



Epistemological foundations of research in social sciences

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ABSTRACT

Abstraction, deductive discourse, and logic relegate this primary/first form of knowledge expatriating it in the name of objectivity. But intuition can be the free vision of taskmaster rationality that in metaphor and symbol apprehends the reality from which it is born. The analogy, not being translatable by concepts of understanding, can be experienced by active and existential subjectivity, by the privilege of creation (plastic and artistic) that is expressed in the insinuation of intelligibility.

Is the non-submission of research to the rules of the scientific method capital? Allegiance to scientific criteria expels criticism of scientific instruments and methods. Without expressing necessary and universal truths, the research we defend makes possible their existence without their permanence being monolithic and invariant. Truth is no longer absolute, still less valid ad aeternum in space and time.

Keywords: research, epistemology, reason, categorization, truth; Social Sciences

Research is a work in which the researcher builds himself, that is, it is the search for thought that thinks itself. Such thinking focuses on the social world in which the researcher is a product and producer. This means that the interpretation of the world implies that the same world interprets the researcher. The hermeneutic method implies the vision of pre-understanding of meanings where “my relationships with others are not limited to those I know and contemporaries. I also relate to predecessors and successors, those others who preceded and followed me in the overall history of my society” (Berger, P. and Luckman, T., 1976, p. 45).”

Understanding is to interpret ends that reflect values, beliefs, and motivations. Hence, “all interpretation [is] guided by the “pre-understanding” of the interpreter (Palmer, R., 1989, p. 59)”. It is the recognition of sense that give meaning to understanding itself that is contextualized, and it is here that we can speak about the hermeneutic spiral that requires pre-understanding. The research does not escape this affectation. That is why we rationalize not only what is shown, but also what is hidden. “(...) a determined will to understand brings to light hidden rationality of irrational behaviors that is, however, intrinsic, that is, that belongs, like rational Action, to the life of consciousness (Ladrière, J., 1984, p. 181).

To speak of science is to talk about contradictory movements that sometimes unite and sometimes diversify knowledge itself. The traditional view mathematizes and sustains an entire explanatory paradigm of human wisdom. “For since all sciences are nothing but human wisdom, which always remains one and identical, however different the objects to which it applies, and receives no more distinction from them than the light of the sun of variety of things it illuminates, there is no need to impose any limits on spirits (Descartes, R., 1989, Rule I – p. 12)”.
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Contrary to the Cartesian point of view, it does not seem to me that there is fundamental science. There are fundamental scientific points of view that lead back to the necessary and complementary interaction that builds an explanatory and comprehensive scenario of reality. The variety of points of view shows that all reflective discourse is tainted from the start precisely because it is a point of view. “(...) two people can see the same color, but it is impossible for two people to feel the same pain (Descartes, R., 1989, Rule I – p. 12).

The scientific project for human beings presupposes a uniqueness over the totality that is necessarily characterized by difference, divergence, dissemination, and fragmentation. It is constructed both by abstract and logical-mathematical thinking and by creative inquiry, or by reflective consciousness. Its beginning is given by the problem. By doubt. For the question. That is why the

“common man, as a rule, is not concerned with what is “real” for him and with what he “knows”, unless he stumbles on some problem. (...) the philosopher is left to decide where quotation marks are appropriate and where they can safely be omitted (Berger, P. and Luckman, T., 1976, p. 14)”.

Knowledge is a chain where the sciences of the spirit and the sciences of nature because they are different, require unification poles that articulate knowledge through interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Its principle is philosophical. The end too. In both cases, it calls for reflection. The whole problem of knowledge, and consequently of education, is essentially a philosophical question. In research a new world is always constructed, and, in this world, the real question is not to be for or against, but to understand the extension of thought. Knowledge is necessarily philosophical



and that is why “all philosophy is like a tree, whose roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that come out of this trunk are all other sciences (...) (Descartes, R., 1978, pp.14 and 15)”.

We will not at all agree with the idea of the physical trunk that inspires all of science, but we know that this privilege dates to the 17th century, when science was confused with technique and became technology capable of manipulating and controlling reality. It was in the 19th century that the specialization of science took place and if other worlds entered and gained the status of science, these same territories were isolated from the men who produce science. Educational sciences have not been and are not immune to this phenomenon.

“(...) when the Educational Sciences subordinated themselves to the practical determinants, they abandoned their comprehensive attitude to fall into an uncontrolled instrumentality and, when they sought to affirm their understanding attitude, they irremediably isolated themselves from the social spaces where educational practices are built and affirmed its superiority around a formalism in an object, whose production did not go beyond the barriers of banality (Correia, A., 1998, p. 20).

The contrast between natural and human sciences corresponds to the classic dualism between matter and spirit, between *empeiria* and reason. Now, the sciences, like men, are dual in their uniqueness, that is, both the explanatory and the comprehensive processes, far from being irreducible, are complementary. The idea that the natural sciences are nomothetic and the human sciences descriptive and interpretive digs a chasm into which this very idea falls. The distinction that Freud proposed between explanation and understanding no longer makes sense.

“Unlike explanation, which is a legitimate process, even in the sciences of the spirit, understanding avoids “chemically” decomposing the data of experience, to build them later the basis of a certain number of intellectual hypotheses, because it considers the lived experience as a “primitive and fundamental data” that it is necessary to deepen and embrace in its entirety, without intervening artificial divisions. (...) It is, therefore, a rational and discursive process that obeys the vulgar laws of logic, but which is not purely rational like reasoning, because it is based, moreover, on the sympathy indispensable to the intelligence of the singular (Freud, S., 1977, p. 98)”.

The difficulty of systematization is concentrated precisely on the fact that we are dealing with and about people with unique and singular human beings and irreplaceable experiences. And if life is not put into formulas, even fewer human beings. “Life is not a problem that can be solved by dividing light by darkness or days by nights, but an unpredictable journey between places that do not exist (Dagerman, S., 2000, p. 17)”. We realize that it is very unlikely that we will obey the

traditional ways of doing research. Our difference is based on the hope of being tolerated and even encouraged. “We know, however, (...) that divergent thinking is not only permitted but encouraged (Moscovici, S. and Doise, W., 1991, p. 212)”.

The text you find here has a face, there are people behind it, and it would be contradictory to do it otherwise. Other faces marked the face that wrote this text. There is no normality, nor evidence in the concealment of the subject and reflection in scientific methodology. There is no greater rigor in excluding the knowing subject. How could there be thought without the being that thinks that thought?

“Can we accept that knowledge is based on the exclusion of the knower, that thought is based on the exclusion of the thinker, that the subject is excluded from the construction of the object? That science is unaware of its social insertion and determination? Can we consider (...) that knowledge has no subject, and that its object is divided between the sciences, and fragmented between the disciplines? Can we accept such a night of knowledge? (Morin, E., 1997, p. 18)”

Knowledge is capitalized and spent anonymously, that is, it needs to be articulated and thought about. We hope to accomplish this task. For some, the answers will not be scientific. Also, there is no method to make Education an object of itself. Each method must articulate what is separate and unite what is dissociated.

Men are not blank slates precisely because circumstances impose conditions that, being accidental, become personal concerns. We live with ignorance, ambiguity, and disorder. Doubt is the starting point, and the localized awareness of uncertainty shows us that the reflective dimension can resist simplification. “We indeed lack method from the start; but at least we can have the anti-method, where ignorance and confusion become virtues (Morin, E., 1997, p. 18)”.

Ideas are the (de)construction blocks whose rules cannot be used in all circumstances because the dialogue does not look for safe truths. We are talking about pieces of knowledge that show that complexity emerges when reflecting on scientific and disciplinary simplification. Therefore, our direction is spiral and, as such, is subject to error. We start, perhaps unwisely in the eyes of empiricists and rationalists, from the point where the path is made by walking. In it, you will find novelistic perspectives, poetic scientism, logical nihilisms, expectant analogies, but above all, a great love of knowledge. You will find a conscious return to Philosophy. We could add Philosophy of Education. But all philosophy is already education, and all education should implicitly be philosophical.

The world was locked up in a logical system of insane rationalization. The paradigmatic organization of experience has been shaken and if facts break down into ideas it is because the experience has not yet been reorganized differently. That is, “what is vital today is not just learning, not just relearning, not just unlearning, but reorganizing our mental system to relearn how to learn (Morin, E., 1997, p. 24)”.



The subjectivity of our daily experiences demands that we rethink the structures of our thinking and analyze theoretical practices, often covered by convictions and dogmas that nullify the possibility of debate. In a way, the ideas that you will find here are also the dialogic reflection of the debate with the academy. It was in it that we found the possibility of difference not being marginalized. And it was in this freedom that was possible to understand that reason is born from history and not from reason.

Reason knows only what it has learned. There were no advantages in man-made correction: both the arguments of reason and arithmetic failed. The humans were divided. And that is why the different domains of knowledge point to a difference in degree between common sense and knowledge. About me, what I am looking for is “a gold that makes all gold worthless (Gustaffson, L., 1992, p. 66)”.

The arrogance of the senses and the vanity of reason have, by inertia, eluded normality. Some old habits between common sense and science must disappear so that research itself can be re-educated and guided. It is necessary to remake the concept of science. The concept of human. There, Philosophy will be a precious help, since it, by itself, is an open system that is not concerned with the most effective means of transmitting knowledge, but with questioning the ends of education. The question is a process, not an act, and in this way, the human cannot be eliminated in the name of irrational objectivity. The process reveals itself in the surrender of each one to knowledge.

It was with the regulative idea of free spirit that I tried to locate the space previously occupied by men. The world was uncovered when the anonymous men attributed the absurdity to reality and not to our recognized limits. My work plan intends to correspond to this argument that finds the human limits of knowledge.

Logic no longer serves us to demonstrate the truth and all its divisions. Education research cannot be seen as the study of objective facts, but as a process of the world in which things and non-things coexist. Education research will be a network of questions and answers, in which the first ones are the invariable quantities. Once the question is posed it always maintains the conceptual situation. The answer is no. In this way, we can see creation more clearly and it is in this sense that we can better understand what drives knowledge itself.

The emphasis given to the answers, or possible answers, is exaggerated to define the questions or problems posed. Questions are not defined in terms of their possible answers, but terms of their true answers to other questions. The answer to a question forms a network of questions in which the unanswered answer is included. An answer does not neutralize the problem. Nature is not closed. No answer can be given at the end because it would promote the Truth. No statement about the world is unquestionable. On the other hand, this does not mean falling into the nauseating skepticism of repetitive questions.

What we teach, scientific theories, are open systems susceptible to falsification. What remains is the question (which

can also be modified, corrected, or made up). Upon closer inspection, it is curious to note that the greater the number of empirical questions contained in the theory and the less theoretical its structure, the greater its merit. The answer is clear: theoretical understanding is more difficult to quantify.

The difficulty with empirical explanations is that they are responses to the world about the world. From them arises the need for another explanation. The explanation demonstrates, from the empirical data, the logical process, and therefore, abstract and adapts it to models or structures and/or resorts to formal or material causality to frame them moving in the sphere of the logical-empirical and analytical-objective. Deterministic causality sees confusion in understanding. This brings subjectivity and affectation. The spontaneity risks falling into error. And the explanation, no? It is more certain to be wrong in numbers and objects than in a plastic sensibility of meaning that is projected onto the concrete.

These forms of knowledge organization must be in constant dialogue because one is reciprocally housed in the other. The explanation is responsible for providing determinations, rules, mechanisms, and organizational structures. But it is understanding that restores beings, life, and the humanity that lives in us. The analogy is startling. Logic defines. Understanding is the poet of the world. The explanation mutilates the imaginary universe. Education tends to be explanatory.

“True rationality does not repress analogy; it feeds on it while controlling it. There may be deregulation of the analog-logic shuttle; analogical excess and logical atrophy lead to delirium; but logical hypertrophy and analogical atrophy lead to the sterility of thought (Morin, E., 1996, p. 133)”.

The questioning of the philosophical relevance of all scientific activity is already the interrogative activity of knowledge. The logic that neglects the question and only considers the answers is false logic. The progression of scientific research necessarily involves the creation of new problems through assiduous criticism of the theory. Conscious criticism must submit to the regulative idea of truth. The truth does not appear overt or covert because there is a decomposition of responses into corseted connections that are broken and corrected. This does not mean that a theory is not valid. The concept of truth is that it cannot be applied to a theory. Validity is defined by the historical human as the one who sees the world.

Science must be based on questions and not on answers because they are the first ones that precede science itself. The notion of research brings with it a creative force through the power of the question. The rephrasing of the question is also a modification of representations. There is a hidden fragment in our answers that we generally do not consider problematic and to which we do not find big reasons to research, since there is a consensus on what scientists consider relevant. But it is this problematic area that allows science to exist. These are the so-called scientific advances. Now and then someone opens the



black box sealed by science. And such a box is opened because the original question remains no matter how great its transfigurations are.

Answers lead to questions, but not all questions lead to answers. Every theory includes unanswered questions and for each given answer there is a lead to new questions. This means that the answer not only generates but directs questions. The question loses credibility when observation makes speculative theory invisible, that is, when empirical observation is lost from the question and all its theoretical background is sufficient to consider it scientific and not because of some special property of nature about observation. We are before the one who builds the theory. We are in the realm of indoctrination. Doctrine is just another point of view. One more creation.

The knowledge we have of the world is a human production that, however, has some autonomy. There is the presupposition of an objective world, of a constructor subject that dialogues with the external reality. Scientific concepts are part of this construction and represent the way we look at dealing with the world. It is impossible to annihilate the subjective element of knowledge because science is constituted by subjectivities. The objectivity of a theory would imply the death of the one who conceived it: the man, the scientist, the researcher.

We do nothing more than perceiving relationships between ideas and things, between subject and object, between consciousness and the world. The questions themselves are ideas about the matter to which they refer. And it is in this sense that every theoretical model is a human configuration that represents our way of living with the world. Such representations are constructed coherently because our experience in the world demands globality, consistency, constancy, and stability. But they are also flexible as such representations are corrected, improved, enriched, and contextualized.

The integration of the results in the research intends to theoretically validate both the discussion and the argument. But it is not through such integration that science can claim the so-called objectivity. Being a human enterprise brings with it virtuality, that is, objectivity appeals to the myth of neutrality. Criticism is emergent, self-criticism is urgent so that one's vision can be broadened in the face of what is hidden, ignored, denied, and relegated to the background. It is in this domain that the desire for knowledge is triggered. It is on the periphery that chaos is born. It's the abyss. "And if you look for a long time into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you (Nietzsche, F., 1974, p. 88, *146)".

Doubt is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the existence of knowledge. Behind the fabric of science, there is already a theory, the question of an activity that generates human thought. It is this capacity that allows the growth of knowledge. Education research necessarily involves problem recognition and not so much problem solving (which does not mean abandoning possible solutions to problems). The fundamental in intelligence is the concentration and relegation of importance to pose problems. In other words: to hold intellectual curiosity.

This activity is the death of some theories that, without disappearing, are recreated and analyzed allowing stability in situations left open.

In conclusion, means the impossibility of dissolving the notion of the problem of science. Theoretical autonomy is impracticable because problems are created when the parts fit together. However, any possibility of a holistic approach is closed to us precisely because it is not achievable. Our observations cannot be assumed as probable, but only as the face of values based on and in the localities. We are faced with the impossibility of certainty. The idea of objectivity brings within itself its contradiction, since being objective implies that such objectivity is reflected in a subject, in a being that is and that exists, in a subjectivity. "The world is my representation (Schopenhauer, A., n.d., p. 7, *1)".

Which comes to mean that the demarcation between what is science and what is non-science is not so clear. Knowledge depends on the interaction it maintains with the human spirit, "the purification of thought by the elimination of all scum, impurities, and impertinence proved to be a purge that took the guts: the dream of finding absolute foundations collapsed with the discovery, at the throughout the adventure, in the absence of such foundations (Morin, E., 1996, p. 18)". The truth is not proposed. It is conceived. It is conceptualized. Hence the scientific resolutions serve the question. And this is what characterizes human intellectual activity: to incite, persuade and commune what conceptually, and because it is conceptual, is problematic.

"Any scientific theory must stand or fall apart on its own merits. However, the consensual perspective is based on skeptical rationality through which theories are constantly tested against each other and the world. What emerges from this process is not the truth or knowledge of the absolute and objective world, but a changing network of ideas that we call scientific theories (Sanitt, N., 2000, p. 223)".

Thus, research in the social sciences has as its primary objective the questioning of itself as a view of the world, its foundations, and assumptions. It has the task of considering that if the truth is not a way to the problem, even less its solution. That is, we intend to encourage researchers themselves to think about the philosophical aspects of their views. It's up to everyone to doubt. Knowledge is first recognition. Confession of guilt, fault, incision, and ignorance. This being the presupposition of knowledge, the effort of the search and the acceptance of ignorance delimits the recognition of limitation. The acceptance of problems, without their prior limitation or elimination, allows the expression of the question from which the possibility of clarity emerges.

The question manifests, shows, reveals, and demands an answer. Response to the life of the individual, a reality that notifies life itself. To investigate is also to reflect on oneself. It is still, and not least, to act on oneself. You can only find the one you miss. The intelligence that worries. Search is the only possibility of stilling. Understanding science is not enough, we



would even say necessary, talent or encyclopedic knowledge possessing acquired wisdom. It is an elementary condition to feel the need for it. This need that imposes itself does not happen without the knowledge of the subject. It's part of it. It is taken as my need. It's mine. It's intimate and internal.

External needs, even under duress, are never intrinsic. Taking what comes from outside as mine is a falsehood. The external need is faking a need you don't feel. It's a deceitful situation. The fragility of the authenticity of the desire for knowledge is based on this emptiness of the need for knowledge. Creation is a vital necessity that precedes the created work. Science rests on the same principle. Disquiet in the face of reality is anguish in the face of the assumption that this may be false. It is the undoing of it that presents itself as done.

"Thinking only about what you live has its meaning: you, however, knew that your "allowed world" was only half of the world and you tried to deny yourself the other half, following the example of the pastor and teachers; but you'll never get it! Nobody will be able to do that, once they have started to reflect (Hesse, H., 2003, p. 60)".

Research requires availability that is assumed in the restlessness of a spirit. Knowledge is an intimate and inexorable need. Among specialists and non-specialists, barbarism remains precisely because dead ideas do not allow the most admirable human act: knowledge. Knowledge is foreign to those who feel no need for it. When the roots are not naturally yours. We witness the culture of the uneducated. It is no coincidence they advocate the dehumanization of humanity. Technicization is taught mechanically. Science cannot be reduced to techniques and formulas. It must be essential to the spirit. Show disorientation towards the presentation. The erudite illiteracy we are witnessing comes from this absence of need. An answer cannot be understood if the question is not felt.

Final considerations

In the name of coherence and intelligibility, the world, the world of education, is increasingly scientific. The exactitude of thought has put aside the disorientation, the vague, what escapes predictability. What does not fit in a compass and a triangle? Man, the world, and science itself must. The becoming has been forgotten. Such abandonment made science claim objectivity without recognizing itself as a process that must adjust to circumstances, to what appears, to the imprecise. It is claimed as an end. Phenomena called minor, imprecise, inexact because they are anomic, without rules, and without laws, are rejected because science does not find a method that fits it millimetrically.

Indeterminacy does not mean falsehood. There are phenomena whose error probability is high because their contours are variable. Now, we must know the causes of variability and not ignore its existence. Other phenomena are beyond metrology or scientometrics (measurement of the results of the scientific process) and because we do not have adequate measurement techniques, they are considered vague. Still, others

are conceptually vague because the very statement (concept) is inadequate. The deviation of these phenomena, whether through arrogance, laziness or carelessness implies the abandonment of life itself. To live is to inhabit a world outside a laboratory without a tape measure and recipes.

"To live is to confront vague things. The world is not a laboratory where phenomena are decanted, isolated, or controlled at the whim of the experimenter who plays with them to discover a transcendent, undeniable truth, since it is purified in the form of strong correlations between evident variables (Moles, A.1995, p. 9)".

The evidence of the Western world became an empirical barometer in which measurement was confused with reality. It is the illusion of precision. Positivism was blinded by the hallucination of the facts.

"There was a common fundamental orientation: the scientificity of Philosophy. The rigorous requirements of scientific thought were to apply to philosophy as well. Univocal clarity, logical rigor, and sufficient reasoning are essential for it, as they are for the other sciences. (...) Metaphysics was to be eliminated. This was the reason why the Vienna Circle had been linked to positivism.

(...) The meaning of a proposition is determined by the method of its verification.

(...) By "metaphysics" is meant the claim to knowledge not accessible to empirical science.

The meaning of a proposition consists of what is verifiable in it. Only statements about facts of experience can be verified. (...) in this way, the propositions of science are precisely divided from those of metaphysics (...). Metaphysics was impossible because of the insolubility of its questions (Kraft, V., 1986, pp. 23, 24, 43, 45, and 47)."

Thus, the human was divided. So, he was taken out of the world. But the issues did not dissolve. The question of meaning and knowledge is metaphysical par excellence. She imposes herself. The absence of an answer shows that beyond all established knowledge there is the knowledge that is built on inquiry and not on explanation. Inquiry can be conceived in two ways: after the answers of science are given and sign their insufficiency, or pre-physics (the moment that precedes the construction of science) in which the foundations of knowledge are questioned showing that there is no knowledge (education) without perplexity and argument.

"What is mystical is that the world exists, not as the world is.

The contemplation of the world sub-specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole.

*Mystical is feeling the world as a limited whole (Wittgenstein, L., 1995, p. 140, *6.44 and *6.45)".*

There is no true science without metaphysics, just as there is no research without inquiry. What are we allowed to know? This question can be considered both from an extrinsic



point of view (referring to the world) and from an intrinsic point of view (initiating the questioning of the subjectivity itself that is projected in the world). No one doubts the conscience of their conscience. Consciousness emerges from the subject's reflection on himself, on what he does, and how he does it. Only in withdrawing from oneself is ignition possible.

Between coherence and contradiction, order and disorder, between certainty and uncertainty, evidence and the hidden, the limits of knowledge are cemented. Our daily reality proves to be effective in the dialogue it maintains with science, calling attention to what science, as a science, has no solution: the becoming, the circumstance, the imprecise. "I am me plus my circumstance. And if I don't save her, I don't save myself (Ortega Y Gasset, J., 2002 p. 12)."

Intelligence alone does not produce perplexity, as it builds the world according to the rules it has drawn up. But it is also intelligence that becomes familiar with the very workings of the world. More important than the verifiable hypothesis from our understanding is the empirically unverifiable finding of vague and random knowledge from which all other knowledge derives (scientific disciplines). Such knowledge without measure and means of observation is speculation. Some call it obscurantism. What are the categories if not armed forms of combat against such a murky enemy of clear, distinct, and objective science? Categorization is necessary but insufficient. It marks our thinking and language bears witness to it.

It is necessary to categorize to understand, but above all to act. Acting presupposes knowing the world, that is, knowing how to define areas, universes, and situations. We don't stop naming, judging, and often arguing without knowledge of the cause. The fact of naming a thing is not sufficient reason to prove that it exists, nor that it can be seen or touched.

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Thought guides Action, and for that, thought creates objects, that is, it schematizes forms of objects, looking for the stable through everything that presents itself and that is alive, that is, that is necessarily variable or unstable. The constructed representations of entities are nothing more than forms of meaning that we attribute to things. Representations are the forms that our sensations and perceptions take when they are organized into ideas and then into words (in speech) to the most elaborate forms of language (poetry).

The representations that we make of the world architect our realities, which take the place of reality. Such development of intelligence is not a simple accumulation of knowledge throughout our lives, but a true game of intellectual and symbolic processes through which we slowly elaborate our representations of the world and objects. Hence objectivity is not given to us once and for all. Better: not be given to us.

"(...) What was a method, a means for the construction of science, becomes a destructive obstacle. He manages, in this way, to narrow his mind to everything that is not his prejudice and close his eyes, ears, and imagination to what does not fit his vision of things (Rodrigues, V., 1999, p. 85)."

We classify, we categorize natures, our own, that of others, all this to understand nature. The history of thought, which is also the history of humanity, represents a slow and patient obstinacy in classifying things, beings, and phenomena to make sense of the world. Aristotle is living proof of the genius of nomenclature. A classification demon is always performed (Vignaux, G., 2000). There is always a reference to a certain idea of nature whose ambiguity makes it possible to carry out all the tacit classifications that common sense and science itself never cease to elaborate on.



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