***Silvia Moore***

***Kuhn and Descartes***

***Journal entry 4***

Kuhn, the post-positivist, would thank Descartes for his Discourse, while at the same time tell him that he got the ‘cart before the horse.’ “My Dear Descartes,” he would say, “observation and experience can and must restrict the admissible scientific belief” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 54). Descartes, of course would respond, “Kuhn…I have learned not to believe anything too firmly about which I have not been convinced by example and custom alone” (Descartes, 2009, p. 11).

These men approach research methods in contrasting ways. Descartes assumes that he is better off ridding himself of all presupposed ideas and replacing them with better ones that have been tested by a criterion of his own reasoning. Kuhn, on the other hand, wants scientists to stick to theories that have been established by rules that replicate the same results each time they are applied. Kuhn’s paradigm defines achievements in scientific research as unprecedented and being sufficiently open-ended as to leave room for scientist to explore problems and find solutions (p. 10).

Descartes’ Discourse sets forth rules that comprise logic based on instinct or intuition formed by experiences. Descartes research approach is to follow a line of reasoning that is the most probable gained by observation and deduced by one’s own reasoning. Kuhn, however, sees research as the investigation of an object that is examined under stringent conditions for further articulation and specification.

While Descartes’ Discourse is a theory, it cannot be termed a scientific revolution if using Kuhn’s criterion. Kuhn believes that a scientific revolution changes the world. “At times of revolution, when the normal scientific changes, a scientist’s perception of his environment must be re-education-in some familiar situations he must learn to see a new gestalt (Kuhn, 2009, p. 113).

Descartes’ Discourse does not change the world. It puts forth one of many competing paradigms for how to approach research but it does not revolutionize a discipline. The Discourse does not displace old methods or instruments for research nor does it revolutionize the language of piecemeal research.

The Discourse was an exercise in normal science that lead to recognition of anomalies and to crisis but it did not replace an existing paradigm and therefore cannot be termed a scientific revolution. Descartes 21 rules are guides to help researchers keep an open mind…*what occurs when scientist change their mind is an essential part of a philosophical paradigm initiated by Descartes* (Kuhn, 2009, p. 121). A true scientific revolution, according to Kuhn, is marked by a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world (Kuhn, 2009, p. 102). Descartes does not create a scientific revolution but he leads the way to one by announcing the problem and providing its first putative solution (Kuhn, 2009, p. 104).