What Must Be Left Unsaid, and Saying It Anyways: Logic and Metaphysics in the Early 20th Century

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Carnap's 1932 "Elimination of Metaphysics" is typically criticized as a poor reading of Heidegger. However, recent works, such as (Stone 2017), (Priest 2002), and (Damböck 2022) have come to reject this reading. Although Carnap's paper itself fails on several fronts, it is indicative of the overall character of his project, and there is good reason to suppose that Carnap would read Heidegger seriously. In fact, the two authors share many of the same predispositions and assumptions. In this paper, I wish to explore these undercurrents, and to expose the origin of the difference between these giants of 20^{th} century philosophy.

First, I will go over the historical and political movements which fuel their projects. The philosophers' positions will then be discussed against the then-dominant Neokantian school and the influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Finally, I will examine their famous one-sided exchange, and spell out the deeper-cutting analysis of Heidegger which Carnap really wished to express. All of this will be done through an analysis of the author's conceptions of fundamental epistemology, metaethics, and their relation to language.

Historical Background, Political Origins

In his 1917 lecture, "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber laid out the limitations of science for guidance in our lives. To Weber, there are only three ways in which science can guide our thought. First, it provides a clear means of inquiry about things in the world through its empirical method. Second, it gives us a theory of causality which we can use to predict the results of our actions. Finally, it provides us a means of analyzing our basic attitudes with mathematical and logical rigor. Although the sciences can and should provide us a method of analyzing our beliefs, it cannot then tell us which things to value. It is entirely beyond the scope of the sciences to provide axioms for practical philosophy. Weber brings these limitations to the fore in order to dispel the student population's desire for an "academic prophet" who could quell the disenchantment

brought on by the decline of the religious worldview. Industrial production and advances in empirical science had lead to a crisis of confidence in theology; without theological faith, there was no order by which to live. So, the question of the age is as above: What are we to do about the incommensurability of (empirical-scientific) facts and (theological-existential) meaning?

> Under these internal presuppositions, what is the meaning of science as a vocation, now after all these former illusions, the 'way to true being,' the 'way to true art,' the 'way to true nature,' the 'way to true God,' the 'way to true happiness,' have been dispelled? Tolstoy has given the simplest answer, with the words: 'Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" That science does not give an answer to this is indisputable. The only question that remains is the sense in which science gives 'no' answer, and whether or not science might yet be of some use to the one who puts the question correctly. (Weber 2014, 139)

For Carnap and his Vienna Circle, the limitations of science are themselves the limitations of knowledge. Anything which can be said about material things (including individuals and their societies) can be stated clearly, in scientific language. The rise of psychology and sociology as disciplines, with figures like Weber, Durkheim, James, and Wundt empiricizing questions typically reserved for philosophy, alongside theories of linguistic logic by Russell and Wittgenstein, provided further fuel for their attitude. Metaphysical pronouncements outside the scope of logical analysis – about abstract essences, ethics, or politics – were considered "nonsense." This term is not to be taken as a complete dismissal, however; the scientific worldview is meant to "serve life", not the other way around.

In the "manifesto" of their group, "The Scientific Conception of the World," they explicitly link their worldview with the socialist movements of the early 20th century. They acknowledge a widespread disenchantment among Weberian lines, connected with the industrial mode of production. The European public "with their socialist attitudes tend to lean towards a down-to-earth empricist view. In previous times *materialism* was

the expression of this view; meanwhile, however, modern empiricism has ... taken a strong shape in the *scientific world-conception*" (Hahn et al. 1973, pp. 21-22).

The Vienna Circle could be seen as the culmination of the liberal Enlightenment project, the scientific worldview winding its way from Descartes to Kant to Marx. If the decisions we make in life are "irrational instincts" (Carnap 1929, p. 4), then we ought to guide those instincts through as rational a process as we can. The scientific worldview was designed to clear up pseudo-problems in philosophy in order to give us the space to think as clearly as we could about how to live our lives. Metaphysics was deemed a confusion, a misuse of language to describe in scientific terms what went beyond the scope of the sciences, and thus was irrational nonsense, poetic at best. The misuse of language would take center stage in the later Carnap's thought, and would drive much of the activity of the early 20th century Analytic tradition. We will discuss language later; what matters now is the goal the Vienna Circle had in mind when pursuing this project. They sought to replace the dead God and his delusions, with a clear, scientific, collectivist attitude toward the world.

> We do not deceive ourselves about the fact that movements in metaphysical philosophy and religion which are critical of such an orientation have again become very influential of late. Whence then our confidence that our call for clarity, for a science that is free from metaphysics, will be heard? It stems from the knowledge or, to put it somewhat more carefully, from the belief that these opposing powers belong to the past. (*Aufbau,* pp. xvii-xviii)

Heidegger, meanwhile, aims to destruct this Cartesian project, clearing the space for a new world-conception which can provide us an ontological ground on which to found both the sciences and practical philosophy. Heidegger's critique of Descartes hinges on his conception of being-in-the-world, as opposed to beings present-at-hand. He claims that Descartes mischaracterizes the essential nature of beings as Nature, that is, as founded on "an entity within-the-world which is proximally present-at-hand" (*BT,* H. 95). As in the "Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger claims that Descartes has essentially made the world ready-to-hand, thus enclosing it and making all of

Nature, including man, into "standing reserve." This view is somewhat ironic considering Heidegger's perceived Nazi sympathies, though reading Heidegger as a clear-cut Nazi hardliner is naive. In "Only a God can Save Us," Heidegger explicitly denies any ties with the Nazi party, considering himself an "unpolitical" person. In fact, he characterizes himself as "confronting the Nazi party" in his Nietzsche lectures, and as the subject of scrutiny under Nazi rule. Whether or not he was truly sympathetic to Nazi politics is a matter of debate, but in any case he is explicitly opposed to socialism as "a form of planetary technicity" (Heidegger 1981, p. 206).

If the sciences can provide us with the facts of their particular disciplines, and nothing further, Heidegger calls on us to examine the "nothing further" which by its nature sets the limitations of what can be known about beings. Similar to Kant, he is asking us to examine our intuitions in order to found our scientific knowledge. Influenced by Edmund Husserl, he takes on a phenomenological hermeneutic of our lived experience in order to found our intuitions, and thus to examine what gives life meaning, in addition to examining the basis for our scientific attitude. The scientific worldview is, after all, one among many.

Heidegger and Carnap are both seated within the Western philosophical tradition, and both are attempting to overcome it. Their methods differ quite dramatically, however, as do their end goals. Carnap wishes to clear away the cruft of the past few millennia in order to see rightly; fundamentally, he believed Descartes was on the right track. Heidegger wants to destruct the method and the worldview which evolved from Plato through Kant, and especially the scientific project began by Descartes. Both do so in order to found a worldview which is capable of overcoming the existential conditions which underlie false metaphysical inquiry. These conditions, being existential, are immediately tied up in both material analysis and practical philosophy, in questions concerning both facts and the meaning of life. Nietzsche declared that God is dead, that facts and meaning no longer lined up; disenchantment in the early 20th

century called for a radical reconstitution of the Western worldview, and both authors were determined to find it. In the next section we will take a look at how they each went about this destruction.

Facts and Values

Heidegger and Carnap were both educated in the Neokantian tradition. In keeping with the post-Kantian idealists, the Neokantians rejected the Kantian distinction between the realms of pure sensibility and understanding. Rejecting the spatio-temporal form of the pure intuition, the Neokantians preferred a pure logical basis for the object of knowledge. (Friedman 2000, p28) This tradition was divided between several schools, most notably the Marburg school and the Southwest school. While there are many differences between these camps, the primary distinction I will focus on is their stance on the distinction between logic and values.

Logic, being a discursive science aimed at proper thinking, is considered to be *normative.* For Rickert, a key player of the Southwest school, this leads to the claim that logic belongs to the realm of transcendental value. Pure logic is then to be distinguished from psychological knowledge, which proceeds by empirical means. There is then a gap between *logic* as value, and *psychology* as fact (p34f). Rickert and the Southwest school are left with a huge problem: how do we deal with the incommensurability of facts and values?

The Marburg school's Cassirer rejects this distinction. Instead of clefting the mind between transcendental psychology and pure logic, Cassirer claims that these gaps are *moments* of cognition. They are not essential features which then are synthesized in to a single cognition, but a unitary relation which has been artificially analyzed into parts. Value and fact are analogous to the universal and the particular, but for Cassirer this is a difference in matter of *viewpoint,* between understanding a thing in its "thinghood" (as it relates to the universal form), and understanding a thing in its "context" (as a being

among beings). This separation between viewpoints is "artificial," only occurring after the initial unitary relation between mind and object (Friedman 2000, p34f).

The parallels between Husserl and the Neokantian schools is fairly clear. Rickert writes positively of the *Logical Investigation's* polemic against psychologism, and there are clear parallels between the unitary relation of cognition in Cassirer and Husserl's unitary field of phenomenological consciousness (see *Ideas* §38). Akin to Rickert, Husserl ends up proposing transcendental phenomenological ideas.

For both Carnap and Heidegger, there are a few primary concerns. They both wish to flatten the distinction between the real and the ideal; they both proceed from phenomenological grounds; and they both do so in a subtle but direct relation to their political aims.

Carnap

The scientific worldview lends itself to the notion of a unified science. It is Carnap's goal to place science on a unified ground, and in so doing to eliminate the confusions which traditional philosophy ("metaphysics") has perpetuated. The goal of science is to "find and order the true statements about the objects of experience" (*Aufbau,* §179). This can be split into two further goals: to create a constructional system corresponding to formal logic, and to investigate the nonconstructional relationships between objects of experience. We then have two foundational aspects of construction theory: conventional stipulation of logical syntax and verification through empirical investigation.

Carnap proceeds from unanalyzable phenomenological units which he calls basic experiences: these are whole-field conscious experiences which appear epistemically prior to the analysis of their constitutive parts. They are precisely the object of phenomenological analysis in Husserl's sense (*Aufbau,* §64). He proceeds to "quasi-analyze" these experiences by creating a formal allegory and examining the

structures thereof. His goal is to construct the world through a purely formal analysis of basic experience, without any reference to ostensive properties thereof. In order to proceed, he needs a foundational relation between experiences, namely recollection of similarity.

In adopting the phenomenological *epoché* and proceeding from purely formal analysis, Carnap obviates the distinction between the real and the ideal. Ultimately, both "real" and "ideal" objects are constructed from the same basic experiences. It is important to note that Carnap is not here discussing ideals as essences. Quite famously, essences are the stuff of metaphysics, which Carnap rejects outright. The difference is that "ideal" objects are purely autopsychological, preceding physical construction, while "real" objects are those that rely on physics and its objectivity (Friedman 2000, p77).

The general structure here should sound similar to Cassirer. Both construct the objects of experience through formal analysis. However, while Cassirer's construction proceeds indefinitely, Carnap constructs definite, finite ranks within the type hierarchy of his system (p80).

For Carnap, as for the Marburg school, all objects are generated through a logical (cognitive) faculty through direct experience. (p75). However, the difference between what is given (the real) and what is constructed (the ideal) is obviated in Carnap. For him, "a concept and its object are the same." This amounts to a "functionalization" of the object. Carnap flattens the distinction between real and ideal, as both are ultimately constituted objects. The real-ideal distinction amounts to the distinction between the spatio-temporal order and all others. (p78)

For Carnap, basic experiences do not have any relation to a subject; the "for-me-ness" is analyzed into it after the fact. Similar to how we can only call integers "integers" in contradistinction to the real numbers once we have constructed them, we only understand our basic experiences as autopsychological in contrast with the later-constructed physical and heteropsychological objects. (*Aufbau*, III.C *passim.*).

By redefining philosophy as logistics – within the *Aufbau* as the formal logic of the *Principia Mathematica* of Russell and Whitehead, and later in the *Syntax* as *any* formal langauge – Carnap aimed to remove the metaphysical notion of the synthetic *a priori.* In doing so he would overcome the infinite regress of the Marburg school's object of knowledge, thus rooting out the unknowable thing-in-itself. Clearing up these final metaphysical notions would leave no room for philosophical pseudoproblems which could not be solved by the logical analysis of language.

Famously, there is an error in the formation of the physical from the autopsychological. In order to ground the physical, we end up needing recourse to the heteropsychological to verify our cognition. Since the heteropsychological is itself founded on the physical, this is an infinite regress. Carnap's denial of the synthetic *a priori* hinges on the definite, finite ranking of all objects, but fails to achieve this. Carnap confronts this problem in the *Syntax* by postulating two formal languages. Language I constructs definite statements akin to those in the classical logics, including the *Aufbau*. Language II constructs indefinite statements, those which can proceed to infinity. Physical statements, and the statements of classical mathematics generally, are expressible only once indefinite structures have been introduced (*Syntax,* §15).

Once we reach the *Syntax,* the stipulatory nature of logic is formalized into the principle of tolerance.

> *In logic, there are no morals.* Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e. his own form of language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods clearly, and give syntactial rules instead of philosophical arguments. (*Syntax,* §17)

Since logic is the ideal evaluative framework, but there are multiple valid logical systems, it is up to us to find the ideal logical system to relate to our practical aims, whatever they may be. While this provides a minimal modicum of guidance, it does not do the crucial thing: there is no standard of ethics. Carnap makes clear his non-cognitivist ethics, but leaves us to interpret what this entails. There is some evidence

that Carnap would be an emotivist. In addition to his famous slam on metaphysics as "bad poetry," consider the following quote:

> 4. According to the ordinary use of language, an action *a* of a certain person is called a *moral crime* if, in the minds of the majority of other persons, the thought of someone (but not themselves) committing an action of this kind calls forth the feeling of moral indignation. (*Syntax,* §80)

The above quote comes from a discussion on the dangers of the material mode of speech. This mode is defined by a casual transposition of complicated syntactical statements of the kind discussed in the *Syntax* into ordinary speech. The move from discussion of syntax to discussion of material properties often leads to shorter and clearer explanations, but easily lends itself to confusion. While Carnap claims that this mode of speech is perfectly acceptable, and in fact unavoidable, he warns us that this translation leads us to speak of spurious universals - i.e., metaphysical essences. Additionally, some material sentences simply cannot be translated into formal syntax. Although these statements are useful for expressing ourselves, they cannot be subject to claims about truth and falsity, and so have no place in a scientific philosophy.

> If a sentence of the material mode of speech is given …, then the translation into the formal mode of speech …must always be possible. *Translatability into the formal mode of speech constitutes the touchstone for all philosophical sentences*, or more generally, for all sentences which do not belong to the language of any one of the empirical sciences. …Sentences which do not give even a slight indication to determine their translation are outside the realm of the language of science and therefore incapable of discussion, no matter what depths or heights of feeling they may stir. (*Syntax,* §81)

In a rare direct confrontation, Carnap claims in a 1932 lecture series that ethical statements are in essence prescriptive: they are imperative statements. However, the material mode of speech allows us to slip up and propose spurious ethical essences. "Do not kill," for example, is clearly an imperative, while "killing is evil" is an assertion about a universal property. Carnap's metaethics is not then a simple emotivism, but a prescriptivism (Carnap 1996, 1.4).

So Carnap's scientific conviction leads him to propose a non-cognitivist ethics. Any justification for normative ethics must be made within the language of science, but the objects of its study are a matter of *psychology* and not something which can be derived from universal principles of reason. Any ethical claim must take the shape of formal-logical arguments proceeding from psychological principles of emotion, ultimately amounting to an arbitrary (set?) of formal languages which capture the ethical feelings we experience as part of our basic experience. In all cases, logic comes first, and the emotions come second.

Heidegger

Heidegger famously places emotions at the heart of his phenomenological analysis of Dasein. In *Being and Time,* the method of analysis is laid out as a hermeneutic of lived experience. This is done in an attempt to directly cognize the essence of Being, that is, the

Hiedeger's conception of phemonenon hinges on his udnerstanding of apophantic logos, that is, the discursive basis for analysis and truth-bearing in general. Logois is a letting-something-be-seen; thus it can be true or false. Truth in Heidegger's sense relates more closely to "the sheer sensory perception of something." (Heidegger 2008a, p57) Connection to dialectical theology; at least parallels. Logic then operates on their basic phenomenal experiences; phenomnoelogy then is the analysis of basic experienes. But the phneomnon is unalayzable in the sense that it has no constituitive parts; there is nothing "Behind" the phenomenon to be uncovered (p60). But what Heidegger takes to be the object of phenomenology is closer to the Husserlian idea; his conception of Being is very close to it. (In what respects?)

The phenomenon is distinguished from the appearnce; the appearnce is manifestly what it is note; it hides its true nature , the Being of the phneomon from

which it originates. Note that Being is at root *historical,* and so it can be covered up or revealed at certain points of time.

The phenomnoelogical method by which Hiedegger aims to disclose the meaning of Being in general takes on the form of a hermeneutic analysis of the existnetial character of Dasein, the being whose Being is a matter of concern to it.

Heidegger and CArnap agree that fundmental phenomenon are unaalyzable, but waht they consider phenonon to be are quite distinct. Carnap takes what Heidegger would call the "oridnary" conception of phenemon, akin to Kant (Heidegger 2008a, p54). What Heidegger wishes to call phenomenon are closer to the formas of the intuition. Kant analyzes phenomena as occuring in space and time. By analogy, Heiddger extends this to be the necessary underlying charactstict Being of any being, irrespective of the empirical character. His goal is to move away from the scientific conception toward a more fundamental analysis.

Phenomenology cannot proceed in the form of logicla assertions because this separates the essential character of the Being from its context. "It gets understood in an empty way" and "loses its indigenous character" (p61.) So *logos* cannot be *logistics.*

The dialectical characteristic of logos presupposes the being-with-others of Dasein, its relation to *das Man.* All of the essential characteristics of Dasein's Being seem to occur simulatneously; they characterize it rather than appear to it. What is Heidegger's epistemology?

Heidegger's criticism of the scientific attitude can be most clearly seen in his criticism of Descartes (I.3 B, especially ¶21). Here he talks fairly explicitly about values.

Carnap actually would agree with Heidegger that Descartes' project is insufficient, but his critique would be quite different. Instead of offering an analysis of different "modes of being" as a criticism of the Cartesian worldview, he would offer the gestalt-theoretical experience as having nothing to do with an ego. This has to be constructed from the aspects of the experience; *res extensa* is not the most fundamental

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Heidegger prefers a holistic approach. The analytic of Dasein occurs piecemeal, but each piece influences and is influenced by the whole. Carnap prefers a constructivist approach, where the basic units of experience are assumed, and the rest is built from there.

Metaphysics - How to Found the Sciences?

For Heidegger, "metaphysics" is characterized by a misuse of language, that is, it is the linguistic fallacy of speaking of Being as *a* being. Where we need to speak of the characteristic essence of beings as a whole, we are instead speaking of essential beings. For Carnap, it's quite similar. Metaphysics is the misuse of language to speak of things which cannot be structurally analyzed, that is, properly thought.

Carnap characterizes Heidegger's misuse of language in "The Elimination" as an attempt to substantiate something which cannot be substantiated. That is, Heidegger attempts to speak of "the Nothing" as if it is in fact a something, a substantial thing. However, this clearly is nonsense under the guise of first-order predicate logic. There is no way to adequately capture "the Nothing nothings" with the existential quantifier. Carnap outlines a transition from ordinary language to formal language. He characterizes the transition first by creating an object, which we call "nothing" (no). We then construct various predicates about "the nothing" by instantiating them with the pseudo-object. However, Carnap argues that what we mean by "nothing" cannot be instantiated, as it is represented by a quantifier ($\neg\exists x.Px$ for some property P). So he argues that we ought to dismiss Heidegger's talk as nonsense.

It is fairly apparent to anyone with an understanding of higher-level logics that, in fact, we *can* predicate over quantifiers. We could write "the Nothing nothings" as something like the following: $N(\neg\exists x.Px)$, and then express properties of this nothing-ing predicate as appropriate. So even on his own terms, given the advances in

logic since the article was written, Carnap's argument fails. He acknowledges as much in later writings (SOURCE), but still maintains that his interpretation of Heidegger is correct. How does he claim this?

Even if we are to predicate over nothing, this form is highly unwieldy, and does little to explain exactly what Heidegger is trying to do by substantiating nothing.

Putting the Question Correctly

Carnap and Heidegger both emphasized the importance of language to our understanding of the world. While Heidegger explicitly used poetic language to speak about what lies beyond science, Carnap believed that that which science cannot formalize should explicitly be avoided in philosophical discourse. Any extrascientific influence is akin to metaphysics: it cannot be formalized, and so should be avoided. In fact, it can be actively dangerous. Carnap worried that metaphysical language, though its claims are unverifiable, could have "psychological impacts" which could influence by an appeal to authority rather than to reason. This was not without good cause: Gogarten and Heidegger would both endorse the Nazi party. (Damböck 2022)

The logical positivists preferred to analyze the logical structure of scientific language over material analysis. This is directly reflected in the title of Carnap's first major work, *The Logical Structure of the World* .[1] In this book he would proceed from the atomic structures of our reason to construct an entire empirical worldview supposedly capable of recreating the world of science. His aim is to show the unified basis of all the sciences, that is, to show that there is only one proper science, and that the separation of the sciences into epistemologically and ontologically distinct subfields is a mistake. In line with the rest of the circle, this was to be done through conceptual reduction and reconstruction. At the time of writing, Carnap's focus was to create a single

1. I will refer to this book as the *Aufbau*.

constructional system which would underlie the sciences. As his work matured, and by the time of his later major work, *The Logical Syntax of Language* , he would shift his view to accommodate flexibility in the choice of the formal system. He calls this the principle of tolerance. "Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e. his own form of language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods clearly, and give syntactical rules instead of philosophical arguments." (*Syntax,* §17) Nonetheless, the method of logical reduction and the autopsychological basis of scientific theory holds. This basis is directly related to Husserl's through the use of the *epoche*, or the bracketing of psychological experiences as real or unreal (see *Aufbau,* §64). Instead of proposing a realm of abstract entities alongside the conceptual connections between them, Carnap would propose only the logical structure, with the objects of that structure taken to be entirely arbitrary.

Carnap and his circle's strict adherence to their scientific aims, and their rejection of metaphysics, is directly influenced by their political goals. Carnap writes in the preface to the *Aufbau*,

> our confidence ... stems from ... the belief that [metaphysics and theology] belong to the past. We feel that there is an inner kinship between the attitude on which our philosophical work is founded and the intellectual attitude which presently manifests in entirely different walks of life. ... It is an orientation which demands clarity everywhere, but which realizes that the fabric of life can never quite be comprehended. ... Our work is carried by the faith that this attitude will win the future. (Carnap 2003, xvii–xviii)

The work of the *Aufbau* and the rest of his corpus can only be explained by a pragmatic choice, the choice to pursue the method which has so far given us the most progress in science, and which promises, according to the value theory held by the group, to provide the most equitable and prosperous conditions for mankind. His justification for the scientific worldview thus appeals to the political and social aims of the leftist movements of the 20th century.

Conclusion

Carnap and Hiedegger come to opposite conclusions from the same background. Both wish to confront the incommensurability of facts and meaning. Carnap does so by expunging meaning from scientific discourse, leaving it to the poets to sort out. For Carnap, scientific discourse is central. Logic ought to guide us more than the irrational whims of desire; it is left to the poets to express these "attitudes toward life." Although both agree that the sciences are preceeded by the emotions, and that in life we are always already experiencing some attitude toward the world, they disagree about what this means for human life. Heidegger takes the ontical primacy of the emotions as evidence of their philosophical priority. If we are to orient ourselves to the world in a meaningful manner, we must think through our moods and our emotions; rather than viewing them as a useful but irrational orientatating schema, we ought to consider them as precisely indicative of a relation to the world. Only through an analysis of this sort can we come to understand how we ought to relate to the world. However, the primacy of emotive, orienting rationality is not to deny the categorical rationality of logic. The difference in our author's positions becomes clear in their stances towards language. For Carnap, formal syntax is the proper mode of scientific communication, and thus the only way to properly enunciate an idea (where by "idea" we mean the formal, Kantian notion of an idea: that of an empirical statement about the world).

Political and geospatial differences fuelled the distance that Carnap and Heidegger felt from each other, despite working from similar grounds. If we are able to overcome these differences to see the throughline, perhaps we could reinvigorate a more linguistic turn in analytic value theory.

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