

# COUNTERFACTUALS, VAGUENESS AND GOD

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## 1. COUNTERFACTUALS

It certainly seems like some counterfactual statements are true. If I dropped the cup, it would have fallen. If I never turned in this paper, the editors would have been disappointed. I shall take it for granted that such counterfactuals are simply *true*. This is a controversial claim: I am rejecting accounts on which counterfactuals express, say, a conditional probability (e.g., Edgington 1995) or an inference ticket rather than a proposition (cf. Lance and White 2007). But we treat counterfactual statements like expressions of a proposition. We say “That’s true” to the one about the cup, and we would say “That’s false” if instead I said that the cup would sprout wings and flown away. Counterfactuals embed in complex logical claims just as other bits of propositional talk do. We say that a law of nature entails such-and-such a counterfactual, that a counterfactual conjoined with its antecedent entails the consequent, and so on. We lie with counterfactuals, whereas it is widely taken that to lie one must assert, and only propositions can be asserted. So I will take the controversial claim on board.

Moreover, we *roughly* know how counterfactuals work. I want to know what would happen if the cup were dropped. I take the truths about how

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the world actually is, and replace the truth that the cup wasn't dropped by the proposition that the cup was dropped. The result is a mess of logical inconsistency and causal weirdness. For instance, it contains the conjunctive proposition that the cup wasn't dropped and  $2 + 2 = 4$ , as well as perhaps the proposition that it's a law that dropped cups fall, and so on. So then we clean up the inconsistencies and weirdness in a natural way, and see what the resulting propositions entail. And hopefully they end up entailing that the cup falls.

The difficulty is in the details of the cleanup phase, and is two-fold. First, there are cases where we just don't know how to do the cleanup. If Queen Victoria were alive today, would it be true that she never died or would it instead be true that she is clawing on the inside of her coffin?<sup>1</sup> Different cleanup methods yield different answers. Second, we not only can't actually do the cleanup, but we don't have a good account of how the cleanup is to be done. (I can't do the long multiplication of two numbers each with a thousand digits, but I have a full account of how it's done.)

There are, of course, theories that attempt explain how things are cleaned up to get the correct answers. But typically these theories are false or incomplete or both. Take, for instance, the most prominent story in the latter part of the 20th century: the Lewis-Stalnaker account (Lewis 1973 and 1979). Putting that story in the vocabulary I used and bracketing technicalities, we look for a way of cleaning up the mess that makes for consistency, and prefer those ways of cleaning up that end up describing a possible world more similar to the actual world over those that end up describing one that's less similar.

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<sup>1</sup>I first heard this joke counterfactual from Richard Gale.

This theory is both false and incomplete. It is false because of Pollock's coat-thief problem (see Bennett 1984 and Edgington 1995). Suppose at eleven in the morning, you left your coat in a room through which a steady stream of habitual and very similar coat-thieves flowed between eleven and noon, and at noon you retrieved your coat, surprisingly unstolen. The truths about the world include truths about each of the coat thieves going through the room and not stealing the coat, and now we replace the truth that the coat was still there at noon with the proposition that it wasn't. The Lewis-Stalnaker account says that we fix the mess in ways that make for a world that is as small a departure from actuality as possible. Having a habitual coat thief who actually went through the room steal yet another coat is a smaller departure than having someone else take it, or having it turn into a butterfly. But from the time that a coat-thief takes the coat, the world is going to be different forever. For instance, the coat-thief has an extra coat, and ripples spread in the gravitational field throughout the universe. The later we suppose the thief to take the coat, the smaller the departure from actuality, as the larger the region of spacetime that we can make exactly like that of our world. So the Lewis-Stalnaker view indicates that if the coat weren't there, it would have been taken by the last thief.

But surely that's not the right answer. Any one of the thieves might have taken the coat. Probably the right answer is that *some* thief would have taken it, but all counterfactuals of the form "If the coat were not there, thief  $x$  would have taken it" are false. So the Lewis-Stalnaker theory is false.

It's also incomplete, because we do not have a complete account of what makes one world closer to actuality than another. Lewis (1979) has a sketch of some conditions, but these conditions are clearly incomplete. For instance,

he presupposes the possibility of comparing the size of “miracles”, i.e., deviations from laws of nature—but how can really one do that in a precise way? Lewis himself thinks that the way that closeness is to be measured depends on context. But we have no account of the function that assigns a measure of closeness to a particular context.

It *is* very plausible to say that the Queen Victoria case shows that counterfactuals are context-dependent. Which features of the world we keep fixed in the counterfactual case depends on context. In some contexts it is true to say that she would not have died, in others it is true to say that she would be clawing on the inside of her coffin, and in yet others it is true to say that the Second Coming would have already come. But positing context-dependence in some set of claims is far from giving a semantic account of those claims.<sup>2</sup> A semantic account would need to tell us *how* it is that context interacts with words and the world to yield a truth-value.

It is tempting at some point to invoke semantic indeterminacy. But that only complicates matters. For not only do we need an account of when a counterfactual is true and when it is false, but then we would need an account of when it is indeterminate.

Furthermore, not only do we not have a complete account of counterfactuals, we have very little hope of ever having a complete account. And that’s surprising. After all, it’s plausible that the meanings of words and their interactions with contexts are a matter of our conventions, rather than being a function of some alien facts beyond our ken. Consequently, it would seem that the answers to these semantic questions about counterfactuals should be accessible to us.

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<sup>2</sup>This is something I have learned from Jonathan Kvanvig in the case of knowledge claims.

We seem to have no way to settle questions like whether it is true or false or indeterminate that Queen Victoria would be clawing on the inside of her coffin. We do not even know what facts about the situation we would need to find out to settle the question.

I hypothesize that the following is true: Three meanings could be attached to “would”-language, fitting our actual usage equally well, such that the sentence “Were Queen Victoria alive today, she’d be clawing on the inside of her coffin is true” would respectively be true, false and indeterminate. If I’m wrong about this particular case, I am quite confident that something like this is true in other cases.

The standard thing these days to do in cases like that would be to settle the question by naturalness considerations, asking which way of attaching meaning to the “would”-language cuts nature at its joints better (see, e.g., Sider 2011). Moreover, probably a slight difference in naturalness will not do the job: meaning isn’t *that* fragile. So we need to look for a way of attaching meaning that cuts nature at its joints significantly better than competitors. But I suspect that in the end there is going to be no way to do that for counterfactuals: there isn’t going to be one of the three meaning-assignments connected with the Queen Victoria case that cuts nature at its joints significantly better than the others.

Our context-sensitive counterfactuals are a messy beast. They don’t cut nature at perfectly natural joints. And it is unlikely that there will be a candidate meaning that settles the question that cuts nature sufficiently more naturally than competitors would.

But if this is how things stand, how can our counterfactual language have a meaning determined by its use?

## 2. OTHER CASES

Counterfactuals are far from the only case where such considerations come up. Other cases of messy context-sensitive language will have the same issue. Perhaps the question of what degree of evidence suffices for a belief to count as knowledge depends on the context. But if so, it is unlikely that there is a clear winner among all the functions from contexts to contents that match our usage of “knows”.

It is, again, tempting to say that this is just a matter of semantic indeterminacy. No one function from context to content wins out, so it’s indeterminate which one gives the meaning of our “knows”-talk when the functions disagree. But that’s just another positive proposal about the function from context to content, namely one on which in some cases the content is indeterminate. And that proposal is unlikely to be the winner, either, since there are many ways to delineate the region of indeterminacy.

Classic cases of vagueness are another such case. We could respectively assign meanings to “bald” that match our usage in such a way that a person with fifty hairs that are an inch long each (a) counts as bald, (b) counts as non-bald or (c) counts as indeterminate in respect of baldness. No one of the meaning assignments will be sufficiently more natural than the others to be the winner. And yet “bald” is meaningful.

## 3. EPISTEMICISM

Counterfactuals and other messy cases all create a problem for the idea that meaning is determined by our use, even when we supplement the considerations of use with naturalness.

One standard solution in the vagueness literature is epistemicism. There is an answer to these questions, but it is beyond our ken. The person with fifty of the inch-long hairs either is bald or non-bald—or, with a higher level epistemicism, bald, non-bald or indeterminate in baldness—but we don't know which it is. Of the various meanings that could be attached to “bald”, one of them is the one that is in fact attached to it, but we are unable to identify it. There are precise transition points between baldness and non-baldness (or between baldness, indeterminacy and non-baldness), but we don't know which they are.

There is even a well-known argument that there *are* precise transition points in such cases (Sorensen 2001). The premises of the argument are clearly true, and the argument is valid in First Order Logic. It's a bit easier to run the argument with a different word than “bald”. I will run it with “old”. Start with these premises about Elizabeth of Windsor, the Queen of England.

- (1) At age one, Elizabeth was wasn't old.
- (2) At age 89, Elizabeth is old.

Consider now this very long sentence:

- (3) (Elizabeth wasn't old at age one and she was old at age two) or  
 (Elizabeth wasn't old at age two and she was old at age three) or  
 ... or (Elizabeth wasn't old at age 88 and she is old at age 89).

It is just a matter of First Order Logic to see that (3) is a logical consequence of (1) and (2). One way is by *reductio*. If (3) is false, then by De Morgan the following sequence of 88 sentences will be true:

- (3i) Elizabeth was old at age one or she was not old at age two
- (3ii) Elizabeth was old at age two or she was not old at age three

(3iii) Elizabeth was old at age three or she was not old at age four.

...

But by (1) and (3i) we conclude that Elizabeth wasn't old at age two, and then by (3ii) we conclude that she wasn't old at age three, and so on, so she isn't old at age 89, which contradicts (2). So (3) must be true if (1) and (2) are. But (3) says that there is an age such that at that age she wasn't old but a year later she was. The conclusion to (3) is just a matter of logic. And each disjunct in (3) entails<sup>3</sup> that there is a sharp transition point, i.e., an age  $x$  at which Elizabeth isn't old but such that she is old at  $x + 1$ .

This argument for a transition point is classically valid, and the premises are clearly true. What more could one want? The one downside of the argument is its conclusion, that there is a precise transition point between not old and old (perhaps contextual: the premises and conclusion must be all read in a single context).

We thus have a good reason to believe in a sharp transition. Why, then, not be an epistemicist? There are two main reasons. The first is the raw intuition that these kinds of cases are just not cases where there are sharp facts of the matter. Being old or bald should be fuzzy, and counterfactuals shouldn't be perfectly determinate. The second is that epistemicism makes it difficult to see how it is that meanings could be grounded in use. There seems to be nothing in the facts about the use of words that would determine sharp transitions or that would yield precise truth values to counterfactuals.

We thus have an uncomfortable philosophical tension between, on the one hand, a classically valid argument from uncontroversial premises and,

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<sup>3</sup>We need here the uncontroversial arithmetical assumptions that  $1 + 1 = 2$ ,  $2 + 1 = 3$ , and so on.



on the other hand, a raw intuition and worries about grounding of meaning in use. If we could find a way of assuaging the grounding worries, perhaps that would decrease the force of the raw intuition as well, and allow us a much more comfortable philosophical position: one where the argument's conclusion is accepted, but is not all that problematic.

Theism allows us to do just that. God could decide on the correct semantics of all the terms. And the availability of a theistic solution to these problems is evidence for theism.

Plantinga (MS) argues in the case of counterfactuals, a theistic solution lets you hold on to *both* the intuitions that figuring out how to measure the closeness of possible worlds (a) “depend[s] upon mind and (b) there is an “objectively correct” measure of closeness. The point generalizes. We do have the intuition that the semantic facts behind these questions depend on mind, and yet it seems that these facts are genuine objective facts. Theism lets one hold on to both intuitions, and that is evidence for theism.

In fact, there are two theistic ways to resolve the difficulties available. They are analogous to two theistic metaethical theories: divine command theory and natural law.

#### 4. TWO THEISTIC EPISTEMICISMS

##### 4.1. Divine institution epistemicism.

4.1.1. *A sketch.* Divine command theory gets its plausibility from an analogy between divine rules and positive human law. According to divine command theory, we should do what God commands us to do. While one could have a particularist divine command theory on which God issues a separate rule for every particular decision, it is more plausible that God issues general

rules. These rules might be simple, such as that the innocent not be killed, but they could also be quite complex, such as that pain not be inflicted unless (a) the patient or a proxy consents and there is proportionate benefit to the patient or (b) the infliction of pain is a just punishment (and there might be lots more disjuncts).

We could similarly suppose that the meanings of language are divinely instituted. Just as we institute meanings in a variety of ways, so too God institutes meanings. It is a commonplace that the layperson's use of technical vocabulary inherits meaning by deferring to experts who instituted that vocabulary sometimes through explicit stipulation and sometimes by ostending to features of the world delineated at natural joints. The lay language user often doesn't know whom she is deferring to, or even that she is deferring. Similarly, one could defer to God in one's use of language, even without knowing that one is doing so.

God has an advantage over us in instituting language. For apart from a small handful of terms that can be explicitly stipulated and a probably smaller handful of terms whose meanings cut nature at the most perfectly natural joints, precisely specifying the meaning of a typical term requires making a great number of decisions. This is particularly true when the terms are context sensitive, since then not just a single content must be specified, but a function determining a content in every possible context. But God can make a large number of decisions as easily as a single one.<sup>4</sup> He can specify precisely in which contexts what degree of evidence is needed for a knowledge attribution to be correct, what organisms need to have what age to count as old, how many hairs of what length, thickness and opacity are

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<sup>4</sup>There may, however, be special worries with an *infinite* number of decisions. See Pruss MS.

needed to rule out baldness, and how it is that the messy mass of truths is to be updated to include the antecedent of a conditional.

A theistic epistemicist, thus, can say that God has instituted human language, and that we defer to God's institution of language, perhaps unknowingly. God makes sure that we have enough of a picture of how the language works that we can fallibly learn about the use of language by observing how others use them, but neither our understanding of language nor our use of it is sufficient to determine meanings.

4.1.2. *Objections to divine command metaethics.* Before discussing further details of the theory, it is worth considering some powerful criticisms of divine command metaethics and whether they have analogues for divine institution epistemicism.

The most famous objection to divine command metaethics is the Euthyphro problem. That problem centers on the question of why it is that God commands as he does. The worry is that God either (a) commands the right because it is right, or (b) he does so arbitrarily. If case (a), we have a circle in the order of explanation: God commands something because it's right and it's right because God commands it. But case (b) is unbecoming to a morally perfect being: one needs significant moral reasons to curtail the autonomy of others by commands.

There are, of course, many answers to the Euthyphro problem. But divine institution epistemicism does not need need them. Language is conventional. One doesn't need significant moral reasons to institute language in one way or another, when the different ways equally well conduce to communicative goals. It would have been impractical to call a rose an "antidisestablishmentarian" (the word would be too long and the etymology would mislead), but

no harm would have been done by calling roses “daisies” and daises “roses”. Likewise, there appear to be many different ways of updating counterfactually or dividing up the bald from the non-bald that would be equally useful to us and revelatory of reality, and there is no harm in choosing one over another. This is precisely the sort of situation where an arbitrary choice would be appropriate.

One may, of course, have general worries that it is impossible for a rationally perfect being to make arbitrary decisions. But while it surely wouldn’t do for God to make commands that significantly curtail our autonomy for trivial reasons, there is no problem with trivial reasons driving linguistic choices. Perhaps roses are better fitted for poetry than daisies, because of the literary possibilities implied by thorns, and perhaps the word “rose” has more interesting rhymes than “daisy”. That slight consideration would be enough reason to institute “rose” as meaning a rose. There are probably many such incommensurable trivial considerations, and God could choose between them (see Pruss Forthcoming).

The second worry about divine command theories is the possibility of horrendous commands (Morrison 2008 and Wielenberg 2005). If God, perhaps *per impossibile*, commanded torture of the innocent, would it really be right? That’s a hard question (see Pruss 2009 for discussion). But there does not appear to be a compelling analogy to the problem in the semantic case. Suppose that God instituted torture as a phrase meaning “I love you” in some sign language. Then we could ask whether the torture would mean “I love you”? But there is no harm in biting the bullet and saying that, yes, it would mean that, but it would be a sign we morally ought to avoid using.

There is a disanalogy between positive law and linguistic institution. A law that commands immoral activity has no normative force on an agent, and hence the question of whether torture of the innocent would be right if commanded by God has force. But one *can* stipulate words that it would be immoral to use. For instance, one could stipulate a (limited) language which is such that every grammatically correct sentence gravely insults some ethnic group. Perhaps such a language could not be morally spoken, except in cases of dire necessity. But even if the language could not be morally spoken, the institution would be successful. It would just produce a language that could not be morally spoken. Likewise, a sign language all of whose signings involved torturing the interlocutor in different ways could not be morally spoken, but would nonetheless have the thus-stipulated meanings. A perfectly good God presumably would not stipulate such a language, but if *per impossibile* he did, it really would have the stipulated meanings.

A third problem for divine command theories is epistemological. How do we know what God has commanded, especially in light of the large variety of religious traditions making different claims about divine commands. This is a serious problem, because moral rules need to be accessible to the agents who are to obey them, and positive law need to be promulgated. Of course, analogously, speakers also need to grasp meanings. But the phenomenon of deference is available in the case of language. We can use words we do not understand by deferring to the understanding of others, and we can do so even when we do not know who these others are.

A fourth problem for divine command theories is that of authority. Would God in fact have the authority to issue all of us commands, independently of our relationship to him? (See Murphy 2002.) This problem is much

less in the case of language. Someone who institutes a language simply has the authority to set meanings. No special authority is needed here, in the way that one needs to have a special authority to constrain others by one's commands.

One may, however, raise an interesting question here. Could someone institute a language that is independent of divine institution? One imagines a bunch of rebels who believe in God but hate him and who try to do so. I suspect not. For a language is instituted by symbolic actions—say, pointings. But it is likely that if God has instituted language, he has instituted our symbolic actions. Ultimately, then, all our acts of institution will have to go back to God, whether we like it or not. This need not, however, be because God has a special overriding linguistic authority, but simply because he was in fact first in the chain of meaning-institution, and hence we have no symbolic actions independent of divine institution.

The last problem I will consider is the *de facto* problem. Is there, in fact, a God who has issued the requisite commands? The parallel question is whether there is, in fact, a God who has instituted our language? Here, for once, the answer from the defender of a divine institution view of language can parallel that of the divine command theorist. Both theories solve serious philosophical problems. That they solve these problems is evidence for these theories.

So, with the exception of the *de facto* problem, the divine institution theory of language sidesteps major difficulties for divine command metaethics. And the *de facto* problem is not particularly serious.

4.1.3. *Some more details?* However, there is one place where the divine institution theory has a disadvantage over divine command metaethics. While

it is easy to see ways in which God might have issued commands, say by creating us with a conscience or by revealing commands to prophets, it is more difficult to see *how* he might have instituted language. So for the remainder of this subsection, I will discuss some options.

First, let's consider this possibility. Whenever every bit of language was originated, it was originated first by God who then communicated it to the person or community to whom the bit of language is normally attributed, and every time semantic shift occurred, God was likewise communicatively behind it. Perhaps in each such case, the individual has some kind of a mental conversation in the language with God, without knowing that it's a conversation with God (she may think she's speaking to herself). Or perhaps God speaks through the individual.

But is this at all plausible? It seems to be an extravagant hypothesis, one making God be communicatively involved in the constant shifting shifting play of meanings. Do I need to have some kind of an inner conversation with God to stipulate that "Smith<sub>1</sub>" means the actual author of *The Wealth of Nations*? The implausibility here is similar to the implausibility of a particularist divine command theory. God doesn't need to issue a separate prohibition to me each time I'm tempted to lie, say.

Can we say more against this option, besides invoking this intuitive implausibility? Perhaps the existence of slurs and other derogatory terms is evidence against the theory. It is just not plausible that such words were originated by God.

So let's consider an alternative. First, note that language is a special case of communicative behavior. Among the communicative behaviors, there are those which assign meaning to other communicative behaviors. Sometimes

this is done by language, as in stipulation, and sometimes through gestures like pointing. We can divide human communicative behaviors into those whose meaning was attached to them through other human communicative behaviors, and those whose meaning was not so attached. On pain of an infinite regress of communications—a regress that certainly did not occur given the finite amount of time humanity has been around—there must be communicative behaviors of the second class. We can then suppose that God instituted the meanings of these “foundational” communicative behaviors.

Perhaps the first time someone pointed to an object while uttering a new word, God communicated with her, giving the human a mental image of pointing as a method of attaching meaning to word. And when God did so, God in turn had in mind a fully precise system of how pointings attach fully precise meanings to words, a system that the first human pointer deferred to. Perhaps there are fundamental grammatical structures of counterfactuals that are built into us, and the first time these structures were tokened, God was communicatively involved in in the speaker’s mind. The same could be true for other classes of communicative behavior, including those that institute semantic shifts.

Or perhaps the foundational communicative behaviors are at an even higher level of abstraction. Perhaps God was involved when humans started engaging in structured behaviors of the right sort to bear meaning, and God then instituted a particular precise function from patterns of structured behavior to meanings, and did so by some kind of inner communication from himself. Thus our use of counterfactual language, say, does in fact determine the meaning of counterfactual language, but the function from use to meaning is not accessible to us in all its detail. Nonetheless, the



function is fully determined by our deference to our linguistic community, since our linguistic community on this picture includes past humans and eventually God.

There are, thus, many ways of filling out a theistic institution story. Again, much work would need to be done here. But notice that this work would have payoffs beyond solving the problems of the cases of apparent semantic underdetermination as in cases of vagueness and counterfactuals: it would yield a general theory of how meaning is attached to language.

Finally, the divine institution theorist could even accommodate the intuition that there is real non-epistemic vagueness and semantic indeterminacy. For God could have instituted the foundational meaning-attaching communicative behaviors in such a way that the meanings that are attached to bits of language involve real vagueness. For instance, it could be that there is first-order vagueness, with its being vague whether Elizabeth was old at age 70, but no higher order vagueness: it could be definitely true that she was definitely not old prior to age 65, and from 66 to 71 she was vaguely old, and from 72 onward she was definitely old. Or it could be that God instituted the meaning-attaching communicative behaviors in such a way that there is vagueness at many finite levels, but the vagueness always disappears at some finite higher level. While such variants have to give up the elegant classical logic argument for epistemicism, they still save the idea that at base there are fully precise semantic facts.

**4.2. Natural law.** According to theistic natural law ethics, moral facts about human behavior are grounded in human nature. This human nature is irreducibly teleological, and sets the ends and normalcy conditions for our behavior. God is involved in at least two ways. First, God is the final

cause of everything and so all teleology ultimately derives from him. Second, God has freely chosen to create these beings with this nature (namely, us) rather than other possible beings with another nature. God is needed for the story, because there is no naturalistic explanation of how creatures with irreducibly teleological natures arose.

If we want to do justice to the intuitions about the conventionality of language, we don't want a particularist natural law semantic theory on which every single bit of language has a meaning directly determined by our nature. Again, it seems to be a better view to say that what our nature determines is the meanings of meaning-instituting behaviors, such as uttering-while-pointing or more generally engaging in structured behavior in a structured world. Similar options as in the divine institution story come up.

How could our nature determine the meanings of foundational communicative behaviors? I see at least two options. The simplest is to say that in addition to there being irreducible normative properties such as teleological ones, there are also irreducible semantic properties.

The more satisfying option, though perhaps it cannot succeed, would be to attempt to reduce semantic properties to normative ones. For instance, one could suppose that a voluntary behavior  $B$  of  $x$  is an assertion of  $p$  just in case it is normative property of  $x$  that  $B$  should be voluntarily engaged in only if  $p$  is true. In the case of foundational assertion behaviors, if there are such, that normative property would be directly grounded in rock-bottom teleological properties of  $x$ . These teleological properties may only in part be accessible to us.

As in the divine institution case, much work would need to be done here to fill out the story. But, just as in that case, the benefits would go far

beyond solving the problems of semantic indeterminism that motivate the approach.

## 5. EVALUATION

Our linguistic behavior does not appear to determine in a way accessible to us which particular way of cleaning up the mess of propositions one gets when one evaluates a counterfactual is correct. Likewise, it appears to underdetermine what to say about cases of vagueness. We can save the idea that *most* of our meanings are determined by our behavior by supposing that meanings of foundational communicative behaviors come from God—either by institution or by the intermediary of our nature—and that the other meanings derive from this. There can be fully precise semantic facts, and classical logic can be maintained. But the details of these facts are not accessible to us.

Of course, a non-theistic epistemicist can make metaphysically or nomically necessary truths of semantics beyond our ken play the role that divine institution or our nature plays in the options I just considered (cf. Hawthorne 2006). Perhaps it is a metaphysically or nomically necessary truth of semantics that pointing by animals with such-and-such a body plan has such-and-such a precise meaning. But this is not an attractive view. These semantic facts seem objectionably brute. There are too many arbitrary details that would have to be necessary if fully precise meanings were *of necessity* attached to foundational behaviors. The implausibility of such a view would be like the implausibility of thinking that the values had by the constants in the laws of nature are metaphysically necessary. It is just too easy to imagine close alternatives to the constants—and to the ways of evaluating counterfactuals and vague utterances. And in the semantic case

at least, this points neatly to a rational being with an impressive intellect, since it is natural to think of language as originating in minded beings.

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