Williamson’s Unified Account of Thought Experiments

I. Williamson on metaphilosophy

- He attacks the ‘conceptual turn’: philosophy primarily about things, not our concepts/conceptualisation of things.

II. Williamson on modality

- Modal monism: all modalities are relativisations of metaphysical modality (e.g. “it’s physically possible that A” is translated as “it’s [metaphysically] possible, given the laws of physics, that A”)

- In particular, conceptual modality (major alternative primitive) is somehow unsustainable.

III. Williamson on thought experiments (TEs):

- All TEs ‘really’ consist of a [metaphysical] modal claim and a counterfactual claim. e.g. Gettier:

(1) It is [metaphysically] possible for S to be Gettier-related to a proposition p.

(2) Had S been Gettier-related to p, S would have a JTB that p but would not know p.

IV. Problems:

- TEs which don’t have modal claim-counterfactual claim form: e.g. Chinese room (or Galileo’s weights) - possibly a reductio?

- Big one: over-generalisation! Non-metaphysical TEs:
  i Conceptual: (invoking reason not imagination?) personhood, the mere fact of using a transporter beam is not informative about whether the person survives/concept of personhood; freedom; trutemp
  ii Ethical: literally pick any ethical TE
  iii Logical: 20th century philosophy on TEs assumed this was in play for most TEs; p-zombies; vagueness/sorites TEs

- Plausibility of Williamson’s argument against conceptual modality:

(3) Conceptual modality relies on(?) an epistemological conception of analyticity.

(4) Epistemological conceptions of analyticity are not viable(?).

What about other notions of analyticity? Why believe (3)?