

# Magidor on Anomaly and Truth-Value Gaps\*

James R. Shaw

*Draft, please don't cite*

Category mistakes—or what I prefer to call instances of *anomaly*—like (1)–(3) tend to sound infelicitous in a distinctive way.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) The number two is green.
- (2) Relativity theory drinks beer.
- (3) Charity stabs flight without swindling.

Following Magidor (2013), we can distinguish two questions: (a) what *is* anomaly—what groups (1)–(3) into a “distinctive class”? And (b) what makes instances of anomaly, so-grouped, infelicitous?<sup>2</sup>

Magidor devotes her *Category Mistakes* to the second of these two questions, arguing that we should see anomalous utterances as syntactically well-formed and truth-evaluable, but suffering from a form of presupposition failure. Her discussion is thorough, penetrating, and chocked full of novel and illuminating insights. Despite finding much to sympathize with and admire in her arguments, here I want to try to say a little in defense of a rival view about anomaly that Magidor rejects along the way. This is the view that instances of anomaly are truth-valueless despite sometimes expressing propositions.

Intriguingly, Magidor’s rejection of this view for the most part does not turn on features of anomaly in particular. Rather, she focuses on making a case against the utility and coherence of views that there are truth-valueless propositions quite generally. I feel that these arguments are unlikely to persuade as they stand, precisely because of their broad scope. My goal here, after briefly characterizing the view Magidor rejects, is to say where its adherents are likely to put up resistance to her arguments.

---

\*I’m very grateful for helpful suggestions from Alejandro Pérez Carballo and Bryan Pickel.

<sup>1</sup>Ryle’s term “category mistake”, which caught on in philosophy, evokes a theory which I suspect is false: that the target infelicities result from “category” or “logical kind” mismatches. The labeling more common in linguistics, “semantic anomaly”, from which my use is derived, is unfortunately also theoretically loaded in a different way: seemingly presuming the target phenomenon is semantic rather than syntactic or pragmatic in nature. Having flagged that I don’t mean to presuppose any such theses with my terminology here, I’ll stick to “anomaly” in this paper.

<sup>2</sup>I follow Magidor here in drawing this distinction, though I have reservations about whether these two questions can in fact be addressed separately, as Magidor (among others) maintains (Magidor (2013) pp.3-4, 146).

# 1 Anomalous Gaps

Here are two ways the utterance of a meaningful sentence can fail to be truth-valued: first, the utterance may fail to express a proposition; second, it may express a proposition, but one which is not truth-valued at at least one possible world.<sup>3</sup>

Arguably the strongest cases for the existence of the first kind of defect among meaningful sentences are infelicitous uses of demonstratives like (4), or complex demonstratives with unsatisfied nominals like (5).<sup>4</sup>

(4) # That [pointing into empty space] is a delicious pear.

(5) # That pear [pointing at a dog] is delicious.

The sentences involved are ‘meaningful’, at least in that they can be used in other circumstances to express uncontroversial truths. But when unaccompanied by appropriate demonstrations, the defect they exhibit is severe. To take one important bit of data, the infelicity is inherited by indirect speech reports.

(6) # James said that that [pointing into the same empty space] is a delicious pear.

(7) # James said that that pear [pointing at the same dog] is delicious.

That echoic indirect speech reports, with parallel demonstrations, falter in this way can foster the sense that perhaps I didn’t say *that* anything was the case (that is, express any proposition) with my original utterances at all.

The existence of the second kind of defect, on which a sentence expresses a proposition truth-valueless merely at some world, is perhaps more controversial. But definites with unsatisfied descriptive material like (6) and (7) are cases that have been treated in this way.

(8) # The thing I’m now pointing at [pointing into empty space] is a delicious pear.

(9) # The pear I’m now pointing at [pointing at a dog] is delicious.

Some maintain (8) and (9) are truth-valueless at actuality, where nothing satisfies the relevant descriptive material. But even if this case can be made, it is much harder to argue that (8) and (9) fail to express propositions altogether. Definites are more readily treated as non-rigid designators than demonstratives, and if so would be free to pick out objects like pears at counterfactual worlds in which I happen to be demonstrating them. And one can felicitously report my speech acts with (10) and (11) (with definites read *de dicto*).

---

<sup>3</sup>My “meaningful” follows Magidor’s intentionally imprecise use. I agree with her that, at least for the arguments that I’ll be considering, little of interest turns on what notion of meaningfulness is at issue. I also won’t be distinguishing between lacking a truth-value and possessing an ‘unconventional’ third truth-value.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of the second case, including appeal to the kinds of indirect speech reports that I use below, see Glanzberg & Siegel (2006).

(10) James said that the thing he was then pointing at was a delicious pear.

(11) James said that the pear he was then pointing at was delicious.

It seems, therefore, that I said that something was the case by uttering (8) and (9), and that the things so said—the propositions I thereby expressed—are true or false relative to certain counterfactual circumstances. Or, at least, so one could argue.

If one maintains a position like this, where someone can assert a proposition which only contingently fails to be truth-evaluable, one would endorse the existence of what I'll here call *mere truth-value gaps* or *mere gaps* for short.<sup>5</sup>

Given these two possible sources of truth-valuelessness, we can distinguish two treatments of anomaly, both of which are instances of what Magidor calls a “Meaningful but Truth-Valueless” (MBT) view.

*Anomalous Expression Failure*: All instances of anomaly involve propositional expression failure.

*Anomalous Gaps*: At least some instances of anomaly involve the expression of a proposition with mere gaps.

Magidor's first step against MBT-theorists is to argue that *Anomalous Expression Failure* is untenable, and inevitably collapses into *Anomalous Gaps*. She makes a strong case for this collapse from the existence of ‘contingent anomaly’, as might be generated by (12).

(1) The number two is green.

(12) The thing I am thinking of is green.

Here is, very roughly, how the collapse is supposed to run: Suppose (1) fails to express a proposition altogether. The best explanation for the failure would be a problem getting to a truth-value from attempting a predication of greenness to two. Now, consider an utterance of (12) in a context where I'm thinking of a particular green table. Then (12) expresses an uncontroversial truth—that is, a true proposition. But since the definite in (12) is non-rigid, the evaluation of that proposition relative to a counterfactual circumstance where I'm thinking of the number two involves evaluating a predication of greenness to two. So we should expect the proposition (12) expresses to be truth-valueless at that world.

This is not Magidor's only route to show that defenses of *Anomalous Expression Failure* collapse into *Anomalous Gaps*, but I find it sufficient.<sup>6</sup>

Once we're driven to this view, Magidor's strategy is to argue against *Anomalous Gaps*, thereby undermining the ‘MBT’ treatment of anomaly altogether. A core part of her case consists of two direct arguments not merely against *Anomalous Gaps*, but against the utility and coherence of mere gaps generally. Let's look at them in turn.

---

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the notion of a ‘substantial truth-value gap’ in Glanzberg (2003).

<sup>6</sup>I should add that Magidor is careful to distinguish views endorsing propositions that are truth-valueless at actuality, and those truth-valueless at counterfactual worlds. The view I mean to defend endorses both.

## 2 Two Worries for *Anomalous Gaps*

### 2.1 Williamson and Truth-Biconditionals

Magidor’s first concern with *Anomalous Gaps* is that Williamson (1994) has offered a “simple yet compelling” argument in a propositional modal logic, that the supposition that there are truth-valueless propositions leads to a contradiction.<sup>7</sup> The (schematic) assumption for reductio is given by (I).

$$(I) \ \diamond(\neg\text{True}(p) \wedge \neg\text{False}(p))$$

To this Williamson adds two premises which are “necessitated versions of the Tarskian truth and falsity schemas.”<sup>8</sup>

$$(NT) \ \Box(\text{True}(p) \leftrightarrow p)$$

$$(NF) \ \Box(\text{False}(p) \leftrightarrow \neg p)$$

It then follows in the weak modal logic  $K$  that  $\diamond(\neg p \wedge \neg\neg p)$ . (Very roughly: appealing to contraposition, if a proposition isn’t true its negation holds, if it isn’t false its double negation holds. So if a proposition is possibly neither true nor false, it’s possible for the negation and double-negation of that proposition to hold.) We should not tolerate possible contradictions any more than actual ones. So, it is suggested that we reject the possibility of truth-valueless propositions, asserted in (I).

The defender of mere gaps must reject some inferences licensed by  $K$ , or forgo at least one of (NT) or (NF). But  $K$  is weak as modal logics go, and Magidor claims that the the latter biconditionals are “entirely fundamental to our understanding of truth and falsity” and quotes Williamson who asks, rhetorically, “What principles govern truth and falsity if not [the Tarskian bi-conditionals]?”<sup>9</sup>

I do think this argument compels a theorist of mere gaps to clarify some controversial aspects of her treatment of truth. But I think that Magidor may be overestimating the costs of invalidating the argument, especially among partisans of *Anomalous Gaps*.

Let’s consider the simplest view accommodating mere gaps of any kind. A theorist embracing that view could claim there is a proposition true or false at other worlds, but defective at actuality. That proposition would not be true, because it is neither true nor false. But this theorist is likely not going to be comfortable expressing the negation of the proposition in assertion: mere gaps exhibit infectious defect, and so tend to be inherited under negation. But that’s precisely to forgo the inference from  $\neg\text{True}(p)$  to  $\neg p$  effectively appealed to in the above proof. Something similar holds of falsehood. From the perspective of this theorist, if (NT) allows us to transition from  $\neg\text{True}(p)$  to  $\neg p$ , then of course that principle is mistaken. That’s precisely what it is to accommodate

---

<sup>7</sup> *Op. Cit.* p.87.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p.87.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.89, Williamson (1994) p.191.

the simplest form of mere gap. So such a theorist will reasonably worry that the Williamsonian argument simply begs the question.

Whether this is so, of course, turns on whether the mere gaps theorist can safely forego the biconditionals in her theory. Magidor claims the biconditionals are entirely fundamental to our understanding of truth and falsity. But this is hotly contested. With very weak assumptions, unrestricted application of the Tarski biconditionals (for sentences at least) are known to lead to contradictions. There is a vast literature devoted to the task of how to react to this problem, where not embracing all Tarskian biconditionals is clearly a live option. Williamson asks what other principles govern truth if not the Tarskian biconditionals. One very simple option here is to embrace some restricted set of the biconditionals.<sup>10</sup> Or we could reinterpret the biconditionals. Perhaps we should hold (NT) and (NF), but only for conditionals that exhibit a weaker logic than classical logic.<sup>11</sup> Or we could have “true” express a circular concept, so that (NT) is true for ‘definitional biconditionals’ but not material ones.<sup>12</sup> Or we could forgo biconditionals as foundational. My own favored view is that “true” has a certain intuitive operational, or ‘procedural’ semantic value.<sup>13</sup> There are many other options, and more in development. Because of this, I’m not sure theorists of anomaly are specially beholden to settle on particular replacement principles when developing their views.

Granting all this, one might instead think that the Williamsonian argument is at the very least pointing to a theoretical cost for the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist. Perhaps rejecting the biconditionals because of anomaly is unmotivated at the empirical level. Or perhaps the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist must concede that her view has pressured her to take an unusually controversial stance about truth. But I don’t think either claim would be correct. Let me say why.

Magidor, in stressing the fundamentality of the biconditionals, rightly notes that “to claim that, for example, it is raining but not true that it is raining seems like an outright contradiction.”<sup>14</sup> But choosing that example seems a little disingenuous. *Anomalous Gaps* theorists won’t contest instances of (NT) and (NF) where gaps aren’t present. And even where gaps are present, the theorists won’t necessarily commit to the negations of the biconditionals. The real question is whether substitution of propositions (allegedly) expressed by highly anomalous sentences share the intuitive ‘obviousness’ of more familiar instances. To evaluate (NT) and (NF), we need to ask how confident we are in asserting things like (13), or even (14) for that matter.

(3) # Charity stabs flight without swindling.

(13) ? If charity stabs flight without swindling then it’s true that charity stabs flight without swindling.

---

<sup>10</sup>This is the reaction of Horwich (1998) pp.41-2 to paradox, though he is familiarly no friend to truth-value gaps (*ibid.* p.76ff).

<sup>11</sup>E.g., as in Field (2008).

<sup>12</sup>Gupta & Belnap (1993), p.138.

<sup>13</sup>Gaifman (1992, 2000), Shaw (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup>*Op. cit.* p.89.

(14) ? If charity stabs flight without swindling, then charity stabs flight without swindling.

It is not obvious that (13) uncontroversially expresses a truth. But since Magidor is committed to (3) expressing a proposition, cases like (13) are precisely those she needs to secure (NT) in its full generality. As Magidor seems to acknowledge, conditionals with anomalous antecedents are not obviously felicitous, even when their consequents would have otherwise, in some sense, followed ‘analytically’ from their antecedents.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, I suspect that to many ordinary English consultants such conditionals continue to sound highly anomalous and confusing. Their status seems significantly more contentious than that of already controversial parallel cases of ostensible presupposition failure in conditional antecedents as in (15) (as said, e.g., by the First Lady).

(15) ? If it’s Kennedy who has been pestering the homunculus living in Obama’s skull, then Kennedy wasn’t successfully assassinated.

If (13) or (14) (or perhaps corresponding contingent forms of anomaly in relevant contexts) do continue to sound highly anomalous, such sentences could obviously form part of an empirical case against unrestricted applications of (NT). So rejecting (NT) or (NF) on the basis of anomaly’s defects isn’t *ad hoc*. It’s perfectly continuous with both the theoretical and empirical motivations for *Anomalous Gaps*.<sup>16</sup>

What of the charge that the view takes on the cost of embracing controversial theses about truth? Well, the claim that the view requires controversial theses about truth is undeniable. But the claim that these theses constitute a distinctive cost would misconstrue the state of the dialectic. Given paradox, there are hardly any uncontroversial general theses about truth.

To press the point, we can remind ourselves that unrestricted propositional versions of (NT) and (NF) come with controversial commitments of their own. In particular, they run into serious problems if contingently paradoxical propositions exists. Magidor is aware of the worry and responds to a few variations of arguments for the existence of paradoxical propositions in a footnote.<sup>17</sup> She does not, however, discuss what is probably the most common argument for such propositions from attitude ascriptions.<sup>18</sup> Here’s one version of such an argument: First, it can be true to state (16), even if Lia is the tallest person in the room.

---

<sup>15</sup>By this I mean that Magidor hedges quite a bit in discussing their status. She says, e.g., similar sentences are “not quite as infelicitous” as other instances of anomaly and are “at least arguably felicitous” (*ibid.* p.135).

<sup>16</sup>Thus, though I think he may be overstating the strength of the objection, I sympathize with the concerns of García-Carpintero (2014) when he says: “...it suffices to plug any problematic sentence in the Tarskian schemas to remove the force from Magidor’s argument against MBT theories.”

<sup>17</sup>*Op. cit.* pp.88-9 n.15.

<sup>18</sup>See, e.g., Burge (1984) pp.10-2, Horwich (1998) p.43, Soames (1999) pp.193-4, Field (2008) pp.132–3, and Schroeder (2010) pp.284-5.

(16) Lia thinks that the thing the tallest person in the room is thinking is not true.

For example, Lia may arrive at her judgment on the basis of the correct belief that Joan is presently thinking some trivial falsehood along with the erroneous belief that Joan is the tallest person in the room. Joan, as it happens, is ever so slightly shorter than Lia, and in fact is the only person who even comes close to being taller than Lia. As a result (17) also seems to report a truth.

(17) What Lia is (actually) thinking would have been true had Joan been tallest.

The argument then proceeds: If (16) is true, it's because there is a propositional object of Lia's thinking, and if (17) is true, that proposition is truth-valued at some non-actual world. But that proposition would also be paradoxical at actuality. So there are contingently paradoxical propositions.

That (16) and (17) are true is not easy to dispute,<sup>19</sup> nor is the paradoxicality of what would be expressed by the compliment of (16) at actuality. As a result the critical premise of this argument is probably a principle that links true belief ascription to the existence of a proposition expressed by its compliment clause. But denying that is to deny that the truth of a belief ascription requires its complement clause to have a denotation, or that such a denotation is a proposition. Either claim is a noteworthy theoretical bullet to bite.<sup>20</sup>

Neither of the cases I've discussed here against Williamson's argument—whether from anomaly, or from contingent paradox—are meant to be decisive. The point is to clarify the state of the dialectic. The Williamsonian argument is in danger of begging the question against the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist, who can seemingly resist the argument in a straightforward way that is both theoretically and empirically principled. The argument at most shows that *Anomalous Gaps* will come with controversial commitments about truth. But that's to be expected: the view is constitutively about truth-value allotments, and hardly any theses about truth are uncontroversial. Indeed, even the key premises of the Williamsonian argument embody contestable commitments about truth, paradox, propositions, or attitudes. So the Williamsonian argument helps us get clearer on the shape of the *Anomalous Gaps* views. But it does not, at least without significantly more supplementation, provide us with any special grounds to worry about its tenability.

---

<sup>19</sup>If there are doubts about the relevance of (17) to the denotation of the clause in (16), note that (16) continues to sound true if we elaborate it with a relative clause "...which would have been true had Joan been tallest".

<sup>20</sup>The view that requires propositional objects for an attitude ascription to be true is probably dominant. But there are Fregean views that countenance the viability of 'mock thoughts' (Evans (1982), McDowell (1984, 2005)). See also the end of Glanzberg (2003) §6 for a discussion of related issues. Magidor (*op. cit.* p.84) notes that Fregeans might resist the claim that true indirect speech reports call for their embedded complements to express propositions. She raises the issue because she wants to avoid arguments that presuppose such Fregeans are wrong. The question here, of course, is whether she instead wishes to endorse arguments that may presuppose that they *are right*.

## 2.2 Gaps without Infelicity?

*Anomalous Gaps* is often invoked precisely to address Magidor’s key question of what makes anomaly infelicitous. In response, Magidor makes two claims. First, that truth-valuelessness isn’t necessary to account for the infelicity—a claim she compellingly substantiates with her own version of a presuppositional view. But she makes a further, much stronger claim that *Anomalous Gaps* is “not... particularly well suited” to explain the infelicity.<sup>21</sup>

This is surprising. *Anomalous Gaps* seems tailored to account for the infelicity. It not only posits a serious form of semantic defect that should straightforwardly influence felicity judgments, but it treats that defect as arising at the level of extension or reference, which seems helpful in accounting for the phenomenon of ‘contingent anomaly’ noted above. But it is actually this latter phenomenon that Magidor thinks reveals the inadequacy of *Anomalous Gaps*.

... careful reflection shows that whether or not a sentence is infelicitous in the relevant sort of way, does not quite depend on actual referents, but rather on (roughly), what speakers *believe* the referents to be. Return to the example of ‘The thing John is thinking of is green’. Consider a context in which John is in fact thinking of a green table, but where speakers mistakenly assume that he is thinking of the number two. The sentence will seem to participants in the conversation just as infelicitous as ‘Two is green’, but on a natural interpretation of the MBT view the sentence will be rendered true. Conversely, consider a context in which John is in fact thinking of the number two, but where speakers mistakenly assume he is thinking of a table. The sentence would seem to speakers perfectly felicitous, despite the fact that on a natural interpretation of the MBT view, the sentence will be rendered truth-valueless. The upshot is that according to the MBT view’s own lights, a sentence’s being truth-valueless... is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to exhibit the relevant kind of infelicity.<sup>22</sup>

The force of this passage seems to rely on the assumption that the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist will appeal to an utterance’s *actual* extension assignment (or lack thereof) in predicting how speakers register anomalous infelicity. But that would be an extremely odd view. When an expression’s extension depends on features of the context of utterance and the actual world, of course speaker behavior will reflect their perception of the context they take to be operative and the world they take to be actual. To take a simple example, it would be no blemish on the empirical success of a semantic theory if it contributed to the prediction that the extension of an actual, unembedded utterance of “the discoverer of the Peano Axioms” is Dedekind, even if most speakers behaved as if the referent were Peano. Nor would it be a blemish if it contributed to the prediction that utterances of “Vaccinations are linked to autism” are false, even

---

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.92.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* pp. 92-3. See also Magidor (2010) pp.170-1.



if most competent speakers treated them as true. Speakers' judgments about, and reactions to, extension-level semantic properties of actual utterances consistently reflect their views about what the actual world and operative context are like.

Accordingly, if *Anomalous Gaps* is right, we should expect speakers to take assertions to exhibit the problems characteristic of anomaly (roughly) when perceived extension assignments of the parts of an utterance would, or could, combine to generate an anomalous gap. That is, we should expect to find things just as in the quoted passage above.

Magidor recognizes the possibility of taking the judgments of infelicity to surface when speakers think they are (or may be) faced with truth-valuelessness. She replies in a footnote, saying:

But this is a much less satisfactory way to account for infelicities. Compare, for example, a view that accounts for the infelicity of 'Boy the here sitting' by devising a syntax which deems the sentence to be ungrammatical, versus an account according to which the sentence is after all grammatical, but for some reason speakers mistakenly think that it is not. In so far as one's theory of syntax is motivated by the wish to account for grammaticality intuitions, the former kind of account should obviously be preferred. Similarly, in so far as one's motivation for the MBT view is simply to account for the infelicity of category mistakes, a view according to which truth-value gaps do not match up with infelicities is at the very least deficient.<sup>23</sup>

But the proposed treatment of contingent anomaly is not at all like the treatment of the syntactic case Magidor describes. A syntactic theory that treats consultants' infelicity judgments about "Boy the here sitting" as systematically mistaken is an inferior theory. But key reasons for this are that the theory introduces a needless complication without any reasonable explanation for the speaker confusion. It's worth noting that when justifications for speaker confusion are available, syntacticians actually do propose explanations of precisely the sort Magidor describes. For example, such explanations are sometimes offered when the hypothesis that speakers meet cognitive performance limitations is plausible (e.g., on multiple embeddings), and this helps smooth out irregularities in phrase structure rules. Or when an understandable tendency toward incremental syntactic parsing leads to seemingly untrustworthy infelicity judgments.

This is important because, in the case of contingent anomaly, we have as good an explanation as there ever could be that speakers' judgments of infelicity needn't reflect the presence of actual defect. As already noted, extension-level properties of actual utterances consistently reflect speakers' views about the context of utterance and actuality. So an explanation of infelicity judgments about anomaly that appeals to perceived, as opposed to actual, reference is in no way overwrought, *ad hoc*, or otherwise impoverished. It is the *default* form of

---

<sup>23</sup>*ibid.* p.93, n.21.

explanation of how infelicity should result from extension-level defect. As noted at the outset, it is rather any theory that used actual extension assignments in explanations of infelicity judgments that would be bizarre.

For these reasons, I don't think that Magidor has raised any worries for the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist in accounting for the infelicity of anomaly. Indeed, such theorists seem able to do so in an empirically adequate way that is consonant with their theoretical commitments.

Not only this, but I find it hard to see how Magidor could maintain her position consistently with some of her other views. For example, Magidor seems to accept that demonstratives accompanied by defective demonstrations fail to express propositions, and so are truth-valueless.<sup>24</sup> Such uses of demonstratives can also result in utterance infelicities. It would be very surprising if the failures of the relevant sentences to express propositions weren't a key part of the explanation of the infelicities. But Magidor's argument above seems to generalize and show such explanations to be inherently lacking. After all, if I utter (4) in a context where my interlocutors and I presume, without looking, that I'm pointing at a pear, no infelicity would be detected. It could easily seem to us a humdrum truth, yielding no interruption in the flow of conversation.

(4) That [pointing into empty space] is a delicious pear.

Conversely if, while uttering, I happened to be pointing without looking at a previously seen pear that had just turned invisible, perhaps my interlocutors and I would eventually balk, considering the utterance highly defective. By assumption, in the first case we have failure to express a proposition without registered infelicity, and in the second infelicity without failure to express a proposition. Would this mean that the failure of demonstratives to pick out referents, and so express propositions, is not the starting point for explaining the infelicity judgments? That seems like a confused conclusion to draw.<sup>25</sup>

This parity of reasoning argument will continue to raise trouble even if Magidor revised her views about demonstratives. After all, embracing the Williamsonian argument from §2.1 strongly pressures, if not commits, Magidor to treat contingently paradoxical utterances as failures to express propositions.<sup>26</sup> But we find the same pattern owing to the contingency of paradox: sometimes paradox without judged infelicity, sometimes judged infelicity without paradox. Magidor's argument seems to force us to conclude that paradox 'is not particularly well suited' to explain the infelicity when it arises—again, surely a strange result. If this is a problem, there actually seems to be an internal tension in adhering to the Williamsonian argument against mere gaps in tandem with Magidor's own argument against the explanatory utility of positing such gaps.

---

<sup>24</sup>*ibid.* pp.81, 83.

<sup>25</sup>One might worry that this argument must be a little more complex if demonstratives express Stalnakerian diagonal propositions. But that is a view Magidor rejects (*ibid.* p.92 n.20).

<sup>26</sup>cf. *ibid.* pp.88-9 n.15.

### 3 Prospects for *Anomalous Gaps*

I've argued that Magidor's Williamsonian case against *Anomalous Gaps* will succeed in clarifying the view's commitments regarding truth, but without obviously applying pressure to the view. The commitments in question are consonant with the theory's core motivations, and not obviously more controversial than the premises of the Williamsonian argument itself. I've also argued that Magidor's claim that *Anomalous Gaps* theorists are poorly positioned to account for the infelicity of anomaly rests on an erroneous conception of how semantic defect results in infelicity judgments.

But it is worth stressing that although I've been critical here, I think Magidor is entirely right to insist that *Anomalous Gaps* theorists face serious obstacles in developing their views at both the foundational and empirical levels.

At the foundational level, significant questions remain about the nature and coherence of truth-value gaps or 'partial propositions'. Magidor hints at such worries shortly after presenting the Williamsonian argument:

No doubt these brief remarks will not settle the ongoing debate between those who accept that propositions are necessarily truth-valued and those who do not. But it is worth highlighting that a commitment to partial propositions is not merely (as many seem to assume) a matter of devising a clever logic that tells one how to compute the non-standard truth-values of complex sentences. The commitment to partial propositions also comes with some deep and difficult theoretical problems.<sup>27</sup>

I agree that there are such challenges for the gap theorist. It's just that I do not think that the Williamsonian argument is a helpful way of pressing those challenges, at least given the current state of debates on truth where the key Williamsonian premise is highly contested on independent grounds. In this context, Williamson's argument is a mere logical argument, dealt with *precisely by* stating independently motivated logical commitments that overcome it. Foundational concerns needn't enter into it. My reply above on behalf of the gap-theorist, for example, said virtually nothing about what truth-values, or truth-value gaps, are. Even so, I acknowledge that there are concerning, more foundational worries of the kind Magidor alludes to, that aren't resolved by clarifying one's logical commitments. These have been pressed forcefully in other ways by Williamson, and by other authors like Dummett (1978) and more recently Glanzberg (2003).<sup>28</sup> The gap theorist must address them.

And at the empirical level, even if Magidor overstates her case in claiming *Anomalous Gaps* is insufficient to account for anomaly's defects, she has made a compelling case that it is hardly necessary to account for the most direct infelicity data. That does apply significant pressure to the *Anomalous Gaps* view.

---

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.* p.91.

<sup>28</sup>My own attempts to formulate and grapple with these problems are in Shaw (2014).

As such the *Anomalous Gaps* theorist needs both firmer theoretical underpinnings, and ideally a positive empirical case for her view. Without them, in the end it may take very little to tip the scales in favor of Magidor’s preferred form of presuppositional view.

## References

- T. Burge (1984). ‘Epistemic Paradox’. *Journal of Philosophy* **81**(1):5–29.
- M. Dummett (1978). ‘Truth’. In *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 1–24. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- G. Evans (1982). *The Varieties of Reference*. No. 137. Oxford University Press.
- H. Field (2008). *Saving Truth From Paradox*. Oxford University Press.
- H. Gaifman (1992). ‘Pointers to Truth’. *The Journal of Philosophy* **89**(5):223–261.
- H. Gaifman (2000). ‘Pointers to Propositions’. In A. Gupta & A. Chapuis (eds.), *Circularity, Definition and Truth*, pp. 79–121. Indian Council Of Philosophical Research.
- M. García-Carpintero (2014). ‘Review of Ofra Magidor, *Category Mistakes*’. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* .
- M. Glanzberg (2003). ‘Against Truth Value Gaps’. In J. Beall (ed.), *Liars and Heaps: New Essays on Paradox*, pp. 151–194. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- M. Glanzberg & S. Siegel (2006). ‘Presupposition and Policing in Complex Demonstratives’. *Noûs* **40**(1):1–42.
- A. Gupta & N. Belnap (1993). *The Revision Theory of Truth*. MIT Press.
- P. Horwich (1998). *Truth*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- O. Magidor (2010). ‘Natural Language and How We Use It: Psychology, Pragmatics, and Presupposition’. *Analysis* **70**(1):160–174.
- O. Magidor (2013). *Category Mistakes*. Oxford University Press.
- J. McDowell (1984). ‘De Re Senses’. *Philosophical Quarterly* **34**(136):283–294.
- J. McDowell (2005). ‘Evans’s Frege’. In J. L. Bermúdez (ed.), *Thought, Reference, and Experience: Themes From the Philosophy of Gareth Evans*. Clarendon Press.
- M. Schroeder (2010). ‘How to Be an Expressivist About Truth’. In C. D. Wright & N. J. L. L. Pedersen (eds.), *New Waves in Truth*, pp. 282–298. Palgrave Macmillan.

- J. R. Shaw (2014). 'What is a Truth-Value Gap?'. *Linguistics and Philosophy* **37**(6):503–34.
- J. R. Shaw (forthcoming). 'Semantics for Semantics'. In B. Amour-Garb (ed.), *Relevance of the Liar*. Oxford University Press.
- S. Soames (1999). *Understanding Truth*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- T. Williamson (1994). *Vagueness*. Routledge, London.