

FEYERABEND HOW TO DEFEND SOCIETY AGAINST SCIENCE

CITATION:

Feyerabend, Paul. (1975). "How to Defend Society against Science". *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science - 3rd Edition*. Klemke, Hollinger, et.al. (Eds.) 1998: 54-65.

MAIN THESIS:

Any ideology, if not counterbalanced by other systems, is detrimental to society and stifles intellectual development. Science's incontrovertible position in society today is due not to any inherent correctness in its methodologies nor to the mass of documented results stemming from these methods, but to mere chance that no serious competitors developed and the generations that followed were educated as such.

SUMMARY:

Feyerabend's 1975 talk was a provocative analysis of science's position in society. His purpose was to defend society from all ideologies including science. Science's history as a practice that questioned the norm shielded it from the scrutiny applied to other ideologies and elevated it - in people's eyes - to something beyond a simple ideology. Feyerabend's goal is to overthrow the tyrant of science which has ruled as "fact", unchecked for centuries. He argued that science should have been only a stage in the development of society, a tool to overthrow other ideologies, then itself be overthrown (or at least questioned) by a new system. Instead, science today is taught as incontrovertible fact not unlike the religious facts taught earlier during the then-dominant religious ideologies.

Feyerabend's more detailed analysis of science's position in society today proceeds in two major parts: (1) that science's method is correct and (2) the results support the correctness of the method.

Regarding (1), after quickly discounting induction, Feyerabend cites various works suggesting that either the method of science is no different from those of other ideologies in accuracy or that there *is* no method particular to science. Feyerabend settles on the latter with Lakatos' aid by distinguishing methodological rules from an independently-functioning methodology.

Regarding (2), Feyerabend challenges the idea that science gained its stature from the results it produces. He provides many examples of science's adoption of supposedly pseudoscientific results to show that much of the highly-regarded body of results attributed to science is actually arrived at by "outsiders". Such examples include areas of alternative medicine swallowed by Western science and contributions by people like Bohr and Einstein who considered themselves outsiders.

Reassessing science as an ideology results in a more wary society, one where science enjoys the same detachment from state affairs as religion and is no longer a source of unassailable truth.

Feyerabend ends his talk with a critique of the education system that currently upholds science's position. He argues that students are "bullied" into becoming scientific followers and are never given the opportunity to seek opposing ideologies, particularly during their childhoods when they are most malleable.

Feyerabend concludes by reiterating his desire to see the ideology of science face some competition (any competition, he indicates that magicians, priests and astrologers would serve as effective counterbalances). It is by mere historical accident that science grew in an environment without predators and it should be subjected to some competition.