

Questions about the existence, nature, and scope of a priori knowledge have been central to both the historical and contemporary literature in the theory of knowledge. This entry focuses on the contemporary literature, in which two questions are prominent: What is a priori knowledge? Is there such knowledge? The discussion of these two questions frequently introduces two others: What is the relationship between a priori knowledge and necessary truth? What is the relationship between a priori knowledge and analytic truth?

## GENERAL OVERVIEWS

Baehr, J. "A Priori and A Posteriori." In the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by J. Fieser, 2006. http://www.iep.utm.edu/apriori.

A useful survey of basic concepts, distinctions, and views of the a priori, with a limited bibliography.

Bealer, G. "The A Priori." In *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Edited by J. Greco and E. Sosa, 243–270. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.

A condensed version of the author's case against radical empiricism, his defense of the view that intuitions are evidence, and his explanation of why they are evidence.

BonJour, L. "In Defense of the *A Priori*." In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Edited by M. Steup and E. Sosa, 98–105. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.

An introduction to the author's arguments against empiricism and his rationalist account of a priori knowledge. Devitt 2005 responds to this article.

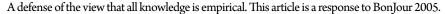
Casullo, A. "Knowledge, A Priori." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Vol. 5. Edited by D. M. Borchert, 79–86. Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2006.

A comprehensive and up-to-date introduction to the main issues that focuses on the concept of a priori knowledge and on the arguments for and against the existence of such knowledge.

Devitt, M. "There is No *A Priori.*" In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Edited by M. Steup and E. Sosa, 105–115. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005.







Moser, P. "A Priori." In the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1. Edited by E. Craig, 3–5. London: Routledge, 1998.

A short introduction to the basic concepts and some main issues.

Peacocke, C. "The A Priori." In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*. Edited by F. Jackson and M. Smith, 739–763. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

A wide-ranging and up-to-date introduction which addresses the concept, scope, and source of the a priori, with an emphasis on the author's metasemantic theory.

Russell, B. "A Priori Justification and Knowledge." In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by E. Zalta, 2007. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/apriori/.

A very comprehensive and up-to-date introduction to the contemporary literature that defends a version of rationalism. Excellent bibliography.

#### Техтвоокѕ

BonJour, L. Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.

A condensed version of the author's case against moderate and radical empiricism together with an articulation and defense of his version of rationalism.

Crumley, J. An Introduction to Epistemology. Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield, 1999.

A detailed presentation of historical and contemporary views on the a priori.

Lemos, N. An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

An accessible introduction that focuses on the debate between proponents of strong and weak views of a priori justification and on the controversy over whether there is synthetic a priori knowledge.

Pritchard, D. What Is This Thing Called Knowledge? London: Routledge, 2006.

A short accessible introduction to the a priori with a focus on principles of inference.

Steup, M. Contemporary Epistemology. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996.

A sophisticated discussion of the concept of a priori justification, the analytic-synthetic distinction, and scepticism regarding the a priori.

# Anthologies

Boghossian, P. and C. Peacocke, eds. *New Essays on the A Priori*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

A collection of new essays that covers a wide range of topics pertaining to the a priori, both historical and contemporary.

Casullo, A., ed. A Priori Knowledge. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999.







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A comprehensive collection, covering the main developments in the field from 1980 to 1998; the introduction provides a broad survey of the field and an extensive bibliography.

DePaul, M. and W. Ramsey, eds. Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

The most comprehensive collection of articles on the epistemic status of intuitions and their role in philosophical theorizing. It contains articles by philosophers on all sides of the debate and articles by psychologists pertaining to empirical studies of intuition.

Gendler, T. and J. Hawthorne, eds. *Conceivability and Possibility*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

A collection of new essays, covering a wide range of topics pertaining to the nature of modality and modal knowledge, with an emphasis on the question of whether conceivability is a guide to possibility. It also contains a comprehensive introduction to those issues.

Moser, P., ed. A Priori Knowledge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

A collection of important articles on the a priori from both the early and the late twentieth century, along with a brief introduction to the field.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Ayer, A. J. Language, Truth and Logic. New York: Dover, 1952.

Rejects Mill's contention that all knowledge is a posteriori but argues that all a priori knowledge is of analytic truths.

Chisholm, R. Theory of Knowledge. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, NJ, 1966.

Defends a modern version of Kant's position, rejecting the empiricism of Mill and Quine, arguing that necessity is a criterion of the a priori, and that there is synthetic a priori knowledge.

Frege, G. The Foundations of Arithmetic, 2nd ed. rev. Translated by J. L. Austin. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1980.

Rejects Mill's contention that mathematical knowledge is a posteriori, agrees with Kant that there is synthetic a priori knowledge, but denies that the truths of arithmetic are synthetic.

Gödel, K. "What Is Cantor's Continuum Problem?" In *Philosophy of Mathematics*, 2nd ed. Edited by P. Benacerraf and H. Putnam, 470–485. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Maintains that we know the objects of set theory by mathematical intuition, which is understood as a faculty that stands in relation to the objects of set theory in a manner analogous to that in which perception stands to physical objects.

Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.







Introduces the primary questions regarding a priori knowledge that continue to dominate the contemporary discussion.

Mill, J. A System of Logic. Edited by J. M. Robson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

Argues that all knowledge is a posteriori and articulates an inductive empiricist account of mathematical knowledge.

Putnam, H. "'Two Dogmas' Revisited." In *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3, 87–97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Argues that Quine 1963 offers two distinct arguments with different targets: an unsuccessful argument targeting the analytic-synthetic distinction and a successful argument targeting a priori knowledge.

Quine, W. V. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." In *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. rev., 20–46. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

Rejects the cogency of the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, rejects Mill's inductive empiricist account of mathematical knowledge, and articulates a holistic empiricist account of such knowledge.

## GENERAL ACCOUNTS

Audi, R. "Self-Evidence." In Philosophical Perspectives 13 (1999): 205-228.

Introduces a concept of self-evident proposition from which it follows that all self-evident propositions are justifiable a priori.

Bealer, G. "A Theory of the A Priori." In Philosophical Perspectives 13 (1999): 29–55.

Offers a defense of the view that rational intuitions are evidence, an explanation of why they are evidence in terms of a modal tie between such intuitions and truth, and an explanation of the tie in terms of the conditions for determinately possessing a concept.

BonJour, L. In Defense of Pure Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Defends the traditional rationalist view that rational insight into the necessary truth of a proposition is the source of a priori knowledge.

Casullo, A. A Priori Justification. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Maintains that the traditional arguments for and against the existence of a priori knowledge are inconclusive and that a resolution of the controversy over the existence of such knowledge requires empirical investigation.

Field, H. "Apriority as an Evaluative Notion." In New Essays on the A Priori. Edited by P. Boghossian and C. Peacocke, 117–149. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

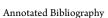
Offers an account of the apriority of propositions and rules for forming beliefs within the framework of a general epistemology that holds that epistemological properties, such as reasonableness, are evaluative rather than factual.

Kripke, S. Naming and Necessity. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.





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Sets the stage for the contemporary discussion by carefully distinguishing the concepts of a priori knowledge, necessary truth, and analytic truth, and challenging traditional assumptions about the relationship between a priori knowledge and necessary truth.

Peacocke, C. The Realm of Reason. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Defends a moderate form of rationalism according to which a priori knowledge is to be explained by features of concept possession, but without invoking a distinct psychological faculty as the source of such knowledge.

Sosa, E. A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Chapter 3 offers an articulation and defense of the view that rational intuition is a source of a priori knowledge.

## MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE

Benacerraf, P. "Mathematical Truth." Journal of Philosophy 70 (1973): 661-679.

Maintains that if the objects of mathematical knowledge are abstract entities, such as numbers and sets, and if mathematical knowledge requires a causal relation between knowers and the objects of such knowledge, then mathematical knowledge is not possible, as abstract entities cannot stand in causal relations.

Hale, B. "Is Platonism Epistemologically Bankrupt?" Philosophical Review 103 (1994): 299–325.

Maintains that, given an adequate general account of knowledge of necessary truths, there is no additional problem for an account of knowledge of mathematical truths.

Jenkins, C. Grounding Concepts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Offers a novel approach to arithmetical knowledge, focused on the role of concept acquisition, which has the consequence that such knowledge is both a priori and empirical.

Katz, J. Realistic Rationalism. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.

Offers a defense of mathematical realism of which a central component is a defense of a rationalist account of knowledge of abstract entities.

Kitcher, P. The Nature of Mathematical Knowledge. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Surveys and rejects traditional a priori accounts of mathematical knowledge and articulates a version of mathematical empiricism.

Maddy, P. Realism in Mathematics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Defends an account of mathematical knowledge according to which basic beliefs about sets are intuitive beliefs generated by neurophysiological mechanisms that correspond to the general concept of set.

Parsons, C. Mathematical Thought and Its Objects. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.







Articulates a very nuanced structuralist account of mathematical objects, together with an epistemological theory that highlights the role of intuition in acquiring knowledge of mathematical structures.

Plantinga, A. Warrant and Proper Function. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Offers an account of a priori knowledge within the framework of a general theory of knowledge and argues that causal requirements on knowledge, of the kind espoused by Benacerraf 1973, lead to more general skeptical conclusions.

#### LOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Boghossian, P. "Analyticity Reconsidered." Nous 30 (1996): 360-391.

Distinguishes two senses of *analytic*, metaphysical and epistemological, and defends the view that the semantic thesis of implicit definition explains how a grasp of the meanings of the logical constants can underwrite a priori knowledge of basic principles of logic.

BonJour, L. In Defense of Pure Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Argues that the concept of analytic truth does not provide a full explanation of how basic logical truths are known and defends the traditional rationalist account of such knowledge.

Field, H. "The A Prioricity of Logic." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1995–1996): 359–379.

Defends the view that all the principles of classical logic are strongly a priori, where p is strongly a priori just in case p can be known or justifiably believed without reliance on empirical evidence and is empirically indefeasible by empirical evidence against p.

Hale, B. "Basic Logical Knowledge." In Logic, Thought and Language. Edited by A. O'Hear, 279–304. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Maintains that acceptance of basic rules of inference involving a logical operator is constitutive of understanding that operator and that, as a consequence, there are rules of inference, including those for the conditional and the universal quantifier, that cannot be rationally doubted and, more tentatively, that can be known to be sound noninferentially.

Horwich, P. "Implicit Definition, Analytic Truth, and A Priori Knowledge." *Nous* 31 (1997): 423–440.

Argues that neither Boghossian's 1996 version of the semantic theory of implicit definition nor Peacocke's 1993 theory of the possession condition for a concept supports the contention that meaning-constituting or concept-constituting rules are knowable a priori.

Peacocke, C. 1993. "How Are A Priori Truths Possible?" European Journal of Philosophy 1: 175–199.

Offers a metasemantic account of a priori knowledge of basic logical rules in terms of a theory of the possession condition for a concept and a determination theory that specifies how that possession condition determines a semantic value for that concept.

Williamson, T. The Philosophy of Philosophy. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007.







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Examines a number of different conceptions of analytic sentences, both metaphysical and epistemological, and argues that none explains how we can know or justifiably believe such sentences.

Wright, C. "Intuition, Entitlement and the Epistemology of Logical Laws." *Dialectica* 58 (2004): 155–175.

Articulates a conception of epistemic entitlement, inspired by remarks of Wittgenstein, according to which we are entitled to rely on the validity of some basic rules of logical inference, such as modus ponens and conditional proof.

## Intuitions and Conceptual Analysis

Bealer, G. "The Incoherence of Empiricism." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol., 66 (1992): 99–138.

Maintains that empiricist epistemologies that deny the evidential status of intuitions are incoherent and, ultimately, self-defeating.

Goldman, A. "Philosophical Intuitions: Their Target, Their Source, and Their Epistemic Status." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 74 (2007): 1–26.

Maintains that one's intuitions constitute evidence for the content of one's personal psychological concepts but denies that such evidence is a priori.

Jackson, F. From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Argues that conceptual analysis is essential to serious metaphysics and that such analysis is a source of a priori knowledge.

Kornblith, H. Knowledge and Its Place in Nature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Acknowledges the evidential status of intuitions but denies that intuitions constitute a priori evidence for conceptual truths; intuitions are a posteriori judgments that serve to identify obvious examples of the phenomenon under investigation.

Nagel, J. "Epistemic Intuitions." *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2007): 792–819.

Provides a survey of the experimental studies on epistemic intuitions and an assessment of their implications for epistemology.

Pust, J. "Against Explanationist Skepticism Regarding Philosophical Intuitions." *Philosophical Studies* 106 (2001): 227–258.

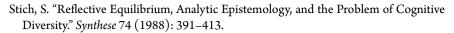
Contends that arguments challenging the evidential status of intuitions in philosophical inquiry on the grounds that the best explanation of their occurrence does not involve their truth are epistemologically self-defeating.

Sosa, E. "A Defense of the Use of Intuitions in Philosophy." In *Stich and His Critics*. Edited by Dominic Murphy and Michael Bishop, 101–112. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2009.

Offers a defense of the use of intuitions in epistemological theorizing to arrive at conclusions about the nature and extent of human knowledge and justification against the challenges raised by Stich 1988 and Weinberg, et al. 2001.







Argues that analytic epistemology, which bases the choice between competing theories of justification on conceptual analysis, is not suited to the project of determining which cognitive processes are good ones.

Weinberg, J., S. Nichols, and S. Stich. "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions." *Philosophical Topics* 29 (2001): 429–460.

Contends that results in experimental philosophy challenge the evidential value of intuitions.

## Modal Knowledge

## a. Overviews

Evnine, S. "Modal Epistemology: Our Knowledge of Necessity and Possibility." *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008): 664–684.

Discusses the relationship between conceivability and possibility, with a focus on the accounts of Chalmers and Yablo and on Sidelle's conventionalist account of modal truth and knowledge.

McLeod, S. "Modal Epistemology." Philosophical Books 46 (2005): 235–245.

Highlights the role of modal realism and the analogy between mathematical and modal knowledge in generating questions about modal knowledge.

Vaidya, A. "The Epistemology of Modality." In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Edited by E. Zalta, 2007. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/modality-epistemology/.

Provides a survey of modal epistemology from the early modern period through Kripke, together with a survey of three contemporary approaches: conceivability-based, understanding-based, and counterfactual-based. The most detailed and comprehensive overview, and contains an extensive bibliography.

# b. Primary Sources

Bealer, G. "Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance." In *Conceivability and Possibility*. Edited by T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne, 71–125. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Maintains that modal knowledge ultimately derives from modal intuitions that result from determinate understanding of concepts.

Chalmers, D. "Does Conceivability Entail Possibility?" In *Conceivability and Possibility*. Edited by T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne, 145–200. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Defends a version of weak modal rationalism according to which primary positive ideal conceivability entails primary possibility.







Hale, B. "Knowledge of Possibility and of Necessity." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 (2003): 1–20.

Distinguishes two different approaches to modal knowledge—the first treats knowledge of necessity as more fundamental than knowledge of possibility, the second treats knowledge of possibility as epistemologically prior—and argues that the first is more promising than the second.

Hill, C. "Modality, Modal Epistemology, and the Metaphysics of Consciousness." In *The Architecture of the Imagination*. Edited by S. Nichols, 205–235. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Maintains that metaphysical necessity and possibility can be reductively explained in terms of the counterfactual conditional and that this reduction gives rise to two tests for determining whether a proposition is metaphysically necessary.

Peacocke, C. Being Known. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Contends that modal knowledge derives from tacit knowledge of principles of metaphysical possibility that is constitutive of possessing the concept of metaphysical modality.

Sidelle, A. Necessity, Essence, and Individuation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Contends that the a priori premises involved in Kripke's examples of necessary a posteriori propositions are analytic truths, which are true by linguistic convention and knowable a priori. Williamson, T. *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007.

Holds that the epistemology of metaphysical modality is a special case of the epistemology of counterfactual conditionals, which can be explained in terms of simulation or the running offline of our cognitive faculties.

Yablo, S. "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993): 1–42.

Provides an articulation of the concept of conceivability which, he maintains, underwrites the claim that conceivability provides basic, but defeasible, justification for believing that something is possible.

#### TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE

Burge, T. "Content Preservation." Philosophical Review 102 (1993): 457-488.

Maintains that although testimony typically involves perceptual experience in some form, such as hearing the words of the testifier, such perceptual experience does not play a warranting role in testimony; it functions only as a causal enabling condition.

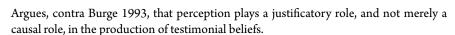
Burge, T. "Interlocution, Perception, and Memory." Philosophical Studies 86 (1997): 21-47.

Maintains, in response to Christensen and Kornblith 1997, that although perception is necessary for one to understand what the testifier says, it need not be part of one's justification for the belief acquired via testimony.

Christensen, D. and H. Kornblith. "Testimony, Memory and the Limits of the *A Priori*." *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1997): 1–20.







Malmgren, A. "Is There A Priori Knowledge By Testimony?" *Philosophical Review* 115 (2006): 199–241.

Contends, contra Burge 1993, that in order for one to acquire testimonial knowledge that p, one must be warranted in believing that the testifier said that p and that such warrant cannot be a priori.

#### NATURALISM

Devitt, M. "Naturalism and the A Priori." Philosophical Studies 92 (1998): 45-65.

Contends that Rey's 1998 conception of naturalistic epistemology is not Quine's and that Quine's conception is not compatible with a priori knowledge.

Goldman, A. "A Priori Warrant and Naturalistic Epistemology." *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 1–28.

Offers a version of naturalistic epistemology that is compatible with a priori knowledge and a discussion of the bearing of empirical research on arithmetical and logical cognition on the question of whether arithmetical and logical knowledge are a priori.

Kornblith, H. "Naturalism and Intuitions." Grazer Philosophische Studien 74 (2007): 27-49.

Maintains that methodological naturalism cannot be reconciled with the philosophical practice of constructing theories on the basis of appeals to intuition.

Quine, W. V. "Epistemology Naturalized." In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 69–90. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Rejects the traditional epistemological project of providing an a priori, philosophical justification of scientific knowledge and offers, in its place, a vision of epistemology as a branch of science.

Rey, G. "A Naturalistic A Priori." *Philosophical Studies* 92 (1998): 25–43.

Endorses Quine's conception of naturalistic epistemology but argues that it can accommodate a priori knowledge.

## **SKEPTICISM**

BonJour, L. In Defense of Pure Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Offers two arguments in support of the claim that denying the existence of a priori knowledge leads to scepticism.

Beebe, J. "BonJour's Arguments against Skepticism about the A Priori." Philosophical Studies 137 (2008): 243–267.

Criticizes both of BonJour's 1998 arguments, maintaining that neither establishes that there is no rational alternative to accepting the a priori.

Casullo, A. "The Coherence of Empiricism." Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 81 (2000): 31–48.







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Argues that BonJour's 1998 Generality Argument proves too much, for it can be employed to show that BonJour's version of moderate rationalism also leads to skepticism.

Harman, G. "General Foundations versus Rational Insight." Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 63 (2001): 657–663.

Argues, in response to BonJour 1998, that a general foundations theory can avoid skepticism without admitting any beliefs that are justified a priori.

Thurow, J. "The A Priori Defended: A Defense of the Generality Argument." *Philosophical Studies* 146 (2009): 273–289.

Defends BonJour's 1998 Generality Argument against Casullo's 2000 criticism and offers a new version of the argument.

## **NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

Casullo, A. "Analyzing A Priori Knowledge." Philosophical Studies 142 (2009): 77–90.

Maintains that the evidence Kitcher 2000 cites regarding the classical conception of the a priori fails to support its pessimistic conclusion regarding the possibility of coherently explicating that concept.

Hawthorne, J. "A Priority and Externalism." In *Internalism and Externalism in Semantics and Epistemology*. Edited by Sanford Goldberg, 201–218. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Argues that, from the perspective of an externalist epistemology, the a priori-a posteriori distinction is not a natural one.

Jenkins, C. "A Priori Knowledge: Debates and Developments." *Philosophy Compass* 3 (2008): 436–450.

Offers a defense of the a priori-a posteriori distinction in light of the concerns expressed by Hawthorne 2007 and Williamson 2007.

Kitcher, P. "A Priori Knowledge Revisited." In *New Essays on the A Priori*. Edited by P. Boghossian and C. Peacocke, 65–91. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Argues that the classical conception of the a priori is too complex to be coherently explicated and, moreover, that the question of whether mathematical knowledge is a priori is not significant.

Williamson, T. The Philosophy of Philosophy. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.

Maintains that the a priori-a posteriori distinction yields little epistemological insight because it obscures more significant epistemological distinctions.

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