

STUDY SESSION 9

THE PHILOSOPHY OF OTHER DISCIPLINES



9.1 Introduction

This study session will take you through the functional role of philosophy and philosophers as compared to other professions and professionals in the society. You are aware that often time philosophy has been seen as being exceedingly abstract, irrelevant and disinterested. This study session will further expose you to the true picture concerning this matter. Some of the fundamental questions to be addressed include; what exactly is philosophy? How does philosophy relate to other disciplines? What is the place of philosophy in the general scheme of human knowledge and culture? Of what importance is philosophy?



9.1.1 Learning Outcome for Study Session 9

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

1. Describe how philosophy interrogates other disciplines;
2. Highlight how philosophy lays the foundation of other disciplines;
3. State the importance of philosophy; and
4. Examine the challenges of philosophy.

9.2 The Concept of Philosophy

Are you aware that the most provocative and perhaps embarrassing question a philosopher can be asked is “what is philosophy?” This is because the nature of philosophy is not well understood. Philosophers are divided into numerous hostile camps on this issues; this is due to the different area perspectives of philosophy. Most definitions of philosophy are perspectival. There are five basic subject areas in philosophy, namely; Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Logic and the philosophy of other disciplines or what some scholars have called the philosophy of infrastructure of disciplines. Do you know that another reason for the lack of a universally acceptable definition of philosophy has been identified as the differences in schools of thought, that is, is the philosopher an Idealist or a Materialist? The school of thought tends to affect the philosopher’s perception of philosophy. There is also the question of culture. A philosopher is said to be a child of his culture and culture often influences a philosopher’s definition and perception of a subject matter. The age or epoch is another area perspective that also influences a philosopher’s definition. Finally, there is the ambition¹ of a philosopher based on a programme and agenda. A philosopher has a programme and agenda or is either a philosopher *of a status-quo* or a philosophical of *change*.

A cursory look at a history of philosophy shows that philosophy indeed has a chequered history and that philosophy is an analogical term. Today, however, “Philosophy goes with criticism, scepticism and refusal to believe, unless on rational grounds”.² Philosophy goes with arguments, reflections, rationality and critical evaluation. In fact, argument is a decisive characteristic of philosophy. “Without intuitive argument and clarification, there is strictly no

¹ C.S Momoh, “Nature, Issues of African Philosophy” , in *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*, Jim Unah (Ed.) (Ibadan: Hope publishers, 1996), pp312-315

²K. Wiredu *Philosophy and An African Culture*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.3

philosophy”.³This is because philosophy, strictly speaking, is an exercise in elaborate argumentation, clarification and answering of objections, known or anticipated. Furthermore, philosophy begins with wonder. This sense of wonder is so vital to the philosopher.⁴ By philosophy is meant critical, rational and reflective study of nature of the world, of man and his position and goal in the world. Philosophy is the study of the fundamental questions and principles underlying conduct, thought and knowledge.⁵ It is essentially the articulation and clarification of concepts. It is the consciousness of a people at a point in time. There is no philosophy in a vacuum. The social milieu in which a philosopher lives influences and encourages him or her in the conception and articulation of the nature of things. Philosophy challenges our ideas, beliefs, concepts, and understanding and analyzes them in the light of evidences and arguments. The *methods and contents of philosophy* best define it.

A philosopher is a professional thinker, equipped with the intuitive insight and rational stamina to delve, more than superficially, into the difficult and complex problems of life and living. “Take nothing for granted” is the dictum of the philosopher. This conception is from the point of view of method. There is also the conception of philosophy from the point of view of content. Here, cognizance is taken that philosophy is traditionally divided into four core areas, viz. Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic- where Logic is both an instrument or tool and a branch of philosophy. In this respect, we define philosophy as a critical, rational and systematic reflection, study or search for the ultimate reality, knowledge, values, reasons or thought.

9.2.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

³ibid

⁴ J.J White, “Philosophy and Society” in *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, (Vol.3, No. 2, 1981), p.74

⁵ G.E Azenabor, *Understanding the Problems of African Philosophy*, (Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2001), p.14

Name the five basic areas of philosophy.



9.2.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Logic and the philosophy of other disciplines

9.3 The Concept of the Philosophy of other Disciplines

We have what is today referred to as the Philosophy of other Disciplines or the Philosophy of the Infrastructure of Disciplines. In the Philosophy of other disciplines, the philosopher inquires into other substantive area of intellectual enterprise or independent disciplines, like Education, History, Law, Mathematics, Religion, Social sciences, science, etc. Here, the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines is to simply study the principles behind the fundamental questions and claims raised or made in other disciplines and the examination of their validity.

The philosophy of other Disciplines is a second order activity which deals with the general theories, character, problems and pre- suppositions in other disciplines. It is the application of philosophical methodology to other disciplines. In this respect, the philosopher has been accused of being an imperialist, a busy-body who is meddling with other peoples' disciplines. The philosopher is accused of pretending to know what he does not or ought not to know. But the reason for this "imperialist" character of philosophy, it must be noted, is that philosophy, if we may recall, is the Parent discipline or the mother of all disciplines; the other disciplines are intellectual descendants of philosophy. This is precisely the reason why at the apex of any intellectual or academic enterprise a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is awarded as a sign of continuity and paternalism. So, philosophy began and ends all intellectual enterprise. In this

respect, philosophy has been described as the highest intellectual achievement of mankind. It is along this line that Momoh sums up: “Philosophy is the base and the apex, the foundation, the ceiling and the roof of any civilization. Any religion, any science, indeed any discipline, any culture, any way of life, corporate or individual, is anchored on a philosophy, floats on a philosophy and hangs on a philosophy. Philosophy is the ultimate intellectual discipline; it is the queen and the king of all the disciplines. Wherever philosophy is present, there is light, where it is absent there is darkness”⁶

Philosophy, Herbert Spencer tells us, coordinates the other branches of knowledge.⁷ Human Knowledge is like a tree, with a trunk and many branches. The trunk, the parent stem is or was Philosophy. The branches are the special sciences. All knowledge was originally included in philosophy. But as knowledge has grown, it has differentiated itself.⁸ Every discipline has its own philosophical foundation, which gives it force and a sense of direction.⁹ Given the profound nature of Philosophy, its contact with any discipline will give the necessary depth, better scales of values and the rational stamina needed to delve into the issues of life and living, provide meaningful and theoretical answers to educational, social, political, religious, moral and economic problems. The philosophical spirit, when applied to other disciplines helps to improve the reflective abilities and critical powers of the disciplines. The relationship of philosophy with other disciplines is manifested in under-listed areas.

⁶ C. S. Momoh, *op.cit*, p.309.

⁷W T. Stace, “ The place of Philosophy in Human Culture” in *Philosophy*, (vol. XII, .1937) p.303.

⁸*ibid.* p.37.

⁹ G. E. Azenabor, *Understanding the Problems of African Philosophy*, (Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 1998), p.14



9.3.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

- a) What do you understand by philosophy of other disciplines?
- b) Another name for philosophy of other disciplines is --



9.3.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

- a) It is an attempt by philosophy to query the basic assumptions, presuppositions, claims and counter-claims of other disciplines.
- b) Philosophy of infrastructure of disciplines.

9.4 Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of education deals with the general theories, character, fundamental questions, problems and pre-suppositions in the discipline of education. When educators apply philosophical principles or methods to the field of education or when philosophers turn their attention to education, we have philosophy of education. Philosophy of education is where education draws materials from philosophy. G.F Kneller confirms the role of philosophy in education when he writes: “Philosophy questions some presuppositions in educational practice with a view to giving meaning and synthesis to this same process. Philosophy seeks to comprehend education in its entirety, interpreting it by means of general concepts that will guide the choice of educational ends and policies”.¹⁰

It is not always easy for the educator to combine contents, instructions, techniques, students and their behaviour, with educational goal. It is the philosophy of education that takes care of

¹⁰G. F. Kneller, *Foundations of Education*, (New York: Willey and Sons, 1963), p 64.

the educational goal. The curriculum of education is influenced by values, like the divine, the material, etc. What does the educational system take as its value? It is philosophy that determines the scale of values.

Philosophy of education gives new insights into contemporary problems and issues in educational matters and helps the educator to take a wider educational perspective at educational problems and attempts to answer basic questions, like why do we go to school? Who should be educated? What is education? What criteria should guide decisions on the contents of education? What should the teacher teach and why? What should he condemn or commend? What is the right method to use in imparting or disseminating knowledge? What is the nature of the human being educated?



9.4.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Which area of human knowledge interrogates the principles and methods of teaching?



9.4.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

It is the Philosophy of Education.

9.5 Philosophy of History

It may interest you to know that philosophy is related to History through the Philosophy of History. Here one of the questions asked by Philosophers are; what is History or what is the meaning of History? This question is of a fundamental importance to the historian even though the question, as you will notice, is not a historical question. The question deals with

the essence and nature of History. It is a philosophical question. For this question to be adequately tackled by the historian he must have recourse to philosophy. Another problem facing the philosopher of history is the question of historical methodology. The kind of methodology a historian uses really defines his idea of history.

For example, “a Hegelian historian who believes that there is a necessary universal force or law that drives history towards its goal, freedom, and that history is a development in the consciousness of freedom, will use a different methodology in his study of history from someone like Karl R. Popper who believes in “the poverty of Historicism”, that is there are no objective laws, metaphysical or scientific, on the basis of which historical developments are predictable”.¹¹ The questions in historical methodology are: Is history a science? Are there objective laws guiding historical process? What is the logic or rationality behind historiography (i.e. record of history)? etc. These are philosophical questions in the Philosophy of History. They are the most critical aspects of history, which is different from the study of history as a chronicle of facts. The critical aspect of history which is philosophical reflects upon the method by which such facts are obtained.



9.5.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Who believes in “the poverty of Historicism”?



9.5.1 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

¹¹ T. Jackson, “Philosophy and other Disciplines”, in *Sagacious Reasoning*, Graness and Kresse (eds.), (Frankfurt: Peterlang, 1997), p.36.

Karl Popper

9.6 Philosophy of Law

Most lawyers are concerned with what the law says and the actions that are legal or illegal. The lawyers know legal and illegal actions, and what sanctions or penalties are stipulated for illegal actions. This is “positive law”. This positive aspect of law does not concern itself with whether or not a legal rule is morally justified. Rather, what the lawyer is concerned about is the *validity* not the *moral justification* of law.

It is philosophy of law that passes from the question of law to morality, from the question of validity of law or what the law says to what is the nature of law itself, upon what concept is law based? What is the ethical justification for the concept of obligation? Ought I always to obey the law? How much or to what extent does morality influence the law? What is the justification for law? What is the relationship between moral and legal responsibility? What is the purpose of punishment and what are the moral and logical justifications for it?

It is these and other related questions that are raised in the philosophy of law, otherwise known as legal philosophy or Jurisprudential philosophy. For anybody to deal with the above questions completely, and competently, the person will have to be a philosopher —a legal philosopher. “The task of a legal philosopher is to discuss the nature and sources of law and the relation of law to ethics or morality”.¹² So the legal practitioner tries to understand and get the justification for the very basic concept on which the law is based.

A critic may object by saying that philosophy of law is not as important as we are portraying it; that law is sufficient in itself for all we need – which is the social control of human beings or the maintenance of security, law and order in the society. But to argue this way is to refuse to see beyond the wider horizon of law. Every legal system is based explicitly on some

¹² 13 *ibid*, p.37

principles. Philosophy, as we said earlier, is the study of the principles underlying knowledge and reality. Philosophy of law is the fundamental principle of law.



9.6.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

- a) Which form of law does not concern itself with whether or not a legal rule is morally justified?
- b) Another name for philosophy of law is -- .



9.6.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

- a) Positive law.
- b) Jurisprudential philosophy

9.7 Philosophy of Religion

In the study of Religion, there are many fundamental questions that a theologian, except he is philosopher, cannot deal with successfully. Theology, as the study of religions “deals with the sociological, historical and perhaps the psychological aspects of religion or religious questions”¹³. It is philosophy of religion that makes the theologian deep and wiser.

Philosophy of Religion deals with such questions as, what is religion? Or, who is a religious person? What is the nature of God? What are the arguments for and against the existence of God? Can we hold on to the idea of God side by side with the problem of evil without contradiction? What are the grounds for religious beliefs? What is the nature of miracles and

¹³ 14 bid, p.39.

religious language, experience or knowledge? etc. These are fundamental questions that cannot be answered satisfactorily without going outside religion, the Bible or Quran, to philosophy — the appeal to human reason, rather than revelation or belief. It is in philosophy that the exercise of human reason is at its highest peak. This is precisely why religion has a need for philosophy, if has to make sense of its beliefs, claims and theories. Our crucial role as philosophers of religion, therefore, is to examine the knowledge claims that are made in the area of religion, to see if they can be justified and to evaluate and interpret the claims within the framework of rational understanding.



9.7.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

What aspect of religion concerns theology?



9.7.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

The Sociological, historical and perhaps the psychological aspects of religion or religious questions

9.8 Philosophy of Science

Philosophy is also related to science through Philosophy of Science. Philosophy of Science is primarily concerned with how science works, how the reasoning in science can be justified. It examines scientific statements, theories, claims, assumptions, methodology and developments. Philosophy of Science deals with questions like: What is the nature of scientific investigation? Is science objective? Etc.

Philosophy of Science also has a social and moral aspect. Here, we study critically ethical issues of scientific use or misuse. Philosophy of science in its moral sphere studies ecological safety and bio-hazards from chemical, industrial and radio-active releases from nuclear power activities.

Science and philosophy are both pre-occupied with explanation and understanding of the natural reality, truth and knowledge. In this respect, the two disciplines can supplement each other. But while philosophy deals with the “why?” science deals with the “how”? it also deals with the “application” of knowledge and this is where technology comes in. To *discover* truth is the task of science, to *define* the nature of this truth is the task of philosophy. Science grows on ideas and philosophy provides the ideas. Philosophy is in fact the reciprocity of ideas. Philosophy has no doubt influenced scientific developments through its checks and critical analysis of scientific assumptions and knowledge. But both science and philosophy aim at liberating man from ignorance.



9.8.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Which area of inquiry can question the method of science?



9.8.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Philosophy of Science

9.9 Philosophy of Arts and Literature

Philosophy is related to Arts, like Design, Fine Arts, Creative Art and Literature. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with these subjects, including basic concepts and

problems therein. “Aesthetics is a philosophy or perception of beauty in art and in nature”.¹⁴

Here, the fundamental questions are what is Art? Of what use is artistic production? What is artistic experience? What are beauty, love and ugliness? What are the problems of art and aesthetics?



9.9.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Which area of philosophy deals with works of art?



9.9.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Aesthetics

9.10 Philosophy of Language

Philosophy of Language deals with the theories and problems of meaning and the nature of language. A branch of philosophy in which the concern for language is very prominent is logic. Logic is the study of correct and incorrect reasoning, valid and invalid inferences and argument. Our reasoning and thoughts are carried out in Language. An important part of logic consists in the classification of statements and meaning. Language deals with statements and meanings.

The philosophical concern for language has to do with the concept of philosophy as conceptual clarification and analysis. Hence, we have the Analytic Movement in philosophy, which is mainly concerned with language. Here, it is the “ philosopher’s business to bring out features of the use or meaning of various words and forms of statements; it is essential for

¹⁴Jackson, op. cit p. 42.

him to proceed on the basis of some general conception of the nature of linguistic use and meaning”.¹⁵

9.10.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

What is the preoccupation of the Analytic Movement?

9.10.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Linguistic analysis of language

9.11 Philosophy of Political Science

The political scientist deals with the descriptive and prescriptive meanings of political terms like “democracy”, “equality”, “freedom”, “government”, etc., but not with their normative meanings. To discuss the normative meaning of political terms is to pass from politics to ethics, a branch of philosophy. So, the political scientist appeals to philosophy and he does this through the study of political philosophy or theories. This is because the political scientist tries to get a philosophical base or justification for the political values which he studies. Philosophy of political science investigates political theory and the nature of human being as a political and rational animal.

9.11.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Discussion of the normative meanings of political terms is the preoccupation of ---

¹⁵W. P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (U.S.A: Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs, 1964), p.7.



9.11.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Political philosophers

9.12 Philosophy of Mathematics

Mathematics and philosophy also relate through logic (symbolic logic). Some logicians even claim that Arithmetic is derivable from logic. “And since Algebra and Geometry are extensions of Arithmetic, it follows that the whole of pure mathematics is based on logic and is reducible to logic. The study of logic is therefore of a great fundamental importance to the students of mathematics”.¹⁶

The basic assumptions and axioms of mathematics are a priori propositions in philosophy. The why of the equation $1 + 1 = 2$ cannot be successfully explained without recourse to a metaphysical and basic assumption. The question, “what is 1?” is axiomatic and unprovable. It is a first principle, which is metaphysical. And metaphysics is the heart-beat of philosophy.



9.12.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Which area of philosophy relates with mathematics?



9.12.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

¹⁶ Jackson, op.cit, p.41

Symbolic logic

9.13 Philosophy of Psychology

Philosophy of Psychology or philosophical psychology examines the theories, claims and presuppositions of psychology. Psychology is the study of individual and inter-personal behaviour (human and animal) for the purpose of understanding. The philosophical questions in Psychology are: Is psychology a science? What is science? What is the nature of the human mind, intellect, will, action, emotion and the mental processes? Is man free or determined, egoistic or altruistic? What is the driving motive of human actions? Can we study scientifically human behaviour, predict and control human actions? Etc. Philosophical psychology has implication for philosophy of mind. It is in the philosophy of mind that philosophy and psychology relate. Philosophy of mind concerns itself with the theories about the nature of the human mind. Here, the philosopher postulates theories that are made the basis of argument and debate in this respect. The psychologist tries to explain human mind and behaviour through quantitative and empirical analysis and experimentation while the philosopher examines the concepts and validity of the claims. Finally, the philosopher is interested in psychology because most of the claims of the psychologist, like other social scientists are value laden.

9.13.1 **In-Text Questions (ITQs)**

State how the psychologist and the philosopher differ in their treatment of the mind.

9.13.2 **In-Text Answers (ITAs)**

While the psychologist tries to explain human mind and behaviour through quantitative and empirical analysis and experimentation, the philosopher examines the concepts and validity of the claims.

9.14 The Importance of Philosophy

From the above explication, it is evident that there is really no discourse or discipline outside the province of philosophy. Every discipline has its own philosophical foundation, which gives it a force and a sense of direction. This is the philosophical principle.

This is precisely why we can define philosophy as the principle underlying conduct, thought and knowledge. Knowledge of philosophy is fundamental to the understanding of any discipline. There is also the importance of philosophy in its etymological meaning as the “love for wisdom”. Every discipline really needs this wisdom in its enterprise. And this wisdom is essential in a nation’s progress and civilization than anything else. Without wisdom for instance, social justice would not be possible. “Wisdom is an affair of value and of value judgments. It is the intelligent conduct of human affairs. It is knowledge of what is most worthy in our¹⁷ experience, of the ends which can be justifiably pursued, of the good, the better and the best, the bad , the worse and the worst in those concrete situations in which confronted by alternatives of policies of action we ask what shall we do?”¹⁸

Philosophy has an immense role to play in the society. The concern of the philosophers for values, goals, ends of human society, human activity and the means of achieving these, makes the philosopher better qualified to play the role of helping to determine societal values, development and progress. When the knowledge of philosophy is applied to our societal life

¹⁷ C. B. Okolo, “Philosophy and the Meaning of Life”, in *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy* (vol. 5 No 2 1985), p. 142-152

¹⁸ Ibid

it creates more enlightenment and gives more meaning, thereby enlarging our range of vision and perspective. Philosophy is a response to society and to social problems. This is not to say that some philosophers have not presented philosophy as a disinterested study — a subject in vacuum. Philosophers can make policy makers to appreciate the deeper aspect of the problems of development — constantly reminding them, for instance of the true nature and dignity of society's greatest asset, namely, human being itself, and of his essential orientation to a goal, above and beyond the state. Philosophy is an important tool of national development, where development is not seen as one dimensional, that is, technological development only. There is also cultural and moral development. This is where philosophy has an important role to play in development. "Culture as a way of life of a people needs a 'standard of appeal'", it needs a basic principle and ethic that justifies and defends it. This ethic should be rational and open to significant changes. But it cannot be so unless it is a philosophical postulate and guided by a constant Philosophical Inquiry".¹⁹

In most African Societies, there is need for cultural authenticity and development. This is where philosophy becomes useful to society, in the sense that it contributes greatly to the foundation of the standard of the culture of a society.

Another point to note is that philosophy is important in the area of ideas. Every organization, be it medical, social, political, economic, educational, financial, industrial, media or even religious need ideas, and philosophy is the repository of ideas.²⁰

¹⁹ Jackson, op.cit, pp 44-45

²⁰ G. E. Azenabor, "A Critical Reflection on the Relevance of Philosophy in the Contemporary World", *Lagos Notes and Records, A Journal of the Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos*, (Vol. 20, 2014), p.88



9.14.1 **In-Text Questions (ITQs)**

The fundamental ideas needed for the development of every organization are generated through what?



9.14.2 **In-Text Answers (ITAs)**

Philosophy

9.15 The Challenge of Philosophy

From the above exposition, the question “what can philosophy do for you?” has been obliterated. So philosophy can no more be said to be suffering from the crisis of relevance. But even then, philosophy still stands accused. Philosophy is accused by the average intelligent person of being exceedingly abstract. Philosophy, for instance, does not teach one how to make money, increase one’s social status, get rich quick with ease, and give one a better bargaining power in the labour market. The accusers have missed the point. “More than wealth and prestige, philosophy provides for man an opportunity to fulfill his life’s purpose which is a more basic need”²¹ Philosophy re-directs the thinking and value of man, by asking and tackling the question of the meaning of life. What is the meaning of human existence? What is the purpose of life and living? It is the way individuals conceive the answers to these challenging questions of existence that make for one’s type of living, contentment and valuation. Many turn to religion, some to science, most forgot philosophy — the rational

²¹21 C. B. Okolo, op. cit, p. 146

method for tackling the questions about human existence, the universe and man's place and role in it.

The real essence of philosophy is metaphysical; the metaphysical urge to penetrate reality and ask questions like: What is the place of man in the universe? What is the origin of things? Why is there something instead of nothing?²² Is nothing even something? Why am I here? What am I? These are "ontological wonders" which are beyond bread and butter. Man is both material and spiritual; philosophy emphasizes more on the spiritual and metaphysical essence of man.

Another of the charges that is usually brought against philosophy is that a philosopher is "a jack of all trades and master of none". But as we discussed earlier, we see this charge springs from a misconception of what a philosopher's task is. The philosopher does not claim to know all disciplines in details, what the philosopher claims to know about every discipline are the fundamental principles underlying each discipline.

So the philosopher only discusses the philosophical questions in other disciplines and the assumptions and principles on which they are based. The philosopher worries about these fundamentals and assumptions because "the fundamentals of a subject are like premises in a logical argument, the validity and soundness of an argument depends on the truth-value or authenticity of its premises. And a change in the truth value of a premise will affect the soundness of the argument itself. Likewise, a change in the fundamentals of a subject entails a change in the subject itself".²³

9.16.2 References / Suggestions for Further Reading

²²Godwin Azenabor: *Philosophical and Psychology*, op. cit, p.36

²³ W.T Stance, "The Philosophy in Human Culture" in *Philosophy*, Vol. xii, 1937), p.316

- Alston, W. P. (1964). *Philosophy of language*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.
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