Kripke on Necessity and A Priority

1. **Kripke on Necessity**

> We ask whether something might have been true, or might have been false. Well, if something is false, it's obviously not necessarily true. If it is true, might it have been otherwise? Is it possible that, in this respect, the world should have been different from the way it is? If the answer is 'no', then this fact about the world is a necessary one. If the answer is 'yes', then this fact about the world is a contingent one. (p. 36)

   (a) Remember that necessity and possibility are **two sides of the same coin**. Kripke gives us lots of notions that are all in this family. [With the exception of the last notion, these are all pretty familiar notions.] **Modal Facts**: facts regarding necessity and possibility

   i. What's **NECESSARY**: What had to be the case.
   example:
   (1)   All red houses are red.

   ii. What's **POSSIBLE**: What might have been the case.
   example: What
   (2)   Bush lost the 2000 electoral vote.
   says might have been the case.
   another example: What
   (3)   Bush won the 2000 electoral vote.
   says might have been the case.

   iii. What's **IMPOSSIBLE**: What could not have been the case.
   example: What
   (4)   Some red house is not red.
   says could not have been the case.

   iv. What's **CONTINGENT**: What is the case, but might *NOT* have been the case.
   example: What (3) says is the case, but might not have been the case.

   (b) **No Reduction**: Notice that Kripke explains the notions of necessity and contingency in terms of possibility. He steadfastly refuses to explain the modal notions he is working

with in non-modal terms. (Later you'll see that the notions of *a priority* and analyticity ARE explained in other terms.)

> By the way, it's a common attitude in philosophy to think that one shouldn't introduce a notion until it's been rigorously defined (according to some popular notion of rigor). Here I am just dealing with an intuitive notion and will keep on the level of an intuitive notion. That is, we think that some things, though they are in fact the case, might have been otherwise. I might not have given these lectures today. If that's right, then it is *possible* that I wouldn't have given these lectures today. (pp. 39-40n.)

(c) **Different kinds of possibility**.
Kripke mentions that, sometimes, we talk about what's *physically* possible, what's *humanly* possible, what's *medically* possible, what's *politically* possible, *etc.* For example:

> [S]ometimes [the concept of necessity] is used in a physical way when people distinguish between physical and logical necessity. (p. 35)

Here are some quick glosses of what might be meant by "physically possible", and its ilk:

- something is **physically possible** iff it is possible, given the facts of physics (laws + boundary conditions).
    example:
    (5)   It is physically impossible for me to jump 200 ft. high.
- something is **politically possible** iff it is possible, given the facts of politics.
    example:
    (6)   It was politically impossible for Hoover to win in 1932.

Notice that all of these characterizations *use* a notion of possibility. The notion that Kripke targets is this notion: What's possible PERIOD. (Sometimes Kripke says: "What's possible *tout court*." (p. 99))

Something is possible PERIOD iff it is possible, given, well, nothing.

(d) **Epistemic uses** of "possible" and "necessary"
Sometimes we use possibility-words like "possible", "may"

and "might" to indicate the state of our knowledge or evidence. This is not the sort of use Kripke has in mind.

> The second concept which is in question is that of necessity. Sometimes this is used in an epistemological way and might then just mean *a priori*. [...] But what I am concerned with here is a notion which is not a notion of epistemology but of metaphysics.

    example:

(7)   Cigarettes may cause cancer.

    translation: "I have some reason for thinking that cigarettes **DO** cause cancer."

Similarly, sometimes we use necessity-words like "necessary" and "must" to indicate the state of our knowledge or evidence.

    example:

(8)   That must be the pizza delivery person knocking.

    translation: "I have good reason for thinking that that **IS** the pizza delivery person knocking."

2. Kripke on *A Priority*:

(THE STANDARD CHARACTERIZATION) : A truth *P* is *a priori* iff it can be known independently of experience (otherwise the truth *P* is *a posteriori*).

REMARKS:

(a) **No falsehoods**: The *a priori*/*a posteriori* distinction is a distinction among **truths**. So it just doesn't make much sense to ask whether a *falsehood* is *a priori*.

    example: It makes no sense to ask whether

(9)   Bush lost the 2000 electoral vote.

is *a priori* or *a posteriori*.

(b) **"independently of experience" (first stab)**: Getting some knowledge about how things are requires that we make observations, do experiments, take measurements, run computer models, and generally look, listen, smell, taste, and feel. This is knowledge we acquire on the basis of experience.

    example:

(10)   Some amphibians change sex.

This knowledge is *a posteriori*. Getting other knowledge does not require any such methods.

> **example**:
>
> (11) $2 + 1 = 3$.

This is knowledge we can acquire without relying on "experience." It is *a priori*.

(c) **A Priori truths are those which need not depend on experience for their *justification***: The kind of dependence at issue in (THE STANDARD CHARACTERIZATION) is dependence for a truth's *justification*. Suppose human beings couldn't think about arithmetical matters without sticking their fingers in their ears and humming to themselves. Then it's impossible to know (13) without having a certain kind of experience. But those experiences just enable us to think about the sum of 2 and 1. They play no role in justifying our belief in (13).

> **DIST**:
>
> | experiences required for us to think P | experiences required for the justification of P |
> |---|---|

(d) **A Priority is Backward-Looking**: What's relevant are the possible sources of knowledge: The difference between truths that are *a priori* and truths that are *a posteriori* lies in the ways one might come to know them.[DRAW THE SOURCE CARTOON]

(e) **A Priority vs. Unrevisability**: This does not mean that everything *a priori* is such that, once you know it, you won't ever be able to doubt or revise your belief in light of new evidence. That's called "unrevisability," and it's a forward-looking notion.

> **example**:
>
> (12) $87^2 = 7596$.

This sentence is *a priori*, but not unrevisable.

(f) **A Priority is explained in terms of possibility**: and not *vice versa*.

(g) **'Can' to 'Must'**: Kripke argues at some length that, just because we **can** know something independently of experience, doesn't mean that we *must*. Sometimes we may use empirical methods if it's convenient.

> **examples**:

- Computer proof of the 4-color theorem
- Calculators (Kripke: computer program to determine whether a number is prime.) [SHARE DK STORY ABOUT SK WITH A CALCULATOR]

(h) **Knowable by Whom?** Kripke notices that there is a question that naturally arises when we try to figure out whether something "can be known independently of experience:"

'Can be known **by whom**?'

Human beings, for instance, might require calculators when a calculation gets beyond a certain complexity. But maybe creatures with **bigger minds** could know the results of such calculations by **pure ratiocination**. So are the results of the calculations *a priori* or not?

(i) **Kripke's Fix**

> It might be best therefore, instead of using the phrase '*a priori* truth', to the extent that one uses it at all, to stick to the question of whether a particular person or knower knows something *a priori* or believes it true on the basis of *a priori* evidence. (p. 35)

(KRIPKE'S FIX) replace '*P* is *a priori*' with '*A* knows *a priori* that *P*'.

[**translation**: "*A*'s knowledge that *P* does not *in fact* depend on experience."]

Thus, the question of whether *A*'s knowledge is *a priori* depends on the **actual justification** *A* has for it.

For example: Since I used a calculator to know (12), I do not know *a priori* that $87^2 = 7596$.

Kripke on Necessity and A Priority

1. **Kripke on Necessity**

   > We ask whether something might have been true, or might have been false. Well, if something is false, it's obviously not necessarily true. If it is true, might it have been otherwise? Is it possible that, in this respect, the world should have been different from the way it is? If the answer is 'no', then this fact about the world is a necessary one. If the answer is 'yes', then this fact about the world is a contingent one. (p. 36)

   (a) **Modal Facts**: facts regarding necessity and possibility

      i. What's **NECESSARY**: What had to be the case.
         (1)   All red houses are red.
      ii. What's **POSSIBLE**: What might have been the case.
         (2)   Bush lost the 2000 electoral vote.
         (3)   Bush won the 2000 electoral vote.
      iii. What's **IMPOSSIBLE**: What could not have been the case.
         (4)   Some red house is not red.
      iv. What's **CONTINGENT**: What is the case, but might *NOT* have been the case.

   (b) **No Reduction**: Modal notions are explained in modal terms.

      > By the way, it's a common attitude in philosophy to think that one shouldn't introduce a notion until it's been rigorously defined (according to some popular notion of rigor). Here I am just dealing with an intuitive notion and will keep on the level of an intuitive notion. That is, we think that some things, though they are in fact the case, might have been otherwise. I might not have given these lectures today. If that's right, then it is *possible* that I wouldn't have given these lectures today. (pp. 39-40n.)

   (c) **Different kinds of possibility**

      > [S]ometimes [the concept of necessity] is used in a physical way when people distinguish between physical and logical necessity. (p. 35)

      • something is **physically possible** iff it is possible, given the facts of physics (laws + boundary conditions).
         (5)   It is physically impossible for me to jump 200 ft. high.
      • something is **politically possible** iff it is possible, given the facts of politics.
         (6)   It was politically impossible for Hoover to win in 1932.

   (d) **Epistemic uses**

      > The second concept which is in question is that of necessity. Sometimes this is used in an epistemological way and might then just mean *a priori*. [...] But what I am concerned with here is a notion which is not a notion of epistemology but of metaphysics.

(7)   Cigarettes may cause cancer.

(8)   That must be the pizza delivery person knocking.

2. **Kripke on *A Priority***:

   (THE STANDARD CHARACTERIZATION) : A truth P is *a priori* iff it can be known independently of experience (otherwise the truth P is *a posteriori*).

   REMARKS:

(a) **No falsehoods**
   (9)   Bush lost the 2000 electoral vote.

(b) **"independently of experience" (first stab)**:
   (10)   Some amphibians change sex.
   (11) $2 + 1 = 3$.

(c) ***A Priori* truths are those which need not depend on experience for their *justification***
   DIST:

experiences required for us **to think** P	experiences required for the **justification** of P

(d) ***A Priority* is Backward-Looking**

(e) ***A Priority* vs. Unrevisability**
   (12) $87^2 = 7596$.

(f) ***A Priority* is explained in terms of possibility**: and not *vice versa*.

(g) **'Can' to 'Must'** Examples of things we **can** know *a priori* that we **do** know through empirical means:

- Computer proof of the 4-color theorem
- Calculators

(h) **Knowable by Whom?**

(i) **Kripke's Fix**

> It might be best therefore, instead of using the phrase '*a priori* truth', to the extent that one uses it at all, to stick to the question of whether a particular person or knower knows something *a priori* or believes it true on the basis of *a priori* evidence. (p. 35)

   (KRIPKE'S FIX) replace 'P is *a priori*' with 'A knows *a priori* that P'.