The Latin terms “a priori” (from before) and “a posteriori” (from after) apply, in the first instance, to knowledge.¹ Knowledge is a priori when it can be had prior to, or independently of, experience.² Knowledge is a posteriori when it cannot be had prior to, or independently of, experience. Every item of knowledge, by definition, is either a priori or a posteriori, and no item of knowledge is both a priori and a posteriori.

Propositions³ as well as knowledge can be said to be “a priori” and “a posteriori.” A proposition is a priori when it can be known a priori. A proposition is a posteriori when it cannot be known a priori. The proposition that all bachelors are unmarried is a priori, since it can be known prior to, or independently of, experience. The proposition that some bachelors are left-handed is a posteriori, since it cannot be known prior to, or independently of, experience. Every proposition, by definition, is either a priori or a posteriori, and no proposition is both a priori and a posteriori.

Since arguments are composed of propositions, we can apply the terms “a priori” and “a posteriori” to arguments.⁴ An a priori argument is an argument all of whose premises are a priori. An a posteriori argument is an argument

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¹ Plato (428/427–348/347 BCE) defined “knowledge” as justified true belief. Formally, S knows that p if and only if (1) S believes that p, (2) p is true, and (3) S is justified in believing that p. Most philosophers agree with Plato that the three conditions are individually necessary, but few philosophers agree that they are jointly sufficient. In other words, the consensus view today (for what it’s worth) is that knowledge is justified true belief plus something else. What that something else is remains controversial. The branch of philosophy in which questions such as this are dealt with is epistemology (sometimes called “theory of knowledge”).

² Experience is by means of the senses, which, in normally functioning human beings, include sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. Whether there are other senses (extrasensory perception, or ESP) is controversial.

³ A proposition is what is asserted by a declarative sentence. For example, “The Texas Rangers beat the Seattle Mariners on 7 September 2015” asserts (the proposition) that the Texas Rangers beat the Seattle Mariners on 7 September 2015. Sentences are linguistic entities, which means that they are necessarily (and therefore always) in particular languages. Propositions are in no particular language but can be expressed in different languages. For example, “Il pleut” and “It is raining” express the proposition that it is raining. Propositions are objects of belief, so we can say, for example, that Keith believes that Donald J. Trump is president and disbelieves that Hillary Clinton is president (i.e., believes that Hillary Clinton is not president). Propositions are either true or false, depending on whether they correctly describe (depict) how things are. We may not know whether a particular proposition is true, and people (even experts) can disagree about whether a particular proposition is true.

⁴ An argument, to a philosopher, is a group of (two or more) propositions, one of which
at least one of whose premises is a posteriori. The Ontological Argument is a priori, since all of its premises are a priori. The Cosmological and Teleological Arguments are a posteriori, since at least one of their premises is a posteriori. Every argument, by definition, is either a priori or a posteriori, and no argument is both a priori and a posteriori.

Here is a summary of what has just been said:

- **All premises a priori**: A priori argument.
- **At least one premise a priori and at least one premise a posteriori**: A posteriori argument.
- **All premises a posteriori**: A posteriori argument.

Here is a classification of the three main arguments for (or proofs of) the existence of God:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deductive</th>
<th>Inductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A priori</strong></td>
<td>Ontological</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A posteriori</strong></td>
<td>Cosmological</td>
<td>Teleological</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(the conclusion) is claimed to follow from the other or others (the premises). If the claim is that the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises (i.e., that the conclusion cannot possibly be false, given the truth of the premises), then the argument is **deductive**. If the claim is that the conclusion follows probably, but not necessarily, from the premises (i.e., that the conclusion is unlikely to be false, given the truth of the premises), then the argument is **inductive**.