

A Priori Seminar 2/2/18

Attending: Giovanni Merlo, Josh Thorpe, Sam Symons, Crispin Wright, Paul Conlan, Indrek Lobus, Xintong Wei, Moritz Baron, Alisa Mandrigin, Peter Sullivan, Giacomo Melis, Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa

Reading: Burge 2000 Frege on apriority

Presenting: Indrek.

1. Motivation

Josh asks what is the motivation for Frege's idea that apriority is to be characterized in terms of derivability from *general laws*.

Indrek suggests that perhaps there is a link between generality and independence of experience.

Josh considers the thought that one thinks that apriority is about independence of experience and also that only totally general laws are knowable independently from sense experience. If so, perhaps the generality condition for apriority would be derived from the condition of independence of experience. Hence apriority is fundamentally about independence of experience. But Frege's view is that apriority comes from generality. So his motivation cannot come from the the link between independence of sense experience and general laws otherwise his view would be totally circular.

Giacomo suggests that the motivation might have to do with Frege's view that apriority is a feature of proposition and relations among propositions, rather than a way of knowing. Perhaps that's the reason why he doesn't include independence of experience in his characterization of apriority—that concerns primarily ways of knowing.

Peter suggests that, as Burge says later, it is not either novel or implausible to think of the a priori in terms of what you can know by reason alone, as applying general principle to particular things. Perhaps this is the motivation.

2. Ultimate justification

Crispin points out that Frege's account of apriority is heavily invested into the assumption that propositions have a canonical justification—that there is a natural order of justificatory relations between propositions. Crispin wonders how much can his programme disentangled from it. Moreover, what is the notion of ultimate justification exactly? We are told that they are the deepest grounds, but that is a metaphor. Where does that depth come from?

Indrek suggests that on Frege & Leibniz's view apriority is feature of an ideal and canonical way of justifying a proposition, which maybe come from the idea of 'derivable'. Crispin replies that you can have such an idea of justification without involve 'depth' or 'ultimacy'. Leibniz seems to be innocent with respect to the notion of 'depth'.

Peter disagrees that the idea of ultimate justification is absent in Leibniz. He points out that for Leibniz, ignoring the finiteness of mind, every truth is provable. At the bottom there will be truths from which all truths can be derived analytically by tautological reasoning. But of course if we put the finite limitation back, it is not obvious which facts will be more basic than others. However, Leibniz has the metaphysical structure such that some truths are grounded in others. Perhaps this is what Frege needs.

Crispin agrees but insists that the question remains: what makes a canonical justification better than the other?

3. Self-evidence & basicness

Indrek wonders about Frege's characterization of not needing a proof as something self-evident.

Crispin replies that the point of not needing a proof is not about self-evidence but rather about what is basic. The issue of whether something appears self-evident to you is a psychological matter.

Indrek adds that when you take a random set of sentences and treat them as basic axioms but they don't have the formal features that the *real* basic axioms have. Could those formal features determine what count as not needing proof?

Peter points out that axioms have to be self-evident. It is close to epistemic analyticity. Properly grasping the concept involves that you cannot deny it. Though in geometry, it is different because proper understanding would involve intuition.

Indrek wonders about the propositions derivable from general *but not* self-evident premises and propositions derivable from self-evident but not general premises. Are these a priori truths or a posteriori truths? It seems that if either self-evidence or generality is missing, then a reference to some fact is needed, and hence those propositions should be a posteriori. Or perhaps such propositions are not possible; if so, then the notion of self-evidence and generality must be tied together.

Peter asks whether Indrek is suggesting that there is a gap between apriority and aposteriority such that there are things that are neither.

Indrek replies that it seems that if apriority and aposteriority were mutually exclusive—a truth is either a priori or a posteriori and cannot be both—then on Frege's characterization it seems that when generality or self-evidence is lost you lose the apriority.

Peter adds that in Frege's objection to Russel, he argues that there are things that you can state in wholly logical terms and general ways (which might be true), but whether it is derivable from purely logical laws is another matter.

4. Singular representations and generality

Crispin asks: how to understand the involvement of singular representation? Is it the intuition contributing to the singular proposition that we come to know? Or is it the singular representation contributing (via intuition) to the cognition of a general proposition?

Peter replies that in Kant purely formal intuition is singular representation e.g. the grasp of the structure of space and time. But the grasp of the structure seems not to have anything to do with a particular spatial temporal thing.

Giovanni also wonders about how to understand the notion of singularity and whether it is the same for Frege and Kant. The kind of singular representations that are purely formal representation seem to involve sensory experience of, for instance, a geometric figure on paper, or imagining a triangle in my head.

Peter replies that he is not sure how exactly for Kant formal intuition becomes an intuition of form (space time structure). Another way to put the question might be: Kant thinks that geometry rests on singular representation, but does Frege disagree with it? Perhaps the difference is merely terminological.

Crispin points out that it is a substantial question whether all apriority involves some generality. His hunch is that it would, but the notion of generality is not very clear. Can one run any proof resulting in a conclusion of a singular form?

Indrek replies that in cogito case, singularity is built into the conclusion. Crispin adds that we can make the result of any proof of a singular form by stating that '*this* shows p', which is singular. So there must be something distinguishing the singularity in cogito and other proofs like the one he just gave.

Giovanni points out that the sense of singularity in cogito judgments seem very different from Kant's use of singularity, e.g., the sense in which intuitions of space and time are singular. But why just time and space? What about other synthetic features?

Peter asks, since Descartes was only interested in certainty, whether cogito is a priori or a posteriori was not a concern to Descartes, do we have a motivation to think that cogito judgments are a priori?

5. Particularity and singularity

Crispin wonders whether constructing geometrical objects as types gets away from particularity. Aren't types particular things? If we take types as generalization over tokens, we would struggle to account for arithmetic. In geometry we may say that each triangle is a token of the type **Triangle**: things we hold true about **Triangle** are also true about token triangles. But with number we don't have that. There are no tokens of 7 by which we make the claim that 7 is a prime. The generality involved in 7 is not the generality about all sevens.

Peter points out that particulars are mentioned first in connection with facts and sensory experiences. Singularity is used whenever the reference is a singular term: it can be shapes numbers, and it is not necessarily associated with sense perception. Perhaps it turns out that in Kant's view triangle is a singular thing, and so are numbers. To confuse singularity with particularity we would lose the focus on particularity used as associated with facts and sense experience.