Feyerabend

- Chalmers, *WITTCS?*, Ch. 10
Against Method

► Science has **no universal, unchanging method**: any rule that one would wish to lay down (and *has* been laid down) will have to be broken (or *has* been broken) to make progress, in the lights of any rationalist account: **epistemological anarchism**.

► The enforcement of epistemological “law and order” is a limit on human creativity and freedom (and crucial opportunism).

► *Nothing* distinguishes science from non-science.
The failure of rationalism

- **Verification** (Logical Positivism) – *failed*
- **Confirmation** (Logical Positivism) – *failed*
- **(Short-term) falsification** (Popper) – *failed*
- **Normal science & consensus** (Kuhn) – *tyrannical*
- **(Long-term) falsification** (Lakatos) – *empty*

‘...[T]he idea of a fixed method, or of a fixed theory of rationality, rests on too naive a view of man and his social surroundings. To those who look at the rich material provided by history, and who are not intent on impoverishing it in order to please their lower instincts, their craving for intellectual security in the form of clarity, precision, ‘objectivity’, ‘truth’, it will become clear that there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: anything goes.’ (AM, p. 19)
Inspirations

- Dadaism: ‘Dada not only had no programme, it was against all programmes.’ – Hans Richter (quoted in AM, 16n.).

  - But cf. Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843).

- Hegel, Marx, Kropotkin.
‘Anything goes’

- Sometimes use induction.
- Sometimes use counter-induction.
- Sometimes be guided by the observable facts.
- Sometimes challenge the observable facts.
- Sometimes reject a falsified ideology.
- Sometimes borrow from rejected ideologies.

- ‘Let a thousand flowers bloom!’

‘There is no need to fear that the diminished concern for law and order in science and society that characterizes an anarchism of this kind will lead to chaos. The human nervous system is too well organized for that.’ (p. 5)
Against distinctions

Rejection of four distinctions:

► Context of discovery/context of justification
► Fact/value
► Observational/theoretical
► Science/ideology

‘[T]he question is not what distinctions a fertile mind can dream up when confronted with a complex process, or how some homogenous material may be subdivided; the question is to what extent the distinction drawn reflects a real difference and whether science can advance without a strong interaction between the separated domains.’ (pp. 139-40)

► Feyerabend had similar views to Kuhn about the language and concepts of science.
► “Incommensurability” again.
► Empiricism as untenable.
► Cf. the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.
Whorf: Shawnee and English gestalts

ENGLISH
“CLEAN”    “WITH”  “RAMROD”

THE THREE ISOLATES FROM EXPERIENCE OR NATURE USED IN ENGLISH TO SAY “I CLEAN IT (GUN) WITH THE RAMROD.”

SHAWNEE
“PĒKW”   “ĀLAK”   “H”
(DRY SPACE) (INTERIOR OF HOLE) (BY MOTION OF TOOL, INSTRUMENT)

THE THREE ISOLATES FROM EXPERIENCE OR NATURE USED IN SHAWNEE TO SAY “NIPEKWĀLAKHA,” MEANING “I CLEAN IT (GUN) WITH THE RAMROD.”
‘[T]here is no limit to my astonishment when I reflect that Aristarchus and Copernicus were able to make reason so conquer sense that in defiance of the latter, the former became mistress of their belief.’ – Galileo, quoted in Chalmers (p. 151)

The “observable facts”:
- The Earth is stationary (e.g. objects fallen from a tower land at the tower’s foot).
- Venus and Mars do not appreciably change their size over the year.

Galileo’s response:
- Appeal to, and preference for, the ‘superior and better sense’ of the telescope, in the face of discrepancies with the naked eye.
- The covert substitution of old ‘natural interpretations’ for new ones, ptic. in the introduction of circular inertia.
- Shrewd popularization: appeal to the orthodoxy’s discontents; publishing in Italian, rather than Latin.
Objections and responses

▶ Is Feyerabend guided by the wrong notion of freedom? Could there be such a thing as an ideology-neutral state? (Chalmers)

▶ No rule for the elimination of ideas. (PGS)

▶ What about medicine, ecology and technology? (PGS)
  ▶ Improvements are in need of explanation.
  ▶ The importance of consensus, or objectivity?

‘What do you call alternative medicine that’s been proven to work? Medicine.’ – Tim Minchin

▶ Is there a middle-ground between an ‘universal, unchanging method’ and ‘anything goes’? – Worrall’s argument and Chalmers, Ch. 11: ‘common-sense universal method’.