

## Letters to the editor

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### *To the Editor:*

This letter is in response to Dr. Betty Pearson's letter in ANS 1:3 requesting an "... explanation, description or definition of paradigm as a concept. . . ." Kuhn's term "paradigm" is central to my article "Perspectives on Nursing Theory" (ANS 1(1):38-39, 1978). The term paradigm has been used frequently and with a wide variety of meanings by Kuhn as he developed his ideas on the growth of scientific knowledge.<sup>1,2</sup> Although the term paradigm is central to his work, he left it undefined. He does say that the established usage of the term—meaning model or pattern—is not his usage.<sup>2(p23)</sup>

Masterman, in an analysis of Kuhn's original

work in 1962, identifies paradigm as being used in at least 21 different senses.<sup>3(p61-63)</sup> Masterman clusters these 21 different meanings of paradigm into three groups.<sup>3(p63)</sup> One of these, the metaphysical or metaparadigm, is the only type of paradigm that Kuhn's philosophical critics have referred to,<sup>3(p63)</sup> and it is the type of paradigm central to my ANS 1:1 article. From this article I would like to quote what I consider to be a general definition of a metaphysical or metaparadigm.

The . . . metaparadigm . . . is a gestalt or total world view within a discipline; it provides a map which guides the scientist through the vast, generally incomprehensible world. It gives focus to scientific endeavor. . . . The metaparadigm is the broadest consensus within a discipline. It provides the general parameters of the field and gives scientists a broad orientation from which to work. (Hardy, ANS 1:1, p. 38)

This definition of paradigm as a gestalt, cognitive orientation or general perspective that has broad consensus within a discipline is based on several descriptive phrases used by Kuhn. Here I will cite phrases referring to the gestalt nature of paradigm. In a recent paper, which will be submitted for publication, I focus on the significance of a paradigm having consensus within a discipline.<sup>4</sup> Kuhn, for example, refers to paradigm as a set of beliefs<sup>1(p4)</sup> as a successful metaphysical speculation,<sup>1(p17)</sup> as a standard,<sup>1(p102)</sup> as a way of seeing,<sup>1(p117-121)</sup> as an organizing principle overriding perception itself,<sup>1(p120)</sup> as a map<sup>1(p108)</sup> and as something that determines a large area of reality.<sup>1(p128)</sup> Masterman points out that Kuhn's metaparadigm is neither "basic theory" nor a "general metaphysical viewpoint."<sup>3(p61)</sup> The metaparadigm is far broader than scientific theory and is prior to it. It is an ideologic, philosophic and cognitive entity that has gained the consensus of scientists in a discipline.

In response to Dr. Pearson's request, I have gone to considerable length in quoting both Kuhn and Masterman. I have done so because philosophy is not my field of specialization and those with more expertise in this area may make

different inferences than I, and secondly, because I think that the meaning of metaparadigm is not easy to grasp, particularly for those of us who are heavily steeped in the tradition of scientific theory, hypothesis testing, and research. Finally, I think it is an important concept for those of us in nursing who are attempting to identify nursing knowledge as opposed to knowledge in the basic and social sciences.

## REFERENCES

1. Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962).
2. Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970).
3. Masterman, M. "The Nature of Paradigm," in Lakatos, I. and Musgrave, A., eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (London: Cambridge Press 1970) p. 59-89.
4. Hardy, M. "Paradigms as tools for structuring the professional science of nursing." Paper presented at the 1979 Rozella M. Schlotfeldt Lectureship, Case Western Reserve University, Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, April 1979.

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