
This book provides a detailed guide to the central themes and changing views in Kuhn’s published texts through 1992. The sub-title is a bit misleading for English speakers; “Kuhn’s Epistemology” would be more accurate. Hoyningen-Huene is not concerned with “philosophy of science in the narrow sense” (p. xvii) nor with Kuhn’s historical context which was set by positivism and critical rationalism. Rather, Hoyningen-Huene interprets Kuhn as having independently discovered hermeneutics (p. 21).

The centerpiece of the book is the view of Kuhn as a Kantian with changing categories, an interpretation that Kuhn reaffirmed in his 1992 presidential address to the Philosophy of Science Association. Chapters 2 and 3, which comprise more than one-third of the text, concern the view that science studies phenomenal worlds that are jointly constituted by empirical concepts and independent things-in-themselves. Scientific revolutions generate new phenomenal worlds and science provides no knowledge of things-in-themselves. Kuhn’s central themes are tied to this account of phenomenal worlds. Science students gain entry to a scientific community and its world by learning a set of similarity relations which are embodied in paradigmatic problems and solutions, not in rules which can be formulated and understood only after the similarity relations have been mastered. Normal science is research within a shared world and the cognitive difficulties associated with scientific revolutions result from the need to learn to constitute, at least in part, a new phenomenal world. This is why innovation and acceptance of a new paradigm are easier for younger scientists.

Hoyningen-Huene’s main criticisms of Kuhn focus on difficulties of world-constitution without a priori concepts. Kuhn attempts to account for the constitution process in ways that draw on scientific results, e.g., from psychology. But given the doctrine of world-constitution, scientific results are valid only within a particular world. The same applies to historical research which must choose relevant texts and principles of interpretation from within a specific world. These historical results cannot be assumed to hold in any other world.

Hoyningen-Huene’s approach to Kuhn involves both a danger and an important lesson. The danger lies in the temptation to write off Kuhn’s detailed analyses of issues in the philosophy of science if the supposed foundation is defective. But in Kuhn’s writings the Kantian theme is a consequence of the analysis of science, not the starting point. Accepting the Kantian conclusion may undermine the analyses on which it is based, but the appropriate response may be to reject the full-blown Kantianism as an overstatement. The lesson mentioned above supports this proposal.

Hoyningen-Huene approaches Kuhn from a continental perspective that is foreign to Kuhn’s own background. This approach is reflected in the title: Just as the world-in-itself is not given but must be reconstructed from a particular perspective, so Kuhn’s account of science is not given in his texts; it too must be reconstructed. I approach Kuhn from an American analytic background, yet I find Hoyningen-Huene discussions of specific issues in Kuhn to be quite accurate. Hoyningen-Huene does a fine job of pointing out that, contrary to many interpreters, Kuhn does not hold that scientific change is irrational, partial communication is not a total absence of communication, Kuhn does not take “incomensurable” to mean “incapable of being compared,” holding that logic and experiment are not sufficient for fundamental theory-choice does not make them irrelevant, and more. This suggests that, to borrow some terminology from Hoyningen-Huene, the object sided moment plays a considerably larger role in reading texts, studying history, and carrying out scientific research than the doctrine of world constitution allows.

HAROLD L. BROWN