Truth III: Deflationism (aka Minimalism, Disquotation, Redundancy)

Frege: truth is primitive and irreducible, but nonetheless, *p* and *'p' is true* are equivalent (have the same sense) for any instance of *p*.

Ramsey, a stronger claim: not just that the equivalence holds, but that all you need to understand the truth predicate is to understand that equivalence. There is *nothing more to truth*.

> 'p' is true (predicate)
> It is true that p (operator)
>
> Everything she said was true
> I don't know what she said to him, but whatever it was it can't have been true

Second set of sentences look like a problem for the deflationist, and to some extent they are; but they also provide an explanation of why we need a truth predicate or operator, something which might seem puzzling on the deflationary account. (Note then that 'redundancy' is a bad name for the account; actually it is a better name for an account that gives a reductive definition of truth.)

To make things more precise, start with

The equivalence thesis: In the following schemas 'S' may be replaced by any declarative English sentence at each place at which it occurs:

> S is equivalent to 'S' is true   (and to It is true that S).
> Not-S is equivalent to 'S' is false   (and to It is false that S).

Then deflationism about truth is the contention that nothing more is required to understand the notion of truth than a grasp of the equivalence thesis (and so implicitly, that all one needs to understand truth is to understand the word 'true'). Sometimes claimed that there is no such property as truth.

Now though we need to understand what is meant by 'equivalent'.

Ramsey
Strong equivalence. Sameness of meaning. Wanted to *contrast* truth with other semantic notions.

Tarski
For Tarski the equivalence works as a condition of adequacy, rather than as a defintion or anything approaching it. But given that it is the constraint on a theory of truth, presumably it is intimately connected with the meaning of the truth predicate. He uses simple material biconditional. (N.B. Davidson puts this on its head: given the notion of truth, we come to understand what meaning is.) We'll look at Tarski properly next week.

Strawson
Truth as performative notion: endorsement. Compare with expressivist theories in ethics.

Horwich
Minimalism: account of truth given by set of necessary biconditionals using propositions:
    <p> is true iff p
He goes on to say that all semantic notions are minimal (unlike Ramsey).

PROBLEMS FOR DEFLATIONISM

Recall Price's claim that truth is a normative notion. Can deflationism explain that belief aims at truth; good theories are true; truth explains why good theories cohere etc? Deflationists claim to capture that in a minimal way: believe that grass is green iff grass is green etc.

Gappiness, first version: There are some meaningful declarative English sentences that are neither true nor false. Some reasons for believing this:

I. Reference failure
    (1) Atlantis was no more than forty miles across

II. Presuppositional failure

    (2) What Harry lost was his diary. (Presupposition: Harry lost something.)

    (3) It was Louise who found the diary. (Presupposition: Someone found the diary.)

    (4) Harry regrets that he is so absent minded. (Presupposition: Harry is absent minded.)

    (5) Harry has stopped resenting Louise. (Presupposition: Harry once resented Louise.)

    (6) Even Louise loses her diary sometimes. (Presupposition: Others, besides Louise, lose their diaries; Louise is amongst the least likely to do so.)

III. Expressivism; Ayer's dilemma.

IV. The truth predicate itself

PROBLEMS WITH ACCOMMODATING GAPPINESS
(i) 'Any proposed requirement on candidacy for truth must be grounded in the preferred account of the nature of truth'. (Boghossian 'The Status of Content') Worry then: if truth is minimal, candidacy for truth ('truth-aptness') must be minimal. But truth-aptness is not minimal. Is it right that if truth is minimal, truth-aptness must be minimal? Compare minimal accounts of lottery tickets.

(ii)

> A popular account of the meaning of the word 'true' also deriving from Frege, is that 'It is true that P' has the same sense as the sentence P.... If, as Frege thought, there exist sentences which express propositions but are neither true nor false, then this explanation appears incorrect. Suppose that P contains a singular term which has a sense but no reference: then, according to Frege, P expresses a proposition which has no truth value. This proposition is therefore not true, and hence the statement 'It is true that P' will be false. P will therefore not have the same sense as 'It is true that P', since the latter is false whilst the former is not.
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>   M. Dummett, 'Truth' (1959), in *Truth and Other Enigmas,* p. 4

Further: suppose S is neither true nor false. Then it is not the case that S is true; and it is not the case that S is false. So, by the equivalence thesis, it is not the case that S, and it is not the case that not S (i.e. not S, and not not S). But that is a contradiction.

Gappiness, second version, not stated in terms of truth itself: There are some meaningful declarative English sentences that are not truth-apt

What is truth-aptitude? Presumably S is truth-apt if and only if S is either true or false (when evaluated with respect to the actual world).

The problem from contraposition:

   (7) If Fa is true or false, then Fa is truth-apt
   (8) If Fa isn't truth-apt, then Fa is neither true nor false

But the same problem seems to arise for reference:

   (9) If Fa is true or false, then a has a reference
   (10) If a doesn't have a reference, then Fa is neither true nor false

   (11) If Fa or not-Fa, then a has a reference
   (12) If a doesn't have a reference, then neither Fa, nor not-Fa

Can we say something in the metalanguage using a different three valued conditional that avoids this problem by avoiding contraposition?

The Strong Kleene three-valued truth-table for the conditional which contraposes

if, then	T	–	F
T	T	–	F
–	T	–	–
F	T	T	T

The Lukasiewicz three valued conditional which also contraposes (look for symmetry along the x=y axis)

if, then	T	–	F
T	T	–	F
–	T	T	–
F	T	T	T

A non-contraposing conditional

if, then	T	–	F
T	T	–	F
–	T	T	T
F	T	T	T

The associated biconditional (using the Lukasiewicz table for conjunction)

iff	T	–	F
T	T	–	F
–	–	T	T
F	F	T	T

BACK TO EXPRESSIVISM

Can we restrict the equivalence to truth-apt sentences?

Alternatively: phrase the thesis in terms of beliefs, rather than in terms of truth. Ethical statements do not express beliefs.

Ask what happens now to scepticism about truth. Much popular rejection is better understood as scepticism (rejection of knowledge) or acceptance of relativism: think of ascriptions of truth as implicitly containing another argument place (can this be universally applied?)

IS THERE ANY SPACE FOR FACTS?

Compatibly with minimalism we could allow a discrete realm of facts; we just deny that truth consists of correspondence to them. Or, in a more minimalist spirit, we could embrace:
  The Identity Theory: the content of a true statement is the fact to which it corresponds. So the correspondence relation just is the identity relation.