

Title: Defending the right a priori: Another case for an anti-realist account of 'a priori'.

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Abstract:

Philosophical disagreements about whether there is a distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge is typically conflated with a disagreement about the possibility of a priori knowledge itself. This is because very few people doubt the existence of a posteriori knowledge or what it is, so the survival of the distinction inevitably is dependent on the survival and/or the characterisation of the a priori.

But whether knowing anything a priori is actually possible has still not found philosophical resolution. Naturalism, for instance, has provided a steady offensive against the possibility of a priori knowledge. And, inevitably, most often the rebuttals have come from within the rationalist camp. But, it is argued here, a defence of the a priori which does not use the most robust analysis of the concept is bound to fail at the outset. Such a robust account does necessarily come from the rationalist camp.

This paper aims to correct one such defence of the a priori and therefore of the distinction: Casullo's 'Four challenges to the a priori-a posteriori distinction' – which is in fact four challenges to the a priori. It further aims to suggest a more robust construal of a priori, by suggesting an anti-realist analysis of 'a priori knowledge'.

Key words: a priori, a priori-a posteriori distinction, intuition, anti-realism

Introduction

The distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge poses problems for epistemologists of many different stripes; there are philosophical challenges for both the dismantling of it and for the preservation of it. Often a campaign for either the dismantling or the preservation of it is informed, specifically, by theoretical challenges to the a priori. What could a priori knowledge be? Thus, defending the distinction typically starts with a defence of the a priori. It should therefore not come as a surprise that defending or assuming the wrong a priori is going to be of very little use for preserving the distinction.

Casullo (2015) assumes a Kantian analysis of the a priori. But a Kantian analysis of the a priori is not defensible, and therefore cannot service the distinction. It is argued here that one solution to this problem is to propose an anti-realist analysis of 'a priori' and, as unsatisfactory as it might be, to instead preserve the distinction with this analysis in place. An anti-realist analysis is one which stands at odds with the Kantian account of the a priori and also with Casullo's, who follows Kant, in this regard.

Casullo (2015) identifies four types of challenges to the a priori-a posteriori distinction. Casullo (2015), throughout his various defences of the a priori adopts as a starting point the Kantian analysis of 'a priori knowledge'. He calls this the 'traditional concept'. The first three challenges he addresses aim to show that 'a priori' is in some way a concept which is defunct in one way or another. The fourth challenge is of a slightly different nature. It holds that, typically, an analysis of 'a priori' which is able to resist the first three challenges will be too far departed from the traditional concept of the a priori. This, according to Casullo, is to not win the battle for the a priori, and to thus not save the prized distinction.

The arguments I present will happen in two parts. One part gives reasons why Casullo and Kant's analysis of 'a priori knowledge' is wrong and another offers an account of 'a priori knowledge' – one that can overcome, at least, the first three challenges identified by Casullo.

I propose two criteria which must be met when analysing 'a priori': (1) 'A priori' must be embeddable in a standard background theory of 'knowledge'. And (2) 'knowledge' must, minimally, be compliant with the tripartite theory of knowledge and, additionally, should be non-accidental. Going forward, unless explicitly stated otherwise, when 'a priori' is used it refers to 'a priori knowledge'.

The potential scope for an analysis of 'a priori knowledge' is not modest. Any sensible discussion needs to restrict itself. One way of restricting it is to speak only of a priori knowledge in relation to a

specific set of knowable objects. Here it seems sensible to take this set of objects to be linguistic objects of a type, since both Kant's analysis as well as the one I shall be endorsing have as their focus linguistic objects. Kant speaks of 'judgements', but we continue by speaking of propositions. The analysis I propose, will be anti-realist, where 'anti-realist' is a type of epistemic anti-realism, referring the non-existence¹ of facts within the domain of epistemology. At first glance, 'anti-realist' might be thought of as a metaphysical term, but it isn't. It refers to facts about knowledge of existence, not facts about existence itself. I argue that 'a priori knowledge' should be given an anti-realist analysis; there are no knowable facts about the meaning of propositions.

Part 1: Casullo's four challenges to the a priori-a posteriori distinction

The Kantian analysis of 'a priori knowledge' is that it is knowledge of (1) a belief (judgement), and the belief is (2) justified without empirical experience and (3) holding the belief also satisfies the further condition that the belief is true (Casullo, 2015, p. 2705) The traditional view of the distinction, which is that all knowledge either is a priori or a posteriori, presupposes this analysis of 'a priori knowledge' (Casullo, 2015, p. 2705). Casullo uses this analysis as his starting point, and the one in need of defence against four identified challenges.

These challenges are that the concept is 1. Incoherent, 2. Coherent but vacuous, 3. Coherent, non-vacuous but insignificant and 4. Coherent, non-vacuous, significant but in tension with the traditional concept of the a priori and, therefore, the distinction.

A brief description of each challenge: What the detractors of the a priori mean by 'incoherent' is simply that the concept makes no sense – that it is, in fact, incomprehensible (Casullo, 2015, p. 2703). Casullo looks to Quine's rejection of 'analytic' and 'a priori' here. For the concept to be vacuous means that 'a priori' has no referent in the world, therefore neither does 'a priori knowledge' and, so, the a priori-a posteriori distinction fails (Casullo, 2015, p. 2705). There are also challenges which maintain that the concept is coherent and even non-vacuous (it has a referent) but makes no significant contribution to the theories of knowledge in which it appears (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2703 - 2704). What Casullo means by this is that, in one way or another, 'a priori knowledge' has no utility in many of our most significant epistemological problems. And the last category is one to which all challenges belong that show that the concept does not fail in any of the aforementioned

¹ 'Existence' here pertains to mind independent existence. Objectively trackable existing matters of fact.

ways, but in resisting these challenges it manages to also elude the traditional concept of the a priori and the distinction (Casullo, 2015, p. 2704). So, it survives the four challenges because it is not Kantian 'a priori knowledge' anymore.

Part 2: The wrong a priori; the traditional concept.

What is the traditional concept of the a priori? Kant holds that 'necessity' is characteristic of *knowledge*, rather than a feature of the semantic value (the type of truth), of a judgement. Specifically, necessity is a characteristic feature of a priori knowledge. This means that, if a judgement, or rather proposition, is known a priori, we know it necessarily. He famously suggests that *all* analytic and *some* synthetic judgements are knowable a priori. This means that all analytic and some synthetic judgements are known necessarily, despite having other differences. From now on we just say that they are necessary propositions – but it should be understood as an epistemic necessity. It is not a necessity in the Carnapian sense, where the necessity is imported by the conventional use of definitions, for Kant certain types of judgement are known by necessity – one cannot *not* know them. But what exactly is it that is known by necessity? What are the objects? Kant distinguishes analytic-synthetic categories from a priori-a posteriori categories. It is with these categories and distinctions firmly in place and with the correct principled combinations of these semantic and epistemic categories that we avoid conceptual and rational confusions.

...I have, in this way, discovered the cause of – and consequently the mode of removing – all the errors which have hitherto set reason at variance with itself, in the sphere of non-empirical thought... I have, on the contrary, examined them completely in the light of the principles, and, after having discovered the cause of the doubts and contradictions into which reason fell, have solved them to its perfect satisfaction. (Kant, 2003, ix)

Kant holds that investigations into the nature of reality can be organised in a way that will eliminate the inconsistencies that arise between the distinct disciplines of science and philosophy. He sees his task as one guided by reason rather than the empirical observation of how these respective disciplines work. The result of such an investigation advocates *legislation* rather than *facts* about our epistemic endeavours.

Since what has to be decided is a question of legitimacy rather than of fact, it cannot be answered empirically, and since the question concerns the possibility of metaphysics, its answer cannot itself consist in a metaphysical claim or stand upon any metaphysical presuppositions. (Gardner, 1999, 20 - 22)

And Kant:

I do not mean by this a criticism of books and systems, but a critical enquiry into the faculty of reason, with reference to the cognitions to which it strives to attain *without the aid of experience*; in other words, the solution of the question regarding the possibility and impossibility of Metaphysics, and the determination of the origin, as well as of the extent limits of this science. All this must be done on the basis of principles. (Kant, 2003, ix)

The distinction between analytic and synthetic judgement is preceded and informed by the distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. But for Kant there is a distinction between the 'origins' of our knowledge and what our knowledge 'arises out of'. He says that all knowledge begins with, or originates from, experience, but denies that all justification or grounds for our knowledge is therefore experiential (Gardner, 1999, p. 53). Perhaps this distinction is easier to understand like this: For Kant the material *about* which we have knowledge is always material gained from experience. However, some of the knowledge we have of that material is knowledge which *arises from* non-experiential grounds. Such knowledge he calls a priori knowledge. To have a priori knowledge, which seems to be necessitated by something, is to have knowledge of what is necessarily the case *in the world*. So, when the knowledge itself arises from experience of the world it is a posteriori knowledge. But when it does not arise from experience it is a priori. A priori knowledge is simply knowledge which, even though it might be of the world, is *not organised* by the world – it is organised by reason alone.

By the term "knowledge a priori," therefore, we shall in the sequel understand, not such as is independent of this or that kind of experience, but such as is absolutely so of all experience... Pure knowledge a priori is that with which no empirical element is mixed up. (Kant, 2003, p. 2)

How does this very nuanced account of the a priori-a posteriori distinction bear on a case for an anti-realist account of a priori? For Kant, to decide whether we have a priori or a posteriori knowledge we ask whether the judgement that we have, based on that knowledge, has 'strict universality'. A judgement has strict universality when what it judges is true for all the objects to which it pertains (Gardner, 1999, p. 53). So, to say of a triangle that it has three sides is a judgement which has 'strict universality', because all triangles have three sides. Knowledge of such a judgement is what Kant calls a necessary. Based on Kant's universality we are entitled to think of the knowledge we have of such a judgement as a priori knowledge, "...Kant makes necessity criterial for a priority..." (Gardner, 1999, p. 53). For Kant then necessity is not uniquely attributed to analytic judgements. For instance, synthetic judgements are not judgements of conceptual containment, yet are necessary, when they are justified a priori (Coffa, 1991, p. 15). Mathematical judgements, for Kant, are examples of synthetic a priori judgements; judgements which are necessary, knowable a priori but not

expressions of conceptual containment and not subject to contradiction when denied (Coffa, 1991, p. 15). The fact that Kant offers us an account of a priori knowledge whereby it is not a demonstrative or deductive process, and has as its object some feature of reality which is not a product of some sort of rule bound demonstration, makes it an apt example for something like intuitive knowledge, some type of apprehension.

Kant's doctrine of pure intuition had multiple origins. We have identified two: the principle of synthetic judgments and the thesis of synthetic a priori knowledge. [...] Yet they are all surely necessary and hence, according to Kant, a priori. Moreover, by Kant's criterion, every judgment with a simple concept must be synthetic and surely such judgments are necessary. Thus, using his nominal definition, Kant had no difficulty identifying synthetic a priori judgments. (Coffa, 1991, p. 18)

So Kant has given us a priori knowledge as knowledge of something intuited or apprehended. However, for 'intuition' to make sense there must be an object to be intuited. And for it to be a necessary apprehension or intuition, it must be of an object which is universal. This means 'real' in the full blown metaphysical sense. 'To intuit' something is the function of a special perceptual faculty; one which makes possible non-sensory apprehension. And it must be a faculty which is aimed at the apprehension of some suitable object, something which can be apprehended in this particular manner.

What would make intuition an *a priori* faculty of justified, true belief? 1. Intuition is a priori because intuitive knowledge is understood as knowledge we have independently of using any of the usual five senses. So, it is not visual, audial, olfactory, prandial or tactile. It is, therefore, not a posteriori. Intuition is rational apprehension. 2. But to intuit anything, including the truth conditions of a proposition, is not *bring it into* existence, construct or stipulate it. To intuit something has a strong implication of there being an object *to be discovered*, or "tracked". The objects of intuition must have mind-independent or objective existence. So, analyses of 'a priori knowledge' as intuition assume some sort of realist account of the objects known in this way. Intuition does not permit constructivist or anti-realist analyses of knowable objects. 3. Lastly, to intuit the truth conditions of a proposition is not to *infer* them, according to specified rules of inference, from other matters of fact or more basic propositions. To intuit, or rationally apprehend, such truth conditions is to directly and non-empirically, and necessarily apprehend the conditions which make true the proposition.

Here is why intuitionist accounts of 'a priori knowledge' cannot satisfy the conditions for truth which the tripartite theory of knowledge requires, if they are to satisfy the aforementioned three features of intuition. Accounts of intuition often rest on claims such as the 'obvious' truth of propositions, or the 'obvious' validity of the laws of logic, or the 'obviousness' of meaning or universal necessities, if

one is Kant. For instance, realists in science ask whether it is not *obvious* that the success of science is due to theoretical terms being treated as referring to mind-independent entities. In other words, the suggestion goes, we are entitled to have some ontological commitments to the existence of such entities based on the fact that science seems to work, on the whole. The opposing camp (such as, some stripe of the scientific anti-realist camp) doubts whether the success of science is due to the obvious correctness of giving scientific propositions a realist treatment and not, rather, due to us having correctly worked in accordance with our *stipulated* conventions for scientific practice.

The crux of the matter, though, is whether the appeal they have, appreciated in this way, is the appeal of obvious truths – better: obviously valid principles – as opposed to: obviously correct codifications of actual intentional practice. The distinction is crucial. (Wright, 2004, p. 168)

Intuition, unfortunately, relies on ‘obviousness’. Yet, no appeal to obviousness will settle the dispute which is at the heart of the debate; something seeming obvious does not get us all the way to *knowing*, a priori, whether a proposition is *true*. Something being obvious to an epistemic agent might, at a push, constitute a case of justification of a belief. But for anyone who takes truth to be a part of set of conditions for knowledge, the problem with obviousness is related to issues of disagreement. If it were ‘obvious’ in the sense that it would have to be for intuition to be regarded a decent epistemic device, then there are three theoretical requirements of intuition: 1. If intuition is supposed to alight necessarily upon certain parts of our experience, expressed as judgements, there has to be an explanation for why there can be distinct intuitions about such judgements. For instance, unlike Kant, Mill did not regard the truth of ‘ $2 + 2 = 4$ ’ as *obvious* (in the sense we are interested in here). Nor, ironically, are Kant’s categorical imperatives obvious to everyone. The obviousness of particular moral facts, realistically construed, is not evident to everyone, 2. Alternately, a priori knowledge as intuition has to be accompanied by a list of objective delineating criteria, by which everyone can distinguish correct from incorrect intuitions – since they often differ. 3. And if some proposition is intuited correctly as either true or false, then, without an explicit demonstration of the cognition of the relevant truth conditions, and with inevitable disagreement always looming, the intuition would have been merely accidentally correct, if correct. Accidentally correct intuitions about truth or falsity do not constitute knowledge. So, intuition fails to provide anything like knowledge because it cannot settle truth of the type Casullo and Kant are interested in. Here is the same worry expressed in relation to knowing the foundations of logic.

The phenomenology of obviousness that attends basic logic is beyond dispute. But to acknowledge that is no commitment to the idea that such obviousness is the marker of a very fundamental, very solid form of cognitive success (Wright, 2004, p. 157).

Boghossian (2003) offers reasons to reject, what seems appropriately akin to, an intuitionist account of logic.

First, it requires us to take seriously a notion of rational insight, a notion that no-one has been able to render respectable. Second, and even if we waived this first worry, the aimed-for transparency will still be unattainable, since the only way to attain it will require that the thinker use such knowledge as rational insight is able to afford him as the basis for an inference to the justifiedness of his conclusion. So no matter how concessive we are about rational insight and about the knowledge of logical implication that it is supposed to engender, there seems to be no way to satisfy the transparency insisted upon...(Boghossian, 2003, p. 263)

Boghossian (2003) holds that the advantage of offering an account of the laws of logic as known by “rational insight” is that it makes possible knowledge of the un-inferred axiomatic parts of logic. At least, it makes this theoretically possible. We have already noted that this is the attraction of endorsing intuition and other forms of ‘apprehension’. Boghossian denies, however, that the professor of rational insight has achieved his aims (Boghossian, 2003, pp. 235 – 237). His reasons are that there is no account of rational insight that explains how it works and, even if an explanation is not required, there still must be direct evidence of what is supposedly transparent in this way to satisfy the epistemological claim. Neither of these have been achieved.

‘A priori knowledge’ if it is to resist the first three challenges Casullo identifies, must be non-Kantian. Here is why. In terms of the concept being incoherent: Casullo (2015, pp. 2705 - 2708) uses Quine’s famous argument against coherence of ‘analytic’, and therefore also of the distinction, as an example of the first type of challenge. Of course, Quine’s argument was against Carnap’s analysis of ‘analytic’ and should, therefore, strictly speaking, be seen as an argument against *inferential* a priori knowledge – since Carnap’s analysis of ‘analytic’ entails analytic truth being logically inferred (demonstrated) truths within explicit and formal linguistic frameworks. So, Casullo is wrong to use Quine’s attack on Carnap’s ‘analytic’ and the a priori as an indictment of the coherence of ‘a priori’. Quine and Carnap had inferential knowledge in mind. Nevertheless, Casullo is right that Quine is wrong, but he does not give the right reasons. Here is why: Quine’s worry about ‘analytic’ is that there seems to be no way of defining the term without appeal to further more problematic concepts, such as that of ‘necessity’ and ‘definition’ (Bohner, 1963, p. 414). Defining terms such as

'necessity' and 'definition' prove problematic because they are not obviously extensional. In other words, there is nothing which can be the object of empirical observation which we can say is 'necessity' or 'definition' (Ebbs, 2011, 210). And this is an awkwardness, according to Quine, which results in the inability to identify an empirically significant set of sentences which are 'analytic'. There are no empirical grounds by which it is possible to distinguish analytic sentences from others. This, according to Quine, undermines a commitment to such a class of sentences since the classification is then arbitrary and artificial. In short, 'analytic' is not extensional. But Quine has failed to observe that his criticism plays straight into the hands of what Carnap takes to be a defining property of analytic propositions. There is indeed no absolutely delineated set of analytic propositions, which can be tracked empirically or non-empirically. Analytic propositions are so because they have been stipulated to be true in a specific manner, and relative to a linguistic framework. Analyticity is not extensional. The term itself, like many theoretical terms, is obviously not extensional either. Bohnert offers this description of this principle.

Definitions are not to be recognized by any intrinsic quality of definitionness simply because they are the very embodiment of linguistic convention. Ultimately (i.e. when a language is formalized) they can be identified only through the fact of their having been explicitly enumerated under this heading. This sort of answer has seemed to some a confession of meaninglessness. (Bohnert, 1963, p. 417)

We can see from the above quote that analytic concepts (i.e. the concepts which comprise analytically true propositions) for Carnap *must have as a property* that they are circular and their circularity is part of how they gain their meaning. So, it is not only *not* a problem that they are circular, it is a requirement. Concepts which are defined analytically are defined by the use of "recursive definitions" (Bohnert, 1963, pp. 411, 415). This, very summarily, means that analytic concepts are defined by other specific, already defined, terms and that part of that definition is also an explicit specification of how the definiendum is *conceptually* and semantically related to other already defined terms, which together act as the definiens. There is therefore no need for extension here. There is, in fact, an active and overt avoidance of it. Inferential a priori knowledge is simply knowledge of these procedures; which is non-empirical justification of a belief in the truth of a proposition; that is its analytic truth. So, 'analytic' is not incoherent, and if it is not then neither is 'a priori' – provided it is taken to be inferred knowledge. Quine is wrong, but so is Casullo.

Nor is the term vacuous. Casullo (2015, pp. 2712 – 2714) raises Benaceraff's causal argument against the a priori as an example of this type of challenge. Benaceraff holds that mathematical entities, as abstract entities, cannot be known because they cannot stand in a causal relationship with an epistemic agent; there is no non-sensory apprehension of, or acquaintance with, mathematical

entities. This is because we stand in no cognisable causal relationship with such entities. Benacerraf is right, of course, but only if there are entities. He goes on to say that our best theories of truth require a causal relationship (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2713). For this reason, Benacerraf rejects possibility of a priori knowledge. But this seems too hasty. Carnap, for instance, offers a very plausible account of knowledge of mathematical propositions, via a semantic theory of mathematical propositions; that is that we interpret them from within a linguistic framework which does not incur commitments to any kinds of referents, abstract or concrete. If we treat mathematics as a non-referring, formal system of calculus (Carnap, 1975) – then there is no need for a causal relationship. And indeed, counter Benacerraf, Casullo argues (2015, p. 2714) that not all epistemological theories rely on causal accounts and thus dismisses Benacerraf's rejection of the a priori. Casullo is right in this regard. However, the only way in which to resist Benacerraf as he does is to adopt a form of anti-realism about the a priori. This, of course, he does not do. And he is, therefore, not entitled to make this move against Benacerraf. Any intuitionist analysis of 'a priori knowledge' *must* certainly presuppose a causal relationship between the epistemic agent and the known object. How else do we know (intuit) things which are independent of us? So, Casullo is wrong to denounce the causal requirement, unless he denounces Kantian intuition too. Mathematical entities or objects, whether abstract or concrete, must be real if one is Kant or Casullo - an intuitionist analyses of 'a priori' demands this, because we need to intuit something. So, causality, if one is Casullo, cannot be foregone. But Benacerraf too is wrong in his presumption that there is something, even abstract, which should be known in this way, but cannot. If we have no acquaintance with mathematical entities or objects how do we know whether they exist in this platonic sense, and what type of causal relationship is required that also fails to be actualised? Benacerraf is wrong about the term being vacuous, but Casullo is not entitled to reject his Benacerraf's argument.

In response to the third type of challenge, which holds that the a priori is insignificant, Casullo discusses alternative accounts of both the traditional view of the a priori-a posteriori distinction (that all justification is either one of these) and also an alternative analysis of the traditional concept (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2715 - 2721). He hopes to show, after having shown that the concept is coherent and non-vacuous, that the concept is indeed significant. Wright offers such an alternative account of the distinction (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2719 - 2721). Wright offers 'entitlement' as a species of warrant for propositions which have neither a priori nor a posteriori justification but he holds that such propositions, nevertheless, have a priori status. The laws of logic are of this type, says Wright (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2718 - 2719). Casullo accepts Wright's point about the abandonment of the traditional view of the distinction – Wright's 'entitlement' seems an apt description for some cases of warrant. But Casullo does not forego the traditional concept of the a priori. If a proposition is

knowable a priori, as Wright maintains, it must be a priori in Kant's way, says Casullo. So, if Wright wants to forego a priori justification for the laws of logic and rather propose entitlement, then he cannot also hold that the laws are in some sense still a priori. This is an inconsistency (Casullo, 2015, pp. 2721 - 2722). If a proposition has not been justified either a priori or a posteriori, it cannot be analysed as an a priori or a posteriori proposition.

Since the traditional concept of the a priori yields a more natural classification of warranted acceptances than the negative conception, the tension should be resolved by embracing the traditional concept and rejecting [all justified belief is either a priori or a posteriori]. (Casullo, 2015, p. 2722) (Square brackets mine.)

Does foregoing the traditional view of the distinction help the traditional concept to be more significant? Casullo says no alternatives are required for significance. Any analysis of a concept is embedded in the epistemological framework which contains that concept and the framework *also* frames the problems which arise for the concept. Concepts are, therefore, always significant to the larger framework in which they exist – they exist relative to it, so to speak. If concepts are challenged from another framework, then it should be conceded that all concepts are capable of insignificance when out of their conceptual environment. Complaints against 'a priori knowledge' which fall under this type of challenge (the third) are therefore no challenge at all (Casullo, 2015, p. 2719).

I concur with Casullo. Where I depart, however, is that even though the Kantian analysis does 'carve significantly at the joints' of its own background theory (in other words, it significantly speaks to the problems generated from within that framework) it does not effectively resist the problems being generated for it from within this background theory of knowledge. This is because it breaks faith with the tripartite requirement that knowledge is only of propositions which are known to be non-accidentally true. It does this because there is no way in which intuition can be shown to be truth tracking, if truth is to be non-accidental. Let us see what should replace the traditional concept of 'a priori knowledge' for the a priori to resist the first three challenges Casullo identifies.

Part 3: The right a priori: An anti-realist analysis of 'a priori'

Boghossian (2003) rejects the possibility of non-inferential a priori knowledge. Knowledge is either gained inferentially by demonstrative processes, such as deductions, or gained empirically.

What about the non-inferential options? If a given item of knowledge is non-inferential, then it is either justified by observation alone or it is justified by nothing. For reasons that I don't have the space to rehearse here, it seems to me very implausible that one can be said to know the general proposition that any argument of the form MPP is valid on the basis of nothing, as though all one would have to do to be justified in believing such an ambitious proposition is simply to believe it. If there is to be any hope for the non-inferential option, it must lie along the observational branch. (Boghossian, 2003, 230)

As attractive as this sounds due to its rejection of intuition, I do not think the non-inferential option can be so quickly dismissed. There is too much which we evidently know, but not from observation nor from explicit demonstrative procedures. So, an explanation of what 'a priori knowledge' could mean, if not Kantian 'pure intuition' or 'rational acquaintance' follows here. The specific arguments will be focused only on one instance of non-inferential a priori knowledge; on the epistemology of implicit definitions, since this seems to be an instance of knowing meaning where it is not from explicit rational procedures, nor from sensory experience. As Hale and Wright (2003) suggest, implicit definition seems to be a case in point for this type of knowing. The hope is that the above moral can be applied to a few other types of propositions too.

Implicit definition can underwrite (non-inferential) a priori knowledge only if it serves not merely to constrain the meaning of the definiendum in the [...] reference-fixing model, but to *explain* meaning in such a way that it can be grasped by someone who antecedently lacks (the resources to define) the concept which the definiendum thereby comes to express. (Hale and Wright, 2003, 25)

If part of what we know when we have knowledge of meaning are the truth conditions of a proposition, then we have looked at how truth conditional accounts of meaning fair, for Kantian a priori knowledge. Truth conditional accounts of meaning have become standard since Frege suggested that to grasp meaning is to grasp truth-conditions (Wiggins, 2006, p. 3). But sometimes there are situations where meaning is available yet truth conditions, when mind-independent or real in the platonic sense, are not. One example would be where we understand the propositions which express the laws of logic, but we cannot seem to track the truth conditions for these laws, nor have we alighted upon these basic or foundational axioms from which they can be inferred. Under such conditions, 'truth' in a truth conditional account of meaning, and therefore *knowing* meaning, must be thought of differently. There are many types of propositions which can serve as instances (such as, mathematical propositions, moral propositions, scientific propositions containing theoretical terms, Kantian a priori necessities). We continue by considering only the propositions expressing the laws of logic. They will be referred to as linguistic conventions and specifically as linguistic

conventions which are also implicit definitions. In this case they serve to define the logical concepts contained by the propositions expressing such conventions. The suggestion is that such conventions are paradigmatic examples of propositions which are known non-inferentially.

If the meaning of a sentence is related to the conditions under which it is true, then there can be no knowledge of meaning if there is no knowledge of truth conditions. Therefore, it is impossible to take seriously how objective and mind-independent matters of fact would determine the meaning of a term when the acquisition and then manifestation of knowledge of these truth conditions seem to be impossible (Hale, 2006, pp. 275 – 280). Such mind-independent matters of fact must, if able to support knowledge, be *cognisable*. It is for this reason that realist accounts of meaning, i.e. *semantic realism* (Hale, 2006; Wright, 1992; 1987), despite all the promise of the objectivity of truth and meaning, fail to give a workable semantic theory for much of our language. Kant's a priori necessities are of this problematic type; the truth of the propositions expressing these necessities is determined by conditions independent to the subject who, allegedly, knows them. But there is a failure in locating the objective truth conditions for such necessities. And with this failure comes a failure in offering a decent epistemology of such propositions.

[But] the classical truth-conditional conception of meaning breaks faith with this thought wherever it construes the kind of state of affairs that would render a particular statement true as something that can impinge only indirectly, or in part on the faculties of one who understands the statement [...] testing must rather proceed by reference to conditions that we, the testers, can monitor and of whose obtaining our subject can be presumed to be perceptually aware (Wright, 1987, p. 276)²

What then is it that we know, when we seem not to know the mind-independent matters of fact which we would know, if we were intuiting? To answer, let us start with an analogy. What do we know when we know the rules of chess? We know how to use the chess pieces. We know when someone has won. We know, well or less well, what to do to win ourselves. Yes, we have learnt these rules, moves and strategies from someone or a computer programme or some such. In doing so we have learnt the conventions of chess. We thus know them. What we do not know, however, is that chess rules make reference to mind-independent facts about the playing chess. Nor do we know, based on knowledge of some *antecedent* facts about chess, which we have failed to stand in a causal relationship with, that it is possible that the rules of chess are the false rules and that we therefore need new ones. Even though chess rules have in fact changed, many would say for the

² By 'this thought' Wright means the thought that we can know meaning based on truth conditions, when the truth conditions are not themselves known.

better, no one would claim that the previous rules were somehow 'false' or 'wrong' or a 'mirage'. Similarly, what we have not learnt is that the new rules are the 'true' rules, based on knowledge of some antecedent chess-rule facts. Nor does being able to play chess indicate that we have landed on an objective basis for chess or some set of primary chess facts. So, to attribute our evident competence in grasping meaning to the intuitive knowledge of some antecedent matters of fact, whether abstract or material, seems metaphysically presumptuous and epistemologically naive.

Now let us compare the above scenario with the possibility of knowing the meanings of mathematical and logical terms, as components of necessarily true propositions.

Implicit definition establishes the meaning of a term, or definiendum, by placing constraints on how it can be used in a particular sentence. This is achieved by the context (i.e. longer sentence or expression and also the greater context) of which it is part. The thought is that by understanding all the other terms in that expression the meaning of the definiendum is established by 'forcing' a speaker to use the definiendum consistently with the other terms, already understood. And it is by stipulating that a sentence is true that a speaker is forced to use an initially undefined term in a particular way. This is how it works:

An explicit definition aims to supply a semantically equivalent expression of the same syntactic type as its definiendum. Implicit definition, taken as the complement of explicit, embraces a variety of subtypes. What all have in common is the idea that we may fix the meaning of an expression by imposing some form of constraint on the use of longer expressions— typically, whole sentences— containing it. On one traditionally influential conception, this constraint is imposed by the (putatively) *free stipulation* of the truth of a certain sentence, or range of sentences, embedding the definiendum and composed of otherwise previously understood vocabulary. (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 1)

This means we take logical terms to be implicitly defined because implicit definition works in the absence of located antecedent matters of fact which might establish the truth of the laws of logic and the meanings of logical terms. A term is implicitly defined when there is no manifest referent, yet it seems to have meaning nevertheless. The theoretical advantage of implicit definition is, therefore, that it is able to perform the function of fixing meaning without knowing the explicitly stated definition of the same definiendum or of tracking a referent. Consequently, logical terms become implicitly defined even when the users of logic do not know the relevant logical rules in their explicit and generalised form. How do we know whether such definitions are 'true'? Standardly, a term is implicitly defined when the sentence in which it occurs is 'arbitrarily' (Boghossian, 2006)

stipulated as true. 'Arbitrarily' is taken to mean that truth is established, for all intents and purposes, only by saying that it is true. A logical constant is implicitly defined by its correct or consistent use within an inference. The inference is taken to be valid because the rule which says it is valid has been stipulated to be a useful rule.

It is by arbitrarily stipulating that certain sentences of logic are to be true or that certain inferences are to be valid, that we attach meaning to the logical constants. More specifically, a particular constant means that logical object, if any, which would make valid a specified set of sentences and/or inferences involving it. (Boghossian, 2006, p. 348)

But now we have a situation whereby terms are defined by simply saying that a sentence is true. Here the only requirement for understanding a logical term is then that it is meaningful in a way which is consistent with other similarly invented meanings of logical terms.

We take some sentence containing— in the simplest case— just one hitherto unexplained expression. We stipulate that this sentence is to count as true. The effect is somehow to bring it about that the unexplained expression acquires a meaning of such a kind that a true thought is indeed expressed by the sentence— a thought which we understand and moreover know to be true, without incurring any further epistemological responsibility, just in virtue of the stipulation. (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 3)

This has the, seemingly, unappealing and, certainly, counter intuitive result of truth being somehow a matter of us 'saying so' and meaning then being a matter of invention. But, truth, when determined by stipulation is not full-blown factual truth such as that which is implied by correspondence theories of truth. Truth is stipulated truth. And stipulated truth does not appeal to reference fixing nor can it appeal to correspondence with antecedent matters of fact which must be known in any other way than what can be known from stipulation (which is not very much at all). Stipulated truth must be able to stand alone, so to speak. It must achieve the goal of fixing meaning without further collateral work (such as a causal relationship or empirical acquaintance) required.

If it so succeeds, our intention to fix a meaning by the stipulation will suffice to ensure that there *will be* a suitable meaning— there is no additional requirement of co-operation by a self-standing realm of meanings. (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 7)

The only way in which implicit definitions are knowable non-inferentially and a priori is when they are stipulated to be true, since stipulations are not inferred and they are simply expressions of our intent (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 7). This, however, assumes that implicit definitions must function without the presence of further or pre-existing meaning facts – unlike the propositions which

express Kantian necessities do. In the case of Kant; his appeal to intuition demands a commitment to a realist construal of the truth conditions of necessities. Knowing meaning, in the case of implicit definition, is a matter of knowing what we say it is, not of tracking objective platonic facts about meaning.

But the analogy obscures the point that, for any but the extreme realist, the existence of an appropriate meaning is not an antecedent fact of metaphysics, so to speak, but— (to oversimplify horribly; qualifications to follow) — a *matter of our intent*. (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 6)

This sense of the problem seems again to be largely inspired by a combination of platonist imagery and a misconceived analogy between implicit definition and reference fixing. (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 8)

Unfortunately, for the traditional concept of the a priori, this is not what Kant meant by a priori necessities. He is committed to full blown intuitive and necessary apprehension of matters of fact. The universal status that Kant gives the material of intuitive knowledge makes such necessities strongly metaphysical or, to use an arcane but useful term, *de re*. This is nearly diametrically opposed to necessities which are truths derived from linguistic stipulation or implicit definition, which are *de dicto* necessities.

It is quite clear that, to defend the a priori knowledge of implicit definition of terms is *only* consistent with an anti-realist position about their meaning and truth. To know the rules of chess is to know them *a priori*, because, despite having learnt them (which inevitably involves flesh and blood and a world in which to do so), the rules are *without empirical significance* – they are known without knowledge of material objective and mind-independent referents. They are therefore rules we have made up and definitions which are borne from those invented and stipulated rules. It is only such an analysis of ‘a priori knowledge’ which can satisfy the tripartite requirements for non-inferential and non-sensory knowledge. It has to be knowledge of our own inventions; ‘One clear desideratum to have emerged is that a satisfying account of explanation via implicit definition must leave room for the capacity of such explanations to *invent* meanings...’ (Hale and Wright, 2003, p. 12)

Conclusion

It has been explained that an analysis of ‘a priori’ as Kantian intuition, is committed to a realist view of what is known. But intuition, given that it is supposed to enable cognition of such realist, mind-independent matters of fact, is not defensible; there is no credible account of intuition if it is also supposed to be non-accidental, true belief, because of evident disagreement where there is

supposed to be knowledge by necessity. For this reason, a defence of the a priori-a posteriori distinction which assumes a Kantian analysis of 'a priori', as Casullo's does, is bound to fail. For a defence of the distinction to succeed it must presuppose a plausible analysis of both 'a posteriori knowledge' and 'a priori knowledge'. We have here been concerned with only 'a priori knowledge', specifically non-inferential 'a priori knowledge'. It has been argued that the only account of non-inferential a priori knowledge which is defensible is one which construes it in anti-realist terms. In other words, such knowledge is knowledge of linguistic conventions, propositions of which the truth conditions have been conventionally established and the meanings have been invented. Only in this manner is justification made explicit and can truth be guaranteed, whilst being non-accidental. To the contrary, intuition is incapable of being embedded within a tripartite theory of knowledge. Most importantly, the distinction is only preserved when it is, at least in part, a function of the right a priori; which is, whether we want it to be or not, an anti-realist analysis of 'a priori knowledge'.

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