

Before Paradigms: Mannheim and the Perspectival Origins of Constrained Rational Normativity

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Abstract

This paper reconstructs a neglected sociology-of-knowledge genealogy behind Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. Kuhn is usually interpreted through his confrontation with logical empiricism: his challenge to cumulative progress, theory-neutral observation, fixed method, and rule-governed accounts of rational theory choice. That narrative remains important, but it is incomplete. Drawing on new archival evidence from Kuhn's annotated copy of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* and an early draft of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, this paper argues that Kuhn's early account of scientific change also emerged from a Mannheimian problematic centered on ideology, perspective, crisis, partiality, and socially situated thought.

The central evidence is Kuhn's own pre-paradigm vocabulary. In the early draft of *Structure*, Kuhn describes scientific communities as governed by "professional ideology," disrupted by "ideological crisis," and reorganized through the emergence of a "new ideology." Read against his Mannheim marginalia and flyleaf notes on "ideology" and "perspective," this language suggests that Kuhn was not only rejecting logical empiricism, but transforming sociology-of-knowledge categories into an account of scientific communities, professional training, and revolutionary change. Fleck's thought collectives provide a supporting scientific version of this problem, while Kuhn's 1969 Postscript and later essay "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice" corroborate the continuity by reformulating the same structure in terms of disciplinary matrices, shared values, models, exemplars, and non-algorithmic judgment.

The paper's contribution is to interpret these materials through the concept of constrained rational normativity. Kuhn did not explicitly formulate such a theory, but his writings make it possible to reconstruct scientific rationality as historically generated, collectively stabilized, and normatively binding within a given scientific world. Mannheim adds a crucial dimension to this reconstruction: rational constraint is not only collective, as in Fleck, but perspectival. It operates through historically situated structures of visibility, relevance, and judgment. Scientific rationality, on this view, is neither universal method nor arbitrary convention; it is a constrained form of practice sustained within professional communities and transformed in crisis.