

## A PRIORI and A POSTERIORI

The terms “a priori” and “a posteriori” refer primarily to how or on what basis a proposition might be known. A proposition is knowable a priori if it is knowable independent of experience. A proposition is knowable a posteriori if it is knowable on the basis of experience. The a priori/a posteriori distinction is an epistemological distinction and therefore should not be confused with the metaphysical distinction between the necessary and the contingent, nor with the semantical or logical distinction between the analytic and the synthetic. Two aspects of the a priori/a posteriori distinction require clarification: ~~The first is~~ the conception of experience on which the distinction turns; ~~and The second is~~ the sense in which a priori knowledge is independent of such experience. The latter **opens onto** ~~issue leads to~~ important questions regarding the positive basis of a priori knowledge.

- I. An initial characterization
- II. The analytic/synthetic distinction
- III. The necessary/contingent distinction
- IV. The relevant sense of “experience”
- V. The relevant sense of “independent”
- VI. Positive characterizations of the a priori

### I. An initial characterization

~~The terms~~ “A priori” and “a posteriori” refer primarily to how, or on what basis, a proposition might be known. ~~Very generally,~~ **In general terms,** a proposition is knowable a priori ~~just in case~~ **if** it is knowable independently of experience, **while a** proposition knowable **a posteriori is knowable** on the basis of experience. ~~is knowable a posteriori. Accordingly,~~ **The distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge thus broadly** corresponds ~~roughly~~ to the distinction between empirical and nonempirical knowledge....