

Michael pollan omnivore dilemma essay



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Michael Pollan in 2006, published a work that has to some degree changed the way that people eat, or at the very least attempted to change the way that we think about the food we eat. (Shea 54) Pollan demonstrates through fundamentally modern rhetoric the relationship that people, and more specifically American's have with food and how very distant we are from it. "History, Old Favorites in" B08) To some degree Pollan, others like him and internationally challenging food shortages and even worse food born illnesses and scares are changing the way that food is understood with regard to an international and national food traceability and accountability movement. (Popper 365) Pollan challenges the " industrial food chain" looking at ingredients, finished food products and other issues to try to source out the distance between man and his or her food. His investment in the idea goes much further as he explores through rhetoric several scenarios regarding obtaining and cooking meals.

Those scenarios including attempting to show American's a better way, or at least shock us out of our food stupor by first enjoying a meal from McDonalds (sourcing it almost exclusively to corn an overused and bizarre food product and petroleum products), producing a meal from a famous " organic" food retailer, challenging this niche industry. The third meal is a meal made from only items found on a utopian Virginian farm, and then Pollan produces a meal from only foraging. Through all these scenarios he explores, from a very basic standpoint, all the inaccuracies, misrepresentations and challenges that our food industry places on the ethic of living on the earth and sharing it with others. The rhetoric of the work is engaging as the writer

brings the reader to a very basic level of view, seeing the pasture from the perspective of the cow, for instance, or simply the exploration itself.

The work is actually what one would call a documentary in print as one can see the author traveling around in his International Harvester tractor looking for his next meal and exploring the ethics of each sourced location for it. According to a Washington Post Reviewer, herself a food writer: The book is really three in one: The first section discusses industrial farming; the second, organic food, both as big business and on a relatively small farm; and the third, what it is like to hunt and gather food for oneself. And each section culminates in a meal — a cheeseburger and fries from McDonald's; roast chicken, vegetables and a salad from Whole Foods; and grilled chicken, corn and a chocolate souffle (made with fresh eggs) from a sustainable farm; and, finally, mushrooms and pork, foraged from the wild. Crumpacker BW09)

Again Crumpacker reiterates the thematic nature of each rhetorical section of the work, describing the underlying theme of the work as an assault on corn and petroleum products: The first section is a wake-up call for anyone who has ever been hungry. In the United States, Pollan makes clear, we're mostly fed by two things: corn and oil. We may not sit down to bowls of yummy petroleum, but almost everything we eat has used enormous amounts of fossil fuels to get to our tables.

Oil products are part of the fertilizers that feed plants, the pesticides that keep insects away from them, the fuels used by the trains and trucks that transport them across the country, and the packaging in which they're wrapped. We're addicted to oil, and we really like to eat. (Crumpacker BW09)

Pollan demonstrates with his unique rhetoric, seeking to find the sources of

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food items and even the logistics that bring them to our tables and follows the logic of a challenging food market. Pathos of the work is demonstrated through the fundamental view of the author, at the level of the cow in the field, the consumer in his or her car eating fast food, the consumer in the Whole Foods market thinking he or she is acting responsibly, the forager in the wild and all the connectivity of these views and the issues that the behaviors raise.

The logos of the work is the logical connectivity between the pathos and the reality of the chain, i. e. the link between the way we choose to separate ourselves from the farmer and the market, with little thought and the fact that we use way too much corn and petroleum to manufacture and obtain our food, then logically get taken by the marketing of “ organic” food and then the difficulty of a one time experience challenging the market to forage in the environment we live. The ethos of the work is derived from the fact that Pollan is willing and able as an individual, on a very intimate level to trace all these links to a formidable conclusion, as well as his own credential as a consumer and a food writer.

Shea 54) “ He vividly describes his experiences and what he has learned, so the reader can participate in his exploration of the many worlds of food in the United States. ” (Flannery 51) Oil underlines Pollan’s story about agribusiness, but corn is its focus. American cattle fatten on corn. Corn also feeds poultry, pigs and sheep, even farmed fish.

But that’s just the beginning. In addition to dairy products from corn-fed cows and eggs from corn-fed chickens, corn starch, corn oil and corn syrup

make up key ingredients in prepared foods. High-fructose corn syrup sweetens everything from juice to toothpaste. Even the alcohol in beer is corn-based. Corn is in everything from frozen yogurt to ketchup, from mayonnaise and mustard to hot dogs and bologna, from salad dressings to vitamin pills.

“ Tell me what you eat,” said the French gastronome Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, “ and I will tell you what you are. ” We’re corn. Each bushel of industrial corn grown, Pollan notes, uses the equivalent of up to a third of a gallon of oil. Some of the oil products evaporate and acidify rain; some seep into the water table; some wash into rivers, affecting drinking water and poisoning marine ecosystems.

The industrial logic also means vast farms that grow only corn. When the price of corn drops, the solution, the farmer hopes, is to plant more corn for next year. The paradoxical result? While farmers earn less, there’s an over-supply of cheap corn, and that means finding ever more ways to use it up. Is eating all this corn good for us? Who knows? We think we’ve tamed nature, but we’re just beginning to learn about all that we don’t yet know.

Ships were once provided with plenty of food, but sailors got scurvy because they needed vitamin C. We’re sailing on the same sea, thinking we’re eating well but still discovering nutrients in our food that we hadn’t known were there — that we don’t yet know we need. We’ve lost touch with the natural loops of farming, in which livestock and crops are connected in mutually beneficial circles. (Crumpacker BW09) The omnivore’s dilemma has a historical root, as do the contents of the work done by Pollan. To reiterate

the “ what” of the work one must understand how the term omnivore’s dilemma plays out in history. In a sense the history of the omnivore’s dilemma coins the concerns that Pollan has for society.

In short it describes the fact that “ we are what we eat” and when we will eat anything that brings to us a real fear that we could eat something that will make us something we wish not to be, either ill or simply wrong. In an historical sense the “ omnivore’s dilemma” has to do with the old adage “ you are what you eat” and since people eat both plants and animals they face the reality of ingesting less than desirable foods and becoming them or being harmed by them. Humans eat both plants and animals and, thus, are subject to the ? mnivore’s dilemma? (Rozin, 1976). Because everything is potentially a source of food, people expose themselves to the dangers of ingesting harmful substances as they seek new sources of nutrition. If ? you are what you eat,? you may ? become? polluted by contact with something less than desirable. (Leppman 24) Pollan argues that when we are taken fully away from the source of our food we remove the traditional and cultural aspects of food from our lives and can be victims to market and demand that move us away even from our intrinsic health.

In his follow up book, discussed below Pollan reiterates this idea and attempts to reintroduce people to food, rather than a confounding list of nutrient ingredients and byproducts, as food has become today. “

Preparation of a newly introduced food according to traditional culinary methods and with traditional flavorings reduces the neophobia and makes the food more acceptable by resolving the omnivore’s dilemma (Fischler, 1988a: 204). ” (Leppman 27) Pollan’s later work In Defense of Food (2008)

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Pollan breaks down the fact that food is no longer food but a list of “ nutrients” which taken together only resembles food. Pollan stresses the need to cook our own food and reassert the historical and cultural importance of food in our lives. Again this strengthens Pollan’s rhetoric and continues the line of reasoning he began in Omnivore’s Dilemma.

So it’s good to be encouraged by Pollan, who eulogises the pleasures of cooking, and to be reminded of some basic truths. “ When you cook at home, you seldom find yourself reaching for the ethoxylated dyglycerides or high-fructose corn syrup,” he says. The cook in the kitchen preparing a meal from plants and animals has a great many worries, but ‘ health’ is simply not one of them because it is a given. “ The final advice given by Pollan encapsulates it all: “ Don’t eat anything your greatgrandmother wouldn’t recognise as food.

” (“ Food Really Does Grow” 12) The rhetoric of his work is demonstratively evident as his lines of reasoning attempt to make consumers more responsible for their own consumption, and overall more healthy in an intellectual and physical sense. One of my favorite passages from the work, that details all the issues of rhetoric, pathos, logos and ethos is the paragraph Pollan dedicates to describing the ethics of buying organic foods from a mass market center, in this case unseasonable asparagus from Argentina: The ethical implications of buying such a product are almost to numerous and knotty to sort out: There’s the expense, there’s the prodigious amounts of energy involved, the defiance of seasonality, and the whole question of whether the best soils in South America should be devoted to growing food for affluent and overfed North Americans. And yet you can also <https://assignbuster.com/michael-pollan-omnivore-dilemma-essay/>

make a good argument that my purchase of organic asparagus from Argentina generates foreign exchange for a country desperately in need of it, and supports a level of care for that country's land—farming without pesticides or chemical—fertilizer—it might not otherwise receive. Clearly my bunch of asparagus had delivered me deep into the thicket of trade-offs that global organic marketplace entails. (Pollan 175) The passage in many ways describes the whole nature of the work. Pollan proposes a question, then a reasonable marketplace answer and then brings the consumer to the process of thought regarding the pathos, logos and ethos of the choices he or she made to reach the point in the consumer chain where he or she stands.

It is fantastic. Mr. Pollan's premise is that the lack of a traditional food culture, combined with a bewildering number of food choices (including 17,000 new products on supermarket shelves each year), contradictory scientific studies and diets galore have caused Americans to be abnormally concerned about what they eat. Obsessed with getting thin while becoming ever fatter, they bounce from one food fad (margarine is good for you) to another (carbs are bad for you). Faced with the same confusion at the supermarket as everyone else (Organic or conventional apples? Local or imported? Wild or farmed fish? Transfats or butter or the "not butter?"), Mr. Pollan concluded that before settling the dinner question he needed answers to two other questions: "What am I eating? And where in the world did it come from?" ("Food for Thought; What" B08) Pollan's use of language and point of view are particularly telling of his rhetorical stance as well as good conductors of his message, which is meant to appeal not only to a food

audience but to the whole of society in America, where we have unknowingly and knowingly removed ourselves from our food sources, with the goal of seeking greater convenience.

The industrial food industry takes advantage of this quandary. “ It is very much in the interest of the food industry to exacerbate our anxieties about what to eat, the better to then assuage them with new products,” writes Pollan. Our bewilderment in the supermarket is no accident. “ I considered myself a somewhat savvy shopper until I read this book. I buy food at a local co-op, not at Wal-Mart, though it, too, now stocks organic products.

But even in the coop I can't avoid the problems of our industrial food system. The same companies that produce organic foods also sell cigarettes.... “ Our food system depends on consumers' not knowing much about it beyond the price disclosed by the check out scanner,” he writes. “ Cheapness and ignorance are mutually reinforcing. (Dinovella 41) The work itself when analyzed for both the what and how is staggering as it brings to the reader countless examples of food issues that have a great deal to do with the ethos of both the author and all consumers, as we continue to seek both willfully and without knowledge cheaper and more convenient foods and live on them to our own detriment. What is intrinsically interesting about the work is that with all the ethics Pollan's rhetoric never really become preachy, because he offers his ethical affronts to the food industry and consumer in an amusing and insightful way.

Pollan telling the reader in short that he or she really just needs to take a much harder look at the reality of what we put in our mouths is a comical

and serious portrayal of the industrialization and urbanization of food and all the concerns it raises. He also does not simply stress that consumers need to buy “ organic” seek natural alternatives but even to look very closely at the way that big business draws us in even to the marketing of “ better” alternatives. When Pollan introduces the final section of his work, the “ hunter-gatherer” experiment he does so in a way that reiterates his point, not that foraging is a rational and practical way in which to live in modern society but that it is a form of play for those who are involved in it and that it should be used to illuminate the manner in which food is obtained and eaten, to challenge the individual to see not only the difficulty with which we once obtained food but that food has sources that are realistically mysterious and unknown. My wager in undertaking this experiment is that hunting and gathering (or growing) a meal would perforce teach me things about ecology and ethics that I could not get in a supermarket or fast-food chain or even on a farm.

” (Pollan 280) Pollan’s work is fundamentally an introduction to responsible consumerism, he goes out and looks at issues that many of us only hear about with regard to serious advocacy and extreme right or left wing demands, by actually living the experiences of being a blind and then knowledgeable and then responsible consumer. His work is a masterpiece of modern rhetoric because it speaks to an audience that includes all of humanity and though it does not necessarily answer all the concerns that separating food from the consumer presents it really makes one think, a main and profound aspect of the rhetorical response. Works Cited

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