

***True Succession and Inheritance of Traditions: Looking Back on the Debate***  
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**Introduction**

Starting with my (1988) and largely continued by David Ruben's instructive (2013a), a lively debate has occurred over how one is to analyze the concepts of true succession and membership of a tradition in order to identify the source of the intractability typically found in disputes in which two groups each claim that it, but not its rival, is in the tradition of some earlier group.

This debate was initially between myself (2013a, 2013b) and Ruben (2013b, 2013c) but later involved Samuel Lebens (2013a, 2013b), Jonathan Payton (2013a, 2013b), Martin Beckstein (2014a, 2014b) and Ruben (2013d, 2014a, 2014b). The time seems ripe to summarize the main lines of the debate to try to draw some lessons from it as we go along and then indicate possible further lines of inquiry.

**Williams and Ruben**

In 1988 I noticed that what appeared in one form or other in discussions of the relationship between the ideas of Confucius and those of Mencius was the relation of 'true succession'.<sup>1</sup> This seemed like an important relation, yet no attempt had been made to elucidate it. I started with examples that tell us something about the properties of true succession. I claimed that although Marx was a true successor of Hegel and Lenin was a true successor of Marx, Lenin was not a true successor of Hegel. Thus true succession is non-transitive. Zeno was a true successor of Pythagoras, but so too was Parmenides. Thus true succession is a one-to-many relation.

Such examples could be in principle contested. In that case they would be poor evidence of the properties in question. But in fact they have not been contested in the debate so far, and I think it is safe to say that all parties to the debate agree on these properties of true succession. I also took 'true successor' to be a term of praise. Certainly it seems to be used that way in Confucianism. So I was surprised to find that claim challenged by Ruben.

Ruben (2013a) focuses on the important concept of tradition. He does not attempt to analyse this concept, although he usefully notes some of its properties (a tradition must last long enough, although how long is inescapably vague. When traditions start to exist may also be vague. One tradition may be 'nested' within another, as Catholicism is nested within Christianity, and it may have a 'gappy' existence, dying out and then being revived). Instead he wants to analyze the *inheritance* of a tradition in order to explain the intractability of disputes over inheritance of traditions. I originally thought of true succession in terms of 'ideas', a term I took to encompass not only beliefs but also aims, theories and explanations, but not practices. Since Ruben's original article, the debate has

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<sup>1</sup> Chang 1964, 298; Cheng 1974, 8; Cohen 1975, 160-161, 166; Cua 1984 234; Fu 1973 375, 378-379, 382; Hwang 1980, 49; Lai 1984, 55; Lau 1970, 44; Lu 1983, 79.

been in terms of ‘beliefs and practices’ found within both true succession and traditions. I think that this is the more precise and more central term. There has also emerged a more or less canonical formalism, one I will follow for the sake of clarity.

I proposed an analysis of the relation that I thought would explain the non-transitivity of true succession. The spirit of this analysis is as follows. Where  $S_Y$  is the set of central beliefs and practices of Y and  $S_X$  is the set of central beliefs and practices of X:

**Successor-W:** Y is a true successor of X iff

- (i) Y developed  $S_Y$  after X developed  $S_X$
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is consistent with  $S_X$
- (iii) Y understood  $S_X$
- (iv) X would, *ceteris paribus*, have more or less developed  $S_Y$
- (v)  $S_Y$  is not identical to  $S_X$ .<sup>2</sup>

This analysis is forward-looking in virtue of (iv).

Ruben objected to my inclusion of (iv), holding that whether X has developed these ideas depends upon which of his other ideas we hold fixed from when he was alive. But there are many different and incompatible ways in which we may fix these, with the result that the truth-value of (iv) is indeterminate (2013a, 38). In its place he proposed the backward-looking:

**Successor-R:** Y is a true successor of X iff

- (i) Y is a temporal successor of X
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$  (2013a, 43).

This is included in:

**Inheritance-R:** Y is an inheritor of X’s tradition iff

- (i) Y is a true successor of X
- (ii) Y develops  $S_Y$  *because* X develops  $S_X$ , where ‘because’ signals causal influence. (2013a, 41).

This explains why succession is a non-transitive and one-to-many relation, because so is qualitative similarity. It also explains why vagueness is the source of the intractability of disputes over inheritance of a tradition. The degree of influence that the development of  $S_X$  has over that of  $S_Y$  relative to a rival set of beliefs and practices  $S_Z$ , is vague. Moreover, how  $S_X$  and  $S_Y$  are to be individuated is vague, as is their centrality and the extent and significance of their dissimilarity.

In (2013a) I proposed one determinate way of fixing X’s other ideas: we imagine a world in which X has lived until the time at which Y is alive that is as similar as logic allows to the actual world at that time. In that world, we fix the history of the

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<sup>2</sup> In what follows I take the liberty of supplying my own labels for analyses given by those in the debate that may or may not be their own.

development of X's ideas at the time of his death. However since the truth-value of counterfactuals is difficult to ascertain, I abandoned **Successor-W**. I argued instead that Y must be influenced by X since he owes something to her and also because 'true successor' is a term of praise, and that this derives from  $S_Y$  being an advance upon  $S_X$ . In contrast, it seemed to me that such an advance is not needed for inherence of a tradition, since a group of disciples of an earlier movement may replicate its central ideas faithfully, neither discarding nor adding to them. Consequently I proposed

**Successor-W\***: Y is a true successor of X iff

- (i) Y developed  $S_Y$  after X developed  $S_X$
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is consistent with  $S_X$
- (iii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$
- (iv)  $S_Y$  is an advance over  $S_X$
- (v) (ii)-(iv) because  $S_Y$  was influenced by  $S_X$ .

My proposed analysis of inheritance results from dropping the advancement condition (iv) to give:

**Inheritance-W**: Y is an inheritor of X's tradition iff

- (i) Y developed  $S_Y$  after X developed  $S_X$
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is consistent with  $S_X$
- (iii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$
- (iv) (ii) and (iii) because  $S_Y$  was influenced by  $S_X$ .

In his (2013b), Ruben denies that my advancement condition (v) is needed for true succession because

... it is perfectly correct to say that, for example, the true successors of the Luddites are certain groups of anti-global capitalist activists, even if the latter have never heard of the former (2013b, 8).

However he also thinks that not much hangs on this, and that we could invent a new word for similarity-without-influence and reserve the phrase 'true successor' for similarity-plus-influence. A more important disagreement is his denial that the advancement condition (iv) in **Successor-W\*** is needed for true succession. He comments that

... even in the case of the so-called plagiarist, I am not sure that we do not want to rule out as a bona fide example of true succession the sycophant who repeats the master's views in their entirety, albeit with some paraphrase or changed formulation or expression (2013b, 9).

Indeed he thinks that there can be a 'true successor who produces a retrograde or degenerate version of an earlier body of ideas' (2013b, 9). He raises the question of how we are meant to evaluate whether something is a theoretical advance. Did Engels advance or distort the ideas of Marx?

I responded in (2013b) by observing that in his original (2013a), Rubens frequently and properly uses ‘true successor’ as a synonym of ‘faithful successor’. But modern anti-global-capitalist activists cannot remain faithful to the ideas of the Luddites if they have never heard of their ideas or if they are not influenced by them, at least to the extent that an understanding of them results in their adoption. It seems then that Ruben must either accept that influence is a necessary condition for true succession or abandon his previous claim that true successors are faithful successors.

As for plagiarists, I considered the worst kind of these, a thief of ideas who uses a predecessor’s ideas as if they were his own with no understanding of them. It seems perfectly natural to say that he is unworthy of succession. By contrast, a disciple of Confucius who fully understands the central teachings of the Master and who as a result, sincerely and accurately disseminates these, neither adding nor subtracting from them, while scrupulously acknowledging them to be the Master’s own, seemed to have more of a claim to be a true or faithful successor.

As for those that produce a retrograde or degenerate version of an earlier body of ideas, I said that these could not be true successors, since ‘retrograde’ and ‘degenerate’ are not terms of praise, unlike ‘true or faithful successor’.

Later in the debate, Beckstein observes that

No person or group will ever raise a claim to true successorhood by asserting to have developed a retrograde (or degenerate) version of the earlier set of beliefs and/or practices (2014a, 32)

and concludes that these versions should be excluded from the concept of true succession. This, as Ruben puts it, is an ‘internal’ perspective on the dispute over who is a true successor, from the point of view of such a putative successor (2014a, 55). It is certainly possible that two parties Y and Z with rival claims that it, but not the other, is the true successor of X, may at least partly base their claims upon the belief that it, but not the other, has advanced, or has more advanced, the central ideas and practices of X. Moreover they might have different and incommensurable standards for deciding what counts as an advance, which only compounds the intractability of the dispute.

In his (2013c), Ruben claims that we need two concepts of true succession, one on which ‘a later group or individual merely holds similar and consistent beliefs with an earlier one, and ...[a]nother on which the latter group is additionally influenced by the earlier’ (2013c, 21). This is the difference between **Successor-R** and

**Successor-R\***: Y is a true successor of X iff

- (i) Y is a temporal successor of X
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$
- (iii) (ii) because  $S_X$  influenced  $S_Y$ .

Ruben claims that I do not recognize degrees or grades of evaluation:

For example, a person's belief can be justified even when false ... To say that such a belief is justified is a weak form of epistemic evaluation. It doesn't seem terribly connected with the idea of praise, as we normally understand that term (2013c, 21).

He adds that

... in the case of true succession, the sense of evaluation can only be the same weak one as when we might say of a rough sketch that it is more or less of a faithful copy or a true reproduction of a more precise map or picture (2013c, 21).

I admit that I did not explicitly acknowledge degrees of evaluation. But neither did I rule them out. A virtue-epistemologist like Linda Zagzebski might hold not only that 'justified' belief is a term of praise because epistemic justification is an intellectual virtue, but also that cognitive success is valuable, so that justified true belief is more praiseworthy. Moreover, the more precise map still influences the rough copy, even if the rough copy is only faithful in a weakly evaluative sense to the map.

### **Lebens and Ruben**

In his (2013a), Lebens claims that Rubens and I have been operating with two concepts of true succession, one evaluative and one not, so that "true-successor' ... is *sometimes* said with an attendant tone of praise, and sometimes said with no attendant evaluative tone of voice' (2013a, 28). This seems correct. For example, if we are within a tradition such as Confucianism or Christianity that sees its originator's beliefs and practices as having moral authority, then to dub someone a true successor has to be praiseworthy. In that case even to say that someone is 'in our tradition' seems to count as praise.

Lebens holds that my forward-looking **Successor-W** came close to capturing something distinctive about the phenomenology of holding oneself to be a true successor in one sense of that term, namely that the predecessor would approve of one's central beliefs and practices. In this sense the successor *feels close* to the predecessor. I think that this is a valuable insight. Following Payton (2013a, 43), Lebens' sense of a true successor can be seen as:

**Successor-L:** Y is a true successor of X iff

- (i) Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$
- (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.

We are to imagine a world in which X dies at the same time as he actually dies, with his beliefs and practices  $S_X$  and in which he is then resurrected to witness the beliefs and practices  $S_Y$  of Y, this possible world being as close to the actual world as logic allows. (ii) is true iff X approves of  $S_Y$  in that world. Thus there is a fact of the matter as to who is a true successor, but since the truth-values of counterfactuals are difficult to ascertain,

that fact is ‘epistemologically inaccessible’ to us, which explains the intractability of disputes over true succession (2013a, 31). That there can be a fact of the matter that is epistemologically inaccessible is shown by Sorensen’s (1988) ‘blindspots’; it might be a fact that I fail to know a specific truth, but if so, then I cannot know that fact.<sup>3</sup> How one is to decide the truth-value of a counterfactual conditional is a vexed question. One suggestion is that one should accept *if it were the case that p then it would be the case that q* iff one’s rational subjective conditional probability  $\Pr(q|p)$  is high. But this leaves us in the dark about what makes such subjective probability rational.<sup>4</sup> ‘High’ is of course vague, and there might be disagreement over how high is high enough.

Lebens notes that **Successor-L** is not identical to **Successor-W** (2013a, 29). It seems to me that they can come apart if X would have approved of  $S_Y$  yet would not have more or less developed it. Perhaps X did not have the theoretical resources to develop  $S_Y$ , yet on considering it, would see that it subsumes what is important in  $S_X$  and is theoretically superior to it. Newton and Einstein might be such a case.

In his (2014a) Ruben reiterates that ‘an analysis that dispenses with counterfactuals is better than one that requires them, partly because of the issue of epistemic access’ (2014a, 56). This seems to miss Leben’s point that the epistemological inaccessibility is one explanation of the intractability in disputes over who is a true successor. Since such an explanation is what is needed, what I saw—and what Ruben continues to see—as a vice may be a virtue. This now encourages me to look again at **Successor-W**. Ruben (2013d) tells us that his criticism of me 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 (2013d, 29).

I agree that we should avoid an analysis of true succession that means that there is no fact of the matter about who is a true successor. But I think that

(iv) X would, *ceteris paribus*, have more or less developed  $S_Y$

in **Successor-W** can be further clarified to avoid this result. If X actually died, with the history of his beliefs and practices ending with  $S_X$  at  $t_1$ , and Y actually developed  $S_Y$  at  $t_2$ , we imagine a world in which X has the same history of beliefs and practices ending with  $S_X$  at  $t_1$ , but in which X continues to live until  $t_2$ . This possible world is as close to the actual world as logic allows. (iv) is true iff X has more or less developed  $S_Y$  at  $t_2$  in that

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<sup>3</sup> Suppose for *reductio* that I know that ( $p$  & I don’t know that  $p$ ). Since knowing a conjunction involves knowing its conjuncts, I know that  $p$ . But since knowledge is factive, the second conjunct is true. So I do and don’t know that  $p$ . Flat contradiction.

<sup>4</sup> Another method for deciding the truth-value of a counterfactual conditional, suggested by a remark in Ramsey (1994, 155 fn), is to hypothetically add its antecedent to one’s stock of beliefs and then decide whether it is rational to accept the consequent under this supposition. One should accept that the conditional is true iff one decides that this is indeed rational. However, this method is faulty (see Williams 2011).

world. So what we hold fixed are *all* of X's beliefs and practices at  $t_1$ , as well as the history of their development. Thus (iv) has a determinate truth-value, but one difficult to ascertain, hence the intractability. We also need to exclude any influence Y's development of his beliefs and practices between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  might have upon Y's development of his beliefs and practices during the same period. One way to do this is to imagine a world in which X has the same history of beliefs and practices ending with  $S_X$ , at  $t_1$ , at which point Y dies, but in which X continues to live until  $t_2$ .

### **Payton, Lebens and Ruben**

In his (2013a) Payton argues that **Successor-R** and **Inheritance-R** should both be modified and then **Successor-L** extended, thereby making it equivalent to the modified **Successor-R**.

Payton's modification to **Successor-R** clarifies 'temporal succession'. This cannot mean that Y is born after X, since X and Y might both be born at  $t_1$  while X dies at  $t_2$ , when Y inherits  $S_X$ . Nor can it mean that Y is born after X dies, since X might be born at  $t_1$  and dies at  $t_3$ , while Y is born at  $t_2$ , after which he inherits  $S_X$  by X's instruction. What is important is that Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$ . This yields

**Successor-R\***: Y is a true successor of X iff there is an  $S_X$  and a  $S_Y$  such that

- (i) Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ .

I take it that this modification is uncontroversial.

Payton observes that if a tradition exists over time by having inheritors at different times, then the inheritance relation needs to be transitive. But **Successor-R\*** is non-transitive because so is qualitative similarity. But since it is 'part of' **Inheritance-R**, that too has to be non-transitive (2013a, 41).

This way of putting it is rather misleading. It suggests that **Successor-R\*** is a necessary condition of **Inheritance-R**, and since **Successor-R\*** is non-transitive so too is **Inheritance-R**. This would be a bad argument, since as I observed (2013a), 'larger than' is transitive but A is larger than B only if A is not the same size as B and 'not the same size as' is non-transitive.

A more pedantic argument has to be given. Suppose that Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$  and  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ . Suppose also that Z develops  $S_Z$  after Y develops  $S_Y$  and  $S_Z$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_Y$ , but *not* to  $S_X$ . Thus by **Successor-R\***, Y is the true successor of X and Z is the true successor of Y, but not of X. Nonetheless it may be the case that Y develops  $S_Y$  because X developed  $S_X$  and that Z develops  $S_Z$  because Y develops  $S_Y$  (where 'because' signals casual influence). In that case, by **Inheritance-R**, Y is an inheritor of X's tradition and Z is an inheritor of Y's tradition, but not of X's tradition—the wrong result.

I now see that this problem afflicts my own account, since qualitative similarity in (iii) of **Inheritance-W** makes it also non-transitive.

In order to keep inheritance transitive, Payton considers modifying **Successor-R\*** to

**Successor-R\*\***: Y is a true successor of X iff there is an  $S_X$  and a  $S_Y$  such that

- (i)  $S_X$  and  $S_Y$  stand on opposite ends of a chain of  $S$ s (which may include only  $S_X$  and  $S_Y$ )
- (ii) Each link  $S_n$  is developed after  $S_{n-1}$
- (iii)  $S_n$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_{n-1}$ .<sup>5</sup>

This is a transitive relation, so the transitivity of **Inheritance-R** is not threatened. However, Payton thinks that we should reject **Successor-R\*\*** because of the following case. Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$  and  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ . Z develops  $S_Z$  after Y develops  $S_Y$  and  $S_Z$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_Y$ , but  $S_Z$  is *far more qualitatively similar*, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ . As Payton adds, Cora Diamond has more of a claim to be the true successor of the early Wittgenstein than her immediate predecessors, and ‘that claim depends on her similarity to *him*’ (2013a, 43), or more accurately, on the similarity of her beliefs and philosophical practices to his.

Ruben (2013d) concedes that Payton has exposed a problem, but accepts **Successor-R\*\***, seeking to disarm Payton’s objection to it with the reminder that one tradition may nest another. For example, Wittgenstein was part of the originating group of the analytic tradition and the originator of the Wittgensteinian tradition. So Diamond’s immediate predecessor, say, Williamson, has a claim to be the true successor of the early Wittgenstein in the analytic tradition, just as Diamond has a claim to be his true successor in the Wittgensteinian tradition, in virtue of high degrees of qualitative similarities between different sets of beliefs and practices, with one set belonging to the analytic tradition and the other to the Wittgensteinian tradition.

But it seems to me that there remains a very simple reason why we should reject **Successor-R\*\***, namely that it is a transitive relation, while intuitively, true succession shouldn’t be transitive. To repeat an earlier example, although Marx was a true successor of Hegel and Lenin was a true successor of Marx, Lenin was not a true successor of Hegel. We might disagree with this example, but I feel confident each of us would endorse others that make the same point.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, as Payton points out, the fact that Diamond and Williamson have an equal claim to be Wittgenstein’s successor (in different traditions) doesn’t deflect his point that Diamond’s claim is based only on the similarity of her beliefs and philosophical practices to *his*. Payton makes this point starker by observing that on **Successor-R\*\***

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<sup>5</sup> Payton’s actual text includes ‘if’ not ‘iff’, but I assume he intends a bi-conditional.

<sup>6</sup> Lebens (2013b, 65) suggests that Anscombe is a true successor of Wittgenstein, Dummett of Anscombe and Edgington of Dummett, but not of Wittgenstein.

... 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 ... (2013b, 19)

However I think that Ruben's has shown us that it would be useful to identify exactly which tradition is under analysis, so that instead of speaking of Y's inheritance of X's tradition, we should speak of Y's inheritance of X's tradition T or T\* and so on.

In order to preserve the transitivity of inheritance, Payton instead proposes leaving true succession out of the analysis of inheritance, modifying **Inheritance-R** to yield:

**Inheritance-P:** 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  $S_s$  (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  $S_{n-1}$
- (v) The holder of  $S_n$  develops  $S_n$  *because* the holder of  $S_{n-1}$  develops  $S_{n-1}$ .

Combining this with **Successor-R\*** accommodates our intuitions. It properly makes inheritance transitive while allowing traditions to undergo radical change. It leaves true succession non-transitive while basing it on the similarity of the successor's beliefs and practices to the person she succeeds.

Payton next seeks to extend **Successor-L**. He claims that counterfactual approval has to be largely grounded in judgments of qualitative similarity; X would approve of  $S_Y$  only because  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ . He recognizes that there are cases in which an appeal to similarity and an appeal to counterfactual approval yield different results. One arises when X would misjudge a slight divergence of  $S_Y$  from  $S_X$  as radical enough to merit disapproval. But Payton thinks that if X is such a bad judge of similarity then we shouldn't care about her counterfactual approval. Thus **Successor-L** is plausible only on the assumption that X would be a reliable judge of qualitative similarity, so we should modify **Successor-L** to read:

**Successor-L\*:** 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  $S_X$
- (ii) X would correctly judge that  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$ .

Payton says that this looks equivalent to **Successor-R\***.

This seems to be an overstatement however, since although (ii) in **Successor-L\*** entails (ii) in **Successor-R\***, the converse does not hold, because as Payton himself admits, X might be a bad judge of similarity. More importantly, (ii) in **Successor-L\*** leaves out something important that is captured by (ii) in **Successor-L**, namely the idea of approval, which is needed to explain the successor's phenomenology of feeling close to the predecessor.

In response to Payton, Lebens (2013b) concedes that for certain intellectual traditions counterfactual approval drops out of the picture, especially if the predecessor is an unreliable judge of similarity, but holds that this need not be so for certain religious, cultural or national traditions. Thus

Even if Moses is unfair, treating minor evolutions as radical breaks, his approval will still be relevant to those who claim to be his inheritors; for Jews, Moses has rabbinic authority *in excelcsis* (2013b, 66).

Thus one important notion is that of authority; one way in which a predecessor might counterfactually approve of his successor is by grounding it upon the historical transmission of an authoritative office from him to the successor. For example,

George Washington, were he to come back to life, ... noting the historical chain of transmission of the office, ... might say [of Obama], 'Yes, this chap is my successor' (2013b, 67).

When different groups claim that office, one group may hold that the predecessor would approve of its beliefs and practices because he would make an authoritative, even if idiosyncratic, judgment that they are similar to his own. Or it may hold that the predecessor would approve of them because he would make an authoritative, although subjective, disambiguation of laws of entitlement and inheritance of an office. So

Given our views about Moses, and his authority, we might want to base our claim to inheritance *upon* that counterfactual approval (2013b, 68).

As Payton (2013b) notes, here Lebens follows Ruben in defining inheritance of a tradition partly in terms of true succession.

The case of Moses is that of qualitative similarity without counterfactual approval. The other way that **Successor-L** can come apart from **Successor-R\*** is when there is counterfactual approval without qualitative similarity. It might be that the predecessor would approve of radical changes to his own beliefs and practices because he would recognize that these are drastic improvements. That certainly seems possible, although how we would go about deciding that this is true of the predecessor looks difficult to decide indeed, which might be another source of the intractability in disputes over who is a true successor.

Ruben (2013d) agrees with Payton on Lebens' **Successor-L**, remarking that

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 (2013d, 29).

I think that Ruben has missed Lebens’ point. Lebens could reply that it is surely possible that Moses would disapprove of modern Jewish belief and practice because he would mistake minor dissimilarities between these and his own for major ones. If that is indeed the case then this is an objective fact, albeit an objective fact about a subjective judgment. Likewise if we knew enough of the psychology and past record of Popper to be confident that he would disapprove of a would-be Popperian in virtue of a very slight deviation from his own thought, then we have reason to claim that this is an objective fact about Popper, albeit one based on his psychological vagaries. Lebens may therefore claim that judgments about counterfactual approval do have enough of the objective in them to make them a component of true succession.

In reply to Lebens, Payton (2013b) argues that it is no mark against his view that it fails to account for political offices, since these don’t count as traditions. One belongs to a tradition in virtue of one’s beliefs and practices, but one occupies a political office in virtue of satisfying procedures such as being elected or inheriting a throne.

Payton also shows that Lebens faces the same sort of problem that afflicts Ruben in making true succession part of the definition of the inheritance of a tradition. For Lebens, being a true successor, say of Moses, means occupying the office of authority, but then it follows that each member of the tradition of Moses, namely a Jew, has to occupy that office, namely be an ordained Rabbi. Clearly that isn’t needed.

Payton considers a ‘fallback position’ that if one is a member of group that contains a true successor of Moses then one inherits his tradition. But since this is only a sufficient condition, adopting this position would mean that Lebens has yet to complete the analysis of inheritance of a tradition.

It seems to me that there is a more general difficulty in including **Successor-L** (or **Successor-L\***) in the analysis of inheritance of a tradition. This is that **Successor-L** makes true succession non-transitive. This is because (ii) in **Successor-L** is non-transitive. Supposing that X would approve of  $S_Y$  and that Y would approve of  $S_Z$ , it may still be the case that X would not approve of  $S_Z$ . One reason is that it is possible that each temporal predecessor would approve of beliefs and practices of others only if these are qualitatively similar to his own, and we have already established that qualitatively similarity is non-transitive. This means that it is possible that although X would approve of  $S_Y$ , Y, but not X, would approve of  $S_Z$ . In that case Lebens must say that Z is not an inheritor of X’s tradition. He cannot say that satisfying **Successor-L** is sufficient for inheriting the predecessor’s tradition, because that would make the inheritance relation non-transitive, since now Y inherits X’s tradition and Z inherits Y’s. So Lebens must say

that inheriting a temporal predecessor's tradition needs something else besides being her true successor. What could this extra necessary condition be? It could not be a chain of causal influence, since Y might develop  $S_Y$  at least partly because X developed  $S_X$  while Z develops  $S_Z$  at least partly because Y developed  $S_Y$ .

In the light of these difficulties I am inclined to take Payton's advice to avoid incorporating the notion of true succession into that of the inheritance of a tradition, an inclination that extends to any forward-looking analysis of true succession in terms of counterfactuals, since counterfactuals are necessarily non-transitive.

### **Beckstein and Rubens**

Beckstein (2014a) shares this strategy by adopting Payton's **Inheritance-P** and modifying **Successor-R\*** in three ways to yield:

**Successor-B:** Y is a true successor of X iff there is a set of beliefs or practices or both  $S_X$ , and a set of beliefs or practices or both  $S_Y$ , such that

- (i) Y develops  $S_Y$  after X develops  $S_X$
- (ii)  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar, to a very high degree, to  $S_X$
- (iii)  $S_Y$  is either an updated or a consistently advanced, but not a retrograde version of  $S_X$
- (iv) Y develops  $S_Y$  because X has developed  $S_X$ .

By mentioning 'a set of beliefs or practices or both', Beckstein wishes to emphasize 'that a true successor is always a predecessor's true successor in *some respect*, i.e. in some selected beliefs, in some selected practices, or in some selected beliefs and practices' (2014a, 33). One source of dispute over who is a true successor is disagreement over which sets of beliefs or practices or both, are relevant.

I am not sure that this does justice to the intractability of such disputes, since all that is needed to settle them is agreement about the respect in which true succession is at stake.

We noted above Beckstein's reason for excluding retrograde versions of  $S_X$  from the concept of true succession. By including (iii) he also aims to accommodate the possibility (against my **Successor-W\***) that when Y claims to be a true successor of X, Y may judge that X's teaching cannot be improved and will just need to ensure that it is keeping with the times. For example, the Jehova's Witnesses claim to be true successors of Jesus in taking the Bible literally, but hold that it needs to be preached in translation because Jesus evangelized in different languages. I think Beckstein has a good point against me here.

Beckstein includes (iv) in response to Ruben's claim that anti-global capitalist activists might be the true successor of the Luddites, even if they have never heard of them. Beckstein observes that if so then the anti-global capitalist activists cannot engage in disputes about the Luddites and so we may ignore such cases.

I am not sure that this is a good argument for (iv). Even if the anti-global capitalist activists knew of the beliefs and practices of the Luddites, still they might have

developed very similar beliefs and practices without being influenced by them. They might claim to have better reasons to justify these. Moreover it is certainly possible that the anti-global capitalist activists develop their beliefs and practices in ignorance of the Luddites, but then learn of them as well as the beliefs and practices of their rivals, the neo-Luddites. At that point dispute can occur.

Beckstein observes that by **Inheritance-P** and **Successor-R**, Y may be a true successor of X without inheriting X's tradition, because of the non-transitivity of qualitative similarity. Conversely, Y may inherit X's tradition without being his true successor if  $S_Y$  is qualitatively similar to  $S_{Y-1}$  but not to  $S_X$ .

Given then that inheritance of tradition and true succession are independent notions, it follows that the source of the intractability in disputes over membership of a tradition is independent of the source of the intractability in disputes over who is a true successor. Beckstein goes on to claim (if I understand him correctly) that if there is a dispute between Y and Z over which is the true successor of X, then Y or Z believes that it knows how to decide it and also believes that the claim that it is the true successor of X is not inherently vague.

I am reluctant to accept this. Beliefs about the inherent vagueness of a claim are pretty sophisticated, and so those without the conceptual resources to form such a belief should not be able to engage into such an intractable dispute. This seems implausible. A particular Sunni might not have the concept of vagueness, despite having the concepts of an elected successor of the Prophet and of a successor appointed by the Prophet. This doesn't seem to prevent her from engaging in an intractable dispute with a Shiite over who is the true successor of the Prophet.

In his reply to Beckstein, Ruben (2014a) argues that that 'external perspectives' (i.e. of scholars) ought to dispense with counterfactuals because they are hard to verify, and should instead appeal to qualitative similarity. Beckstein (2014b) agrees but observes that the question remains of why the dispute may persist despite recognition of the vagueness of qualitative similarity. Beckstein (2014b) agrees but observes that the question remains of why the dispute may persist despite recognition of the vagueness of qualitative similarity. One possibility is that Y and Z agree that it is vague as to how similar  $S_Y$  and  $S_Z$  are to  $S_X$ , but Y justifies his claim that  $S_Y$  is more similar to  $S_X$  than  $S_Z$  by appeal to exclusive divine revelation. Another is that Y and Z rely on different rational methods of assessing qualitative similarity. When  $S_X$  is expressed in a text, Y and Z might disagree over which method is best at reconstructing what X meant by it. In fact such a method may represent an external perspective on verifying counterfactual approval. Ruben (2014b) however takes this last point to be about a backward-looking approach that asks, 'What did the exemplar mean when it wrote ...' (2014b, 94), whereas Beckstein seems to intend a forward-looking approach as well, that asks a second question, 'Given that the exemplar meant such-and-such, would he have approved of so-and-so?'

## Concluding Remarks

It seems that the concept of true succession should not be built into the analysis of inheritance of a tradition. These two concepts appear to be messier than one might have thought, especially that of true succession, which seems to be more of a term of art than that of inheritance. Given that there are multiple senses of both concepts, it would be helpful to disambiguate them, while specifying exactly which tradition is under consideration and the respect in which one is supposedly a true successor. It might turn out that which sense of inheritance is in play is determined by the type of the specific tradition under consideration. Perhaps this could hold of true succession as well, with a specific tradition held as a background conversational context of debates about true succession. If this is correct, then we might do well to try to examine more specific types of traditions in order to see if these display different properties, including those heavily centred on practices, such as musical, humorous, literary, military and sporting traditions, to name just a few.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion also reveals that attention has not been paid to the phenomenology of those who count themselves members of a tradition. These do not always feel close to its originator or originators, if only because they may not know who these are (who were the originators of the British tradition of fair play?). But they do typically feel *loyal* both to that tradition and its members, and typically manifest that loyalty in action, particularly when the tradition is political, religious or cultural.<sup>8</sup> While this might not explain the intractability in disputes over membership of such traditions, it does help explain why such disputes may be fiercely passionate, even erupting into violent conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples might include playing sessional Irish music primarily for the musicians themselves, in British humour self-deprecation with deadpan delivery, in postcolonial literature adding native experience and forms to European models, wearing large beards among the *sapeurs* of the French Foreign Legion and serving strawberries and cream at Wimbledon.

<sup>8</sup> This point resonates with MacIntyre (2007, xii-xiii).

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