



Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times

Steve Fuller

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Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is one of the best known and most influential books of the twentieth century. Whether they adore or revile him, critics and fans alike have tended to agree on one thing: Kuhn's ideas were revolutionary. But were they?

Steve Fuller argues that Kuhn actually held a profoundly conservative view of science and how one ought to study its history. Early on, Kuhn came under the influence of Harvard President James Bryant Conant (to whom *Structure* is dedicated), who had developed an educational program intended to help deflect Cold War unease over science's uncertain future by focusing on its illustrious past. Fuller argues that this rhetoric made its way into *Structure*, which Fuller sees as preserving and reinforcing the old view that science really is just a steady accumulation of truths about the world (once "paradigm shifts" are resolved).

Fuller suggests that Kuhn, deliberately or not, shared the tendency in Western culture to conceal possible negative effects of new knowledge from the general public. Because it insists on a difference between a history of science for scientists and one suited to historians, Fuller charges that *Structure* created the awkward divide that has led directly to the "Science Wars" and has stifled much innovative research. In conclusion, Fuller offers a way forward that rejects Kuhn's fixation on paradigms in favor of a conception of science as a social movement designed to empower society's traditionally disenfranchised elements.

Certain to be controversial, *Thomas Kuhn* must be read by anyone who has adopted, challenged, or otherwise engaged with *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

"Structure will never look quite the same again after Fuller. In that sense, he has achieved one of the main aims of his ambitious and impressively executed project."—Jon Turney, *Times Higher Education Supplement*

"Philosophies like Kuhn's narrow the possible futures of inquiry by politically methodizing and taming them. More republican philosophies will leave the future open. Mr. Fuller has amply succeeded in his program of distinguishing the one from the other."—William R. Everdell, *Washington Times*

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