

# NIETZSCHE, ZARATHUSTRA, AND THE THREE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE SPIRIT: POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF GAME.

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## Introduction

This text will reflect on the use of the word game at the end of the parable “On the Three Metamorphosis of the spirit”, in Friedrich Nietzsche’s masterpiece *Thus spoke Zarathustra (Z)*<sup>1</sup>. With this, we think we are able to contribute to the accumulated discussion in philosophy of sport<sup>2</sup> from an indirect stimulus, meaning, it is evident that Nietzsche did not have in mind discussing the phenomenon of game but, in using the term, even if allegor-

1 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

2 Philosophy of sport constitutes a relatively new discipline in the area of Philosophy, Kinesiology and correlate areas (such as Physical Education and Sport Sciences). We could trace the institutionalization of the discipline and the concentration of research under this nomenclature starting in the early 70s.

ically, the acuteness of the German philosopher’s thought may open for us fields of reflection that have been little explored in the area. With this, we do not wish to rewrite the concept of game, and even less so to reveal imperfections in its historic rubric. Rather, Nietzschean reflection may foment debates and increment perceptions. What possible interpretations about game at the end of the parable could we realize? Would this excerpt have some contribution to the reigning notion of game?

The reception of Nietzsche in the philosophy of sport is still incipient, having as one of its major representatives Yunus Tuncel<sup>3</sup>, but it appears in works of more applied and thematic character, such as those of Aggerholm<sup>4</sup>, Aggerholm and Larsen<sup>5</sup>, and Kilpatrick<sup>6</sup>, to name a few. The reasons of this incipient effect may be traced back to the predominance of research coming from analytic philosophy in the discipline<sup>7</sup>, although this distinction from continental philosophy was more eminent in the initial years of philosophy of sport as we know it nowadays.<sup>8</sup>

3 Tuncel, Yunus. *Agon in Nietzsche*. Marquette University Press, 2013; Tuncel, Yunus. “Defeat, Loss, Death, and Sacrifice in Sport”. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 409-23.; Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, pp. 349-63.; Tuncel, Yunus. “The Aesthetic and Ecstatic Dimensions of Soccer: Towards a Philosophy of Sport”. *Soccer & Society*. vol. 18, no 2-3, 2017, pp. 181-87.

4 Aggerholm, Kenneth. “Existential Philosophy and Sport.” *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

5 Aggerholm, Kenneth and Signe Højbjerg Larsen. “Bubbles & Squat - Did Dionysus Just Sneak Into the Fitness Centre?”. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2018, pp. 189-203.

6 Kilpatrick, David. “Nietzsche’s Arsenal”. *Soccer and Philosophy*, edited by Ted Richards, Open Court, 2010, pp. 37-46.

7 McNamee, Mike. “Sport, Ethics and Philosophy; Context, History, Prospects”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-6.

8 Moe, Verner F. “The Philosophy of Sport and Continental Philosophy”. *The Bloomsbury Companion to the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Cesar R. Torres, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 52-65.

Many authors have delved into the game thematic through the years.<sup>9</sup> Although this is a topic of broad debate inside philosophy of sport, the definition of Bernard Suits<sup>10</sup> has without a doubt been influential in the area's international academic scene, which maintains in its shortest version that: "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." There is also a large number of works destined to comprehend the game phenomenon, as well as some initiatives encompassing the work of Nietzsche, such as Hyland<sup>11</sup> and Tuncel<sup>12</sup>. Nietzsche uses the term game in his work a few times, although authors such as Tuncel<sup>13</sup> understand that play is a key-notion to understand his thought.

Having done this preamble, we will present the paths treaded to achieve the purposes intended here. We will begin with the presentation of the metamorphosis of the spirit and the concept of game presented in the excerpt of the Nietzschean work. Concomitantly, we will explore other terms, such as innocence, active forgetting, among others used by Nietzsche to build the passage that serves as inspiration and motto to the reflection proposed here. Afterwards, we allude to the concept of free spirit and thus produce nexuses of intelligibility for that which we propose here as player spirit, which serves as an antidote to the herd morality and to a kind of passive resentment. That said, the objective that emerges is to present a more vital and, in turn, more affirmative conception before life's vicissitudes and paroxysms, out of the player spirit.

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9 Some studies such as Meier's (1981) point to a continuum between play-game-sport in many works, while others such as Carlson's (2011) detect metaphysical confusions in classic authors in the area and suggest a clarification and conflation between terms. To avoid eventual confusions: we will margin ourselves by the term "game" comprehending that, here, it also carries aspects of what some interpretations would perhaps state as being more accurately described by spirit of "play", since the German term originally appearing in the passage (*Spiel*) conflates both meanings.

10 Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, And Utopia*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2014, p. 43.

11 Hyland, Drew A. *The Question of Play*. University Press of America, Inc., 1984.

12 Tuncel, Yunus. "Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture". *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no 4, 2016, pp. 349-63.

13 *Idem*.

## Reflections and Developments

Let us start by highlighting the passage in question, at the end of the parable "On the Three Metamorphosis of the Spirit", after the philosopher has communicated to us how the herd individual, facing the desert, metamorphizes first into a camel, then into a lion, and finally into a child. The Camel is the one who stands the weight of the thou-shalt and does not perish, while the Lion is the one who frees themselves from the weight of the thou-shalt, opening space for creation. But, in this unfolding, of what is the child able that the Camel and the Lion could not? Let us read Nietzsche (Z: 1 "On the Three Metamorphoses"):

The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying. Yes, for the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred yes-saying is required. The spirit wants its will, the one lost to the world now wins its own world.

It is important to underline that the mention of the child does not correspond to a nostalgic vision maintained by the author. On the contrary, the philosopher sets himself against this attempt at returning. We think the Nietzsches's intent is to work on the acting of the child, comprehend this dynamic, this movement. In order to do so, Nietzsche begins the paragraph with a provocative and controversial term. Inside the discussion, what could be characterized as innocence? Would it be a romantic connotation? Would it be one of the distinctive elements of the child? Would innocence be a basal condition to the activity of creation and affirmation of becoming?

Maybe we can start from the comprehension that innocence presents itself as a necessary characteristic to the acting of the child and, through this path, assume a certain freedom and detachment this child has in the face of the "Thou-shalt". This innocent state reveals itself thus, as a certain detachment from what is established as good and correct, good and evil. An acceptance

and affirmation of the inexorable march of the becoming. An active and affirmative innocence to create new values. An action that does not possess, in such an imperative form, the weight of gravity that compels towards the absence of movement or towards the morbidity that invites to renunciation. It seems to us that moral values, when facing innocence, present themselves as sandcastles close to the sea and, thus, regardless of the effort to raise them, there is no braking the movement of uninterrupted creation and destruction. The child's innocence plays with this game of creation and destruction not because of a presupposition of the castle's ephemerality (which would be of the order of reason), but rather of its lightness, its precarity, placing ephemerality on the game, not on the castle. Certainly, a form of affirmation of life and a legitimizing of becoming.

The philosopher – in his first writings, dating from the 1870's – mentions the forgetting, a term dear to Nietzsche's thought, and he uses it from some distinct perspectives that, in a first glance, may look contradictory or paradoxical. Forgetting, conceived in a passive way, may be comprehended as the tendency to the maintenance of truths. The attachment to the feeling of security and control which the concepts associated with the sensation of truth, may provide is an illusory one. We were the ones who built the concepts ourselves and, thus, attributed transcendental or absolute values to them, enslaving the creator to the creature. For Nietzsche, this perspective of passive forgetting collaborates to our tolerating and not affirming the inevitable contradiction of the world.

Forgetting, in the philosopher's thought, can also be comprehended as an active and affirmative faculty, as a force promoting life.<sup>14</sup> It is not, therefore, a facilitator to escape reality, which would be more related to the capacity of forgetting oneself as a being of the herd. The forgetting of the man of cre-

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14 Niemeyer, Christian, editor. *Léxico de Nietzsche*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2014.; Tuncel, Yunus. "Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture". *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, 349-63.

ation is of another order which is not that of the herd apathy. The detachment from the fixation of models and beliefs demonstrates that it is sometimes necessary to forget the effort to comprehend suffering, say yes to life even when facing the incomprehensible, without the recourse of metaphysical palliatives, while in other others, a vital action of play in the face of existence is necessary.<sup>15</sup> This attitude appears to be, in the parable, an attribute of the child and, of course, not an attribute of the Camel, neither of the Lion. The thou-shalt holds from the innocence and from the game, for the obligation occupies the space of creation. A superficial reading or counterargument could assume that the child spirit, as it does not bow to the moral weight of the thou-shalt, frees itself from all obligation, of all social contract, which is, at its extreme, impeditive to the game itself and an attitude non-compatible with social life. But it is necessary for us to understand that, for Nietzsche, "spirit" does not entail a metaphysical comprehension, on the contrary, it inscribes itself in the history and in becoming as energetic and technic.<sup>16</sup>

In *Human, all Too Human* (HH),<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche presents the "free spirit" in tune with these forces we here see in the Child of *Zarathustra*. For our philosopher, these "free spirits" do not in fact exist, meaning, it is not a matter of finding them in reality and separate them from the horde of their contraries, as a segregationist reading could assume. It is rather a matter of a search or quest, which leads us to understanding that these are also the figures of the Camel, the Lion and, above all, of the Child. Spirits are at play in the search of a technical disposition that is energetic and affirms life. An active forgetting that positions itself as a no-more-wanting the moral tablets' tradition, a freeing oneself from its weight. The insidious load of gravity dilutes itself in the forgetting, without stoic apathy or ascetic suppression, however, but by an active forgetting that also plays with this weight.

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15 Aggerholm, Kenneth. "Existential Philosophy and Sport." *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

16 Beardsworth, Richard. *Nietzsche*. São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 2003.

17 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, all Too Human*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Comprehending that values are arbitrary and contingent constructs makes it possible for us to forget and build another tablet of values that possesses life as base element<sup>18</sup>. However, this process does not occur through the path of denial, but through the affirmation and recognition of the herd condition. It is a condition that, once again, is not stable, just as the ones of the Camel, Lion and Child also aren't – whence the notion of spirit metamorphosis, which in itself certainly engenders mixed states, gray zones and hybridity. Can the very metamorphosis that name the parable be read as a game? Is playing an attitude of the free spirit? In pragmatic terms, game, here by us underlined, appears structurally in every facet of the argument when we avail ourselves to the concepts Nietzsche employs abundantly in his work, demonstrating, so to speak, the potent articulation with the ample concept of play in Nietzsche's philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Further on, we read that this game of the child is “a new beginning”, a “wheel that spins on its own”. Facing a tradition that compels the resounding “thou-shalt” and, with this, many times embargoes creation and movement, active production of a new beginning is all that is left, a “search” in the sense we have already explored. A philosophy which sees “that becoming outstanding has primacy over being outstanding.”<sup>20</sup> A wheel that spins on its own alludes to a creating movement, not happening due to the imposition of external driving forces, namely, moral. In a time of narcissistic tendencies such as ours, in which self-help and self-sufficiency speeches proliferate, once again this passage might be read through distorted lens. We also argue that the moral sense may be recovered by the idea of game. Here, the metaphor would lead us to think that, despite the presence of the rules, what motivates a game is the player spirit of its participants.

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18 Aggerholm, Kenneth. “Existential Philosophy and Sport.” *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

19 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, 349-63.

20 Aggerholm, Kenneth. “Existential Philosophy and Sport.” *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Sport*, edited by Mike McNamee and William J. Morgan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 142-60.

In accordance to the ends intended here, this player spirit dialogues with the free spirit. For the game spirit to be affirmatively active and realized, there is no space for restraints and neither for the weight of gravity that compels to stagnation. The constant flow of becoming is a fundamental premise concerning the impermanence of the very game, and, above all, of life. What interests us here is the strict approximation with multiplicity of forces that the dynamics of the encounter, of the contact and even of the conflict present in playing and in this dynamic of the contradictory which manifests itself in losing and winning. The element of uncertainty and the distancing from the illusory idea of safety are the constant and incessant invitation of the movements. The action mediated by the great noon and other developments may result from this locus of play. In this manner, a strict dialogue with the free spirit is established, which by a restless way of seeing has destroyed morals and has also so done away with religion. Freed from the shackles of conformity, it enters game's nebulous and unstable terrain without the need of previous confirmations. Immersed in the experience's intensity, it fulfils and breaks free of its dependence on metaphysical crutches and, taken by the instant's potency, dignifies life in the here and in the now. As a recourse of autonomy, beyond the destruction of the traditional tablet of morals, proposes new values margined by dispositions of the power and of the “yes to life”. This would be a task of the “free spirit”, a type of nomad spirit, which has in movement and suspicion its operating mechanism. Avid for vagrancy and for what is unwonted, the free spirit is inebriated on the ecstasy of movement and uninterrupted creation and destruction and intoxicating in an immanent way. It affirms, categorically, life's paroxysms and vicissitudes and thus moves on in the process of suspicion, deconstruction, creation and new suspicion. It walks in search of the new and as a good inquisitor, questions every construction that has totalizing pretensions. It questions and escalates the structures which support the lasting maxims and

perceives the hollow innards of such constructions. Imbued with an agonistic and combative behavior, the free spirit tends to hammer all these edifications. Nietzsche (HH) comments that it was not conflict and clash what made society a violent place, but, above all, the convictions on the beliefs that preceded, on many occasions, these conflicts.

We highlight that in no way does this player spirit resemble an inert posture, settled down and passive, that positions itself reactively before norms, as we have already explicated when we discussed the idea of resentment. Even if modern society searches voraciously for stabilization and cries out for a life anchored in safety and stability, the presence of the free spirit baffles and causes an ill-feeling.

There is no way this “game spirit” can be found in the rules themselves and a strict adherence to them does not guarantee playability (which does not mean that their transgression does either). We can also consider that it is common to the practice of games (and here we use plural to designate the various episodes of game) the characteristic of always restarting. A wheel that ceases spinning by the end of the match, but begins again in the new game. Each match is a new reality, that certainly nulls (forgets) previous victories. Favoritism is a rational exercise, but the experience of the game is open at every time the game begins again, also to contradict any expectation or rationality, for “all forms of games, formalized expressions of play, are *interpretations* [...] the act of interpretation can also be construed as a form of play”.<sup>21</sup>

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21 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, p. 353.

Here we face one more turn in which adequation or transgression are equally distinct from technic and energy, spirit’s components that search being free. Now, if the search for this free spirit is made by the game, in order to deepen our specific question, could we here name this search “spirit of game”? Repeating our strategy, we ask a generous patience from the reader: we cannot go so far without entering original affirmations about such an established philosophy as is Nietzsche’s, which is not our objective. But it seems to have been demonstrated that the approximation is pragmatically productive in order to think game as a spirit resembling a certain conceptual constellation of the philosopher, thus constructing intelligible nexuses between Nietzschean philosophy’s potency and possibilities of understanding in the field of game.

But what risks might the “spirit of game” face in a way that is not spontaneously present in the game? Would it be possible to assume threats or a decadent configuration that results in the corruption of such a spirit? As a spirit of power, would it not be plausible to assume that it would always impose itself?

What the philosopher reminds us – and which once again is here relevant – is that the forces of resentment are also voracious and, in their struggle for power, they impose themselves over an affirmative vision of life. By extension, resentment forces in the game are those which would somehow aim to suffocate the spirit of game. Thus acting, resentment forces would have the role of diminishing the potency of the game, relegating it to a superfluous plane, affirming it as empty fun, and negating it as a world view. These forces point to a type of bad conscience that would result in a simplistic moralism justified by the fetish of rationality. Moreover, such elements flirt in a repugnant way with a paternalistic behavior, an unreasonable formalism that looks for a unique justification and the true answer to all questions springing from experience. What’s more, intents to solve and neutralize conflicts may come to rise. And to what end would such demobilizing forces act? To execute a transvaluation similar to the one our philosopher

denounces in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>22</sup> we may assume that the elevation of Judeo-Christian moral values in secular life and in ordinary conduct forced a shadow over affirmative expressions, in a way that in the game, the anguish of the losers, incapable of dealing with the wheel of victory and of defeat opted for suppressing the competition of the game. If there are no more winners and losers, as proposed by the most varied pedagogical approaches that argue in favor of cooperation and against any competition, there will be no one dissatisfied. The problem with it is that, by doing so, one also annihilates the game that, now predictable and without danger, can no longer be affirmative, for there is no longer risk and without risk the game is puerile theatrics—a byproduct of a rationalization and the domestication of the instincts.

The game thus domesticated by the forces of resentment does not allow the “Spirit of Game”, because it is robbed of the essential *daemon*, this personified spirit of Greek mythology that animates the transit of forces and of happenings in the *Mythós*. This *daemon* is the Agon, of which the splendor was carefully understood by Yunus Tuncel, revealing to us the marks of this spirit not only in the Nietzschean conception of the Greek universe, but the inheritance it bestows all over the German philosopher’s thought: “What is striking in Nietzsche on agon then is how he makes focused and insightful observations on agon based on what was known at the time, how he retains its symbolic significance, and how he later uses this symbolism in his work.”<sup>23</sup>

If we return to this primordial energy the Greeks had present around the concept of Agon and how it guided distinct aspects of collective life, we will notice that the game seems to be an element contained in this agonistic spirit, which reveals to us much about its dynamic and corroborates a for-

22 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the genealogy of morals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

23 Tuncel, Yunus. *Agon in Nietzsche*. Marquette University Press, 2013, p. 9.

native role of the being’s very autonomy. In other words, the role of resentment over the game spirit, creating obstacles to the formation (Paideia) of the Greek man, as we read in Hawhee:<sup>24</sup> “In the name and spirit of the *agōn*, bodies not only came together, they became bodies, bodies capable of action and (hence) identity formation”.

The spirit of game may be a potent and immanent opening for the becoming. “Play is an arena in which, if left in its immanence, the innocence of life can be *restored*.”<sup>25</sup> A way of affirming life’s misfortunes without the need for the cosmetics of moral and religious delineations, with universal pretensions anchored in the beyond. The game opens a possibility for the transfiguration of the pains and the displeasures into potentiality for beauty and affirmation of life. Affirm the movement of birth and death, light and shadow, creation and destruction as an antidote against resentment and Manichean polarization.

### Possible Conclusions

The game is made, such as we understand in the usual sense of the term in the area, in the experience of movement permeated of order and disorder. The game occurs, thus, in the recreation, given the characteristic of destruction and displacement of the experience of movement. A continuous flow in the experience of reality. About this dynamism of the real, Onfray<sup>26</sup> corroborates: “The cyclic nature of the Real implies that the maximum of wanting and desiring the chosen act be carried.” This is a way of celebrating the existent without deluding ourselves with a utopian idealized tomorrow.

24 Hawhee, Debra. *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Kindle Edition, p. 308.

25 Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche, Sport, and Contemporary Culture”. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, p. 352.

26 Onfray, Michel. *A Sabedoria Trágica: Sobre o Bom Uso de Nietzsche*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora, 2014, p. 99.

If it is not possible to overcome things, neither to transcend them in an idealized conjuncture extricated from the world of here and now, it is possible to inhabit them and take them on. A possibility of affirming life such as it is, and therefore also of a possible transvaluation: to affirmatively inhabit the instant, which was deprecated for ages, so that it can now become an ethical and aesthetical task to be operated by the presence of the spirit of game.

Still concerning this excerpt of the Nietzschean work, attention is necessary to the expression “game of creation”, in the final half of the passage. The expression gathers part of the elements into which we have already delved here, both about game and creation, also advancing into what we may associate to the important Nietzschean concept of transvaluation, not fortunately associated to the very finality of all of Nietzsche’s philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, up to that point, facing the validity of the “Thou shalt”, the holy “saying no” has reigned. Confronting and making justice to his provocative and aphorismatic style, the German philosopher uses the sacred term with an ironic tone, for it satirizes the transcendent character and presents it in an immanent manner. Facing the chaos of the world and life’s absence of meaning, man does not retrocede, neither is he paralyzed: instead he dives, and, by doing so, he abandons metaphysical crutches. This way, he avails himself only to his will as spear and shield. Saying “yes” does not presuppose linearities and certainties, the only guarantee is the movement of creation and destruction. It is, so to speak, the beginning of his own game. Nietzsche alerts and invites us to a sacred saying “yes” to the present moment. An acceptance of the instant as if it would return infinitely. An ethical appeal for life to be lived in its integrity.

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27 Abbagnano, Nicola. *Dicionário de Filosofia*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003, p. 935.

From these movements, the individual is lost from her/his world, because s/he is no longer adequate to the reigning values. After the movement of the three metamorphosis of the spirit, this individual goes beyond moral values of tradition which try to dictate the forms and norms of the game. The world with which Nietzsche is concerned is the one of the “Thou shalt”, trespassed by decadent and sick values inviting to a lack and to a denial of life. Actively affirming life by means of this movement that incessantly creates and destroys itself is the conquering of the autonomy in effect on the affirmation of the instant, in the perennial flow of the contraries, as the Heraclitean dialectics – so dear to Nietzsche – had already announced. As Tuncel<sup>28</sup> puts it, “Life must be taken as a game.”

The game occurs in the constant becoming; in the continuous tense; in the playing; in the movement of the action. Rooted in the world, human being enjoys its presence and accepts the forms which inhabit it. Against the renunciation, the lack and the excess of order, this being practices the overflowing, and an enthusiastic reuniting of the body with itself, or an inebriation, an ecstasy. The game is a constant exercise of creation and destruction and a categorical affirmation of life. It is a way for us to be authors-artists of our own lives, starting with the integral affirmation of the paroxysms and vicissitudes of living (Z). Inspired by the metamorphosis, what would we summarily affirm about game? Its essential component is inebriation, the “Spirit of Game”.

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