

The Mystery of *A Priori* Knowability and the Predicament of Theories of Mental Representation

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Abstract

This essay discusses (1) how the phenomena of *a priori* knowledge or justification are to be understood; and, (2) whether and how theories of mental representation might provide a satisfactory explanation for such phenomena. The paradigm example is the proposition that nothing can be both red all over and blue all over—a proposition involving modality. I first propose that *a posteriori* is non-*a priori*, and that *a priori* ways of knowing/justifying are ways that are symmetric to all experiences.

I then argue that no satisfactory explanations of *a priori* cognition are given by contemporary cognitive science. Further, though Bonjour attempts to understand *a priori* knowing in terms of “immediate rational insight,” his theory is supplemented with Aquina’s metaphysics concerning how to fix mental content. I argue that his solution is equally unsatisfactory, in that he merely shifts the mystery of *a priori* to the mystery of distinguishing *esse naturale* from *esse intentionale*.

Key Words: *a priori* knowability, experiential symmetry, analytic proposition, rational insight

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