

***Internal and External Perspectives: Reply to Marin Beckstein***  
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I want to pick up on a perspective at the end of Martin Beckstein's [contribution](#), and (I now see) one that Beckstein continues from Samuel Lebens earlier [contributions](#), that I had missed entirely.

My [original article](#) was written entirely from an external, 'objective' perspective as if by someone outside the dispute about the continuity of a tradition over time. I offered criteria that can be applied by an outsider to 'judge' which if either party has a better claim to membership in a tradition.

Lebens and Beckstein both raise issues about what the dispute 'looks like' to insiders who are actually parties to the dispute. The insiders could be either the contemporary disputants or the earlier bearer of the tradition. The perspective shifts from external to internal.

I discern two issues in what they write. First, vagueness. I was imagining that the judgement that membership was vague was made by an outsider. But suppose the disputants, having read my article and the subsequent exchange, come to believe too that membership is vague. What will their response be?

I think two different responses are possible. We can distinguish between a descriptive and a prescriptive response (I wonder if Beckstein had in mind only the descriptive response). The descriptivist will just accept that he and his rival are locked into a vague dispute. Such a response may indeed take the punch out of the dispute. But I don't think that that is the most likely outcome. The prescriptivist will continue advancing his claims. He will say that although he can see that there is vagueness in the dispute, his beliefs and practices, or the central ones at any rate, *are* more like the earlier paradigm than are his rival's. I don't think that the recognition of vagueness is likely to end the dispute between the parties.

Second, both in Lebens and in Beckstein, it arises regarding the counterfactual about what the 'originator' of the tradition would approve if, resurrected, he were to confront the contemporary dispute. This move also adopts an 'internal' stand, asking what someone inside the tradition would say.

Lebens says that the result is inaccessible 'because counterfactuals are...notoriously difficult to verify'. Indeed they are. I hold by my externally oriented criteria, one of the virtues of which is that they require no such hard-to-verify counterfactual. My analysis uses only the basic idea of similarity of belief and practice (plus time constraints). An outside observer could apply my analysis. If the parties to the dispute argued over what the resurrected founder were to say, it is likely in any case that they would begin citing

facts like similarity. To use Lebens example, Moses would approve of my view and not yours, because mine is more similar to what he said than yours is.

Unless I can be convinced that my analysis is inadequate, I believe that an analysis that dispenses with counterfactuals is better than one that requires them, partly because of the issue of epistemic access.

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