

## *Thought-Experiment Intuitions and Truth in Fiction*

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### **1 Introduction**

WE START (where else?) with a story.

Professor McStory was teaching an epistemology course. “It’s surprisingly difficult,” he said, “to provide an analysis of knowledge.” A student in the back row raised his hand. “Yes, Brian?”

“I don’t see why we should think it’s so hard to provide an analysis of knowledge,” Brian said. “I think I know what knowledge is – it’s justified true belief.” Professor McStory marveled privately at how conveniently the dialectic was progressing. “Let me tell you a story.” The class leaned forward attentively. “Listen to this, and see if you think that knowledge is justified true belief.

Joe had left his watch at home, and he wanted to know what time it was. Luckily for him, there was a clock on the wall. As a proficient reader of clocks, Joe had no difficulty in determining that the clock read 10:15. ‘Good,’ thought Joe, ‘I still have fifteen minutes until Mr. Pumbleton will be expecting me.’ Joe had arranged an important meeting at 10:30.

However, things were not as they appeared. Poor Joe had formed his belief on the basis of an inaccurate clock! The clock was fifteen minutes fast, and it was already 10:30! But fate smiled on Joe that day – for due to a careless error on the part of Mr. Pumbleton’s secretary,

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Mr. Pumbleton thought Joe's appointment was at 10:45. So Joe's belief about how much time he had until Mr. Pumbleton would consider him late was true after all.

Think about Joe's belief about how much time he had," Professor McStory suggested. "It was justified, and it was true, but we can see that it was not knowledge. So knowledge isn't justified true belief." Brian and the rest of the class thought about the story and conceded that Professor McStory was right. Justified true belief wasn't the same as knowledge.

Philosophers often construct thought experiments to test theories; Professor McStory's presentation is a fairly typical example. Central in the project is the invocation of intuition. "Intuition" didn't appear in my story, but it could have. Instead of saying "we can see that it was not knowledge", Professor McStory might've said "intuitively, it was not knowledge." This is standard philosophical methodology. But there is apparent reason to be skeptical about the invocation of intuition to advance philosophical claims; there is now an extensive literature challenging the role of intuitions in philosophical inquiry. Skeptical arguments threaten the whole project of conceptual analysis.<sup>1</sup> If the critics are right, then Professor McStory is presupposing a problematic philosophical methodology.

More recently,<sup>2</sup> Timothy Williamson has offered a sort of a defense of Professor McStory's strategy. On Williamson's view, there is no special faculty of intuition that we must invoke in order to judge that Joe doesn't know. Instead, the 'intuition' we form is a counterfactual judgment, no different from the naturalistically innocuous counterfactual judgments we make every day. Although Williamson is aptly read as defending McStory's invocation of a thought experiment, it is not right to understand Williamson's project as a defense of traditional philosophical methodology, for the judgments with which he identifies 'intuitions' are scarcely recognizable as the things traditional philosophers had in mind. In particular, on Williamson's view, the contents of the intuitions in question are contingent. This is problematic, from the standpoint of traditional philosophical methodology, for two reasons. First, tradition has it that intuitions like the Gettier intuition have modal content; there aren't supposed to be possible worlds where Joe's belief counts as knowledge. Second, relatedly, the standard view has it that intuitions like the Gettier intuition can be known *a priori*. Williamson's contingent counterfactuals could be known at best empirically.<sup>3</sup> Williamson is like the postman in the classic comic strip who finally brings Calvin his package after 6–8 anxious weeks. And Williamson's 'intuitions' are like the disappointing beanie hat that has finally arrived, but doesn't let Calvin fly.

In what follows, I will attempt to deliver an account of thought-experiment intuitions that can fly. I hope to establish that philosophical intuitions such as the Gettier intuition do have modal content, and thus to leave open the question of whether we can

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the various papers in (DePaul and Ramsey 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Williamson (2005)

<sup>3</sup> The problem isn't that contingent things cannot be known *a priori*; we know that some can. It's that the counterfactuals with which Williamson identifies thought-experiment intuitions are clearly not the kinds of things that could be contingent *a priori*.

know them *a priori*. I suggest that what is missing from Williamson's presentation is a proper understanding of the role of truth in fiction. Once this is supplied, we will have no compelling reason to understand intuitions like the Gettier intuition<sup>4</sup> as having merely contingent content. I will begin with a restatement of Williamson's argument, then attempt to establish a way around it.

## 2 Williamson's Argument

How shall we formalize the Gettier argument? Here is a first stab:

- $K(x, p)$ :  $x$  knows that  $p$ .  
 $JTB(x, p)$ :  $x$  has a justified true belief that  $p$ .  
 $GC(x, p)$ :  $x$  stands to  $p$  as in the given Gettier story.
- (1)  $\diamond \exists x \exists p GC(x, p)$   
 (2<sub>n</sub>)  $\Box \forall x \forall p [GC(x, p) \rightarrow (JTB(x, p) \& \sim K(x, p))]$   
 $\therefore$  (3)  $\diamond \exists x \exists p (JTB(x, p) \& \sim K(x, p))$ .

In English:

- (1) It's possible for some  $x$  to stand to some  $p$  as in the Gettier story.  
 (2<sub>n</sub>) Necessarily, if  $x$  stands to  $p$  as in the Gettier story, then  $x$  has a justified true belief that isn't knowledge.  
 $\therefore$  (3) It's possible for someone to have a justified true belief that isn't knowledge.

In this formulation, (2<sub>n</sub>) represents the Gettier intuition. And this Gettier intuition is a necessity claim, just as traditional philosophers think it is. But Williamson argues that this cannot be the correct formulation of the Gettier intuition. For, (2<sub>n</sub>), says he, is false. The key to seeing this is that Gettier stories, such as the one that Professor McStory tells in my introduction, are inevitably underspecified. There are details that are left out of the text, and some of them are important. It is possible, consistent with the text of the story, to insert pieces that will prevent the story from presenting a case of justified true belief that isn't knowledge. Call a story in which the given Gettier text is true, but there is no case of non-knowledge justified true belief (hereafter NKJTB), **bad** Gettier cases. Gettier cases with NKJTB are **good** ones.

Following are two ways we could understand Professor McStory's story as a bad Gettier case by adding consistent bits to it:

- (a) Joe had left his watch at home, and he wanted to know what time it was.  
 Luckily for him, there was a clock on the wall. As a proficient reader of clocks,

<sup>4</sup>I follow Williamson in using the Gettier intuition as a paradigm, but the point will generalize to all thought-experiment-based intuitions about particular fictional cases. So what I have to say here should bear also on the modal status of intuitions about whether or not twater is water, Mary learns something new, it is wrong to blow up a fat man to save several lives, etc.

Joe had no difficulty in determining that the clock read 10:15. **Joe decided to believe that the clock was accurate, even though it was only one of dozens of clocks decorating the wall, and each clock showed a different time.**

- (b) As a proficient reader of clocks, Joe had no difficulty in determining that the clock read 10:15. “Good,” thought Joe, “I still have fifteen minutes until Mr. Pumbleton will be expecting me.” **Joe knew that Mr. Pumbleton was watching him via closed-circuit television and would be able to accurately predict that it would take him fifteen minutes to reach his office from his current location.**

Both (a) and (b) are bad Gettier cases—in neither case does Joe have NKJTB. In (a), Joe’s belief fails to be justified; in (b) his belief qualifies as knowledge. Williamson argues that given the possibility of bad Gettier cases,  $(2_n)$ , the necessity claim, cannot be right. For sometimes, when  $x$  stands to  $p$  as in the Gettier story,  $x$  is standing to  $p$  as in a *bad* Gettier story. So  $(2)$ , the Gettier intuition, must be weakened. Here is Williamson’s version of the argument:

- (1)  $\Diamond \exists x \exists p \text{GC}(x, p)$ .  
 (2<sub>cf</sub>)  $\exists x \exists p \text{GC}(x, p) \Box \rightarrow \forall x \forall p [\text{GC}(x, p) \Box \rightarrow (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p))]$ .  
 $\therefore$  (3)  $\Diamond \exists x \exists p (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p))$ .

In English:

- (1) It’s possible for some  $x$  to stand to some  $p$  as in the Gettier story.  
 (2<sub>cf</sub>) Counterfactual: If some  $x$  were to stand to some  $p$  as in the Gettier story, then anyone who stood to any proposition in the same way would have NKJTB.  
 So, (3) It’s possible to have NKJTB.

This formulation of the Gettier argument, like the first, is valid. It is also sound, for the weaker  $(2_{cf})$  is true, where the original  $(2_n)$  was false. It’s possible to stand to a proposition in a way matching the text’s description of Joe’s relation to *I have fifteen minutes* without NKJTB – but the relevant counterfactual does not include the bad cases. *If* someone *were* to stand to a proposition in the way matching the text, it *wouldn’t* be bad, even though it’s logically possible to be in such a position in a bad way. *If* someone *were* to stand to a proposition in a way matching the story, it would be good.

But now we’re just a short step from the conclusion I want to resist:  $(2_{cf})$ , which is meant to correspond to the Gettier intuition, is true, but it is only contingently true. This is so because the truth of counterfactuals depends on characteristics of the *nearest* possible worlds where the antecedent is true.<sup>5</sup> And which worlds are the nearest worlds depends on what the actual world happens to be like. To know this counterfactual requires knowing many contingent facts about the actual world. If the Gettier intuition is like this, then it is not the sort of thing that traditional philosophy takes it to be.

<sup>5</sup> For simplicity of language, I assume a possible-worlds semantics for counterfactuals. This assumption is dispensable for my project.

Williamson’s account leaves intuitions as mere judgments about contingent matters of fact. As such they cannot be known *a priori*.

### 3 Responses

Williamson considers and rejects various alternate formulations of the Gettier intuition which attempt to preserve its modal content. It is worth rehearsing his arguments against two of these responses, as they will provide useful points of comparison with my own solution. Here is the first alternate formulation Williamson considers:

$$(2_{cf\exists}) \quad \exists x \exists p \text{GC}(x, p) \Box \rightarrow \exists x \exists p [\text{GC}(x, p) \Box \rightarrow (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p))].$$

(If some  $x$  were to stand to some  $p$  as in the Gettier story,  
then there would be some example of NKJTB.)

This weakening of  $(2_{cf})$  still provides a valid Gettier argument, but Williamson shows that this move cannot save the traditional understanding of intuitions, for two reasons. First, it is implausible that this is what we mean by the Gettier intuition; the intuition is about a particular situation. We don’t read about Joe and Mr. Pumbleton and judge that *somebody* has NKJTB – we judge that *Joe* does. So the logical structure of  $(2_{cf\exists})$  doesn’t match that of the Gettier intuition. Second, even  $(2_{cf\exists})$  is contingent; in worlds with lots of bad Gettier cases, including some similar to our Gettier story, and no good ones, the counterfactual is still false.

Another rejected solution move I’d like to consider is to concatenate an implicit ‘things are otherwise as we expect’ clause to the Gettier story. Again, Williamson offers two reasons to reject the move. The first is that what *we* expect is still a contingent matter. One way to see this is to recognize that we’re introducing another counterfactual: ‘what we expect’ will have to be evaluated as something like ‘what the relevant members of the community *would* expect *if they were given* the story’. So this move won’t help the modal intuitions team. The second objection Williamson raises is that invocation of a clause like this begins to threaten the status of premise (1). It’s obvious that it’s possible for the text Professor McStory gave to have been true; it’s much less obvious that if the story had concluded, “and things were otherwise as you’d expect”, it could have been true. Who knows (*a priori*) what crazy things some people might expect?

### 4 Truth in Fiction

Williamson gives us the predicate  $\text{GC}(x, p)$ ,  $x$  stands to  $p$  as in the Gettier story. The way he treats it,  $\text{GC}(x, p)$  holds any time that  $x$  stands to  $p$  in a way that makes each sentence of the body of text true. But there are more resources available here. I suggest that what is missing from Williamson’s analysis, and from the two attempted responses to it, is the recognition of the difference between a text and a *story*.<sup>6</sup> There is more to a story than the literal claims of the sentences used to tell it. Insights from the philosophy of fiction can help us to understand the subclass of fictions that are thought experiments.

<sup>6</sup>For a compelling argument that the story is not identical to the text, see Currie (1991))

In particular, we can invoke the notion of *truth in fiction*.<sup>7</sup> Some, but not all, fictional truths are explicitly stated in the text. It is true in my fiction that Professor McStory was teaching an epistemology course; this is so because my text included the sentence, “Professor McStory was teaching an epistemology course.” Some fictional truths are not so directly identified. It’s true in my fiction that Brian had exactly two eyes, even though I didn’t say so. It’s even true in my fiction that Professor McStory was male, even though it’s consistent with the text I wrote that the protagonist was a woman. The challenge of a theory of truth in fiction is to explain all of this.<sup>8</sup>

Using truth in fiction as a placeholder for now, we can make use of it in a reformulation of the Gettier argument. Recall the ‘first stab’ formulation from §2:

- $$\begin{aligned} (1) & \quad \diamond \exists x \exists p \text{GC}(x, p) \\ (2_n) & \quad \Box \forall x \forall p [\text{GC}(x, p) \rightarrow (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p))] \\ \therefore (3) & \quad \diamond \exists x \exists p (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p)) \end{aligned}$$

The problem with this formulation was that it is unsound; (2<sub>n</sub>) is false, because there are bad stories that can be described by the Gettier text. However, now that we are armed with truth in fiction, we may try to reformulate the argument in a way that doesn’t move to Williamson’s merely contingent counterfactual (2<sub>cf</sub>). We replace GC, which merely demands that the claims of the Gettier text be met, with GC<sup>tf</sup>:

- $$\text{GC}^{\text{tf}}(x, p): \quad x \text{ stands to } p \text{ in the way that it is true in the fiction that Joe stands to } I \text{ have half an hour.}$$

The worry was that there are bad stories for the particular text; GC<sup>tf</sup> specifies that we’re talking about this particular *story*, instead of this particular text. So we may say:

- $$\begin{aligned} (1_{\text{tf}}) & \quad \diamond \exists x \exists p \text{GC}^{\text{tf}}(x, p) \\ (2_{\text{tf}}) & \quad \Box \forall x \forall p [\text{GC}^{\text{tf}}(x, p) \rightarrow (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p))] \\ \therefore (3) & \quad \diamond \exists x \exists p (\text{JTB}(x, p) \& \sim \text{K}(x, p)). \end{aligned}$$

That is:

- $$\begin{aligned} (1_{\text{tf}}) & \quad \text{It’s possible to stand to a proposition the way that it’s true in the Gettier fiction that Joe stands to his belief.} \\ (2_{\text{tf}}) & \quad \text{Necessarily, anyone who stands to a proposition in the way that it’s true in the fiction that Joe does to his belief would have NKJTB.} \\ \therefore (3) & \quad \text{It’s possible to have NKJTB.} \end{aligned}$$

There’s no mention of counterfactual here. So have I defeated the argument that the Gettier intuition is contingent? In this formulation, (2<sub>tf</sub>), the Gettier intuition, invokes

<sup>7</sup>The seminal piece on truth in fiction is Lewis (1978). See also Walton (1990) and Currie (1990). For recent developments in truth in fiction, see Hanley (2004) and the papers cited therein. Walton uses the term ‘fictionality’ where others, including myself, use ‘truth in fiction’.

<sup>8</sup>Also, fictions are not determinate on every proposition. It’s neither true nor false in my fiction that Professor McStory skipped breakfast that morning.

the notion of truth in fiction.<sup>9</sup> So everything depends on our true theory of truth in fiction; the Gettier intuition can be *a priori* if we can access fictional truths, given texts, *a priori*. We might be worried about the plausibility of this line. On one of Lewis's views, for example, truth in fiction *is* a counterfactual: *p* is true in the fiction iff, were the story true, *p* would be true.<sup>10</sup> This would quickly collapse my formalization into Williamson's, with respect to the modal and epistemic status of the Gettier intuition. But there are good reasons to think that this view is not right, and some of them locate the problem just with the counterfactual.<sup>11</sup> The best sort of objection to this view is raised by Lewis himself:

Suppose I write a story about the dragon Sculch, a beautiful princess, a bold knight, and what not. It is a perfectly typical instance of its stylized genre, except that I never say that Sculch breathes fire. Does he nevertheless breathe fire in my story?<sup>12</sup>

It's not true in the actual world that if there were a creature matching Sculch's textual description, it would breathe fire, but it's true in the fiction that Sculch does, so the counterfactual account of truth in fiction is wrong. But is there good reason to think that the correct account will serve us better in this respect? Any theory of truth in fiction which demands a contingent judgment will render the Gettier intuition in my formalization as a judgment about a mere contingent matter of fact. Is there good reason to think that the correct theory of truth in fiction will allow us to come to a judgment of necessity? Is there hope for the traditional view that thought-experiment intuitions are available *a priori*? I think that there is, and in what follows, I shall try to spell out some grounds for optimism.

I will not attempt in these short pages to defend a particular view on the *analysis* of truth in fiction. This is not necessary for my project—all that I need is an *a priori* way to know fictional truths. Such a technique need not provide an analysis; indeed, the one I will propose fails in that regard. But if I can deliver an *a priori* way to know that proposition *p* is true in fiction *F*,<sup>13</sup> then I'll have saved traditional thought-experiment intuitions from Williamson's argument.<sup>14</sup> The solution I have in mind derives from Kendall Walton. It begins with this major theme, which is now a mainstay in the philosophy of fiction: to engage properly with a fiction is to engage in a certain kind of game of make-believe. Walton gives us this principle:

(TFI) Principles of generation are functions from texts to prescribed imaginings; the prescribed imaginings are the fictional truth.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup>So it is a consequence of my view that to have intuitions about thought experiments, one must have some understanding of truth in fiction. This seems correct.

<sup>10</sup>Lewis (1978). This is (paraphrased) Lewis's *Analysis I*, the simplest of several theories of truth in fiction he puts forward.

<sup>11</sup>For several good arguments against *Analysis I*, see Currie (1990; §2.3).

<sup>12</sup>Lewis (1978), p. 274. Because of the possibility that it is a conceptual truth that dragons breathe fire, Lewis goes on to further stipulate that the word "dragon" isn't used in the text of the story.

<sup>13</sup>This will, of course, entail that there *is* some analysis of truth in fiction that renders it available to *a priori* recognition. It is beyond my project here to provide that analysis. My concern is epistemic, not metaphysical.

<sup>14</sup>This may raise a new worry about my premise (1<sub>tf</sub>). I shall return to this worry below.

Fictional texts, on Walton's view, are props in games of make-believe. The game—the fiction—includes the text and a series of instructions—what Walton calls *principles of generation*. These principles take the fictional text as input and deliver a series of prescriptions to imagine. If we understand the principles of generation, and we have the text available to us, then we can derive the prescribed imaginings with no (further?) need for contingent experience. Once we have the prescribed imaginings, we may make use of Walton's (TFI) principle to identify truths in the fiction.

This is an attractive line, and would serve our purpose well, but there are problems with (TFI). Not all prescribed imaginings are true in the fiction; sometimes, fictions invite us to imagine fictional mere possibilities, or to imagine an obvious but fictionally false scenario to set up the surprise ending. Perhaps these problems can be overcome, but as it stands, it would be unwise to rest our theory of thought-experiment intuitions on (TFI). Happily, we can work with an uncontroversial principle at a higher level of abstraction. We needn't consider principles of generation for prescriptions to imagine; we may work directly with principles of generation for fictional truths. We abstract from Walton's principle, thus: fictional texts combine with principles of generation to generate fictional truths (which play a certain role in games of make-believe).

(TFTF) Principles of generation are functions from fictional texts to fictional truths.

So once we know the relevant principles of generation and the fictional text, we are in a position to derive the fictional truths. Since, on my suggestion, thought-experiment intuitions are intuitions about fictional truths, the relevant question comes to this: does knowledge of the principles of generation require judgments of contingent fact? If not, then it is plausible that we could know the modal ( $2_{tf}$ ) *a priori*.

I suggest that there is good reason to think that such knowledge does *not* require such judgments of contingent fact. After all, we're the ones playing the game. Surely I can take a text and give myself some rules of generation about what to imagine, thus making up a game. None of this seems like the kind of thing that would require judgments of contingent fact. Once I do this, I need only reflect on the rules of generation I've given myself. Once I know the rules, I can know that necessarily, these rules (identified rigidly) dictate that such-and-such fictional text generate such-and-such fictional truths. To go back to Joe and the clock, Brian can know the rules of the fiction-game, and he can know that necessarily, given the text of the fiction, the rules of generation make it true in the fiction that Joe has NKJTB. So, necessarily it's true in the fiction (*this* fiction) that Joe has NKJTB. So, necessarily, anyone who is in the same position as the one that it is true in the fiction that Joe is in will have NKJTB. This is exactly what I suggested the correct formulation of the Gettier intuition to be.

$$(2_{tf}) \quad \Box \forall x \forall p [GC^{tf}(x, p) \rightarrow (JTB(x, p) \& \sim K(x, p))].$$

<sup>15</sup>Walton (1990), p. 39. (My paraphrase.) Walton offers this account as an attempt to *analyze* truth in fiction. It fails as an analysis, partially because it gets the order of explanation between imagining and truth in fiction backwards. But this is no failure to provide an epistemically useful sufficient condition for truth in fiction. See above.

If the story I've told is right, then Brian has acquired the Gettier intuition, with modal content, without relying on any contingent judgments. But there is an obvious objection to my story: I've claimed that Brian can access the rules of generation without relying on any contingent judgments. This may be problematic; surely, one might object, facts about the language, the social conventions, the author's intentions, and many other contingent facts influence what the correct rules of generation are, and likewise, what is true in the fiction.

There is obviously much that is right in this point, but I will show in the next section that it is consistent with my argument.

## 5 Differentiating Fictions

We may put the objection in these terms: perhaps we can set up and identify our own rules of generation without contingent judgments. But in order to know they're the *right* rules, we must know many contingent things. My response is simply that the latter requirement needn't concern us here; it's ok that we don't know they're the right rules of generation. I concede that we won't know *a priori* that we're imagining the things that the author intended us to, or the things that other people would imagine; but all of this is beside the point. On my view, the Gettier intuition is formalized in terms of truth in fiction, but it is not formalized in terms of truth in *the fiction that the author intended us to engage with*, or truth in *the fiction that most people would engage with, given the text*. One text, when coupled with two different sets of principles of generation, can generate two separate fictions. If the text I wrote at the start of this paper were in a culture in which all professors are women, then they would probably engage with a fiction in which Professor McStory is female. If it were read in a society of Cyclopes, it would generate a fiction in which Brian has only one eye. If it were read by a society of psychopathic philosophers, it might generate a fiction in which Professor McStory has murdered several students. So the availability of alternate rules of generation does not preclude *a priori* knowledge of truth in *this* fiction – the one I'm engaging with. The rules of generation, taken with the text, fix the fictional truths. This is all I need for the Gettier argument to go through.

- (1) It's possible for someone to be in a position like Joe's in this fiction I'm actually engaging with.
- (2<sub>tf</sub>) Necessarily, anyone in a position like Joe's in this fiction I'm actually engaging with would have NKJTB.
- ∴ (3) It's possible to have NKJTB.

## 6 Final Points

Recall what went wrong with the two proposals I discussed in §3. The first proposal involved the weakening of  $(2_{cf})$  to  $(2_{cf\exists})$ , a counterfactual existential claim. Williamson's first objection there was that the Gettier intuition is not a mere existential – it is about the particular person and situation we're considering. This is preserved in

my account; the intuition is about Joe, the character I'm engaging with. Williamson's second objection was that as a counterfactual,  $(2_{cf\exists})$  was still merely contingent—it is false in worlds where there are lots of bad Gettier cases and no good ones. Not so for my  $(2_{tf})$ : regardless of what the actual world is like, my rules of generation establish that it is true in the fiction that Joe has NKJTB.

The second proposed response, the addition of a 'things are otherwise as we expect' clause to the text of the story, is in many ways similar to mine. But Williamson's first objection demonstrates an advantage of my view; *things are otherwise as we expect* looks again like a contingent counterfactual, but my truth-in-fiction account does not. But what of Williamson's second objection here? Williamson worried that such a clause would threaten the obvious truth of premise (1), the claim that the text is possibly true. In this case, there *does* seem to be a parallel worry on my view. How can we be sure that the fiction we're engaging with describes a possible situation?

My response to this point is simply to concede it. There is room for a skeptical worry that the situation we're considering isn't possible. But we already knew that – when thought experiments describe impossible situations, the intuitions they generate are not to be trusted. It has been my project to establish that these intuitions have necessary propositions as contents, and in so doing to undercut the argument that we cannot know their contents *a priori*. A positive epistemology of thought-experiment intuitions would have to include at least a minimal epistemology of possibility. But I am optimistic that we can know *a priori* that the Gettier story (the one we're actually engaging with) is possible.

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