

POPPER ON A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE

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The question of a priori knowledge is answered in its most elaborated way only in his latest book *All Life is Problem Solving*. As a critical rationalist (or a critical intellectualist), belonging to the tradition that has evolved from Parmenides, through Plato and Descartes to its most developed form by Kant, Popper's position on a priori knowledge is a unique one. He agrees with traditional rationalism that knowledge is innate, but he objects the traditional notion that knowledge is certain.

Popper raises the question of a priori knowledge by connecting rationalism and "a very modest reformulation of Darwinism" (2002, 47). From the perspective of a rationalist evolutionary epistemology the term of a priori knowledge is used "to characterize that kind of knowledge - of fallible or conjectural knowledge — which an organism has *prior to sense experience*; roughly speaking, it is *inborn* knowledge." (ibid., 69; emphasis in the original). This knowledge is not valid a priori, as Kant maintains. It is psychologically or genetically a priori. That is to say, any particular hypothesis precedes observation (1963, 47; 2002, 70). But it is not only that a single hypothesis or conjecture or expectation precedes the data one obtains a posteriori. It is also that, "we must first have established an overall frame of reference", and, following Kant, "(t)his a priori knowledge contains, especially, knowledge of the structure of space and time (of space and time relations), and of causality (of causal relations)" (2002, 70).

Popper goes further than Kant in claiming "that 99 per cent of the knowledge taken by Kant to be *a posteriori* and to be 'data' that are 'given' to us through our senses is, in fact, not *a posteriori*, but *a priori*. For our senses can serve us (as Kant himself saw) only with yes-and-no answers to our own questions; questions that we conceive, and ask, *a priori*" (2002, 70).

Three questions will be addressed in this paper: 1) Is Popper's a priori knowledge independent of experience? 2) How is his a priorism to be harmonized with his theory of tradition in *Conjectures and Refutations*? 3) What are the implications of his theory of a priori knowledge for the social sciences and for politics?

Popper, K. 1963. *Conjectures and Refutations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Popper, K. 1994. *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem*. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. 2002. *All Life is Problem Solving*. London: Routledge.