

Rethinking the Epistemology of Testimony

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1 Theories of Testimonial Justification

Reductionism:

(R1) A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if she has reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

(R2) Testimonial justification consists in the above reasons.

Anti-Reductionism:

(A1) A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony can be supported by testimonial justification even if she lacks reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

(A2) Testimonial justification does not consist in the above reasons.

Dualism:

(D1) A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if she has reflectively accessible reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

(D2) Testimonial justification does not consist in the above reasons.

2 Dualism's Dilemma

Question:

*A listener's belief in a speaker's testimony is supported by testimonial justification only if her belief is **based on** her reflectively accessible reasons for*

thinking that the speaker's testimony is true.

Is this true?

If the answer is 'no', then it cannot be maintained that these reasons are necessary. People who have reasons but do not base beliefs on them are intuitively no more rational than people who have no reasons at all. This means that **(D1)** is false, which suits anti-reductionists

If the answer is 'yes', then the listener's justification seems to consist in these reasons, which means **(D2)** is false. This suits reductionists.

3 Some Objections

Objection 1 – Epistemic Pluralism

- Listener's get one type of justification from her reasons, but another type from the speaker.
- This doesn't seem to respect the thought that *all* that matters for inferential justification is the quality of the input beliefs.

Objection 2 – Treating a Speaker as an Authority

- There are different types of reasons – some take you through the idea that the speaker is an epistemic authority where others don't.
- But this doesn't explain why they should relate to your belief in any different fashion – it still seems that your belief might just be justified by your reasons.

4 Rethinking the Epistemology of Testimony

- Dualism is attractive, but faces a dilemma that is distinctively its own.
- So we get a paradox – we think **(D1)** is true and we think **(D2)** is true, but we think that **((D1) ∧ (D2))** is false.
- And (maybe surprisingly) we get some motivation for the claim that **((R1) → (R2))** and the claim that **((A2) → (A1))**.