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The Concept of Personal Identity: Freud, Jung, Jaspers and Lowe

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Abstract

Leibniz's concept of monads had of great importance for the development of the idealistic conception. Through Kant and his "Physical Monadology" she infiltrated into modern German philosophy. However, not only modern idealists referred to the concept of monads. Especially, that many scientific disciplines, which emanated from philosophy, related to the scope of idealistic notions, for example: psychology or sociology. German psychology and its creators have many often referred to monads theory. Freud, Fromm and Jung presented even their own point of views on this topic. Later theories, such as Lowe's theory, also refer to the concept of monads. These relations and the historical connections between monad theory and modern German psycho-philosophy are shown in this work.

Key words: unity, atom, personal identity, being, consciousness, center of attention, individual subconscious.

I

There are various definitions of unity. First, the atomist definition, according to which unity obtains of the tiniest thing possible, so tiny that to damage it in any way would lead to its annihilation¹. At the opposite extreme is the holistic definition, according to which unity obtains of that which is fullest, so complete in fact that nothing more could be added to it (for

¹ This is a definition based on the quantitative paradigm and proposed for most part by materialist thinkers.

example, the Universe)². Another definition is given by Leibniz, in whose view unity obtains of that which is without parts³. Another yet is enunciated by Perzanowski, according to whom unity obtains of that which is uncombinable (for example, the mind)⁴. Finally, there is the definition given by Kant, who proclaims unity to be the permanent joining of elements incapable of existing separately⁵. The last of these will be our chief interest in this paper.

II

Kant's conception grows out of various attempts to reconcile opposing views about the nature of the world. Kant has in various places called it *a conception half-way between materialism and spiritualism*. It balances on the notion of simple being – the monad – combining the properties of spirit and body. We, however, shall be exclusively concerned with the definition as such, and not with how it is realized. For this definition has a certain singularity. It proclaims the existence of soul as a substance simple in nature but not devoid of structure. Thus, it represents not only an attempt to reconcile the materialist and spiritualist worldviews, but also to answer the question of plurality in unity – in other words of how a thing composed of multiple parts can be said to be a simple substance.

In order to elucidate the problem I shall conduct a brief analysis of the Kantian conception of the monad. I will then analyze how the concept of the soul has been defined throughout the history of thought, and subsequently focus on the definition of soul proposed by the modern German psychophilesophers⁶. This will enable me to draw analogies between tradition and modernity with respect to the definition of soul and to indicate the place of Kant's definition of the monad in the history of philosophy.

III

Kant sees the monad as an aggregate of parts indissolubly joined. He defines it as follows:

Substantia simplex, monas dicta, est, quae non constat pluralitate partium, quarum una absque aliis separatim exsistere potest⁷.

² Such a view is held by Parmenides, for instance.

³ Leibniz G.W., *The Monadology*, p. 113.

⁴ Perzanowski J., *Protofizyka* – unpublished text from 2004.

⁵ Kant I., *Physical Monadology*, in: “American University” Series V, *Philosophy*, vol. 9, New York 1938.

⁶ By German psychophilesophers I mean a certain current of thought rather than national or linguistic affiliation.

⁷ Kant I., *Physical Monadology*... op. cit., p. 113: “Simple substance, also called the monad is that which does not consist of a plurality of parts any one of which can exist separately from the others”.

The monad is thus a reduced unity, an absolutely simple substance. It is a local center of the activity of forces (repulsion and attraction), possessing an impenetrable field of activity.

Monas spatiolum praesentiae suae definit non pluralitate partium suarum substantialium, sed sphaera activitatis, qua externas utrinque sibi praesentes arcet ab ulteriori ad se invicem appropinquatione...⁸.

Vis, qua elementum corporis simplex spatium suum occupat, est eadem, quam vocant alias impenetrabilitatem; neque si ab illa vi discesseris, huic locus esse potest⁹.

Corpora per vim solam impenetrabilitatis non gaudent definito volumine, nisi adforet alia pariter insita attractionis, cum illa coniunctim limitem definiens estensionis... Opus igitur est cuilibet elemento praeter vim impenetrabilitatis alia attractiva, a qua si discesseris, non resultarent determinata corporum naturae volumina¹⁰.

The monad is thus a carrier of an amassed energy, and we may only speak of its mode of existence in terms of the manner in which it is limited by the activity of adjacent monads. Thus monads do not exist in nature substantially but only through the power of their activity.

Compositum in infinitum divisibile non constat partibus primitivis s. simplicibus... Non alienum fore ab instituti ratione autumavi, post vindicatas corpori cuilibet partes primitivas simplices, et post assertam infinitam spatii sui divisionem, cavere, ne quisquam monades pro infinite parvis corporis particulis habeat¹¹.

The properties of monads are grounded in their inherent dynamic embodied in a living force causative of a series of successive perceptions. This dynamic delimits the perimeter of the monad.

Let us now move on to the history of the notion of soul.

IV

The soul (Gr. *psyche*, Lat. *anima*) is the animating principle, the life breath. The dictionary gives the following synonyms of the term: *mind, psyche, psyche, spirit, the subconscious*,

⁸ Ibid. p. 117. "The monad does not determine the limited space where it is by a plurality of its substantial parts, but by sphere of its activity, whereby it hinders things on both sides of it from any further mutual approach".

⁹ Ibid. pp. 118-119. "The force by which the simple element of a body fills its space is the same as that which others call impenetrability. If the former force is denied, there cannot be a place for the latter".

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 121. "By the force of impenetrability alone bodies would not have a definite volume; [this is why] there must be another force equally inherent in them, a force of attraction, which in conjunction with it defines the limits of the bodies' extension. There is therefore needed in every element, besides the force of impenetrability, another force, that of attraction. If one denies this, there can be no determinate volume of any natural body".

¹¹ Ibid. p. 115: "A composite divisible to infinity does not consist of primitive or simple parts. [...] It will not be out of order in this study, after establishing the existence of the simple primitive parts of body and after asserting the infinite division of its space, to be on guard lest anyone hold monads to be infinitely small particles of body".

superego, ego, the I, inner life, nature, being, consciousness, self, conscience, soundness of mind as well as *fortitude* and *power*. The common meaning of the term concentrates on four elements:

- the psyche (consciousness, the *I*, inner life - the true self, being, etc.)
- the will (to will something out of the depths of one's soul)
- dynamic (fortitude, power, movement)
- being a center (nature, *to be the center of attention*).

The concept of soul is largely associated with the sphere of belief. The concept, however, was not known to ancient mythologies, which proclaimed the unity of man. It only came to birth with the emergence of difficulties in explaining natural phenomena. Myths, viewing natural processes as a manifestation of divine agency, proved insufficiently equipped to explain for example the causes and principle of movement.

The image of the soul as an immaterial and immortal element animating the bodies of men predominates in systems of religious belief. We encounter it both in dualist religions (Islam, Jainism) as well as monist ones (Buddhism, Hinduism).

From the perspective of Kant's definition of the monad there is a special interest in considering religious conceptions which split the unity of the soul. And so Chinese systems of belief mention two types of souls (*hun* - related to the heavens, and *yang* as well as *po* - related to earth and to *yin*). Judaism (Ranini) on the other hand sees the soul as composed of spiritual intelligence (*neshamah*), conscience (*ruah*, רוח – wind) and the vegetative principle (*nephesh*, נפש – throat, neck).

The Bible moreover distinguishes the notions of soul and spirit. Spirit is here akin to the Hebrew notion of breath (Hebr. *ruah*). Spirit has an animating character. It is what turns man into a living soul. Thus death is the loss of spirit, but not of soul¹².

The Bible provides the basis for theological thought. This thought, to put it as briefly as possible, has evolved in the following way:

- Tertullian – soul is a *bodily substance*, simple and homogeneous. It does not differ from spirit (they combine in their main function – to animate the body). Another function of the soul is mind (the cognitive apparatus). All souls (inherited from the parents) are part of a single original soul;

¹² 2 Cor 12:2-4 (NIV) “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows. And I know that this man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows - was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell”.

- St. Gregory – refuted the notion of a material soul. Soul animates matter. It is the source of life which gives movement to the body. It is simple, non-corporeal, and immortal. Equipped with intellect, it is thus that it was capable of creating the arts;
- St. Augustine – returned to the Biblical association of soul with the Hebrew notion of *ruah*. He sees soul as equivalent to intelligence or mind, a Divine emanation (soul emanates psyche and the latter emanates matter, hence the idea that the body is placed in the soul);
- Scholastic philosophy (e.g. St. Bonaventure) – to some extent reinstated the notion of material soul by introducing the category of spiritual beings (angels) whose bodies are filled with subtle matter (so-called spiritual matter);
- St. Thomas Aquinas – strove to overcome Aristotle's problem of the co-existence of mind and body and sought a principle of man's unity. He considered soul to be the form of the body. This is why man is not a simple combination of soul and body (form and matter), but their living unity. The power of this unity makes the soul's act of existence at once applicable to the body. The reality of human existence involves a constant manifestation and permeation of matter by spirit. The soul is “the first act of an organic body having life potentially”.

Various religions thus define the soul as a dynamic principle organizing the activity of living beings, the subject of thought and sensation.

It is from religion that philosophy inherited the concept of soul. “This concept prefigured the leading question of pre-Socratic philosophy concerning the arche, the omnipresent, unresolvable, immortal and timeless principle”¹³. And so the principle of living things, the principle of life, came to be known as ψυχή. Owing to its general character, it was ascribed to people, animals as well as plants.

Greek philosophy also introduced other principles close in meaning to the concept of soul, above all the principle of the *intellect* (Anaxagoras) and principle of the *cosmic mind* (Heraclitus). *Mind (nous)* came to be defined as a kind of subtlest matter, an ordering principle inducing and controlling movement. The principle of the *cosmic mind* on the other hand echoed the search for the nature of the universe, in other words for that which in it is fixed and governs all things (including man). Since man is governed by reason, and all things are governed by a single power, reason must be the universal cosmic force. A different interpretation of the soul was offered by the materialists, who viewed it as made up of atoms

¹³ Świeżawski S., *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej*, Warsaw-Wrocław 2000, p. 166.

(although the stuff of the soul is of a somewhat more noble kind than the stuff of hard matter; the Stoics gave it the name of ethereal matter).

The Platonic notions of *pre-existence* and a *anamnesis* mark a turn in the understanding of the concept of soul. According to Plato, soul should be likened to

...the divine, and immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable¹⁴.

Souls thereby acquire a kinship with ideas, are the eternal cause and principle of life, the first ingredient of man's being.

With Aristotle there then comes a vision of the soul as the end giving shape to all being. Aristotle defines the soul as an immaterial force proper to every being, responsible:

- in plants - for reproduction,
- in animals - for reproduction, movement and nourishment,
- in humans - for reproduction, movement, nourishment, cognition and thought.

It is here that we first encounter the contemporary designation of soul as a set of spiritual functions, the organizing principle of a living thing. As an organizing factor, the soul determines the shape, movement and nature of the body. It is its form.

Observe that in his usage of the term principle of movement Aristotle understands movement as life. He thereby reduces the science of the soul to a science of actuality (actual being) and potentiality, concerned with relations between form and matter. It should be added that according to Aristotle the soul is not a body but a principle belonging to the body (“the cause and principle of a living body”).

It is thus that we arrive at the formulation of the problem of co-existence of soul and body which will accompany nearly all of Scholastic philosophy, to be rediscovered in the XVII century. This problem can be summarized as follows: how is it possible for such completely different substances, existing in two different realms, to combine in man? – or, more directly – how does the immaterial mind co-operate with the material body? And finally: how is man possible?

The mind-body problem remains a problem still open. Various kinds of intermediate beings have for example been proposed throughout the history of philosophy, e.g. *vital spirits* responsible for physiological phenomena. This view played, in its time, an important part in leading up to the claim that the soul constitutes the generality of the psychological capacities

¹⁴ Plato, *Fedon* (Phaedo), 80 a-b. English text from the Benjamin Jowett translation.

of man. Finally there emerged attempts to overcome the dualism of soul and body, relying largely on the conception of homogeneous substance (many of these attempts appealed to earlier conceptions, especially those of St. Augustine and St. Thomas). Substance came to be conceived as

...that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself; in other words that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception¹⁵.

In this manner soul and matter were reduced to attributes of substance (they became something “that the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance”¹⁶).

This reasoning involves an attempt to distinguish, once and for all, that which is real from that which only appears to be so. The (Cartesian) epistemological question is renewed: *what is the ground on which we may assert that anything exists?*

The notion of an experience of presence was initially invoked: there exists that which we experience. The view positing cognition as the result of direct sensory perceptions (with time and space as forms of intuition) was then developed, which led to the claim that although the mind contemplates metaphysical concepts (such as God or the soul), the objects designated by these concepts cannot be objects of science (while the concepts themselves are merely regulatory ideas).

The unknowability of things in themselves will eventually be questioned, and philosophical thought will once more turn towards the (newly defined) homogeneity of substance. But the unity of soul and body shall now be seen to be vested in man and not in the Divine Being.

Man is a synthesis of soul and body. Yet a synthesis cannot be thought unless two elements are united in a third. This third element is spirit. [Thus] man is spirit, but what is spirit? The spirit is self, but what is the self? The self is a relation constituted towards oneself, and the nature of this relation is that it obtains with respect to itself; the self is not a relation, but the phenomenon of a relation's relating to itself.

Modern positivist and analytic philosophy has replaced the notion of soul with that of mind, viewed either as an abstract concept or identified with the brain or central nervous system. This philosophy obliterates all reference to the notion of soul, claiming it to be unscientific and not to correspond to any natural phenomenon. In its reductionist version, it

¹⁵ Spinoza B., *The Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, def. 3. English text from the R. H. M. Elwes translation.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* def. 4.

declares – though this is merely a supposition – that mental phenomena are reducible to physical phenomena. The world of spirit, according to this view, is a construct of the mind, and not an objective reality.

Let us now move on to an analysis of the concept of soul put forward by the modern German psychophosophers: Freud, Jung, Jaspers and Schopenhauer. To conclude, I shall perform a brief comparison of the monadological idea of Kant with the modern spiritualist conception of J. Lowe.

V

The concept of the monad does not appear in the work of Freud. However, there are several analogies between the definition of this concept, especially as given by Kant, and the Freudian conception of the soul. We find the concept in Freud’s indissoluble combination of three components: the *Id*, the *Ego* and the *Superego*:

Id	Ego	Superego
I, self	it, libido	superself
conscious component	unconscious component	unconscious component
external consciousness	internal consciousness - shallow	internal consciousness - deep
principle of reality	principle of pleasure	principle of possibility

The monad thus conceived is an indivisible element, since the destruction of one of its parts inevitably leads to the annihilation of the whole. What is more, the mind is here a monad-unity, not just in the sense of simplicity, but also in the sense of non-composition (minds are uncombined).

The monad thus conceived – as in Leibniz – possesses mental life. There are however significant differences between the conception of Freud and that of Leibniz. Freud holds that mental life is realized via two roads: the conscious (facts) and the unconscious (hypotheses). In Leibniz, we find instead a hierarchy of beings based on degrees of consciousness. Moreover, the *Principle of Pre-Established Harmony* is at work in Leibniz, while Freud does not consider consciousness a vital part of the psyche. An important role is played by hypotheses filling the gaps resulting from the fallibility of mental life. Unconscious experiences are therefore normal and natural, and even of greater importance than conscious ones. They are what governs the psyche. Conscious experiences are merely their outer layer. Thus to Freud the self is not man's personality in the strict sense of the word but its external stratum. It is what lies directly opposite of man's inner personality.

The Freudian conception of the soul however inscribes itself in the tradition of monadology, especially with regard to how the monad is defined. The monad is here a structural uniformity. It is a reflection of the problem of plurality in unity. It also reflects the generic reduction of reality in which consciousness and unconsciousness, as representing that which is inborn (ideal) and that which is external, come together in a particle of being.

VI

According to Jung, the monad-mind is – so to speak – a system of systems¹⁷. The said systems are those of:

- the ego/I – responsible for adaptation to the external environment;
- the persona – responsible for adaptation to the social environment;
- the soul – responsible for adaptation to the internal environment;
- the individual subconscious – content independent from the individual's consciousness;
- the collective unconscious – a subconscious area common to all humankind.

The monad is here a permanent compound of systems, each having a different structure. Common to all of them is a superior order. This order binds the monad into unity.

Jung's conception carries a twofold echo of Kant's pre-critical thought. First – in a manner similar to Freud's – it posits the monad as a monolith characterized by an internal structure (thus a unity of parts permanently joined); second, it refers to a certain conception by Kant, meant to offer a solution of the mind-body problem. This is the path of its reasoning.

Following its restatement by Descartes, the mind-body problem focused on substantialist solutions. Descartes presented one of possible solutions in which soul and body constitute two separate spheres communicating with each other under specific circumstances (affects)¹⁸ through the intermediary of a certain organ¹⁹. This organ (Descartes pointed to the pineal gland) is responsible for the conversion of physical phenomena into mental ones and vice versa. Two other solutions are based on an attempt to reduce all phenomena to a single kind and admitting the existence of only one type of phenomena – either physical (with spiritual phenomena merely as their effect) or spiritual (effecting physical phenomena). There is finally

¹⁷ See Jung C.G., *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trns. By R.F.C. Hull, New York 1959, p. 132-138.

¹⁸ See Descartes R *Meditations on First Philosophy...*, Warsaw 1958.

¹⁹ Ibid.

a fourth way, combining the material and the spiritual into one (this is the road taken, for example, by Spinoza).

Kant took an altogether different path. He concluded that the mind-body problem could be solved on the ground of phenomena and not of substance. Body and soul are bound by a community of phenomena subjected to a single law²⁰. The binding phenomenon, Kant maintained, is force, which manifests itself in a twofold way: as physical force in the world of matter, and as force of will in the world of spirit. Force, whether manifesting itself in the material or the mental world, is subject to a single law.

A similar approach is taken by Jung. His reasoning however does not intend the mind-body problem but the concept of the monad. Stating the monad to be a permanent union of multiple systems however, he brings to light a certain question about the nature of this union. Were the monad to be conceived as mind, this union – clearly – could not have a substantial character. This is why Jung invokes a phenomenon – the superior order. The systems form a unity on account of their subjection to a universal law. And it is this unity precisely that turns them into a monad. This is a highly original vision of unity, though strictly tied to Kant's definition.

VII

Jaspers' conception also relates to the Kantian definition of the monad. However, similarities are here found at a much deeper level. It is true that the object of Jaspers' philosophy is being, but it is not being in a particular sense – as in Kant's definition – but rather being in general. Let us however disregard the object of both definitions and concentrate instead on the method of defining.

The concept of being has a threefold meaning in Jaspers²¹:

- first, being is that which is objective, which constitutes the object of existence. This is being as such.
- second, being is that which is subjective – existence;
- finally, thirdly, being is that which is transcendent, expressed as the entirety of existence.

²⁰ Kant never specified this law, he merely indicated (in his *Physical Monadology*) certain threshold conditions: “To search out the laws of the two forces in the elements, the repulsive and the attractive, is a difficult investigation worth the efforts of the most acute minds. It suffices me here to have shown their existence, as far as the requirements brevity permitted.”. Quoted from: Kant I., *Physical Monadology...*, op. cit., p. 117.

²¹ See Jaspers K., *Filozofia egzystencji*; selected by Stanisław Tyrowicz, with an introduction by Hans Saner, afterword by Dorota Lachowska, transl. Dorota Lachowska, Anna Wołkiewicz, Warsaw 1990.

Being is thus an object of being, existence (I am deliberately avoiding the expression “its existence”, since for Jaspers the existence of a given being is only – to invoke ancient conceptions – its participation in global existence) and transcendence. Being, existence and transcendence form one whole. It is impossible for an existing being not to participate in existence or to be without transcendence. We thus once more encounter the permanent joining of three elements.

VIII

Analogies between Kant's definition of the monad and the definition of reality may also be discerned in Schopenhauer. In various textbooks and commentaries we read that the point of departure for Schopenhauer's philosophy is the statement: *the external world is only my representation*²². I think it would be most adequate to state that according to Schopenhauer the world is a complex of representations making up a common cognitive structure as a result of the operation of a certain general law. This law, in Schopenhauer's view, is the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which manifests itself in four ways:

- as a relation occurring between reason and consequence,
- as a relation occurring between cause and effect,
- as a relation occurring between motive and act,
- as a relation in time and space.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason can be observed in both the material and the spiritual realm (motive and act). We thus return to the conception positing a phenomenon or process rather than a substance as the binding agent of unity, making sure to note that for Schopenhauer unity does not hold for being, but for impressions. *The Principle of Sufficient Reason* combines into one physical and psychological impressions, connecting sensory and internal cognition. For Schopenhauer, the *Principle* thus serves a function similar to that of the concept of force in the ontology of Kant. It binds the material and non-material world into a whole, manifesting itself as a specific relation.

IX

It is in epistemology and phenomenology that Kant's conceptions are usually examined in juxtaposition to those of the modern German psychophilosophers. The history of philosophy however all too often fails to appreciate the pre-critical thought of Kant. Meantime many of

²² This is a paraphrasing of Schopenhauer's phrase.

the ideas contained in Kant's early conceptions in the philosophy of nature and ontology are reflected – in a more or less conscious way – is his later philosophy. The conceptions of the German psychophilosophers, heirs to XVIII-century epistemology, thus appropriated a certain viewpoint in evaluating and defining phenomena that is characteristic of Kant. The Kantian definition of the monad became inscribed in philosophical reflection not just as an ontological principle, but also as a way of designating the unity of an object of science, no matter what its character.

X

Let us finally pass to one of the modern philosophical projects belonging to the tradition of Kantian monadology. This is Lowe's idea of Personal Identity which considers the Person a type of psychological substance²³. This long-forgotten way of defining psychological reality constitutes one of the most interesting attempts to develop the course disrupted by the naturalist psychology of the XIX and XX centuries. This psychology reached the conclusion that all psychological phenomena may be reduced to physical ones, and that the human psyche or identity are simply different ways in which material substance manifests itself.

Modern scientific discourse is pre-eminently dominated by materialist conceptions which have given rise to a wide range of theories presupposing the existence of matter alone. Even though these attempts are still largely confined to the sphere of belief, and no unquestionable proof or objective justification has yet been offered to substantiate them, the material nature of the soul is nearly universally held to be a tenet. In this context we may say that both naturalism and modern cognitive science remain a kind of faith, akin to faith in the supernatural character of the soul (which both of them strive to combat). It is of little importance that conceptions stating the soul to result from the motion of deoxyribonucleic acid and receptor activity in our brains *seem* convincing and justifiable, since theories of a flat earth or astrological predictions sounded equally convincing in their time. Whether anyone likes it or not, the choice between naturalist and spiritualist conceptions remains a question of personal aesthetics. Let us return to Lowe. The recognition of the Person as a type of substance unavoidably inscribes itself in the tradition of Kantian monadology. For monads are themselves a type of substance. This substance is to Lowe a special kind of substratum underlying all properties, in this case personal traits²⁴. It is like Newton's absolute time and

²³ Cf. Olson E., *Is Psychology Relevant to Personal Identity?*, in: "Australian Journal of Philosophy" vol. 72. pp. 173-186.

²⁴ Lowe E.J., *Real Selves: Persons as a Substantial Kind*, in: Cockburn D. (ed.), *Human Beings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991.

space in relation to the totality of physical phenomena. This is a very interesting solution, which – as in the case of Kant's conception, amongst others – tries to tackle the problem of plurality in unity. Substance, thus, is that which binds the diversity of psychological states into one, the only truly existing whole.

XI

The Kantian manner of resolving spiritualist problems has not lost actuality. It provides a certain answer to the intuitive need to define the human psyche in terms of its inner unity and outer distinction from the physical order. This distinction is present not just on the intuitive level or in cognition, but even in language. For the concepts and formulations related to the world of spirit, with a predominance of meta-language, universals and transcendentals, are markedly different from those used to describe that which is tangible and real. Special attention should be expended on Lowe's conception, which constitutes a successful attempt to return, precisely, to a dualist manner of viewing reality.

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