**TRANSPERSONAL REALITY: EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE**

***ABSTRACT:*** There is a transpersonal reality behind the doors of perception. This reality manifest itself in observable world in such diverse areas as psychology, physics, and biology. This paper explores the evidence in these diverse disciplines, discusses the need for a paradigm change which recognizes the importance of considering non-material influences which the transpersonal realm exerts on the physical world, and concludes with examples of individuals who have experienced this super-ordinate realm, noting the similarities in their descriptions of those experiences.

“What matters, what’s at the heart of the subject, is whether there exists realms that challenge convention by suggesting that what we’ve long thought to be *the* universe is only one component of a far grander, perhaps far stranger, and mostly hidden reality” (Greene 5).

“We may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing the books and hearing the conversation, but having no idea of the meaning of it all” (James 771).

The two quotes above, one from an Oxford educated physicist and one from an early founder of modern psychology, hint at a reality behind the doors of perception which we struggle to understand. I will present the theories of prominent experts in such diverse fields as psychology, physics, and biology which describe extra-dimensional sources of influence on the material world and how that influence manifests in the perceptual world we experience daily. I will also discuss several cases in which this transpersonal, super-ordinate reality was experienced and how such experienced influenced the individual’s sense of the sacred.

Jung’s “collective unconscious,” Bohm’s “implicate order,” and Sheldrake’s “morphogenetic field” are all descriptive of one transpersonal super-ordinate source of influence on the material world which originates in this hidden, ultimate reality. This is the same reality which Corbett alludes to in the introduction to his text wherein he states, “I feel deeply that there is a Reality that is the source of our being…” (Corbett, 2012, p. 1).

This paper is organized into seven sections. The first section discusses the nature of the hidden realm which provides evidence of its existence. The second section explores Jung’s concept of the unconscious and the archetypes which influence the psyche. The third section delves into Bohm’s implicate and explicate theory of quantum physics which treats the entire realm of existence, hidden and manifest, as an unbroken, interconnected whole. The fourth section seeks to explain Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenesis and how that theory accommodates the ideas of both Jung and Bohm. The fifth section discusses the problems encountered in attempting to legitimize the study of this hidden realm. The sixth section provides a cogent argument against the materialist’s denial of the existence of this realm. The seventh section summarizes the arguments presented.

**Nature of the transpersonal realm**

This hidden, transpersonal realm is behind Huxley’s doors of perception but manifests in the visible world. Its existence can be inferred from its effects on the visible world. It exerts an influence on:

1. The psyche through the operation of archetypal constituents, including experiences of the numinous;
2. The micro world through its effect on quantum wave/particles which exhibit properties such as quantum entanglement which are not explainable in Newtonian scientific terms.
3. Animate and inanimate matter through morphogenetic fields.

Corbett has argued that transpersonal depth psychologists have no need to know the true nature of the divine, that the nature of the divine is the province of metaphysicians. He maintains that the transpersonal Self provides the archetypal grand plan of the personal Self like an architect. Furthermore, he asserts that depth psychologists are only concerned with the direct *experience* of the transpersonal realm by the individual. I do not take issue with Corbett’s assertion that we have no need to know the true nature of the divine. However, I maintain that it is important to investigate the evidence of this hidden or divine realm because, continuing with Corbett’s metaphor of an architect, we should try to understand what drives this “archetypal grand plan”. I also maintain that by informing a depth psychologist’s patient of the evidence for the existence of a hidden or divine realm the therapist can reinforce the numinous experiences the patient may have had or reduce their anxiety.

Ken Wilbur, a transpersonal psychologist, also sees the benefits of exploring other disciplines. He has extended his studies into the areas of philosophy, mysticism, and quantum physics. Wilbur views transpersonal psychology as “a sustained and experimental inquiry into spiritual, transcendental, or perennial philosophical concerns” (Parish, 2006, p. 106).

Stanislav Grof, a Czech psychiatrist, is also sympathetic to the idea of a hidden or ultimate reality

Western science recognizes only those phenomena that can be objectively observed and measured; perennial philosophy acknowledges an entire hierarchy of realities -some of them manifest, others hidden under ordinary circumstances and directly observable only in certain special states of consciousness (Grof, 1983, p. 14).

The ‘perennial philosophy’ or philosophia perennis, alluded to by both Wilbur and Grof, had its genesis in the writings of Leibniz. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was a brilliant German philosopher who believed, along with Plato, Descartes and Spinoza, that human reason was capable of discovering the nature of the ultimate, hidden, divine reality. In more recent times, Aldous Huxley introduced the term to denote the metaphysical recognition of a hidden, divine transpersonal reality behind the everyday world of perception (Huxley 1944).

Paul Davies, a physicist at Arizona State University, is one of a growing number of scientists open to the idea of a hidden or divine realm. In his book *The Mind of God* he notes:

“Sooner or later we all have to accept something as given, whether it is God, or logic, or a set of laws, or some other foundation for existence. Thus, “ultimate” questions will always lie beyond the scope of empirical science as it is usually defined…Among those scientists who are not religious in a conventional sense, many confess to a vague feeling that there is “something” beyond the surface of daily experience, some meaning behind existence…Through my scientific work I have come to believe that the universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot merely accept it as a brute fact” (Davies,1992, pp. 15-16).

**Evidence of the transpersonal reality from psychology**

Carl Jung wrote his biography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* when he was eighty-one years old. In it he recounts his dream discovery of “…a collective a priori beneath the personal psyche” (qtd. in Carr 2003). This a priori is the collective unconscious of the psyche which extends beyond the realm of the personal and may be thought of metaphorically as the mind of God. This collective unconscious, or transpersonal level of the psyche, is seamlessly connected to the individual’s psyche (Corbett Psyche). *Collective unconscious* and *transpersonal self* are terms which are used interchangeably and which reflect the view that there is a “unified field of consciousness that affects inner and outer at the same time”. Corbett argues that the spiritual dimension of the psyche is vast -it may “permeate the entire world of nature, and even the entire cosmos”. Jacobi agrees on the enormity of this dimension, considering the collective unconscious as “…suprapersonal matrix…an inner cosmos as infinite as the cosmos outside us” (qtd. in Carr).

Jung describes the collective unconscious as a collection of “mythological motifs or primordial images…the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969, p. 152). Von Franz considers the unconscious as playing a miraculous role by delivering “models which can be arrived at directly from within without looking at outer facts, and which afterwards seem to fit outer reality” (von Franz, 1980, p. 36).

The archetype, which arises from this “supra-personal matrix,” is considered to be a transpersonal self-organizing principle within consciousness whose origin is unknown (Corbett, 2012, p. 44), and which manifests as images, or symbols in dreams, mythology, synchronicities, and projections (Carr 2003). These archetypes are important to psychology in understanding behavior and they manifest a spiritual principle within the psyche. This spiritual principle is ubiquitous and cannot be considered the unique province of any single religious doctrine (Corbett 2012). All religious traditions incorporate some form of ritualistic behavior, suggesting that such behavior is archetypally influenced.

Jung supported this notion of a spiritual principle within the psyche. He considered the universal belief in spirits to be a direct expression of the archetypal influence of the unconscious (Jung, 1969, p.101). He noted that the collective unconscious can be experienced, but not controlled. He felt that the collective unconscious “…is either the *medium* for the transmission of numinous experiences from a transcendent divinity beyond the psyche, or numinous experience may be a direct experience with the autonomous (objective) psyche itself” (Corbett, 2012, pp. 42-43).

Our understanding of the collective unconscious is that it is a vast, non-material realm. “The reality of this realm is demonstrated by the spontaneous appearance of archetypal forms…” (Taylor, 1992, p. 239). This realm acts upon and influences the personal psyche. One way in which it does this is through the symbolism presented in dreams. A clue that the transpersonal psyche has a message for the individual psyche is in the experiencing of “big dreams”. “Big dreams” is Jung’s colloquial term for archetypal dreams which incorporate a peculiar numinosity (Jung, 1969, p. 306).

Big dreams occasion a numinous experience which causes us to feel as if we are being visited upon by a consciousness different from our own. Corbett compares this experience with the analogy that just as a wave is part of the ocean, the experiencing ego is not in fact separate from the transpersonal level of consciousness (Corbett, 2012, p. 43). Big dreams are the source of deep religious and spiritual beliefs because they often provide a glimpse of the spirits of the recently dead, ghosts, demons, and angels, all of which are archetypal images (Taylor, 2012, 46). Taylor explains that “…dreams always come to bring us to a deeper experience of the Divine…There is a potentially unbroken continuity of experience stretching from the ordinary, limited awareness of ‘me’…all the way to a transcendent awareness of the completeness and oneness and self-identification with the ALL -the Divine” (Taylor, 2012, p. 98). This awareness is a transpersonal moment when the individual realizes that they are experiencing something outside the boundaries of everyday ego consciousness.

Ponte, Valadas, and Schäfer (2013, p. 603) make the following observation concerning the relationship of Jung’s archetypes to quantum physics:

“If we want to characterize Carl Jung’s psychology in one sentence, we can say that Analytical Psychology, embodied in the archetype structure, leads us to the view that there is a part of the world that we can’t see, a realm of reality that doesn’t consist of material things but of non-material forms. These forms are real even though they are invisible because they have the potential to appear in our mind and act in it.”

One way this transpersonal realm influences the material world is through its effects on the psyche; there are, however, other ways in which its effects are manifested in the material world.

**Evidence of the transpersonal reality from physics**

David Bohm was a professor of theoretical physics at Birkbeck College who made significant contributions to the field of quantum physics. His theories involved a new assumption about the nature of matter. He theorized that quantum particles are represented by fluctuations within a quantum field and those particles exhibit a quantum potential. “The quantum potential is…subtle in its form and does not fall off with distance…even objects which are at remote distances from the quantum particle can still have a profound effect on it” … [the quantum potential] (Peat, 1987, p. 168).

This quantum potential has something in common with the mechanism by which Sheldrake’s morphic field acts on an organism (See *Evidence from biology*). Bohm is describing a “…‘place’ from which it is possible to look at the universe we know and all that lies within it and perceive it in a new way” (Singer, 1984, 2). “…particles have to be taken literally as projections of a higher-dimensional reality which cannot be accounted for in terms of any force of interaction between them” (Bohm, 1980, 237). The quantum particles to which Bohm refers exhibit very strange attributes which are observed in ‘wave-particle duality’ and ‘quantum entanglement’.

Wave-particle duality refers to the fact that subatomic units of matter cannot be labeled as waves or particles, but have a dual nature in which they sometimes behave as waves and at other times they manifest as particles, depending on our observation of them and how we have set up to measure them.

Quantum entanglement occurs when our observation of a quantum object causes it to manifest, simultaneously influencing its correlated twin object, irrespective of the distance between the two objects (Goswami, 1993, 9). Einstein was uncomfortable with the phenomenon of quantum entanglement, calling it ‘spooky action at a distance’ (Radin, 2006, p. 14).

Bohm, on the other hand, recognized this universal connectedness of things and events which he considered a basic aspect of quantum reality (Capra, 1999, p. 138). His casual interpretation of the quantum potential “suggests that matter has orders that are closer to that of a mind than to a simple mechanical order” (Peat, 1987, p. 169). Bohm believed that there was a deeper reality than that which was detectable through our senses. He called the implicate order “an undivided holistic realm that is beyond concepts like space-time, matter, or energy” (Radin, 2006, p. 254). ‘Implicate order’ comes from the verb ‘to implicate,’ which means to fold inward. Bohm offered two examples of how this order manifests in the world of everyday reality.

The first example involves placing a drop of ink in a liquid such as glycerin. The glycerin is then stirred very slowly until the drop of ink completely disappears in the glycerin. If the glycerin is then stirred in the opposite direction, the drop of ink reappears. This experiment illustrates an expression of a high degree of *hidden* order (Bohm, 1980, pp. 188-89).

The second example concerns the way in which a television receiver functions. The picture appearing on the television screen has first been viewed through a camera and then transformed into an electrical signal. That signal is then carried by radio waves which are then picked up by an antenna (this was before cable!) and transformed back into an electrical signal which then appears on the television screen. This example illustrates the process of going from visible images to subtler forms of energy and back again to manifest images.

Bernard d’Espagnat of the University of Paris agrees with Bohm’s universal connectedness. He concluded that “The violation of separability seems to imply that in some sense all these objects constitute an indivisible whole.” And agreement on the topic of universal connectedness is ubiquitous: Carr notes “Everything that one sees, hears, tastes, touches, feels, everything in the hear (sic)-and-now, including consciousness, is forever connected…” (Carr, 2003, p. 40). The applicability of quantum entanglement to the macro world has been an important topic of debate among scientists since its discovery. Accepting non-locality means embracing the temporal paradoxes of an instantaneously connected world in which nothing can really be separated from anything else. Non-local ultimate reality is thus the contemporary echo from mathematics of ancient mystic’s claim, “We are all one” (Keutzer, 1982, p. 256).

Bohm further explains the heightened role which consciousness plays in determining reality at all levels. He argues that physical objects and spiritual values share a similar reality (Parrish, 2006, p. 70). This view was shared by Eugene Wigner, who stated that “this [connectedness] is only known position that can be consistent with quantum mechanics” (Parrish, 2006, p. 77).

Bohm elaborated on his thoughts in a dialogue with philosopher Renée Weber. The relevant parts of this exchange are reproduced here (Parrish, 2006, pp. 121-22):

Weber: Mathematics is pure thought.

Bohm: That’s right. You won’t find it anywhere in matter.

Weber: You are saying that even today’s physicists, who might be least inclined toward anything spiritual, are practically forced to assume that it is beyond the material.

Bohm: Physicists may not accept this, but they are attributing qualities to matter that are beyond those usually considered to be material…the mystic sees in matter an immanent principle of unity, and this is implicitly what the scientist is also doing…Matter was found to be far more subtle than we supposed, both for quantum mechanics and relativity.

Weber: Does “subtle” imply spiritual?

Bohm: It moves in that direction.

I interpret this interchange as confirmation of Bohm’s recognition of the spiritual dimension of matter. Although as a physicist he appears to be guarded in his assertions, it is clear that Bohm considered the distinction between matter and spirit to be far less robust than what was assumed in Newtonian physics.

Bohm looked for a model which would illustrate his notion of “undivided wholeness,” and realized that a hologram incorporated features which were consistent with his model. Each small snippet of a holographic image contains the entire image, in contrast to a traditional photograph. He saw the hologram as analogous to the storage area of memory in the brain. Others have argued that memory may not be stored in the brain after all.

Carr relates Jung’s argument that historical repetition has a direct relationship to the stabilization of form. “In discussing the implicate order, Bohm could have been discussing the archetype when he states:

“If you have a large number of repetitions of this…process, you’ll start to build up a fairly constant component to this series of projections and injections. That is, a fixed disposition would become established. The point is that, via this process, past forms would tend to be repeated or replicated in the present, and this is very similar to what Sheldrake calls a morphogenetic field or morphic resonance…such a field would not be located anywhere [in time or space]” (qtd. in Carr, 2003, p. 30).

**Evidence of the transpersonal realm in biology**

Rupert Sheldrake holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Cambridge. He is the author of more than ten books and eighty technical papers so his theories, however unfashionable, unconventional, or unorthodox, deserve to be at least seriously considered. In particular, his theory of morphogenetic fields, mentioned above in the quote from Bohm, has been subjected to harsh criticism and resistance from mainstream science. His book, A New Science of Life, was attacked by senior editor of the prestigious publication *Nature* as ‘pseudo-science’ and ‘worthy of burning’ (Maddox, 1981, pp. 245-46).

Not all scientists condemned Sheldrake’s theories. Stanislav Grof, mentioned earlier, was one of the founders of transpersonal psychology; he offers a different view of Sheldrake’s work:

“Sheldrake has offered a brilliant critique of the limitations of the explanatory power of mechanistic science and its inability to face problems of basic significance in the areas of morphogenesis during individual development and evolution of species, genetics, instinctual and more complex forms of behavior” (Grof, 1983, p. 25).

Sheldrake argues that morphogenetic fields are fields of information which influence the structure and form of both animate and inanimate matter. They embody a kind of knowing, a knowing of *how* to grow and *what* to grow into (Carr p. 47). This idea of fields of knowing is consistent with the new scientific paradigms that originate in quantum physics. Two of these new paradigms are:

1. That at a deep level, there is a dimension of information which creates form out of formlessness.
2. Empty space is not ‘nothingness,’ but rather a fullness and reservoir of non-material intelligence (Parrish, 2006, p. 151).

The influence of this field can be seen in the turning in unison of a flock of birds or a school of fish. The field informs, directs, and holds the individual units of the group together.

Sheldrake maintains that we receive the effects of the past behaviors of our own species, which strikes a similarity with Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious and Bohm’s theory of the implicate order. These morphogenetic fields connect similar things across space, without any known way in which they could be connected (in a Newtonian paradigm) and, he argues, they connect things together across time. These fields, similar to electro-magnetic fields and comparable to Bohm’s television receiver metaphor, are what dictate the shapes of plants and animals. The species is modified by the environment and, in turn, the modified plants and animals exert an influence on the morphogenetic field (Singer, 1984, p. 7). This idea of a ‘feedback loop’ is comparable to what Jung says about archetypes.

In another work by Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At*, he introduces in some detail his theory on extended minds. He suggests that minds are not confined to the heads, but stretch out beyond them (Sheldrake, 2003, p. 263). He skirts the issue of mind-over-matter effects, but argues that there is much evidence that people can influence physical events at a distance through their intentions. A major stumbling block to Sheldrake’s ideas seems to be the absence of an acceptable explanation of how it all works. Sheldrake believes he may have the genesis of that theory with his ideas on extended minds, pointing to an example of psychokinesis, which may be another distinctive feature of a hidden reality:

“In several independent series of experiments, some people were prayed for while others were not. These experiments were conducted according to standard double-blind procedures in clinical trials. The patients themselves did not know they were being prayed for, nor did their physicians. Nevertheless, those who were prayed for without their knowing it tended to survive better or heal more quickly than those who were not prayed for. [Of those who pray] … “most would probably agree that the focusing of their intention provides a channel for healing grace or divine power” (Sheldrake, 2003, p. 265).

Thomas Kuhn, a pioneer in recognizing resistance to new ideas, describes the problem which discoveries made outside the traditional accepted paradigms face in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn’s observations are particularly relevant to the work of Sheldrake because of the staunch resistance and dismissal of his ideas without serious investigation.

Interestingly Heisenberg, a founder of quantum physics, had this to say about scientists in general, which also applies to Sheldrake’s work:

“From what has been said, one would be inclined to demand that the scientist should never rely on special doctrines, never confine his method of thinking to a special philosophy. He should always be prepared to have the foundations of his knowledge changed by new experience” (Heisenberg, 1958, p. 140).

**The need for a paradigm change**

Sheldrake notes that the Cartesian mechanistic paradigm is still the rule rather than the exception today, particularly in biology and medicine. It is also interesting that this materialistic world view arose from ancient ‘mystical’ religions which saw reality as timeless and changeless. Today, the words ‘mystical’ or ‘mysticism’ are eschewed by many scientists (Sheldrake 1987).

Those serious scientists who desire to obtain funding for a research project or have a paper published in a prestigious journal will often go to great lengths to avoid acknowledging or recognizing anything which might be called ‘mysticism.’ But what does this word mean, and why is it so abhorrent to serious scientists? There are many definitions of ‘mysticism’ and doubtless just as many connotations of the term. One definition which is apropos to this discussion is “…a doctrine of an immediate spiritual intuition of truths believed to transcend ordinary understanding…”. The word ‘mysticism’ is avoided because it does not fit in the old Newtonian paradigm; it is, however ever so slowly, gaining respectability in the age of quantum physics.

Physicist and Nobel laureate Richard Feynman had this to say about quantum physics:

“It is my task to convince you *not* to turn away because you don’t understand it [quantum electrodynamics]. You see, my physics students don’t understand it either. That is because *I* don’t understand it. Nobody does” (Feynman, 1985, p. 9).

No one, not even Nobel laureate Feynman, understands quantum physics. And why, since there are so many inexplicable, but mathematically proven attributes of quantum particles, do scientists shun the word ‘mysticism’ which could be helpful in understanding even more about how and why observer participation is a prerequisite for a collapse of the wave function. And if observer participation is requisite for this quantum event, perhaps macro events require observer participation.

An example of two physicists who seek to insulate their work from anything which might be considered ‘mystical’ are Rosenblum and Kuttner:

“Since quantum mechanics can make Nature appear almost *mystical*, some people become susceptible to wholly unjustified notions. They can be misled into accepting supernatural foolishness (Rosenblum and Kuttner, 2011, p. 11) …Sometimes we physicists hesitate to call attention to this strangeness [of quantum mechanics] because *it can make physics seem mystical*” (Rosenblum et. al. p. 103. Italics mine).

But surely it isn’t a great leap to suggest that the strangeness to which Rosenblum and Kuttner refer could justifiably come under the ‘mystical’ rubric. Somewhat surprising is the fact that even today the resistance to a paradigm change which recognizes the proven importance of consciousness in quantum events is unjustifiably resolute.

This same resistance to recognizing how something non-physical (consciousness) can influence the material world impedes the ability to find funding for research programs in other fields, such as extra-sensory perception, and psychokinesis.

A debate between Caltech physicist Sean Carroll and a Buddhist scholar is illustrative. Carroll claims, in reference to the possibility of true psychic powers:

“…we know that there aren’t new particles or forces out there yet to be discovered that would support them. Not simply because we haven’t found them yet, but because we definitely would have found them if they had the right characteristics to give us the requisite powers” (Carroll, 2017)

Later in the debate, Carroll assures us that he knows that there is no ‘life after death’. Carroll is an erudite, eloquent speaker whose confidence and demeanor can mislead those who fail to look more deeply at what is being said. Carroll’s conceit must serve as a caution to all who search for the truth; even highly educated individuals are capable of arguing from ignorance.

In this paper, I have advanced the idea that it is important to explore the manifestations of this hidden, ultimate reality in order to help us understand that there is something missing in the materialist science view of reality. Corbett has stated that many people today often give up on traditional religion because it fails them in times of crisis (Corbett 3). Recognizing and accepting the idea of a super-ordinate realm, a realm with real, tangible evidence available in our day-to-day reality, offers an alternative to those who have abandoned their faith in religious dogma.

**Transpersonal Experience of the super-ordinate reality**

There are numerous ways in which the super-ordinate reality is experienced. This hidden realm is not only inferred, as in the manner set forth above, but may be experienced as the “feeling of the ‘uncanny,’ the thrill of awe or reverence, the sense of independence, of impotence, or of nothingness, or again, the feeling of religious rapture and exaltation” (Otto 1950). These experiences of the super-ordinate are transpersonal: they show the individual a reality beyond ordinary ego consciousness.

Entheogens may also provide one with what might be called a numinous experience of the hidden realm. “For Huxley, there was no question that the drugs gave him access not to the mind of the madman but to a spiritual realm of ineffable beauty” (Pollan 2018).

Michael Pollan, a writer who explored the effects of entheogens on the ‘reducing valve’ feels that when the ego is no longer blocking impressions and meanings during the experience of the numinosum “…what comes through…in a great flood, is love” (353). His experience agrees with that of Huxley who stated, after a session with LSD, “What came through the closed door [of perception] was the realization…the direct, total awareness, from the inside, so to say, of Love as the primary and fundamental cosmic fact” (qtd. in Pollan, 2018, p. 173).

It is not necessary, however, to ingest drugs to experience the hidden realm: Emerson describes his encounter with the numinous in his essay *Nature:*

“In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel nothing can befall me in life, -no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.”

I have demonstrated the weaknesses of the materialists’ argument that the brain is the mind. Aldous Huxley considered the brain as functioning like a reducing valve. To Huxley, “Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us stay alive…” (Huxley, 1954, p. 23). The direct experience of the sacred to which Corbett refers, may be thought of as something which slipped through this ‘valve’. It is not something which arises in the brain but is something that a ‘malfunction in the reducing valve’ has allowed consciousness to experience.

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