

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 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
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 - 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 observe 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

A posteriori Knowledge:

- Beliefs we can justify
 - That we can know to be true or false
- *Only* by consulting sense experience—this knowledge is *dependent* on sense experience.
 - *E.g. There are bachelors in this room.*
 - *There are 4 coins in my pocket..*

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.