

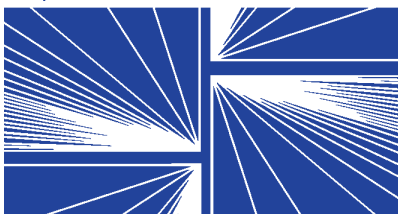
**Man in his Natural State:
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Locke's *Second Treatise***

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Man in his Natural State: The New World and Locke's *Second Treatise*

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Over the past four decades an effort has been made to relieve John Locke's writing of its central position in the foundation of the "American Republic," as historians of political philosophy have tended to devalue his role in the pantheon of America's founding philosophers (Huyler 1995; Pocock 1975; Bailyn 1967). Although we have a robust historiography that considers the question of Locke in America, we have surprisingly few scholarly studies on the role of America in Locke's thought, particularly of the conceptual imagery of the Americas and its peoples in Locke's *Second Treatise* (Bailyn 1967; Pocock 1975). The studies that do consider this connection do not situate his work into a broader historiography concerning the impact of the New World on Europe during the three centuries after its discovery. Instead, scholars have largely approached the question from the perspective of political theory and with the relatively limited goal of explicating his political thought more clearly. In this paper, I am interested in reading Locke as a crucial moment in the larger impact of the New World on Europe during the three centuries after its discovery.

Only relatively recently have historians begun to consider how the early conceptualization of the Americas altered European views on politics, religion and philosophy more broadly conceived (Grafton 1992; Pagden 1993; Kagen and Parker 1995). The discovery of the Americas, these historians argue, forced a European public to alter not only their concept of space but also the trajectory of European history. Persistent but formerly secondary problems in Ptolemaic and Aristotelian world geography demanded reconsideration in lieu of the discovery. Inchoate doubts concerning the validity of ancient teachings hardened into open skepticism after the revelation of undisputed, empirically demonstrated existence of previously unknown continents (Pagden 1993, 89-92). In reaction to these inconsistencies, European intellectuals created a mortar, a mixture of ancient and modern understandings, to fill the cracks in ancient thought. This mortar was inevitably prepared with knowledge gleaned from the existence of the New World.

In the midst of this larger transformation of the European world-view, Locke attempted to establish a theory of the role of government in the lives of 'men.' Locke's understanding of the relationship between government and governed hinged critically on his sense of the "place of man in nature," out of which evolved his understanding of political authority (Simmons 1989, 449-452). But what was the process by which Locke actually arrived at his understanding? Most studies focus on the connection between the nature of politics and ideas of property, though they do so in order to understand the internal logic of the text, not the philosophical milieu within which it was created. I argue that to understand Locke's political philosophy we must first appreciate the conceptual impact the New World had on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European thought. To that end, this paper will contextualize Locke's *Second Treatise* by examining the climate of geographic discovery during the century and a half preceding its first publication, with particular focus upon the ways in which the

Americas influence the critical thought of contemporaneous philosophers. Placing Locke within this broader context will help to elucidate the extensive and varied philosophical significance of Europe's recognition of the geographic reality of the Americas in the Age of Discovery.

This reinterpretation of Locke's political philosophy will be framed through the completion of two tasks: First, a survey of the historiography surrounding Locke, America, and the intellectual impact of New World discovery will be conducted. This brief overview will trace the scholarly literature surrounding European meditations on the discovery as well as the academic understanding of Locke and America, placing particular emphasis on Barbara Arneil's (1996) arguments in *John Locke and America*. In situating Arneil's study of Locke's work within the literature surrounding questions of the conceptual imprint of America on Europe, this essay highlights the broader context within which Locke's political philosophy must be understood. Second, a survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts produced by a number of early modern European theorists, as well as sundry traveler's testimonies, will be undertaken to demonstrate the extent to which the New World, and its 'discovery', had provided European philosophers with a model for innovation in religious, scientific, geographical and political modes of inquiry. Locke's *Second Treatise* will then be incorporated into this larger body of work surrounding European interpretations of the New World. By doing so, this paper demonstrates that Lockean political philosophy was not narrowly conceived in a *sui generis* moment, nor did it trace its roots only as far as the works of continental philosophers of natural law. Rather, it was part of a distinct body of material that attempted to understand the Americas through philosophical means.

Over the last half-century the historiography surrounding early modern Europe has broadened to incorporate a variety of texts and methods, fostering a proliferation of studies that focus on Europe's reaction to the "new-found World" of the Americas (Acosta 1975). This discovery resulted in a re-conceptualization of both the geographic and mental landscape of early modern Europe. The implications of this historiographical shift towards a broader geographic context, exemplified by the rise of the Atlantic World as a recognized, and fruitful, sub-discipline of historical inquiry, has altered the study of Europe in the early modern period. This scholarship has illustrated the various ways in which the discovery of the New World influenced Early Modern Europe, tracing broad currents of influence rather than isolated instances of inspiration. In these studies there is little room for a direct concentration on particular people or works. Similarly, studies focusing on the New World and British ideas of empire and identity overwhelmingly focus on particular subjects over extended periods of time, while the historiography surrounding the use of the Americas in Locke's *Second Treatise* has concentrated primarily on broad conceptions of the construction of man "in civil society" (Arneil 1996, 7).

The literature concerned with *The Second Treatise* has consistently portrayed Locke's use of the Americas as an attempt to reconcile "fact with theory," to strengthen his argument with empirical evidence in the creation of his political philosophy (Carey 1996, 23). In 'The Uses of America in Locke's Second Treatise of Government,' Herman Lebovics highlights the role of the New World in the creation of Locke's political philosophy. "In his *Second Treatise*," argues Lebovics, Locke "summed up the New World to validate the society emerging in the old" (Lebovics 1986, 568).

However, in Lebovics's account the West Indies function more as an example of already articulated theories in Locke's mind, rather than a formative influence. His conclusion was shared by Barbara Arneil, who agreed that Locke's work was intended as a validation for colonialism. In *John Locke and America: The Defense of English Colonialism*, Arneil focuses specifically on the uses of the Amerindian as a justification for colonial expansion, looking primarily at references to America in the *Second Treatise* (Arneil 1996, 10). However, neither Arneil nor Lebovics attempt to situate their analyses of Locke into the broader historiography that highlights the impact of New World discovery as a catalyst for European re-conceptualization of natural and moral philosophy. By omitting this connection their studies overlook a distinct and influential role the New World, and geographic discovery more broadly conceived, played in early-modern philosophic discourse.

Early English translations of travel literature, a theme to which Arneil devotes an entire chapter, were undertaken in large part to convince England of the benefits of colonial acquisitions (Steele 1975). Though this understanding of the purpose of translation is widely accepted in the historiography surrounding sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, Arneil does not mention it. The work of Richard Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas and Sir Walter Raleigh, though acknowledged, are reduced to "absorbed" fascination, while the Elizabethan translators Richard Eden, John Frampton and Thomas Nicholas are omitted entirely (Arneil 1996, 22). All these translators had colonial aspirations and wished to increase the British presence in the West Indies. Locke was not the first but one in a line of many who attempted to entice planters to the American colonies. While Arneil derides recent historiography on the subject for its narrow vision, or lack of "global context," she does not fully explore the broader influence of exploration and discovery and its subsequent influence upon Europe, choosing to view this influence primarily through the concept of natural law (Arneil 1996, 45). Arneil traces the formation of Locke's conceptions of natural law back to both Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, who draw upon depictions of the Americas for their understanding of man in his natural state, without a protracted examination of the larger impact on European thought (Arneil 1996). Though the philosophy of natural law is indeed central to Locke's political theory, the roots of European intellectual struggles with the existence of the Americas go deeper. In overlooking these beginnings Arneil builds an argument that does not give sufficient global context when describing the relationship between America and Locke's work.

Arneil's assertion that Locke's political theory was meant as a "defense of English colonialism" is indeed correct. Locke and his patron the Earl of Shaftsbury both had interests in the Georgia colony and wished to extend their interest into the future. She is also correct in highlighting Locke's representations of the New World as a "Garden of Eden" (Arneil 1996, 1). Without the example of the Amerindian in his *Second Treatise* a vision of the state of nature could not have been created effectively. However, Locke was not alone in his attempt to understand philosophical theory through the empirical illustrations of the Americas and its peoples. From Pietro Pomponazzi to Alexander von Humbolt, early modern Europeans endeavored to incorporate the West Indies into a coherent understanding of their spatial and intellectual world. With his integration of empirical evidence about the 'natural state of man' into the discourse on government, Locke joined a growing community of intellectuals who defined early modern Europe through knowledge of the Americas.

The representations of the Indigenous Americans in the *Second Treatise* serve not only to convey an understanding of the ‘natural state of man’ but also to illustrate a continuation of the conceptual struggle of European intellectuals to understand the New World and its inhabitants. These intellectual currents are not to be overlooked in a study of Locke’s conceptualization of America.

During the century after the discovery of the Americas, descriptions of the first voyages west rapidly circulated within Europe. It seemed to those who commented upon them that Spanish accounts of these voyages and natural histories of the New World continually illustrated the ability of that continent to fascinate Europeans with the fantastical and the unknown. “Every creature in this sublunary world...that gives birth to something,” claims Peter Martyr in book V of *De Orbo Novo*, either immediately afterwards closes the womb or rests for a period. The new continent, however, is not governed by this rule, for each day it creates without ceasing and brings forth new products, which continue to furnish men gifted with power and an enthusiasm for novelties, sufficient material to satisfy their curiosity. (D’Anghera 1970, 335)

Identifying the Americas as a New World raised doubts about many established truths: Aristotle, whose philosophy was used to fill scientific gaps in Christian theology, was unclear on the presence of any such landmass in his work concerning the composition of the earth and the heavens. Furthermore, his writings stated that life could not exist at longitudes that close to the sun (Ford 1998, 32). This assertion, as the Florentine traveler Amerigo Vespucci recognized in his famous *Letters* to Lorenzo de Medici in 1503, “is false, and entirely opposed to the truth” (Vespucci 1963, 42). Vespucci’s testimony of empirical proof that there existed “a continent in that southern part [of the globe]; more populous and more full of animals than our Europe, or Asia, or Africa, and even more temperate and pleasant than any region known to us” provided unquestionable gaps in Aristotelian teachings (Vespucci 1963, 42). The publication and broad circulation of Vespucci’s *Letters*, along with later accounts of voyages to the Americas, led to rising European awareness of the New World.

Using Vespucci’s *Letters* as inspiration, Thomas More projected his design of an ideal commonwealth on the blank canvas of the Americas. In *Utopia*, More conceives of a fictional island situated in the New World whose citizens’ “way of life provides not only the happiest bases for a civilized community, but also one which, in all human probability, will last forever” (More 2003, 112). In giving an account of the Utopian structure of government, More underscores Europe’s moral immaturity by painting a fictitious society upon the empty tapestry of the Americas (Goddie 1970, 16-17). “You’d be more qualified to judge the age of their civilization,” the traveler Raphael says of the “Utopians,”

if you’d read their history books. If these are to be trusted, there were towns in the New World before human life had begun in the Old. As for what you say about intelligence and chance discoveries, there’s no reason to suppose we have a monopoly on either...I doubt if we’d be quite so quick to take over any of their arrangements which are better than ours. And that’s the main reason, I think, why although they’ve got no more intelligence than we have, they’re so much more ahead of us politically and economically. (More 2003, 46-47)

More's message is clear: the existence of the Americas raises questions concerning the primacy of European philosophy. If there is a world beyond European knowledge, with other peoples and civilizations hitherto unknown, in what other ways have we misunderstood the world? His critique of the machinery of European structures of government also produced the first philosophical reaction to the discovery that highlighted its importance and potential: *Utopia* not only united the West Indies and European philosophical discourse but it also created a model of literary experimentation using the New World to suggest "possible methods of reforming European society" (More 2003, 19). Not only can the Americas teach us about the reality of our physical surroundings, More's work pronounces, but it can also help us conceive a new Europe. This union of travel literature and philosophical discourse proved potent and was emulated by other European authors in the following centuries, creating a new genre for analytical works of philosophy and social criticism (Hadfield 1998). Not only Bacon's *New Atlantis*, but also Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* and James Harrington's *Oceana* espoused ideal commonwealths set in exotic geographies. For many, the metaphorical juxtaposition of geographic and cerebral discovery became a starting point for works attempting to construct a new Europe in the midst of an epistemological crisis. More's *Utopia* attempted to reverse this crisis through a positive representation of the West Indies. The discovery, according to More, was inherently positive: its existence could be used as a philosophical laboratory, a place to experiment with, and improve upon, existing European conceptions of politics, science and philosophy. Thus, political experimentation and the New World became infused through his work.

Those who commented on the possibilities of this New World did so not only in the realm of moral philosophy, as had More, but also in natural philosophy, and particularly within a framework of scientific praxis. Throughout the sixteenth century a body of knowledge was constructed based upon accounts of sensory experience in the West Indies. Columbus had been the first European to witness and comment upon the differences between Spain and the New World, the latter containing "many kinds of trees, herbs, and sweet-smelling flowers; and birds of many different kinds, unlike those in Spain, except the partridges, geese, of which there are many, and singing nightingales" (Columbus 1963, 71). José de Acosta's first empirical observations, as one scholar has pointed out, can be linked to the works of Christopher Columbus, laying both a foundation for empirical study as well as creating a corpus of information compiled from sensory experience to be used by seventeenth-century 'men of science' (Butzer 1992, 557-558). Few authors who have published their accounts of the New World employed the same empirical approach that José de Acosta displayed in his *History of the Indies* (1590). As one scholar has recently pointed out, Acosta's work has commonly been read as ethnology in order to better understand the Aboriginal Americans of the sixteenth century (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006). While this approach has proved useful for ethnohistorians, it does not reflect one of the primary motives of its author: to undertake an empirical study of nature using information gleaned from the American continent. Unlike others who penned accounts or natural histories of the Americas, Acosta's work is structured through the language of scientific discovery, using the data he collected on his journeys to re-conceptualize the ways in which science should be undertaken.

A Jesuit by training and faith, Acosta would not have claimed that he was attempting to unseat the ancients from their lofty positions and he intended his *History* to reconcile the discovery of the

New World to classical geography (Ford 1998, 22). It often reads like a panegyric to Greek philosophy, triumphantly praising theories that had been demonstrated by the discovery while downplaying others that could not be merged into a new empirical understanding of the world (Acosta 1970, 4). In this way Acosta attempted to mesh ancient ideas of science, as visibly flawed as they were, with the ocular reality of the Americas. Acosta's work, in spite of his intentions, nevertheless emphasized the extent to which ancient beliefs had become antiquated. But, it was only after Acosta's work that an embryonic body of empirical findings began to take shape. His supposition that empirical evidence, wherever possible, should be used to buttress the 'philosophical demonstrations' that had constituted the canon of sixteenth-century European thought provided a wholly scientific reaction to the Americas (Acosta 1970, 30-31). Unlike the Italian philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi, Acosta did not feel that "where experience and reason are in conflict...we should hold to experience and abandon reason" (Pagden 1993, 91). Instead, when a divergence between empirical evidence and philosophical or religious teachings appears, one must "consult with the force of reason" as it will "answer with this her integritie and gravitie" (Acosta 1970, 20-21). On the negation of the possible existence of human life on the other side of the world, however, even Acosta had to concede that Aristotle and the ancients had been wrong.

His reaction to an obvious abundance of life in the equatorial region, called by the Greeks the 'burning zone' and believed to be uninhabitable, illustrates both his reliance on sensory experience and inability to disregard Ancient teachings:

Whereby they [the ancients] did coniecture that if they had the sunne so neere vunto them as to go directly over their heads, the heate would have bene so insupportable, as it would burne and consume men with the vehemency thereof. The same reason moved the Auncients to think that the middle region was not habitable, and therefore they called it the burning zone. And in truth, if visible experience did not vnfold this doubt, we should yet confesse that this reason were very peremptorie and mathematical; whereby we may see how weake our vnderstanding is, to comprehend these naturall things. (Acosta 1970, 31)

Thus, he acquits the ancients of any false knowledge due to their ignorance of these lands: the voyages of discovery, Acosta is saying, are simply filling the holes in Greek knowledge, holes that were impossible to fill in ancient times. In Acosta's work we see not only a reverence for ancient teachings but also the first signs of a distinctly modern scientific method which relies on empirical discovery to understand the natural world.

English translations of Spanish travel literature to the Americas arrived in England with Richard Eden's 1555 rendering of *De Orbo Novo* and other selected texts. Collectively titled *The First Three English Books on America*, Eden's work not only relayed the events of New World encounters but also commented on the importance of the discovery. In his 'epistle dedicatore' to the Duke of Northumberland at the start of the *Second Book*, Eden illustrates with a familiar example the profound importance of the West Indies on both Europe in general and England in particular:

There chaunfed of late to come to my handes, a fheite of paper, (more worthy fo to beecalled than a boke) entytuled of the newe founde landes. The whyche tittle when

I readde' as one not vtterlye ignoraount herof, hauynge before in my tyme readde *Decades*, and alfo the nauigations *de nouo orbo*, there feemed too me no leffe inequalitye betwene the tittle and the booke, then if a man woulde profeffe to wryte of Englande, and entreated only Trumpington a village wythin a myle of Cambrydge. Wherefore partelye moued [by] the good affeccion, whyche I haue euer borne to the fcience of Cofmoraphie, whyche entreately of the defcripcion of the worlde, whereof the newe founde landes are no fmal part...whyche of duetie I beare to my natyue countrey and countreyemen, whyche haue of late to their great praife...attempted with new viages to ferche ye feas and newe found landes, I thought it worthy my trauayle...to translate this boke oute of laten and into Englifhe, (Eden 1971, 5)

Early translations such as Eden's were the first visions for many in England to gain a fuller understanding of the West Indies. It was with these translations that "the Renaissance came to England" (Mathiessen 1931, 1), and with them came a broader understanding of the importance of the Americas. It was through these works, as illustrated in Eden's dedication, that an early vision of English overseas expansion was put forth. The publication of this literature forced England to consider both the enterprise that these translations advocated as well as reflect upon their own position in Europe and the world (Hadfield 1998, 70-71).

As the translations of Richard Hakluyt the elder were expanded upon by Richard Hakluyt the younger, so too did the writings considering the New World develop from simple colonial dreams to a nascent imperial reality. From the early inspirations of More's *Utopia*, English philosophers had incorporated the America's into their mental construction of a "modern" world, one that was distinctly different from that of the ancients. "Wherin experience should be of more force than all Philosophicall demonstrations," read Edward Griston's 1604 translation of Joseph de Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, "and to clear any doubt that might grow, it sufficeth that I have seen in this hemisphere that part of heaven which turnes about this Earth, the which was vnknowne to the Ancients" (Acosta 1970, 4). It was the empirical nature embodied by geographic discovery, both Acosta and Griston believed, and not the wisdom of the ancients, that truly propelled European critical inquiry. Their convictions were shared by many seventeenth-century thinkers, including philosopher of science Francis Bacon, whose codified empirical method was widely influential during the following centuries.

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon considered the discovery of the Americas in both his *New Organon* and *New Atlantis*. These vastly different works, the former a template for empirical scientific research, the latter a utopian tract advocating the creation of a society based upon scientific principles, both incorporated the New World into the fabric of their arguments. The Americas, for Bacon, served as the empirical evidence that nullified ancient teachings and unequivocally proved the importance of the inductive method. "We...should take into account," he explains in the *New Organon*,

that many things in nature have come to light and been discovered as a result of long voyages and travels (which have been more frequent in our time), and

they are capable of shedding new light in philosophy. Indeed it would be a disgrace to mankind if wide areas of the physical globe, of land, sea and stars, have been opened up and explored in our time while the boundaries of the intellectual globe were confined to the discoveries and narrow limits of the ancients. (Bacon 2000, 69)

Here Bacon points directly to geographic discovery as the template for subsequent intellectual inquiry. As the central instance illustrating the power of geographic discovery, not only the landfall and subsequent settlement of the Americas but also the information gleaned from published ethnographic, botanical, and faunal descriptions helped philosophers better understand the broader world.

English and European meditations on the Americas necessarily affected the political and scientific discourse in this period, creating an atmosphere of regeneration in the realm of philosophical cogitations. In this context of intellectual reassessment brought on largely by geographic discovery it is hard to imagine that Locke's *Second Treatise* was simply a justification of English colonial endeavors. Moreover, it is unlikely that Locke used the 'American Indian' merely as "empirical evidence," as Barbara Arneil suggests, without reflecting on previous literature considering America's conceptual impact (Arneil 1996, 16). The role of empirical evidence in Locke's work, which takes a central position in the *Second Treatise*, stretches back to Francis Bacon's call for a "well built road" to be "constructed for the human understanding from sense and experience" seventy-eight years previous (Bacon 2000, 67). It is in the Baconian empirical tradition that Locke constructs his arguments and condemns his rival, the political philosopher Sir Robert Filmore, for his lack of proper evidence. And it is in the language of post-discovery European discourse in which he conceives his vision of "the true original, extent, and end of civil-government" (Locke 2008, 153).

Locke's understanding of property was founded upon, and exemplified by, the model of the Americas and their indigenous inhabitants. In his *Second Treatise* he explained that "in the beginning all the world was *America*, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as *Money* was any where known" (Locke 2008, 299-300). The nature of the Aboriginal Americans, as those who existed in a state free from the trappings of seventeenth-century European society, allowed Locke to study the mechanics of civil and societal interaction. He described the lack of industry displayed by the inhabitants of the Americas in undertaking agricultural projects as an absence of labour, tying together the notion of communal land holding and dormant or under-cultivated land. The enclosure of the commons, Locke argued, provided the conveniences of modern life, as an industrious labourer could have a "greater plenty" cultivating ten acres than "he could have from an hundred left to nature" (Locke 2008, 294).

In the Americas, Locke witnessed what he perceived as a state of nature and from it deduced that the expanses of common and underutilized acres debased the value of land. To underscore his argument he stated that "in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America left to Nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres will yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life as ten acres of equally fertile land doe in Devonshire where they are well cultivated" (Locke 2008, 294). To Locke, land held in common for hunting was necessarily underutilized, producing little of value from the labour of those who held it. It was here, in the

evidence gleaned from the Americas, that practices of land tenure and the closing of the commons in Britain was justified. From this American model, Locke formulated an understanding of property that was contingent upon labour, an action that “*puts the difference of value on every thing*” (Locke 2008, 296). Moreover, his theory of property is underscored by the American example, stating that

[t]here cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the *Americans* are in this, who are rich in Land, and poor in all the Comforts of Life; whom Nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of Plenty, *i.e.* a fruitful Soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundreth part of the Conveniencies we enjoy: And a King of a large and fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England. (Locke 20008, 296-297)

In much the same way his predecessors had re-conceptualized their understandings of the natural world through the existence of the New World and its inhabitants, Locke formulated an understanding of property that centres upon the Americas. The peoples native to the Americas proved to be a compelling example of ‘man in the state of nature’ and his inability to adequately harness the benefits of property.

In Locke’s *Second Treatise* America and its peoples served not only as evidence but also as stimulus, forcing Europeans to re-evaluate the world and themselves. Locke, as many had done before him, took a profound interest in the American continents and framed his philosophy through the vocabulary of this New World. Moreover, his work was constructed upon evidence gleaned from the Americas and their inhabitants, which provided a model for human social interaction in the state of nature. Given Locke’s stature and significance in the emergence of modern political thought, integrating Locke into the historiography surrounding the impact of American discovery is a crucial step in the larger project of scholars to understand the place of the New World within English and European intellectual discourse. Locke’s political philosophy was not conceived in a vacuum of English Colonial endeavors, but rather existed within a larger body of work that struggled with the implications and explications of the discovery.

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Man in his Natural State: The New World and Locke's *Second Treatise*

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