

A priori/ a posteriori

Distinction about *how we come to know or justify* a statement.

Analytic/synthetic

Distinction about what makes statements *true*.

A priori: S knows P a priori if and only if S's justification for believing P does not concern or involve sensory experience.

[basically: P can be known/justified independent of experience*]

E.g., All bachelors are unmarried.

A posteriori: S knows P a posteriori if and only if S's justification for believing P ultimately concerns or involves sensory experience.

[basically: P can be known/justified only via experience and observation]

E.g., The earth orbits the sun.

Analytic: truth depends only on meaning of the words
(trivially true; true by definition)

E.g., Triangles are three-sided.

Synthetic: truth depends on the meaning of the word *and facts about the world*. (non-trivial; not true by definition)

E.g., It often rains in Ireland.

Kant's definitions (Aaron's handout)

A statement is **analytic** *iff* its falsehood entails a contradiction.

A statement is **analytic** *iff* the concept that delimits its subject is in some sense “contained” within the concept associated with its predicate.

A **synthetic** truth is any truth which is not analytic.

A **synthetic** truth is one in which the concept associated with the predicate is added to the concept that delimits the statement's subject.

A statement is analytic *iff* its falsehood entails a contradiction.

Analytic statement: Triangles are three-sided

Falsehood: It's not the case that triangles (three-sided figures) are three-sided

Contradiction: It's not the case that three-sided figures are three-sided

A statement is analytic *iff* the concept that delimits its subject is in some sense “contained” within the concept associated with its predicate.

Analytic statement: Bachelors are unmarried

Delimiting concept: *bachelor*

bachelor contains *unmarried* + *man*

Pop quiz: for all statements, are they: analytic or synthetic? a priori or a posteriori?

1. Mount Everest is the highest mountain above sea level.
2. Salmon are fish.
3. If dogs have tails, then dogs have tails.
4. Vodka is alcoholic.
5. Siblings share at least one parent.
6. Gold is a metal.
7. Trees are organisms.
8. All bachelors are afraid of commitment.
9. You are nearly finished this exercise.
10. $2+2=4$

Bonus question: why are there no analytic a posteriori statements?

Natural fits:

Analytic a priori: when the truth of a statement depends only on meanings of the words (analytic), you can justify it without observation/experience (a priori)

Synthetic a posteriori: when the truth of a statement depends on meanings of words *and facts about the world*, you can justify it only via observation/experience (a posteriori)

Back to ethics

Kant thinks arithmetic truths are *synthetic a priori*.

He thinks the same is true of moral laws.

Synthetic a priori truths are interesting because, being synthetic, they are not just “true by definition”; yet, being a priori, we can know them independent of experience and observation.

Mill: rightness of actions depends on consequences. So, we need observation to figure out the right actions.

Kant: The rightness of actions depends on *accordance with reason* (a priori knowable). So, (to some extent) we don't need to observation.