Transition:

From A priori
To
Anselm
A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE:
Philosophy and Sense Experience

• We said: “Philosophical questions cannot be answered solely by appeal to sense experience.”
  – If we can answer a question by “looking”—by observation and experiment—that’s what we should do.
  – If this is right, then “knowledge” in philosophy, if there is any, must, at least in part, be “independent” of sense experience.
Knowledge from Sense Experience

• What we know on the basis of what we see, hear, taste, smell, and taste, --and our memories of these sensations.
  – Observation and experiment
  – Scientific method
  – Often called “empirical” knowledge, or knowledge based upon “empirical evidence”
  – E.g., I know my car is in the parking lot
    • My reason is that I saw it there.
Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of God

• I claimed that philosophical questions, like the existence of God, cannot be answered solely by appeal to sense experience.

• This means sense experience by itself cannot adequately justify this belief.
  – But it might still justify *part* of our reasoning.
  – Some arguments for God begin with certain things we apparently know by experience.

• *Anselm’s argument does not.*
Anselm’s Argument

• Anselm thinks that we can prove the existence of God without relying upon the truth or falsity of any facts about the world we have learned from sense experience.
  – He thinks we can prove the existence of God by *pure thinking*.
  – In fact, he thinks the existence of God *follows from the definition of ‘God.’*
    • Hmm….. Is there anything else that you *know* exists simply by understanding the definition of some word?
Independent of Sense Experience?

• When we say that we know something “independent” of sense experience,
  – We are not talking about the origin of our ideas…
    • E.g., How did we get the idea that “X is true?”
  – But our reasons or justification for claiming that these ideas are true.
    • I.e., How do I know X is true?
Knowledge *not* from Sense Experience

- Knowledge that does not rely upon sense experience
  - Beliefs that are *true* and where our reasons or justifications do not rely upon what can be observed.
- *--is known as a priori knowledge.*
  - Not: beliefs that we have “before” sense experience,
  - But where our reasons or justifications for saying we *know* these beliefs to be true does not depend empirical evidence.
“All bachelors are male”

• I wasn’t born with this belief in my head.
  – I didn’t know this “before” sense experience.

• But, I don’t need to consult sense experience to offer reason or justification for my belief that I know this to be true.
  – If you ask me, “Are all the bachelors here today male?” I don’t have to look (to observer or experiment) to figure out the answer.

• This is a priori knowledge.
“All the males in this room are bachelors”

- To know whether or not this is true, I would need to consult sense experience.
  - I know, from experience, that this statement is false.
  - I can’t know by pure “reasoning,” or simply by understanding the words, that this statement is false.

- This is a posteriori knowledge.
The Difference:

**A priori Knowledge:**
- Beliefs we can justify
  - That we can know to be true or false
- Without consulting sense experience—*independently* of sense experience.
  - By “reason” or “thinking” alone.
  - E.g., All bachelors are male.
  - $2+2=4$
  - Many other phil. claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori Knowledge:</th>
<th>A posteriori Knowledge:</th>
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A priori vs. A posteriori

• The “Ontological Argument” (Anselm) is sometimes described as an “A priori” argument.

• The “Cosmological Argument” (Aquinas) is sometimes described as an “A posteriori” argument.

• What is the difference?
A priori vs. A posteriori Arguments

- An argument is *a priori* if all of its premises are *a priori*, i.e., if their truth can be established without appeal to sense experience.
- An argument is *a posteriori* if at least one of its premises is *a posteriori*, i.e., if the truth of at least one premise can be established only by appeal to sense experience.
A priori vs. A posteriori Arguments

• Who cares?

• Since *a priori* arguments do not rely on sense experience to establish the truth of any of their premises, they cannot be refuted by any kind of perception or observation.

• *A priori* arguments are “conceptual” arguments, and so are independent of sense experience.