

A Kuhnian Paradox: Finding Transitions to New Conceptions

ABSTRACT – This article examines the difficulty necessarily faced by apithological practitioners in the transition to a new paradigm of practice. The dynamics of the classic Kuhnian paradigm transition are re-examined and revealed in new ways using an apithological perspective. Failed transitions occur when there is an absence of one of three elements necessary for sustained coherence. The necessity of a shift in each of the subjective, objective and inter-subjective domains is highlighted. In noting that a transition of paradigms rarely occurs, even when a paradigm approach is in crisis until an alternative is provided, apithology is examined as to its adequacy as an alternative. The article applies an analysis of apithological transition dynamics to the formation of the practice of apithology itself. This raises the proposition of the intentional role, and the role of intention, in the formation of an apithological paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

The process of emergence of any new field of inquiry involves a transition stage where the initial expressions of inductive intuition struggle to find appropriate forms of communication. New terminology is understood with old minds and old terminology is redefined by new minds. A period of crisis in methodology results. At this stage in the evolution of a field, from its intuition to interpretation within a community of practice, there is a subtle tension between explanation of the conceptual new within the discourse of the accepted present.

Thomas Kuhn (1962), as a historian of the scientific method and its social processes, in describing the structure of scientific revolutions did more than challenge the assumptions we have of deterministic and incremental change in scientific knowing. He highlighted a subtle assumption that a developmentalist perspective creates in the re-telling of historical paths of occurrences. Simplistically, the assumption is that where we are now, is where we were always heading. Yet Kuhn reveals in looking across a series of transitions in paradigms that the process of knowledge acquisition through normal science is not as deterministic as we might believe. It is then unclear that the pattern of evolution, whether in form or in thought, always prescribes one pre-determined path.

There is something profound in the shift in assumptions that results from this initial signaling of doubt. There is also a profound shift in responsibility for the paths we may promote by way of innovation as a result. If developmental paths are assumed to be deterministic within a desired teleology, we need have no concern for their unfoldment. There would be no need for any ethic of engagement with that process of development. Development itself will proscribe the path. Progress itself is progression. Teleology determines deterministically. As soon as we change this assumption and consider how the qualities of the forms that manifest through evolutionary processes may not be deterministic, but are determined by what is made manifest, a dramatically different ethical stance is enacted. (Article continues ...)