

History 360-01. Structure of Scientific Change

(M & W 2:00-3:15, 2209 HHRA)

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Office hours: Tu & W 3:30-4:30, or by appointment; I am potentially available many other times! I encourage you to come see me if you're having trouble or just want to talk.

Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, first published in 1962, has been one of the most widely influential scholarly books of the 20th century. Its ideas about paradigms and paradigm-shifts continue to guide the thinking of people in and out of academia. Although the book was addressed to historians and philosophers of science, scholars in those fields have often been less enthusiastically accepting of Kuhn's vision than many in quite distant disciplines. In any event, the book is brim-full of important insights about science, and even its weaknesses can be used as starting points for more valid analyses. In this class we will spend several weeks getting comfortable with Kuhn's ideas and language, and then test to what extent his schema for scientific change holds up against two major conceptual revolutions in science, *viz.* the change from an earth-centered to a sun-centered universe associated with the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), and the collection of changes known as the Chemical Revolution associated with the French chemist Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743-1794). In assessing Kuhn we will also make use of several prominent critiques of his ideas.

The required books for this course are Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd or 3rd ed. (the 3rd. ed. is identical except for a 2-page index) and Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*. Readings marked "eR" are available online as e-Reserves via Blackboard, as described below. *In some cases I have made available a longer selection than the actual assignment in case you want a little more context: be sure to check the page numbers!* You will get the most out of this class if you do the assigned readings before the corresponding class *and* review them after class. You are encouraged to ask questions! Note that this is a *writing-intensive* ("WI") course.

The course will begin with a series of lectures designed to equip students with sufficient historical background in the history of science to be able to read Kuhn with reasonable understanding. Most classes will be a combination of lecture and discussion; I will often give out questions ahead of time to serve as foci for discussion.

There will be one exam, worth one-third of the final grade, consisting of both short-answer and essay questions. The general themes of the essay questions will be indicated in advance. Each student will also write *and revise* two 5-page *typed* essays according to the schedule spelled out below; each is worth one-third of the final grade. Only the grade on the

revision counts, *but you **must** hand in the first version with your revision!* I will discuss the essays in more detail on February 12, at which time I will hand out a set “Guidelines for Students’ Essays and Paper,” *which I expect you to read and follow!* I will also hand out a list of typical essay topics, though you are encouraged to think up your own. *For all written work, unexcused lateness is subject to a penalty of up to a full letter grade!* In addition, there will be frequent short in-class and at-home writing exercises, which I will mark on a check-plus, check, check-minus basis. These, plus attendance and class participation, will also be taken into account in determining the final grade (up to a full letter grade). *Students who miss the first two classes will be dropped from the roll.* I reserve the right to drop students who have more than three absences.

A few words about **Blackboard**, UNCG’s online course management system. You can access it from the UNCG homepage by clicking “Current Students” on the horizontal yellow bar, then “Blackboard” on the horizontal grey line just below it. Most of you will already have been exposed to Blackboard at one or another orientation session for incoming students. If not, you can familiarize yourself with it via the Blackboard Online Student Orientation at <http://www.uncg.edu/aas/itc/bborient/>. If you have specific problems—say with logging in or printing—you should call the Help Desk at 6-TECH (*i.e.*, 68324) on a University phone. *In order to gain access to Blackboard you will first need to have activated your student account.* If you haven’t, go to <http://blackboard.uncg.edu/webapps/login> Click on the yellow “Support” tab at top, then “Activate your accounts” under the Links at upper left, and follow the directions. What you need to know for this course is relatively simple. “Course Information” contains the syllabus (this document). “e-Reserves” is a list of all the readings, arranged alphabetically by title (including an initial “The” or “A[n]”). That’s the principal feature you’ll need for this course. “Announcements” will alert you to things like changes in the assignment or cancellation of a class--unlikely, but you should check regularly just in case.

Student Learning Goals

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of Kuhn’s theory of scientific change.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of Kuhn’s ideas.
- Know the principal actors and basic issues involved in the Copernican and Chemical Revolutions.
- Analytically and critically evaluate historical evidence, especially in regards to Kuhn’s theoretical ideas.
- Communicate historical and analytical ideas clearly in good English prose.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Jan. 8: Introduction: no reading.

Jan. 10, 17, 22: Historical Background: no reading, but it will be *very* helpful to begin with a quick read through Kuhn [*handout*].

Jan. 15: MLK Holiday: no class.

Topic I: Kuhn's Image of the Nature of Science and Scientific Change

Jan. 24, 29: Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1-51, 52-135.

Jan. 31, Feb. 5: Kuhn, *SSR*, 136-173, 174-210.

Feb. 7: Kuhn, *SSR*, 174-210; Dudley Shapere, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (**eR**); Shapere, "The Paradigm Concept" (**eR**); *recommended*: Alan Musgrave, "Kuhn's Second Thoughts" (**eR**). The first and third of these readings are from Gary Gutting (ed.), *Paradigms and Revolutions* (on reserve).

Feb. 12: Buffer Day: *recommended reading*: John Horgan, "Profile: Reluctant Revolutionary" (**eR**); some of you might like to read an essay of mine (wholly optional), "Possible Kuhns in the History of Science" (**eR**); DISCUSSION OF ESSAYS [*handouts*].

Feb. 14: EXAM

Topic II: The Copernican Revolution

Feb. 19: Ptolemaic Background: Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 1-8, 25-41, 64-77, and skim the rest of Chaps. 1-3 [*handout*].

Feb. 21: Medieval and Renaissance Background: Kuhn, *CR*, 100-106, 113-133.

Feb. 26: Copernicus' Innovation: Kuhn, *CR*, 134-144, 160-184.

Feb. 28: Implications of Moving the Earth: Kuhn, *CR*, 144-160, 185-209.

Mar. 5, 7: Spring Break: no class

Mar. 12: Kuhn vs. Kuhn: review *SSR*, 67-69, 79, 82-83, 154-155, and *CR*, 36-41, 124-133, 136-137, 139-141, 143-144, 181-184, 264-265.

Mar. 14: A Second Look at Kuhn's *Copernican Revolution*: Robert Westman, "Two Cultures or One?" Pt. A, 79-97 (**eR**) [*handout*].

Mar. 19: Was There a Copernican Revolution?: I. Bernard Cohen, *Revolution in Science*, Pt. A, 105-125 (**eR**; for those who may wish to consult the bibliography, the book is on reserve).

Mar. 21: Brahe and Kepler: Kuhn, *CR*, 200-219; Cohen, *Revolution in Science*, Pt. B, 126-133 (**eR**); Westman, "Two Cultures or One?" Pt. B, 104-112 (**eR**); FIRST ESSAY DUE.

Mar. 26: Galileo; Newton and Celestial Physics: Kuhn, *CR*, 219-228, 243-265; Cohen, *Revolution in Science*, Pts. B, C, D, 135-175 (**eR**); FIRST ESSAY RETURNED.

Topic III: The Chemical Revolution

Mar. 28: Eighteenth-century Chemistry: James Conant, "The Overthrow of the Phlogiston Theory," 67-74 (**eR**); Carleton Perrin, "Research Traditions, Lavoisier, and the Chemical Revolution," 55-60 (**eR**).

Apr. 2: Lavoisier's Early Work: Perrin, "Research Traditions," 60-74 (**eR**); you may want to get a start on the reading for next time; FIRST REVISED ESSAY DUE.

Apr. 4: The Discovery of Oxygen: Conant, "Overthrow," 74-105 (**eR**).

Apr. 9: The Composition of Air and Water: Conant, "Overthrow," 105-113 (**eR**).

Apr. 11: Post-1785 Success of the New Chemistry: Perrin, "The Triumph of the Antiphlogistians," 40-63 (**eR**).

Apr. 16: Kuhn on the Chemical Revolution: review Kuhn, *SSR*, 10, 23, 53-56, 59-60, 69-72, 79, 82, 87, 88-89, 99-100, 107, 118, 120-123; DISCUSSION OF ESSAYS

Apr. 18: Was There a Chemical Revolution?: Perrin, "Research Traditions," 53-55 (**eR**); Marco Beretta, *The Enlightenment of Matter*, 246-258 (**eR**; for those who may wish to decipher the footnotes by consulting the bibliography, the book is on reserve).

Apr. 23: The Nature of the Chemical Revolution: Perrin, "Research Traditions," 74-81 (**eR**).

Apr. 25: A Final Evaluation: Frederic Holmes, "The Boundaries of Lavoisier's Chemical Revolution," 9-21, 38-40, 46-48 (**eR**; skim the details on 21-38, 40-46); SECOND ESSAY DUE.

Apr. 30: Final Reflections; course evaluation administered; SECOND ESSAY RETURNED

May 4 (Friday): SECOND REVISED ESSAY DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 3:30 p.m.