INTRODUCTION

The division of human cognitive faculties into those based on reason and those based on experience belongs to the standard epistemological vocabulary. The controversy between empiricism and rationalism, which is one of the most important in epistemology, is organized around these categories. Both parties occur in their genetic and methodological versions. Within the former version, we have nativism (genetic rationalism) and genetic empiricism, but apriorism (methodological rationalism) and aposteriorism (methodological rationalism) are connected with the latter. This chapter deals mainly with apriorism and aposteriorism, although their connections with the genetic issue will be also noted. The distinctions pointed out in the title are usually regarded as helpful in explaining how apriorism and empiricism are related. In particular, since both views appear in radical or moderate versions, it is important to see where the borderline between them should be drawn.

When we speak about methodological aspects of cognition, we take into account various things on which apriorism and aposteriorism debate. Typically, justifications, concepts and sentences (propositions, beliefs, statements, judgements, etc.) play a central role in those discussions. Roughly speaking, justifications are processes, activities or simply acts of a kind, sentences receive support from justifications or they do not, and, finally, some concepts, at least in Kantian tradition, make knowledge possible. Thus, labels ‘based on reason’ and ‘based on experience’ may be directed, disjunctively or jointly, to justifications, sentences or concepts. Philosophers attribute various properties to activities performed by reason (for instance, deductive inferences) and their results (truths of reason). They are declared to be independent of experience, universal, necessary, certain and infallible. Similarly, philosophers declare that activities and statements based on experience are revisable, probable, contingent, uncertain and fallible. However, some philosophers argue that no essential difference between performances of reason and those of experience occurs at all. Also, it happens that reason is dethronized, being merely considered as an auxiliary device for knowledge principally organized by senses. On the other hand, we encounter attempts at attributing certainty, necessity or universality to results of experience.

Thus, at a very preliminary stage, we face a fairly complicated picture of relations between reason and experience, their differences and dependencies. Apart from questions concerning features of knowledge based on reason and those based on experience, we encounter, for example, the question: Is sensory knowledge possible without participation of reason? The reverse question also gained much attention. It was Kant who said that reason without senses is empty, but senses
without reason are blind. Clearly, both these questions are relevant for genetic empiricism and nativism as well. Yet we have problems suggested by ways of knowing realized in particular fields. Is logic analytic, that is, is it based on meaning relations that hold between constituents of sentences? Is mathematics a priori? Is physics a posteriori? Are there a priori ethical principles? In fact, formal sciences, that is, logic and mathematics always served as the pattern of the empire of reason, and natural science as provided the model how experience works.

Perhaps it will suffice to show in a very condensed way how the distinctions ‘analytic vs. synthetic’ (AS for brevity) and ‘a priori vs. a posteriori’ (AP for brevity) can contribute to epistemology. Of course, AS and AP are interesting in themselves because they are related to the basic problems of logic, semantics, philosophy of mathematics or philosophy of science. Our distinctions operate on various levels (see Moser 1987, Boghossian 1997, Bealer 1999). AP is mainly epistemological, but AS is explicated in semantics in the broad sense, that is, as including syntax, semantics proper (the theory of referential relations involved in language) and pragmatics. On the other hand, both distinctions are closely related, and it is shown by their respectable history. A quite popular view sees AS and AP as extensionally identical (it is the so called linguistic theory of the a priori in a preliminary characterization), but there are several objections against this position. To some extent, the recent discussion about AP and AS can be largely reduced to an exchange between proponents of the linguistic theory and its critics.

I will begin with AS as perhaps elaborated in the most complete way. I will review different conceptions of analytic sentences and objections directed against them. Then, I will pass to AP which combined with AS is central for epistemology. And finally, one terminological question. It is customary, that ‘analytic a priori’ sentence is an abbreviation for ‘analytically (a priori) true sentence’. It is a simplification due to the fact that our qualifications, i.e., ‘analytic’ and ‘a priori’ are also applicable for false sentences. Thus, if one says that ‘A is an analytic sentence if and only if, e.g., A is true in such and such circumstances’, a related definition of synthetic sentences cannot be constructed as: A is a synthetic sentence if and only if A is not analytic. Rather, we should say: A is synthetic if and only if A is neither analytically true nor analytically false. However, I will follow the traditional way of speaking in most cases for its convenience. Moreover, it is not difficult to derive correct definitions of analytic falsities and synthetic statements from particular proposals concerning analytic truths. Although I will report various views about AS and AP in order to give a comprehensive survey of related discussions, I find it difficult to abstain from expressing my own position. Roughly speaking, it consists in a defence of moderate empiricism, that is, the view that the analytic and the a priori can be coherently embedded into empiristic epistemology. I hope that this attitude does not obscure that other solution are also arguable.

2. ANALYTIC VS. SYNTHETIC

Disregarding anticipations, the great philosophical career of the concept of analyticity began with Kant, although he was conscious that he had predecessors. For Kant, the linguistic form ‘S is P’ represents the most general structure of