

Corresponding Reasons: on Richard Moran's *The Exchange of Words*

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1. One theme in Richard Moran's rich and rewarding discussion of testimonial beliefs concerns the kinds of reasons that underwrite those beliefs. One variation on that theme involves his attempting to explain a special form of *harmony* that obtains between a speaker and their audience when the speaker tells the audience something and the audience believes the speaker, and so accepts what the speaker tells them. The target form of harmony between speaker and hearer is with respect to the *kinds of reasons* that the former offer to the latter in telling them something, and that the latter take up in believing the former:

In telling her audience something, the speaker aims at being believed, an aim which is manifest to both parties, and which binds the speaker and audience together with respect to a norm of correspondence between the reason offered and the reason accepted. When an act of telling completes itself, speaker and audience are aligned in this way through their mutual recognition of the speaker's role in determining the kind of reason for belief that is up for acceptance, so that when the speaker is believed, there is a nonaccidental relation between the reason presented and the reason accepted. (Moran 2018: 72; unattributed references are to Moran's book.)

A second variation, closely connected with the first, involves Moran in seeking to argue that the reasons that underwrite an audience's believing a speaker, and in that way believing what they are told, cannot be of an *evidential* kind. The variations are connected via the idea that a speaker cannot relate to the reasons that they offer to an audience in telling the audience something in the way that someone is related to what they treat as evidence. That in turn is due to the way in which a speaker must present the audience with reasons in their acts of telling the audience things, a mode of presentation in which the speaker assumes special responsibility for the standing of those reasons. When classified into kinds by appeal to their relations to individual possessors, then, those reasons are not of an evidential kind. Hence, assuming that the form of harmony between speaker and audience that is emphasized in the first

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variation holds with respect to kinds of reasons on that way of classifying reasons into kinds, the audience cannot relate to the reasons they are offered in the way that someone is related to evidence. On that way of classifying reasons into kinds, the audience's reasons cannot, therefore, be evidential.

When Moran's two variations are understood at that level of generality, I think that they have a great deal of plausibility. My questions will concern Moran's understanding of the two variations at levels of greater specificity. In particular, I want to probe Moran's understanding of the distinction between evidential and non-evidential reasons, and his conception of the reasons that speakers offer, and that audiences take up, in cases in which the audience believes the speaker. My approach will be to begin by sketching an account of testimonial reasons that fits the general understanding of Moran's two variations (§2), and then to raise some questions about how, and why, Moran's more specific account differs from the sketch (§3). My hope is to gain clarity about the precise contours of his more specific account.

2. The sketch develops a remark of J. L. Austin's. Austin is considering a situation in which one knows that an animal of some kind is about but not what kind of animal it is. In attempting to settle the latter question, one has been gathering evidence which supports the hypothesis that the animal is a pig. "But," Austin writes,

if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more *evidence* that it's a pig, I can now just *see* that it is, the question is settled. (Austin 1962: 115)

Why does Austin think that the pig's coming into view doesn't provide one with *evidence* that it is a pig?

One line of thought takes off from the plausible idea that acquiring evidence that it is a pig entails coming into possession of a reason to think that it is a pig. Given that idea, for one's seeing the pig to provide one with evidence, it would have to sustain one's possession of a reason to think that it is a pig. But it is plausible that coming into possession of a reason to think something is a matter of coming to know that reason. (See e.g. Hornsby 2007; Moore 1905–6.) Thus, for example, in order for one's reason for thinking that it is a pig to be that it leaves porcine prints, one must know that it leaves porcine prints. So, if one comes into possession of a reason for thinking that it is a pig through seeing the pig, then seeing the pig must enable one to know that reason. And yet seeing the pig seems to enable one to know immediately that it is a pig, and so to acquire that knowledge without deducing it from other facts that one came to know through the perceptual transaction. If that is right, then the only reason one possesses for thinking that it is a pig is the fact that one came to know immediately from seeing the pig: the fact that it is a pig. And now if one held in addition that the fact that it is a pig cannot

be one's reason for thinking that it is a pig, then one would be forced to deny that one had any reasons for thinking that it is a pig, and so to deny that one's thinking so was supported by evidence.

Why might someone hold that the fact that it is a pig cannot be one's reason for thinking that it is a pig? Someone might hold that because they hold that any reason for thinking that it is a pig must be a reason for *coming to think* that it is a pig. More generally, they might hold that a reason for being in the state of thinking that p must also be a reason for entering that state, and so for coming to think that p . On the assumption that knowing that it is a pig requires thinking that it is a pig, it would be impossible to know that it is a pig in advance of thinking that it is a pig. It would therefore be impossible to come to think that it is a pig on the basis of reasons the possession of which depended on knowing that it is a pig. But the fact that it is a pig is such a reason. Since possessing a reason requires knowing it, one can't think something in light of the fact that it is a pig without knowing that it is a pig. So, one cannot come to think that it is a pig in light of the fact that it is a pig. Hence, on the assumption that any reason for thinking that it is a pig must be a reason for coming to think that it is a pig, one cannot think that it is a pig in light of the fact that it is a pig.

Now one might be willing to accept that line of thought with respect to one's thinking that it is a pig. For it is not out of the question that one might possess good reasons for thinking that it is a pig in advance of knowing that it is a pig. However, further applications of the same line of thought carry the consequence that we have no reasons for thinking much of what we think. For any reason for thinking something must be known; and anything one knows must be something one thinks. So, the search for reasons for coming to think things would terminate ultimately in things that one thinks without having come to think them in the light of reasons. With respect to anything that one knows without basing that knowledge on inference from some prior knowledge, one must think it without having come to think it for reasons. And since much of our knowledge is like that, the assumption that any reason for thinking something must be a reason for coming to think it has the consequence that much of what we think is unsupported by reasons.

There are two major options at this stage. First, we might accept that in Austin's case, and other relevantly similar cases, one thinks, for example, that it is a pig without any reason for thinking that. Second, we might reject the assumed connection between reasons for thinking something and reasons for coming to think it. (An array of minor options could also be considered, corresponding to the rejection of other operative assumptions—for example, the assumption that one can think something in light of a reason only if one knows the reason.)

There is doubtless some temptation to take the first option. However, ordinary practice frowns upon thinking things without reasons. It is a commonplace that if one has no reason for thinking something, then one shouldn't think it. Furthermore, it is hard to square our normative concern with the reasons for which people think *some* things with the proposal that there is really nothing wrong with thinking

things for no reason. It is difficult, in particular, to condone the idea that the kind of thinking that goes along with knowing could regularly manifest what would otherwise seem to be an imperfection. (As an aside, it is worth noting that it would be question begging to require that a proponent of the claim that thinking is reason-hungry supply independent reasons for accepting that claim.) One must anyway weigh the costs of accepting the claim that it is regularly acceptable to think something without reasons, even where one also knows it, against the costs of rejecting the assumption that reasons for thinking something must be reasons for coming to think it. When one does so, it becomes far from obvious that the first option is preferable to the second.

If we take the second option, by rejecting the claim that reasons for thinking something must be reasons for coming to think it, then we shed one putative source of support for holding that Austin's subject thinks that it is a pig without reasons. There are, of course, others, but since we are sketching, let's assume that Austin's subject thinks that it is a pig for the reason that it is a pig. If we are nonetheless to agree with Austin that the fact that it is a pig is not evidence that it is a pig, then we must find a route that allows that some reasons are not evidential.

A second line of thought, directed towards that conclusion, then, exploits the idea that the fact that it is a pig is not merely *some* reason to think that it is a pig, but is rather a *conclusive* reason to think so. It couldn't be that it is a pig, in a case in which one knows that it is a pig, and yet that one risks falsity by thinking that it is a pig. So, if one held that what marks off evidence from reasons in general is that evidence is never conclusive, then one would be inclined to deny that, on seeing the pig, Austin's subject acquired evidence that it is a pig. However, we are ordinarily willing to allow that evidence can be conclusive. On coming to know that either the butler or the gardener did it, the detective acquires some evidence concerning the culprit's identity. On coming to know, in addition, that the gardener didn't do it, we are ordinarily willing to allow that the detective is now in possession of better evidence. And yet, since the detective's evidence entails that the butler did it, that evidence is conclusive. If we are right to allow that there can be conclusive evidence, then it cannot be because of its conclusiveness that the fact that it is a pig is not evidence that it is a pig.

A third route to Austin's conclusion seems more promising. The most striking property of the fact that it is a pig, as it figures in Austin's example, is one that was exploited in discussing the first line of thought: one can think that it is a pig in light of that fact, but one cannot *come* to think that it is a pig in light of it. A natural proposal, then, is that it is that feature that marks the distinction between evidential and non-evidential reasons. An evidential reason for thinking something is a reason for thinking so that one can possess—and so, know—without thinking so, and so a reason both for thinking so and for coming to think so. The proposal warrants further testing on a wider variety of examples but it garners some support from its ability to explain Austin's plausible pronouncement about his case. (The proposal might also figure in helping to explain away the initial plausibility of denying that Austin's subject has

a reason to think that it is a pig. For that would seem plausible to someone who identified reasons and evidence whilst adhering to the proposed restriction on evidence.)

On the basis of reflection on Austin's case, we have arrived at the proposal that there can be reasons for thinking something that aren't reasons for coming to think something, and also that one can have reasons for thinking something even when one possessed no reasons for coming to think it. And we have that those reasons for thinking something that are not reasons for coming to think so are non-evidential reasons for thinking so. We sometimes come to think things—for example, on the basis of seeing things—without reason. And we think some such things not on the basis of evidence, but not without reasons. How do those two results bear on the nature of testimonial reasons?

When one comes to know something—for example, that there are pigs about—on the basis of coming to believe someone who tells it to one, one thereby comes to think it too. And it can seem natural to hold that coming to think something on the basis of what someone tells one, as one does when one comes to believe them, requires reasons for doing so. If that seemingly natural thought were correct, then the reasons for coming to believe someone would have to be available to one in advance of believing them, and so in advance of accepting what they tell one. Thus, if one comes to know that there are pigs about by believing someone who tells one that there are pigs about, one's reasons for coming to think that there are pigs about cannot include the fact that there are pigs about. For that fact is available to one as a reason for thinking something only in virtue of one's knowing that there are pigs about, and so thinking that there are pigs about. It cannot, therefore, be one's reason for coming to think that there are pigs about. So, if there are reasons for coming to believe someone who tells one that there are pigs about, then—according to the operative proposal about the demarcation of evidential reasons—those reasons must be evidential reasons. That is the first way in which our results bear on the nature of testimonial reasons.

The second way our results bear is more significant. One aspect of the first result is that the general demand that reasons for thinking things must at the same time be reasons for coming to think those things is regressive, and so must be rejected. A second aspect is that the general demand that one should have reasons for coming to think things, in addition to whatever reasons one has for thinking those things, is similarly regressive, and so must also be rejected. Those results present a challenge to the seemingly natural thought that coming to think something on the basis of what someone tells one, as one does when one comes to believe them, requires reasons for doing so. They indicate that the seemingly natural thought is not supported by a more general demand to the effect that one should have reasons for coming to think things, for there is no such more general demand. If the seemingly natural thought were defensible, then its defence would need to be specific to the case of testimony. And since there are, in fact, no obvious reasons to think that coming to believe someone is subject to special demands that do not apply equally to, for example, coming to believe that there it is a pig on

the basis of seeing the pig, it is not obvious that we should retain the seemingly natural thought.

Furthermore, the result entitles us to pull apart reasons for believing someone—reasons for accepting, and so thinking, that which they tell one—from any reasons one might have for coming to accept, and so coming to think, that which they tell one. And that in turn opens up the possibility that one's reason for believing someone might be a reason that is made available to one only through one's believing them. More specifically, it opens up the possibility that one's reason for believing someone might be the very fact that one comes to know by believing them—in our example, the fact that there are pigs about.

Suppose that we accept all that. That is, suppose that we accept that one needs no reasons for coming to believe someone and that the reasons for believing them that one acquires by believing them are just whatever facts one comes to know by believing them. Since those reasons for thinking something could not be reasons for coming to think so, they are not evidential reasons. Thus, it is a further potential consequence of our results that reasons for believing someone are not evidential. The sketched account thus captures the second of Moran's variations. What about his first variation, the requirement of harmony between the reasons offered by someone who tells one something and the reasons one has for believing them?

Here, a natural development of the sketch is that one who knows that there are pigs about, and expresses their knowledge by telling another that there are pigs about, offers the other that very fact, that there are pigs about, as a reason for thinking so. More generally, one who knows that p and tells another that p offers the other the fact that p as a reason for believing them and so coming to think that p . And one who accepts the offer, and comes thereby both to know that p and to think that p , is one who thinks that p for the very reason that they were offered: the fact that p . So, when the sketch is developed in this way, it provides for a clear way in which speaker and audience are in harmony, in Moran's sense, and so captures the first of Moran's variations.

Furthermore, the sketched account doesn't only sustain harmony in the sense that Moran makes explicit, but does so also in a more demanding sense. Moran's explicit account requires correspondence only between the reasons the speaker offers and the reasons their audience accepts. It therefore leaves open whether there are further requirements of harmony that have to do with correspondences between the speaker's and the audience's reasons for thinking that which the speaker tells the audience. However, insofar as we find Moran's harmony requirement plausible, we might be inclined to favour the more exigent demand that where a speaker who knows that p expresses that knowledge in telling an audience that p , and where the audience believes them that p , and so comes to know that p too, the audience should have the very same reason for thinking that p that the speaker had for thinking that p —namely, the fact that p . And as we've seen, the development of the sketched account sustains harmony between speaker and audience in that more demanding sense.

3. The purpose of the foregoing sketch is comparison, and perhaps contrast, with corresponding elements of Moran's discussion. Two features of Moran's discussion complicate comparison.

The first is that he doesn't provide a fully explicit account of his understanding of the distinction between evidential and non-evidential reasons. We have, for example, first, that "evidence is not dependent on presentation" in the way that non-evidential reasons can be (see, e.g., 45, 57). Moran's thought here is that the audience has a reason to believe what they are told only insofar as the speaker has presented their utterance in the specific ways that are required for them to perform an act of telling their audience something. To a first approximation, his idea is that something's being evidence for a hypothesis, and so a reason for thinking it, is not dependent in the same way on its being freely presented by an agent. And we have, second, that someone in possession of evidence is in a position to "draw her own conclusions," by contrast with someone in possession of non-evidential reasons, who is thereby guided towards specific conclusions by the one offering such reasons (see, e.g., 55, 57, 64). However, it is not entirely straightforward to reconstruct Moran's distinction between evidential and non-evidential reasons on those bases. The two bases would be consistent, for example, with the proposal about the distinction between evidential and non-evidential reasons that is drawn in the sketch, but they don't clearly require that proposal. A first question arises here: whether, and if so why, does Moran's conception of the distinction differ from the proposal made in the sketch.

The second feature of Moran's discussion that complicates comparison is that he is not entirely explicit about what he considers to be the major candidate reasons for believing someone. Here we have, for some examples, the idea that one's reasons for believing someone might be constituted by their speech (see, e.g., 43), a statement (e.g., 48), a speaker's utterance (e.g., 51, 63-64, 66), a speaker's words (e.g., 52, 57-58, 63-64, 69). (On the plausible assumption that reasons are facts, none of the candidates could be reasons. Rather, they would be constituents of reasons, in the sense that operative reasons would be facts about them.) One common characteristic of this list of candidates is that they seem to be *products* of acts of speaking, rather than acts of speaking themselves. One important consequence of their being products of acts would be their aptness to be considered either independently of the ways in which they are presented in acts of speaking, as on Moran's evidential conception, or rather in light of the ways that they are presented by speakers in acts of speaking, as on Moran's non-evidential conception. In this, they contrast importantly with a different sort of candidate reason-constituent, acts of speaking themselves, including acts of telling, which impose internal demands on the way they are presented. A further common characteristic of Moran's candidates is that an audience will typically be in a position to know of their presence without coming to believe the speaker. Since they can therefore serve as reasons for coming to believe the speaker, they would be counted as evidential reasons by the

sketch proposal. In addition to sharpening the first question, by suggesting that Moran's conception of the bounds of the evidential is different from that proposal, his list of candidates suggests a second question. Is this an accurate account of Moran's candidate reasons, or does he have in view further alternatives—including, perhaps, the facts that knowledgeable speakers express?

Now although Moran sometimes seems to focus on products of acts of speaking, he also considers the idea that (facts about) acts of speaking might be reasons for believing someone. He considers someone responding to the claim that, unlike evidential reasons, reasons for believing someone are dependent on the way in which they are presented by the speaker in an act of speaking:

Yes, the speaker freely assumes responsibility for the truth of what she asserts. But now this very act of assurance is a *fact*, which the audience confronts as evidence (of some degree of strength) for the truth of what has been asserted. Speech is acknowledged to be importantly different from other (indicatively) expressive behaviour, but the audience's relation to it, as a reason to believe something, can only be evidential. (69)

However, Moran's reaction seems to revert to considering only the speaker's words or their utterances as candidate reason-constituents, rather than their acts of speaking:

The point...is that refusing to acknowledge any epistemic stance towards the speaker's words other than as evidence means that speaker and hearer must always be in disharmony with each other, for in the contexts of telling, promising, and apologizing the speaker is not *presenting* her utterance as evidence. (69)

In the context of Moran's argument, a failure to hold apart acts from their products would be of potential significance. For one way of construing Moran's argument that reasons for believing someone are non-evidential is that their status as reasons for believing someone depend distinctively on the ways in which they are presented by speakers in acts of speaking. However, (facts about) acts of speaking seem not to depend in the same way on the ways that their agents present *them*. If acts of speaking depend constitutively on the way they are presented by their agents, then those acts—unlike certain products of such acts—would simply not occur in the absence of being so presented. It seems that in order to bypass this issue, Moran's argument must be that (facts about) acts of telling are reasons for believing someone, and are non-evidential in that they occur (or obtain) only insofar as acts of telling are partly constituted through their being presented as being such reasons.

Delicate issues arise here concerning, first, how we should understand the idea of acts that depend on their being presented in one or another way (as opposed, say, to depending on their presenting their agent in one or another light) and, second, how we should understand their doing so as bearing on the reasons-status of facts about those acts—in particular, on whether they are reasons at all, and whether, if they are,

they are evidential reasons or not. However, I propose to bypass those issues in order to focus on the more fundamental question of whether the fact that someone has told one something can be one's reason for believing them.

One thing that it is important to notice here is that it is consistent with the sketch to accept that one wouldn't have the reasons one does have for believing a speaker that p if one didn't know that they had told one that p . However, the sketch will treat the fact that they have told one that p not as a reason for thinking that p , but rather as a necessary enabling condition for one's coming to know that p , and so for one's having the fact that p as one's reason for thinking so. (It is worth noticing that if this aspect of the sketch were correct, then it would supply a ground for denying that the fact that someone has told one something is an evidential reason for believing them, through providing an account on which that fact is not any kind of reason for believing them.) Grounds for thinking that one couldn't have a reason for believing a speaker that p without knowing that they had told one that p would therefore fail distinctively to support the claim that the fact that someone has told one something can be one's reason for believing them over the proposal made in the sketch. So, is that claim distinctively supported?

A natural worry about the claim is that the mere fact that someone has told one that p doesn't seem to be a satisfactory reason for believing them. (Compare: "Why did you believe them that p ?" "Because they told me that p ." Contrast: "What explains your being in a position to believe them?" "Their telling me that p .") Things look slightly better with respect to one's thinking that p by way of believing the speaker. For one might reasonably explain one's thinking that p by appeal to the fact that someone told one that p . However, that one thinks that p because someone told one that p need not be construed as entailing that the fact that someone told one that p is a reason in light of which one thinks that p , as opposed to an explanation of one's thinking so that bypasses one's own reasons. (Compare: He awoke because she told him that p .) And when it is so construed as articulating a reason in light of which one thinks that p , it seems to compare unfavourably with a competing claim: that the reason in light of which one thinks that p is that p , as someone told one.

Furthermore, that someone has told one that p doesn't seem, in general, to provide one with a reason for thinking that p in cases in which the telling fails to express knowledge (See, e.g., 58). So, even if the fact that someone has told one that p could sometimes be amongst one's reasons for thinking that p , its being so would seem to depend on one's also having reasons for thinking that the telling expresses knowledge, or at least on one's relying on their being such reasons. For the fact that someone has told one that p seems to require supplementation if it is to figure amongst one's reasons for thinking that p . The target claim, that one's reason for believing someone that p can include the fact that they told one that p , therefore suggests that one's believing someone can be the outcome of a calculation. So, can it?

Elizabeth Anscombe considers a case in which one's coming to think that p is an outcome of calculation from their having told one that p , and suggests that the calculative structure she considers is not compatible with one's believing the speaker:

For suppose I were convinced that B wished to deceive me, and would tell the opposite of what he believed, but that on the matter in hand B would be believing the opposite of the truth. By calculation on this, then, I believe what B says, on the strength of his saying it—but only in a comical sense can I be said to believe him. (Anscombe 1979: 4, as discussed by Moran 2018: 59.)

Here, we can assume that B has told me that p and that I know that he has. Thus, the fact that B has told me that p is amongst the reasons that feed into my calculation. Conjoining that fact with other things I believe about B, I calculate that p . Why doesn't that count as my believing B?

The answer offered in the sketch is that it is because my thinking that p is based not on the fact that p , as offered to me as a reason by B, but rather on other facts—including the fact that B told me that p —that are able to serve as reasons for coming to think that p . According to that answer, the reason I don't count as believing B is because I think that p only in light of evidential reasons, reasons for coming to think that p . If that answer were correct, then it would exclude the possibility that (facts about) acts of telling can be reasons for believing someone.

An alternative explanation, favoured by Anscombe, appeals to the sorts of convictions about the speaker that conjoin with my knowledge that the speaker has told me that p in sustaining my thinking that p : "you are only willing to *call* it believing the man when you believe he is right and truthful in intent" (Anscombe 1979: 10). Her thought is that when I calculate that p on the basis of the fact that B has told me that p together with my conviction that B is incompetently mendacious, I do not count as believing B. By contrast, when I calculate that p on the basis of the fact that B has told me that p together with my conviction that B is competently sincere, I do count as believing B. (Anscombe also allows for cases of believing B which involve no such calculation. It is unclear whether she counts these as cases in which one either comes to believe B for reasons or believes B for reasons.)

Suppose that an explanation like Anscombe's is correct. What account does it offer of my reasons for believing B, for thinking that p on B's say-so? Anscombe appeals to my *convictions* or *beliefs* about B, rather than to what I *know* about B. So, if we retain the assumption that having a reason requires knowing it, then my reasons are confined to the fact that B has told me that p . (We might allow that I also have reasons for believing that B is right and truthful in intent, but that is not required by Anscombe's explanation.) But appeal to the calculative structure was supposed to supplement the fact that B told me that p , which otherwise seemed unsatisfactory as a reason for thinking that p . So, unless there are things that I know that provide reasons for thinking that B is right and truthful in intent, then it seems that I would have *no* satisfactory reason for thinking that p . More generally, insofar as one often lacks specific

such reasons in cases in which one believes a speaker, the claim that someone's having told one that p is amongst one's reasons for thinking that p will often have the consequence that one has *no* satisfactory reason for thinking so. And that result seems to favour the sketch's treatment of the fact that someone has told one that p as enabling access to reasons for believing the speaker, rather than as itself constituting such a reason.

Does the sketch have resources to explain the distinction between cases in which calculation seems compatible with believing a speaker and cases in which it doesn't? One thought here would be that calculation is consistent with believing the speaker only when it figures not as manipulating reasons for believing the speaker, but rather—as with one's knowledge that the speaker has told one that p —as enabling possession of the expressed fact that p as a reason for believing the speaker. Since such a reason is available in the case in which one correctly calculates that a telling expresses knowledge, but is not available in the case in which one correctly calculates that a telling doesn't, a version of Anscombe's distinction can be captured. According to the consequent view, one believes the speaker only if one thinks that p for the reason that p , as offered by the speaker as a reason through their telling one that p . One wouldn't have the same form of access to that reason if the speaker had not so offered it in an act of telling, but according to the sketch it is not that mode of dependence on the speaker's act which makes one's reasons for believing them non-evidential. Rather, it is the fact that one's reasons are not available to one in advance of believing the speaker, and so cannot serve as one's reasons for coming to believe the speaker.

A third question arises, then, about the relation between Moran's account and the sketch. Does Moran intend to defend the claim that one's reason for believing a speaker that p can include be the fact that they told one that p , rather than the fact that they expressed in the telling? If he does, then a fourth question comprises an invitation to say more about what favours that claim over the alternative presented in the sketch.

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