Boghossian, Paul and Peacocke, Christopher, eds., *New Essays on the A Priori* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp.xi+478, £15.99

This book is like a box of chocolates: once you've looked at the contents page, you know exactly what you're going to get—but this does not mean that the pleasure of consumption is in any way diminished. It consists of seventeen new essays on the *a priori* by some of the most distinguished philosophers going about, together with an editorial introduction by two of these philosophers.

The editors divide their very useful introductory discussion into three parts: identifying (or characterising) the *a priori*; explaining the *a priori*; and demarcating (or determining the scope of) the *a priori*. Almost all of the essays are mainly concerned with the second of these topics, i.e. with the question of explaining something about the *a priori*, either in general, or in some particular domain. However, the last few essays are mainly concerned with the third topic, in particular with arguments which suggest that the scope of the *a priori* is more extensive than anyone could reasonably believe; and the first couple of essays are more concerned with questions about the characterisation of the *a priori* in the thought of particular philosophers. In the remainder of this review, I shall provide a brief description of the contents of *some* of the essays in the collection. (There are essays by Tyler Burge, Quassim Cassam, Philip Kitcher, Paul Horwich, Peter Railton, Paul Boghossian, Christopher Peacocke, Frank Jackson, Bill Brewer, and Thomas Nagel which I shall not attempt to describe here.)

Penelope Maddy ("Naturalism and the *A Priori*") argues against philosophical theories which require a distinction between two levels of discourse—e.g., "empirical" versus "transcendental" (Kant), or "internal" versus "framework" (Carnap)—and in favour of a naturalism which forgoes any such distinction. However, unlike Quine, Maddy does not reject the distinction between levels of discourse because she accepts a blanket pragmatist account of scientific methodology; in her view, there *is* a genuine methodological distinction between the conventional/pragmatic and the theoretical/empirical, but this distinction is not a distinction between different levels of discourse, and it cannot be used to support a viable account of *a priori* knowledge. Moreover, Maddy insists that it is important to allow that the differences between conventional/pragmatic and theoretical/empirical hypotheses should be "studied side-by-side using scientific methods"—an insistence which must go by the board if the conventional/pragmatic is held to be *a priori*, i.e. prior to scientific inquiry.

Hartry Field ("Apriority as an Evaluative Notion") argues that reasonableness is a non-factual or evaluative property, and that recognition of this fact can help us to attain a thoroughly naturalistic and demystified account of the *a priori*. In particular, he claims that certain rules—governing deductive inference, inductive inference, and perceptual belief formation—are default reasonable, and hence *a priori*. In support of his "evaluationism", Field argues (1) that naturalistic reductionism—i.e. the view that reasonableness is entirely a matter of prediction of truth, avoidance of falsehood, and so forth—is subject to numerous difficulties; and (2) that evaluationism provides the only satisfactory response to epistemological scepticism and to a well-known argument for the conclusion that we must suppose that our basic empirical methods are empirically defeasible.

Stephen Yablo ("Apriority and Existence") argues that everyday talk about Platonic objects—numbers, models, worlds, propositions, facts, events, properties, areas of discourse, etc.—is nowhere to be taken literally. According to Yablo, everyday talk of Platonic objects is existential metaphor: the use of the definite article and the existential quantifier in these connections is always non-literal. However, this is not to say that such talk is eliminable: the existential metaphors in question have no literal paraphrases, or none which is readily available, or none with equally happy cognitive effects. Moreover, there are various reasons why it is hard to notice that talk of Platonic objects is existential metaphor: figurative elements in speech are often unconscious; metaphors can be pregnant, or prophetic, or patient, or in other ways outrun a speaker's sense of the particular truths which the metaphor is apt to express. Finally, Yablo claims that the view that talk of Platonic objects is existential metaphor provides the only satisfactory explanation of, say, our reluctance to infer the existence of models from uses of the Tarskian analysis of validity.

Bob Hale and Crispin Wright ("Implicit Definition and the *A Priori*") defend the neo-Fregean view that the meanings of significant classes of expressions can be constituted by implicit definitions, and that such definitions have an important role to play in any satisfactory account of the possibility of *a priori* knowledge of logic and mathematics. According to Hale and Wright, where implicit definition is meaning-constituting: (1) the definition must explain the meaning in such a way that it can be grasped by someone who antecedently lacks the resources to grasp it; (2) the definition must create a pattern of use in which certain constraints—e.g. of "conservativeness", "generality", and "harmony"—are met; (3) the definition must provide the only possible way of grasping the meaning; and (4) the definition may proceed by stipulating that certain sentences involving the term(s) to be defined are true while allowing that other sentences involving these term(s) are hostage to empirical fortune. Furthermore, according to Hale and Wright, we can legitimately think of the stipulation of the truth of "Hume's Principle"—i.e. the claim that the number of Fs is the same as the number of Gs iff there is a one-one correlation between the Fs and the Gs—as an implicit definition of the numerical operator "the number of" which satisfies the first three of these conditions (and perhaps more besides)—and hence can hope for success in carrying out a substantial part of Frege's programme aimed at providing logical foundations for arithmetic.

Stewart Shapiro ("The Status of Logic") defends the view that there is something in the realm of logic which is fundamentally *a priori*—i.e. possessed of an *a priori* warrant, where the reliability or legitimacy of that warrant is *a priori*, and the reliability or legitimacy for <u>this</u> too is *a priori*, and so on (until we reach something which is not in need of any warrant)—and much more which is locally *a priori*—i.e. possessed of an *a priori* warrant, but of such a kind that, in justifying the warrant, we ultimately appeal to observation *via* roles in our web of belief. In particular, Shapiro claims that some transfer principles—i.e. some principles which represent equivalences between inference and logical truth—are fundamentally *a priori*. This positive claim is located within an extended critical discussion of two prominent critics of the view that logic is *a priori*, W. V. O. Quine and Michael Resnik. Against Quine, Shapiro argues that, by Quine's own lights—i.e. by other claims to which Quine is more deeply wedded than he is to his rejection of the claim that logic is *a priori*—something in the neighbourhood of the transfer principles is fundamentally *a*

priori, and the rest of logic is at least locally *a priori*. Against Resnik, Shapiro deploys a battery of arguments designed to show that Resnik's non-cognitivism about logic is untenable, and that if anything at all is objective (and hence cognitive) then logic is.

Michael Friedman ("Transcendental Philosophy and *A Priori* Knowledge: A Neo-Kantian Perspective") offers—as an alternative to Quine's holistically conceived web of belief—a differentiated system of belief which consists of three levels. At the base there are the concepts and principles of empirical natural science: empirical laws of nature which face the tribunal of experience *via* a rigorous process of empirical testing. At the next level up there are the constitutively *a priori* principles which define the fundamental (spatiotemporal) framework within which—and within which *alone*—the rigorous formulation and testing of base-level principles is possible. And, at the top level, there are philosophical meta-paradigms or meta-frameworks which play the indispensable role of serving as a source for guidance or orientation in motivating and sustaining the transition from one fundamental (spatiotemporal) framework to another. According to Friedman, the need to distinguish between the first two levels was recognised by Reichenbach, Carnap, Kuhn, and others, and is well-motivated by close attention to the early twentieth century Einsteinian revolution in physics. However, according to Friedman, a complete vindication of the constitutive *a priori* (of the kind provided by Carnap et. al.) requires the deployment of a kind of transcendental justification at the top level, and is strongly supported by a close reading of the entire history of spacetime physics from Aristotle to Einstein.

Martin Davies ("Externalism and Armchair Knowledge") provides a refinement of prior attempts of his to explain how one can consistently adopt externalism about content while nonetheless maintaining that subjects have privileged access to the contents of their own thoughts. The difficulty he confronts is that: (1) the argument: "I am thinking that water is wet; If I am thinking that water is wet then I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water; therefore I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water" is plainly valid; (2) acceptance of the first premise of this argument can be warranted *a priori* (given that one has privileged access to the contents of one's own thoughts); (3) acceptance of the second premise of this argument can be a warranted *a priori* (given that philosophical theorising can justify externalism about content); and yet (4) acceptance of the conclusion of the argument is plainly not something which can be warranted *a priori*. Davies argues that acceptance of a certain general claim—viz. that epistemic warrant cannot be transmitted from the premises of a valid argument to its conclusion if, for one of the premises, acceptance of (i) the assumption that there is such a proposition for the knower to think as that premise and (ii) the warrants for the other premises <u>cannot</u> be rationally combined with doubt about the truth of the conclusion—would suffice to solve the difficulty. Moreover, Davies offers interesting reasons for thinking that this general claim should be accepted. And, in consequence, he claims—at least *inter alia*—that more expensive solutions to the difficulty which have been considered in the literature need not be adopted.

There are many interesting points of convergence and divergence which appear when all of these essays are taken together. Not everyone operates with the same conception of the *a priori*; and not everyone agrees about where the greatest problems for a satisfactory treatment of the *a priori* arise. However, if the essays in this book are

anything to go by, there does seem to be an emerging consensus that Quine's rejection of the *a priori* on the basis of an undiscriminating blanket pragmatism is no longer tenable: even if there are reasons for being sceptical about the *a priori*, those reasons are not the ones upon which Quine relied. (Many similar—but more interesting— points of this kind could be made; but the present kind of review is not an appropriate place in which to try to do so.)

I think that this is a book which almost all philosophers will want to own. The essays are of a very high standard, and they deal with matters of considerable philosophical importance. In almost every way, the editors—and authors—should be congratulated for the fine work which they have done. (One tiny grumble. There are numerous minor typographical errors—I counted more than thirty—of a kind which could not be detected by a standard spellchecker.)