

John Pemberton (LSE)

*Powers – the no-successor problem*

30/05/2019 Corpus Christi College, Oxford

Many contemporary accounts of powers suppose that when a power is in some suitable state (a state in which the power is in circumstances sufficient for its manifestation), a manifestation occurs. Such a state may comprise the power being in stimulus conditions appropriate to that power (e.g. Bird), or perhaps the power being in some compresence of mutual manifestation partners (e.g. Martin). Typically, it seems, the manifestation is some new state, perhaps the co-instantiation of new properties or powers. But, as Russell famously notes in relation to causal relations, the absence of successors within the set of Real numbers creates a problem (if time is continuous): either these states have a temporal gap between them, or they occur at the same time. A temporal gap suggests a jump across time, which seems problematic. But the simultaneity of these distinct states also seems problematic – how could this underwrite change through time? I identify problems, too, with an alternative suggestion (e.g. Ellis) that the manifestation is a process. I consider various leading contemporary accounts of powers to suggest that the no- successor problem threatens the very foundations of these accounts. Powers such as Aristotle's, in which the power obtains through the period of its manifesting, may provide a solution to the no-successor problem – but conditions must be met for this solution to succeed.