

From Embryo to Child's Soul

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A B S T R A C T

The article discusses the nature of the prenatal process and the amazing transformation (alchemists would say “transmutation”) that a born child undergoes during early childhood. Regarding the prenatal process, as is known, there are disputes between supporters and opponents of abortion, since they interpret the embryo and fetus in opposite ways (the former as a biological prerequisite, the latter as already a person with a soul, and, therefore, the right to life). The author presents a reconstruction of the understanding of the soul in different cultures, showing that it performed two functions: it allowed, by affirming immortality, to overcome the fear of death and recorded the personal characteristics of a person. Correlating these ideas with the features of the prenatal process, the author is inclined to think that in this process a biological organism is formed as one of the prerequisites for the future development of a person. An organism that does not have human consciousness and soul, since there is no semiotic support and communication with people yet. Further, he outlines two main stages in the development of a child as a human being in early childhood.

Keywords: Embryo; Human; Consciousness; Soul; Action; Culture; Reconstruction; Practice; Medicine; Signs

Introduction

What nature and man have done easily and repeatedly from time immemorial, philosophers and scientists comprehend with difficulty, if they comprehend at all. The subject of this article is the analysis of the prenatal process, as well as the first stage of the formation of child consciousness. We are talking about explaining how a person is formed from an embryo, which is parental sex cells that have found each other, and from the simplest biological unit (not even an organism) a most complex whole, possessing a soul and consciousness, grows. I was persuaded to think through this problem by the report of Doctor of Philology. Pavel Tishchenko, which was called “How is it possible to think about the world of prenatal medicine or in what sense today can we talk about the plant, animal and rational soul of man?” This report was read on April 23 of this year at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences at the first meeting of the new interdisciplinary seminar

“Human consciousness and animal consciousness: ethical-legal, cognitive-ethological and religious-philosophical aspects in an intercultural perspective.”

Tishchenko is a well-known specialist in the problems of bioethics, in which a real revolution is currently underway, associated not only with new discoveries, but, above all, with the formation of new technologies. What did the author draw attention to in the rather complex second part of Tishchenko’s report? Firstly, in recent decades, a new medical practice has developed, including not only traditional prenatal procedures and treatment, but also completely new ones, for example, genome editing, artificial insemination, psychological adjustment before childbirth to a new life for the mother, etc.

The problems of this practice return us to another attempt to disenchant nature and the mystery of human life. As Tishchenko said at the seminar: “Today, in the flickering light of the increasing medical and socio-humanitarian

problems generated by the development of prenatal medicine: technologies for editing the genome of human embryos and assisted reproductive technologies, the escalating conflict between supporters and opponents of abortion, the problems of forming a new interdisciplinary area of fetal psychology, with all the fundamental philosophical problem of understanding the meaning of human existence (life) before birth opens up more clearly to thought. It is necessary to try to understand the meaning of prenatal human existence (prenatal life) and the world in which this existence takes place.”

Secondly, Paul argued that the embryonic state of a child conceived by parents is conceived in the logic of medical science, in fact, in natural science, while a child, even at the embryonic stage, is a more complex whole, possessing a soul, consciousness and individuality. In accordance with the latter, Tishchenko proposed to explain this whole within the framework of the “concept of individuation” of the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon. “The prenatal generative process,” explained Pavel, “from this point of view, must be thought of as a process of joint individuation of at least three sources of agency - the fetus, the placenta and the mother. Moreover, one of the sources of agency, the placenta, is born together with the embryo and dies at the moment of birth of the fetus. As a medium, the placenta connects the flows of vital activity of the individuating fetus and the individualizing body of the pregnant woman, and, at the same time, separates them (placental barrier). Birth for both the fetus and the woman turns out to be a severance of the direct connection (death of the placenta). The gap opens up space between the fetus and the mother. Their relationship of satisfying the mutual need for each other, which ensures their joint constant individuation, turns out to be spatially distinguished, observable from the outside, turns out to be in the light in the literal and symbolic sense.”

Controversy Over The Nature of The Prenatal Process

It is easy to see that Tishchenko’s opposition (medical understanding of the embryo and, so to speak, “spiritual-anthropological”) is close to the opposition of the parties arguing about allowing or banning abortion. The first consider the conceived fetus simply as biological material; if there is life, it is rather primitive, comparable to that which arose on the planet in prehistoric times, and, of course, unconscious. Their opponents, on the contrary, are confident that a human embryo is already a person who has not only consciousness, but also rights that must be respected. The main argument in defense of this second point of view, writes L.V. Konovalov, “the following can be considered: the embryo is a human being. And since the right to life is the inalienable right of every human being, the fetus also has such a right. This means that abortion is unacceptable from a moral point of view, abortion should be prohibited (in those countries where they are allowed) and in no case allowed (if they are currently prohibited in a given country).

The fire of criticism is focused on the main argument of opponents of abortion, that the fetus is a human being. What is this difference? Similar differences are recognized even for a plant: the difference between a seed, a sprouted shoot and a mature plant.

But let’s return to the main question: when, at what point in time, at what point in the development of the pregnancy process does the fetus become a human being, with all the rights inherent in a person? At the moment of conception? In the first third,

second or third stage of pregnancy? At the moment of birth? Moreover, this is by no means a medical question, but an ethical question - a question about the moral status of the human fetus. Depending on the answer, the issue of allowing or prohibiting abortion can only be resolved. Is it possible to establish, if not a point or a specific moment, then a certain boundary, when the fetus acquires the status of a moral being, and with it the right to life⁴?

One answer to this question is this: the fetus becomes a person at the moment when a soul enters it (in rational logic, when a soul appears). It is clear that this answer is given not in the logic of medical (biological) discourse, but in spiritual-anthropological discourse. Supporters of the ban on abortion unanimously nod their heads in agreement, and their opponents will sarcastically object: it’s really funny to appeal to some incorporeal substance, the question is, what is the soul, how can it be conceived, especially in our age of the highest achievements of science and technology? By the way, they will add, Aristotle in his work “On the Soul” showed that it is quite possible to do without the concept of soul.

Nevertheless, the author, like Tishchenko, also believes that the fetus not only has the traits of individuality, but also, as the beginning of a person, should have, well, if not a developed soul, then some kind of organization that resembles it, including a certain spirituality. The question is, is it possible to understand what this organization is? Let us recall the analogy between phylo and ontogeny. Let’s use it to understand the nature of the human soul in the history of culture, and then project this knowledge into ontogeny².

In connection with this assumption, the author recalled the “Confession” of St. Augustine, which discussed much the same dilemma. For a long time, Augustine tried to think about God rationally, in the spirit of the natural elements, but finally he realized that he needed to change the modality of thinking - God is not nature, but Spirit. “I did not know anything else,” writes Augustine, “that which truly is, and I seemed to be pushed to consider as witty the assent to stupid deceivers when they asked me where evil came from, whether God is limited to a bodily form and whether He has hair and nails, maybe Should those who had several wives at the same time, killed people and sacrificed animals be considered righteous? In my ignorance, I was confused by such questions and, moving away from the truth, imagined that I was going straight to it. I did not know even then that evil is nothing more than the diminishment of good, reaching its complete disappearance. What could I see here if my eyes saw nothing beyond the body, and my soul beyond the ghosts? I did not know then that God is a Spirit, who has no members extending in length and breadth, and no magnitude: every magnitude in its part is smaller than itself, the whole, and if it is infinite, then in some part of itself, limited by a certain space, it is less than infinity and is not whole everywhere, like the Spirit, like God. And what is in us that makes us like God, and why the Scripture correctly says about us: “in the image of God,” this was completely unknown to me¹.

So, what is the soul, how can it be conceived? Doesn’t the author want a lot: to answer the question that the best minds of humanity have struggled with? No, I want to solve a more modest problem: as a cultural scientist, to understand what meaning was put into these concepts in different cultures, and whether it is possible, based on this meaning, to clarify the meaning of the soul in order to transfer these characteristics by

analogy to ontogenesis. Naturally adjusted for time and other conditions. I'll start with the very first, archaic culture.

Cultural and Historical Concepts of The Soul

Faced at the dawn of this culture with the problems of misunderstanding the phenomena of death, illness, dreams, images of people and animals (in rock paintings, sculpture, dance), archaic man invents a "scheme of the soul", with the help of which he not only explained all these phenomena, but was also able act practically. Three main properties were attributed to the archaic soul: it is life, it is located in a house from which the soul can leave, but also return to it (like a bird in its nest), the soul never dies. The last characteristic was introduced to explain not only what death is, but also to overcome the fear of it, which was increasingly taking over a person. As a result, he begins to dream of eternal life. As the "scientists" of the ancient people of the Nagua Indians, who in the past inhabited the Greater Mexican Valley, wrote.

*I'm crying, I feel desperate:
I remember that we must leave the beautiful
flowers and songs.
Let us then enjoy and sing,
once we leave forever and perish.
Let those who live in malice not come,
the land is very wide.
Oh, if only I could always live,
if only I had never died!⁵*

Death, from the point of view of the scheme of the archaic soul, was understood by archaic man as the soul leaving the body without returning (it goes to a new permanent home - a burial, or a temporary one - "yterma", or to the land of the dead, or flies to sit on the "tree of life"). Illness is like a temporary exit of the soul from the body, because it became cold or hot, or wanted to eat. The dream has been interpreted as a journey of the soul during sleep. Finally, rock carvings were understood as a way to evoke the soul, for example, to bring it a gift ("sacrifice"), ask for something, persuade it to protect from enemies ("totemic Spirit"), etc. According to this understanding, a person acted practically: he saw off the deceased, treated the sick, interpreted dreams, communicated with souls and totems⁸. The author shows that all other phenomena of this culture (natural elements and social processes) were interpreted by archaic man using the diagram of the soul; It is no coincidence that this culture was called "animistic" (see, for example, the studies of the classic cultural scientist E. Taylor¹²).

Even on the basis of this material, the following proposition can be formulated. Although the human soul is not observed visually, it can be reconstructed by analyzing: "problem situations" that a person encounters in culture, ways of resolving them (signs, diagrams and other semiotic constructions), meanings and understanding arising from these semiotic inventions, practical actions determined by these meanings and understanding. If we speak in terms of existence, then at the first stage the soul exists as a virtual mental phenomenon (as a problem that requires resolution), then as meaning and a new vision given by schemes, and finally as a real social phenomenon in the practical activities of a person and a social collective. Let us pay attention, although we attribute a soul to a person, considering that this is his natural (one is tempted to say biological principle,

but this is wrong), in fact, or rather, reconstruction shows that the soul is an intermediary between man and culture, that its character corresponds to the level of development of man and society, is determined by the ingenuity of a person in explaining the problems he has encountered, as well as by the organization of practical actions. And one more important point - the archaic soul was understood as immortal, continuing to live with people. In all difficult situations, people called upon the souls of their ancestors and were sure that they would come to their aid. And, for example, at present we are puzzling over where the soul disappears after the death of a person, or how it joins the human embryo and transforms it. Cultural studies show that this characteristic of the soul (immortality) is invariant and is preserved in all subsequent cultures, except the last one, the New Age, where it disappears or is eroded.

If in archaic culture the soul was a response to anthropological problems, then in the following culture of the "Ancient Kingdoms" the idea of gods (schemes of gods) was a response to problems of collective action - *division of labor* and strict vertical management in large teams ("megamachines" of the kingdom, army, labor community). A person had to understand why he should give most of his harvest and labor to others, obey priests, generals and scribes, and live according to rules common to all. The scheme of the gods gave the answer to these questions: the gods created the world and man by sacrificing themselves, the king is a living god, the priests are intermediaries between gods and people, the gods support man if the latter obeys the king and priests and makes sacrifices to them in the form of products of his labor, lives according to the rules formulated by the gods and communicated by the priests. The idea of the human soul is also changing radically. Firstly, she now submits to the gods, even after the death of a person (the gods of death Osiris, Hades, Mara, Israel, etc.). Secondly, the human soul very much depends on the conditions of social and individual life. For example, judging by the text of the Epic of Gilgamesh, among the Sumerians, the life of the soul after the death of a person resembles imprisonment.

*To the house of darkness, to the dwelling of Irkalla,
To a house from which the one who enters never leaves,
On a path where there is no way back,
To a house where the inhabitants are deprived of light,
Where is their food- dust and their food - clay,
And they are dressed like birds with the clothing of wings,
And they do not see the light, but they live in darkness,
And the bolts and doors are covered with dust!³*

In ancient culture, starting with Plato, a double interpretation of the soul is established and begins to be reproduced: on the one hand, its immortality is proven, which is a condition for overcoming the fear of death, on the other hand, characteristics are attributed to the soul that in modern times have been assigned to the individual (reflection, thinking, experience, action, etc.). For example, Plato in the Republic argues that the soul is not only immortal, but can recognize and think through a past life and choose a future one. "After these words of the soothsayer, the one who received the first lot immediately approached ("the lot" in Plato sets the future life. - V.R.), he took for himself the life of a powerful tyrant (above, the goddess of fate Lachesis, who cast lots into the crowd of souls, said: "Virtue is not the property of anyone alone; whether one honors it or not, everyone joins it more or less. It is the fault of the chooser, God is not guilty." Because of his foolishness and gluttony, he made a choice without thinking, and there lay hidden a fatal fate for him... By

chance, the very last of all the lot fell to the soul of Odysseus. She remembered her previous hardships and, throwing away all ambition, wandered for a long time, looking for the life of an ordinary person, far from business; Finally, she forcibly found it, lying somewhere, everyone had neglected it, but the soul of Odysseus, as soon as it saw it, joyfully took it for itself⁶.

In the Middle Ages, the same duality persisted: the soul is immortal, although now its state is due to the Christian God, and the soul increasingly takes on the individual characteristics of a person, which is especially visible in St. Augustine. "Therefore," we read in "Speech against the Hellenes" by Tatian the Assyrian (112 - 185), "we believe that at the end of everything there will be a Resurrection of bodies - not as the Stoics teach, according to whom, after certain periods of time, the same creatures always appear and perish without any benefit - but one day, after the fulfillment of our centuries, and solely for the sake of restoring some people for judgment... Let the fire destroy my body, but the world will accept this substance, dissipated like steam; let me perish in rivers or seas, let me be torn to pieces by beasts, but I will hide in the treasury of the rich Lord. A weak and atheist man does not know what is hidden; and King God, when He wants, will restore to its previous state the essence that is visible to Him alone¹¹.

In Augustine, the conversation of the soul, perhaps for the first time, is carried out on behalf of the "I" and is conditioned by the idea of the Creator of everything, given by a new scheme. Here is a diagram of the Christian God of St. Augustine: He is the "way," "truth," "creation," and as the hypostasis of God Christ, "the mediator between man and God." This scheme, on the one hand, set a new idea of man (he is together with God, who guides him, but only if the person comes to the Christian faith), on the other, a new idea of the world and man's life path. God created the world and man, which will pass away; a person must become a Christian; There will be a Last Judgment and the end of existence for some, shining and good, for others - sad and terrible. Again, the understanding of the human soul undergoes a radical transformation: it becomes active and reflexive, positions itself in the space of its own passions (desires) and the requirements of the Christian faith, and becomes capable of action that resolves the dilemma of the desires and demands of the Christian faith.

"I had," writes Augustine, "no apologies. I could not say that it was precisely because I had not yet renounced the world and followed You that I did not know the truth; no, I knew the truth, but, tied to the earth, I refused to fight for You... I approved one thing, but followed another¹.

"Let them perish before Thy presence," Lord, how they perish, "the vain talkers and seducers," who, noticing the presence of two desires in man, declared that we have two souls of two natures: one good and the other evil.

When I was thinking about serving the Lord my God (as I had long ago decided), I wanted this and I did not want this - and I was the same me. I didn't quite want to and I didn't quite want to. That's why I fought with myself and became divided within myself, but this division did not testify to the nature of the other soul, but only to the fact that my own was punished⁹. Again, new problems and ways of solving them led to new schemes and, as a consequence, a new vision of man, which is attributed to him as the characteristics and essence of his soul.

Let me stop with the examples; I think it is clear that one can

agree with the position stated above that the human soul is the result of objectification (attribution to a person) of characteristics specified by schemes that are invented to resolve problematic situations in a culture. They are invented in accordance with the level of human development and cultural characteristics. The ideas about the soul are twofold: the immortal essence of man and his personal characteristics and characteristics, which are different in individual cultures. Let us now project these ideas onto the processes of human formation in the prenatal period and into the beginning of the "culture of childhood" (about the concept of "cultures of life" - "childhood", "adulthood", "maturity", "old age" see¹⁰). In the prenatal period, we can only talk about the formation of human preconditions, mainly biological, in the culture of childhood - about the first stages of human formation.

First, let us pay attention to a two-way process: the conception (both semiotic and practical in love) of the future child by the parents, behind whom society and the state loom, and the process of fetal growth. Parents create the conditions for this growth: they plan for the future, hope, already love the future child, try to live and eat properly, undergo treatment if necessary, and now they even try to correct the fetus and its development if they do not fit into the medical norm. From the point of view of abortion supporters, a fetus is a fetus, an embryo, and not a person and therefore does not have consciousness and intelligence. This is a certain form of life, clearly biological, but so far it cannot be attributed either to an animal or to human society, since it is not yet the normal cultural life of a small child with his parents and not the life of a Mowgli.

Opponents of abortion are confident that the fetus is already a person, even at the very beginning of its formation, however, how this is possible cannot be rationally explained, replacing explanation with faith. True, if they knew how archaic people explained marriage, they might have found an explanation. The fact is that archaic man, as cultural scientist Natalya Erofeeva shows, understood marriage relations as hunting. "It is extremely difficult," writes Erofeeva, to understand where the hunt ends and the wedding begins. Thus, in the carol repertoire of the Slavs, there is a widespread plot situation in which a young man hunts for a doe (chamois, marten, fox), which turns out to be a maiden. In the Eastern Romanesque epic poem "Jorgovan and the Wild Maiden from Under the Stone," the hero goes to hunt the wild maiden directly.

*Goes to hunt light birds,
Goes to woo cute girls...*

Erofeeva also cites linguistic analogies. In Turkic languages ATA means "male", "father" with the root AT meaning "to shoot"; ANA - "female", "mother" with the root AN - "game". Erofeeva illustrates the well-known ritual of courtship and intercourse as the pursuit and defeat of the victim during a hunt with rock paintings (petroglyphs), which depict hunters with raised phalluses, shooting at the genitals of women and animals. For example, as in the petroglyph (Neolithic Tiu, North Africa)².



It's not clear what hunting and marriage have in common?⁷ Here's what. A mother has her own soul, but where does the soul of her child come from? Petroglyphs (diagrams) suggest how this problematic situation was eventually resolved. The result of a successful hunt is the death of the animal, therefore, from the point of view of archaic man, its soul left the body. Then the hunter is a kind of shepherd, driving the soul from the animal's body to another place (burial, itterma, land of the dead, tree of life). The result of intimate relationships, on the contrary, led to the appearance of a child in the mother's body and, consequently, his soul. Again it turns out that now the husband (groom) is distilling the soul in the opposite direction into the body of his wife. There was little left, which is what happened - to identify hunting with marital relations, the husband (groom) with the hunter. This story is depicted in different versions in thousands of petroglyphs. You can guess why there are so many of them. These schemes were probably created to support both hunting and mating relationships.

And let us note that from the point of view of opponents of abortion, such an archaic explanation is twofold: both a psycho-biological process (the intercourse of lovers and cells) and a spiritual one (the appearance of the child's soul in the mother's body, probably with a corresponding transformation of the mother's soul). But this is, if only, and besides, biological knowledge cannot be ignored. Now, what does fetal growth represent in terms of the formation of a future person?

As I show in the concept of the origin of man, the trigger that launched the process of transformation of hominids was, on the one hand, the process of replacing signal behavior with sign behavior, which required following the signs of the leader and re-imagining real situations into imaginary ones in accordance with these signs, and on the other hand, as necessary the condition for this change is the adaptation of somatics, psyche and physicality to sign behavior¹⁰. This process ends (which took about a million years) when the behavior of "creatures of a transitional form" (not yet humans, but no longer hominids) becomes completely symbolic (any situation and event must be designated and understood accordingly, in addition they must result into new actions), and somatics, psyche and physicality are completely adapted to this behavior. As a result, a person appears.

Archaic man is formed in the conditions of solving the above anthropological problems and the ways of their extension to natural and social phenomena. At the same time, the meaning becomes more complicated: schemes of "soul", "arche" (translated as "beginning"), schemes for understanding individual phenomena, for example, an eclipse, are formed. "In the Tupi language," writes E. Taylor, "a solar eclipse is expressed in the words: "a jaguar ate the sun." The full meaning of this phrase is still revealed by some tribes in that they shoot flaming arrows to drive away the ferocious beast from its prey. On the northern continent, some savages also believed in a huge sun-eating dog, while others shot arrows into the sky to protect their luminaries from imaginary enemies who attacked them. But next to these prevailing concepts, there are also others. The Caribs, for example, imagined the eclipsed moon as hungry, sick or dying... The Hurons considered the moon sick and performed their usual charivari with shooting and howling dogs to heal it¹². Let us note that here again the indicated triad is meaning (the expression "the jaguar ate the sun" can be interpreted both as a sign and as a diagram⁸, a new understanding and vision (of the jaguar in the sky) and a new action (we drive away the jaguar).

problematic situation	→ SIGN – SCHEME →	new action
fear of eclipse	"The jaguar ate the sun"	drive away the jaguar

Hypothesis About The Very First Stage Human Development

What happens during the period of fetal growth? Probably, the somatics, psyche and physicality necessary to launch the mechanism of the child's formation after birth are taking shape. It is reasonable to think that a biological organism is being formed as one of the prerequisites for the future development of man. An organism that does not have human consciousness, since there is still no semiotic support and communication with people, in which only such support can take shape. In this regard, we agree with the assertion of critics of abortion that the fetus is not yet a person. Briefly, the launch of the mechanism of human formation during childhood.

At the first stage of childhood, until about 3 years of age, the child does not separate himself from his parents; his life and being are one with his parents, which is L.S. Vygotsky expressed it with the concept of "prama." Prama means following the changes in this whole that occur as a result of care and education. The initiator of change is the parents, the child changes; in turn, parents, but meaningfully follow the changes in the child's life.

Parents put the child on the path of humanization by talking and communicating with him, which in theoretical terms can be understood as the meaning of all phenomena and events that parents and the child deal with. Initially, this meaning for a child is nothing more than semiotic accompaniment of real phenomena and events, following which, however, the child involuntarily establishes connections and correspondences between signs and objects (events). Sets under the influence of parents in the logic of prama, for example, they call milk with the appropriate word, feed, immerse the child in their feelings. The turn occurs when the child understands that signs and patterns predict changes, facilitate their occurrence, change the whole, transferring it to a more attractive state. Understands by learning to create, with the help of signs and diagrams, imaginary phenomena and events, followed by their real analogues. That is, for a child this is no longer just semiotic accompaniment, but real meaning. Further developments of events and humanization, as well as the role of semiotic schemes in this process, are outlined in⁹. But let's return to understanding the prenatal process.

Conclusion

Is it possible to attribute a soul to a growing fetus and, if so, what kind? Let us remember that the diagram of the soul has two functions: to explain the immortality of individual life and to express the personal characteristics of the individual. Opponents of abortion might like to endow the embryo with these two properties, but do not know how to do this, and supporters cannot either, but for another reason, they agree that the fetus is not yet a person, so one cannot talk about immortality and personal features. Parents are another matter. Since they are planning their child, they can wish him both immortality and a personality desirable for his parents. Believing parents do this, turn to God in prayer during pregnancy, and plan to introduce the child to a religious lifestyle; and parents who believe in medical science and practice go to doctors for treatment or genome editing.

Modern prenatal practice, which we talked about at the beginning of the article, evokes the image of the unborn child

as *works*, which parents create (conceive and design) on their own or involve doctors and psychologists for these purposes. Does this mean that prenatal practice promotes a new image of the human soul - perfect from the point of view of parents and society? The question is, what principles are laid down by different subjects in such perfection, and how does it relate to the traditional and modern understanding of man? These questions will have to be answered, on the one hand, by time (prenatal practice is just taking shape), on the other, by scientists (psychologists, biologists, semioticians, teachers).

We tried to show that although supporters of abortion are right in saying that the fetus is not yet a person, they are mistaken in thinking that it does not have individuality and does not develop in an environment focused on realizing the plans of the parents and creating conditions for the formation of a future soul child. In this regard, abortion opponents are partly right. But in general our concept differs from both points of view. The prenatal process and the formation of the consciousness and soul of the child cannot be considered and explained in isolation from the social attitudes of society, the plans of the parents, the requirements for the biological organism, coming from the future life of the child, already as a person.

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