The purpose of this work is to analyse the concept of the 'a priori'. It is one of the central, yet highly ambiguous, concepts of philosophy. Many 'careless' and 'systematic' ambiguities attach to it. Our main task will be to dissolve these ambiguities by separating the concept of the 'a priori' from a host of other allied concepts usually confused with it.

The method used in this work is, therefore, the analytic method advocated by an influential group of contemporary Western philosophers. But before we start the systematic discussion of the problem, we give in Section I of Chapter I, a historical introduction. The aim of this section is to roughly indicate the material to be analysed in the subsequent chapters and not to arrive at any novel conclusion based on historical research. So we have merely summarised the theories of Plato and Kant as interpreted by well-known authors.

After this historical introduction, in Section II of this chapter we systematically formulate the problem to be studied in this work. Much confusion about the concept of a priori is due to its close association with some other
allied philosophical concepts, such as universal, formal, analytic, necessary etc. Each of these concepts has its contradictory, namely, particular, material, synthetic and contingent, respectively. There is a tendency among philosophers to equate the 'a priori - a posteriori' pair with the other four pairs of concepts. So we have here two complementary aims: one is to bring out some points of contrast between the 'a priori' pair and the other four; the other is to clarify the concept of a priori in the light of the above comparison. For this objective, however, it would have been better if we could give independent definitions of these concepts because there is hardly any precise and universally accepted definition of these concepts. But we refrain from giving any such independent definitions and merely analyse the different meanings of these terms which have already been given.

In the second Chapter an attempt is made to analyse the concept of the universal and its apparently contradictory concept, particular.

The third chapter is an elaboration of the pair of concepts 'formal-material'.
The fourth and fifth chapters are likewise devoted to the exposition of the various meanings of the remaining of the two pairs, 'analytic-synthetic' and 'necessary-contingent' respectively.

In these four chapters attention has chiefly been given to the analysis of the allied concepts with their relation to a priori. These four chapters lead up, in chapter VI, to the vexed problem of the synthetic a priori and its claim to be justified on philosophical grounds.

So far strict neutrality has been maintained and no metaphysical commitments were made. But in the last chapter metaphysics is inevitable to justify a realistic theory of a priori. The realism proposed here may be called 'direct' in the sense that objects are known directly. Thus we discard all kinds of Platonism regarding the metaphysical status of the objects of knowledge, i.e. no priority is given to the objects of intellect over the objects of sense. If there be universals distinct from particulars, they may be known in the same way as the particulars. If this possibility is taken into consideration, then the 'problem' of the a priori takes an
altogether new form. From Plato to Kant, every philosopher assumed the existence of a priori knowledge, the problem was to explain the nature and the source of this knowledge. But now the problem has completely changed. The problem now is, rather, to justify the very existence of a priori knowledge. No example of a priori knowledge seems available. Very few now believe in the possibility of metaphysical knowledge which Plato considered to be an example of a priori knowledge. Even mathematics and logic have ceased to enjoy an undisputed right to be considered as a priori sciences. Many important logicians and mathematical philosophers are now inclined to regard logic and mathematics as empirical sciences differing from other sciences only in degree. In the concluding chapter we have tried to justify this position by a discussion of the different philosophies.

I am greatly indebted to Professor Sibajiban Bhattacharyya under whose guidance the thesis has been prepared. I have felt free to use his published and unpublished papers on the topics discussed here. I am very much obliged to Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya whose lectures in the University of Calcutta have helped me greatly
in understanding the Kantian notion of a priori. Finally, I must also express a collective obligation to the authors of all the books and papers read and referred to in my work.