

V. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

BIOETHICS DEBATE IN UNITED EUROPE

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ABSTRACT. The American influence on the development of bioethics in Europe cannot be ignored today. Since the early 80s of the last century, many European bioethicists and philosophers have visited universities in North America, accepting secular theories on bioethics without restraint, particularly those principlistic theories of Beauchamp and Childress. The most enthusiastic were the English and the Dutch, and so the continental Europeans are talking about an Anglo-American influence rather than exclusively American bioethics. Despite the import of ideas, Christian values still inspire European bioethics, a challenge through which people try to take the path that leads to God or, on the contrary, it takes them away from Him. Since philosophy and ethics came to be understood today as secular intellectual disciplines, the possibility of implementing Christian bioethics should be evaluated by exploring the differences, but also the values that separate and bring together the two projects.

Keywords: bioethics, philosophy, secular, Christianity, tolerance.

Introduction

Today, when the dominant culture of the European Public Forum is post-Christian, and traditional Christianity can still make its voice be heard, we need to articulate a coherent cultural and moral identity able to remove the confusion and ambiguity that exist in the bioethics debate in Romania.

1. Theology as discourse

The beginning of this century puts us in front of an unusual synthesis between philosophy and theology, where the philosophy not only provides terms and distinctions for the theological reflection, but became itself a source of

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theological knowledge. Here's how, thanks to the techno-sciences penetration in all spheres of activity, an area that until recently belonged exclusively to Holy Fathers and monks who lived and live through God was invaded by astute philosophers, academics and publications trying to convince us, like Adriano Pessina, that “the reasons of faith and philosophy find a decisive meeting place on anthropological level.”¹ Going further with the reflection, Jürgen Habermas requires religion to “agree with the premises of an institutional State, founded on a profane morality”², arguing that Christian churches should reshape their theological messages to please the dominant post-traditional culture, marked by religious and moral pluralism. It is even suggested a non-literal reinterpretation of Christianity and a transformation within the Christian world, in which “charity replaces the truth.”³ In his thinking, the famous Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo urges even the reformulation of the Christian precept of the Gospel, which sets man free, claiming that, in fact, “the truth that has to set us free is true, precisely because it releases us.”⁴ Moving finally within different aspects of the truth, which it dissolves, eventually in liberating size, it is no longer able to obtain but a barren anarchy, religion becomes a simple field for the affirmation of philosophy.⁵

Here is how, given these ground commitments, many Western Christian scholars see theology as a special form of intellectual reflection, and not as a living God experience confusing Orthodox claims to translate into everyday life experiences and teachings of the Holy Fathers with “a person's ability to repeat in an academic way what tradition or Fathers or Ecumenical Councils have said and thought”.⁶

Are not these steps pushing us to displaced beliefs and heretical religious commitments only for the sake of protecting people and tolerate religious groups with cultural beliefs and dissonant behaviour against the majority of population? Against this background, protestant groups are trying to speed up the doctrinal and ecclesiastical changes, distancing them from their own history. We do not wonder then why the Bishop of Canterbury speaks approvingly of priestesses and women bishops, and at the same time, is approaching the assertion of moral equivalence of homosexual and heterosexual unions.⁷

¹ Adriano Pessina, “Antropologia filosofică și problemele de bioetică,” *Bioethica* III, no. 2 (2008): 49-55.

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity, 2003), 405-10.

³ Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *Il futuro della religione* (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), 44-45.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andrei Marga, *Absolutul astăzi. Teologia și filosofia lui Joseph Ratzinger* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2010), 10-11.

⁶ Denis Müller, “Open «Laicity» and Secularity versus Ideological Secularism: Lesson from Switzerland,” *The Journal of Christian Bioethics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 76.

⁷ Herman Tristram Engelhardt jr, *Bioethics and Secular Humanism; The Search for a Common Morality* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 86-100.

Also, the social democratic discourse, which requires a mutual respect that combines tolerance with acceptance, ultimately marks serious theological differences. In this context, the task of the majority is no longer that of making disciples of all nations and in the process the harmonization to proper Christian bioethics (Matthew 28, 19), but engaging in open critical and controversial discussions, within the churches among believers and Christians.⁸

How can Denis Müller equate today's "Christian freedom" with the desideratum "modern values of freedom and justice"⁹, when, for example, people's different representations on sexuality is at the origin of the groups and movements claiming their own social space, which they want to acquire even with their segregation price? We wonder then which can be the limit of tolerance toward minority groups. Of course, we could give an affirmative answer for the national, ethnic, religious minorities but beware, the expression of such an injudicious logic could bring in the future the talk about tolerance towards "murderers", "rapists" "robbers" minorities etc. At the same time, the following thought is taking its place: what to do with this minority group? Should it be exterminated? Obviously not, because the time has long passed since the deadly violence, along with the rise of human ignorance and bioethics should give an answer.¹⁰

Christianities that contemporary philosophers consider exclusivist, as Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, can be labelled by some "heretical", considered external intellectual edifices, namely residues of the past, responsible for

the intellectual and spiritual catastrophe of the human being today, that find in the traditions and practices of the official churches, beautiful clubs of religious and moral friendships.¹¹

Shouldn't we learn from the experience of Western churches which we see struggling in the midst of a crisis of identity, and try to get people to understand that God is a serious matter that He requires a full commitment to religious life and that theological errors should scrupulously identified and corrected, and hence the bioethical ones?

One thing seems certain: religious life flourishes when educated through asceticism, worship and serious commitment and disappears, as we can see from the French Revolution onwards, when it becomes primarily a cultural edifice supported by intellectuals. Of course, theology became here as

⁸ Denis Müller, "The role and the influence of religions in bioethics," in *Global Bioethics*, ed. Ronald M. Green, Aine Donovan, and Steven A. Jauss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 334-56.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mircea Gelu Buta and Iulia Alexandra Buta, *Antropologia filosofică și problemele de bioetică* (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2008), 200.

¹¹ Müller, "Open «Laicity» and Secularity versus Ideological Secularism: Lesson from Switzerland," 76.

well a “science”, as far as we suffered Catholic and Protestant influences, and to the extent that the language of the era we live was imposed to us. We must not forget that in a university and then in a culture where there is a context on Western superiority in all fields, there are people who, in the spirit of the nineteenth century, continue to worship Renaissance, Enlightenment and technological sciences. This is why Nae Ionescu has to sound contemporary to us, because he has succeeded to bring the revenge of the Eastern spirit. A metaphysical and religious victory, from which it has to be understood that our theology is mixed by worship, consubstantial to it and it is inconceivable out of it. Therefore we have few cabinet or editorial theologians, rather abroad scholarship amateur than serving the altar. Our most brilliant teachers themselves put before their name the priestly quality as academics from the faculties of medicine do not leave the specialty title, which, admittedly, they have obtained with so much effort.¹²

2. The Religious and moral geography of Europe

The moral and identity ambiguity of contemporary Europe is caused by a historical, cultural, religious, scientific and philosophical complex that the western and eastern countries have crossed from the Great religious Schism of 1054, when the Christian world was divided between Orthodox and Catholics.

In the sixteenth century, with Luther's Reformation, Catholicism was divided, creating the appearance of the Protestant Church, a name which now designates a multitude of religious communities, including the Lutheran Church, the Calvinist Church, and the Anglican Church

For centuries, the three major churches have evolved following their own way, their dogmatic differences of worship or organization between them increased over time. Moreover, these heresies have decided social, political and institutional evolution of people in Europe, giving rise to different lifestyles. The West rather followed the Old Testament, its constructive effervescent atmosphere its mobility and understood to accumulate. Man in this zone expresses itself through deeds and works, you can see it in what it has undertaken and you wonder. Let's recall quickly the development of natural sciences and technology, the discovery of new continents and the immense riches that come from there to Europe, the radical philosophical ideas about social and political liberalism that followed them, the expansion of the middle class and revolutions to claim its rights, the emergence of a new conception about the state and political power, the emergence of capitalism and the amazing spread of the use of

¹² Mircea Vulcănescu, *Nae Ionescu, așa cum l-am cunoscut*, Ediția a 3-a ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2009), 39-42.

machines in production. The main feature of this historical transformation is the Occidental's effort to master the physical and historical reality with its own powers and possibilities, without recourse to metaphysics' support or religious justifications for its initiatives.

Gradual emancipation of the Roman Catholic Church authority and, ultimately, dissociation to opposition religious element of the mundane in everyday life have become fundamental features of the era of "modern times" in Western Europe.¹³

For example, Germany of the nineteenth century demonstrates the modern victory of Protestantism in good and in bad. From Catholicism remain empty monasteries, charitable programs, social and culinary curiosities. There are, however, recognised civic skills, as the worship of accuracy, the reliability of promises, the value of trust, all secular variations of a religious ethos, specific to the European centre and north.

Unlike Protestantism, valuing and respecting the person, the Eastern polished its self through meditation, and thus gained fullness is seeking to "dispel it in the communion." Love in the Orthodox East did not dilute the authority, but to make from it a form of love. Therefore, the prohibition and reprehension are not regarded by the Orthodox Christian under punitive legal aspect but in a parental way.¹⁴

One must not forget that in the East, the heart always goes before the brain and feeling before logic. Maybe this is the excess of tolerance that is understanding each other, accepting the nuances, the richness and diversity under which reality depicts. On the other hand, avoiding conflict and dispute, Orthodox Christians were able to focus on their faith, to deepen it and to exploit it, rather than dispel their belief outside.

Another problem of the Eastern world is the plan of concrete. An initiative, a solution cannot penetrate conceptually. If you show a man a construction plan, this will shake his hand and will look at you suspiciously. But if he will see, instead, the foundation and workers you will be understood and you will even arise enthusiasm.¹⁵ The East should be treated as a person, not as an "individual" that is to talk to him face to face and do not transmit messages via radio, television or newspapers.

There is some scepticism in the east regarding the spirit of initiative and renewal. You do not have to expose yourself here. Only God takes risks, we do not. Ambition is often associated with shame and denial of the fact leads to duplicity and intrigue. Unlike Western European standards, competition, risk, spectacular initiative, renewal must occur within certain limits. A wealthy

¹³ Mircea Gelu Buta, "Integrarea spirituală a României în Europa și revenirea Europei la bazele sale creștine," *Studia Theologia Orthodoxa* LIV, no. 2009 (2009): 157-62.

¹⁴ Dan Ciachir, *Cronica ortodoxă* (Iași: Timpul, 2001), 10.

¹⁵ Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, *Psihologia poporului român* (București: Paideia, 1999), 11-17.

man can be an example of a good manager, when a too wealthy man already catches the eye, it is out of the ordinary. This contradiction with the European spirit is the fruit of ecumenical, of unanimity or, in other words, a kind of levelling. Moreover, Orthodox communities seem reconciled with the ideals of a civil society than with those of a liberal democracy. The reason would be that they regard the latter as being ground by the competition and confrontation, while the Church works towards community and harmony.

Another feature of orthodoxy is the avoidance of confrontation with the state authorities. This Byzantine concept is actually the spirit of Blessed Augustine, who argued that the gap between the "City of God" and "City of Man" can and must be overcome. Both the State and the Church must work together for the good of the whole community.¹⁶

Regarding the role and the place of religion in postmodern society, a long discussion separates today Europe's political leaders. In their view, the conservatives consider society and consciousness to be generated by divine intention. This connects people through an eternal chain of rights and obligations. Equality between people is a moral one. Society needs to change, because slow change is the means of its conservation and the right tool is the providence.¹⁷

Of course, we can understand the argument of the left, that religion has no place in the constitutional projects, or in a democratic and open society. In this way we risk to disturb the free thinkers who want more than anything to live in a morally neutral society that would respect, therefore, according to their view, the human rights.

The list of challenges that European Union is forced to face the is long: deep economic crisis, excessive taxation, which encourages financial fraud, the painful reforms of security systems and social mechanisms of solidarity, European disunity in important matters of foreign policy, etc. Adding to these the conflicts arising from the attempt to integrate allogene ethnic and religious group we understand the efforts of the MEPs to reform the paradigm of integration policies of the Central and Eastern European countries.¹⁸

3. Christian Bioethics approach in United Europe

In Europe, Christian bioethics occurs amid deep cultural intersections that define the contemporary European situation, especially the conflicts created by interpreting the meaning of being in Europe and being a Christian.

¹⁶ Buta, "Integrarea spirituală a României în Europa și revenirea Europei la bazele sale creștine," 157-62.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Although the dominant culture of the public forum is post-Christian and post-traditional, traditional Christian groups still want to talk to their surrounding culture, but not always able to make their Christian message understood. The result is a complex geography of moral and religious voices.

We hear more and more people say:

I'm not sure if God exists or whether Christ rose from the dead, but I know I am a Roman Catholic or Protestant at least in culture, and am willing to pay to support this culture.¹⁹

If many western European Christians want to transform religion and bioethics in the image and likeness of liberal or social democratic values contained in the dominant secular culture, trying to remove the feeling of dissonance, however, for Orthodox Christians, the task is to live in a continuous experience with God, feeling mandated to lead the secular culture and bioethics in line with the thinking of the Holy Fathers, finally Christianizing that culture. It is a set of beliefs, liturgical and para-liturgical practices capable of generating rather a way of life and a form of identity. In other words, the Romanian Orthodox ethics bears, therefore, in addition to the religious component, the political and legal mark, which in addition to participation demands obedience and conformity with the majority opinion.²⁰

The main concern of European Christian bioethicists, either they are Catholic or Orthodox, is the preservation of their own bioethical traditions and finding common ground with other religious or non-religious visions in the world, especially with the Anglo-American "Principlism" stated by Beauchamp and Childress.²¹ If at first "Principlism" was embraced rather quickly²², today it suffers criticism because it strengthens the secularization of medical profession. When I say secularization, I mean the removal of what we call "the approach of a suffering person in Christian spirit"²³, a practice based on the following principles of bioethics: placing the suffering person into the centre of attention; integral human nature; respect for body and soul; the patient will be regarded as a

¹⁹ Herman Tristram Engelhardt jr, *The Journal of Christian Bioethics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 86-100.

²⁰ Daniel Barbu, *Firea românilor* (București: Nemira, 2004), 121.

²¹ Cristina Gavrilovici, Dana Cojocaru, and Vasile Astărăstoae, "Despre autonomie, vulnerabilitate și fragilitate," *Revista Română de Bioetică* 10, no. 4 (2012): 3-4.

²² Paul Schotsmans, "Christian Bioethics in Europe: In Defence against Reductionist Influences from the United States," *Christian Bioethics. Non-ecumenical studies in medical morality* 15, no. 1 (2009): 20.

²³ The term "closeness" wishes to emphasize that it is really a way to get closer to our fellow suffering, to get in touch with him, with diplomacy, compassion and respect, and on the other hand because gestures and words that our Orthodox Christian faith inspire us must be considered in a near real opportunity and not a artificial restraint.

person; care developed from love; understanding the suffering, need to be heard, and humility before the patient and God; Jesus Christ, the supreme doctor for soul and body, praying for the suffering.²⁴

The prevailing position of “autonomy” in the principlialist vision of health care, explains the success of this concept in a medical system led by the market, like the one in the United States. Undoubtedly, technology development following the profit criteria increased human power over nature, making life much easier. But the two guides of science, utility and effectiveness, often bring conscience conflicts between risks and benefits and individual “autonomy” does not do anything but to transform bioethical discourse in a speech about “bio-law” rather than about bioethics.²⁵ Today, when the “autonomy” of the patient is radicalized, medical services are increasingly pushed to obey the laws of market economy, patients inevitably become their merchandise. What would Hippocrates or Jesus, the son of Sirach, have said about concepts such as: “health services marketing”, “health market”, “waiting list”.²⁶

On the other hand, difficulties in financing health systems have boosted their efforts to streamline, which entails a number of disadvantages, such as limiting access to care, which could be useful for the acquisition and/or maintenance of the patient’s wellbeing. When resources are low, health service planners will determine what will be streamlined. To these inequities of the market economy victims might fall the disadvantaged such as the poor, the elderly, women and children. Morally, rationalization requires the restriction of the individual right to choose, limiting, ultimately, the freedom of expression and movement of society as a whole.²⁷

Unlike “Principlialism”, the impact of hippocratic-Christian tradition, that recognizes the doctor-patient relationship as fundamental to any bioethical discourse continues to dominate European medical thinking.²⁸ In a research project of the European Commission, between 1995-1998, were formulated the basic ethical principles in bioethics and “bio-law”, a guide that helps us know the tradition of European bioethics and to understand why Christian influence cannot be ignored.²⁹

²⁴ Gelu Buta, “Îngrijirea omului bolnav în duh creștin,” *Studia Bioethica* 1, no. 1 (2007): 68-70.

²⁵ Schotsmans, “Christian Bioethics in Europe: In Defence against Reductionist Influences from the United States,” 20.

²⁶ Mircea Gelu Buta, Pavel Chirilă, and Adina Rebeleanu, “Bioetica și identitatea persoanei umane,” *Revista Română de Bioetică* 8-3, no. 4 (2010): 82.

²⁷ Liviu Oprea, “Aspecte etice ale inegalităților sociale în îngrijirile medicale,” *ibid.* 8, no. 2: 8-10.

²⁸ Edmund Daniel Pellegrino and David C. Thomasma, *The Christian virtues in medical practice* (Washington D.C.: George Town University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Jacob Dahl Rendtorff and Peter Kemp, eds., *Basic ethical principles in European bioethics and bio-law II-8* (Copenhagen: Centre for Ethics and Law, 1995).

The first and most important difference between the American and European bioethics is the concept of person. European vision, which goes beyond the minimalist approach of the person, not only focuses on autonomy, but also concerns the concepts of integrity, dignity and vulnerability. The way a human being must be seen and treated in Christian perspective is based on the fact that man was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 27). So each person is wearing this chip, inalienable in its very conscience in the depth of its being. The image of God is the one who gives the absolute value of each human being and makes it sovereignly worthy of respect, whatever its gender, race, age or condition. This means that man is a dynamic being, existing in relationship with the Triune God, whom he imagines and to whom he relates.³⁰

Regarding this subject, it is carefully observed the grammatical plural from the biblical sending on creation of man: "And God said, Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Genesis 1, 26). Holy Fathers see in this the first scriptural revelation on persons of the Trinity.

Regarding the body, the respect that is owed is connected to the fact that it is a constitutive part of the human being, a part of the image of God in man. Moreover, its value is given by the fact that the Son of God, being made human, thus taking human form, sanctified it, so that every human body has become, as Disciple Paul says, "temple of the Holy Spirit" (I, Cor 6.19).³¹ Through the incarnation of the Word, who took upon Himself all of humanity, every man is mysteriously comprised into the body of Christ, as Christ, mysteriously, identifies Himself with each man. Therefore He says that whenever we do something good or harm a neighbour of ours, even the least insignificant of men, we are making Him good or bad. (Matthew 25. 3-46).

It is important to understand that a person's dignity is conferred by God and not people, that is why an embryo or a patient in advanced coma are considered persons of integrity. Here's why infanticide would never be approved and blessed by the Church, which is the conception of the gospel. The sacredness vested by God in a child since conception does not depend on its physical and mental health, nor the quality of his DNA.³²

Today, there are big disagreements regarding the proper understanding of the Christian concept of human dignity, which became the foundation of human rights as a legal instrument to protect human beings. Dignity is universal today and indicates intrinsic value and moral responsibility of every human being. As a result of intersubjective understanding of the dignity, the person must be

³⁰ Buta, Chirilă, and Rebeleanu, "Bioetica și identitatea persoanei umane," 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

regarded as priceless, that means it is not a value which can be lost. Therefore, human beings cannot be objects of trade or commercial transactions, a synthesis that coincides exactly with the fundamental Christian ideas about human dignity.³³

Explicit recognition of human dignity in a Christian sense, explains why the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (European Council, Oviedo, 1997) prohibits financial profits derived from the sale of human body parts (Article 21). This concept of human dignity has clearly emphasised The Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of the European Council, its main purpose being the protection of human dignity in today's and future generations.³⁴

Here's how the Christian principle of person-centred medicine finds a comfortable place in humanizing the health systems.³⁵ As Sebastian Moldovan claims, quoting Stephen Buetow, referring to the analysis of doctor-patient relationship from the models "patient-centred", "relationship-centred" and "person-centred" using heuristically the metaphor "light-dark", it is argued that the superiority of the latest model it is not so much the discharge of shadows (unknown or ignored fiber of the person) in terms of relationship, but the need to recognize both to himself and the other, beyond the public appearance, the interior contextualization and social relations universe of the individual, based on the personal nature of human individuality.³⁶ They also notice that restricting freedom of expression, by imposing some rules "a priori" regarding health care, limits the ability of the physician and patient to engage in a relationship of open communication, aimed to understand each other, as well as itself.³⁷

Human solidarity is another fundamental value of health systems in Europe. Even the idea of European civilization is based on the ideal of social justice, where people are respected unanimously. There is no other Christian concept more convincing than this translation of "incarnation" regarding the prophecy of the Kingdom of God.³⁸ It is a vision of a collective history towards solidarity and fraternity in creating a free and prosperous society. This vision inspires and makes Christians full members of the modern societies³⁹. Even

³³ Schotsmans, "Christian Bioethics in Europe: In Defence against Reductionist Influences from the United States," 20.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mihaela Cătălina Vicol, "The dimension of values in doctor-patient relationship," *Revista Română de Bioetică* II, no. 2 (2013): 3.

³⁶ Sebastian Moldovan, "Centrarea pe persoană în programele pentru recuperarea din adicție ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române," *ibid.*XI, no. 1: 63-78.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Schotsmans, "Christian Bioethics in Europe: In Defence against Reductionist Influences from the United States," 20.

³⁹ Christian ideas about justice and equal access to health care are the foundation of health systems in Europe, mostly built on the idea of collective responsibility. The social network is developed in a way that not only the rich and privileged, but also the poor, the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups have access to health care.

civil law has adopted the concept of social justice which led to a broader conception of state responsibility towards the members of society⁴⁰. Here's an approach that continues to be misunderstood by the organizers of the North American health systems.⁴¹

4. Conclusion

The attempts being made so that the plurality of traditional Christian bioethics concepts to be brought in line with the secular morality, Christian ethics would be missing, so the bioethics it generates, of a moral distinction that would allow it to bring its own contribution.

However, the solution may not be where Western Middle Ages gave us hope in discursive argument, because, as I said, the context for Christian bioethics is the personal discovery. Therefore, any general description of philosophy, theology and bioethics as essentially argumentative and analytical accomplishments, can only be incomplete. Philosophy and thus bioethics decoupled from centring a true wisdom becomes a caricature, as St. John Chrysostom laments it: "There are many analyzes and many reflections, but little moral guidance that you can rely on".⁴²

Regarding the value of Christian bioethics based on a noetic experience (spiritual), the sceptic will wonder: How can anyone argue if there are spiritual experiences? After all, there are demons deceiving.⁴³ The answer is simple: except for a genuine experience of the transcendent, in the light of the true worship and true faith, there is only one path: Try this experience yourself!⁴⁴

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⁴⁰ The ideas of universality, liberty and fraternity are essential principles governing legal structures in the modern state. The liberal creed of personal freedom and responsibility in relation to the specific actions of a free person was replaced with the responsibility for the fate of a citizen.

⁴¹ Schotsmans, "Christian Bioethics in Europe: In Defence against Reductionist Influences from the United States," 20.

⁴² St John Chrysostom, "Homily I on the Gospel of St. Matthew I-10," *NPNF* 1: 5.

⁴³ Engelhardt jr, *Bioethics and Secular Humanism; The Search for a Common Morality*, 22-23; 266.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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