

Keeping Successorhood and Inheritance Apart: A Reply to Lebens and Ruben
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I want to thank both Sam Lebens and David-Hillel Ruben for their responses to my (2013) essay. In my reply to Lebens, I want to make two points. First, political offices should not be counted as a kind of tradition, so it is no mark against my view that it fails to account for them. Second, if there is an concept of successorhood which must be defined in terms of counterfactual approval rather than qualitative similarity, then this concept ought not to be built into the concept of inheritance; that is, we must allow Y to be an inheritor of X's tradition without being X's true successor. In my reply to Ruben, I want to clarify and expand upon my original argument against the requirement that inheritors also be true successors. In doing so, I hope to reinforce the advantage that my own view has over the view that Ruben now adopts.

Reply to Lebens

On Lebens's view, there is a concept of true-successorhood which must be cashed out in terms of counterfactual approval, where this is not reducible to facts about qualitative similarity. In my (2013) I summarized this concept as follows:

Successor-L: Y is a true successor of X iff there is an S_X and S_Y [where these are sets of beliefs and/or practices] such that (i) Y develops S_Y after X develops S_X , and (ii) X would approve of S_Y , after some initial shock, if X were to be resurrected from the dead, or suddenly and abruptly transported into the future to see Y for himself (2013, 43).

Successor-L includes a slight modification of Lebens's own presentation of the view. (2013a, 31) While Lebens does make mention of S_Y , since what X is supposed to approve of is a certain set of Y's beliefs and practices (ibid.), he makes no mention of S_X , or of the temporal relation between S_X and S_Y . I had argued that condition (i) gives the best account of the temporal successorhood relation that must hold between X and X's successors (2013, 40-41), and so built in the reference to S_X . Since Lebens did not object to this point, I took **Successor-L** to express his view, and took the references to S_X and S_Y to motivate the reduction of counterfactual approval to qualitative similarity.

However, in his reply to my paper, Lebens seems to be insisting on a different view, one on which the references to S_X and S_Y seem to be out of place. Lebens thinks that the office of the president is a kind of tradition, and that the counterfactual approval which grounds one's inheritance of that tradition need not be based on qualitative similarity between two belief/practice sets:

Washington, were he to come back to life, might think that the views, the constitutional understanding, and even the understanding of the office of presidency, of Barack Obama differ greatly to his own. He might think that there are many better candidates around to play the role of president. Nevertheless, noting the historical chain of transmission of the office, he might say 'Yes, this chap is my successor.' (Lebens 2013b, 67)

The target of Washington's approval seems not to be Obama's beliefs and practices at all, but rather Obama himself: even if Washington *disapproves* of Obama's political beliefs and practices, Obama can apparently still count as Washington's successor, because Washington is aware that he stands at the end of a kind of historical chain, and on that ground approves of *him*.¹

It seems that **Successor-L** needs to be replaced by something else. If we remove the references to S_X and S_Y , and ensure that X approves of Y rather than S_Y , we get:

Successor-L*: Y is a true successor of X iff X would approve of Y, after some initial shock, if X were to be resurrected from the dead, or suddenly and abruptly transported into the future to see Y for himself.

The problem now is that it isn't clear how a criterion of temporal successorhood is to be built into **Successor-L***. If there is no S_Y to serve as the target of X's approval, and no S_X to set the standard by approximation to which approval is to be gained, then the condition that S_Y develops after S_X looks completely out of place. If X's approval doesn't concern S_Y , then why should the temporal location of S_Y be of any importance? But the criteria I considered and rejected in my (2013) are no more plausible for political 'traditions' of the sort Lebens isolates than they are for intellectual traditions, for which he thinks my account is well-suited. If we insist that the lives of X and Y must not overlap at all, then it seems that Washington never had any successors. If we insist that the overlap must be only partial, then we rule out by fiat a case (which is obviously possible) where one's own twin is one's political successor. We might try to leave the condition somewhat open-ended, to be filled in by each particular tradition to which **Successor-L*** applies, but I'm not confident that this could be done without circularity. If the relevant tradition to which Washington and Obama belong is the tradition of *being the President*, then we can't say that Obama is Washington's temporal successor iff Obama holds the office of President *after* Washington does without assuming the very notion of successorhood (namely, the notion of Presidential successorhood) on which **Successor-L*** is meant to shed light.

My own solution to this difficulty is simply to deny that the Presidency is a tradition. The reason it was so plausible to treat successorhood and inheritance as grounded in features of one's beliefs and practices, I think, is that traditions (whether they be philosophical, religious, or political) are precisely traditions of *thinking* and *behaving* in certain ways, so that one belongs to a tradition in virtue of one's beliefs and practices. One typically holds a political office for very different reasons, having to do with the procedures that are in place which govern succession or appointments: presidents of democratic societies get the position by being elected to it; monarchs get the position by familial inheritance; etc. When determining whether Y is the President, or the King, one typically doesn't look to Y's beliefs and practices, but to the procedures which the relevant government has in

¹ Of course, in a case like this the historical chain is in place regardless of Washington's counterfactual approval. In other cases, however, the relevant X is meant to be authoritative over who stands at the end of the chain, because X is authoritative about the disambiguation of ambiguous rules of succession. X's counterfactual attitude thus *grounds* successorhood, rather than being a mere indicator of it.

place for determining such things.² If we deny that political offices count as traditions, then they can't be used to motivate **Successor-L***.

Lebens extends his considerations about offices of authority beyond political 'traditions' to religious traditions. He points out that in the Jewish tradition,

[t]here may be cases where more than one splinter group claims to be in control of the office of authority, each with seemingly equal entitlement, based upon the ambiguity of the law ... In these sorts of cases, we might want to come back to counterfactual approval. Even if the relevant formal laws are, in some objective sense, ambiguous, we might want to say that Moses would approve, *subjectively*, of our splinter group. Given our views about Moses, and his authority, we might want to base our claim to inheritance *upon* that counterfactual approval. (2013b, 68)

At this point my concerns about the relationship between successorhood and inheritance come into play. Lebens, like Ruben, wants to define inheritance of a tradition in terms of true successorhood: to be the inheritor of the tradition started by X is to be, among other things, one of X's true successors. However, if being X's true-successor means holding the office of authority (where this in turn is grounded in Moses's counterfactual disambiguation of the laws), then unless every member of the relevant tradition at a given time can 'be in control of the office of authority' at that time, it would be unwise to build true successorhood into inheritance. I take it as obvious that one can be a member of the Jewish community without being an ordained Rabbi, and hence without counting as one of Moses's true successors.

There is a fallback position available, which is to say that one counts as an inheritor of the Jewish tradition if one is a member of a group one of whose members counts as a true successor of Moses. So, although I don't need to be an ordained Rabbi in order to be Jewish, being a member of a group which contains, as one of its members, an ordained Rabbi is both necessary and sufficient for being Jewish.³ The thing to notice about this fallback view is that being an inheritor of the tradition is no longer equivalent to being, among other things, one of Moses's true successors; the reason this view of successorhood works, if it does — notice that the concerns raised above about the target of counterfactual approval and the nature of the temporal successorhood relation will apply here as well — is precisely that we've kept successorhood and inheritance separate, so Lebens has more work to do to define what it is to inherit a tradition.

² (Or, if one *does* look to Y's practices, these practices can't serve to ground Y's status; political offices typically bring with them unique powers, so one is able to behave as one does *because* one holds the office, rather than vice-versa.)

³ One might worry that an ordained Rabbi will satisfy this condition trivially, and hence will count as inheriting the Jewish tradition by virtue of being an ordained Rabbi. While that seems wrong to me, it's easier to accept that being an ordained Rabbi is a *sufficient* condition on being an inheritor of the Jewish tradition than it is to accept that it's a *necessary* condition.

Reply to Ruben

Lebens is willing to grant that my view works well for intellectual traditions, but insists that a different approach must be taken for certain political and religious traditions. Ruben, by contrast, rejects my view outright. Recall, I originally suggested the following two definitions as providing a suitable modification of Ruben's view:

Successor:** Y is a true successor of X iff there is an S_X and an S_Y such that (i) S_X and S_Y stand on opposite ends of a chain of Ss (which may include only S_X and S_Y), (ii) each link S_n is developed after S_{n-1} and (iii) each link S_n is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to S_{n-1} (2013, 42).

Inheritance: Y is an inheritor of X's tradition iff (i) Y is a true successor of X, and (iii) Y develops S_Y *because* X develops S_X , where 'because' signals causal influence (2013, 40).

Call this combination **RUBEN** (since it is the combination he now wants to accept). **RUBEN** allows inheritance to be defined in terms of successorhood, and as I mentioned above, I take this to be a bad way to go. One of the arguments I gave was that **RUBEN** comes to grief over the following example. Wittgenstein is one of the founders of the analytic tradition, so inheritors of the tradition he started should count as such by standing at the end of causal-similarity chains that start with him, Frege, Russell, etc. However, it seems to me that being Wittgenstein's true successor doesn't involve standing at the end of a similarity chain (not necessarily a *causal* similarity chain) which begins with Wittgenstein. As I put it, "Cora Diamond's claim to be a true successor of the early Wittgenstein (whether valid or not) depends on her similarity to *him*, not her similarity to her immediate predecessors." (2013, 43) To help Ruben avoid this difficulty, I offered him the following combination of definitions:

Successor*: Y is a true successor of X iff there is an S_X and an S_Y such that (i) Y develops S_Y after X develops S_X and (ii) S_Y is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to S_X (2013, 41).

Inheritance*: Y is an inheritor of a tradition T iff (i) there is some X that originates T, (ii) S_X and S_Y stand on opposite ends of a chain of Ss (which may include only S_X and S_Y), (iii) each link S_n is developed after S_{n-1} , (iv) each link S_n is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to S_{n-1} , and (v) the holder of S_n develops S_n *because* the holder of S_{n-1} develops S_{n-1} (2013, 43).

Call this combination **PAYTON** (since it is the combination I defend). **PAYTON** avoids the problem just raised, while still making the identity of traditions a transitive affair (the original motivation for introducing similarity-chains).

Ruben thinks that this argument for **PAYTON** fails, but I think he misunderstands what I take the real issue to be. He summarizes the problem as follows. If **RUBEN** is true, then the following seems possible: "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 ... the New Wittgensteinians.” (2013b, 30) Ruben is right that I take this to be a bad result; Timothy Williamson and Cora Diamond both stand at the end of a causal-similarity chain that begins with Wittgenstein, but surely one of them has greater claim to be Wittgenstein’s true successor than the other. Ruben is also right that we need not move to **PAYTON** in order to avoid the bad result. His own solution to this problem is to point out that Wittgenstein stands at the beginning of *two* traditions: the analytic tradition and the Wittgensteinian tradition. Williamson certainly counts as an inheritor of the former, but probably doesn’t count as an inheritor of the latter. What this means is that Williamson might count as a true successor in one sense and not in another: he stands as a true successor to the early Wittgenstein in one respect, which is why he counts as an inheritor of the analytic tradition, but he does *not* stand as a true successor in another respect, which is why he fails to count as an inheritor of the Wittgensteinian tradition. By making this distinction between traditions, Ruben can retain **RUBEN**, and hence keep true successorhood as a necessary condition on inheritance of a tradition. However, Ruben is wrong that to think that he has solved the original difficulty.

The original difficulty, recall, was *not* that Diamond and Williamson have an equal claim to be Wittgenstein’s true successor, but rather that Diamond’s claim to be Wittgenstein’s true successor is no longer grounded, as it should be, in a relation of similarity that she bears directly to *him* (or rather, a relation of similarity that her philosophical beliefs/practices bear directly to his). According to **RUBEN**, if Diamond counts as Wittgenstein’s true successor, this is because she stands at the end of a similarity *chain* that begins with him. Admittedly, **Successor**** allows that she and he are the only two links on the chain, but nothing seems to rule out the following story: there is a similarity chain running from Wittgenstein to Anscombe, from Anscombe to Dummett, from Dummett to Edgington, and finally from Edgington to Diamond, and it is in virtue of *this* that Diamond counts as Wittgenstein’s successor. Surely, however, the notion of a similarity chain is completely out of place here. The belief/practice sets of Anscombe, Dummett and Edgington are *irrelevant* to the issue.

In fact, not only does the concept of a similarity chain look completely out of place here, but the concept itself looks bizarre upon reflection. The notion of a similarity chain, as it occurs in **Successor**** is *not* the notion of a *causal*-similarity chain. I originally introduced the concept of a non-causal similarity chain to preserve the transitivity of identity for traditions without sacrificing what I take to be one of Ruben’s insights: namely, S_Y must be causally influenced by S_X *only* if Y is an inheritor of X ’s tradition; Y can be X ’s true successor without having been influenced by S_X .⁴ (Ruben 2013a, 38-39) While the notion of a non-causal similarity chain can achieve this result, it now seems to me to be otherwise useless as a component of a plausible account of successorhood. If there is no requirement that each link on the chain be causally influenced by the prior

⁴ So, for instance, there is such a thing as the British Empiricist tradition, not simply because these philosophers all had similar views to one another, but because there is a chain of causal influence running between them. If there is some long-forgotten Mesopotamian tradition of empiricist philosophy, whose causal influence stopped long ago, and of whom the British Empiricists consequently had no knowledge, then while we may count Hume as among the true successors of this Mesopotamian tradition, there is no philosophical tradition that contains both Hume and the Mesopotamian Empiricists.

link, then we should be able to gerrymander all sorts of similarity chains connecting Wittgenstein to Diamond. At least in principle, we can construct a chain running from Wittgenstein to a philosopher A upon whom Wittgenstein had no causal influence, to a philosopher B upon whom A had no influence, and so on up to Diamond; there is no requirement that the links on the chain have lived in the same country, engaged with each other's work, etc., so the chain is held together only by qualitative similarity and temporal successorhood. Obviously this chain is not a good candidate to *ground* Diamond's claim to true-successorhood, yet it if **RUBEN** is true, it seems to have as good a claim to that role as the Wittgenstein-Anscombe-Dummett-Edgington-Diamond chain.

We would get a more plausible view if we built the notion of a *causal*-similarity chain into **Successor****. Indeed, it seems to me that the story about the Wittgenstein-Anscombe-Dummett-Edgington-Diamond chain is only plausible because we tacitly assume that this is a chain that registers causal influence. Unfortunately, to do that would be to reject Ruben's insight about the difference between successorhood and inheritance. The best solution, then, is to adopt **PAYTON**, and be done with defining successorhood in terms of similarity chains of any kind. So, while Ruben is certainly right that his view can account for Diamond's greater claim to be Wittgenstein's true successor — provided we pay more attention, as I did not, to the ways in which different traditions splinter and intersect — I take **PAYTON** to be the better view, because it makes Y's claim to be X's true successor depend on the similarity of S_Y and S_X , irrespective of any other links on a similarity chain, and because it does so without building causal influence into the relation of successorhood.

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