Pardon my paradigm: On the paradigmatic nature of methods and paradigm changes in biblical studies

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ABSTRACT

In a noteworthy article published in 2000, Robert Shedinger contested the idea of scholars too easily referring to paradigm changes in the field of biblical studies. Instead, the notion of inter-paradigm debate is suggested to describe the dialogue among biblical scholars. This article relates the meta-theoretical issue of paradigms and paradigm changes to the field of biblical studies. It sets out with a careful analysis of the Kuhnian concept of paradigms and paradigm changes, especially as it manifests in his later work. From this analysis it is indicated that Kuhn leaves room for more than one paradigm to rule a discipline at a given time. This conclusion is supported by a few examples from the field of the natural sciences. The article further illustrates how seemingly opposing methods in biblical studies share a common ground when it comes to the meta-theoretical (paradigmatic) level. The article concludes by reclaiming the scientific nature of biblical studies (and the rest of the Humanities).

A INTRODUCTION

In an article published in 2000 Robert Shedinger again drew our attention to the classic work done by Thomas S Kuhn in the field of Philosophy of Science. Shedinger argues that Kuhn’s description of the structure of scientific knowledge is not applicable to the field of biblical studies. In this article I take issue with some of Shedinger’s views. I shall argue that the criteria he sets for testing whether a work from the field of biblical studies justifiably refers to Kuhn are too rigid, and in fact do not originate from the work of Kuhn when viewed holistically. Furthermore, I shall demonstrate that the work of Kuhn is not situated in that area of natural science where Shedinger seemingly places it. Lastly, I shall ponder the notion of paradigms currently ruling the field of biblical studies.

B PARADIGMS ACCORDING TO SHEDINGER’S VERSION OF KUHN

I begin by presenting an interpretation of the article by Shedinger that gave the impetus for the present study (2000:453-471). The article is summarized as ‘… explor(ing) the ways in which biblical scholars have cited Kuhn in their own works for the purpose of challenging this or that scholarly paradigm’. More specifically the article aims ‘… to discern to what extent the Kuhnian notion of paradigm change will
support the interpretations placed upon it by these various scholars’ (2000:453).

Shedinger’s article begins by giving an apt description of the context, content and consequence of Kuhn’s (1962) initial contribution to the field of philosophy of science (Shedinger 2000:454-456). Attention is drawn to the fact that Kuhn views a paradigm as (1) what defines a specific branch of science and (2) what sets the parameters for scientists in that field to work within. It is only after a long period of ‘normal science’, that is, working within these parameters, that anomalies not explained by the current paradigm lead to a questioning of the theoretical presuppositions of the reigning paradigm and the birth of a new paradigm. He also reminds us that this new paradigm is not always accepted throughout the scientific community, but that established scientists will continue to use the older model for some time (2000:456).

It is just before Shedinger turns his focus to biblical studies and the role presumably played by Kuhn’s concept of paradigm changes in that field of study, that the balanced view of Kuhn we have met thus far in the argument all of a sudden becomes rigid. Thus we learn from his summary of Kuhnian paradigms first of all that ‘… all practitioners of a scientific discipline commit to a common paradigm and work in it’ and also ‘[o]nly one paradigm can claim the discipline at any given time’ (emphasis added). Also, when a paradigm changes according to Shedinger’s version of Kuhn ‘a new community of scientists emerges … that commits unanimously to the new paradigm’ (2000:457). Secondly, Shedinger views Kuhn’s concept of paradigm change as occurring ‘as the natural outgrowth of normal science’. Such a change befalls scientists who are not seeking to create any change in the paradigm that is defining their scientific community. Thirdly, we are informed that Kuhn leaves no room for the postmodern insight into the role of power relations in what Shedinger labels ‘the production of knowledge’.1 This three-pronged and more rigid view of Kuhn’s ideas then becomes the yardstick against which what the academic community does in the field of biblical studies is measured.

I shall not present a detailed discussion of Shedinger’s findings of the extent to which the three works from the field of biblical studies that he considers comply with the criteria for paradigms and paradigm changes that he has set. The results of his comparison were published and all that needs to be noted is that not one of the three works fared very well when judged against Shedinger’s criteria. What I shall do is to consider in what way the set criteria were not met, as well as take a look at the genre of the texts that were discussed as examples of texts from specifically the field of biblical studies. I begin by looking at the ‘genre’ issue.

The subtitle of Shedinger’s article poses an alarming question: Is biblical studies a science? The answer given in the end is that it is not – at least not in the Kuhnian

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1 Cf Shedinger (2000:458). In defining science in this way, Shedinger falls into the same trap he later accuses Brueggemann and Golb of when he criticizes them for reading a post-modern political agenda into the work of Kuhn. Here Shedinger applies an economic model of research dating from the early 1980’s to a sociological model of research developed by Kuhn and others in the 1950-1960’s (cf Mouton 1996:18-19).
sense of the word. This answer is arrived at after scrutinizing three scholarly texts in order to indicate how they divert from Kuhn’s notion regarding science. However, one should ask the question as to the type of texts that were used as epitomizing ‘biblical studies’. Biblical studies itself is a vast field and include a diverse range of disciplines and sub-disciplines: from various historical orientated studies, through an array of literary orientated studies to quite a number of studies from specialized fields such as sociology and psychology – all these can find a place under the general rubric ‘biblical studies’.

The texts discussed by Shedinger mirrors this phenomenon. The study by Brooten is unmistakably a study from a historical perspective, focused on methodology in historical studies (Brooten 1985:65-91). Brueggemann (1993) addresses among others the notion of text interpretation or exegesis, while the study of Golb (1995) is also historical in outlook, but with a definite slant towards sociology as well. Considering all of this it becomes clear that not only biblical studies is in the fray, but in fact the Humanities as such. To my mind the fact that all sciences in the field of the Humanities might be implied, raises the stakes considerably and calls for a very cautious course of action in dealing with the issue at hand.

Next, I want to look at the criteria on account of which not one of the texts discussed by Shedinger meets the grade he sets. Brooten falls short on the basis of the fact that ‘only one paradigm can rule the discipline at any given time’ (Shedinger 2000:460). As regards Brooten’s work it boils down to a call that feminist scholars ‘adhere to the androcentric paradigm and work within it … and wait for a new paradigm to emerge naturally out of the work of “normal scholarship” performed under the androcentric paradigm’ (emphasis added). The rigid interpretation of Kuhn by Shedinger regarding one paradigm ruling a discipline will be discussed below. What should be noted here is the way in which the progression in scientific knowledge is described as a ‘natural’ developmental process. This is precisely what the Kuhnian concept is not, although Shedinger presented it as one of the three rigid criteria against which the selected works should be judged. For all his trouble, Brueggemann is also

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2 This is a point that is apparently recognized by Shedinger (2000:460). Shedinger in fact states: ‘Biblical studies and historiography are not science, at least not in the Kuhnian view of what constitutes science’ (2000:461). On a more fundamental level this statement casts a shadow over Kuhn’s whole project, which he begins with the following statement: ‘History … could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science by which we all are now [in the early 1960’s] possessed’ (emphasis added), see Kuhn (1970:1).

3 Cf Shedinger (2000:460). Of course Shedinger uses irony in order to get his point across. The literary technique employed here is not the issue, but the notion that only one paradigm can rule a discipline.

4 Kuhn reacted to this very notion of theory change being a smooth and cumulative process as held by the Logical Positivists (Mouton 1996:15). See also Berent Enç (1999:641-642). In fact, Shedinger noted this point earlier, but here his view becomes blurred (2000:454).
faulted on two accounts: first, because he reads Kuhn through a ‘postmodern lens’ and ‘politicizes’ him whereas Shedinger has indicated that ‘Kuhn’s view of science is manifestly apolitical’ (2000:462). In the second instance Brueggemann is criticized, like Brooten, for introducing the notion of a second paradigm into a world where only one paradigm holds sway at any given stage. Golb in turn is charged for a ‘political undercurrent’ that is present in his argument and that is foreign to Kuhn’s view of science (Shedinger 2000:464).

It seems as if especially the first and third criteria laid down by Shedinger are causing difficulties. These are the notions of one paradigm ruling a discipline and the apolitical nature of Kuhn’s program. The second criterion whereby Shedinger sees paradigm change as the natural outgrowth of science is noted explicitly only with regard to the work of Brooten and perhaps implicitly with regard to the work of Brueggemann. In these contexts this second criterion is closely related to the first. In fact, in Shedinger’s argument this criterion functions rhetorically: first, it is indicated that only one paradigm can function in a discipline at a specific time and then this second criterion is introduced to call on the rest of a community to sit out the old paradigm and wait for the natural process whereby it will eventually be overthrown. Scientists cannot force this process and according to Shedinger (and indeed Kuhn 1970:52) they will not want to do so. I have already depicted this criterion of ‘natural development’ as problematical when it comes to a discussion of Kuhn’s view of science. I leave it at that and shall turn the focus in the next section to a discussion of the first and third criteria as set by Shedinger.

Lastly, and by way of inclusio, I return to the genre issue raised at the beginning of this section. We should note that in the case of Brooten’s historical study the emphasis fell on methods employed, while in the case of Brueggemann it is something on the pre-methodological level that is considered, that is, authoritative presuppositions. I hasten to add that Brooten’s argument also pertains to a pre-methodological level, but the point I want to make here is that ‘paradigm’ can be used on different levels. We shall return to this issue later.

C PARADIGMS: SHEDINGER VERSUS KUHN

Before getting into the details of a conversation between Shedinger and Kuhn, a general remark concerning the citation of Thomas Kuhn’s work seems in order. In 1987 Eugene Garfield listed fifty titles claimed to be the most cited works in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index for the period 1976-1983 (1987:101). In the number one position we find none other than The structure of scientific revolutions by Thomas Kuhn. To what extent this ranking will hold true for the post-1983 period must be decided on basis of an empirical analysis that falls outside my field of competence.

[^5]: Cf Shedinger (2000:463). In this context Shedinger also states that in doing so Brueggemann lowers the credibility of his program for those (like Shedinger?) ‘who possess a detailed familiarity with Kuhn’s work’(!).
However, one’s gut feeling is that perhaps not too much has changed over the past two decades. One notes, for instance, that all three examples of citations of Kuhn in the field of biblical studies that Shedinger uses for his analysis date from after 1983. With such a host of citations the law of averages also predict a higher number of misreadings of this text. Since Shedinger does not state the criteria for his selection of the three works we are left to presume it was done randomly. However, seeing the frequency of the citation of Kuhn’s work it can also be that three proper misreadings were selected from a corpus that would also offer instances indicating the contrary. In all fairness, nothing suggests any *male fide* intentions of such a nature on the part of Shedinger, although some sort of selection criteria may have helped his cause.

Above it was noted that all three texts under scrutiny do not measure up to Shedinger’s criteria. In this section I shall measure Shedinger’s measuring tool against the work of Kuhn to see whether it gives an apt outline of his views. As mentioned above it will be especially the first and third criteria that will be addressed. Although Shedinger quite often mentions that only one paradigm can rule a discipline at a given time, no exact reference to Kuhn supporting this statement is ever made. In fact, a careful reading of Kuhn perhaps suggests quite another view. In the chapter entitled ‘The priority of paradigms’ Kuhn states the following (note the use of the plural form) when he refers to ‘a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their [various] applications’ as identified in ‘a given specialty at a given time’:

> These are the community’s paradigms ... by studying them and by practicing with them, the members of the corresponding community learn their trade. ... Despite occasional ambiguities, the paradigms of a mature scientific community can be identified with relative ease (Kuhn 1970:43, emphasis added).

Furthermore, we read that ‘debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution’ that characterize what Kuhn initially labelled a ‘pre-paradigm period’, ‘do not vanish once and for all with the appearance of a paradigm’. Kuhn

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7 On the other hand, if the measuring tool applied to the texts of Brooten, Brueggemann and Golb is faulty, then the same result will be possible for all texts subjected to this type of scrutiny.

8 Cf Kuhn (1970:48). In a later work, while reflecting on the notion of paradigms, Kuhn extended the possession of paradigms to the schools in the pre-paradigm period. He writes: ‘Whatever paradigms may be, they are possessed by any scientific community, including the schools of the so-called pre-paradigm period’ ([1974] 1977:295). Kuhn leaves us in no doubt as to the consequences of his initial oversight when he states: ‘My failure to see that point clearly has helped make a paradigm seem a quasi-mystical entity or property which, like charisma, transforms those infected by it. There is a
then notes how the transition from Newtonian to quantum physics evoked debates that continued up to his day, and probably are still continuing (1970:48). Furthermore, Kuhn makes an important distinction between ‘small revolutions’ and ‘large ones’ when he states that ‘some revolutions affect only the members of a professional subspecialty’ and not the scientific community at large (1970:49). This leads up to a crucial statement and one seemingly overlooked by She dingher. Instead of the rigid notion of science and paradigms that She dingher ascribes to Kuhn we read:

> What has been said so far may have seemed to imply that normal science is a single monolithic and unified enterprise that must stand or fall with any one of its paradigms as well as with all of them together. But science is obviously seldom or never like that (Kuhn 1970:49).

This seems to overturn She dingher’s whole argument regarding only one paradigm allowed in the sacred space of a scientific community at any given stage. In fact, when She dingher places Kuhn in an ‘empirical framework’ (2000:462) and sees his conception of science as ‘value-neutral’ (2000:467) one is left wondering to what extent he does justice to Kuhn’s project. The first part of *The structure of scientific revolutions* exhibits a number of anti-Baconian sentiments (Kuhn 1970:16, 28). Kuhn was moving away from the Empiricists in more ways than one. Not brute empirical facts determine the scientific agenda, but a society referred to as a scientific community. Gillies points out the difference between the Historical School, to which Kuhn and others are said to belong, and the preceding school of Logical Positivists, that was inspired by British empiricism, by means of the following comparison: ‘Perhaps the logical approach gives the science of computers, while the historical approach presents the science of human beings.’ No wonder that the work of Kuhn and others are also referred to as the ‘sociological model’ of scientific research, whereas the Logical Positivists represent the ‘epistemic model’ (Mouton 1996:17-18). The accentuation of the human aspect in the research project also highlighted the role played by the presuppositions held by the scientific community and this was a definite break from the value-free notion of scientific activity as held by the Logical Positivists. The work that Kuhn and others belonging to the Historical School did in the field of philosophy of science can almost be viewed as a paradigm change in itself. In some circles their reaction against the positivist-empiricist philosophy of science is consequently

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10. Kisiel & Johnson (1974:147) indicate how Dudley Shapere highlighted the role of ‘global presuppositions’ in directing science in what they referred to as ‘the new philosophy of science’.

11. The four main exponents of the Historical School were Stephen Toulmin, Norwood R Hanson, Paul Feyerabend and Thomas S Kuhn (Kisiel & Johnson 1974:149-160).
referred to as a revolution (Botha 1988:35). Shedinger will probably disagree in this regard due to his notion that only one paradigm can rule a scientific community at a given time. Either Shedinger is not altogether correct in his analysis, or we have uncovered yet another field (philosophy of science) where Shedinger’s rigid version of Kuhn does not leave room for talk about a paradigm or a paradigm change.

Shedinger’s objective is to prove that what he terms ‘biblical studies’ is not a science in the Kuhnian (read: natural science’s) sense of the word, since in this field we do find more than one paradigm operating at any given time and thus only inter-paradigm debates occurring. It is a misreading of Kuhn, however, to claim that this is his stance regarding the natural sciences. Kuhn supplies us with a good example to refute Shedinger’s claim to this extent. Two (natural) scientists, a physicist and a chemist, are asked whether a single atom of helium is a molecule or not. Both answer without hesitation, but give opposite answers! The same phenomenon is explained at the same time in two totally opposite ways by two natural scientists working from different paradigms (Kuhn 1970:50-51). While explaining how a paradigm change can also be of import only to members of a subspecialty, Kuhn gives yet another example: ‘Astronomers … could accept X-rays as a mere addition to knowledge, for their paradigms were unaffected by the existence of the new radiation’ (1970:93).

It should also be noted that a paradigm change is not viewed as something occurring overnight. There is a time of crisis – it can be a rather long time – during which anomalies lead scientists to produce different versions of a paradigm to solve these anomalies. A new paradigm usually emerges in the wake of these rather frantic attempts at ‘saving’ an existing paradigm. However, there is a period, which again can be quite long, during which at least two competing paradigms share the stage, and resulting in a “battle” over the acceptance of the new paradigm. This new paradigm represents a complete break with the previous and is ‘a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field’s most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications’ (Kuhn 1970:85). The issue here is not the notion of one paradigm ruling the discipline, but where a scientist finds him/herself during this period. Thus the focus is not on some esoteric idea called a ‘paradigm’ forcing itself onto someone, but on individuals making up a scientific community. At this point Kuhn introduces the

12 A crisis may end with scientists eventually finding a way to solve a persisting problem with an old paradigm (even to the despair of some seeking its change), or by shelving the problem for a future generation, or with the emergence of a new paradigm (Kuhn 1970:84).
13 Kuhn does refer to ‘a relatively sudden and unstructured event’, but this I take not to have a bearing on the process, but on the individual scientist experiencing the ‘Gestalt switch’ (1970:122).
14 Cf Kuhn (1970:84). In Kuhn’s work this phenomenon is restricted to two paradigms, probably for the sake of clarity (1970:77). However, the possibility of a third or even a fourth contender cannot be ruled out and it will not alter Kuhn’s main thesis in any significant manner.
idea of a Gestalt switch. An individual chances his/her way of looking at the same
data – choosing ‘a new way of looking at the field’ (Kuhn 1970:84). All those making
this choice together form a new community of scientists working on the basis of the
new paradigm. Only now a rigid notion is introduced: the scientist does not have the
freedom to ‘switch back and forth between ways of seeing’ (Kuhn 1970:85). Once the
fence is crossed there is no turning back. In fact, an animosity towards those
remaining on the ‘other’ side may even develop, justifying in a sense the war
metaphor (‘battle’) employed by Kuhn. It seems as if the scientist can adhere to only
one paradigm at any given stage and not that only one paradigm governs a specific
field of study at a specific time. Below I shall indicate that this is especially true of
paradigms functioning on a macro level. Changing your paradigm, your way of
looking, on this level has even been explained by means of a religious notion –
comparing it to a conversion.\footnote{Cf Van der Merwe (1975:343). Kuhn in fact mentions
scientists that use another distinctly religious metaphor when they refer to ‘scales falling from the eyes’ (1970:122).}

Where then does the idea come from that Kuhn is propagating only one paradigm
to rule a discipline at any given time? I think the answer lies in the fact that Kuhn’s
chapter on ‘The nature and necessity of scientific revolutions’ may be ambiguous in
this respect. In that chapter Kuhn takes issue with the idea fostered by the Logical
Positivist regarding the view of ‘science-as-cumulation [sic]’ (1970:96) and it
precedes a chapter in which he argues against another view from that quarter, namely
that scientists are working with ‘raw data’. There he postulates that ‘raw data’ does
not exist, but \textit{what} I see is already influenced by the paradigm I am working from.\footnote{Cf Kuhn (1970:22). In this chapter Kuhn provides a number of interesting examples. In
one of these he compares what an Aristotelian scientist would see as a falling stone
(attached to a string), to what Galileo saw as a pendulum, governed by another set of
laws. He again takes up the issue of multiple paradigms stating that Galileo’s \textit{paradigms}
(the work of Archimedes, the impetus theory and Neo-Platonism) provided the concep-
tual categories for him to view a swinging stone in a way different from that of his
predecessors and contemporaries. Just how deeply paradigms influence our world view
is illustrated by the statement, ‘scientists with different \textit{paradigms} engage in different
laboratory manipulations’ (Kuhn 1970:126, emphasis added).}
concept Shedinger did not find in Kuhn’s talk about (natural) science, but which he (rightly) claims frequently appear in the social sciences. It is my contention that Kuhn does allow for more than one paradigm ruling a science at any given time. As indicated above he even gives examples from the natural science to support this claim.\footnote{These examples can be multiplied from work in the field of natural science. An example from the field of physics that immediately comes to mind is the debate on the nature of light. Gösta Ekspong (2002) gives a good summary of this issue. In the science of medicine, which is perhaps the field where natural and social sciences meet – and one Kuhn very seldom refers to, the following examples of competing paradigms can be noted: On the one hand there is the (still) controversial issue of AIDS dissidents (cf Butler 2003:215), while on the other hand we find a new approach in medicine focusing less on curing disease and more on healthy living (cf Viens 2000). Silverstein (1998:342) views new tools in genetics and informatics as facilitating a further paradigm (shift) in medicine.} Of course an issue still outstanding here is the one dealing with the question of what a paradigm is. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

Before I get to that though we must deal with Kuhn’s concluding chapter in his initial publication where not only the notion of a single paradigm again seems to surface, but the social sciences are also referred to by name. Regarding the single paradigm that scientists work from during periods of normal science Kuhn is, at least at first, not too rigid. Thus we find phrases such as: ‘\textit{Normally}, the members of a mature scientific community work from a single paradigm’ (1970:162, emphasis added); ‘the absence \textit{at most times} of competing schools … makes the progress of a normal-scientific community far easier to see’ (1970:163). It is only after introducing the idea of a contrast between natural science and social science that we read ‘revolutions close with the total victory for one of the opposing camps’ (1970:166). This leaves the new generation of students in the natural sciences with no alternative paradigm in the field. This is in stark contrast to the social sciences where newcomers are introduced to a variety of problems for which ‘a number of competing and incommensurable solutions’ have been proposed (1970:165). However, in his postscript (added 1969) Kuhn explicitly states that instead of talking about the absence of competing schools, he now talks about ‘the relative scarcity of competing schools in the developed sciences’ (1970:209). The alterations made to his stance in especially the two sections of his earlier work as highlighted above, was picked up and summarized by Musgrave (1980:42) in the following way: ‘According to Kuhn’s postscript fundamental metaphysical controversy, either between communities or even within the same community, \textit{can} accompany “normal research”’ (his emphasis).

I now turn the focus to the third criterion that Shedinger deduced from Kuhn as part of a measuring tool applied to three scholarly texts in order to see whether their use of ‘paradigm’ and ‘paradigm change’ is congruent with that claimed to be Kuhn’s use of these terms. This criterion, as will be recalled, refer to an apolitical view of science that Kuhn presumably displays and on the basis of which the texts of both Brueggemann and Golb are faulted. Taking issue with this criterion set by Shedinger
can be done in a less elaborative manner and in fact only a few points need to be noted.

It was already stated that Kuhn moved away from the viewing science as an accumulation of knowledge in an objective way as seen by the Logical Positivists. Kuhn’s focus is on the revolutionary events that further scientific knowledge whereby scientific communities reject ‘one time honored theory in favor of another incompatible with it’ (1970:6). It is a community of people that as individuals experience a ‘Gestalt switch’ that leads to a different way of looking at the world. Given the emphasis on the role that the scientific community plays in the process Kuhn’s ideas cannot be viewed as apolitical. The adherents to the most influential paradigm will make authoritative claims. Kuhn’s contribution has therefore been described by Gutting as follows: ‘the real significance of Kuhn’s work is that the ultimate locus of science’s rational authority is the scientific community’ (Gutting 1980:11, emphasis added).

Kuhn makes it clear that his choice of metaphor for describing paradigm shifts is well thought out (1970:92-94). How can we ascribe to an apolitical view of Kuhn when the central metaphor he uses is taken from the political sphere? Furthermore, the acceptance of one paradigm over another is not a matter of logic. There is circularity in the argument for any different way of looking at the world. That is why techniques of persuasive argumentation are devised by a scientific community (1970:94).

Towards the end of his work Kuhn spends more time on one of these techniques, namely the production of textbooks (1970:136ff). He indicates how these reproduce the history of the subject in a quite peculiar way. Textbooks tend to disguise the very revolutions that produced them, representing the path travelled thus far as a smooth one on which the field developed in a linear way. In this way the real revolutionary reformulations that history attests to are hidden. At this junction Kuhn gets as political as can be: ‘the depreciation of historical fact is deeply, and probably functionally, ingrained in the ideology of the scientific profession, the same profession that places the highest of all values upon factual details of other sorts’ (1970:138, emphasis added). In a later work Kuhn is able to refer to the ‘more powerful professional behavior’ of the members adhering to the more influential paradigm at a given time ([1974] 1977:295).

It should also be noted that power struggles are not an invention of the so-called post-modern period. This period merely supplied us with a shared language describing a phenomenon that had existed almost for ever. Just like gravitation was not invented by Newton, but merely described by him, I do not see a problem in using the term ‘power struggle’ in relation to a scientific community from a Kuhnian point of view. Although perhaps a little less attuned to the issue, Kuhn surely recognized it.

I argue that from the discussion thus far it should be clear that the measuring tool devised and employed by Shedinger is not totally congruent with the views of Kuhn. It is cautioning all working in the field of the social sciences to pay special attention to our interpretations and applications of other texts. Even if the argument of Shedinger
is found wanting on a few accounts, the question still remains as to the applicability of the Kuhnian concept of paradigms and paradigm changes in the social sciences, and more specifically the field of biblical studies. To that question our attention now turns.

D PARADIGMS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

What is presented here is not completely novel or extensive. However, merely pondering the theory of paradigms and paradigm changes, which I hope to have indicated do exist in biblical studies if we alter the interpretation of Kuhn put forward by Shedinger, will not go far enough. The idea here is not to salvage the usage of Kuhnian terminology by Golb, Brueggemann or Brooten. Regarding these works I indicated that the measuring tool devised by Shedinger could not completely do justice to them, since the tool itself is skew. We have found that more than one paradigm occur in developed (natural) sciences, as do inter-paradigm debates. Furthermore, science cannot be seen as value neutral when referring to Kuhn on the issue, and thus it does include issues of power and power relations.

Before looking at paradigms operative in biblical studies as such, a definition of ‘paradigm’ seems in order. Here we are at a loss if we turn to Kuhn’s initial work for an answer. Serious criticism was levelled against his ambiguous use of this term in his 1962 work (Shapere 1980:38). Kuhn responded to these criticisms and suggested two broad categories in which the various uses of the term paradigm in his original work can be explained: disciplinary matrix; and exemplars ([1974] 1977:297-298). The ‘disciplinary matrix’ includes ‘most or all of the objects of group commitment’, whereas ‘exemplars’ refer to ‘concrete problems and their solutions’ that serve as a community’s standard examples ([1974] 1977:306). More fundamentally, though, Kuhn recognized that scientific communities exist on various levels (1970:177).

Taking their point of departure from the broader definition of paradigm provided by Kuhn as a ‘disciplinary matrix’ or ‘an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community’ Hans Küng and David Tracy, along with a number of noteworthy theologians, contemplated this issue in the late 1980’s. Tracy stresses the paramount role of hermeneutics in the theological debate in that it addresses the common need for interpretation in the field of theology. This reality of interpretation is even seen as ‘one of the most basic continuities’ operative throughout theological paradigm shifts (Tracy 1991:57). As such it functions as a macro level paradigm.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:38-46) outlines four paradigms operative in biblical studies. These four paradigms operate on what is referred to below as the ‘macro level’ of scientific endeavour. On that level I highlight only three paradigms, with the third perhaps a combination of her third and fourth paradigms.

See their contributions to a volume, which they edited, dealing with this issue (Küng 1991). A shortcoming in the article of Shedinger is that he apparently did not take note of this volume.
Küng, with reference to Kuhn and Toulmin, also mentions the fact that in theology, as in the natural sciences, there never is a total break with the past. The same data is just placed in a new system of relations. When explaining a paradigm change using the example of a Gestalt switch, Kuhn often relates it to a different way of observing the same data (1970:111ff). As suggested above, this ‘different way of looking’ need not only pertain to the macro level of scientific work.

Küng mentions macro, meso and micro models that are associated with a specific paradigm (Küng 1991:13). If we briefly relate this to biblical studies a pattern that can occur regarding the view of our data may be the following:

- A narrower definition of biblical studies supposes that its primary source of data is the books collected as a religious text we commonly refer to as the Bible. The question is to what extent have biblical scholars’ view of this data changed?

- There was a time when the Bible was simply seen as ‘Word of God’. This was during a pre-modern period, before the time when ‘the seventeenth century scientific revolution and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment [and] the nineteenth-century historical consciousness’ (Tracy 1991:55) made people realize what vast cultural differences existed between them and the text. When these differences were recognized it led to a change in the way the Bible was viewed.

- A bridge had to be created between the ‘then’ and the ‘now’ and by building this bridge it was realized that the Bible could only be viewed as ‘Word of God mediated through human words’. The impenetrable ceiling that the Enlightenment created between the real world and the metaphysical world, if that world exited at all, furthermore led to the focus turning more to human activity. This activity could be interpreted by means of different historical and, in the twentieth century, literary methods. We can refer to this period as one during which a modernist paradigm held sway.

- The last part of the twentieth century brought with it an intense focus on the way ideology not only influences text interpretation, but also text production. In this post-modernist era the view of our data again changed: the Bible could not be more than human reflections on and experiences of God.

All the above can be referred to as the fundamental changes in the way biblical scholars view their data on a macro level. Currently all three these paradigms still function on that level in the field of Biblical studies. As indicated above more than one paradigm can also function in the natural sciences and this does not lead to the expulsion of social sciences from the realm of science. Within each of these paradigms, but this time on a meso level, there were also changes in view that did not lead – as is also the case on the macro level – to one paradigm ‘winning the war’. Take for example what has been labelled above as the modernist paradigm: towards the middle of the twentieth century it was realized within this paradigm that there is more than one way to view a text.
• Up to this point a text was by and large perceived as a historical artefact that could be interpreted through historical means;

• Since then texts also became viewed as literary artefacts that could be completely bracketed from their history and understood in terms of their literary features.20

Lastly, there exist micro models or levels that can be related to each of the paradigms identified on the meso level. Let us take again the modernist paradigm (macro level) viewing the biblical text as literary artefact (meso level). Cascading down to the micro level, there is also more than one way of looking at the text:

• The focus can fall on the way in which the text is composed and arranged in what can be referred to as biblical structuralism (Barton 1996:121-137);

• But we can also focus solely on linguistic features such as repetition, chiasms and inclusions in what is referred to as a rhetorical study of the text.21

A scholar’s movement between paradigms is restricted by the level (macro, meso or micro) on which the paradigm functions. Often we find a scholar viewing the text as a literary artefact (meso level) employing more than one literary method on the micro level. When it comes to the meso level itself, it becomes a little more difficult to switch paradigms. The sometimes heated exchanges between historical and literary orientated scholars bear testimony to this fact.22 On a macro level it is very difficult to accept a different paradigm.23 For those who have undergone such an experience it is usually not an overnight affair. In the literature it is also not something readily discussed. An example that does come to mind is Patte’s book entitled Ethics of biblical interpretation, which can be viewed as a switch from a modernist to a post-modernist paradigm (Patte 1995).

Of course Shedinger is correct in maintaining that we do not talk about feminist physics and the like (2000:467). By the same token, however, we do not talk about Newtonian exegesis or Quantum archaeology. Care should be taken not to confuse paradigms, and sciences, and the different levels on which each operates.

20 These differences on a meso level can be indicated for each of the three paradigms identified. The work of Lowth (1969) on parallelisms can be viewed as an example of how literary features were reflected upon in the pre-modern paradigm, while exponents of the so-called Yale school represent examples of dealing with literary features from the post-modern paradigm (cf De Man 1983 – an example of deconstructing a biblical text is provided by Clines 1993).


22 In the South African context the work by Le Roux (1993) and the response it created (cf Loader 1994) provide an example in this regard.

23 Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:38-39) draws a similar conclusion.
E  AN ARGUMENT FUNDAMENTALLY FLAWED

When one turns to a text that has been labelled as one of the most cited academic texts in the twentieth century, then the question arises to what extent all those citations have done justice to the original work.

In his article related to this issue Robert Shedinger draws a sharp distinction between natural science and specifically biblical studies, but much of his argument holds true for the humanities in general (2000:466-469). However, the method that he employs to indicate this distinction is one shared by scientists from both fields (natural and social sciences). He devises a set of criteria (Kuhn’s notion of paradigm changes) and then he relates other data (three scholars’ works) to this set in order to determine whether the data complies with the set criteria. His conclusion is that it does not and therefore the three scholars are mistaken in using the notion of ‘paradigm changes’ in their works. On a philosophical level what Shedinger operates with is Popper’s notion of falsification, which in turn stems from a very objectivist (modernist) notion of science. This is ironic since Popper in devising this theory wanted to set a criterion for empirical science, over and against pseudo-science and metaphysics. From his article it seems as if Shedinger is aiming for something to the contrary by giving biblical studies a place outside ‘empirical science’ in Popperian language. He uses a Popperian method in order to reach an un-Popperian goal. This begs the question when exactly is biblical studies a science and when not?

More irony is found in the fact that Kuhn developed his idea of paradigm changes in opposition to the logical positivistic idea of expanding scientific knowledge as a smooth and cumulative process (Enç 1999:462). Shedinger thus operates exactly from the premise that Kuhn upsets. Little wonder then that Shedinger suggests, ‘… the discipline of biblical studies constitutes a poor arena for the application of Kuhn’s notion of paradigms’ (2000:454, 469). Shedinger seems to be more at home in the logical positivistic frame of mind, hence also questioning (or is it denying?) a place to biblical studies among the sciences.

F  CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is paramount that scholars in the humanities remain truthful to their sources. In the case of the text by Kuhn some have failed to do so. Let us give the last word in this regard to that person without whom our understanding of what we are doing as scientists, natural or social, would have been much poorer. In reflecting on his initial notion of paradigms Kuhn remarks that he finds it hard to believe that all parties involved in the discussion of his book had been engaged with the same volume. He then adds: ‘Part of the reason for its [the book’s] success is, I regretfully conclude, that it can be too nearly all things to all people’ ([1974] 1977:293). When it comes to the study of a text like the Bible these words sound almost awkwardly familiar and at the same time without doubt like a text from which we may still profit.
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