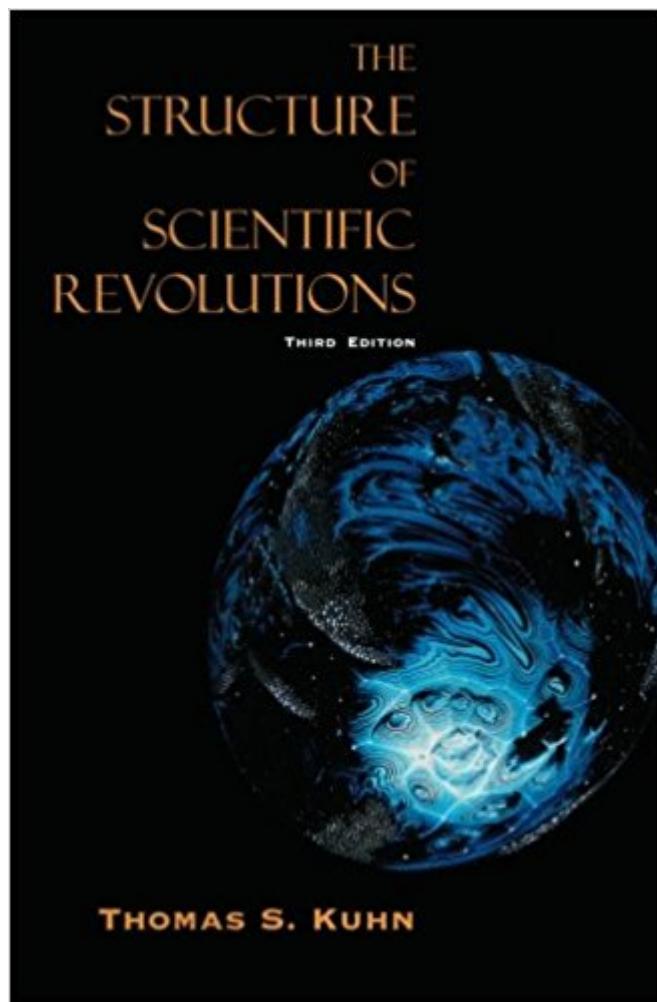


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# The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions



## Synopsis

Thomas S. Kuhn's classic book is now available with a new index."A landmark in intellectual history which has attracted attention far beyond its own immediate field. . . . It is written with a combination of depth and clarity that make it an almost unbroken series of aphorisms. . . . Kuhn does not permit truth to be a criterion of scientific theories, he would presumably not claim his own theory to be true. But if causing a revolution is the hallmark of a superior paradigm, [this book] has been a resounding success." --Nicholas Wade, *Science*"Perhaps the best explanation of [the] process of discovery."

--William Erwin Thompson, *New York Times Book Review*"Occasionally there emerges a book which has an influence far beyond its originally intended audience. . . . Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* . . . has clearly emerged as just such a work." --Ron Johnston, *Times Higher Education Supplement*"Among the most influential academic books in this century."

--Choice--One of "The Hundred Most Influential Books Since the Second World War," *Times Literary Supplement*Thomas S. Kuhn was the Laurence Rockefeller Professor Emeritus of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His books include *The Essential Tension*; *Black-Body Theory and the Quantum Discontinuity, 1894-1912*; and *The Copernican Revolution*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There's a "Frank & Ernest" comic strip showing a chick breaking out of its shell, looking around, and saying, "Oh, wow! Paradigm shift!" Blame the late Thomas Kuhn. Few indeed are the philosophers

or historians influential enough to make it into the funny papers, but Kuhn is one. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions is indeed a paradigmatic work in the history of science. Kuhn's use of terms such as "paradigm shift" and "normal science," his ideas of how scientists move from disdain through doubt to acceptance of a new theory, his stress on social and psychological factors in science--all have had profound effects on historians, scientists, philosophers, critics, writers, business gurus, and even the cartoonist in the street. Some scientists (such as Steven Weinberg and Ernst Mayr) are profoundly irritated by Kuhn, especially by the doubts he casts--or the way his work has been used to cast doubt--on the idea of scientific progress. Yet it has been said that the acceptance of plate tectonics in the 1960s, for instance, was sped by geologists' reluctance to be on the downside of a paradigm shift. Even Weinberg has said that "Structure has had a wider influence than any other book on the history of science." As one of Kuhn's obituaries noted, "We all live in a post-Kuhnian age." --Mary Ellen Curtin

Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) argued that scientific advancement is not evolutionary, but rather is a "series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions", and in those revolutions "one conceptual world view is replaced by another". The University of Chicago Press has released The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions to the benefit of all students of the history of science, philosophy, and the impact of science on society (and society on the development of science). If every there were a true classic on the history and development of science that is "must" reading for each new generation, it is Kuhn's benchmark work, The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions. -- Midwest Book Review

This book is a very difficult read, and worth the effort. More learned people than I will review the contents of this book. I will give a more personal account. I first learned of Thomas Kuhn at a lecture in the 1980s. During the Q&A someone asked about Thomas Kuhn and his relevance to the topic. From the first mention of his name, Kuhn intrigued me. It took me several years to find the book; finally in the Princeton University bookstore. It was not widely circulated at the time, certainly there was no in 1985! The first read was very difficult. I had the book on my lap with a dictionary right beneath it. The dictionary was not helpful because of all of Kuhn's specialized terminology. I read it once a year for about five years. I got the gist of his point in the first reading. But each subsequent reading gave me a more detailed understanding of his thesis and his examples were more easily understood. I bought some other books that were commentaries on "Structure". (I recommend "The Road Since Structure" especially.) This most recent purchase of "Structure" is a gift for a young

seminarian who's first grade daughter happens to be my student the Sunday School class which I teach.

Few books have influenced my scientific thinking as much as Kuhn's great book. Like "On the Origin of Species," it was written as a preliminary to a fuller version, which never appeared. However, In the Preface we soon encounter an intimation of the author's bold intentions: "Since my most fundamental objective is to urge a change in the perception and evaluation of familiar data, the schematic character of this first presentation need be no drawback. On the contrary, readers whose own research has prepared them for the sort of reorientation here advocated may find the essay form both more suggestive and easier to assimilate." How these intentions might be fulfilled he then proceeds to suggest. Kuhn was trained as a physicist, yet his thoughts are equally applicable and inspiring to biologists and other scientists. After fifty years I still find "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" an exciting and stimulating experience.

Kuhn's basic argument is that once the information collected from experiments or the real world is not explained by a theory the theory will become obsolete. Things that cannot be explained lead to the generation of a new theory that will include the new information. At points Kuhn is not clear. A book presenting shifts of paradigm with greater clarity is Paul De Kruif's Microbe Hunters. Paradigm shifts are the way that science moves forward. Old theories move into the history of science as failed attempts toward completeness.

Kuhn's book examines the historical records of how scientific "paradigms" changed. This record is used to probe how people describe scientific proof. Kuhn's methods can be generalized to understanding the meaning of "truth" and how different "truths" are justified. Only for people who dig science in depth, and philosophy

I read this book completely by accident; I found Kuhn's name and this book as a reference while looking for something completely different. When I checked out the reference a little further, I discovered that this book is generally considered a classic (anything written a half a century ago that's still cited probably has -some- staying power). So I decided to take a look at it. The book is relatively small, which means you might think it's an easy and quick read. You'd be wrong. Kuhn's book is dense with information and thoughtful presentation, which makes it challenging to sail through quickly. However, I felt that was also one of its strong points; it forced me to work through

the book and really think about what I was reading. If you're looking for fluff and pablum; look elsewhere. So, what's the book about? As has been stated elsewhere, Kuhn's premise is that scientific progress isn't what it's typically made out to be. Generally, such as in most of my high school presentations, science is portrayed as a steadily moving river; progressing inevitably from one port of discovery to the next. Kuhn's book set that perspective on its ear, by stating that science progresses relatively seamlessly until it gets near the edges of understanding, where it then begins fragmenting into a variety of perspectives and viewpoints. Eventually, a fundamental [paradigm] shift occurs which completely changes the world-view of that science (and which often creates an academic war to go with it). Once the dust has settled, revisionist history takes over, and we romanticize the struggle that our understanding went through in that period of growth and change. Kuhn presents all this in a logical fashion, strengthening his argument via both a well-thought-out approach and a variety of supporting anecdotes. In particular, he doesn't rely too heavily on the Copernican revolution, which seems to be the only argument that others can present on scientific revolution. That alone contributes perhaps most heavily to the value of the argument. So what has this got to do with change management? I worked as a management consultant for a few years, all before I read this book. Upon reading it, I was hit with the most blinding flash of the obvious; a lot of what I saw empirically in the business world echoed the issues of scientific paradigm shift that Kuhn so eloquently presented in this text. If your work involves any change to an organization; you -have- to read this book. It communicates, better than any book I've read on the subject, what's happening and why in the midst of change. The title may say "Scientific Revolutions," but the applicability is across the board. Buy it and read it.

Kuhn provides an in-depth, scholarly, philosophical dissertation on the causes, process and results of paradigm shifts within the scientific community. Much of the text, however, is applicable to other fields of study where paradigm shifts are concerned. While originally written for the scientific community, it has found wide acceptance in the social sciences. Kuhn, while not for the faint of heart, offers rare gems for those willing and able to mine them.

Really difficult book to get through, but the basic idea was interesting. It changes the way you think about science.

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