

## Characteristics of Criteria <sup>(1)</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes the characteristics of criteria, thus clarifying Wittgenstein's criteriological view, his view of the mental, and why he is not a behaviorist. We find that *criterion for* is a two-place, irreflexive, nonsymmetrical relation. There are often many different criteria for the same state of affairs. Under normal circumstances, a criterion for something provides us with evidence for that something's being the case. However, a criterion for something is usually neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for it; hence satisfying a criterion does not in general provide us with logically decisive evidence that the thing in question obtains. Criteria can be distinguished from mere evidence as follows: X is a criterion for Y only if learning the full meaning of Y requires that we grasp the connection between X and Y; they are tied together conceptually. That X is mere evidence for Y, in contrast, implies that we can learn the full meaning of Y without grasping the connection between X and Y. Finally, criteria for mental or psychological events are not always directly observable, and psychological concepts are not always employed on the basis of their criteria. Of psychological verbs, for instance, this asymmetry between the first-person singular and the second – and third-person use in the present tense is characteristic of the mental.

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It has been much discussed how Wittgenstein could counter the argument for skepticism about other human minds. One of his conclusions is that there must be public criteria for the mental—for being in pain, thinking, etc. We cannot get these concepts—or any others—by just being in pain or thinking and giving ourselves private, ostensive definitions of these things. “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (PI, §580). But what exactly are these criteria we cannot do without? How should we characterize them? What does Wittgenstein mean by this key term ‘criterion’? I shall try to answer these questions. This should help clarify Wittgenstein’s view of the mental, which is often called the “criteriological view,” especially by those who do not confuse his position with behaviorism.

### 1. *CRITERION FOR*: A TWO-PLACE, IRREFLEXIVE, NONSYMMETRICAL RELATION

We speak of one thing being a criterion of or for another thing. So *criterion for* is a two-place predicate or relation—it takes two things, two subjects or singular terms. For example, somebody’s continuing a series correctly is a criterion of that person’s understanding the system (PI, §146). What you say and do is the criterion for what mental image you have, for example, whether it is red or some other color (PI, §377). For instance, if in response to the question “What image do you have?” you paint a picture of a red one or say that you have a red one, you satisfy some of the criteria for having a red image. The account you give of your dreams and what you say you said to yourself in your thoughts are also criteria for what you dreamed and of what you said to yourself in your thoughts, respectively. In the last two cases Wittgenstein adds that truthfulness is a guarantee of truth (PI, p. 222).

Saying that one thing is a criterion for another also implies that these things are not identical. That is, *criterion for* is an irreflexive relation<sup>(2)</sup>. Finally, if X is a criterion for Y, then Y may or may not be a criterion for X. In other words, *criterion for* is a nonsymmetrical relation<sup>(3)</sup>. Thus moaning is a criterion for being in pain, but being in pain is not a criterion for moaning. On the other hand, being a closed figure with three straight sides is a criterion for being a triangle and being a triangle is a criterion for being a closed figure with three straight sides, since this is the definition of a triangle.

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(2) A relation is irreflexive if and only if for no object *a* is *aRa* true. Thus ‘is lighter than’ is an irreflexive relation since no object is lighter than itself.

(3) A relation R is nonsymmetrical if and only if whenever *aRb*, it may or may not be the case that *bRa*. Thus ‘loves’ is a nonsymmetrical relation, since if *a* loves *b*, *b* may or may not love *a*. Love may be unrequited. On the other hand, we know that it isn’t necessarily or always unrequited.

## 2. OFTEN SEVERAL CRITERIA FOR THE SAME STATE OF AFFAIRS

Crying, groaning, saying "It hurts!" in English or "¡Me duele!" in Spanish are all different criteria for somebody's being in pain. Wittgenstein speaks of the "great variety of criteria for personal 'identity'" (PI, §404). And he observes that in different circumstances we apply different criteria for a person reading. So there is generally, if not always, more than one criterion for the same state of affairs. *Criterion for* seems often, if not always, to be a many-one relation, in the sense that there are usually many criteria for a given state of affairs.

## 3. PROVIDING EVIDENCE THAT SOMETHING IS THE CASE

If X is a criterion for Y, X is something by which we can tell whether Y is the case. As we have seen, normally your continuing a series correctly is evidence that you understand it; your saying you have a red image is evidence that you have such an image; and your saying you said such and such to yourself in your thoughts is evidence that you did. Similarly, under normal circumstances your saying you had a particular dream is evidence that you did have such a dream. Later, in Sections 6 through 8, we shall see that although a criterion can give us evidence, the evidence it provides us with is not any kind of evidence.

Discussing the notion of criterion, Kenny omits the qualification 'under normal circumstances'. He just says flatly, "If X is a criterion of Y, then it is a necessary truth that X is evidence for Y"<sup>(4)</sup>. The qualification, however, is need. Without it we would be committed to the view that we have evidence for saying that people in plays, movies, and on TV have certain thoughts, images, and dreams simply because of what they say in playing their roles.

## 4. A CRITERION NEITHER A NECESSARY NOR A SUFFICIENT CONDITION

You may have a red image and never say you have a red image. You may be a good opera singer, yet be unable to sing Wagner, even though being able to sing Wagner is a criterion of a good opera singer. You may understand the series but not continue it correctly, perhaps because —perversely— you want to fail your exam. You may also have a dream or say something to yourself in your thoughts without telling anybody about the dream or your thoughts. Maybe you are too embarrassed. Finally, the machine

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(4) Anthony Kenny, "Criterion", *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1967), p. 259.

may be able to lift a ton, even though it never lifts anything that heavy. So a criterion for something is not always a necessary condition for it.

The following examples also show that a criterion for something need not be a sufficient condition for it. Saying you have a red image, or that you just had a certain dream or thought, does not establish that you do or did, for you may be lying. Similarly, continuing a series correctly may be the result of hypnosis; you may not actually understand how to do it. And the mere fact that a piston has been put inside a cylinder does not show that it fits the cylinder: it may have been forced in under great pressure or sit in there quite loosely. That is why Hacker correctly asserts that it is wrong to maintain "if  $p$  is a criterion for  $q$ , then  $p$  entails  $q$  ... at least if (this is) made as a *general claim*"<sup>(5)</sup>.

On the other hand, a criterion for something may be a necessary and or a sufficient condition for something. For example, being a closed figure with three straight sides is a necessary as well as a sufficient condition for being a triangle, but it is also a criterion for being a triangle. And being a male is both a criterion and a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition for being a bachelor.

## 5. SATISFYING A CRITERION NOT LOGICALLY DECISIVE

We have seen from the previous point that a criterion for something is not characterized as a sufficient condition for it. So in general, it is not logically decisive evidence in the sense of implying that for which it is evidence.

But there is another way in which it falls short of being decisive. Since there are often several criteria for something, it sometimes happens that someone may satisfy some of the criteria for some state of affairs, but not others, and perhaps even satisfy other criteria for *not* being in that state of affairs. For example, you may satisfy some of the criteria for liking someone—you invite Sally to the prom—but you fail to satisfy other criteria for liking her—you never sit at her table at meals—and you satisfy other criteria for actually disliking her—you remark to your friends that she has an ugly disposition.

## 6. A CRITERION IS NOT MERE EVIDENCE

At this point the reader may wonder how plain empirical evidence differs from a criterion, since such evidence too is not defined as beings logically decisive or as being

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(5) P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 316. This is a greatly improved edition of *Insight and Illusion: Wittgenstein on Philosophy and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), a work Hacker wrote fifteen years earlier.



either necessary or sufficient for the obtaining of some state of affairs. Such evidence also provides us with reason to believe that something is in a certain state. Moreover, there can be different evidence for the same state of affairs. Indeed, *evidence for* seems also to be a many-one, two-place, irreflexive, and nonsymmetrical relation. I turn now to an important difference between a criterion and evidence, which I shall illustrate with a few examples. Hereafter when I speak of evidence, I shall mean just this plain empirical evidence, and for the other sort I shall reserve the word 'criterion'.

In the *Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein gives an example of something that is evidence but not a criterion. Imagine that experience teaches us that having an inflamed throat is a symptom of angina. So finding someone who has an inflamed throat is evidence for saying that that person has angina. But this is not a criterion of angina. Suppose now that medical science called angina an inflammation caused by a particular bacillus. Then finding that bacillus in someone's blood would be a criterion—as well as evidence—of angina. For "then to say 'A man has angina if this bacillus is found in him' is a tautology or it is a loose way of stating the definition of 'angina'. But to say, 'A man has angina whenever he has an inflamed throat' is to make a hypothesis" (BB, p. 25).

AIDS may provide us with a second example. Experience may have taught us that unbearable fatigue is a symptom of AIDS. Then finding someone who has unbearable fatigue is evidence for saying that that person may have AIDS, especially if he is also a member of a high-risk group (for example, he is a promiscuous homosexual or a drug addict). But this is not a criterion of AIDS. On the other hand, having certain immunity problems would be a criterion for having AIDS. But unlike the foregoing example, having certain immunity problems is not definitive of AIDS, since you might have AIDS and not at this time exhibit any immunity problems and you could have immunity problems that have nothing to do with AIDS.

Finally, let me give a third example, one having nothing to do with medicine. Someone might discover by experience that whenever I am in my office and old Raleigh bicycle is to be found leaning against Linton Hall. Then finding that bicycle there will be evidence that I am in my office. But this does not constitute a criterion for people being in their offices or even for me being in my office.

Notice that in all three of the examples given—having angina, having AIDS, being in the office—we have a fairly clear distinction between what is evidence and what are criteria. But this is not always the case. In diseases doctors are often not clear, Wittgenstein says, "Which phenomena are to be taken as criteria and which as symptoms" (BB, p. 25). People also disagree about what is and what is not a criterion for example, whether rapid eye movement is a criterion or merely evidence for dreaming, or perhaps neither. Maybe it was initially evidence but now it has become a new criterion for dreaming, just as the weight of an element was once evidence for its presence but now it is a criterion for that element. Wittgenstein recognizes that the language can change in this way, that there is sometimes a "fluctuation in grammar between criteria and symptoms," or between criteria and evidence. A good example of this comes from the

early history of chemistry. Originally being an acid was defined as having a sour taste and being able to dissolve many metals. It was then discovered that a piece of metal dropped into an acid solution gives off hydrogen. Today acid is defined as a substance that generates hydrogen gas upon reaction with metal. As Wittgenstein says, "In science it is usual to make phenomena that allow of exact measurement into defining criteria for an expression" (Z, §438). This fluctuation in grammar, Wittgenstein says, "makes it look as if there were nothing at all but symptoms," or evidence, which is of course a mistaken view, according to him (PI, §354).

## 7. WHEN X IS A CRITERION FOR Y

Suppose Jones cries, groans, and says "My stomach hurts." Imagine this happens in "normal circumstances" —that is, not in a play, movie, or on television. You only grasp the connection of these things to pain if you recognize that, in spite of their not being necessary or sufficient conditions of being in pain, they constitute something more than mere evidence of somebody's being in pain. You must understand that they have some sort of conceptual connection with pain. But what does this mean? That such behavior, in these circumstances, gives you grounds for thinking that somebody is in pain. Hacker puts the point well: "A criterion  $p$ ", he says, "is a grammatically (logically) determined ground or reason for the truth of  $p$ "<sup>(6)</sup>. Thus were Smith to object, "But what do cries, groans, saying it hurts, and so on have to do with a person's being in pain?" we would suspect that Smith does not fully understand what it means to be in pain. For the criteria for something are connected in meaning with what it means to be a thing of that kind. That is why when the criteria for Y change, Wittgenstein is committed to saying the meaning of 'Y' changes.

Wittgenstein's view does not of course imply that you can always, or usually, define what it means to be 'Y' by listing the criteria for it. As Wittgenstein says, for example, the word 'pain' neither means crying nor the verbal expression of pain we sometimes replace crying with and that we learn as children (PI, §244). Pain is not pain behavior (PI, §304), though the latter is a criterion for pain. Nor does the word 'pain' mean pain behavior. The criteriological position is not a form of behaviorism nor any other kind of reductionists view. However, it can be called a form of quasi-behaviorism because, like the behaviorist, criteriologists recognize that pain behavior is a criterion for pain.

## 8. WHAT "X IS EVIDENCE FOR Y" IMPLIES

Suppose scientists discovered that whenever people are in love their C-fibers fire, or

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(6) P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 315.

that they have more of a certain chemical that is found in chocolate, or even more surprisingly, that their livers curl slightly. Curling livers, having a high dose of this chemical, and C-fibers firing would then become evidence for saying that people are in love. You could fully understand, however, what it means to be in love without knowing that these things give us evidence for saying people are in love. The meaning of 'being in love' has nothing to do with such phenomena. That is why curling livers, having a high dose of this chemical, and C-fibers firing are not criteria for 'being in love'. In time they might, of course, become new criteria of love —just as we adopted new criteria for being an acid (see Section 6 above)— in which case the meaning of the word 'love' and our concept of love would have changed. But as of now, biochemical or electrochemical processes and the shape of livers are not our criteria for being in love. We recognize that Shakespeare would not be judged to know less about what it means to be in love than we would because he was unaware of these "discoveries". This case contrasts, then, with the one mentioned in the previous paragraph, illustrating the difference between mere evidence and a criterion for something, and why it is important not to equate the notion of criterion with the notion of evidence. The test for whether X is a criterion for Y is always: could you completely understand the meaning of 'Y' without having grasped the connection between X and Y? If the answer is yes, X is not a criterion for Y, though it may be evidence for Y. If the answer is no, X is a criterion for Y. Talk of *completely* understanding the meaning of an expression indicates that this notion is subject to degree: a person can understand the meaning of an expression to a greater or a lesser extent; it is not a matter of all or nothing.

It is a corollary from the present and the last two characteristics of criteria that the notion of evidence is less basic than the notion of criteria, since the former presupposes the latter. Certainly we cannot get evidence for some state of affairs until we understand what it means to be in that state of affairs. The next two characteristics are characteristics of mental or psychological criteria.

## 9. CRITERIA FOR MENTAL EVENTS NOT ALWAYS DIRECTLY OBSERVABLE

Kenny notes that while, "most commonly, in the *Investigations*, a criterion is an observable phenomenon" —especially a person's behavior— "a criterion for a mental event need not always be something which is itself directly observable"<sup>(7)</sup>. Sometimes a criterion may be a capacity. He bases this on the following passage from Wittgenstein: "How are we to judge whether someone meant such and such? —The fact that he has, for example, mastered a particular technique in arithmetic and algebra, and that he taught someone else the expansion of a series in the usual way, is such a criterion"

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(7) Anthony Kenny, "Criterion", p. 260.



(PI, §692). That is, a criterion for having meant such and such—for example, addition by the plus sign— can be an ability, the person's ability to do arithmetic.

#### 10. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS NOT ALWAYS EMPLOYED ON THE BASIS OF CRITERIA

When I say of myself, for example, that I am in pain, I do not apply the criteria of being in pain to myself to report that I am in pain, as I would in your case (PI, §404). As Wittgenstein says, I don't "identity my sensation by criteria" (PI, §290). Kenny sums the point up as follows:

It is not part of Wittgenstein's thesis that a concept which has criteria is always employed on the basis of those criteria. The concepts of pain, of mental images, and of personal identity have criteria which Wittgenstein discusses at length; but none of these criteria, he says, are applied when a man says of himself that he has a pain or an image (§§239, 290, 377, 404)<sup>(8)</sup>.

These ten characteristics of criteria seem pretty much to sum up what Wittgenstein means by the term 'criterion', especially when applied to mental or psychological things.

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(8) Anthony Kenny, "Criterion", p. 260.