

THE FOLKLORE OF THE MIND

RADU J. BOGDAN

A distinguished wise man, Emil Cioran, with whom I share a country of birth and the thought that follows, said once that the two most interesting things in life are gossip and metaphysics. I can hardly think of a more self evident and enjoyable truth, if wisely construed. This volume combines the two pleasures, for it is an exercise in the metaphysics of wise gossip, of how we make sense of each other, and how, as a result we interpret, explain, rationalize and evaluate our representations and actions. The body of wisdom which allows us to do all this is currently called folk or common sense psychology. I will also call it psychofolklore or the folklore of the mind.

The folklore of the mind has probably been around for as long as minds have. People were so used to it that they rarely asked serious questions about its nature and modus operandi. Little appeared to be at stake. Not anymore. There is now a surprising surge of interest in our psychofolklore. The stakes are high. It is not that we want to understand the mind. We always wanted that. It is rather that now, unlike in the past, our psychofolklore has a role to play in our understanding of the mind. Why such a role, and what could it be? It is true that common sense provides the home language in which we conceptualize the mind. It is also true that, when cleverly reconstructed by philosophers and opposed to science, common sense psychology appears to offer ideological support

and protection by portraying the mind as special, unique and different from the rest of nature, and thus irreducible to physical matter and its laws.

But there must be more than that. The distant universe has always been of interest to ordinary people, which is why they came up with folk astronomy. In clever hands, folk astronomy too was put to useful ideological work: we are in the center of the universe, everything revolves around the earth, and other reassuring stuff like this. Folk astronomy wasn't a capricious invention. It was based on solid folksy evidence: it looked that way to most people. It still does. (One recent poll, reported in a recent *ECONOMIST*, reveals that only 34% of Britons know that the earth goes around the sun and that it takes a year to do so. One fifth of the Britons are also reported to think the earth is hurtling around the sun once a day. Must be pretty dizzy in Britain.) And yet folk astronomy has been effectively marginalized, mostly because its scientific counterpart works so much better and visibly so.

So why this sudden importance of common sense psychology? Why hasn't it been marginalized by the sciences of cognition? There are in fact two questions that we are asking here. One is about ordinary folk generally: Why is common sense psychology a guide to their understanding of the mind? Another is about philosophers and perhaps some scientists: Why, in this age of science and expertise, do they cling professionally to a piece of folkloric wisdom? These questions need not, and are not likely to, receive the same answers. Ordinary folk must manage in life, while the philosophers and the scientists worry about the intrinsic properties of the mind. Since an introduction is not a place to

provide answers to questions, the best I can offer is a sketchy map, followed by a few invited articles, to help the reader find a way to some answer.

THREE PSYCHOLOGIES. Our wisdom about the mind, as about most things, is of two kinds, folkloric and scientific. The folklore of the mind, unlike the folklore of anything else, comes in two versions, one subjective and naive, the other public and common sensical. We can think of subjective and naive psychology as based on spontaneous, unreflective, immediate and private access to the phenomenal data of our mental life. The phenomenal data need not be only in the form of specific sensations (such as color impressions), feelings (such as pain) or generalized states (moods). They could also reveal attitudes (such as beliefs and desires) or processes (such as thinking). The phenomenal access is limited in scope and rather superficial in reach. Subjective and naive psychology represents a natural first person stance from where we are aware of some of the outputs of our cognition and volition. We learn our subjective and naive psychology by simply exercising our cognitive and conative abilities such as vision, memory, language, planning, inferring, desiring, planning, and the like. We all are natural and fairly good subjective and naive psychologists.

Common sense psychology appears to be a different thing altogether, even though it involves plenty of subjective and naive psychologizing. Common sense psychology relies on an elaborate and powerful social practice of interpersonal attribution and evaluation of cognition and behavior. The common sense concepts appear to reflect

not only properties of cognition and behavior but also environmental facts as well as social norms and conventions. We learn how to make common sense of, or interpret, each other as part of our becoming social beings. And again, we are natural and fairly good common sense psychologists.

The scientific psychology of cognition and behavior, a historically late development, studies mostly the information processing mechanisms and operations which define our competence for cognition and behavior. We learn scientific psychology by going to school, taking the right classes, reading the right professional books and articles, talking to the right people, and so on. There are different ways of doing scientific psychology, some better than others, but all aspire to making psychology a science of the psyche based on operational definitions, theoretical concepts and laws, backed by empirical evidence, careful experiment and formal simulation. In recent years, people talk of a comprehensive alliance of the sciences of cognition, from psychology and linguistics to the neurosciences. To accommodate this development, I will talk of cognitive science as the larger class, of which scientific (cognitive) psychology is a distinguished member.

For easy reference and discussion, I will summarize the trilateral distinction just introduced as follows:

COGSCIENCE. Cognition and behavior are driven by data structures encoded in distinct forms (symbols, visual images, formal structures, sentences, etc.) and processed in various patterns (representation, computation, inference, relevance relations, etc.) in distinct but often interacting cognitive modalities (visual, linguistic, memory, etc.).

SUBJECTIVITY. We have phenomenal access to the outputs of our internal structures and processes in the form of images, sensations, feelings, pains, as well as attitudes and control states.

COMMON SENSE. Guided by social and linguistic norms, we attribute thoughts, beliefs, desires, and the like to others in terms of which we then endeavor to characterize their cognitive and conative states and explain, predict, and evaluate their cognition and behavior.

SOME HISTORY. Each of these three paradigms has had its day of intellectual glory when it was thought to hold the theoretical key to the understanding of the mind. SUBJECTIVITY came first. Descartes, the early British empiricists, later the German psychologists inspired by Wundt and Brentano, the sense data analysts, Husserl's phenomenologists and many logical empiricists have all in various ways tried to fortify SUBJECTIVITY into a disciplined and motivated logos of the mind. The enterprise was essentially epistemological. Mesmerized by the immediate certainty of the phenomenal data of sensation and consciousness, and suspicious of anything that is not reconstructed from such certainty, most of these philosophers were looking for a powerful method (clear and distinct ideas, internal reflection, introspection, reduction, analysis, and so on) to rigorously reassemble the human psyche from its phenomenal atoms. The mind was what the philosophically trained inner eye could see, rigorously and infallibly. The epistemological reconstruction of the psyche was thought to deliver its theoretical explanation as well.

SUBJECTIVITY ended up being challenged from two main directions. Its scientific hopes were dashed by behaviorism which pointed out, quite effectively, that the privacy and indubitability of internal experiences do not make for a good science of the psyche. Behaviorism also downgraded dramatically the psychological importance of the internal workings of cognition. At about the same time (the first decades of this century), a number of philosophers with positivist or behaviorist sympathies (Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle and Quine, among others) were resisting both the epistemological ideal of SUBJECTIVITY and the explanatory role of the structures and mechanisms operative in cognition, and were turning toward the ordinary language and the social practices of communication, interpretation, and translation. COMMON SENSE was gaining ground. In the '50's and 60's the use of the mentalist fragment of the ordinary language and the practices of attitude attribution and meaning interpretation became prominent objects of philosophical inquiry. The result was rather deflationary: the mind is either a manner of talking about behavior, or else a manner of talking about our sociolinguistic practices and interactions.

Two largely parallel developments then started to put pressure on this deflationary COMMON SENSE. One was the computational study of language and cognition, stimulated and motivated mostly by Chomsky's work in linguistics, and by advances in computer science in general, and their applications to cognitive matters (vision, language understanding, artificial intelligence) in particular. The computer metaphor of the mind was gaining tremendous popularity either as heuristic frame of conceptualization, or indeed as a possibly very realistic description. COGSCIENCE was taking over. The other, not unrelated development was

taking place in philosophy of mind. It came in the form of functionalism, a doctrine which encourages philosophers to construe the mind as a program for cognition, in terms of inputs, internal instructions and executions, and outputs. This is a construal which deliberately ignores both the hardware implementation of the program and (possibly as a consequence) the phenomenal accompaniments of the program execution.

The computer metaphor and functionalism are natural allies when it comes to understanding the mind. The computer metaphor of the mind makes functionalism not only intuitively attractive but philosophically respectable as well. Many philosophers like the detachment of program from hardware. Some even see in this detachment the latest version of the mind-body distinction. Others like any approach that frees them from the obligation to worry about hardware and other empirical matters. Yet, even more importantly, functionalism ushers in a new vision and utilization of COMMON SENSE. Functionalism provides a bridge between folklore and psychology by allowing folklore to have a say in how to think of the functional construals of mental and behavioral states, and hence of the subject matter of psychology. The assumption (or bet) is that our COMMON SENSE knowledge cannot possibly be about the bodily hardware, and being COMMON cannot be about subjective and private experiences. So it must be about the functional roles of our mental states. Three options for the functionalist utilization of COMMON SENSE have so far emerged: the interpretational, the heuristic, and the realist.

Both the interpretational and the heuristic options regard our common sense attributions and explanations as approximating rationality

and practicality assumptions of the deductive, inductive, decisional and pragmatic sort. Both regard our psychofolklore as an implicit and normative (as opposed to a descriptive) paradigm of the functional program of the mind. The two options differ, however, in how they see the relation between COMMON SENSE and COGSCIENCE. The interpretational view was notoriously articulated by Davidson (1980; 1984). It shows the influence of the earlier deflationary conception of Quine, and even reminds one of the still earlier German speculations (Dilthey, Gadamer) about hermeneutics and the human sciences. The interpretational view defends the autonomy of psychology and its irreducibility to the sciences of cognitive design and hardware. On this view, psychology is in the business of interpretation, or explanation from representation and motive, as opposed to the explanation from natural kinds and laws, typical of the hard sciences.

The heuristic view (best articulated by Dennett, 1981; 1987) construes our psychofolklore as a normative guide to the functional design of the mind. The common sense notions do not tell us how the mind works but they suggest how to look at it, if we want to find out how it works. After it shows the way, COMMON SENSE is dispensable; the real conceptual and explanatory work belongs to the sciences of cognitive design and hardware. By contrast, the realist option construes COMMON SENSE as an implicit but descriptive theory of the functional joints of the mental program (Harman, 1973). The common sense notions and attributions are fully descriptive and explanatory because the implicit functionalist theory embodied in our psychofolklore is generally true of the mind. As a result, COMMON SENSE should inspire COGSCIENCE, and

end up being absorbed by and reduced to it (Fodor, 1975; 1987; and Pylyshyn, 1984).

The opposition to any scientifically respectable treatment of COMMON SENSE remains vehement, and is reminiscent in tone and intensity of the turn of century reaction of behaviorism against SUBJECTIVITY. For what is at stake on both occasions is the very nature of the scientific enterprise. The puritanic defenders of science cannot tolerate the very thought that our folklore can have anything true to say about anything, let alone such a complex and elusive object of inquiry as human cognition. This is the ideological premise of eliminativism. Its position (best represented by P. M. Churchland, 1979; and Stich, 1983) is that the COMMON SENSE notions and generalizations are false and capture nothing at all, least of all the functional joints of cognition. COGSCIENCE will slowly but surely take care of everything, in its own terms, and at a level of abstraction totally incommensurate with that of folklore.

MODUS OPERANDI. Much more energy, imagination and ink have been spent on the comparative virtues of COMMON SENSE (how it fares with respect to science in general, and COGSCIENCE in particular) than on how it works. With so much at stake, one would expect numerous speculations and analyses of how our folklore engages the mind, and how its notions, attributions and explanations operate. In fact, such speculations and analyses are rather few and mostly traditional. Perhaps the most popular is the one (probably) initiated by Hobbes. He writes that:

[T]here is another saying ... by which they might learn truly to read one another...Nosce teipsum, Read thyself ... [which was meant] to teach us that, for the similitude of the thoughts and Passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth when he does think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c., and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and Passions of all other men upon the like occasions. I say the similitude of Passions, which are the same in all men, desire, feare, hope, &c.; not the similitude of the objects of the Passions, which are the things desired, feared, hoped, &c. For these the constitution individuall, and particular education do so vary, and they are so easie to be kept from our knowledge... And though by mens actions wee do discover their designe sometimes; yet to do it without comparing them with our own, and distinguishing all circumstances, by which the case may come to be altered, is to decypher without a key. (Hobbes, 1651/1968, pp. 82-83).

The Hobbsian equation is that COMMON SENSE = SUBJECTIVITY + PROJECTION ONTO THE OTHER under an assumption of similar design. (Hobbes is probably the first serious cognitive scientist. He is also the one who thought that cognition is mechanical computation over mental symbols.) Wisely, the Hobbsian equation covers only attitudes and operations, not their contents, for, given what they have to represent, mental contents can hardly be determined with any rigor and reliability. Hobbes' projection gambit has its contemporary followers (Quine, 1960; Stich, 1983; and many others), not only in philosophy but also in

psychology. Nicolas Humphrey, for example, writes that:

Nature's solution to the problem of doing psychology has been to give to every member of the human species both the power and inclination to use a privileged picture of his own self as a model for what it is like to be another person (Humphrey, 1983, p. 6).

There is a problem with the Hobbsian equation. The problem is that PROJECTION and SUBJECTIVITY may fail to apply to the same entities. What is being introspected need not be what is projected onto another. How do we know, when internally scanning our phenomenal data, that what we access are states and attitudes such as beliefs, desires and intentions, as publicly conceptualized by COMMON SENSE, and not unprojectible images, feels, or even formulae in mentalese? Saying that we call what we introspect 'beliefs' or 'passions' is not going to help. For how do we know that such COMMON SENSE concepts as those of belief or passion capture internal and phenomenal states in the very form in which they are accessed?

The problem faced by the Hobbsian is not that different from Hume's puzzle about personal identity. I may look inside me for my I-ness but see no separate and recognizable type of entity that the personal pronoun 'I' could pick up; I only see fleeting sensations of various sorts, a headful of them. What am I going to project onto the other when I want to grasp her use of 'I' from my introspective basis? The Hobbsian case for PROJECTION faces a similar puzzle. One looks inside oneself but may see no type of entity that the words 'belief' and 'desire' could pick up; one only sees

what Hume saw. Of course, people believe and desire, for they are designed this way, and must have the required concepts to identify and attribute the attitudes. For, when one looketh into oneself and considereth what one doth when he does think, opine, reason, fear, &c., one presumably knoweth what one must look for. One already hath the concept of an attitude and its content. Or else, how would one know what look for, and how would one recognize what one has found? Those concepts must therefore come from sources other than introspection. The SUBJECTIVITY leg of the Hobbsian equation of COMMON SENSE is rather shaky.

But there is life after Hobbes. Language, a social game whose rules require some internal representation, is there to bridge the gap -- to some extent. Here is Quine:

In indirect quotation [when we describe someone's belief] we project ourselves into what, from his remarks and other indications, we imagine the speaker's state of mind to have been, and then we say what, in our language, is natural and relevant for us in the state thus feigned [...] We find ourselves attributing beliefs, wishes and strivings even to creatures lacking the power of speech, such is our dramatic virtuosity. We project ourselves into what from his behavior we imagine a mouse's state of mind to have been, dramatize it as a belief, wish, or striving, verbalized as seems relevant and natural to us in the state thus feigned (Quine 1960, p. 219, my square brackets).

Quine's insight amalgamates the Hobbsian introspection of attitudes

with the reconstruction of their content from linguistic and behavioral clues. Among recent attempts to develop Quine's insight, Stich's (1983) stands out as a systematic and pragmatically sensitive effort to turn projection into set of similarity judgments based on functional (internal role), ideological (fit with other cognitive states), causal (history of the cognitive content) and social (context and prevailing norms) parameters. As in Quine's, there is in Stich's analysis less emphasis on introspection and more on what language and other general assumptions or practical guesses can do to anchor our projections.

Yet the linguistic and behavioral strategy of projection from inside faces some of the same problems we found with Hobbes' approach. Quine made them famous in the guise of problems of translation and radical interpretation. How do I, the sense maker, know that my words mean the same as those of the person I must make sense of? More generally, how do I know what the other is like, cognitively? These questions have led to the philosophically foundational project known as RADICAL INTERPRETATION. It is radical because it starts from scratch: very little, if anything, is either known or assumed about the person whose mental life is interpreted; and it is interpretation because it starts from the person's utterances, and other relevant cognitive and behavioral clues, and proceeds to determine what she means, believes, desires, and so forth. Interpretation is a reconstruction of mind from speech, with the aim of identifying the concepts, beliefs, and other attitudes which can explain or rationalize behavior. There are different strategies of radical interpretation. The best known are Quine's (1960), Davidson's (1984), and Lewis's (1983). It is not clear that these authors meant their

theories of radical interpretation to be theories of common sense psychology, although one could expect some overlap. But, given the urgent pressures of life, the common sense psychologist can hardly afford to be a radical interpreter, and is more likely to be a pragmatic interpreter of the sort envisaged by Stich. Yet one can look at the theories of radical interpretation as attempts to make explicit, step by careful step, the various assumptions that COMMON SENSE must have made to do its interpretational job.

There is finally a truly huge literature, which I do not dare even to sample, on the common sense notions of propositional attitudes (belief, desire, thought, intention, etc.) analyzed either as linguistic forms, with plenty of logical and semantic properties, or as cognitive structures with informational and functional properties. Although they purport to tell us a good deal about how we understand and use such notions, the resulting analyses are not necessarily part of comprehensive theories of common sense psychology, nor (therefore) are they always subject to the evidence and constraints of real life common sense making.

THIS VOLUME. This is the general background against which the reader is invited to consider the papers written for this volume. They represent a rich variety of positions on common sense psychology, from critical to supportive, from exegetical to speculative. Some of the papers address the matter of the intellectual identity and motivation of common sense psychology (Bennett, Churchland, Morton, Wilkes, Bogdan): Is it an empirical theory, a body of analytic knowledge, a practice or strategy? If it is a legitimate enterprise, can it be naturalized (Morton, Bogdan) or not

(McGinn)? If it isn't a legitimate enterprise, can it be eliminated (Churchland) or not quite (Rosenberg)? And how does common sense psychology work? Analytically (Bennett), or as a method of empirical explanation (Churchland, Rosenberg), or by various clever strategies with explanatory (Morton) or practical import (Bogdan)? And is the fate of common sense psychology tied in with our understanding of consciousness (McGinn, Wilkes)? Should we approach the concepts and generalizations of common sense psychology from the standpoint of conceptual analysis (Bennett) or philosophy of science (Cummins)?

That was the broad picture. Now some more details. I begin with the friends of common sense. Jonathan Bennett ("Analysis without Noise") is one of them. He finds common sense psychology a good tool for social cooperation, and hence inherently worthy of study. He also finds common sense psychology mostly made of analytic statements and generalizations, hence not much of an empirical theory, which is why his approach to it is that of conceptual analysis. But an analysis without noise -- that is, without the bizarre thought experiments (Searle's on the Chinese Room Thinker, and variants) which challenge and check on our conceptual intuitions without providing an informative account of how the sources of those intuitions, our common sense concepts, really work. Bennett's own account is teleological. It motivates the common sense concepts of belief, desire, and the like as essentially explanatory.

Adam Morton ("The Inevitability of Folk Psychology") is also a friend of common sense. The thesis he is arguing for is that common sense psychology is a natural, inevitable and rational conceptual strategy for understanding complex cognitive systems like ours, not unlike those

recently deployed in physics to explain chaos and other forms of high complexity. At the center of the common sense strategy is the "differential explanation" in terms of which we track the perception and action of an agent. Any common sense concept of mind we may come up with is based on this explanatory strategy. But differential or tracking explanation leaves a gap between perception and volition, a gap which (in our culture) is filled by a conception of practical reasoning in terms of beliefs and desires.

This author ("Common Sense Naturalized") is also friendly to common sense, shares with Adam Morton the view that common sense psychology is a natural, inevitable and rather good device for tracking the cognitive and behavioral conditions of agents, but resists any assimilation of common sense policies and inferences to those of science. Far from being a theory, common sense making is a practice whose main function is not to explain cognition and behavior but rather to represent an agent so as to obtain relevant information about the world or the agent himself, in a context. The common sense making practice is the exercise of a specialized cognitive competence which must have been motivated by imperative biosocial needs. The common sense notions owe their success, not to how well they represent the mind (for they have no such theoretical function), but rather to how well they practically exploit conditions of an agent, and track his cognition, volition and behavior, in order to provide another agent with the needed information.

We now turn to the folks who would rather do without common sense. Paul Churchland ("Folk Psychology and the Explanation of Human Behavior") is certainly no friend of common sense psychology. He is an all

out eliminativist. His paper reexamines the notion that common sense psychology is an empirically false theory of human beings, a notion that he has articulated and defended over the years. Churchland still finds this notion eminently plausible but now in need of an important and consequential revision. It was wrong (Churchland argues) for him and other eliminativists, who regard common sense as a body of false empirical knowledge, to construe this knowledge linguistically, as an internally stored set of sentences. It is much more probable that, like the rest of our knowledge, the common sense knowledge of other persons takes the form of prototypes represented by neural connectionist networks.

Alex Rosenberg ("How Is Eliminative Materialism Possible?") is no friend of common sense psychology either. He is, however, a dialectical eliminativist. He thinks that eliminativism must concede a few things to save its core thesis. The reason for concessive dialectics is that Rosenberg takes seriously the charges that eliminativism may be incoherent or self defeating because its very formulation and truth depend on the existence of representational states with meaning, which are believed and acted upon, and so on, all of the latter being assumptions and categories of common sense psychology --that is, the very framework that eliminativism charges with falsity, meaninglessness and elimination. Rosenberg also considers the slightly weaker charge that eliminativism may be incredible because it entails the falsity of all the causal claims made in terms of common sense psychology. His solution is to reconcile the truth of singular causal statements made by common sense psychology with the irremediable falsity of the latter's concepts

and generalizations.

Robert Cummins ("Methodological Reflections on Belief") seems rather neutral about common sense psychology but urgently recommends an empirical study of it, if we want to make up our minds about what is going on. What Cummins finds instead in most of the fashionable philosophical literature is a misguided and fruitless attempt to turn arm-chair semantics and conceptual analysis into psychology. As a result, we have a notion of belief which is academic, lacks any empirical basis, and may have nothing to do with how common sense psychology works. Cummins examines the steps which have lead to this impasse. His advice to the philosophers of belief and other attitudes is: Change gears, and do philosophy of science!

Most discussions of common sense psychology are about propositional attitudes. Colin McGinn's ("Consciousness and Content") is about consciousness, a topic that most philosophers of mind and common sense avoid and would rather not think about. McGinn's paper tells us why. A naturalistic account of intentionality (content) must also explain consciousness. Failure to explain the latter results in failure to understand the former, for the conscious and the intentional are two sides of the same mental coin. The trouble is that consciousness is bound to remain a mystery, forever. Whereas many philosophers have felt this way, McGinn argues for this dramatic limitation by suggesting that we are cognitively closed with respect to the phenomenon of consciousness. The phenomenon is real and determinative of intentionality but beyond our comprehension. Since the notions of content and consciousness belong to common sense psychology, it would appear that, by a reductio, McGinn's

thesis favors eliminativism. But McGinn's point is somewhat different. He finds consciousness a robust phenomenon, a datum, and finds its inexplicability a serious reason to doubt that common sense psychology could ever be naturalized.

McGinn's story connects interestingly with that told by Kathleen Wilkes ("The Long Past and the Short History"). She has argued for some time that scientific and common sense psychology are about different and often totally incommensurate things, by having different objectives which they pursue by using different methods and making different assumptions. Why, then, the competition? Because of the stubborn cartesian equation of mind with consciousness, an equation which favors common sense psychology. In spite of all disclaimers, from those of early behaviorists to the more recent ones of cognitive scientists, that consciousness does not matter in scientific psychology, the cartesian equation remains, for most philosophers, definitive of the mental, and acts as a criterion of success in understanding the mental. This cannot but place scientific and common sense psychology on either a collision or an unnecessarily comparative course.

I conclude with a small sample of the recent literature on common sense psychology. Like this introduction, it is meant to give the reader a first guide to the literature. I begin with the works cited above and then add a few more titles. I have generally included only those works which explicitly worry about and explore the nature and objectives of common sense psychology. I have not included the much more numerous works in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, epistemology and ethics, which examine, and have many interesting things to say about, our

common sense psychological concepts, such as those of belief, desire, perception and the like, but which do not aim at either questioning and examining common sense psychology itself or the deeper nature and functions of its concepts. Likewise, I have not included the very many books and articles which assume the position of common sense, and its truth or usefulness, but do not examine its motivation, function, psychological operation and intellectual validity.

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MIND AND COMMON SENSE

PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS ON COMMON SENSE PSYCHOLOGY

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