

Does reductionism succeed in explaining how we can know things on the basis of testimony?

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In this essay I will address the question of whether reductionism is successful as an explanatory account of how people can know things on the basis of testimony. I will consider versions of anti-reductionism and reductionism from Thomas Reid, David Hume and Elizabeth Fricker, and assess whether Paul Faulkner's and Alan Millar's approaches to testimony are forms of reductionism. Finally I will conclude that different forms of reductionism can only provide partial explanations for different types of testimony.

The philosophical debate around testimony is broadly concerned with whether testimony can be knowledge in itself or whether it can only be a conveyance of knowledge. A distinction can be drawn in this context between the primacy of knowledge as a true and direct representation of things in themselves and subsidiary belief as being true by virtue of being justified by reasons or having a causal connection to the thing in itself (Goldman, 2005) [1]. The most general definition of reductionism in respect of testimony is the view that testimony cannot be knowledge in itself, but rather must be "defined or explained" by some subsidiary source of information (p.194, Price/Chimmiso, 2014) [2]

Conclusion

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References

1. Alvin Goldman. *"knowledge."* entry in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
2. Carolyn Price and Cristina Chismissio. *Knowledge and Reason*. The Open University, 2012.