



The Science of Definition: " How We Define Our World With Language "

Edited by Paul F. Kisak

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A definition is a statement of the meaning of a term (a word, phrase, or other set of symbols). Definitions can be classified into two large categories, intensional definitions (which try to give the essence of a term) and extensional definitions (which list every single object that a term describes). A term may have many different senses and multiple meanings, and thus require multiple definitions. An intensional definition, also called a connotative definition, specifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for a thing being a member of a specific set. Any definition that attempts to set out the essence of something, such as that by genus and differentia, is an intensional definition. An extensional definition, also called a denotative definition, of a concept or term, specifies its extension. It is a list naming every object that is a member of a specific set. Thus, the "seven deadly sins" can be defined intensionally as those singled out by Pope Gregory I as particularly destructive of the life of grace and charity within a person, thus creating the threat of eternal damnation. An intensional definition would be the list of wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony. In contrast, while an intensional definition of "Prime Minister" might be "the most senior minister of a cabinet in the executive branch of government in a parliamentary system", an extensional definition is not possible since it is not known who future prime ministers will be. This book covers the many forms of definition and naming conventions that we use in language.



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