

A NOTE ON "CRITERION"*

"Criterion" is a technical term in Philosophy, and can be defined as one wants it to be. But the way I shall use the term will not be very different from how most philosophers have wanted to use it. I therefore choose to begin by indicating the dominant features of a criterion, and then specify the sense in which I want to use the term. What these features amount to can be best brought out by considering some examples of what standardly would be called criteriological relations (hereafter, C-relations). Such relations are said to hold between pairs of propositions like the following :

Someone is displaying (what we call) pain behaviour *and* he is in pain.

Someone is muttering in sleep, his face changing expressions as he does so *and* he is dreaming.

Someone gives correct answers to most questions in a quiz *and* he is intelligent.

Each of the former propositions in this illustration is said to be a criterion for the truth of the corresponding latter proposition. This means that under all normal circumstances we can say that in each case the latter proposition is true if the former is true. The qualification "under all *normal* circumstances" underlines the fact that a c-relation is not one of entailment, for it is fairly conceivable—even factually possible that in any particular case, though the former proposition is true the latter is nevertheless false. But although the relation is thus not strictly logical, we are *justified in saying* that any of the latter proposition is true if the (corresponding) former is true, and we have *no justification* for saying that the latter is true if the former is not true though nevertheless the latter *may* be true.

In other words, *a criterion for a given things being so is something by which one is justified in saying that the thing is so and in whose absence (coupled with the absence of any other alternative criteria¹) one has no justification whatsoever for saying that the thing is (or*

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even, is not) so. However, the fact that what is called a criterion may sometimes fail to give the right result need be no reason for saying that it is *not* a criterion under all conditions or that something's being a criterion is relative to *some* conditions only. For one thing, if it fails to give the right result the question is: *what* fails to give the right result ? It is the *criterion* that fails. We do not say of *any* phenomenon but only of the phenomenon of what is called pain-behaviour that it gives or fails to give the right result, namely, that the subject is in pain. Therefore, if *p* is a criterion of it is a criterion, *simpliciter*, of *q* and the "abnormal" conditions (under which *p* naturally gives the wrong result) are called "abnormal" *because* under these conditions *p* (the criterion) fails to give the right result. We say of a case of someone's pretending to be in pain that it is "abnormal" *because despite the phenomenon of pain behaviour*, he is not in pain. The fact, therefore, is that if something is a criterion for something else then it is *always* so though its giving the right result or wrong result depends on whether the circumstances are normal or abnormal. Moreover, the fact that we can make mistakes sometimes while working on the basis of a criterion cannot discredit the criterion or make it *cease to be* the criterion. This point can be brought out by taking an analogous illustration from Pollock;² the fact that someone applies a concept (e. g. "bird") to a wrong object (e. g. to a duck hunter's decoy from a distance) cannot show that he has not learnt the meaning of the concept. That he has is evident from the very fact that he did apply it to something very much *like* a bird. In other words, his application of the concept was *justified* (hence his learning of its meaning accomplished), though, due to extraneous conditions, false or mistaken. To learn the meaning of a concept is hence, "to learn how to ascribe it *justifiably* to things"³ (my emphasis). Similarly, a criterion is a "justification condition"⁴ and the test of something's being a criterion of something else is whether we can say *justifiably* (even it falsely, sometimes), on its basis, that the latter is true.

It is important to note that a "justification condition" is quite different from a defining condition and that a c-relation is not a relation of entailment. The fact would need no mention if it were not a dominant tendency among some to think otherwise, and to treat the c-relation very much like one of entailment. Rogers

Albritton, in giving one interpretation of Wittgenstein's use of "criterion" said: A criterion for a given thing's being so is something that can *show* the thing to be so and *show* by its absence that the thing is not so; it is some thing by which one may be *justified in saying* that the thing is so and by whose absence one is justified in saying that the thing is not so.⁵ (The first two emphases mine)

In bare outline this passage makes it appear as if c-relation is no different from the relation of entailment. But that this latter is mistaken will be evident by considering the passage in its finer detail. The passage may be understood to express two theses: an implied strong thesis, that a criterion for a given thing's being so can *conclusively* prove (or is *conclusive* evidence) that the thing is so and that its absence can *conclusively* show (or is *conclusive evidence*) that the thing is not so; and an expressed weaker thesis that a criterion is a justification (which, by no means, is conclusive proof or evidence) for saying that the thing is so and for saying in its absence, that the thing is not so. Taken in the first sense, the passage is entirely mistaken (even as an account of Wittgenstein's view as we shall shortly see), since, as we saw, not only can we think of a criterion yielding wrong results, we can also think of something's being so without the relevant criterion being instantiated; indeed these are factually possible. Nor is it what Wittgenstein would want to say. For clearly a number of evidences listed as criteria in the *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter *PI*) are not conclusive evidences (e. g. *PI* pt I sec 377, also of pt II p 222 and pt I sec 56). And as Malcolm pointed out, Wittgenstein would "clearly" deny that a criterion is ever a conclusive evidence.⁶ I shall submit further that Albritton's passage, taken in the second sense as indicated above, though expressing what Wittgenstein might have said, is at least partially wrong. For although we are certainly justified in saying on the basis of the criterion that something is so, we have no justification, *in its absence alone*, for saying that the thing is *not* so. Are we *justified* in saying that Smith is *not* in pain *simply* on the basis of the fact that he is not engaged in pain behaviour? Certainly not. As I have said, the truth simply is that, in the absence of pain-behaviour we are *not justified* (assuming, of course, that there are no alternative criteria which we know to have been satisfied and hence point to the contrary)

in saying that he is in pain although, as noted before, he may be in pain nonetheless, but NOT that we are justified in saying (in the absence of pain behaviour *talone* (that he is *not* in pain for, he may as well be.

However, these shortcomings in Albritton's interpretation are not so much of his own makings as they are due to Wittgenstein's unclear expressions of this disturbing concept (though Albritton must still be blamed for not giving any essential guidelines to carve out a definite notion of " criterion " from the Wittgensteinian obscurity). Wittgenstein's use of " criterion " is found to be oscilating between definition and inductive evidence or what he distinctively called symptoms. The *Blue and Brown Books* (hereafter *BB*) seems to make criterion almost indistinguishable from " definition ". This is evident from his claim that "...to say 'A man has angina if this bacillus is found in him' is a tautology or a loose way of stating the definition of angina " ⁷ also and from the fact that " criterion " is often seen to have been equated with what he called, " defining criterion " (See esp. *BB* p 25 paras 1 and 2). Now if his version is taken seriously, a criterion would have to be both necessary and sufficient condition for what it is a criterion of and the c-relation would have to be a strict logical relation of entailment. But our analysis of the notion, and particularly the above criticism of Albritton's interpretation, has shown that this is not the case and this is not true of what most philosophers would want to call c-relations. Incidentally, I will not rule it out that something could be called a " defining criterion ". As far as I can make of this, a state of affairs could be called a 'defining criterion' for another if and only if it can be *the* criterion-in the sense of one and only one piece of necessary evidence-for that other. But whereas this *could* be a sense of the term 'criterion' it would be a very strong sense indeed; such a criterion would in effect, be indistinguishable from definition. For in being the only piece of necessary evidence, this criterion has to logically guarantee the truth of what it is the defining criterion of; and in this sense it will entail the latter which is what a definition does. The curious fact is that Wittgenstein cannot be said to be committed to this. We have just noted his "negative answer" to such a proposition (see note 4); further, he sometimes gives way to such ways of talking as might draw criteria nearer to symptoms rather than to

definitions.⁸ (Though, irritatingly, he cannot be said to have been committed to *this* either. This will be evident from the following paragraph.)

However, things are not as desperate as they look like. For there is something which Wittgenstein *was* committed to and which rightly contribute to a reasonably clear and useful account of criterion; and this is the view, recently brought out by Shoemaker, that a criterion is a *non-inductive* evidence and that the c-relation is not an empirical relation. This explains why he was so anxious to like criterion to definition and to keep it distinct from symptom. One of the unchanged part of his thesis consists in the following way of distinguishing a criterion from a symptom, namely that the evidential value of a symptom is something taught to us by experience (see *BB* p. 25) whereas the evidential value of a criterion is something "founded on a definition" (*PI* sec 354, also, of *BB* p. 25). But if a criterion is thus *not* to be taught to us by experience and yet *not* to be equated with definition, it must enjoy a somewhat intermediary status between definition and symptom. Unlike a definition, a criterion is not to be taken as *entailing* the existence or occurrence of what it is a criterion of, but it must not, for that reason be taken to be empirically (so contingently) connected to the latte, just as a symptom is related to what it is a symptom of. This unchanged, and correct, intention of Wittgenstein was not entirely though considerably eclipsed by his various loose and obscure ways of talking about 'criterion'. In recent writings, Shoemaker has very succinctly expressed it by saying that a criterion is a "direct and non-inductive evidence."⁹ Thus, a criterion is a special sort of evidence which, unlike other evidence, viz, symptoms, is not *inductively* known to be an evidence. For it is not "what we have (experimentally) *found to be* evience", but "what we have learned to call evidence".¹⁰ Criteria earn this "privileged intermediary status" from the essential role they play "in the way certain concepts are formed and in the way certain words are learned".¹¹ This point is very often stressed by Wittgenstein. For example, if pain behaviour were not connected with one's having pain in the usual way, i. e. if people did not display pain-behaviour when they *are* in pain, no one could have taught the use of the word "pain" to anyone else and the words would not have any meaning or, at best, it would have had a different meaning (of *PI* sec 385). For if the usual link between pain and what

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we call pain behaviour were otherwise, either people did not pain-behave at all or they "pain-behaved" under different situations (normally always¹² when they felt ticklish, for example). But if people did not pain-behave at all, there would be no way in which anyone could tell what pain is (i. e. what does the word "pain" signify). We are taught the meaning of the word "pain" being shown people who are in pain (or so at least they seem) and we know that people are in pain from what they do and say. If nobody ever behaved as if he is in pain or said that he is, nobody could have known what pain is and even there would be no word called "pain". And if, alternatively people usually behaved as if they are in pain. (i. e. like how they now do behave when they *are* in pain) when in fact they felt some other sensation, then "pain" would not mean what it does and would mean *that* other sensation. It is in this sense that a criterion is necessarily tied up to *meaning* and is said to be "founded on a definition", and this makes it what I called a *necessary* evidence. But this is not to say that a criterion (or even *all* criteria for a given thing) *is* the meaning or *is* the definition (cf even *PI* sec. 299). We say of a man that he is in pain when he groans or moans, carefully nurses a part of his body and implores for anaesthesia and so on; but *that* is not what "being in pain" means, we say of a man that he is dreaming if he mutters something in his sleep and so on, but *that* is not what "dreaming" means (see Malcolm, *Dreaming* p. 60). A criterion *shows* what pain or dreaming is, but it does not *mean* what they mean (and we have already indicated how a criterion *shows* it). Nor, for the reasons stated above, would be right to say that the criterion is empirically (so contingently) related to what it is the criterion of.¹³ And as Shoemaker has very rightly said, "If so-and-so's being the case is a criterion for the truth of a judgement of-identity the assertion that it is evidence in favour of the truth of the judgement is necessarily rather than contingently (empirically) true. We know that it is evidence, not by having observed correlations and discovered empirical generalisations, but by understanding the concept of a ϕ and the meaning of the statements about the identity of ϕ 's"¹⁴. Thus, being determined by our understanding the *meaning* of the concept, a criterion is direct, and being knowable by no *observed* correlations it is non-inductive evidence.

We are now in a position to see at least two senses in which a phenomenon p can be said to be a criterion of another phenomenon q .

- (1) That p is logically necessary and sufficient condition for q . e. g. when p could be what we have seen to be the "defining criterion" of q .
- and (2) That p is a good reason or justification for q , but is not inductively established to be so. e. g. the general but violable justification condition, as we have called them.

Although both senses (or sorts?) of criteria above may satisfy Shoemaker's requirement (which I subscribe to) of being 'direct and non-inductive evidence' yet (1) being logically necessary and sufficient condition, is non-distinct from definition and has to involve entailment. It is for this reason I pointed out that this would be too strong a sense for the term to be used at all. We further argued that a criterion is not a conclusive evidence, but a defining criterion would be an evidence that *is* conclusive. We must therefore fall back upon the second sense for an acceptable, usable and useful account of "criterion".

Post Script

I have argued that a criterion is simply a justificatory evidence and that it does not and need not (in stronger words, *cannot* entail the truth of what is a criterion of. In this respect it is to be contrasted not only with a definition but also with a necessary condition. For although a necessary condition usually does not and *need not* entail the truth of whatever it is a necessary condition of, yet the conjunction of necessary conditions do (and even one single necessary condition, if it is the one and only one such condition, may) entail. Our contention, on the contrary, is that even if *all* the criteria for a thing's being so are satisfied it will not entail that the thing is so. (It is, for example, perfectly coherent to suppose that a certain being looks like a man, acts like a man in all observable respects is like a man but is not a human being). Moreover, there is a general asymmetry between the two concepts. In the sense of 'criterion' I have outlined, pain behaviour (understood non-question beggingly) is a criterion of someone's being in pain, but as we have seen, it is not a necessary condition of the latter. On the other hand being a material object is

a necessary condition of something's being a book, but it will not be a criterion for the latter. Nevertheless it does not follow that the two concepts are logically incompatible. For I think that a (not *any*) necessary condition of something being so can be a criterion for that thing being so as long as it is a justificatory evidence for that thing being so, i. e. as long as one is justified, on its basis, in saying that the thing is so. For example, it is a necessary condition for someone's understanding the meaning of a word that, more often than not, he is able to use it in the appropriate context. But this very fact is also our justification for saying that the man has understood the meaning of the given word. The important thing, however, is that a fact's being a criterion for something does not (logically) depend on its being a necessary condition for that thing. I can be justified, on the basis of x, in saying that y is true, and I may, perhaps, stumble on the fact that x happens to be a necessary condition for the truth of y; but I don't *have* to be aware of this latter fact. On the contrary, and this is the crucial point, x may be found *not* to be a necessary condition of y, and yet it may continue to be our justification for saying that y is true. In the very few cases of the described coincidence some criteria may be 'privileged', but it is important to see that not all criteria are and that not any need be.

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NOTES

1. For this qualification as mentioned in brackets, I am obliged to Professor R. G. Svinburne of the University of Keele, England.
2. J. L. Pollock "Criteria and Our Knowledge of the Material world", *Philosophical Review* Vol. 76 (1967) P. 32.
3. W. C. Lycan "Non-inductive Evidence: Recent Works on Wittgenstein's Criterion". *American Philosophical Quarterly* (APA hereafter), April, 1971.

4. "Wittgenstein's use of the Term 'Criterion', *Wittgenstein*, ed. G. Pitcher (Papermac, London 1968) pp. 243-4.
5. See Norman Malcolm, *Knowledge and Certainty*. (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1963). "Do the Propositions that describe the criterion of his being in pain logically imply the proposition. 'He is in pain'?. Wittgenstein's answer is clearly in the negative (p. 113). And Malcolm goes on to say, "A criterion is satisfied only in certain circumstances" (p. 113) and "the expressions of pain are a criterion of pain in certain surroundings, not in others" (p. 114).
6. *The Blue and Brown Books* (Basil Blackwell, 1958) P25 (My emphasis).
7. See esp *Ibid* p. 25, where he says that no strict line can be drawn between criteria and symptoms, and also *PI P I* sec 354, where he speaks of "fluctuations between criteria and symptoms".
8. *Self knowledge and Self Identity*. (Cornell University Press, 1953). This notion is elaborated and consistently applied in the book.
9. Lycan, *op. cit*, P 110
10. *cf op cit*, P 110, two Paragraphs earlier.
11. I rule out the possibility that one might display the same behaviour each time under a different situation. For I think this would not only be abnormal but also that, there being no particular phenomenon to go with that behaviour, even he himself would find no word to signify on quality that behaviour, and any word (pain or something else) we and he may choose to qualify the behaviour by is bound to be without a fixed meaning. It is therefore a matter not of fact, but of logic, that people normally behave in similar ways in similar situations. For this is necessary in order for the crucial word to have a fixed meaning.
12. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1959.
13. Furthermore, an empirical relation in this case would have to be at least like what holds between a symptom and what it is the symptom of. Wittgenstein calls symptom "a phenomenon of which experience has taught us that it coincided . . . with the phenomenon which is our defining criterion" (*B. B.*, P. 25). If this is so, then the fact of there being a symptom would imply that there must be something, which is a criterion, for it to coincide with. But if a criterion too has to be thus empirically related to what is the criterion of, then it would, like a symptom, require another "criterion" to coincide with, and this for the very same reason, would require yet another criterion to coincide with, and so on infinitely. Consequently, nothing would ever be a criterion; equally, nothing could ever be a symptom either.
14. *Self - Knowledge and Self - Identity*, p. 4.

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