

PHIL 105 – WEEK 2 SLIDES

GIVING DEFINITIONS

Definition

the **necessary** and **sufficient** conditions for the application of a term or concept. A proper definition should specify all and only the things satisfying the necessary and sufficient conditions

NATURAL & SOCIAL KINDS

Natural Kind

a kind that corresponds to some grouping that reflects the structure of the natural world rather than the interests, actions, or practices of human beings

Socially Constructed Kind

a kind that is either brought into existence or specifically makes reference to “social” practices as opposed to “natural” causes or events

WRITING EXERCISE

1. Give an example of a natural kind and a social kind
2. Name a feature for each example that you think marks it as being a natural kind or a social kind

“FOOD” DEFINED?

Food

Any substance or stuff that can provide nutritional calories

Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.

*Once, food was all you could eat, but today there are lots of other edible foodlike substances in the supermarket
(Pollan, “Unhappy Meals”)*

FOOD VS FOOD-LIKE-SUBSTANCES

- Pollan's claims:
 1. We should distinguish food from other “food-like” edibles
 2. The modern western diet is mostly based on edibles that resemble, but are not actually, food

NUTRITIONISM

The first thing to understand about nutritionism...is that it is not quite the same as nutrition. As the “ism” suggests, it is not a scientific subject but an ideology. (Pollan, “Unhappy Meals”)

1. What is an ideology?
2. Why is nutritionism an ideology?

NUTRITIONISM AS IDEOLOGY

Ideology

Way(s) of organizing large swaths of life and experience under a set of shared but unexamined assumptions

Nutritionism

An ideology that conceives of food purely in terms of nutrients consumed for the maintenance & development of the organism's bodily health

- How could construing food as a natural kind be ideological?

WHAT IS WRONG WITH NUTRITIONISM?

1. Oversimplifies our relationship to food
 - Ignores context (i.e. is 'reductionist')
 - isolates nutrients from each other
 - isolates food from diet
 - isolates diet from culture/life
2. Assumes food is only for bodily health
3. Ignores qualitative distinctions between foods
 - no difference between, e.g., beef, chicken, fish, or tofu, all are simply protein sources
 - treats 'processed' food as equivalent to 'unprocessed' or 'natural' food
4. Easily leads to abuse by economic/political interests

OBJECTING TO NUTRITIONISM OR TO FOOD SCIENCE?

- Are Pollan's worries directed at *nutritionism* or food science more generally?

If nutritional scientists know [that focusing on isolated nutrients can produce misleading evidence], why do they do it anyway? Because a nutrient bias is built into the way science is done: scientists need individual variables they can isolate. Yet even the simplest food is a hopelessly complex thing to study ... So if you're a nutritional scientist, you do the only thing you can do, given the tools at your disposal: break the thing down into its component parts and study those one by one, even if that means ignoring complex interactions and contexts, as well as the fact that the whole may be more than, or just different from, the sum of its parts. This is what we mean by reductionist science.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO NUTRITIONISM?

Scientists operating with the best of intentions, using the best tools at their disposal, have taught us to look at food in a way that has diminished our pleasure in eating it while doing little or nothing to improve our health. Perhaps what we need now is a broader, less reductive view of what food is, one that is at once more ecological and cultural. What would happen, for example, if we were to start thinking about food as less of a thing and more of a relationship?

“FOOD” AS A RELATIONAL KIND

*When most of us think about food and health, we think in fairly narrow nutritionist terms—about our personal physical health and how the ingestion of this particular nutrient or rejection of that affects it. But I no longer think it's possible to separate our bodily health from the health of the environment from which we eat or the environment in which we eat or, for that matter, from the health of our general outlook about food (and health). (Pollan, *In Defense of Food* p. 144)*

FOOD HOLISM

Food Holism

We should evaluate the status of a foodstuff as **food** with respect to its place in a chain of social practices, production, and consumption

- What distinguishes **food** from *food-like-edibles*?
 - Is the foodstuff heavily processed?
 - Is the foodstuff that is produced also *consumed* by its producers?
 - Is the production of the foodstuff harmful to the environment?
 - Is the production of the foodstuff heavily dependent on technological intervention?

ESCAPING THE WESTERN DIET

1. Leave the (industrialized) west
2. Alter your food consumption habits

POLLAN'S "RULES"

Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.

EAT FOOD

1. Don't eat anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food.
2. Avoid food products that come bearing health claims.
3. Avoid food products containing ingredients that are a) unfamiliar, b) unpronounceable c) more than five in number, c) contain high-fructose corn syrup
4. Get out of the supermarket whenever possible

IS POLLAN'S PROPOSAL REALISTIC?

- The exhortation to “eat food” makes a number of assumptions about food consumers
 1. Have a family or cultural culinary tradition from which to draw
 2. Have the time to evaluate food labels or latest dietary science
 3. Live in areas that have decent “food culture” (e.g. farmer’s markets, restaurants) rather than “food deserts”
 4. Be able to afford food rather than food-like-substances

