The Methodological Way out for Contemporary Philosophical Difficulty

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Abstract

Today's philosophy is not so self-consistent, the difficulty of which actually lies as follows: in the ontological presupposition the domain of its discourse is shrinking, in its theoretical construction it tends to be self-proclaimed, and in its reason construction it shows the tendency of one-sided concern. Philosophical reasons are differentiated and have collapsed. Philosophical reasons of this kind are problematic. They should be reconstructed as a whole. By putting the theoretical orientation of philosophy to such a way that the structural and the historical approaches integrate with each other, we can reconstruct philosophy as a holistic wisdom. This integration is such an approach that reconstructs human cultural reasons as a whole. It is both broad and dialectical. So it is necessary for us to establish an academic mechanism regarding such a wisdom form of the scope of the cultural existence of man, for philosophy is self-consistent only when it can effectively dissolve the notional conflicts between various culture forms of human beings and when it can promote the comprehension and harmony between cultures.

Keywords: the self-consistency of philosophy, dissolution, cultural reasons, holistic reconstruction, academic mechanism

1. Introduction

In the 20th century, the legitimacy of philosophy is seriously challenged. It seems that the reason for philosophy itself to exist was absent since the day it was born. It is not the case, however, seen from the perspective of genetics (Han Caiying, 2008). But since Kant the reason structure of philosophy has become seriously off balance—Philosophy has either high-heartedly closed itself up in the self-admiring tower of ivory, separating itself from the rapid developments of science, or fallen into the whirlpool of the scientific reason, making itself the slave of science. Therefore, since modern times, in the construction of secular knowledge, philosophy has become useless and for this reason, some philosophers have fallen into confusion, leading philosophy to the way to self-dissolution.

Is philosophy really useless? Can human being, the animal of wisdom, only hesitate in the state of separation of, opposition to and conflict between such cultural reasons as scientific, humanistic and religious reasons? Obviously, it is not what we will. Besides, the relationship between the various reasons in the history of human wisdom was not like what it is now (Han Caiying, 2008). Man is an animal whose wisdom keeps on growing higher and higher and whose feelings also keep on developing richer and richer. He needs not only the wisdom to know and change the world, but also the feeling to nourish and pacify his own soul. As a living thing and a social being he needs to seek an outer world for him to live in and meanwhile, as a kind of being who has not only physical needs but also mental ones, he should also seek an inner world in which to nurture his mind. Such needs can be satisfied neither by the scientific, nor the humanistic nor the religious reason alone. It is right here that the usefulness of philosophy lies. By analyzing the essence of the predicament of contemporary philosophy and the harm brought by the collapse of the reason of philosophy itself, this paper discusses the fundamental approach to dissolving the predicament of contemporary philosophy and the academic significance of the integration of various cultural reasons.

2. The Difficulty of Contemporary Philosophy in Its Self-consistency

It is generally thought in the philosophical world that the theoretical forms of philosophy have undergone three developmental stages which include four aspects: the ontology seeks the world's (or part of the world's) Principle (Arche) and Reason; the epistemology seeks the path and manner to realize the (secular and religious) human reasons; the methodology focuses on the route and instrument to know the world while the theory of knowledge explores in what sense knowledge is recognized.

The contemporary typological classification of the theoretical forms of philosophy is, however, only the distinction of the historical typologies of them based on the scope of the problems of philosophy. The formalist classification of this kind has discarded the historical examination of the fission and evolution in the contents of the learning of wisdom and has thus naturally forgotten the historical examination of what philosophy, as the learning of wisdom, concerns in performing its function.

Though we have intuitively seen that the mainstream theoretical forms of philosophy have presented themselves as ontology, epistemology, methodology or theory of knowledge at different historical stages, it doesn't mean that a certain mode of philosophical theory or the mainstream philosophical form at a certain period can designate the total philosophical contents themselves. As a matter of fact any philosophical theory contains—either explicitly or metaphorically or implicitly—such theses and reasons as ontology, epistemology, methodology and theory of knowledge. These aspects of philosophical theses go into One in expressing and suggesting meanings. Then any forms of philosophy have no essential differences in the sense of morphology. The contents of philosophy, however, have been constantly changing over the history. We may say that the mainstream history of Western philosophy appears the history of the shrinking of the learning of wisdom in its contents and function. Of course, it is not inappropriate to make this classification merely in terms of the historical forms of philosophy inside the self-sufficient philosophy. But when facing external questioning and internal reflection, this typological consideration with only the form but no content is unable to save the desperate situation in confronting the external exclusion and the internal self-dissolving. In other words, the predicament of contemporary philosophy lies not in what form it may take on, but essentially in the following: ontologically and axiologically in the shrinkage of the contents and the functions of philosophy in its scope of questions, epistemologically in the opposition between the scientific reason and the humanistic reason, and methodologically in the extremes of adoration for or otherwise exclusion against the formal logic reason.

Historically, each time a new form of philosophy appeared, there appeared actually a philosophy that was directly related logically to the presupposition of its argument and to its theoretical aims instead of simply a theory with a new logical form. As far as the self-consistency of philosophy and the means to realize it are concerned, the consideration from these two aspects is of great importance: in theoretical presuppositions, any philosophy necessarily presupposes a self-evident logical starting point and has therefrom logically constructed legitimate theories; and in theoretical aims, any philosophy seeks to attain perfect presentation of the world it speaks of and has therefrom logically constructed the justification system of that theoretical world and itself, and this demands that this theoretical system is rational at least for the time being.

For the first thing, however, any logically constructed philosophy is not self-sufficiently legitimate or self-consistent because

> In philosophical writings proof should be at a minimum. The whole effort should be to display the self-evidence of basic truths, concerning the nature of things and their connection. It should be noticed that logical proof starts from premises, and that premises are based upon evidence. Thus evidence is presupposed by logic; at least, it is presupposed by the assumption that logic has any importance (Alfred Whitehead,1968:48).

In other words, to assume that logic has any importance, we should base it upon evidence. However, the presupposition—the logical premise of any theory, including philosophy, is not proved. Therefore any theory, including philosophy is only relatively self-evident in its self-consistency or its legitimacy rather than absolutely being so, that is, when we prove or demonstrate the legitimacy of theory itself or the legitimacy in constructing it, its presupposition—the logical premise of it is not proved. Any theory, therefore,   will unavoidably fall into the difficulty of self-consistency because it is parochial in the ontological presupposition of its logical premise.

Second, the self-consistency of any theory including philosophy, is something that is always on the way of being constructed rather than being a one-time shot so the legitimacy of the theory, as a kind of knowledge, is only faith.

> Philosophy, in any proper sense of the term, cannot be proved. For proof is based upon abstraction. Philosophy is either self-evident, or it is not philosophy. The attempt of any philosophic discourse should be to produce self-evidence. Of course it is impossible to achieve any such aim. But, nonetheless, all inference in philosophy is a sign of that imperfection which clings to all human endeavor. The aim of philosophy is sheer disclosure (Alfred Whitehead,1968: 49).

The so-called "to prove logically" is but "the tools for the extension of our imperfect self-evidence" (Alfred Whitehead,1968: 50) Both the Kuhn paradigm and Whitehead's process philosophy have indicated the immediate rationality (or self-consistency) of human wisdom and the possibility of progress, as well as the potential limitations (to be thought of in the future). So we say philosophy at any time is but a stage or a ladder for progress in the history of human wisdom rather than being, also, a one-time shot.

However,

> It is almost universally assumed that the growth of a specialism [of ideas] leaves unaffected the presuppositions as to the perspective of the environment which were sufficient for the initial stages. It cannot be too clearly understood that the expansion of any special topic changes its whole meaning from top to bottom. As the subject matter of a science expands, its relevance to the universe contracts. For it presupposes a more strictly defined environment (Alfred Whitehead,1968: 55).

It is futile to try to dissolve the predicament of philosophy by concerning only what the formalization of philosophy designates because the history of the development of philosophy is one of differentiation-condensation. If philosophy cannot make universal metaphysical formulation of the main types of human wisdom, then its self-consistency and legitimacy are problematic and it will be unnecessary for philosophy itself to exist in the end.

Third, in its relationship to human being, in its value orientation, philosophy is the kind of human wisdom which concerns truth, goodness and beauty. It is the reflection of the spirit of the times. Any specific disciplinary wisdom is therefore only one aspect of human wisdom. We need a kind of learning indeed that can understand on the whole its own wisdom. No matter how philosophy changes in its form, truth, goodness and beauty as a whole should be the indivisible and enduring axiological theme of it. Therefore, it is necessary for philosophy to give a whole concern for the total human culture in its logical presupposition and theoretical forms.

So, the theoretical reality of today's philosophy is the shrinkage of the domain of discourse in the ontological presupposition, the absolute self-exclamation in the theoretical construction, and the one-sided concern in its reason construction. The theoretical reality of wisdom collapse—the human learning of wisdom has undergone the tests of the times, lasting till today on the one hand and is divorced from the whole spirit of the times on the other hand, this is the very essence of the difficulty of the self-consistency of philosophy.

3. Harms of the Collapse of Philosophical Reason Brought by the Shrinkage of the Philosophical Domain of Discourse and its Value Collapse

Richard Rorty thought that "'Reality' and 'truth' are but secular names for a power thought of as awesome". (Richard Rorty, trans. Li You-zheng 2003: 4) Whitehead pointed out that "The notion of a sphere of human knowledge characterized by unalloyed truth is the pet delusion of dogmatists, whether they be theologians, scientists, or humanistic scholars." (Alfred Whitehead,1968: 68-69) Are scientific hypotheses such as the general theory of relativity absolute truth in the cosmoscopic frame? Not necessarily. For the confirmation by experiments (such as those depending on radio telescope) is only the confirmation about a very slim part of the universe, thus to what extent does this confirmation conform to the whole picture? So any way, to what extent do the experimental results conform to the reality and to what extent are they adaptable to the reality? It's all problematic. Scientific reason innately presupposes parochialism and absoluteness in the whole (some /a particular) domain of natural sciences (and their theories). The history of science has shown that in the epistemological sense any scientific theory belongs to a certain historical period, cannot be always right and so has one-sidedness and limitations in knowing the world. Scientific rationalists replace epistemological notions with methodological ideas and parade the physical positivism as the highest standard of human cognitive activities, which is in essence a strategy of suspending humanity.

Truth versus goodness and beauty. The realness of truth is the most universal conception of human's common wisdom, thus is the most universal thing of human culture. Though there are differences between individuals and between groups in what we truly experience, in the sense of philosophy as metaphysics, however, they are mainly differences and changes in the historical course, i.e. the differences are mainly diachronic. In contrast, beauty and goodness incarnate themselves simultaneously in synchronic cultural differences and in differences of historical changes. They incarnate the cultural demand of individuals and groups in their value cognition, thereby making ethnic cultural differences prominent in the aspect of our experience of beauty and our evaluation of the value of goodness. Nevertheless, we should not neglect our pursuit for goodness and beauty on the pretext of cultural differences. It is not proper for the human learning of wisdom to singly keep the pursuit for truth, leaving the pursuit for beauty simply to artists and returning the pursuit for goodness to God or to the natural order. This kind of orientation has in fact gradually narrowed the way for pursuing truth.

In Western philosophy there are no great differences between goodness and beauty, both traditionally having to do directly with being perfect. The core of the philosophical conceptions of truth, goodness and beauty in the West is the searching for a perfect terminator, method or effect. Because of the complexity of the world and the complexity of man himself and because this state of complexity is still lasting, however, the above-mentioned wild wishes will exist only in the everlasting imperfect terminator and method, with only transient imperfect effect, so man can only get transient imperfect satisfaction. Truth, goodness and beauty are not absolute, instead, they are inherently relative.

It is well-known that in ancient Greece there didn't exist obvious distinction and separation in the domain of wisdom. Various human wisdoms can all be called learning. They coexisted harmoniously and peacefully. This was the case not only between the learning of nature and the learning of human being but also between that of nature and that of gods, between that of human being and that of gods. Then from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, the mainstream philosophical reasons of the West changed from the religious reason to the humanistic reason and then to the scientific reason. In the historical changes of the Western philosophical reasons the differentiation of human reason and the opposition of various reasons to each other have accordingly embodied themselves in the philosophical reasons, have thus elicited high-degree differentiation, serious opposition and conflicts of the Western philosophical reasons in their specific forms and contents (Han Caiying, 2008). The shrinkage of the mainstream philosophical reasons in their horizon and contents, and the collapse of them in their intension and function have led to many bad results in contemporary philosophy.

The mainstream contemporary philosophical reason derived from this historical course of the differentiation and collapse of philosophical reasons presents unavoidable limitations: (1) the paradigm of the mainstream philosophical reasons has presented itself most prominently as the paradigm of formal logic and this paradigm of formal logic has become predominated; (2) the object range of human wisdom (or in other words, what human wisdom tries to study) mainly focuses on the natural domain while the matter of man is, as it were, only a matter of folk's common sense; (3) the range of questions of human wisdom focuses only on truth, while the pursuit for goodness and beauty is entrusted to workers of literature and art; (4) positive knowledge has almost become the only legitimate knowledge model in the total framework of social knowledge while knowledge of human's mental experience has become marginalized; (5) the reason of strong power in the past has now turned into (scientific-)technological reason; in the mainstream philosophical reasons, the part of humanity has died, what takes its place is our instrumental reason and (numerical) economic reason in social life (Han Caiying, 2013); (6) what's more pitiable is the collapse of the spirit of the reason of philosophy itself: in the historical process of the differentiation and collapse of the philosophical reasons, philosophers of system are hard to appear because of the complexity of philosophical matters; philosophy exists mainly as a local learning and it is right because of this limitation that the courage of philosophy to reflect on itself and to self-criticize has collapsed and even the courage to reflect on and criticize other kinds of reasons has collapsed, too, causing philosophy to present itself as generally in a state of disorder with neither self-discipline nor discipline from others.

4. Reasons Integration as the Fundamental Approach to Dissolving the Predicament of Contemporary Philosophy

Without doubt, the pursuit for truth and the aspiration for goodness and beauty are the inherent and indispensable demands of human being to seek the existence for himself. In other words, human wisdom is innately related in the range of raising questions and in its range of value, so it's absolutely impossible for philosophy not to be related with the matter of value. To dissolve the above limitations, to perfect philosophy itself, we must restore the metaphysical pursuit of philosophy both in logic and in the reason for justifying its own existence, give answers to the fundamental questions concerning human being, respond to both the current and the historical questions of human being, tackle the common questions of such human cultures as science, humanities and religion etc., draw all the quintessence of human wisdom in the history of philosophical thought, and restore philosophy to the inherent holistic wisdom construction, which deals not only with truth but also with goodness and beauty of human culture. To achieve this theoretical aim, we must place the theoretical orientation of philosophy to such a methodological line on which the structural and the historical approaches couple or integrate with each other.

By structural approach we are discussing the subject from the static perspective: its multi-dimensions and structuredness in the static state. It is a basic approach in the sense of ontology and theory of knowledge which integrates the total human culture both in the logical modality and in the wisdom contents. This approach mainly refers to the multi-dimensional cultural relationships between the knowledge noumenon and the world noumenon in the logical modality and to their structural value connotation in the wisdom contents.

By historical approach we are discussing the subject from the dynamic perspective: the dynamic multi-dimensional evolution and development of human reasons. It is a basic approach in the epistemological and methodological sense which integrates the value connotation of truth, goodness, and beauty as a whole both in the wisdom contents and in the logical modality. This approach mainly refers to the value relationships, which is multi-dimensionally evolving, between the subject and the object/ the object world in the wisdom contents and to their dynamically developing cultural content in the logical modality.

The integration of the structural and the historical approaches, an approach about the holistic reconstruction of human cultural reasons (Han Caiying, 2008), is both an approach of a broad culture horizon and an approach of cultural dialectics. We call "the integration of the structural and the historical approaches" "the approach of cultural dialectics"

because this integration of approaches incarnates the broad culture's holistic and dialectic orientation.

First, in terms of the overall form of philosophical theories, the holistic orientation seeks to draw and integrate the past basic theoretical forms of philosophy including ontology, epistemology, methodology and theory of knowledge; and in terms of the intension of thought the holistic orientation seeks to restore the basic value connotation of truth, goodness, and beauty as a whole, which is what philosophy originally was.

Second, in terms of the theoretical orientation of the forms of ontology and theory of knowledge and of the relationship between the two, the holistic orientation seeks to integrate in the logical modality various human cultural forms and their value connotation, to integrate the logical relationships between the knowledge noumenon and the world noumenon, and thus to realize the holistic multi-dimensional cultural logic relationship between the ontology and theory of knowledge; in terms of the value orientation of the forms of ontology and theory of knowledge and of the relationship between the two, the holistic orientation seeks to realize in the whole value structure of truth, goodness and beauty the philosophical construction of the world in term of ontology and theory of knowledge.

Third, in terms of the theoretical orientation of the forms of epistemology and methodology and of the relationship between the two, the holistic orientation seeks to integrate various cultural relationships and their value meaning, including the relationship between men and that between man and nature, to integrate the logical relationships between the subject and the object/ the object world, and thus to realize the holistic multi-dimensional cultural logic relationship between the epistemology and methodology; in terms of the value orientation of the forms of epistemology and methodology and of the relationship between the two, the holistic orientation seeks to realize in the whole value structure of truth, goodness and beauty the philosophical constructions of the holistic cultural relationship between man and the world epistemologically and methodologically.

Fourth, in terms of the overall form and the intension of thought of philosophical theories, on the basis of the holistic grasp of the history of the evolution of philosophical forms and the holistic grasp of the history of the adjustment of the value meaning of philosophical culture, the holistic orientation seeks to overcome rigidity and incarnate the spirits of the times, to overcome closeness and realize the spirit of openness, thus to realize as much as possible the integrity, self-consistency, rationality and legitimacy of the system of philosophy itself.

Fifth, in examining the value of thought intension the dialectic orientation seeks to maintain necessary tension and dynamic grasp of the correlation between world noumenon and human noumenon, between world noumenon and knowledge noumenon in the epistemological scope and to maintain necessary multi-angle, multi-aspect and multi-level tension and multi-dimensional grasp of the correlation between world noumenon and human noumenon, between world noumenon and knowledge noumenon in the methodological framework; the dialectic orientation seeks to hold the multi-factors and openness both in conception and in value and to restore and reshape the value system of humanity regarding truth and falsehood, goodness and evilness, beauty and ugliness.

Sixth, in terms of the value orientation of the forms of epistemology, methodology and of the relationship between the two, the dialectic orientation seeks to incarnate fully the cultural and historical relationships between man and the world in the sense of truth, goodness, and beauty, to incarnate fully the inner cultural logic relationship between truth, goodness, and beauty of philosophical wisdom. For the theoretical construction of philosophy, the integral construction of the structural and the historical approaches is certainly a dialectical approach rich in cultural meaning both in the epistemological horizon and in the methodological intension.

5. The Integration of Cultural Reasons

Since modern times philosophy has turned into such wisdom form as epistemology and in this sense, what it needs to solve is "how is knowledge possible?" After the linguistic turn in the contemporary times it has turned into such wisdom form as theory of knowledge, and now what it needs to solve is "how is knowledge expressed?" ; and further philosophy has turned into such wisdom as an ontological and axiological wisdom form of postmodern man, and what it needs to solve is "how is knowledge expression undertaken?"

Historically seen, philosophical themes are always changing. It is indeed rational for the philosophical themes and the specific scope of questions to change with the times. But as Jay Schulkin has pointed out, "The dawn and crowning feature in the evolution of rationality is valuation. (Jay Schulkin, 1992: 40)" "The evolution of rationality means going beyond crude egoism to recognize the life plan of others as being pivotal for one's own attainment of happiness. Realizing one's own life plans requires that one recognizes those of others. One way to do this is to recognize their experiences. (Jay Schulkin, 1992: 39)" Furthermore, though the focuses of philosophy can be different with different times and questions, the whole horizon and scope of discourse of philosophy cannot be changed at will. Although philosophy does not necessarily have absolute universal validity, it is necessary for it to have universality (or universalism), because the latter is the most fundamental quality of philosophy as a kind of wisdom. Philosophy will

survive any uncertainties, doubts and queries about it, as human being is always seeking some greater and loftier state of wisdom.

We have seen that what postmodern philosophy—that which has transcended the postmodern philosophy, to be exact—needs to solve is to restore on the basis of contemporary theory of knowledge what philosophy originally was. The interaction of deconstruction and reconstruction that try to transcend postmodern philosophy contains the possibility for philosophy to develop further. This kind of restoration and development mainly manifest themselves in the four respects: (1) the searching for the root of knowledge; (2) the searching for the form of knowledge; (3) the searching for the meaning of knowledge; and (4) the searching for the usefulness of knowledge. How the root is formed, how the knowledge and reality accord with each other, how the meaning is possible and how the usefulness is realized—all these are the kernel problems for philosophy to solve. This elicits such questions directly related to the value orientation of philosophy itself as "What exactly is what the philosophical reason and the philosophical logic directly point to?" "What exactly is the interpretation for the meaning of philosophy itself and what exactly is its reasoning?" and "Exactly on what basis is philosophical reasoning realized?"

We say not so much "Kein Ding ist, wo das Wort gebricht" like Heidegger as "beyond human being there is nothing," for putting aside the existence of human being any talking about existence is meaningless: Who is talking and who can talk (about existence) apart from the existence of man! No philosophy can eliminate or elude the logical premise of "It is man who exists" in the ontological or metaphysical sense. In the last analysis neither the epistemology nor the methodology can eliminate or elude the fundamental question of "Who is it that strives to know?" Neither can theory of knowledge eliminate or elude the question of the relationship between knowledge and the world. As a matter of fact the logicality of any mode of reason or in another word the reliability, rationality, self-consistency and legitimacy of the effectiveness of logic lies fundamentally in the value presupposition of the evaluation for the effectiveness of this reliability, rationality, self- consistency and legitimacy.

So it is necessary to establish an academic mechanism concerning the scope of man's cultural existence so that in the sense of rational coupling, various cultural reasons have an appropriate interphase to see both differences and commonality. This will allow various cultures to share a common rational basis of ontology, methodology and theory of knowledge, to share a basic interphase on which to have epistemological evaluation and to have dialogues, thus to directly reply to or respond to the heckling currently emerging or put forth . The core of cultural reasons lies fundamentally in this: In the most general sense, what do we human beings seek? The self-consistency of philosophy lies in whether it can effectively dissolve the notional conflicts between various cultures of human being and whether it can promote the comprehension and harmony between various cultures.

"The progress of systematized knowledge has a double aspect. There is progress in the discovery of the intricacies of composition which that system admits. There is also progress in the discovery of the limitations of the system in its omission to indicate its dependence upon environmental coordinations of modes of existence which have essential relevance to the entities within the system.(Alfred Whitehead,1968: 74) " On the one hand, history as a process presents itself as concrete facts and their coupling in time; on the other hand, logical reason is fundamentally a relational reason between men and between man and nature, reflecting essentially the diversity of cultural reasons. Such reasons will not only combine human's desire to trace the source of the authentic nature but also integrate the lofty ideal of man himself to pursue truth, goodness and beauty.

The ontology, epistemology, methodology and theory of knowledge of the cultural approach which transcends postmodern philosophy have the characteristics of being relational, integral and dialectical in human cultural value. The cultural dialectics acknowledges both the subjectivity, the initiative and the finiteness, ethical limits as well as the self-control of reasons; it acknowledges both nature's objectivity and infiniteness and its subjectivity and finiteness (in terms of our cognition of nature) and thus acknowledges the objective agreement between the natural world and man. Such cultural theoretical model can be seen as the historical reaction to philosophy and the metaphysical reconstruction of philosophy itself. But it is not only ontological and epistemological, more importantly it is methodological and reflective. We are to reconstruct from the thought of complexity, from the philosophy of process, phenomenology and hermeneutics, the philosophical reason on the basis of the historical reflection on the paradigms of the philosophical reason, accepting other rational factors/patterns and the criticism of postmodernism.

As Wartofsky has pointed out, in the dual sense of the construction and reflection of philosophy itself, "Philosophy is nothing if not a dedicated search for coherence, for the synthesis of what we know in one field with what we know in others. (Marx W. Wartofsky, 1969: 5)" We must see clearly that human reasons are diverse, so the philosophical reason should not close itself up in the self-admiring tower of ivory, causing itself to flicker and wobble in the whirlpool of diverse human reasons. To undertake such a mission, to overcome the defect of itself in reasonableness, to go out of the crisis of itself in legitimacy and to go out of the dilemma of itself in self-consistency, contemporary philosophy needs

first to integrate various human cultural reasons, to seek the dimension for common value pursuit of various reasons and the academic paradigms for various academic cultures to comprehend each other, and thus to actively seek the self-consistency of itself that is in accord with the times.

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