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## Knowledge of Metaphysical Necessity. A Remark on Williamson

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**Abstract.** According to Williamson's epistemology of modality, we know metaphysical necessities by means of our knowledge of some specific counterfactual conditionals. In particular, Williamson's idea is that we come to have knowledge of metaphysical necessities—which have the form  $\Box A$ —via our knowledge of counterfactual conditionals which have the form  $\sim A \Box \rightarrow \perp$ . In this paper I claim that there are two different ways in which Williamson's position can plausibly be articulated, and that both ways lead to circularity.

**1.**

We have knowledge of many metaphysical necessities. For example, we know that necessarily gold is the element with atomic number 79, or that necessarily water is  $H_2O$ . How do we know these modal truths? In this paper I focus on the theory proposed by Timothy Williamson (2007, pp. 133-178), according to which the epistemology of metaphysical necessities is a special case of the epistemology of counterfactual thinking. I claim that there are two different ways in which Williamson's position can plausibly be articulated, and that both ways lead to circularity.

**2.**

Williamson thinks that we acquire knowledge of metaphysical necessities via our knowledge of some specific counterfactual conditionals. To explain how one can know a counterfactual conditional Williamson has presented what he himself considers sketchy epistemological remarks. Since these remarks are not my focus here, let us take it for granted, following Williamson, that we can have knowledge of some counterfactual conditionals, and in particular of counterfactual conditionals of the form  $\sim A \Box \rightarrow \perp$  (this, of course, is to be read as “not-A counterfactually implies a contradiction” or, more explicitly, “if it were not the case that A, then a contradiction would be the case”). Williamson's idea, in fact, is that via our