, 2021, p. 10]. Latours empirical problem that (some of) his ideas were "hijacked" [Ruser, 2021] by climate sceptics and other anti-scientfic groups with political motivations and goals Latour didn't share wouldn't have bothered Feyerabend since his epistemolgcial pluralism and socially embedded science are debated in an idealized setting and can only be realised (if at all) in a future state of society [Shaw, 2021, p. 11]. Finally, Feyerabend, bein an outsider and enfant terrible, was arguably not risking much by pushing his ideas since he was aware that they were merely the noble gestures of a concerned intellectual without much influence on academic and politcial establishment. Today in contrast anti-scientific sentiment and attacks on scientific authority are longer provocative musings of a liberal, intellectual avantgarde but a central feature of public debate and are increasingly adopted by the political right. In the following we should therefore explore how Feyerabend's principle of anything goes and his utopian vision of epistemic pluralism embraced by "citizens" plays out in political reality of the 21st century.

Feyerabend has been described as an enfant terrible and provocateur [Kulka, 1977; Laudan, 1989] and liked to cast himself as a rebel against the scientific and philosophical establishment [Duerr, 1995]. Moreover, as stated above, his objection to science and scientific authority should be conceived of as an expression of the intellectual and political climate of his time in which "Big Science" [Ruser, 2021] and the political utilization of scientific research were a major concern for the intellectual left. Then, the critique of science and scientific authority was motivated by a dissatisfaction with the specific political and economic order and its resulting conditions of authority and domination and as an attempt to criticize scientific knowledge *as a political resource*. It is therefore tempting to approach the dawning of a post-factual era and post-factual politics [MacMullen, 2020] from a purely social perspective and explain every rejection of scientific knowledge claim solely by political motives. From such an angle Feyerabend could be reduced to the regrettable role of helping to open the pandoras box of radical "relativism" (in no specific philosophical meaning). However, as for instance Paul Boghossian has argued it is worth to engage with the epistemological and methodological arguments that (could) support the rejection of the existence

of an unconditional "truth" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 10] and to explore the connection between Feyerabend's methodological anarchism and the fashionable references to the "social construction" [Ibid.] of facts.

In the following we therefore need to clarify first why Feyerabend's philosophical approach is particularly appealing to a constructivist perspective of facts and knowledge. We will turn to the historical and political dimensions of the argument before we explore the meanings of "anything goes" within a social constructivist paradigm and uncover some serious misunderstandings of Feyerabend's philosophy. This will allow us to distance Feyarbends anarchistic and pluralistic approach from simple and simplistic notions that facts do not exist and to outline some ideas for a more nuanced perspective.

The Missing Object of Knowledge in Feyerabend's Philosophy

A cornerstone of Feyerabend's philosophy of knowledge and in consequence position towards the philosophy of science is the rejection of clear, "objective objects" of knowledge [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 104]. According to him. human beings exist in worlds filed with things and events they can have knowledge about. However, this knowledge about things is always acquired from a distinct perspective and a specific epistemological angle. Knowledge of things and events is thus subjective and socio-historically contingent and never serves as building blocks towards a coherent, objective interpretation of the world that is "automatically" intelligible or persuasive to others. Or in Feyerabend's words: "Not everybody lives in the same world. The events that surround a forest ranger differ from the events that surround a city dweller lost in the woods" [Ibid.] One could argue that the forest and everything in it – sounds, visual impressions, smells etc – are unfamiliar and potentially scary events for the lost wanderer, while the same sensual impressions mean something very different for the forest ranger who is completely familiar with the situation. Moreover, natural environments are not only objects of knowing but can directly affect the perspective of potential knowers: Proponents of "place identity" for instance would argue that location and natural environments are important in developing "identities" and thus distinct epistemological perspective [Twigger-Ross, 2003].

For Feyerabend the perspectivity of knowing is an essential aspect of his epistemology: For him the different experiences of a forest implies the existence ff "different events, not just different appearances of the same event" [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 104]. In other words, different people are not experiencing the same forest differently but they acquire knowledge of different "things". If we adopt this believe we must accept limitations

to our ability to overcoming the perspectivity of "our" knowledge, our subjective ways of making sense of the world. Feyerabend uses the example of (past) religious believes – for instance the Greek Pantheon – to illustrate this problem. For the ancient Greek their gods were "there" while today "they are nowhere to be found" [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 104]. Feyerabend didn't think of the gods of the Greek pantheon as manifestations "capable of being known objectively" [Friedmann, 1978, p. 76]. From his perspective the question of whether Zeus Poseidon or Artemis "really existed is missing the point since "alien cultures" [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 104] "not only contain different events, they also contain them differently" [Ibid., p. 105]. According to Feyerabend it is therefore impossible to assign a "truth value" to statement that the Greek Pantheon existed (at least not in a Popperian sense here) or concluded from the fact that its gods are nowhere to be found today that their existence had successfully disproven [Friedmann, 1978, p. 79]. All contemporary historians can do is to try to reconstruct religious practices of citizens in ancient Greek and formulated hypotheses about the decline of the relevance of rituals and convictions but they nevertheless live in a different "reality" from their object of study [Feyerabend, 1987, p. 105].

It is important to stress that Feyerabend assumed that people live parallel lives in many parallel worlds and to explain how this conviction informed his perspective on scientific knowledge claims and the objectivity of knowledge in general. If we assume that people live in many different parallel realities, that might be (partially) intelligible to scholars and other "outsiders", the idea of an objective way of knowing and with it the superiority of one specific set of practices for the production of knowledge (like Western science) have to be abandoned. Moreover, "[w]ith objective knowledge 'dissolved into thin air' (…) we have to turn to the question "of how knowledge from whatever source is to be jointed to organized action in the construction of social reality" [Friedmann, 1978, p. 84]. It is exactly this connection between Feyerabend's objection of objective knowledge and the construction of social realities that we have to explore further. To do so, we will first explore the "historical dimension" of Feyerabend's principle of "anything goes" and interrogate how it relates to historical accounts of "facts". After that we will turn to the political dimension of the principle and examine the role of scientist and scientific expert.

These excuses will lay the foundation for a subsequent discussion of how exactly Feyerabend's philosophy relates to a constructivist perspective and how we can utilize his principle of anything goes to challenge scientific authority without giving up the idea of a (minimal) factual basis for public debate.

What Do We Mean by "Anything Goes" –
Historical Dimension

A first viable angle on Feyerabend's principle of "anything goes" is historical. To discern Feyerabend's discomfort with the self-description of scientific knowledge production it is worth to take a detour though. In our everyday understanding, scientific research is often depicted as the process of "finding out" something. Stuart Firestein remarks that this view is expressed whenever we speak of a "discovery" that is "to uncover, to remove a veil that was hiding something, already there, to reveal a fact" [Firestein, 2012, p. 20]. This picture of scientist as discoverers who, equipped with objective methods, probe into the unknown and add to our pile of knowledge corresponds (in principle) with for example Poppers conception of fallible, yet self-correcting scientific venture that strives to get closer to objective knowledge. Scientific theories and methods, in this view, are mere "tools" to remove whatever blocks a clear view at the facts, which once they are laid bare, speak for themselves. However, such a view belies the reality and practicalities of scientific research: "No matter how objective the measurement, someone still had to decide to make that measurement, providing ample opportunity for bias to enter the scheme right there. And of course, data and facts are always interpreted because they often fail to produce uncontestable result" [Ibid.]. The everyday equation of science with discovery can be objected on two grounds: First, as we have seen we can question the existence of objective, independent methodologies that guide us to the facts. Second, we can challenge the idea of observer-independent facts as "objects of knowledge" that, in fact, speak for themselves.

However, making these objections doesn't necessarily imply one has to deny the existence of criteria to judge the quality scientific methods nor that all facts are mere chimeras. Yet, these objections might draw attention to historical analyses of scientific practices and, especially, to historical accounts of the evolution of scientific facts themselves. Mary Poovey for instance, has demonstrated in her seminal *A History of the Modern Fact* [Poovey, 1998] that what "counts" as scientific fact is historically contingent and evolved alongside science itself. Most impitrnatly the same process that gradually distanced scientific practices such as making observations and taking measures and scholarly interest from medieval curiosity and religious fascination with miraculous occurrences. What would once have caught the eye of the medieval thinker – the cow born with two heads or unusual weather phenomenon – would fade into the background once pattern detection, regularities and "laws of nature" claimed the center stage and would eventually be "explained away" as statistical anomalies that couldn't compromise the scientific facts won by repeated measurement and note-taking.

In the same vein, Lorraine Daston has pointed to the importance of distinguishing between "facts" and "evidence" and warned against assuming a straightforward connection between the two. In her words facts are "the mercenary soldiers of argument, ready to enlist in yours or mine, whatever the evidentiary fits best" [Daston, 1991, p. 93]. Since the arguments and interpretation of evidence are historically contingent too, both the definition of facts and their evidential value are not fixed and need to be understood against the background of specific historical contexts. However, neither Poovey nor Daston suggest that facts do not matter or that facts a mere construction. Historians of science like Daston and Poovey rather show that the selection and interpretation of facts themselves need to be analyzed and that the criteria for both can vary between contexts and change over time. Their historical work thus stresses that scientific facts do not "speak for themselves" and that the methods, practices and procedure for identifying and interpreting certain objects and events *as facts* need to be scrutinized and put into a historical perspective. Historians of science hence partially agree with Feyerabend in discarding the idea of a world of objective facts that can be discovered once we have developed appropriate methods for removing the veil that was hiding them. However, at the same time, historians of science would not support interpretations that would discard the existence of facts altogether. The calf born with two heads might no longer command the most attention from modern biologist and zoologists, but contemporary biological theories would still be able to offer an explanation for such a (statistically marginal) occurrence. Form a historical perspective, facts and methods for uncovering and understanding them should themselves be treated as historically contingent objects of study. As we will see in the following such an understanding if important for our understanding of Feyerabend's anarchistic principle and its relation to the "classical conception of knowledge" [Boghossian, 2008]. Before we turn to this problem, we need to briefly revisit the second, "political" dimension of the principle of "anything goes" though.

What Do We Mean by "Anything Goes" – Political Dimension

As we have touched upon already above, it is important to understand Feyerabend's non-academic motivation for developing his anarchistic philosophy. Feyerabend saw himself as an "engaged philosopher" and critical intellectual. His criticism of Popper and positivism, for instance, stemmed from academic disagreement but also fueled by his conviction thatits uncritical adoption would lead to a dangerous acceptance of scientific authority with unwelcome and unacceptable *social* and *political*

consequences [Feyerabend, 1975b, p. 3; Kidd, 2016, p. 56]. Challenging increasingly state-run, big research projects that fueled the technological arms-race of the cold-war period and criticizing science that served political ideologies as ideology itself [Feyerabend, 1975b, p. 4] was not only the expression of an theoretical disagreement with philosophical theories of science but the expression of an intellectual duty to speak out against problematic science politics. Since the certainty of its findings and the objectivity of its methodic were the primary sources of the credibility and status of science they provided excellent points of attack as well. It is therefore neither a surprise that Feyerabend targeted the methodological principles of scientific research, nor that he "frequently resort[ed] to propagandizing (…) and rhetorical hand-waving" [Laudan, 1989, p. 300] as he clearly aimed at contributing to wider social debates.

Feyerabend, and in this respect he resembled many of the post-modern intellectuals in the 1970s didn't see himself as mere observers of the social impact of science but as critics, provocateurs and hence active contributors to public debate. He rejected the idea that scientists could play the role of impartial "experts" or, worse guide society to a technocratic, rational utopia [Kidd, 2016, p. 74] and called into question that science could provide the basis for such a disinterested, "objective" perspective on societies. Feyerabend's aim was "to defend societies and its inhabitants from all ideologies, science included" [Feyerabend, 1975b, p. 4] and was therefore determined to uncover the ideological aspects of science. The consequence of this mission to defend societies was a peculiar mix of sharped-tongued polemics against the dominance of a naïve belief in scientific facts in educational politics [Ibid.] and the embracing of magical thinking and the acceptance of "phenomena such as telepathy and telekinesis" [Ibid., p. 6].

For Feyerabend, epistemological anarchism is thus an appropriate reaction to what he believed to be an increasingly totalitarian, indoctrinating role of science [Ibid., p. 7] and hence a political statement as much as an intellectual position. By stressing the social conditions in which scientific knowledge is produced and by rejecting the "aseptic" epistemological narrative that knowledge claims are accepted because of the methodological rigor and immediate persuasiveness of evidence presented to scientific peers, Feyerabend was not only challenging philosophical principles but the adopted the role of a intellectual Casandra, warning of the political consequences of the dominance of Western science.

Know that we have examined the historical and political side of Feyerabend's principle of anything goes, we can turn to its interpretation in contemporary debates about social constructivism and objective facts.

Are (All) Facts Socially Constructed?

From a philosophical perspective Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism manifest itself in a rejection of what Paul Boghossian calls the "classical conception of knowledge" which rests on three core assumptions: "Objectivism about facts", "Objectivism about Justification" and "Objectivism about Rational Explanation" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 24]. To say that "anything goes" can – in theory – concern all three aspects of the classical conception of knowledge, however with very different consequences.

Before we delve deeper into these connections we should briefly pause and justify that we draw a parallel between Feyerabend and proponents of social constructivism in the first place. Feyerabend has frequently and consistently refered to scientific explanations as stories and interpretations, equated them with fairy tales and has stressed that they should be taught in parallel to other non-scientific interpretations of the world [Feyerabend, 1975b, p. 8; Shaw, 2021]. He thus shared some core assumptions of social constructivists that *all* facts are socially constructed [Boghossian, 2008, p. 25]. However, despite the fact that the connection between Feyerabend and social constructivism can be made, it need to be said that some, very important aspects of the debate are not as easily linked to him. Take for instance the highly problematic demarcation between "natural" and "social" facts. While for radical constructivists all facts (including every aspect of the natural world) are socially constructed "softer" versions would allow for a distinction between given natural facts (for instance a mountain) and social facts (e.g. gender roles, social institutions). Contemporary debate however shows that the distinction between these two types of facts is far from clear (think for instance of polarizing disputes about the distinction between gender/ biological sex, biological and social "age", mental health etc.) and the lines between factual explanation and social and political interpretation are often blurred. Feyerabend has to my knowledge, not addressed these questions directly. In the following we will therefore try to reconstruct possible and plausible relations of Feyerabend's principle to these questions and the "classical conception of knowledge" in particular and offer an interpretation of his views that (hopefully) provide a fruitful use of his approach in todays polarized debate.

Approaching the Classical Conception of Knowledge

Starting point for our ist the classical conception of knowledge. It "holds that many facts about the world are independent of us, and hence independent of our social values and interests" [Ibid., p. 20]. It is worth pausing

here for a moment and contemplate what this "being independent of so-cial values and interests" means. The classical conception does not imply that values and interests are irrelevant on making sense of "facts", but rather insists that they are (in some cases) irrelevant to constituting the fact as such. Take for instance the contested issue of climate change. According to the classical conception of knowledge the chemical and physical processes that lead to the trapping of heat (energy) are independent of *whatever* one might think about them or who works on deciphering the interlay of chemical and physical processes.

However, values and interests certainly play a role in how these facts are interpreted. Moreover, it is important to notice that the classical conception assumes that *many* not *all* facts are independent of us, which means that it is entirely compatible with variants of social constructivism that insist that social facts (e.g. gender, nationality etc.) are constructed that thus dependent on values and interests. In its most radical form "anything goes" would thus imply that we must consider (and accept) different, equally valid "facts". Scientific evidence that supports the theory of evolution and the describes the development of homo sapiens as a long chain of events in the evolution of mammals constitute "facts" just as Christian creationists believes that the earth was created in seven days just a few thousand years ago. It is tempting to read Feyerabend that way, in particular if we think of his "rhetorical hand waving" [Laudan, 1989, p. 300] and his political polemics against the dominance of science.

A second aspect of the classical conception of knowledge is the "Objectivism about Justification" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 22]. If (some) facts are independent of social circumstances, then these facts can justify a corresponding belief independently of social factors. If, for instance, the discovery and dating of fossils (assuming the methods for both had been sufficiently scrutinized) establishes that certain creatures lived in a certain period of time, these "facts" should be sufficient to disprove the traditional Christian belief in divine creation only a few thousand years ago. We can add a third (closely related) aspect here according to which it the exposure to certain facts should be sufficient to explain why we derive a certain conclusion from them. Taken together these two facets of the classical conception of knowledge state that facts can be performative in the sense that they suggest distinct conclusion which in turn are rational (in the light of the facts) and thus independent of individual or collective preferences, value systems and so on.

In this context, "anything goes" could inform constructivist thinking in two different ways First one could claim that facts are not immediately suggesting specific, inevitable interpretations. The interpretation of facts, the conclusions we draw, are always dependent on socially "contingent needs and interests" [Ibid.] and thus reflect distinct socio-historical contexts.

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This leads to the third aspect and the question whether such contextual conclusions can be called rational. According to the standard conception of knowledge our "exposure to the evidence alone is capable of explaining why we believe what we believe" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 22]. In other words, there is an objective standard for what counts as a rational explanation and this standard is derived from the facts rather than the social circumstances. From this perspective scientist and anybody else can either draw true or false conclusion or at the very least conclusions that are consistent (or not) with given theoretical models. We therefore have an objective standard for judging how rational or irrational an interpretation and a "fact based" conclusion is.

Apparently, Feyerabends principle *could* challenge all three aspects of the classical conception of knowledge. However, as we shall see in the following concluding paragraphs, it can have distinct meanings each of which have specific consequences for Feyabends relation to (radical) social constructivists positions.

Regarding the first aspect of the classical conception, "anything goes" could hint at a radical constructivist position according to which scientific methods and procedures inevitably fail to produce objective, certain knowledge because facts themselves are socially constructed and therefore historically and socially contingent. This position is somewhat problematic, even for Feyerabend, since it deprives us of *any* "rational grounds for making the judgment that one method is better than the other" [Laudan, 1989, p. 313] and one interpretation is preferable to any other. Again, at first glance it might look like this corresponds with Feyerabend's idea of science as an ideology like many others. However, if we consider its consequences we find, I think, it to be incompatible with Feyerabend's idea of epistemic pluralism. If we root methodological anarchism in radical social constructivism, scientific methods would *not* co-exist alongside alternative views such religious, traditional or indigenous knowledge claim as Feyerabend envisioned. Nor could we assume that "mature people" of democratic communities would have the appetite engaging with dissenting views in a respectful, open way. We should rather assume that *because* of the close relation between perspectivity and identity that Feyerabend presupposes the absence of any factual basis would foster the entrenchment of opposing positions and the polarization of debate. Moreover, since the very existence of collective identities and thus alternative views could be called into question (for instance by simply denying that a minority or indigenous group constitute a collective with its own perspectives) it is difficult to see how a pluralism of viewpoints could be constituted in the first place. Without some minimal consensus about certain "facts of life" knowledge claims are not debated and confronted with alternative positions but rather enforced or suppressed based on entirely social factors and the relative power of social actors. Such a depiction comes the closest to literal definition of "post-truth" as it

would eradicate the basis for any judgment of quality of a knowledge claim. Instead of dismantling the dominant position of Western science and to broaden public debate to include alternative views as equal, the result would be most likely a new dogmatism and increasingly irreconcilable clashes between social power blocks. Such a radical interpretation of Feyerabend's principle clearly runs counter to his academic and political intention, I think it is fair to discard it – despite some rhetorical hand-waving that could be read this way [Feyerabend, 1975b, p. 7] – as youthful enthusiasm just like Latour distanced himself from some of the more radical exegeses of his work.

In the following we should therefore turn to two alternative, less radical readings of Feyerabend's principle.

The first of the two is connected to the question whether facts can "automatically" suggest specific interpretations or "corresponding beliefs" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 14] and if not, what that would tell us about the epistemological and social status of alternative knowledge claims. The answer to these questions is dependent of what exactly is meant by "corresponding belief". For instance, we could agree scientific experiments establish that the emission of greenhouse gases causes certain changes in the chemical composition of the Earth's atmosphere. We could further agree with the interpretation of these facts that the chemical changes lead to a heat-trapping effect and might finally accept to call the whole process "climate change". If we stay within the narrow path of scientific reasoning the argumentation is reasonably plausible Feyerabend would just have warned us that even this plausible scientific narrative is not without flaws and would have argued that we shouldn't discard alternative stories right away.

However, as soon as we widen the scope it becomes less clear what the "corresponding belief" of this scientific knowledge is: People might accept the scientific evidence but could still count on a divine intervention or conceive of climate change as a "test" engineered by a higher being. Moreover, does the corresponding belief include that climate change is a problem that warrants social and political action? People might accept that scientific knowledge claim without seeing its political relevance. Historians of science such as Loraine Daston [Daston, 1991] remind us that evidence (that is "facts put into a certain context/narration") itself is not automatically performative and never speaks for itself but can be challenged and re-interpreted. However, in contrast to a radical rejection of "facts" the reinterpretation of evidence and likewise disputes about corresponding believes presuppose the existence of a minimal factual common ground. The principle of anything goes and the subsequent call for epistemological pluralism could be read as a rejection of the idea of "pure facts" and a qualified opposition towards the second assumption of the classical conception of knowledge, the "Objectivism of Justification" [Boghossian, 2008, p. 22] and the embracing of a plurality of socially constructed beliefs about facts and their meaning.

Thirdly and finally, this debate could be further narrowed down to the question of how "rational" a rejection of a corresponding belief must be. To me it seems that this question is closest to Feyerbabend's epistemological *and* political criticism of scientific authority. If dissent with the conclusion of scientific research is synonymous with unreasonable thinking, scientific knowledge would be automatically advantaged. If we acknowledge that criteria for rational behavior can be socially and historically contingent though, we are able to open up debate and hear a plurality of voices without dismissing the majority of them as unreasonable. The last two interpretations of Feyerabend's principle and social constructivist ideas are thus requiring a delicate balancing act between a minimal consensus about facts and tolerant stance towards their diverse and potentially conflicting interpretation, which in turn requires "mature people" [Feyerbabend, 1987, p. 87] willing to accept the existence of competing and conflicting rationalities.

Conclusion: Where Are We Going When Anything Goes

"Anything goes", the "ubiquitous Feyeabendian slogan" [Laudan, 1989, p. 299] condenses a philosophical project that oscillates between academic and political attacks on science and combines philosophical and "propagandizing" [Ibid., p. 300] arguments and rhetoric. It is tempting – especially in the current intellectual climate – to emphasize its roots in a long, skeptical tradition and highlight Feyerabend's polemic attacks on science to turn him into a figurehead of a wild, radical relativism, Current debates about the post-factual and social constructivist rejection of any facts seemingly carry the torch of warning against blind faith Western science and object to scientific chauvinism [Shaw, 2021, p. 2]. However, as I have argued in this paper it would be a mistake to simply equate Feyerabend's disagreement with certain schools of philosophy of science and his objection of an aseptic presentation of scientific methodology as a superior, objective way of accumulating knowledge with a general rejection of facts or an embracing of current debates about post-factualism [Ferretti, 2021]. Such a simple interpretation of Feyerabend belies both his historical understanding of the scientific enterprise and his political views on a truly pluralistic society.

In this short paper I have therefore argued for a more nuanced analysis of the relations if Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism and debates about the social construction of facts and subsequently the interpretations and beliefs we derive from them.

Most importantly I wanted to put forward three variants of such a relation each with distinct epistemological *and* political implications.

First, in its most extreme reading "anything goes" relates to the radical social constructivists position according to which all facts are socially constructed. However, as we have seen such a position would *not* lead to Feyerabend's envisioned methodological and epistemological pluralism, but rather replaces scientific authority with any authority strong enough to enforce its views on others. Moreover, the absence of any objective facts would make it hard to sustain the very foundation of the more pluralistic approach as it the very existence of a specific group-perspective could be challenged and dismissed. Instead of anything, nothing might be possible in such a rather dystopian scenario as there would be no basis for a dialogue between dissenting positions.

Secondly, anything goes could refer to the fact that scientific facts do not automatically "cause" corresponding believes and that we have to accept that different ways of knowing and methods for producing knowledge lead to variety of corresponding convictions. Feyerabend's philosophy, in this case, is a strong and healthy reminder of the social conditions in which scientific evidence is presented and interpreted and could justify a more open debate that allows to dissect and reject elements of scientific "story-telling". This leads over to the last and in my view most "Feyerabendian" reading of anything goes, the question of whether a specific reading of "facts" warrants the label of being rational. Anything goes could be a reminder that monopolizing rationality by making it synonymous Western with scientific rationality belies the complexity of the concept. It is not me to decide whether debates about alternative rationalities that reflect the distinct conditions in which – for instance non-Western knowledge systems evolved – have merit or not. However, I would argue that the careful distinction proposed in this contribution allows us to use Feyerabend's anarchism to open a space for debate about the co-existence of alternative knowledge systems [du Toit, 2005] and the use of scientific knowledge without blindly trusting scientific authority.

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