



Health
and
Everything

How We Use the Word "Chair"



Meaning and Complexity

- It seems to me that the application of a word appears to be more related to aspects of complex systems than to the hard and fast sets of necessary and sufficient conditions demanded by essentialist, nominalist or functionalist theories of meaning.



Meaning and Complexity

- We know how to play complex language games that are embedded in history, practice, custom, “forms of life” .
- I think that it is well worth exploring the actual use of a word in order to demonstrate the intricate web of rule-like factors that allow us to use it. Our intuitions count for a lot in the process we will use.



Definition by necessary & sufficient conditions

- Essentialist theories argue that definitions must provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for being whatever is being defined. Good examples of this may be found in logic and mathematics, and in some of the most developed sciences like physics and chemistry.



Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

- A "necessary" condition is one without which something cannot be what it is. For example, if something is not a living creature, it cannot be a mammal. So being a living thing is a necessary condition for being a mammal. A "sufficient" condition specifies one way of being that thing. For example, "having the flu" is a sufficient condition for "feeling miserable." If you want to feel miserable, having the flu will do the job.



Definition of a square

- Each is a necessary condition
 - Plane figure
 - Four sided figure
 - Sides of equal length
 - Four internal angles
 - Angles of equal size
- The sum of necessary conditions is a sufficient condition for being a square



Essentialist Definition of "Chair"

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person





Essentialist Definition of "Chair"

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person





Essentialist definition continued

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- **Sometimes has arms**





Definition of “Chair”

- What are usually thought of as the defining characteristics of the word “chair” are not necessary conditions for the application of the term
 - No one of these conditions is “essential.”
There are chairs that do not satisfy each if these conditions
- The sum of those conditions are not sufficient for the application of the term
 - There are things that are not chairs that satisfy all the conditions



When We Look

- There are things that are chairs that do not satisfy each of these supposedly necessary conditions
- And there are things that are not chairs that satisfy all of them.



A Chair that is not furniture

- **Furniture**
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair that is not furniture

- **Furniture**
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Non-movable or non-removable chair

- Furniture
- **Which is movable**
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Three Legged Chair

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with two legs

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A One-Legged Chair

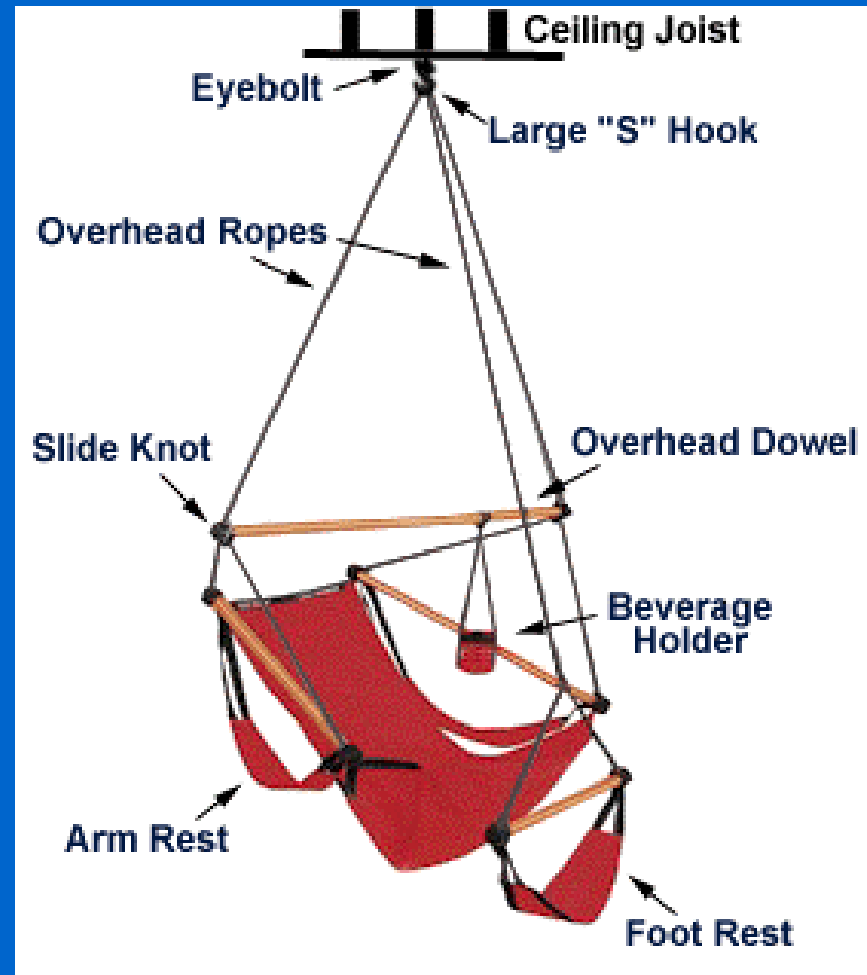
- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- **Sometimes has arms**





Chair with no legs (1 of 4)

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no legs (2 of 4)

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no legs (3 of 4)

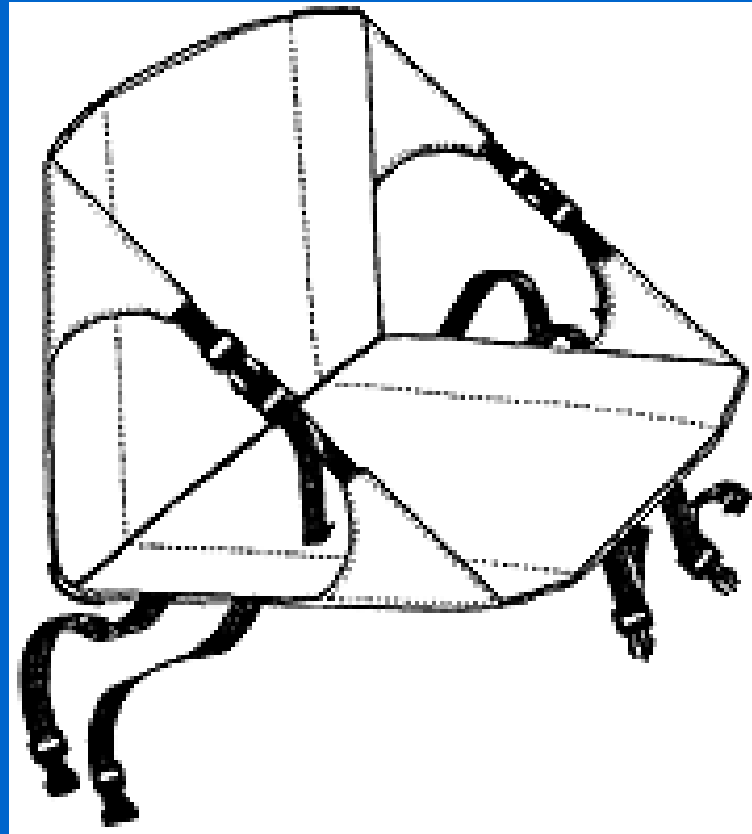
- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no legs (4 of 4)

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to support paddling
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no seat

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- **A seat**
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no seat

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- **A seat**
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair with no seat

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to excrete**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Curule chair has no back

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **And a back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A chair with no seat, back, or legs?

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- **A seat**
- **And a back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- **Sometimes has arms**





A chair with no seat, back, or legs

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- **A seat**
- **And a back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- **Sometimes has arms**





A chair that has to be blown up



Is it a chair before it is blown up?



Two-seater Muskoka Rocking Chair

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- **For one person**
- Sometimes has arms





A Camp Chair for two?





A Twig Chair for Two?





A Settee

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- **For one person**
- Sometimes has arms





A 5 seater settee

Lest you think that a settee must be a chair-like piece of furniture that seats two (2) people, here is a counter-example





A settee or Siamese Chairs?

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- **For one person**
- Sometimes has arms





Is this a 4 person chair?

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- **For one person**
- **Sometimes has arms**



From Doppelmayr



Functional Definition

- Being used for one person to sit on is a necessary and sufficient condition for being a chair
- A chair that is not used for sitting is not a chair
- Something that is used for one person to sit on IS a chair



Museum Chairs not for sitting

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to look at**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





Museum Chairs not for sitting





A Chair for used for standing (1)

- Furniture
- **Which is movable**
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to support**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A chair used for standing (2)

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to move standing up
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair for Assisted Standing

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to stand you up**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





Assisted Potty Chair

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- **A seat**
- And a back
- **Used to excrete**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A massage chair

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to massage**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A chair used for killing

- **Furniture**
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to execute**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair used for crowning

The Coronation Chair

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to crown
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms



Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey.
Note the stone at the base of the chair.
According to Celtic legend it is the rock
Jacob slept on in Beit El.



Nominalism

- A second historical theory argues that there are no essential characteristics, only conventions.
- A thing is a chair because it is called “a chair” by convention
- But there is an example of something that is clearly a chair but is not called a chairs.



A chair that is not called a chair

A Throne



- Not called a chair
- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- **Used to rule**
- For one person
- Sometimes has arms



Nominalism

- And there are also things that are called “chairs” that are not chairs



Two Chairs: same word different sense



Chair: Seat of Authority



The history of “Chair”

- Lest you think that chairs as persons are a metaphorical use
- Common people sat on stools
- Chairs began as seats of authority
- The latin word for chair is “cathedra”
- “Chair” originally meant “seat of authority”
- So are the following really chairs?



The word “chair”

- “Chair” in “chairwoman” and “rocking chair” = same word different sense OED



Two Bridge Chairs from Google



Bridge: Game or Place



The word “bridge”

- “Bridge” as in “bridge chair” for card playing and “bridge chair” for steering a boat are different words - OED.



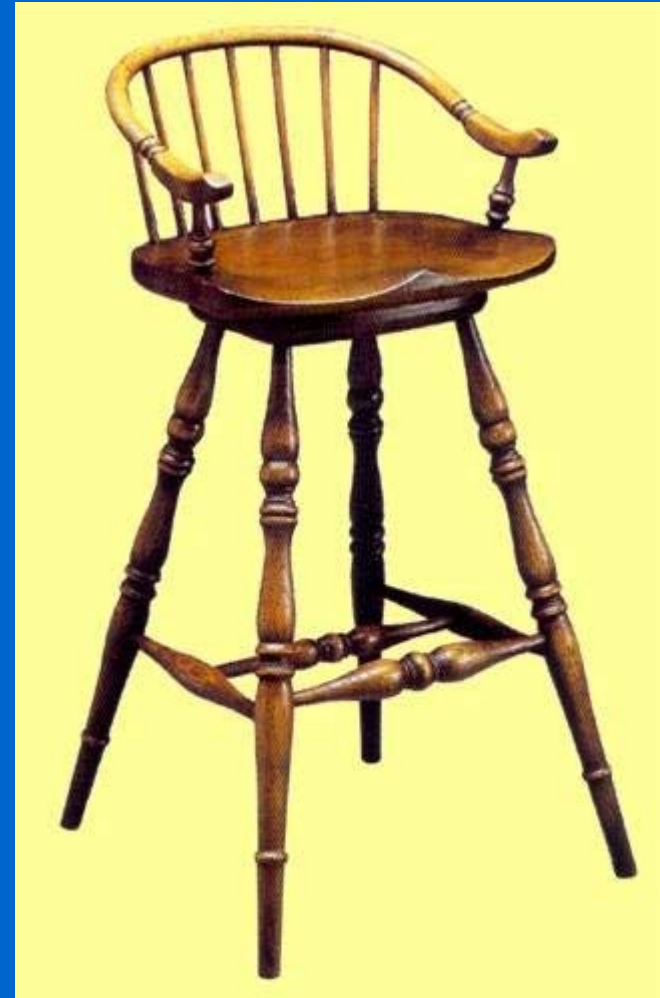
The conditions are not sufficient

- It is possible for something to have all the defining characteristics that we have listed and still not be a chair
 - Furniture with
 - Four legs
 - A seat
 - Sometimes arms
 - And a back
 - Used to sit on
 - For one person



A Bar Stool: all characteristics but not a chair

- Furniture with
- Four legs
- A seat
- Sometimes arms
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person





Other Seats for One

- How do we differentiate other things for one person to sit on that are not chairs?
- We can learn about the characteristics that help us to distinguish these various objects by looking at them.
- Some of these characteristics are evident and in standard dictionary definitions.
- Others are less evident and can provide us with surprising insights



Distinguish between

Chair



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person

Stool



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person



Some differentiating characteristics?

Stool



- Furniture
- **Sometimes Fixed**
- With four legs
- A seat
- **No back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person

- **Higher off the ground**
- **Swivel Seat**
- **Located at counter or bar**
- **Used to perch?**



A Theatre Seat



- Furniture
- Which is fixed
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person

- Tiltable Seat
- Located in a Row of seats



Car Seat

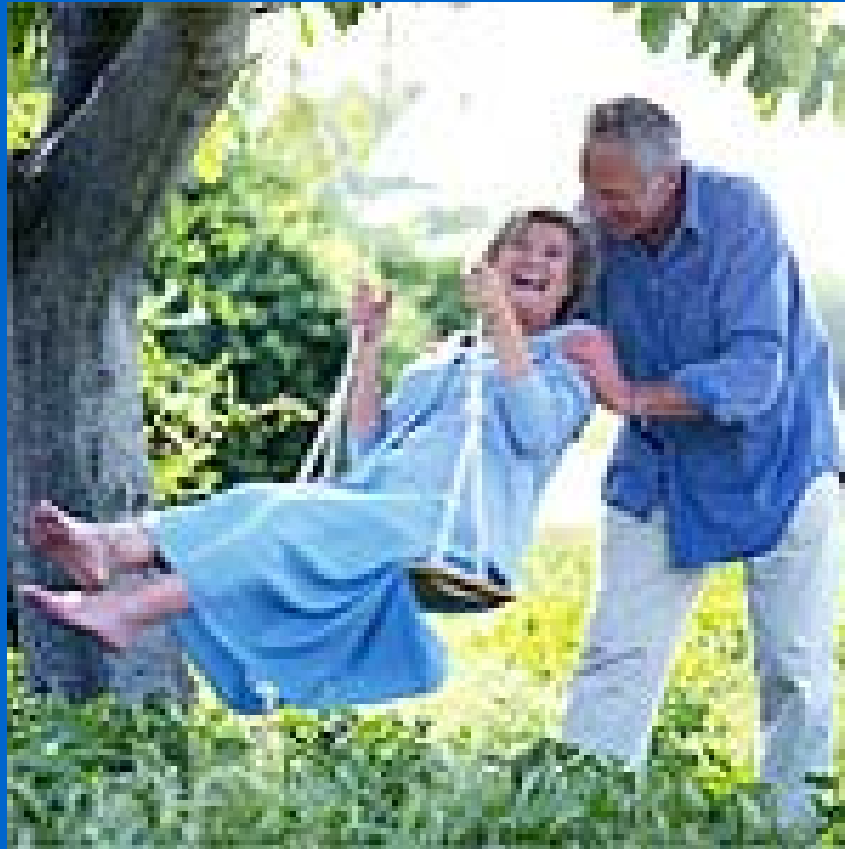


- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person



Swing

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person





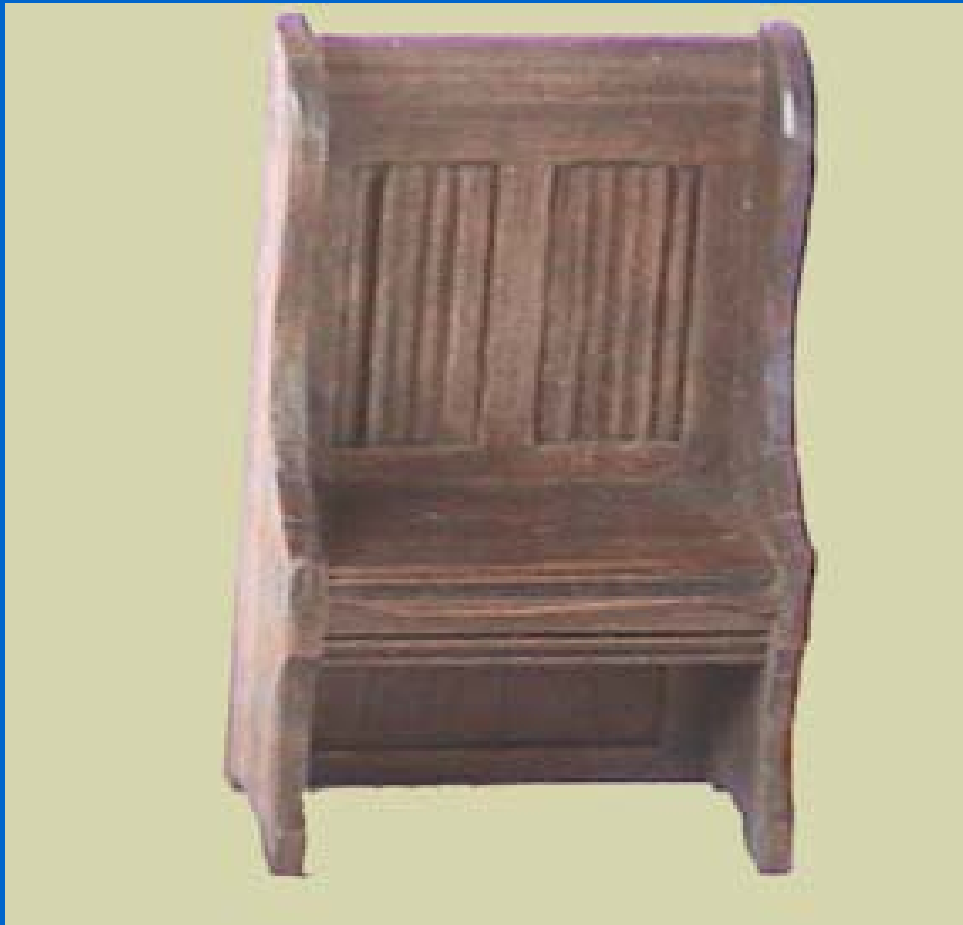
Airplane Seats



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person
- Location?



Pew



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- And a back
- Used to sit on
- For one person



Conclusion

- The defining characteristics do have relevance to the meaning of the word “chair” and perhaps some logical weight but seem to be neither necessary nor sufficient for the application of the word
- There are other characteristics we use to distinguish chairs from other seats



Three Kinds of Cases

- Clear cases of things that are things of a certain kind
- Clear cases of things that are things of a different kind
- Borderline cases that are at the blurry edge, might be seen as either one or the other (or neither)



Three Bar Stools & a Chair



The Swivel Seat is the Differentiating Characteristic



A Windsor Chair and Bar Stool



The Height is the Differentiating Characteristic



Piano Stool



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **No back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person

- Adjustable Height
- Swivel



Piano Bench



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **No back**
- Used to sit on
- For one (**or two**)

- Located next to piano



Borderline case?



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **No back**
- Used to sit on
- For one person



Piano Stool? (depends on size)



5014

A very attractive stool with deep music box. Choice of timbers and a wide range of fabric tops to suit all rooms. Available in solo or duet versions.

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **No back**
- Used to sit on
- **For one (or two)**
- **Adjustable seat**



Piano Chair?



- Furniture
- Which is movable
- With four legs
- A seat
- **A back**
- Used to sit on
- For one

- Located next to piano



Borderline Cases

- Similar borderline cases can be found between different concepts
 - Chair and settee (see above)
 - Chair and sofa
 - Chair and Bed
 - Chair and Hammock
 - Chair and Pew
 - etc



Translation

- Because words are embedded in a cultural historical and social context, they often don't translate exactly from one language to another
- So chair, stuhl, and chaise don't apply to the same sets of objects
- In Wittgensteinian terms they belong to different language games, embedded in somewhat different forms of life.

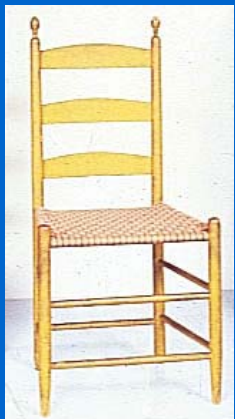


Extension shifts with language

English

Chair

- All Chairs
- No stools
- No Chaises



French

Chaise

- All Chairs
- No Stools
- All chaises



German

Stuhl

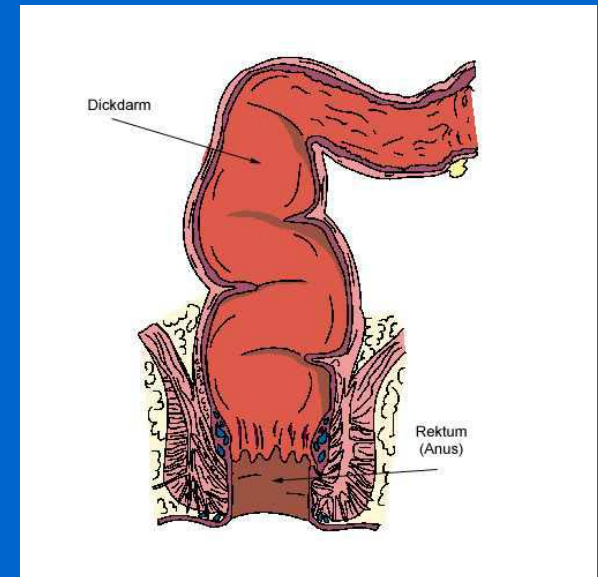
- All Chairs
- All stools
- Some chaises





Dictionary Def of Stuhl

- Seat, chair, stool, pew
- Chair of a professor
- Railway seat
- Throne (of the pope)
- Flag-staff
- Evacuation of the bowels





Family Resemblance

- Chairs are part of the family of seating
- This includes seating for one
 - Chairs
 - Stools
 - Chaises
 - Various other seats for one like
 - Car Seats
 - Train Seats
 - Theatre Seats



Family Resemblance

- Many terms defy definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. For these terms a definition is best understood by listing of the family resemblance among objects referred to by the term. The idea is that one member of a family will have the same nose as another member, but not the same eyes or mouth, while some other member will have the same mouth, but not the same eyes or nose. Thus, there is no single (necessary) feature which can be found in all of the family members.



The Kennedy Face

- ✓ Are Kennedy's
- ✓ The Kennedy eyes
- ✓ The Kennedy Hair
- ✓ The Kennedy smile
- ✓ The Kennedy mouth
- ✓ All three have the Kennedy Face





Kennedy Family

- Being a Kennedy there is often a family resemblance





Eunice Shriver Kennedy

- ✓ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✓ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✓ The Kennedy mouth
- ✓ The Kennedy smile
- ✓ Has the Kennedy face





Joseph Patrick Kennedy

- ✓ Was a Kennedy
- ✗ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✗ The Kennedy Hair
- ✗ The Kennedy mouth
- ✗ The Kennedy smile
- ✗ Doesn't have the Kennedy face





Caroline Kennedy

- ✓ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✓ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✓ The Kennedy mouth
- ✓ The Kennedy smile
- ✓ Has the Kennedy face





John Kennedy Jr

- ✓ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✗ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✗ The Kennedy mouth
- ✗ The Kennedy smile
- ✗ Doesn't have the Kennedy face





Joseph Kennedy

- ✓ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✓ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✓ The Kennedy mouth
- ✗ The Kennedy smile
- ✓ Does have the Kennedy face





Kathleen Kennedy

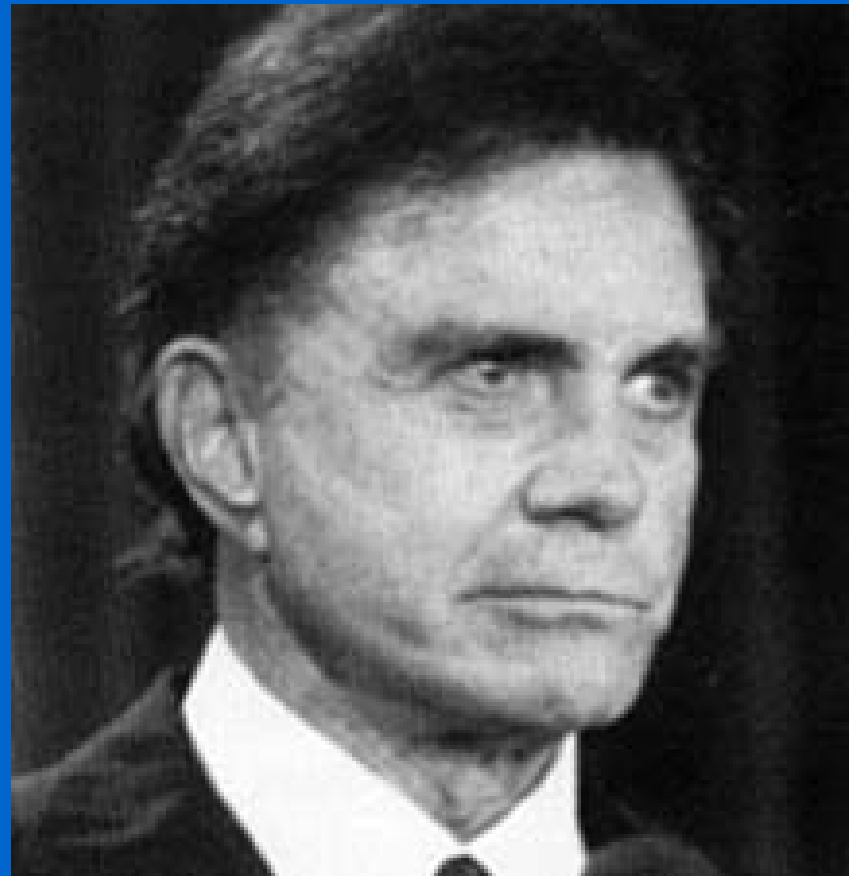
- ✓ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✗ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✗ The Kennedy mouth
- ✗ The Kennedy smile
- ✗ Doesn't have the Kennedy face





A non-Kennedy with the Kennedy face

- ✗ Is a Kennedy
- ✓ The Kennedy Eyes
- ✓ The Kennedy shaped face
- ✓ The Kennedy mouth
- ✗ The Kennedy smile
- ✓ Doesn't have the Kennedy face





A person called "Kennedy" without the Face





Seeing As

- Wittgenstein uses the duck rabbit picture to talk about how we can see things in different ways.



A Duck



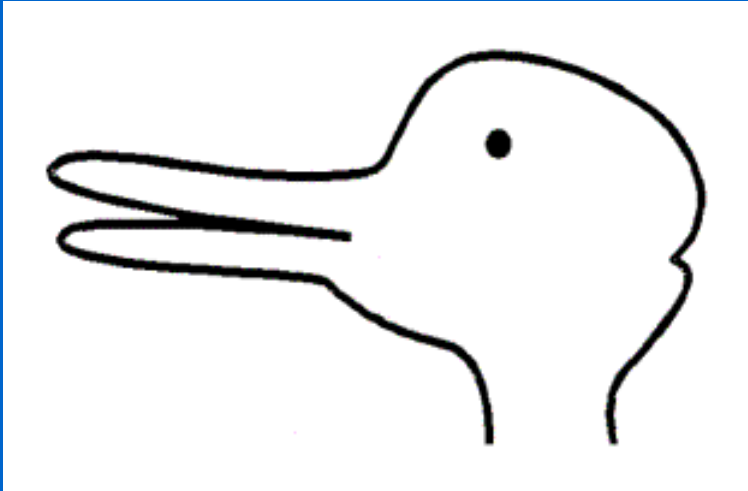


A Rabbit





The Duck-Rabbit





Seeing A Chair as.....

- Here are some examples of chairs that are either hybrids or can be seen as other things



A Chair





A shopping cart





Shop till you drop?





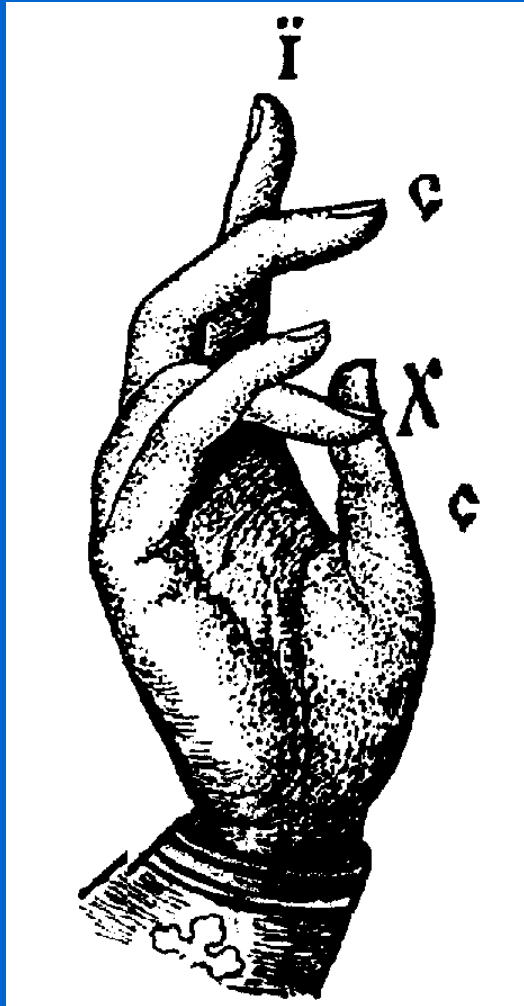
A Chair





A Hand

A Baseball Glove





Hand and Glove Chairs

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used for sitting
- For one person
- **Used for amusement**
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair





A Shoe





Some Shoe Chairs

- Furniture
- Which is movable
- **With four legs**
- A seat
- And a back
- Used for sitting
- For one person
- **Used for amusement**
- Sometimes has arms





A Chair





A Woman





A Woman Chair



For Keith Oatley
Woman Chair (Allen Jones)



Folding Chairs





Clubs





A Club Chair?





A Club Chair





Meaning and Complexity

- We know how to play complex language games that are embedded in history, practice, custom, “forms of life” .
- I think that it is well worth exploring the actual use of a word in order to demonstrate the intricate web of rule-like factors that allow us to use it.
- The application of a word appears to be more related to aspects of complex systems than to the hard and fast sets of necessary and sufficient conditions demanded by essentialism.