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INCOMMENSURABILITY, TRANSLATABILITY, AND
THE STATUS OF PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE IN THOMAS KUHN

Abstract

Many critics have rightly maintained that Kuhn's philosophy of science after *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has undergone important changes, above all concerning the incommensurability thesis. The following change is particularly important: according to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a scientist that works with a paradigm can not understand and use an incommensurable paradigm, whereas the latest Kuhn acknowledges the possibility of using two incommensurable paradigms at once (as the analogy with a bilingual suggests).

However, this change is not so radical as it would seem at first sight. A *tertium comparationis* (it does not matter how it should be more precisely defined) must be available to a bilingual, if he/she must be able to understand that a translation is *de facto* difficult or impossible, but Kuhn continues to deny the possibility of an independent point of view from which one can evaluate incommensurable paradigms. Moreover, the impossibility of translation in some contexts is tantamount to assume tacitly a knowledge that is not communicable in principle, an assumption that contradicts Kuhn's acceptance of Wittgenstein's critique of a private language.

This is not to say that there are no important changes in Kuhn's philosophy of science after *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. However, these changes are not to be found in the contents, but in the epistemological status of his philosophy of science. Above all, Kuhn replaces the original claim that history could produce a decisive transformation in our image of science by a rejection of history as a basis for philosophy of science. But this too indirectly reaffirms Kuhn's earliest notion of science development as alternation of self-contained and incommensurable conceptual schemes.