

Zurich, 7th February 2013

Opponent's Report of Luděk Brouček's PhD thesis**“The Paratactic Aggregate – Feyerabend's Pluralistic Philosophy”**

Luděk Brouček's doctoral dissertation aims at a comparison between Paul Feyerabend's later pluralistic philosophy and the philosophy of Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō. The focal point of the comparison lies in the historicity that constitutes an important feature of both philosophies. As Brouček writes, the “basic assumption [of both philosophers] is that our world and our knowledge is a historical and creative process.” (p. 4). The dissertation contains four major chapters: Chapter one analyzes Paul Feyerabend's intellectual development. Chapter two focuses on Feyerabend's later philosophy and, in particular, on his interpretation of archaic Greek thought in the posthumously published *Naturphilosophie*. Chapter three provides a concise overview of the main topics in Nishida's philosophy. Finally, in chapter four, a comparative perspective is taken, and the contributions of both thinkers to the philosophy of technology as well as the philosophy of biology are discussed. By parallelizing the approach of one of the most important western philosophers of science (a characterization that Feyerabend himself would surely reject) with that of one of the founding fathers of modern Japanese philosophy, the candidate's dissertation provides an innovative and interesting piece of philosophical analysis.

The first chapter of the thesis gives a concise overview on Paul Feyerabend's thinking and the intricate ways it changed over the years. All stages of the development of Feyerabend's philosophy are clearly depicted including his early positivist phase, his relationship to Popper, the principle of proliferation, the thesis of incommensurability that Feyerabend co-developed with Kuhn, his anti-rationalist and epistemological anarchist phase, and, finally, the ontological pluralism of the later years. Brouček covers a wide range of relevant literature and also proves acquaintance with the latest developments in the field of Feyerabend research by referring the most recent literature. In general, the chapter draws a picture of Feyerabend as a thinker that moved away from a static, realistic and

empiricist line of thinking towards a pluralistic and dynamical view of science and culture in general that involved a specific and genuinely Feyerabendian form of relativism.

The second chapter focuses on Feyerabend's later philosophy of nature. Brouček focuses in particular on Feyerabend's analysis of the archaic Greek world as a so-called "paratactic aggregate" in the *Naturphilosophie*. In his elaboration of the thesis of the paratactic aggregate, Feyerabend heavily draws on Bruno Snell's analysis of the Homeric epic and early Greek geometric art. Likewise, Brouček also carefully reconstructs the main ideas of Snell's analysis. One of them being for instance that the Iliadic heroes, or rather the vocabulary that Homer used to describe them, did not include the concept of a free soul or a conscious person making autonomous decisions. Rather, Snell finds a "paratactic aggregation of the body and mind in Homeric Greek" (p. 51). Feyerabend takes Snell's analysis as support for his claim that the principles of the paratactic aggregate were constitutive of archaic world view in general and that they heavily influenced the way in which the archaic Greeks experienced and conceived the world: as a dynamic and abundant multitude of things, events, forces, processes etc. According to Feyerabend, this dynamical worldview was gradually replaced by a hypotactic thinking structure, which culminated in modern rationalism. It has to be mentioned here that the candidate, although he mentions some criticism that can be found in the literature against Snell's and Feyerabend's views, does not take himself a critical stance on them. For example, he seems to agree with Feyerabend that Parmenides and his rejection of becoming have to be blamed for the replacing the old dynamical thinking with a rational and objectifying approach to reality that became to dominate modern science and philosophy. It could be objected at this point against Feyerabend that it was actually the philosophy of the atomists, which they had developed as an alternative to Parmenidian monism, and which, through mediation via Epicurus and Lucretius, influenced the mechanical philosophy of early modern thinkers like Boyle, Newton and others. Dynamical and mechanical phenomena as well as the idea of an underlying atomistic or corpuscular structure of matter were at the very heart of that philosophy. In that sense, modern science can be thought of as having always been highly dynamical and pluralistic rather than static and monistic, as Feyerabend wants to claim. Whether Feyerabend's blame on Parmenides is justified or not, and whether Feyerabend might be overestimating Parmenides's influence on western science, are questions not addressed by the candidate.

Chapter three is mainly concerned with the philosophy of Japanese philosopher and founding father of the Kyoto School Nishida Kitarō. Because the reviewer has no acquaintance whatsoever with neither Nishida's philosophy nor Japanese philosophy in general, no objective assessment can be given on these issues. It can be said, however, that Brouček introduces the main topics of Nishida's philosophy in a way that it becomes accessible to the layman. It is made clear that at the core of Nishida's thinking lies the notion of a highly dynamical, non-static reality. On the epistemological side, the process of acquiring knowledge of reality is not taken to be merely passive. For Nishida,

experience and cognition are creative in the sense that it might actively change the underlying reality that is conceived or experienced (p. 59). It is at precisely this idea that the candidate uses as an anchor for his comparison between Nishida and Feyerabend, since, for the later Feyerabend too, “being is dynamic [and] influences and reflects the activity of its explorers” (ibid.).

Accordingly, in chapter four, this line of comparison is further elaborated. Consequences for the philosophy of technology as well as the philosophy of biology are discussed, and references to current discussions in these fields are established (e.g. with references to Murata, De Waal, and Markoš).

Brouček’s doctoral dissertation makes an important and creative contribution to both, Feyerabend research as well as to the reception of eastern philosophy from a western perspective. The text is composed in a structured, well-formulated and concise language and the main topics in the philosophies of Feyerabend and Nishida as well as their common points of reference are carefully laid out. Thus Brouček’s approach is mainly descriptive and less analytic. The quality of the thesis could have been increased by a more critical stance of the candidate towards the ideas that he discusses. Yet, this point of critique does by no means derogate the very good general impression of the thesis and its content. The quality of Luděk Brouček’s doctoral thesis definitely satisfies the necessary criteria for obtaining a PhD degree.

Yours sincerely

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