Lecture 10.3
Deflationism about Truth
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1.   Deflationism about truth is roughly this: nothing very substantial can be said about truth. Compare this with what we might say about marriage, or redness, or being a mammal.

        We will consider two deflationary theories of truth: the redundancy theory of truth, and the minimal theory of truth.

2.   The **redundancy** theory of truth:

        Nothing very substantial can be said about truth because there is no such thing as truth - 'true' does not express a property. To assert that it is true that p is not to assert that the proposition that p has a certain property; rather, it is nothing more than to assert that p.

        Examples:
        (i)   To assert that it is true that grass is green is to assert that grass is green.
        (ii)   To assert that what Lawrence just said is true is to assert what Lawrence just said.
        (iii)   To assert that everything Lawrence said is true is to assert everything Lawrence said.

        A redundancy theorists might make the following translations into predicate calculus:

        (a)   My apple is bad:
                Ba
        (b)   It is <u>possible</u> that my apple is bad:
                $\Diamond Ba$
        (c)   It is <u>true</u> that my apple is bad:
                Ba

3.   Then why do we have the adjective 'true'? Answer: to assert things that we otherwise could not (perhaps (ii) and (iii) above).

        The following suggest a generalization:
        •   Either grass is green or grass is not green
        •   Either it rained in Paris yesterday or it did not rain in Paris yesterday
        •   Either Kennedy was shot by Oswald or Kennedy was not shot by Oswald.
        •   etc.

        Can we express the generalization without using the word 'true' (or a synonym)?

4.   A problem. How can redundancy theorists translate 'Everything Lawrence said is true' into a formal language (and thus attempt to display its logical form)?

        (4.1) $\forall p$[if Lawrence said p then p is true]?
        (4.2) $\forall p$[if Lawrence said p then p]?
        (4.3) $\forall S$[if Lawrence said that S then S]?

        (4.1) is no good. It contains 'true', which redundancy theorists claim contributes nothing to logical form.

(4.2) is no good. 'p' is a variable that ranges over propositions, so instances of (4.2) are obtained by replacing 'p' by a singular term that refers to a proposition. But that yields ungrammatical results: 'If Lawrence said the proposition that S Club 7 is great then the proposition that S Club 7 is great.'

(4.3) is no good. 'S' is a variable that ranges over English language sentences, and instances of (4.3) are obtained by replacing 'S' by a sentence: 'If Lawrence said that S Club 7 is great then S Club 7 is great.' That fixes the problem of ungrammaticality. But what if Lawrence said a whole bunch of false things that we cannot express in English? Then (4.3) is true, but 'Everything Lawrence said is true' is false.

It seems that in 'Everything Lawrence said is true', 'true' is contributing something to logical form, and thus is not redundant.

5.   The **minimal** theory of truth (at least the version held by Horwich).

'True' *does* express a property - there is such a thing as truth. But its content is exhausted by the so-called 'minimal theory': the collection of all non-paradoxical T-propositions. Which propositions are they? We can express a lot of them (but not all of them) in English, using sentences of the form:

 (T)   The proposition that S is true iff S.

(This is a schema, instances of which are obtained by replacing 'S' by a declarative sentence.)

Some claims that get made:

*   To grasp the property *truth* is to be disposed to believe the propositions in the minimal theory.
*   To understand the word 'true' in English is to be disposed to accept any instance of (T) that one understands.
*   To have the concept TRUE is to be disposed to accept any instance of (T) that one understands.

6.   Problems:

(a)   Is this really what it is to understand the word 'true'?

(b)   Isn't there more to say about truth? Why, for example, do we find the paradoxical cases paradoxical?

Additional reading:
Horwich, Paul (1998), *Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP).