

FOOD AS NUTRIENT

GIVING A DEFINITION

Definition

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

CONCEPTS & KINDS

Natural Kind

a kind, term, or "sortal" concept (e.g. cat, dog, mammal) that corresponds to a grouping that reflects the structure of the natural world rather than the interests, actions, or practices of human beings

Socially Constructed Kind

Something is a socially constructed kind just in case it is an intended or unintended product of a social practice.

- Causal vs. constitutive social construction

WRITING EXERCISE

1. Give an example of a natural kind and a social kind
2. Name a feature for each example that is sufficient for its being a natural kind or a social kind

CAUSAL VS. CONSTITUTIVE SOCIAL KINDS

Causal construction

Something is causally constructed just in case social factors play a causal role in bringing it into existence or, to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is.

Constitutive construction

Something is constitutively constructed just in case in defining it we must make reference to social factors.

FOOD & NUTRIENTS

Calorie

The amount of energy needed to raise the temperature of 1 kilogram of water 1 degree Celsius

Nutrient

a component or element of a food stuff that an organism needs in order to develop and/or survive

"FOOD" DEFINED?

Food

Any substance or stuff that provides 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

FOOD: NATURAL AND SOCIAL?

- Might we use "food" in a way that is *ambiguous* between a purely natural use and a purely social use?

PEOPLE FOOD

- Are there good reasons for denying that (other) people are food?

1. CANNIBALISM IS A KIND OF ILLNESS

Cannibalism/suicide are manifestations of mental illness. The mentally ill are not competent. Thus, because competence is a prerequisite for legitimate consent, Brandes did not consent. (16)

- Begs the question
 - that cannibalism is illegitimate or cannot be consented to is just what is up for debate

2. CANNIBALISM WILL KILL YOU

A popular view now seems to be that the consumption of human flesh is a cause of this disease [Kuru]. If this is true, it seems, we have a reason not to consume human flesh: namely, it will kill us. (18)

- We consume lots of things that harm us without it being morally/legally illegitimate

3. CANNIBALISM IS DISGUSTING/OUTRAGEOUS

The sense of general disgust that pervaded that population, the argument goes, and the moral outrage that accompanied this disgust, would far outweigh whatever meager culinary benefits might accrue by consuming the dead. (18-19)

- There are lots of things that might be deemed, at a time, outrageous or societal harms, but a conservative stance isn't itself justification

4. CANNIBALISM VIOLATES OBLIGATIONS TO THE DEAD

The final argument against cannibalism is an argument from obligation to the dead. On this view, cannibalism violates the general principle that we ought to respect the dead, and hence, cannibalism is morally impermissible.
(19)

- In some cultures cannibalism is a form of respecting the dead (e.g. Fore people of Papua New Guinea)

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
 - treats 'processed' food as equivalent to 'unprocessed' or 'natural' food
4. Easily leads to abuse by economic/political interests

OBJECTING TO NUTRITIONISM VS. 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 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

- 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?

