

reassessment of our overarching assumptions. In these terms, inequality can provoke a revolutionary phase that disrupts the conventional “growth” and “modernization” paradigms that have dominated social science since the Second World War.

This is how Thomas Kuhn (1977: xvii) distinguished between periods of normal science and revolution:

Scientific development depends in part on a process of non-incremental or revolutionary change. Some revolutions are large, like those associated with the names of Copernicus, Newton, or Darwin, but most are much smaller, like the discovery of oxygen or the planet Uranus. The usual prelude to changes of this sort is, I believed, the awareness of anomaly, of an occurrence or set of occurrences that does not fit existing ways of ordering phenomena. The changes that result therefore require “putting on a different kind of thinking-cap,” one that renders the anomalous lawlike but that, in the process, also transforms the order exhibited by some other phenomena, previously unproblematic.

Inequality has come to prominence precisely as the anomaly that troubles conventional social scientific models. This revolutionary moment is not only one of revelation but also is disruptive and provokes critical reactions from those wedded to conventional models. In this Introduction, I trace this revolutionary moment across three independent domains: first, the relationship between rich and poor; second, the nature of social scientific expertise; and third, the vision of progress itself. These three themes might appear to raise entirely different issues. That is my point. Inequality disrupts our perceptual frames, breaking down older silos of expertise, and encouraging surprising and unanticipated new understandings. In fact, these three themes are Russian dolls, nested inside one another. We are on an exciting journey indeed.

I: Turning the Telescope: The Rich as a Social Problem

If we are to isolate one moment when the challenge of inequality to conventional paradigms crystallized, May 2011 is a good contender. This was