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Ivette Fred-Rivera

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# A Historical and Systematic Perspective on A Priori Knowledge and Justification

 Springer

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Ivette Fred-Rivera

A Historical and  
Systematic Perspective  
on A Priori Knowledge  
and Justification

 Springer

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*For Georgina and Juana*

# Preface

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Arnold Koslow for his very detailed and helpful comments. It was indeed Koslow who suggested me to work on a priori knowledge and on Hale.

I would also express my great gratefulness to the memory of Robert S. Cohen and Marx Wartofsky. They were very supportive of my work. Their wisdom, sense of humor, and beauty of spirit were always very inspiring to me.

I would like to express my deepest sense of gratitude and appreciation to the memory of Bob Hale and to Crispin Wright. Their kindness, generosity, and intellectual encouragement, I so much value.

What has motivated me the most in finishing this book during this 2020 pandemic was the memory of the love, strength, and support I received from my mother: Georgina Rivera-Rodríguez. I also have an older recognition that goes back to my childhood:

I want to thank, with all my heart, my great grandmother: Juana Rodríguez-Figueroa. The memory of her unconditional love, temperance, and thoughtfulness has been a constant source of inspiration and love. My greatest debt is to them.

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Ivette Fred-Rivera

# General Introduction: The Problem of A Priori Knowledge

Two important tasks in the epistemology of a priori knowledge occupy me in this book. First, the most urgent: to provide an explicit characterization of the notion of “a priori knowledge” and related epistemological notions. This task is the most urgent since we have first to clarify what we are talking about before addressing important questions about a priori knowledge. Second, an equally important task though not as urgent as the first task since without the first, the second cannot be settled: I come up with a plausible notion of infallibility which is compatible with the fact that we are fallible knowers (in that compatibility resides precisely its plausibility) and offer an answer to the question whether infallibility, properly understood, has a place *only* in the realm of a priori knowledge – in other words, whether infallibility is an a priori matter.

The notion of a priori knowledge, as it is discussed today, stems from the epistemology of Kant.<sup>1</sup> Kant distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: a posteriori knowledge and a priori knowledge. A posteriori knowledge is knowledge whose justification must be based upon experience. (It is also called empirical knowledge.) A priori knowledge is knowledge whose justification need not rest on experience. (It is also referred to as knowledge justifiable independently of experience.)<sup>2</sup> Now Kant recognized that some empirical knowledge is required in order to obtain even a priori knowledge, since, for him, all knowledge begins with experience. But once we have the experience required to learn the required concepts, experience does not play any further role.

Mathematics and logic are considered paradigms of disciplines constituted by a priori knowledge. In addition, many sentences the content of which is neither purely logical nor purely mathematical are said to be known a priori: “All bachelors are unmarried men,” “All bodies are extended” and “Nothing is simultaneously red and green all over.”

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<sup>1</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Introduction, B2, pp. 42–43.



The notion of a priori knowledge is one of those notions that has been widely utilized by philosophers despite the fact that it is terribly vague. Before deciding if the notion of a priori knowledge is vacuous or not, important or not, coherent or not, let's try to get clear about what the a priori amounts to.

In order to clarify the notion of a priori knowledge, one has to explain what the "independence of experience" that is characteristic of it consists in; that is, one has to provide an illuminating account of the kind of independence of experience that is involved. It is a separate and subsequent issue whether some of our knowledge is indeed a priori. In this book, although I do in fact believe that a priori knowledge is possible, I shall give no argument for that. My concern will be rather, on the assumption that there is a priori knowledge, to say what it consists in: what marks it as a priori.

In order to get clear about the property of being a priori we have to settle what "a priori" primarily applies to. I believe that an essential insight here is that the notion of an *a priori justification* is the primary notion that needs to be characterized in the epistemology of a priori knowledge. My basic proposal is that the distinction between a priori knowledge and empirical knowledge is grounded first and foremost in a distinction between ways in which we can obtain knowledge, and only secondarily in differences in the products.

Furthermore, any adequate account of the way in which a priori knowledge is independent of experience has to allow room for a degree of *dependence* on experience: certain experiences may be necessary to equip ourselves with the concepts needed if we are to entertain a candidate for a priori knowledge in the first place – or indeed, in the case of inferential a priori knowledge, if we are to understand the premises for the inference in question.<sup>3</sup>

Let me indicate what kind of an account I am seeking. It is necessary for any account of a priori knowledge to be able to satisfy most (if not all) of the following adequacy conditions. In my view, the conditions for such an adequate account are:

- (1) It has to make sense.
- (2) It has to be an account that involves no notions which are problematic or, at least, the minimal number of notions which are so.
- (3) It has to be an account that is not narrowly circular, that is, the notions involved in the account can be related – of course, how could they be useful to characterize the notion in question if they had no connection with it at all – but should not be so close that the account can shed (some) light on the nature of a priori knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup>Basic a priori knowledge is knowledge which is not obtained by any inference from other premises. For example, elementary arithmetical truths like " $2 + 2 = 4$ " and trivially analytic truths like "All bachelors are unmarried men" are considered items of basic a priori knowledge. In contrast, inferential a priori knowledge is knowledge obtain by inference from premises already known a priori. For example, the conclusion of an argument constitutes inferential a priori knowledge given that the premises in the inference are already known a priori.

- (4) The account should accommodate most, if not all, the truths we usually consider a priori, that is, it should get the extension of a priori truths right.<sup>4</sup>
- (5) It has to be an account that explains the possibility of a priori knowledge, and, in so doing, respects its problematic nature.
- (6) The account ought to illuminate the issue of the certainty of a priori knowledge. If a priori knowledge is certain: where does the certainty come from?

Why are these conditions of adequacy desirable? I don't claim that they are exhaustive, but they certainly reflect the salient concerns in the philosophy of a priori knowledge. Furthermore, I do not intend to provide an answer to all of them in this book, but will address them in my account, as best as I possibly can.

I will provide a detailed and comprehensive discussion about the problem of a priori knowledge from a historical as well as a systematic point of view. Usually philosophers opt one way or the other, but not both. Given that a priori knowledge is one of the basic problems of philosophy, it has numerous and important ramifications in different philosophical areas, and which I am unable to discuss in this book. I won't be exhaustive here but rather will be concentrated only on views directly related to my approach.

The book consists of three parts. The first part consists of three chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter 1 discusses Kant's views about a priori knowledge. Kant was the first philosopher who most systematically worked on the notion of a priori knowledge. His views will be examined in detail and some of the questions and responses we have inherited from his analysis of the notion. In particular, I find very helpful to try to answer the question whether Kant thought, or his view implies, that a priori knowledge involves (entails) some sort of infallibility.

The most important questions of the first chapter are: (a) whether Kant succeeded in characterizing the notion of a priori knowledge, and, therefore, what he meant by the notion of "experience independence" distinctive of a priori knowledge; and (b) whether Kant considered a priori knowledge to involve some sort of infallibility.

In the second chapter, I shall closely examine Quine's criticisms of the notion of a priori knowledge. The relationship between his notions of a prioricity and analyticity will be examined, and how the attack on analyticity affects the possibility of a priori knowledge. There is ample justification to examine Quine's position: for, first, his discussion of these matters has been enormously influential, and, second, it is a discussion which leaves its opponents – defenders of a prioricity – with interesting lines of investigation still open.

I argue in this chapter for two main points: first that a priori knowledge does not have to be conceived as infallible (and so as requiring unrevisability as Quine requires a priori knowledge to do), and second that the scope of revision of items of a priori knowledge (i.e. of a priori warrants and a priori statements) might include empirical revision.

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<sup>4</sup>It is understood that there is a certain looseness in this condition because of the disagreement among philosophers as to which are the a priori truths.

The focus of the third chapter is Putnam's various views about the connection between a priori knowledge and the issue of revisability/unrevisability. In this chapter I shall elaborate on issues that, according to Putnam, Quine suggests. Also I discuss Putnam's views in their own merit since they shed some light on important topics about a priori knowledge. In this chapter, I analyze very important papers of Putnam, explain how he changes his views on the topic, and evaluate them as a whole.

Putnam's position is very interesting because it is dialectical. He is in a middle position. He is very critical of the traditional notion of the *a priori* as entailing unrevisability. However, he also recognizes that there is at least one a priori truth, a weak formulation of the principle of non-contradiction ("Not every statement is both true and false"), taken as a principle which operates as a norm for any conceivable rationality.

Part II is concerned with my work on Bob Hale. Hale's work<sup>5</sup> on a priori knowledge provides a very useful departing point in my project. He is the first philosopher who most carefully has scrutinized Philip Kitcher's important challenges to a priori knowledge. However, Hale's own important contributions to a priori knowledge – i.e., his criticisms of Kitcher and his own proposals – have not been practically analyzed. His discussion bears directly on a number of important issues in connection with the notion. For instance, he offers proposals for the characterization of the notion, forcibly argues for the compatibility of a priori knowledge and revision, addresses the issue of the non-falsifiability of a priori statements, and – given the mere fact that we are fallible creatures prone to make mistakes everywhere – he does remain neutral for any possibility of infallibility, properly conceived, in *the a priori* realm. Given that Hale's work bears directly on the issues I am interested, it is quite relevant to discuss his work in detail.

The third part consists of two chapters followed by a conclusion. In Chap. 9, I will offer more illuminating (explicit) characterizations of the notions of "a priori knowledge," "warrant," and "method"; will provide a glossary of terms; and will proceed to evaluate the suggestions analyzing whether the truths we usually regard as a priori come out as a priori on my account. In Chap. 10, I will try to make sense of the concept of infallibility among others. I shall argue that the properties "a prioricity" and "infallibility" are primarily properties of methods. I will elaborate on the thesis that infallibility is a matter of methods alone and then will address the important issue whether there are empirical methods which are infallible in my sense. In the concluding section, I shall recapitulate the most important theses of the chapter and book.

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<sup>5</sup>Hale, Bob. *Abstract Objects*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, Chapter Six "Platonism and Knowledge II: Non-Empirical Knowledge", pp. 123–48, 1987.

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## About the Author

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## Part I

# Kant, Quine and Putnam on *The A Priori*

The first part consists of three chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter one discusses Kant's views about a priori knowledge. Kant was the first philosopher who most systematically worked on the notion of a priori knowledge. His views will be examined in detail and some of the questions and responses we have inherited from his analysis of the notion. In particular, I find very helpful to try to answer the question whether Kant thought, or his view implies, that a priori knowledge involves (entails) some sort of infallibility.

In the second chapter I shall closely examine Quine's criticisms of the notion of a priori knowledge. The relationship between his notions of a prioricity and analyticity will be examined, and how the attack on analyticity affects the possibility of a priori knowledge. There is ample justification to examine Quine's position: for, first, his discussion of these matters has been enormously influential, and, second, it is a discussion which leaves its opponents - defenders of a prioricity - with interesting lines of investigation still open.

The focus of the third chapter is Putnam's various views about the connection between a priori knowledge and the issue of revisability/unrevisability. In this chapter I shall elaborate on issues that, according to Putnam, Quine suggests. Also I discuss Putnam's views in their own merit since they shed some light on important topics about a priori knowledge. In this chapter, I analyze very important papers of Putnam, explain how he changes his views on the topic, and evaluate them as a whole.

# Chapter 1

## Kant's Views on A Priori Knowledge



**Abstract** The task of this chapter is to closely examine Kant's views on a priori knowledge. His views will be examined in detail and some of the questions and responses we have inherited from his analysis of the notion. In particular, I find very helpful to try to answer the question whether Kant thought, or his view implies, that a priori knowledge involves (entails) some sort of infallibility.

The most important questions of the first chapter are: (a) whether Kant succeeded in characterizing the notion of a priori knowledge, and, therefore, what did exactly he mean by the notion of "experience independence" distinctive of a priori knowledge; and (b) whether Kant considered a priori knowledge to involve some sort of infallibility.

**Keywords** A priori · Infallibility · Intuition · Synthetic a priori knowledge · Necessity

Kant was the first philosopher who more systematically worked on a priori knowledge. Undoubtedly, Kant is also the philosopher who most profoundly has thought about the notion of a priori knowledge. The depth, the terminology, the breath of his reflections, the distance from us, are challenging to the contemporary reader. Such difficulty, though, should not impede us from studying, carefully, his work.<sup>1</sup>

I can't discuss exhaustively Kant's philosophy of a priori knowledge in this chapter. I will discuss his views that relate more directly to mine. He gave more than one use to the term "a priori" applying it to judgments, categories, intuitions, for example. Since my focus is on (propositional) a priori knowledge, I will concentrate on the issues strictly related to Kant's application of the term "a priori" to judgments.

My main approach to Kant will be more systematic rather than historical, or mainly historical, though I tried to respect the historical Kant. What I intend to do is

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<sup>1</sup>I consider that Michael Friedman, Charles Parsons and Jaakko Hintikka have helped, enormously, to bring Kant's philosophy of the a priori to the contemporary debate. We owe them this achievement.

to suggest a viable reading of his views on a priori knowledge. A central question in our discussion is whether he considered a priori knowledge to involve some sort of infallibility.

I begin with a brief introduction of what I take to be Kant's main concern in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (henceforth, *Critique*),<sup>2</sup> followed by eight sections. In the second section I consider the question whether there is a priori knowledge for Kant. In the third section I discuss what he meant by "independence of experience" in connection with a priori knowledge. Section four deals with the question whether Kant was an innatist. Section five is devoted to a close examination of his criteria of universality and necessity for a priori knowledge. The sixth section is concerned with the nature of necessity in Kant. The seventh section takes up the question whether his notion of a priori knowledge is a purely "negative" one, i.e., whether it is adequately characterized as *non-empirical* or *non-a posteriori*. In section eight I examine the important issue whether Kant considered a priori knowledge as involving a notion of infallibility. Section nine includes the concluding remarks.

## 1.1 Kant's Main Concern in the *Critique*

I want to make clear that I will only be giving the following overview in order to set the stage of my own discussion, and that I am aware that there are many aspects of the Kant's aims in the *Critique* which I will not be discussing at all. It is quite possible that many readers of Kant would not agree with my characterization of Kant's aims. What are then the fundamental aims I have in this chapter? To set out my reading of Kant, to briefly characterize his treatment of the related notions of *the a priori*, necessity, etc., and, most importantly, to clarify whether he thought that there was a notion of infallibility distinctively associated with a priori knowledge.

Kant states that an important task of metaphysics is to explain the possibility of (our having) synthetic a priori knowledge. This raises the question of the Kantian distinction between a priori and a posteriori judgments, and the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments.<sup>3</sup> Analytic judgements are those in which the extraction of the concept of the predicate from the concept of the subject is governed by the principle of non-contradiction – the concept of their predicate is contained in the concept of their subject. Some of Kant's examples of true analytic judgments (i.e. analytic truths) are "All bodies are extended"<sup>4</sup> and "All triangles are three-sided

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<sup>2</sup>I shall refer to the standard English translation by Kemp N. Smith. All the Kantian passages quoted are from this translation.

<sup>3</sup>Kant uses the term "judgment" and I will be using it in this chapter to facilitate my own discussion of Kant. Nonetheless, Kant's term "judgment" can be interpreted as having the same sense as the term "proposition". Propositions may be regarded as what are expressed by suitable declarative sentences and we shall also take them to be truth-bearers.

<sup>4</sup>A7; B11, p. 48.

figures". Synthetic judgements, for instance, "All bodies are heavy"<sup>5</sup> and "All triangles have the three interior angles equal to two right angles" are those in which the extraction of the concept of their predicate from the concept of their subject is not only governed by the principle of non-contradiction. Kant does not think that the predicate concept can be 'extracted' from the subject concept in a synthetic judgment at all, i.e. he had no notion of *another* way of extracting the predicate concept, other than in accordance with the principle of non-contradiction.

A correlated Kantian distinction is that between a priori and a posteriori judgements. A priori judgements are those which need not to appeal to experience in their support. An example of an a priori (analytic) judgment is: "A body is extended". Two allegedly a priori (synthetic) judgements in natural science that Kant offers are: "In all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged" and "In all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal". These judgements are necessary. (We will see soon that "necessity" is a criterion of a priori judgements.) A posteriori judgements are those which must appeal to experience in their support. All analytic judgements are a priori. They involve no appeal to experience. This is true even when they depend upon the analysis of empirical concepts. Yet, not all synthetic judgements are known a posteriori. A crucial Kantian claim is that there are synthetic a priori judgements. According to Kant, synthetic a priori judgements are those which exhibit a necessary connection between concepts but cannot be derived by merely conducting an analysis of concepts. For Kant, an example of a synthetic a priori judgment – "a priori", contrary to Hume – is the principle of causality, that "Every alteration must have a cause", construed as a strictly universal and necessary judgment, though the concept of *cause* is not contained in the concept of the subject (i.e. in the concept of *event*). Also, the judgements of mathematics are examples of synthetic a priori judgements.<sup>6</sup>

Kant comments<sup>7</sup> that Hume was very concerned with synthetic judgments which state the connection of an effect with its cause. Hume believed to have shown that such an a priori synthetic judgment is entirely impossible. For Kant, if we accept

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<sup>5</sup>A7–A8; B11–B12. PP. 48–49.

<sup>6</sup>For Kant, most mathematical judgements are synthetic a priori. There are synthetic a priori judgements in science also.

<sup>7</sup>Kant's words:

He [Hume] occupied himself exclusively with the synthetic proposition regarding the connection of an effect with its cause .... and he believed himself to have shown that such an a priori proposition is entirely impossible. If we accept his conclusions, then all that we call metaphysics is a mere delusion whereby we fancy ourselves to have rational insight into what, in actual fact, is borrowed solely from experience, and under the influence of custom has taken the illusory semblance of necessity. If he had envisaged our problem in all its universality, he would never have been guilty of this statement, so destructive of all pure philosophy. For he would then have recognised that, according to his own argument, pure mathematics, as certainly containing a priori synthetic propositions, would also not be possible; and from such an assertion his good sense would have saved him. (B19–B20; p. 55)

Hume's conclusions, then all what we call metaphysics is illusory. We believe we are having rational insight, when what occurs is that we borrow solely from experience; and under the influence of habit we think that causality is necessary. If Hume had considered our problem in full generality, he would have recognized that, according to his view, pure mathematics, as certainly containing a priori synthetic judgments, would likewise be impossible. Kant believed that Hume would have rejected such a claim. Here Kant seems to be saying that necessity is an objective property of judgments, in contrast with the subjectivistic account of necessity that Hume gave.<sup>8</sup>

Kant thought that Hume failed to realize that mathematical judgements are synthetic a priori, so Hume did not realize either that traditional metaphysics could not be abandoned without affecting mathematics. Kant does not discuss the possibility that Hume would be willing to analyze mathematical necessity as founded on custom or habit too. In any case, such a possibility is considered much later in twentieth century philosophy. We ought to remember that, for Hume, mathematics occupies itself with 'relations of ideas', and would be analytic in Kant's terminology.

Kant argues that Hume's empiricism cannot explain all of our knowledge. It may serve to explain our knowledge of both analytic and a posteriori truths, but it cannot account for our synthetic a priori knowledge, for instance, for our knowledge of the truth of some synthetic mathematical judgements.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge of analytic truths is unproblematic because we are just making explicit in the concepts of their predicate what is already contained or thought – perhaps confusedly – in the concepts of their subject. Synthetic a posteriori truths are known by establishing that the predicate applies to an object we have picked out in the external world. In Kant's view, synthetic a priori judgements constitute a real problem for empiricism. Hume only accounts for relations of ideas and matters of fact. For Hume, mathematical judgements are analytic, so they would present no problem. He would have to show only that the principles of physics are a posteriori. For Kant, since synthetic a priori judgements are informative, the concept of their predicate cannot be derived solely by analyzing the concept of their subject. And in virtue of their a priori character, the connection between the concept of their predicate and the concept of their subject cannot be justified by observing the external world.

Analytic judgements are not the primary concern of the *Critique*. They do not extend our knowledge but only articulate it. The *Critique* is primarily concerned with (true) a priori synthetic judgements – a priori synthetic truths – since they extend our knowledge. The central questions of the *Critique* are: "How are a priori

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<sup>8</sup>I shall discuss in section five the important issue of the nature of necessity in Kant, i.e., whether it was an absolute notion or one relative to our way of knowing.

<sup>9</sup>Why synthetic a priori knowledge has to be a problem for empiricism? The empiricist could deny that there are synthetic a priori judgments. He could explain judgments of arithmetic and analysis, for example, as analytic (in some sense of analytic) and geometrical judgments as empirical. But the view that geometrical judgments are "empirical" is anachronistic for Hume as well as for Kant. The purported "empirical" status of geometry was brought up by the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries in the nineteenth century.

synthetic judgements possible?" and, more importantly: 'How is it possible for us to acquire a priori knowledge of some synthetic a priori judgments?'<sup>10</sup> A priori synthetic judgements occur in mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. Kant observes that these disciplines do not advance by the mere analysis of concepts. Kant considers the synthetic a priori judgements of each of these disciplines, and asks how they can be justified.<sup>11</sup> Now my concern will not be the semantical distinction analytic-synthetic of judgments or the metaphysical distinction between necessary and contingent judgments but rather the epistemological distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. The primary task in the epistemology of a priori knowledge is to characterize what is an a priori justification. To do that, we don't need to recur to the semantic distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. We can characterize the notion of an a priori justification without recurring to the notion of analyticity. Kant himself does not characterize the notion of a priori knowledge through the notion of analyticity. These are related notions but independent notions. The concept of a priori justification does not imply the concept of analyticity, and the concept of analyticity does not explain the possibility of a priori knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, complete insulation from the notion of necessity is not possible, specially in the light of Kant's characterization of all a priori truths as necessary truths (whether they are analytic or synthetic).

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<sup>10</sup>Casullo considers that Kant has not explained the claim that the source of the synthetic a priori knowledge is different from, and more problematic than, the source of analytic a priori knowledge.

In his view, knowledge of analytic propositions requires knowledge of the principle of contradiction and the content of concepts. Yet he never addresses the source of such knowledge. In the absence of such an account, there is no basis for assuming that the source of analytic a priori knowledge is different from the source of synthetic a priori knowledge, let alone that the latter is more epistemically problematic than the former. (*A priori Justification*, p. 214)

I don't think that it is correct to say that Kant took it for granted. Kant does not explain – explicitly – analytic knowledge because he considers it obvious. It comes from the analysis of concepts guided by the principle of non-contradiction. Analytic knowledge does not add anything new to our knowledge. The source of synthetic a priori knowledge is intuition (as Kant technically understands it). The whole *Critique* is dedicated to show and explain, particularly, the synthetic a priori nature of mathematical knowledge; different and problematic knowledge because it relies on reasoning and intuition, on visualization and construction of concepts in our minds, in imagination, and not merely on our apprehension of mathematical concepts. Synthetic a priori judgments add new information, they are ampliative. Kant gives examples to show the difference between analytic a priori knowledge and synthetic a priori knowledge. He has basis, provides reasons, in the examples provided in his explanations. Clearly, the subsequent discussion of these issues, that have lasted until today, shows the problematic nature of a priori knowledge, whether analytic or synthetic, as Casullo is fully aware of being himself a protagonist in such discussions.

<sup>11</sup>According to Kant, the following three questions arise: (1) How is pure mathematics possible? (2) How is pure physics (or the pure part of physics possible)? (3) How is pure metaphysics possible? The success of mathematics and physics proves that they are possible. What demands explanation is *how* they are possible. In contrast, in the case of metaphysics we have to ask whether it is possible, and then inquire into how it is possible. (B xvii; p. 22)

<sup>12</sup>See Casullo, Albert. *A Priori Justification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 237–38, 2003.

## 1.2 Is There A Priori Knowledge? How Is A Priori Knowledge Possible?

Kant had set himself the task of investigating the possibility of a priori knowledge – particularly synthetic a priori knowledge<sup>13</sup> – as the enterprise of investigating “how much we can hope to achieve by reason, when all the material and assistance of experience are taken away”.<sup>14</sup> As he reiterates: “For the chief question is always simply this: what and how much can the understanding and reason know apart from all experience?”<sup>15</sup>

On the question how a priori knowledge is possible, Kant considers two ways of explaining how we possess synthetic a priori knowledge. Either our concepts must conform to objects, or objects (as known) must conform to our concepts. “Objects as known” is an extremely important qualification for Kant. If our concepts must conform to the objects, then we cannot explain how can we know anything a priori in regard to the latter. On the other hand, if the objects must conform to our concepts, the situation looks more promising.<sup>16</sup> This point of view will facilitate the explanation of the possibility of our having a priori knowledge of objects prior to their being given.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Analytic judgements are a priori also, but they do not seem to be particularly problematic for Kant.

The idea here seems to be that necessity can only be known through reason since experience cannot teach us what holds necessarily.

But we can know necessities a posteriori by testimonial evidence for example. This possibility does not seem to have occurred to Kant.

<sup>14</sup>Preface to first edition. A xiv, pp. 10–11.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, A xvii, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup>Kant says:

In the former case I am again in the same perplexity as to how I can know anything a priori in regard to objects. In the latter case the outlook is more hopeful. For experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves understanding; and understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being a priori. They find expression in a priori concepts to which all objects of experience necessarily conform, and with which they must agree. (Bxvii–Bxviii; pp. 22–23)

<sup>17</sup>Kant explains that he got this insight from the Copernican revolution.

We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This will agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects *a priori*, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given. We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus' primary hypothesis. (B xvii, p. 22)

Kant claims that he will establish in the *Critique*, *apodeictically not hypothetically*, this change in point of view. (note a, Preface to the second edition, p. 25) To some extent, this contrast between apodeictic and hypothetical certainty will be useful for our discussion of the question whether for Kant a priori knowledge must involve some sort of infallibility.