

Thought Experiments, Modal Knowledge, and Counterfactuals

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In philosophy, claims to knowledge are often based on considering non-actual scenarios. But it is not so clear what explains and justifies such claims. Opposing the traditional lore that the knowledge at stake is conceptual or based on rational intuitions, Timothy Williamson has come up with a revolutionary proposal: both modal claims and thought experiments can be accounted for in terms of our capacity of evaluating everyday counterfactuals. No wonder this daring proposal has sparked an intense debate. To mention just two critical points: concerning claims to metaphysical necessity or possibility, doesn't the evaluation of the relevant counterfactuals have to rely in turn on something like knowledge of metaphysical necessity or essentiality? Concerning thought experiments, don't counterfactuals fall prey to the same problem of deviant realisations of the case description which Williamson intimates them to dissolve? The workshop aims at promoting the critical discussion of the counterfactual account both with respect to modal knowledge and thought experiments.