

“Lonergan On the Edge” Proposal:  
BERNARD LONERGAN AND THOMAS KUHN; THE ADVANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* greatly influenced the common perception of scientific investigation and the collective advancement of knowledge. His sociological theory depicting science periodically advancing by sudden, radical transformations, labeled a scientific revolution, has become the accepted understanding of the scientific enterprise. Between the few individuals who instigated the major shifts of understanding, normal science proceeds through puzzle-solving. From its first publication in 1962, this work has been widely criticized. Bernard Lonergan, however, was interested in Kuhn’s ideas. Like Kuhn, Lonergan investigated the advancement of knowledge. Unlike Kuhn, Lonergan brought the knowing process down to the individual critical mind going through the general empirical method. Several key aspects distinguish Lonergan’s idea of a higher viewpoint from Kuhn’s notion of a revolution.

I am proposing a critical analysis of the works of both Thomas Kuhn and Bernard Lonergan. I will summarize the work of Kuhn and his notion of the paradigm. During this gradual growth of normal science, tension builds as anomalies arise. A crisis occurs which erupts into a revolutionary shift toward an incommensurately new realm of understanding. This perpetual cycle continues on, forgetting the past and grasping for what is yet undiscovered. This theory does not accurately describe the advancement of scientific knowledge. I will show how Kuhn strategically sidestepped controversial scientific issues. I will then compare Lonergan’s work to Kuhn’s by pointing out the corresponding aspects as well as the differences. Instead of an outside paradigmatic structure dictating the inner, investigative drive of a community of scientists, Lonergan’s method is inside out. He describes an individual’s personal, detached, disinterested, pure desire to know the truth. The joint work with others then leads to ever-higher viewpoints. My conclusion is that Lonergan does not fall into the same mistakes as Kuhn because he takes into account the larger context of the total human person ever seeking a more perfect and true knowledge.