

A PRIORI IN PHILOSOPHY (Latin *a priori*—from what is first or previous)—occurs as a “pre-judgment”, a condition for recognizing the value of the formulations and justifying arguments of a stated theory.

The application of an *a priori* position to philosophy as a whole or to some part of philosophy is a kind of “pre-judgment” that deprives philosophy of the conditions necessary for cognitive value, and so for truth, honesty, and verifiability. From the beginning, philosophy has tried to explain the real world of things and people in ultimate (or basic) terms. This world is given to us as: (a) the extra-subjective object with which man deals in his various cognitive operations; and (b) if the real extra-subjective object is given to us in our spontaneous human cognition, which (cognition) includes concomitant reflection, which (reflection) appears as registration in the present of knowledge and action; and (c) if at the same this real knowable object is communicated to another in our natural language which (language) is integrated (and so not divided or broken into its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components); and (d) if communicated knowledge that includes understanding is justified to the limits of human rationality, which (rationality) is guided by non-contradiction which excludes absurdity—if all these conditions are met, then in the process of cognition that includes understanding “*a priori*” judgments are basically excluded.

The “*a priori*” is found in the kind of explanatory philosophical cognition in which the object of philosophical knowledge is established, not in spontaneous human cognition, but in reflective cognition. Cognitive acts then concern previously elaborated human concepts and their contents; then contact with the real world such as we possess in normal spontaneous cognition is lost, and meanings that were first obtained in spontaneous cognition, rather than really existing extrasubjective beings, become the object of analyses. An *a priori* object of philosophical explanations appears in Plato’s philosophical thought. Plato makes ideas the object of philosophical cognition. These ideas appear in the context of noetic, dianoetic, and doxical cognition, and this sends thought to anamnesis. In Plato, the different modes of intellectual cognition become a necessary condition for perceiving ideas (or meanings) as the object of philosophical analyses. The object of cognition in this system is given *a priori* in relation to human cognitive acts of spontaneous cognition. These problems were repeated in somewhat different form in Arab philosophy by Avicenna, and in European philosophy by John Duns Scotus, F. Suarez, Descartes, and later in C. Wolff, I. Kant, and post-Kantian schools of philosophy. These post-Kantian schools together with other trends of modern philosophy are a manifestation of subjective philosophy, that is, the philosophy of the human subject.

Besides an object of philosophical explanations provided *a priori*, there is another *a priori* factor: the use of reflective cognition as the primary or leading way in establishing the object and mode of explanation. Reflective cognition does not directly and immediately concern the existing world of real beings. It concerns the contents of things as these contents or meanings are manifest in consciousness. Therefore when reflective cognition is applied as the primary method in philosophical explanation, we are given a “world of meanings” in human consciousness, not the world of real beings. The *a priori* character of reflective cognition does not directly connect human explanation with the world of things given for explanation.

A third factor that causes *a priori* philosophical cognition is the use of natural language, not in its integrity, but in one of its parts or aspects, commonly the semantic or pragmatic aspect.

Human natural language is a system of relations including the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspect. Only the use of language in its integrity can guarantee the avoidance of linguistic lapses, since the different aspects of language “verify” each other. Meanwhile in the history of philosophy we witness the use of aspects of language apart from its integrity. The Sophists of Athens primarily used (and propagated) the pragmatic aspect of language. In the Middle Ages we see these tendencies in W. Ockham’s conception of nominalism; today, after the works of Wittgenstein, the pragmatic aspect of language is excessively accented in analytic philosophy. From the times of Plato, the use of the semantic aspect of natural language has been dominant, and in philosophy this has contributed in large measure to an ontological semiology. In contemporary philosophical-linguistic structuralism the syntactic structure of language is excessively accented. Language may become in some measure an *a priori* condition for engaging in philosophy and various deformations of philosophy.

Also, modes of explanation and argumentation have an influence on the shape of philosophical thought and explanation. These modes are normally connected with our understanding of the object, the nature of cognition, and language. Furthermore, they are sometimes borrowed from other areas of cognition, and this can lead to illusions in argumentation and to argumentation that is inadequate with respect to the object of philosophical explanation. The processes of description or even purely logical analyses are not by themselves sufficient for establishing independently existing structures between beings, structures which cannot be treated as some form of independently existing beings. It happens sometimes that prime matter, which cannot exist on its own, is treated as an independently existing being. If the ways of cognition are mixed and undifferentiated, this leads to confusion in philosophy.

The last type of *a priori* thought which is particularly dangerous in philosophy is seen when philosophy is made into ideology. This occurs when philosophy and philosophical thought are treated as processes to serve the interests of political, economic, and social groups. Philosophy as it has been traditionally understood has always been connected with cognition for the sake of the truth. To take philosophy off this path is to deform it.

P. Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, P 1963 (*Symbolika zła* [Symbolism of evil], Wwa 1986); idem, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka* [Existence and hermeneutics], Wwa 1985; M. A. Krapiec, *Filozofia co wyjaśnia?* [What does philosophy explain?], Lb 1998; idem, *Filozofia w teologii* [Philosophy in theology], Lb 1998, 1999²

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