

***More on True Succession and Tradition: Replying to Lebens and Payton***  
**David Hillel-Ruben, University of London, Emeritus**

That for which I most want to thank Lebens and Payton, is for joining me in a discussion of this fascinating topic. Reading Lebens in particular reminds me how I despaired at times of my claims being able to cover all the bases. Traditions (and true succession) cover such a wide variety of phenomena that I was always aware that there could be counterexamples. Notwithstanding that despair, I decided to make a start and I am pleased that they have joined me in furthering this complicated endeavour of grasping intellectually this rich and multi-faceted set of topics.

I can't do justice to everything that both say but I would like to remark on a few salient points:

(1) Lebens seems to me to have misunderstood how Williams' forward-looking criterion is meant to operate and as a consequence my criticism of it. Williams asks: if the earlier A were alive at the same time as the later B, would A have *developed* (my italics) the same set of beliefs and practices as B? Lebens on the other hand imagines that a resurrected A is alive at the later time along with B, and with all his (A's) beliefs and practices intact. No development of A's beliefs or practices is envisaged.

My criticism of Williams revolved around the development point. My view was that there were many ways in which A's beliefs and practices might have developed, depending on which subset of them one held fixed and which were allowed to vary, and it was that fact that made for the indeterminate truth-value of the counterfactual.

So Lebens proposal is not the one Williams advanced and that I criticised. But what about Lebens' proposal? On that proposal, we imagine A resurrected when B is alive, with exactly the same beliefs and practices A had when he died, and ask whether A would approve of B. On this, I agree with Payton. What one requires here is approval (or not) based on similarity of beliefs and practices). A might approve (or not) of B for all sorts of extraneous reasons. Someone (as it is said of Karl Popper) might withhold approval even if a later 'Popperian' deviated in the slightest from his thought. Approval is subject to the vagaries of psychological pathologies. Similarity judgements have enough of the objective in them to make them a component of true succession. Approval does not.

(2) Payton has spotted a real flaw in my argument, although one that he can help me identify and correct. True succession is a non-transitive relation, and I use true succession in the analysis of a tradition. But that would make the relation of belonging to the same tradition similarly non-transitive. I may have been thinking when I wrote the original article that the idea of a tradition (or inheritance, as Payton puts it) was similarly non-transitive. But if that is so, then one should not really talk about the numerical identity of a tradition over time, as identity is a transitive relation par excellence. I don't think I was clear about this in my own mind.

There are two ways to deal with this. One way would be to declare the idea of the numerical identity of a tradition a myth. The other way is the one that Payton offers me,

and that is to make the idea, belonging to the same tradition as, a transitive relation. The ‘trick’ is the same as in David Lewis’ definition of causation in terms of causal dependence plus a causal chain; or Derek Parfit’s use of connectedness (non-transitive) and continuity (transitive), which builds on connectedness and only requires overlapping chains. It is similarity in all three cases, causation, personal identity, and the numerical identity of a tradition, that require transitivity and hence some addition to the idea of similarity in order to build up to the target idea.

I accept Payton’s emendation (to the idea of true successor and consequently to the idea of inheritance of a tradition) and was therefore disconcerted that he himself does not accept it. The case is this (simplifying his example somewhat): there is a tradition in philosophy that begins with Wittgenstein, Russell, Moore and others, the analytic tradition, say at time  $t$ . Along comes a group of New Wittgensteinians) at  $t^*$  who hold ideas more similar to the ideas of Wittgenstein than those who belonged to this tradition in the intervening years between  $t$  and  $t^*$ . On the similarity chain proposal, there may be a group of philosophers at  $t^*$  with ideas less similar to Wittgenstein’s at  $t$  but because they are on a similarity chain, they would have more or at least equal right to be counted as his successors than those of the New Wittgensteinians. Payton thinks that this is wrong.

I briefly considered an example that raises the same or a very similar issue: ‘throwback claims’ (2013, 42-43). The Catholic Church may have been connected to the Early Church by a similarity chain but the Protestant Reformation, in spite of that, claimed a closer affinity to the practices of the Early Church and was happy to disregard the developments in between. When I wrote at the beginning about my despair at the counterexamples, given the complexity of the notion of a tradition, this is the sort of case I had in mind. Some adjustment will have to be made for it. However, on the particular example Payton uses, I think he has not sufficiently taken on board my comment on the way in which traditions can nest and traverse each other (40). Wittgenstein was BOTH part of the originating group of the analytic tradition and the originator of the Wittgensteinian tradition. The relationship between the Wittgensteinian and analytic traditions is itself somewhat complicated; perhaps one is a part of the other. But in any event, they are not identical and this needs to be taken on board in the construction of an apparent counterexample by Payton to his own suggestion that I myself would be happy to adopt.

In his second contribution, Lebens introduces the idea of an authoritative line of succession (to put my gloss on what he says), acknowledged by the originator and the successor, as something that can replace or trump on occasion the idea of similarity. This seems to me to be a very promising idea and one I will want to think about further.

**Contact details: [david.ruben1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:david.ruben1@yahoo.co.uk)**

## References

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