Concepts

“I’ll know it when I see it”

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Goal for Today

Develop the ability to formally and precisely define “concepts” using two common approaches to concept definition, and beginning thinking about how to assess the quality of competing definitions.
1 Concepts

2 Concepts: Classical Approach

3 Concepts: Family Resemblance

4 Evaluating Concept Definitions
1 Concepts

2 Concepts: Classical Approach

3 Concepts: Family Resemblance

4 Evaluating Concept Definitions
Concepts

Definition: The words and ideas that we use to describe the world
Concepts

- **Definition:** The words and ideas that we use to describe the world
- **Why do we care?**
Concepts

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- **Why do we care?**
  - We cannot theorize a phenomenon until we know what it is
Concepts

- Definition: The words and ideas that we use to describe the world

- Why do we care?
  - We cannot theorize a phenomenon until we know what it is
  - We cannot agree on or debate measure of things until we share a definition of what we’re trying to measure
Concepts

- **Definition:** The words and ideas that we use to describe the world

- **Why do we care?**
  - We cannot theorize a phenomenon until we know what it is
  - We cannot agree on or debate measure of things until we share a definition of what we’re trying to measure

- Problem Set 1 is due soon
Concepts are useful because they distinguish things from other things.

In particular, they:

1. Resolve ambiguity
2. Avoid vagueness

This allows us to talk precisely about phenomena without confusion or cross-talk.
Ogden & Richard’s Triangle\textsuperscript{1}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}[->,node distance=3cm,thick, on grid]
    \node ( Meaning) {Meaning};
    \node (Label) [below left of=Meaning] {Label};
    \node (Cases) [below right of=Meaning] {Cases};
    \path (Meaning) edge node {} (Label);
    \path (Meaning) edge node {} (Cases);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{1}Richards, I.A., and Ogden, C.K. 1923 \textit{The Meaning of Meaning}.
Quick Brainstorm

What are some important political science concepts?
Quick Brainstorm

What are some important political science concepts?

- Democracy
- Inequality
- Populism
- Extremist
- Nation
- Opinion
- Values
- Ideology
- War
- Liberty
- Political party
- Immigrant
- Social movement
- Authoritarianism
- Development
Approaches to Concept Definition

Two common approaches:

1. Classical Approach

2. Family Resemblance

There are other ways to define concepts but these are the most important.
Simple Boolean Logic

- **AND**: necessity
  - Represented by $\land$
  - For attributes *required* for a given instance be considered a member of the concept’s set

- **OR**: sufficiency
  - Represented by $\lor$
  - For attributes *optional* for a given instance be considered a member of the concept’s set
1 Concepts

2 Concepts: Classical Approach

3 Concepts: Family Resemblance

4 Evaluating Concept Definitions
Classical Approach

- Specify a set of “constitutive dimensions” that are the concept
  - Fundamental characteristics of the concept
  - Not causes or effects
  - Not measures of the concept
Classical Approach

- Specify a set of “constitutive dimensions” that are the concept
  - Fundamental characteristics of the concept
  - Not causes or effects
  - Not measures of the concept

- Dimensions are *individually necessary* and *jointly sufficient* for a case to be a member of the concept set
Dahl’s Definition of Democracy

- Two dimensions

- Both necessary and jointly sufficient
Dahl’s Definition of Democracy

- Two dimensions
  - Liberalization (Public contestation)
  - Inclusiveness (Participation)
- Both necessary and jointly sufficient
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- Without liberalization: “inclusive hegemony”
Dahl’s Definition of Democracy

- Two dimensions
  - Liberalization (Public contestation)
  - Inclusiveness (Participation)

- Both necessary and jointly sufficient

- Without liberalization: “inclusive hegemony”

- Without inclusiveness: “competitive oligarchy”
Questions?
Define the concept of “chair”
1. Concepts

2. Concepts: Classical Approach

3. Concepts: Family Resemblance

4. Evaluating Concept Definitions
Family Resemblance

- Classical approach focuses on *necessity*
- Some concepts have no necessary elements but are still meaningful
Family Resemblance

- Classical approach focuses on *necessity*
- Some concepts have no necessary elements but are still meaningful
- We might also think about elements that are individually or jointly *sufficient* to establish membership
Complex Boolean Logic

- Jointly necessary and sufficient:
  Rule of Law $\land$ Equality
Complex Boolean Logic

- Jointly necessary and sufficient:
  \[ \text{Rule of Law} \land \text{Equality} \]

- Jointly necessary w/ insufficient attributes
  \[ \text{Rule of Law} \land (\text{Equality} \lor \text{Elections}) \]
Complex Boolean Logic

- Jointly necessary and sufficient:
  \[ \text{Rule of Law} \land \text{Equality} \]

- Jointly necessary w/ insufficient attributes
  \[ \text{Rule of Law} \land (\text{Equality} \lor \text{Elections}) \]

- Simple family resemblance logic:
  \[ (\text{Equality} \lor \text{Elections}) \]
Complex Boolean Logic

- Jointly necessary and sufficient:
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- Jointly necessary w/ insufficient attributes
  \[ \text{Rule of Law} \land (\text{Equality} \lor \text{Elections}) \]

- Simple family resemblance logic:
  \[ (\text{Equality} \lor \text{Elections}) \]

- Complex family resemblance logic:
  \[ (\text{Rule of Law} \land \text{Participation}) \lor (\text{Equality} \land \text{Elections}) \]
Democracy

Rule of Law

Equality

Elections
Questions?
Example: Define “game”
1 Concepts

2 Concepts: Classical Approach

3 Concepts: Family Resemblance

4 Evaluating Concept Definitions
Other Approaches

- Two most common ways to think about concepts
  - Classical approach (emph. necessity)
  - Family resemblance (emph. sufficiency)
- These are useful when defining *things*
Other Approaches

- Two most common ways to think about concepts
  - Classical approach (emph. necessity)
  - Family resemblance (emph. sufficiency)

- These are useful when defining things

- Other approaches might be useful when defining processes
  - Mansbridge’s definitions of representation
  - First, Second, and Third faces of power
  - In LT: notions of causality
Trade-offs in Definitions

Extension
(More cases)

Intension (More attributes)

Low

High
Trade-offs in Definitions

Extension
(More cases)

Intension (More attributes)

Necessary
Trade-offs in Definitions

Extension
(More cases)

Intension (More attributes)

Sufficient
Trade-offs in Definitions

Intension (More attributes)

Extension (More cases)
Gerring’s Criteria

1. Resonance
2. Domain/scope
3. Consistency
4. Fecundity
5. Differentiation
6. Causal utility
7. Operationalization (next week)
Questions?
In Sum

- We need to know what we’re talking about before we can study anything empirically.
- Concept vary in their usefulness and are often contestable.
- Many ways to define and evaluate the quality of concepts.
- Chess: Wikimedia user MichaelMaggs https://commons.wikimedia.org/ wiki/File%3AOpening_chess_position_from_black_side.jpg
- Gameboy: Public domain https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AGameboy.jpg
- Cribbage: Wikimedia user Aerion https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:120-hole_cribbage_board.jpg
- Cards: Public domain https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AEuchre.jpg