The A Priori and its Role in Philosophy

edited by Nikola Kompa, Christian Nimtz and Christian Suhm

Acknowledgments

The contributions to his volume have grown out of the invited contributions to three international conferences on the a priori – *A Priori Justification* (Oelde, Westphalia, February 2006), *Implicit Definitions and A Priori Knowledge* (Berlin, September 2006), and *The A Priori and Its Role in Philosophy* (Oelde, Westphalia, June 2007). All three conferences have been organised by the *Research Network on A Priori Justification* funded by the German National Research Council (DFG) (DFG number KO 1971/4-1). We are extremely grateful for the funding provided by the DFG, as well as for the helpful support provided by this institution and its officials. We would also like to thank the German Society for Analytic Philosophy (GAP) for including our Berlin workshop in their sixth international conference. At the University of Münster, we would like to thank Prof. Scholz and Prof. Rheinwald for their valuable support and priceless encouragement, Sebastian Schmoranzer and Andreas Berg-Hildebrand for all the work they put into the initial application, and Mr. Gütschow and Mr. Rensmann for the smooth management of our finances. At Bielefeld University, we would like to thank Lars Dänzer for his invaluable help in editing this volume. Our greatest debt, however, is to those who made the three conferences the pleasant and inspiring events they turned out to be – Mrs. Teeke, Mr. Kortmann and Mr. Strangfeld at Oelde, who impressed us with their kind hospitality, Julian Thomas at Berlin, and last but not least all the members of the network and all participants of our three conferences. We for our part enjoyed it all a lot.

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Introduction: The A Priori and its Role in Philosophy

Christian Nimtz / Nikola Kompa / Christian Suhm

1. Why the A Priori is of Concern to Philosophy

On the face of it, the a priori is of concern to philosophers because it marks an important subject of philosophical inquiry. Since epistemologists are concerned with knowledge in its varieties, they are bound to deal with a priori knowledge, just as they are bound to be concerned with perceptual knowledge and self-knowledge. There should, moreover, be no doubt that inquiring into whether 'a priori' primarily characterises a variety of knowledge or a sort of propositions, what a priori propositions are, what potential sources of non-experiential justification there might be, and how a priori knowledge is related to empirical knowledge are important epistemological tasks in their own right. We will subsume all this under the label of the *analytic project*. After all, the actual debate very much focuses on providing an analysis of what a priori knowledge amounts to.

There is, however, a second reason why the a priori is of concern to philosophers. Philosophy itself is regularly classed as an a priori discipline, notably so by Kant (KrV B18), the Logical Empiricists (see Ayer 1946, chs. 2-3) and contemporary rationalists (see Bealer 1998, 2002). To do so is not to claim that philosophers exclusively rely on, or aim at, a priori knowledge. To do so is to hold that philosophers may embark on a priori inquiries aimed at a priori insights. This idea fits well with what they appear to be doing. Many philosophers neither pursue extensive empirical research, nor rely much on the latest insights the empirical sciences provide. In dealing with philosophical questions concerning e.g. consciousness, meaning, values, properties, morally good actions, explanation, free will, and the like, they stick to their proverbial armchairs. If philosophy was an a priori discipline, this could easily be explained. So *is* philosophy an a priori discipline? More generally, how does the a priori affect philosophical methods, aims, topics and research programmes within the different philosophical disciplines? These questions mark hotly contested issues within philosophy, and we will subsume the respective debates under the heading of the *reflection project*.

Recent collections on the a priori have mostly been concerned with the analytic project (see Moser 1989, Casullo 1999, Boghossian/Peacocke 2000). By contrast, the contributions to this book devote a substantial part of

their efforts to the reflection project. It goes without saying that these projects are not independent of one another. Rightfully classing philosophical inquiry as a priori presupposes a clear grasp of what philosophical inquiry amounts to as well as a robust understanding of the a priori. However, we do not need to wait for a refined analysis of the a priori to emerge before we can take up the reflection project; a robust working conception of a priori knowledge will do. Embarking on the reflection project is moreover likely to advance the analytic project as well. Worrying about whether or not to class philosophical inquiries, approaches, methods, and insights as a priori should improve our grasp on the a priori. So pursuing the reflection project should be of value to the analytic project.

2. The Analytic Project, or Defining A Priori Knowledge

The epithet 'a priori' is commonly employed to characterize a variety of propositional knowledge, thereby marking it off from knowledge that is empirical or a posteriori. But what *is* a priori knowledge? More to the point:

- What does it take for a thinker *S* to a priori know that *p*?

There are two routes to answering this question. One could either try to trace back the a priori status of someone's knowledge that *p* to some characteristic feature of its propositional content *p*. This approach explains a priori knowledge in terms of a priori propositions. Or one could try to trace back the a priori status of someone's knowledge that *p* to some characteristic feature of the thinker's epistemic relation to the propositional content *p*. This approach explains a priori propositions in terms of a priori knowledge. It likewise explains the apriority of concepts, epistemic procedures, or whole sciences by the relations they bear to a priori knowledge.

We find the first approach at work in Hume's distinction between 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact' EHU §4), and it figures prominently in the Logical Empiricists' dealings with the a priori in terms of analytic propositions (see Ayer 1946, ch.4). It may also explain why many contemporary accounts of the a priori focus on a priori propositions (see e.g. Kripke 1980, 34, Blackburn 1994, 21, Boghossian/Peacocke 2000b,1, Field 2000). However, finding a property, *other* than the property of being a potential content of a priori knowledge, that marks off a priori propositions has proven challenging. The traditional idea that a priori propositions are 'true solely in virtue of meaning' could foot the bill, but there are reasons to

doubt that such a metaphysical account of analyticity is viable (see Boghossian 1997, Nimtz, this volume). Moreover, there is reason to think that explaining a priori knowledge in terms of a priori propositions cannot work, since propositions that are knowable a priori can typically be known a posteriori as well. If Jones knows that $9^2=81$ because he has done a thorough calculation, whereas Smith knows that $9^2=81$ because he has asked the generally reliable Jones, they both have knowledge of the very same proposition. But it seems wrong to class Smith's knowledge as a priori, whereas we have every reason to regard Jones' knowledge as falling into that category. So *pace* Kant (KrV B3f), the necessity and the utter generality of its content cannot ensure that the respective knowledge is a priori.

We find the second approach at work in Kant's account of a priori knowledge as knowledge that is 'independent of experience' (KrV B3). There is a is a broad consensus within contemporary epistemology that this is the right idea, and that a priori knowledge is to be characterised by its non-experiential character (see e.g. Moser 1998, Kitcher 2000, Casullo 1999, Casullo 2003); we think that authors ostensibly focussing on a priori propositions typically agree. To hold this view is not to maintain that a priori knowledge needs to be pre-experiential or 'innate'. Experience may figure in the *enabling* conditions for some thinker *S* to a priori know that *p*. As is widely granted, that *S* might need experience to acquire the concepts necessary to understand *p* does not undercut the knowledge's status as a priori. What is ruled out is that experience figures in the *evidential* conditions for some thinker *S* to a priori know that *p*. If *S* knows a priori that *p*, *S*'s justification for *p* must be thoroughly non-experiential.

Taking our cue from Boghossian and Peacocke (2000b), we would like to rephrase this necessary condition on a priori knowledge thus: *S* knows a priori that *p only if S*'s entitlement to believe *p* is not grounded in experience. Now, since a priori knowledge is simply a variety of knowledge, we can convert our necessary into a sufficient condition by enriching the antecedent: *If S* knows that *p*, and *S*'s entitlement to believe *p* is not grounded in experience, *then S* knows a priori that *p*. Combining the conditions lets us to arrive at a way of spelling out what it is for a thinker *S* to a priori know that *p*:

(AK) *S* knows a priori that *p* iff *S* knows that *p* and *S*'s entitlement to believe that *p* is not grounded in experience.

We believe that AK provides a compelling analysis. It sensibly marks off knowledge classed as a priori, and fits well with pre-theoretically identified paradigmatic cases of a priori knowledge, *viz*. knowledge of logical, mathematical, and conceptual truths. It also remains laudably silent on issues that are not to be decided by a mere analysis.

First of all, AK takes up the Kantian thought that a priori knowledge is to be essentially non-experiential, and it takes into account that what you know a priori might be known a posteriori by me, for it might well be that my entitlement to believe that *p* is grounded in experience, whereas yours is not. Secondly, AK yields a straightforward explanation as to what it is for a proposition to be a priori:

(AP) A proposition *p* is a priori iff *p* can be known a priori.

Thirdly, AK is neutral on the question of whether we should embrace an internalist understanding of justification, on which *S* is entitled to believe that *p* only if *S* can come up with or recognize reasons for *p*, or an externalist account of epistemic justification, on which *S*'s entitlement to believe that *p* depends chiefly on the reliability of the belief thus held. AK is also neutral on the modal status of propositions known a priori. It thereby leaves room for Kripke's (1980, 56f) contingent truths a priori as well as for his necessary truths a posteriori. This is as it should be. Analysing the a priori should not force us to take a stand on the issue of internalism *vs.* externalism. And although Kripke might well be wrong to hold that there is knowledge of these sorts, there is nothing in the concept of the a priori that rules it out.

Our analysis is, finally, not thoroughly neutral, for it implicitly takes sides on two contentious issues concerning the a priori. On the one hand, AK provides a negative analysis of a priori knowledge as involving an entitlement that is *not* grounded in experience (see Casullo 2003, Bonjour 1992, 1998, ch. 4.3*). It does not provide a positive theory as to what a non-experiential entitlement might rest on, and it does not identify potential sources of non-experiential justification. We deem this to be just right. AK is intended to provide a general analysis of a priori knowledge, elucidating *what* a priori knowledge is. AK does not pretend to provide an account of a priori knowledge, explaining *how* – by what routes or sources – a priori knowledge might be attainable by us. AK specifies the criteria the deliverances of any true source of non-experiential justification need to meet, and it remains silent on what these sources might be. It thereby also remains si-

lent on whether only a rational intuition, as embraced by Bonjour (1998) and Bealer (1998), can procure non-experiential entitlement, or whether there might well be a source of such entitlement acceptable to naturalists.

On the other hand, AK does not count empirical indefeasibility amongst the defining features of a priori knowledge. It thereby allows for empirical evidence to defeat a priori claims. We believe this to be correct (see Casullo 1988, 2003b). For any entitlement to believe that *p*, there are two different kinds of potential defeaters. An overriding defeater provides sufficient reason to think that non-*p* is true. The atomic clock showing 15:00 is an overriding defeater to your belief, based on your watch, that it is now 14:58. An undermining defeater indicates that some prerequisite for justifiably believing that *p* is absent. The fact that the hands of your watch don't move at all is an undermining defeater for your belief that it is now 14:58. There might not be overriding empirical defeaters for a priori knowledge. But there might well be undermining empirical defeaters for knowledge of this kind. Determining that you were drugged whilst thinking up that proof of Goldbach's conjecture should undermine your entitlement to believe the conjecture's truth. This is why we avoid adding empirical indefeasibility to the defining features of a priori knowledge.

There is an additional respect in which our analysis is not so much neutral as deliberately non-specific. According to AK, someone knows a priori that *p* only if her entitlement to believe that *p* is not grounded in experience. As has been stressed (Boghossian/Peacocke 2000b), what varieties of knowledge might qualify as a priori on such a standard crucially depends on one's notion of experience. This is true along two different dimensions. As for the first dimension, someone's notion of experience might, or might not, be a more encompassing one than the notion of sensory experience. This affects what varieties of knowledge are candidates for a priori knowledge. Someone restricting 'experience' to 'sensory experience' is open to hold that phenomenal self-knowledge is a priori. By contrast, someone holding that any conscious state or event counts as experience thereby excludes all kinds of self-knowledge from the realm of the a priori.

As for the second dimension, we might class a conscious mental state as experiential or not by taking into account specific properties of its content. This, again, affects what varieties of knowledge are candidates for a priori knowledge. Someone regarding all informational states with *contingent* contents as experiential is thereby bound to deny that there could be a priori knowledge of contingent facts (see Bonjour 1998, 8). By contrast, someone

holding that an entitlement to believe that *p* resting on states with contingent contents might well count as non-experiential may embrace the Kripkean contingent a priori. Anyone believing that semantic truths may be known a priori is likely to embrace the latter approach.

So, which is *the* right notion of experience, providing *the* correct way to read our analysis? We feel that it might be ill-advised to insist on uniqueness. It might be wiser to see AK not as demarcating a single notion of a priori knowledge, but rather a family thereof. For any sensible notion of experience, AK yields a sensible standard for a specific variety of a priori knowledge. It thereby also delineates a priori knowledge *simpliciter* from knowledge that cannot be but deemed empirical, for if there is *no* sensible notion of experience on which *S*'s entitlement to believe that *p* is non-experiential, then *S*'s knowledge that *p* isn't a priori by AK's standards. What our pluralist reading of AK does not yield is a unique determinate notion of a priori knowledge. This, again, might be as it should be. First, there is a dispute as to which notion of experience to draw on in explaining the a priori. Understanding this to be a quarrel about the unique correct notion of a priori knowledge presupposes that a priori knowledge has a determinate nature beyond what is captured in AK. This is a questionable idea, or so we think. Is Bonjour wrong to tie a priori knowledge to non-contingency? Or is Kripke wrong to even ponder the possibility of contingent a priori knowledge? We cannot see that there is a conceptual or metaphysical matter of fact deciding this issue. So we would rather like to understand the mentioned dispute as a contest aimed at determining which notion of a priori knowledge is the most sensible one for a specific task at hand, where varying that task may well affect varying the relevant notion of a priori knowledge as well.

3. The Reflective Project, or Philosophy as an A Priori Enterprise

Whereas some contemporary philosophers argue that there is no a priori knowledge in the first place (see Quine 1951, Devitt 2005), most agree that logical and mathematical knowledge rests on non-experiential entitlement, and is hence to be classed as *a priori*. There is no such consensus when it comes to philosophical insights. Traditionally, explorations of the stances on this issue are conducted in terms of *rationalism* and *empiricism*, where rationalists are understood to hold that philosophical inquiry yields a priori knowledge about the world, whereas empiricists are taken to deny that a pri-

ori methods allow us to learn about the world. Since we think that it provides a fuller picture, we instead prefer to focus on the following, rather different question:

- Does philosophical inquiry allow us to procure *a priori* knowledge of philosophical import?

To our minds, someone who considers philosophy to be an a priori enterprise does *not* need to deny that philosophers pursue and accomplish all sorts of worthwhile empirical tasks. They manifestly do, and e.g. the prolific historical research undertaken by philosophers or their contributions to inter-disciplinary projects bear witness to that fact (see van Gelder 1998, 1999). Someone who considers philosophy to be an a priori enterprise rather commits herself to the idea that philosophy *can* be pursued as an a priori endeavour. This commits her to two controversial ideas. Against Quine (1951), she is bound to hold that there is a legitimate kind of philosophical inquiry allowing us to reliably procure a priori knowledge. And against Putnam (1962), she needs to maintain that the knowledge thus procured goes beyond the mere trivial, and is of true philosophical import.

Throughout most of its history, philosophers have taken for granted that their philosophical reflection can make us learn about the world. This idea is still prominent today. Its adherents emphasize the *autonomy* of philosophical inquiry from empirical ways of learning about the world, especially from those of the natural sciences, and embrace the following claim:

- Philosophical inquiry allows us to procure *a priori* knowledge of mind-independent matters of fact.

Amongst those who embrace this idea, there is a broad consensus as to what the relevant mind-independent matters of fact are. They hold that philosophical inquiry aims at ascertaining essential truths about e.g. consciousness, meaning, values, properties, morally good actions, explanation, or free will. There is, however, no consensus as to *how* philosophical inquiry allows us to do so. *Traditional rationalists* such as Bonjour (1998, 2005) and Bealer (2002) argue that our intuitions provide intellectual access to fundamental facts about the world. *Modal rationalists* such as Kripke (1980) and Lowe (2002) assume that philosophical reflection allows us to ascertain metaphysically modal truths about kinds of entities such as “No person could have had other parents than she actually has”. And Davidson (1977), whom we cautiously think of as a *transcendentalist*, argues from the premise that

we communicate successfully to the conclusions that our view of the world must be largely correct, and that laying out the large structures of our language – something we may very well do by a priori reflection – amounts to laying out the large structures of mind-independent reality.

Contemporary philosophers are often unwilling to postulate mystifying epistemic capabilities, and thus remain skeptical about the prospects for a priori knowledge of mind-independent matters of fact. Many deny that philosophy is an a priori enterprise at all, and reject the idea that there is a principled epistemic difference between philosophy and the empirical sciences. They embrace the following claim:

- All knowledge of philosophical import we can attain by philosophical inquiry is a posteriori.

Advocates of this idea accept the *epistemic goals* of traditional a priori philosophy, but reject its avowed *method*. They, too, think that philosophical inquiry aims to ascertain essential truths about consciousness, meaning, values, properties, etc. But they regard the proposal that intuitions, modal reflections, or transcendental inquiries provide non-experiential sources of evidence as spurious and insist that the only route to knowledge about such worldly phenomena is empirical. This leads *methodological naturalists* like Kornblith (2002, 1994) to accept the natural sciences as the sole authoritative guide to philosophy. Philosophers should emulate the empirical methods of the sciences, they should squarely base their philosophical accounts on scientific results, and they need to confine their epistemic ambitions to questions empirical evidence can have a bearing on. There are no indications that philosophers actually heed this call for methodological reform *en masse*. By contrast, *armchair empiricists* such as Rudder-Baker (2001) and especially Williamson (2007, 2004) disallow the idea that rejecting the a priori nature of philosophy calls for a methodological transformation. They consider the thought-experiments philosophers devise to argue their claims as reliable means to arrive at empirical insights from the armchair – "[a]fter all, we had plenty of experience before we sat down"(Williamson 2004, 13). Appealing though it is, the claim that armchair philosophy is a variety of empirical inquiry that proceeds unchecked by scientific procedures and results, yet still reliably procures knowledge about the world is at least controversial (see Häggqvist, this volume, and Nimtz, this volume).

The flight from mystifying epistemic capabilities drives naturalists to renounce a priori philosophy wholesale. Other thinkers agree that there is no a

priori knowledge of mind-independent matters of fact. They nevertheless insist that we take the apparent a priori character of philosophy seriously, and they hold that this methodology marks off philosophy from the natural sciences. The idea they endorse is this:

- Philosophical inquiry allows us to procure *a priori* knowledge of conceptual truths, and this knowledge is of philosophical import.

Philosophers sympathetic to this understanding typically view their armchair explorations as exercises in conceptual analysis, just as Moore (1942), Ayer (1946, ch. 3), and Grice (1958) did. But anyone advocating this stance today faces serious challenges. Amongst other things, she needs to argue that *pace* Quine (1951) and Williamson (2006), there actually are conceptual truths, and she needs to explain how conceptual truths can be of philosophical import – after all, philosophers want to learn about the world, and not about the theories or conceptual scheme we devise to capture it. *Traditional lingualists* such as Hanfling (2000) defend the viability of conceptual truths relying on ideas from Wittgenstein (1953) and the ordinary language tradition. Still, they apparently share the view that philosophical inquiry cannot and should not take us beyond conceptual knowledge (see Ayer 1946, ch. 3), and they appear to deny that philosophy first and foremost aims to learn about the world. By contrast, *conceptual rationalists* like Lewis (1994) or Jackson (1998) think that conceptual investigations are of relevance beyond conceptual insights. They argue that the conceptual truths philosophical a priori inquiry attains are essential elements in *reductive explanations* allowing us to square our everyday accounts of the world with scientific theories of the universe we inhabit. So philosophical a priori inquiry does not by itself yield knowledge of mind-independent matters of fact. But it vitally contributes to a joint enterprise of learning about the world.

4. The Papers in this Volume

Identifying the main stances on the apriority of philosophy, as we have just done, is one thing. Inquiring into specific aspects of the a priori within various philosophical disciplines, always with an eye on the analytic and the reflection project, is quite another. This is what the papers here collected undertake. **Spohn** examines our fundamental picture of a priori knowledge, and finds it seriously incomplete. Working from within the framework of

theories of rational belief change, he offers an explication of both the notion of justification or ‚being a reason for', and the notion of apriority. Drawing on these resources, Spohn diagnoses an ambiguity in our notion of a priori knowledge. He urges us to distinguish between, on the one hand, that which is known or believed *whatever* our experience may be ('unrevisable apriority'), and, on the other, that which is known or believed *without* any prior experience ('defeasible apriority'). Having explicated these two notions within his framework, Spohn goes on to discuss their relations to more traditional notions of the a priori as well as the new perspectives and questions to which they give rise. Here he focuses on the notion of defeasible apriority, which he takes to be much less well understood than its counterpart.

Exploring the vexed connection between testimony and a priori knowledge, **Misselhorn** discusses Burge's celebrated ‚acceptance principle', which assures us that unless there are strong reasons to the contrary, a person is a priori entitled to accept a proposition as true if that proposition is intelligible to her, and is presented to her as true by an interlocutor. Misselhorn discerns two conflicting lines of argument in support of this principle in Burge's writings. According to the first line, the justification for the principle derives from its reliability, whereas, according the second, it follows from the fact that the principle is partly constitutive of the concept of rationality. Misselhorn finds the first wanting and judges Burge's own development of the second, more promising line to be unsatisfactory. She offers a proposal of her own, drawing on the idea that a constitutive aspect of rationality is the clarification of one's own conceptual system, and arguing that this essentially depends on communicative exchange with other speakers.

Häggqvist inquires into the form and viability of philosophical thought experiments and their modal underpinnings. He distinguishes thought experiments proper from a particular type of argument linked to them, and, scrutinizing and rejecting a recent proposal by Timothy Williamson, presents an analysis of the latter's logical form. Driven by the insight that the argument's modal premises are in need of justification beyond what the thought experiment provides, Häggqvist presents a critical assessment of thought experiments, and argues that thought experiments are highly unreliable epistemic means. For all that, Häggqvist is sympathetic to Williamson's proposal that knowledge of modal propositions may be attained through the 'careful development of counterfactual suppositions', drawing on the very same cognitive processes that underlie our evaluation of ordi-

nary counterfactual conditionals. Still, Häggqvist remains sceptical about both this sort of justification and its usefulness in philosophy.

Stojanovic argues against Kripke's claim that there are *contingent a priori* truths, as well as against the Kaplanian idea of *contingent logical* truths. She proposes relativized notions of both apriority/aposteriority and necessity/contingency, which she claims to be more fruitful than the familiar absolute notions. Applying these to Kripke's alleged examples of contingent a priori truths, she argues that as long as apriority and necessity are relativized to the same circumstances, they do not come apart. Stojanovic goes on to criticize attempts to make sense of the idea of contingent a priori truths drawing on Kaplan's semantics of demonstratives, arguing that these suggestions are either of dubious coherence, or else divest the idea of all philosophical interest. She also objects to Kaplan's claim that the 'logic of demonstratives' involves examples of contingent *logical* truths, arguing that the main candidates for this status offered by Kaplan are not true in virtue of meaning alone, but rather depend for their truth on contingent features of utterances. From this she concludes that they do not meet the criteria for logical truths.

Horwich addresses the question whether the epistemic norms we accept, and which we draw on in judging beliefs and belief forming processes to be rational, are open to explanation or justification. He critically examines the most prominent proposals on offer, including (i) the so-called 'semantogenetic' strategy, according to which the justification of our epistemic norms derives from implicit definitions, (ii) the rationalist view that these norms can be justified through a quasi-perceptual epistemic faculty of intuition, (iii) the reliabilist account, which has it that our epistemic norms are justified since they reliably bring about true beliefs, and (iv) the view that epistemic norms reflect the rules of language-games on which our community has implicitly decided. Finding all considered proposals wanting, Horwich argues that there is neither any reason to believe that an explanation of the desired sort is to be had, nor any need for such an explanation. Rather, these norms are basic or fundamental, and we cannot do better than accepting them as such.

Burri offers a defence of an analytic theory of the a priori. He first of all argues that a priori knowledge can be defended if we can give a satisfactory account of the justification of foundational or "elementary" a priori beliefs. These beliefs are understood to be such that their justification does not derive from any other propositional state, yet they still provide the basis from

which all further a priori knowledge is derived. Giving this question a cognitive twist, Burri asks what sort of non-propositional mental state, if any, can serve as input to the "faculty of judgment" – construed as a cognitive input-output system – to bring about such elementary a priori beliefs as output. He argues that the mental states of *understanding* or *knowing the meaning*, which he conceives of along use-theoretic lines, can plausibly be taken to play this role and thus can serve as the basis for a satisfactory account of a priori knowledge and justification.

Aiming to explain both the notion of apriority and the notion of metaphysical necessity in terms of such notions as language, meaning and conventions, **Glock** continues his earlier efforts to defend a 'conventionalist' account of both apriority and metaphysical necessity. Glock distinguishes two basic forms such an account may take: 'classical conventionalism', closely associated with the logical empiricists, is based on the idea that the apriority and necessity of a sentence derive from the fact that the sentence is *true solely in virtue of meaning*. According to a 'normativist' account inspired by the later Wittgenstein, on the other hand, these properties derive from the fact that the function of the relevant sentences is to express rules for the correct use of expressions, where these rule are constitutive of the expressions' meaning. Glock's sympathies lie with the normativist version, and the main part of his paper is devoted to defending this account against both long-standing and more recent objections.

Nimtz mounts a defence of conceptual truths, rejecting old and new arguments designed to show that the notion of 'analytic truth' is incoherent, or that there simply are no such truths. In a first step, he rejects the 'argument from factual content', as proffered by Peacocke, Boghossian and Cassam, intended to show that a metaphysical notion of analyticity is incompatible with what we know about truth. This argument turns out to pivot on an ambiguity of 'the facts' in combination with an uncharitably reading of Ayer and Carnap. In a second step, Nimtz argues that a metaphysical explication of analytic truth is bound to fail for quite different reasons, and he proposes an analysis of analyticity in epistemic terms. The third step forms the bulk of his paper. Here Nimtz scrutinizes and rejects Williamson's recent argument designed to show that there simply are no epistemic analyticities. Nimtz concludes that conceptual truths may well be a key element in the methodology of philosophy, and that we should draw on them to explain the armchair characteristics of philosophy as we know it.

Kompa addresses the questions of what knowledge of meaning amounts to, and whether knowledge of meaning is apt to yield a priori knowledge. After discussing the epistemological conception of analytic truth and its recent critique by Timothy Williamson, she argues that although meaning and belief are – *pace* Williamson – intimately intertwined, no a priori knowledge is gained by knowledge of meaning. Assessing what it takes to learn the meaning of a word makes plain that to know a word's meaning is often to know something about the word's denotation. To know the meaning of a word is, therefore, a gradual matter – some know it better than others. Also, since there is no fundamental difference between learning the meaning of the words of a language and acquiring a theory about the world, to come to know the meaning of a word is part of acquiring a theory of what the world is like. Any language incorporates a theory or view about the world. But given that it is supposed to be a theory about the world, any part of that theory may turn out to be mistaken, or may stand in need of revision. Coming to know the meaning of a word thus encompasses acquiring specific beliefs. But there is no prior guarantee that the beliefs so gained are true.

Scholz advances the thesis that a strict two-part distinction between what is knowable a priori and a posteriori is too coarse, because there is an important class of rules or principles – the class of presumptions, or presumption rules – that do not fit either category. Scholz clarifies this notion of a presumption, illustrates it with various examples from diverse philosophical contexts, and addresses pressing questions pertaining to them, in particular the question of how presumptions in different areas can be justified. His main examples of presumptions include principles relating to rationality, cooperation and truth – such as the Principle of Charity and Gricean maxims of conversation – as well as epistemic principles governing the rational formation of belief through perception and memory. Scholz argues that presumptions of these various sorts are neither a priori, since they are not immune from revision. Nor are they a posteriori, since a presumption to a certain effect typically holds independently of whether, and before, empirical evidence to this effect has been adduced.

Diagnosing a surprising likeness between Fodor's famed asymmetric dependency thesis and Horwich's use-theoretic semantics, **Rey** proposes a new account of conceptual content, and explores its implications for the a priori. Rey accepts the idea, common to Fodor and Horwich, that the content of an expression is determined by the property which is explanatorily basic for its use or tokenings, i.e. the property on which its uses or tokenings

asymmetrically depend. Still, Rey's account differs substantially from those of Fodor and Horwich. On the one hand, he rejects Fodor's externalism in favour of a more internalistically oriented account. On the other hand, Rey argues against Horwich's deflationist view of explanatorily basic properties, suggesting instead that we should think of them as substantial characteristics of cognitive processes. Rey recommends his view for its potential to accommodate crucial phenomena, including the shareability of concepts and the existence of empty and normative concepts. He goes on to discusses the way in which his account supports a moderate conception of epistemic analyticity, doing justice both to the robust 'analytic data' manifest in our semantic judgments and to Quinean qualms about unrevisability.

Psillos and **Christopoulou** aim to assess the viability of a conception of the a priori that lies between the Kantian 'absolute conception' of the a priori on the one hand, and the 'absolute rejection' of apriority by Mill and Quine on the other. On such a conception, an a priori proposition would have to be *irrefutable* and *revisable* on empirical grounds at the same time. Psillos and Christopoulou argue that such a conception could in principle be provided by the 'constitutive a priori', pivoting on the idea that propositions constitutive of a theoretical framework are a priori. Their ensuing discussion focuses on two major attempts to spell out this idea, *viz*. Poincaré's account of the principles of Geometry and Mechanics as 'conventions', and Carnap's theory of implicit definitions or 'meaning postulates'. A main issue in this context is the question of how such an account can satisfy the constraint that the alleged constitutive a priori propositions must be "non-arrogant", i.e. that they must not allow any new inferences to empirical conclusions that could not also be drawn without them. Their conclusion is ambivalent. While Carnap's account is superior to Poincaré's in satisfying this constraint, it still proves unsatisfactory on other counts.

Suhm

Strobach approaches the issue of the a priori through the question of the justification of the elementary mathematical statement „1+1 = 2". On Strobach's view, the most basic application of the concept of apriority is to *justifications*, and the concept of apriority is *relative* in the sense that the a priori justifications are always relative to some set of presuppositions. He reviews four proposals to a priori justify „1+1 = 2", in each case pointing out the sort of assumptions used or presupposed in the justifying inference. He concludes that, in the light of what is suggested by the proposals examined, one

of the crucial issues to be addressed is a reconsideration of the traditional idea that an a priori justification is one "without any presupposition".

Ernst addresses the epistemic status of moral knowledge. Surveying key respects in which moral knowledge appears to differ from paradigmatic cases of both a priori and a posteriori knowledge, he makes a case for the *prima facie* conclusion that moral knowledge is of neither kind. Ernst then argues for two claims. First, he maintains that moral knowledge is of exactly the same epistemic standing as scientific knowledge. However, and this is his second claim, Ernst argues that it is a mistake to think of scientific knowledge as simple empirical knowledge. Scientific knowledge essentially involves knowledge to the effect that some properties are *natural* properties, suited to figure in natural laws, predictions and explanations. In a perfectly analogous way, moral knowledge is knowledge to the effect that some properties are *good-making* properties. Ernst points out several attractive implications of this account of the status of moral knowledge.

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