

Knowledge and Reality

A Priori Knowledge

What are the notions of *analyticity* and *apriority* (*a prioricity*)? Are all, and only, analytic propositions knowable *a priori*? Is *anything* knowable *a priori*? If so, how is *a priori* knowledge possible?

READING

There are two major collections of papers on this topic, whose introductions are worth reading. These make reference to the individual papers, which you could move on to read as you wish.

Paul K. Moser (ed.), *A Priori Knowledge* (Oxford Readings in Philosophy, OUP, 1987)

Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke (eds), *New Essays on the A Priori* (OUP, 2000)

The Moser volume contains Quine's classic attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction, which you should know:

W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", *Philosophical Review* 60, 1951, pp. 20-43.

The best-known response to this is probably Grice and Strawson's paper "In Defense of a Dogma" (*Philosophical Review* 65, 1956 and reprinted in Grice's collection *Studies in the Way of Words*). However a lot has happened since, and the issues are complex (e.g. the Quinean attack is also often associated with his views on indeterminacy of translation), so you are probably better advised to get an overview of the debate from secondary literature such as:

Alexander Miller, *Philosophy of Language* (UCL Press, 1998), chapter 4

A useful overview article which also puts Quine's views on analyticity into a wider context, is:

Paul Boghossian, "Analyticity", in Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (eds), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell, 1997)

Boghossian aims to show that the existence of a viable analytic/synthetic distinction follows from realism about meanings, an approach summarised and criticised in:

Jerry Fodor and Ernie Lepore, "Analyticity Again", in Michael Devitt and Richard Hanley (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell, 2006), pp. 114-30

Two of the main battlegrounds of debate about the *a priori* have been mathematics and logic. An overview which gives significant attention to these is:

Hartry Field, "Recent Debates about the A Priori", in Tamar Szabo Gendler and John Hawthorne (eds), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (OUP, 2005), or through Google

Along with Quine, the other classic contribution to the issue of *a priori* knowledge is:

Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Blackwell, second edition 1980)

though relevant excerpts from this are usefully reprinted in the Moser collection. Kripke writes in an engaging manner (in fact, the text is from spoken lectures rather than typed prose), and the work is so influential that you should try to read the entire thing at some stage. Kripke is also very important for the related topic of necessity and possible worlds. Casullo's short paper in the Moser collection raises some important points about Kripke. Also worthy of particular note is that collection is Swinburne's paper, which is clear and makes an attempt to sort out various distinctions. In Boghossian and Peacocke, you might wish to look particularly at the papers by Cassam (which relates the discussion to classical Rationalist/Empiricist debates), Jackson (who gives a punchy defence of the *a priori* against various objections, somewhat in the spirit of Boghossian's argument) and Kitcher (which is a retrospect on a well-respected 1980 paper of his, related to one in the Moser collection).

If you have time you might also wish to investigate the work of Laurence Bonjour, whose book:

L. Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of A Priori Justification* (CUP, 1998)

has become well known as a "rationalist" throwback. James Beebe has a detailed critique of Bonjour in *Philosophical Studies* 2006 – it can also be found on Beebe's website by Googling "Beebe" and "Bonjour". Another much shorter paper by Nenad Miscevic is in *Philosophical Studies* 1998, and again Google will find it.