

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

D-VISIONS/SHUTTERSTOCK



The two-faced statue of Janus in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Reviewing 2021 in the Month of Janus, *Part 1*

Abandoning Purpose in Life for Our Feelings

JAMES SALE

We have just left the month of January. January was named after the Roman god Janus, who had two heads: one looking forward, which meant that he was the god of new beginnings, and one looking backward, which meant he was a god of wisdom. Because, of course, we need to learn from what has gone before, and failure to do so means we end up in a futile cycle of defeat and despair. If, therefore, I were to invite you to identify what

If Janus-like we look back at 2021 in order to increase our stock of wisdom, we can consider more pointedly how to go forward.

one thing would you consider the most significant, important, or noticeable of the year 2021, what would you say?

I guess most of us want to talk about the big stuff: certainly, COVID is alive and well, and all its ramifications. Are vaccine passports the big issue? Or maybe you think the first year of Joe Biden's presidency is worth much more commentary? Or even, is it international issues such as what China or Russia are doing and the tensions that are building up? Or climate change—does that need addressing? These are all big and important things, but for me, I sometimes

think we need a more Sherlock Holmesian approach to reviewing the data.

You will recall that Holmes frequently spurned the big clues that Dr. Watson and others always thought solved the case; for Holmes, it was often the small details that were most revealing. And so, if Janus-like we look back at 2021 in order to increase our stock of wisdom, so that we can consider more pointedly how to go forward, then I would like to identify one small detail that I have noticed with increasing frequency.

Continued on Page 4

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Feeling the evil in our culture, feminist Naomi Wolf believes it's time to talk about "spiritual combat" again. "Michael and Satan," circa 1630–1635, by Guido Reni. Our Lady of the Conception of the Capuchins, in Rome.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Antidotes to Ideology: Art and Faith

JEFF MINICK

"More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened,'" said Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1983 when he accepted the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

Nearly a century has now passed since Solzhenitsyn's childhood, and here in America many have not only forgotten God but also, over the years, some have worked to abolish altogether any hint of Divine Providence from the public square.

Our coins still bear the official motto of the United States—"In God We Trust" along with the word "Liberty"—but most of our officials and politicians leave their religious beliefs at home. In our society, faith all too often resembles the water of the pond near my house this January; passersby know the water exists, but it is concealed by a thick sheet of ice.

Yet cracks can and do appear in that ice.

A Stunning Cry From the Heart

In a recent essay "Is It Time for Intellectuals to Talk About God?" feminist author and cultural commentator Naomi Wolf discusses COVID-19 and the efforts by government and big tech to suppress any information that contradicts the prevailing narrative of the pandemic. Wolf is

particularly outraged by the readiness of her fellow liberals to squash opinions and data opposing that narrative.

And then her argument takes a shocking turn:

"I felt around us, in the majestic nature of the awfulness of the evil around us, the presence of 'principalities and powers'—almost awe-inspiring levels of darkness and of inhuman, anti-human forces. In the policies unfolding around us I saw again and again anti-human outcomes being generated: policies aimed at killing children's joy; at literally suffocating children, restricting their breath, speech and laughter; at killing school; at killing ties between families and extended families; at killing churches and synagogues and mosques; and, from the highest levels, from the President's own bully pulpit, demands for people to colude in excluding, rejecting, dismissing, shunning, hating their neighbors and loved ones and friends."

Wolf then addresses the restrictions imposed by our politically correct culture on discussions of God:

"It was not always the case that Western intellectuals were supposed to keep quiet in public about spiritual wrestling, fears and questions. Indeed in the West, poets and musicians, dramatists and essayists and philosophers, talked about God, and even about evil, for millennia, as being at the core of their understand-



A monument to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on the Korabelnaya embankment in Vladivostok, Russia.

ing of the world and as forming the basis of their art forms and of their intellectual missions."

Having surveyed what she considers the evil growing in our culture, Wolf offers this conclusion:

"It is time to start talking about spiritual combat again, I personally believe. Because I believe that is what we are in, and the forces of darkness are so big that we need help. Our goal? Perhaps just to keep the light somehow alive—a light of true classical humane values, of reason, of democracy, inclusion, kindness—in this dark time.

"What is the object of this spiritual battle?"

"It seems to be for nothing short of the human soul."

Forgotten Premises

Many people today, particularly our leaders, have forgotten that America was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. The men and women who helped give birth to the United States of America varied in their religious beliefs and their fervor, but even deists like Thomas Jefferson understood that without morality and a belief in Divine Providence the republic could not survive.

Biblical principles coupled with the influences of writers ranging from Cicero to John Locke gave Americans their laws and means of governance, which applied to all citizens whatever their religious faith. Some of the Founders were explicit in recognizing the gifts of Christianity to the new nation. As Patrick Henry wrote: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here."

And until the middle of the 20th century, faith played a role in our politics and culture. Americans as different as Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Tubman invoked the Almighty without shame or apology. Prayer was common in schools. In his address to the troops setting out to invade France on D-Day, General Dwight Eisenhower stated, "Let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon

this great and noble undertaking."

How far we have traveled from those ready recognitions of a deity is apparent to anyone who even casually examines our culture today. "The past is a foreign country," L.P. Hartley wrote in his 1953 novel, "The Go-Between." "They do things differently there."

So it seems.

Our Manmade Mess

When we put aside the divine, when we instead worship Mammon and celebrity, we diminish our culture and ourselves. We elevate the body above the soul, the material above the metaphysical. In doing so, we give up a piece of our humanity and may even become prey to dangerous enemies, the grim fanatics of extreme ideologies.

In his book "Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in an Ideological Age," Gregory Wolfe sums up the damages done by ideology to the human soul:

"The political expression of modernity, of course, is the ideological regime, founded on a rigid system of abstractions which are imposed on society by force. ... Ideology involves a fundamental alienation from being."

If we study those words, we find they explain many of the wars and the murderous policies of certain governments over the last hundred years. Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Communist China: What are these and dozens of smaller powers if not regimes imposing abstractions by force?

And now we in the United States find ourselves increasingly sucked down into the quicksands of ideology. Certain politicians and cultural gurus have introduced measures that we might once have regarded as the marks of tyranny: imposing mandates and masks, demanding changes in language that in turn will alter reality, and ostracizing and denigrating those who oppose them. "In God we trust" is becoming "In Big Brother we trust," and that transformation can end only in disaster for the bulk of humanity.

Renewal

So what can we do? How can we resist those who are so keen to direct our thoughts and control our speech, who

Until the middle of the 20th century, faith played a role in our politics and culture.



Harriet Tubman invoked the Almighty without shame or apology. An 1895 portrait in the National Portrait Gallery.



"In God We Trust" first appeared on the obverse side of the two-cent piece in 1864.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

seem to view human beings as parts in a machine rather than as individual souls, who believe they possess the solutions to all our problems, and that we need only obey them to build our own brave new world?

Gregory Wolfe answers these questions by arguing for a renewal of Christian humanism, "to draw nourishment from the deepest sources of culture: art and religious faith." He cites artists from all genres, both past and present—musicians, painters, writers—whose work enriches our souls and so enables us to become more fully human.

"After centuries of secularization," he writes, "the West has exhausted the moral and spiritual capital of the Judeo-Christian tradition," and yet he refuses to give way to despair. Instead, he believes that we can best replenish that worn-out store of Western culture by returning to the traditional union of faith and art.

In her essay, Naomi Wolf makes similar connections. She, too, looks to the past to provide a compass into the future: "I do think we need to call, as Milton did, as Shakespeare did, as Emily Dickinson did, on help from elsewhere; on what could be called angels and archangels, if you will; on higher powers, whatever they may be; on better principalities, on whatever intercessors may hear us, on Divine Providence—whatever you want to call whomever it is you can hope for and imagine."

By infusing ourselves with the restorative powers of culture, the arts, and tradition, we can guard against the virus of raging and deranged ideologies infecting our time. Not only will we then resist the evils bred by those who are the enemies of all that is sacred, beautiful, good, and true, but we will also preserve the human dignity and the liberty that is our birthright.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin in seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

What Our Readers Say (#31, part 1)



I subscribed to The Epoch Times from an ad I had seen on YouTube. In the ad I saw the slogan "Truth and Tradition." That really caught my eye as those two elements are often missing from the mainstream news media.

Truth - A journalist's opinion is often considered the truth nowadays and that should never be the case. There are those journalists who believe that they do not need to mention the source from where they get their information. While reading The Epoch Times I notice that their journalists extensively list references throughout their articles. This is helpful as I can go to their direct source to verify the information and receive even more insight on the article.

Tradition - I am proud to be an American and, on a daily basis, I am grateful for the opportunities this country provides to me. I am very traditional. I am NOT progressive. Our founding fathers fought for independence through the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The American Revolution established that every American then, now and in the future have

three unalienable rights: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Progressives believe that they need to radically change our Constitution. I don't. The words written in our Constitution are just as strong today as they were when originally written. I enjoy reading The Epoch Times because this paper understands American tradition and the value of every American. I especially enjoy reading the Life & Tradition section as it provides great biographical and many other informative articles that are helpful to me.

I am very pleased with The Epoch Times' no holds barred coverage on the CCP. I am now better informed on the CCP's communist influence here in America and around the world. I enjoy reading all the very well done infographics. Some of my favorites include: The CCP's Virus Propaganda War, The CCP's Influence Over International Groups and China's Secret War Against America. **The Epoch Times has made me a much better informed American. I am very pleased with my subscription.**

JAMIE MANUELS

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Two-faced Janus, looking both forward and backward in time, appears in Anton Raphael Mengs's "The Triumph of History over Time" (1772) as part of a ceiling fresco at the Vatican's Camera dei Papiri. Father Time with his long grey beard and scythe sits in the foreground, behind whom History is busy keeping records. She looks up to the fresh new face of Janus, as the old one looks away to the right.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Reviewing 2021 in the Month of Janus, Part 1 Abandoning Purpose in Life for Our Feelings

Continued from Page 1

A Recent Trend

And it is this: As a business person, I am a regular user of LinkedIn. I have been a user for well over 10 years, indeed close to when it was first launched. For those who don't know, LinkedIn is a kind of platform, like Facebook; only unlike Facebook, which is for personal connections, family, friends, relationships, it is for business networking. The whole rationale of LinkedIn (and there are some 770-plus million people on it) is

to promote business: recruitment, selling, networking, and so on. One posts business stuff on it, not personal stuff (except in relatively rare cases). That's the point of it. But in 2021, we had a glut of posts—an avalanche of posts—that were firstly all connecting to the "positivity" trend of advocating wellness, resilience, and kindness as a sort of universal panacea. Secondly, as these unoriginal memes proliferate, there has grown up with them a darker side. Namely, LinkedIn now abounds with posts about people's

personal mental problems, depressions, impostor syndromes, suicides (of their loved ones or friends), and such other and like stuff that is clearly NOT business related—except, of course, as by being now accepted as normal on LinkedIn. All this emotional, personal stuff is becoming itself a business! This is surprising and quite different from what we once considered business to be: a transaction between two parties in which honesty, courtesy, respect, decency, and goodwill were manifested for mutual benefit. Busi-

ness was not at any point thought to be a replacement for the deeper human contact that came from family and friends and one's wider social circle. It is perhaps indicative that such deeper relationships are now at the point of collapse, which is why business people are now seeking such depths in LinkedIn posts. There is, too, in all this emotional welter a sense that many of these people are seeking—craving even—some sort of validation for their experiences. The validation occurs in two ways. First, they get their



Philo of Alexandria, from André Thevet's 1584 book, "The True Portraits and Lives of Illustrious Greek, Latin and Pagan Men."

followers to comment with statements like, "how brave," "authentic," "real"; and then, the longer-term objective seems to be the normalization of the pathological condition. I say "pathological" not as a judgment call but as a reminder that being depressed or suicidal is not normal or desirable. The healthy human being seeks to avoid these conditions. What we want is joy and life. Put another way, rather than getting confirmation that having mental health problems is normal because so many other people have them and can relate to them, it might be better to think about this question: What can I do to redress mental problems? True, support from other people can be vital in these situations, but the trouble with the way this escalates on LinkedIn (and elsewhere) is that we form ghettos celebrating our problems rather than finding a way through or past them.

We are forming ghettos celebrating our problems rather than finding a way through or past them.

And this leads to another pattern I have noticed with many of these posts. Frequently, as they wrestle with expressing their mental states and suicidal thoughts, they somewhere along the line reveal that they cannot see the purpose of life, or see a point in anything. Then, leaving the issue unresolved, they conclude with the best they can do: a final meme, and the most popular here must surely be "So everyone, be kind." They leave us with rationality's (and the Enlightenment's) final aspirational ethic on the topic of meaning. Sadly, however, an ethic in itself does not produce meaning, for how does "being kind" contribute to one's seeing the purpose of life?

Directionless

Perhaps the original formulation of the meme "being kind" was from Philo of Alexandria (circa 20 B.C.–A.D. 50) who is reported to have said: "Be kind. Everyone you meet is carrying a big problem." Being kind is, of course, a good thing and accords with all the major religious traditions, but viscerated from these other religious contexts, what does it amount to? Really, "be kind" is just a throwaway and virtue-signaling semaphore that, at bottom, says "I'm a good person, really, aren't I? Validate me." This, then, is the small detail I have noticed. Like COVID, this need for validation has become an epidemic even on LinkedIn, so goodness knows what it is like on other social media sites, which I do not follow so closely. But the important thing is that it is telling us something critically important about people and society: People are increasingly feeling, and in larger and larger numbers, wholly lost. They don't know who they are, where they are going, and why. They are in an emotional turmoil and stew, and it seems to me that

the rational faculty is largely turning itself off as people abandon themselves to how they feel.

Of course, how we feel changes; it is unstable. So as a barometer of who we are, it is extremely unreliable—like the weather in England!

There is, of course, no easy solution to this. But if I were to start outlining a beginning (for Janus), I would start with an important model that I outline in my book "Mapping Motivation for Coaching" (co-written with Bevis Moynan) and which is featured in Stephen Covey's famous book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." Basically, the one and whole human being is made up of four essential strands or levels: body (physical-doing), emotions (emotional-feeling), mind (mental-thinking) and spirit (spiritual-knowing/being, which also might be described by some as "existential"). These levels are not discrete; they impact each other.

A primary mistake the Western world has made is that it has predicated the physical level as being the most important. We see this every day when joggers run past us, cyclists pedal with all their flash kit on, gym membership escalates, when challenges for marathons bring in tens of thousands, health watches proliferate, and so on. And then we have the nutritional crazes to lose weight, get healthy, live forever, and government or local authority initiatives seek to reduce fat or sugar content in school meals, and so on. Never has there been such a focus on achieving physical health while at the same time experiencing rocketing obesity, and drug- and drink-related health problems.

But what if instead of trying to fix our problems at the physical level—diet and exercise—we attempted to review our life at the spiritual (or existential) level? What would that look like? I think there are three primary questions that we would need to ask ourselves if we were to have any chance of really grappling with some of the issues. In part 2 of this article, I will outline what I think these three questions are. Perhaps, Janus-like, you might want to look ahead and figure out what they might be.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is "HellWard." For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit EnglishCantos.home.blog



We are a nation obsessed with our physicality.

VIDIUSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

ALL PHOTOS BY THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART



"Four Seasons: Winter: Skating Scene," late 1600s–early 1700s, Gobelins Manufactory (Paris, France). Wool, silk, and gold filé; tapestry weave; 96 inches by 153 inches. Gift of Francis Ginn, Marian Ginn Jones, Barbara Ginn Griesinger, and Alexander Ginn in memory of Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn, The Cleveland Museum of Art.



"Four Seasons: Spring: Fishing Scene," late 1600s–early 1700s, Gobelins Manufactory (Paris, France). Wool, silk, and gold filé; tapestry weave; 101 1/2 inches by 104 1/2 inches. Gift of Francis Ginn, Marian Ginn Jones, Barbara Ginn Griesinger, and Alexander Ginn in memory of Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn, The Cleveland Museum of Art.



"Four Seasons: Summer: Harvest Scene," late 1600s–early 1700s, Gobelins Manufactory (Paris, France). Wool, silk, and gold filé; tapestry weave; 99 1/2 inches by 100 1/2 inches. Gift of Francis Ginn, Marian Ginn Jones, Barbara Ginn Griesinger, and Alexander Ginn in memory of Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn, The Cleveland Museum of Art.



"Four Seasons: Autumn: Vintage Scene," late 1600s–early 1700s, Gobelins Manufactory (Paris, France). Wool, silk, and gold filé; tapestry weave; 103 inches by 143 1/2 inches. Gift of Francis Ginn, Marian Ginn Jones, Barbara Ginn Griesinger, and Alexander Ginn in memory of Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

FINE ARTS

Rarely Shown: Four Seasons Tapestries by Gobelins Manufactory, Paris

LORRAINE FERRIER

Time and tide wait for no man. As sure as day turns to night, the ever-changing seasons constantly take us through life.

Visitors to the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) need wait no more to see its rare set of late 17th- to early 18th-century tapestries back on display—for the first time since 1953—in the exhibition "Cycles of Life: The Four Seasons Tapestries."

The chance to see the tapestry set is an extraordinary one for many reasons. Weavers at the esteemed Gobelins Manufactory in Paris made the tapestries. (The manufactory, made famous in Louis XIV's reign, is still in production today.) And the tapestry set will be on display starting Feb. 13 for the first time since its extensive restoration.

Why the Four Seasons?

For centuries, artists have celebrated the supreme harmony of nature by depicting the four seasons in frescoes, paintings, sculptures, and tapestries, on furniture, and even on snuff boxes.

The ancients used the zodiac signs, and then gods and goddesses, to personify the attributes of spring,

summer, fall, and winter. But medieval artists depicted everyday seasonal scenes, such as summer fields full of farmers bringing in their hard-won harvest.

The CMA's set of four season tapestries is full of such everyday activities: men, women, and children fishing and gardening in spring, harvesting in summer, winemaking in autumn, and ice skating in winter.

Exhibition visitors can learn about the history of the tapestries, how they were designed and created, and how the museum acquired them. Visitors will also be able to understand the unique challenges that the CMA's textile conservator and tapestry conservation specialists at the Belgium royal tapestry manufacturer De Wit faced when preserving the delicate textiles.

Not only will visitors be able to marvel at the workmanship involved in making the tapestries, and in restoring them for future generations, but they'll also see how nature waits for no man.

The "Cycles of Life: The Four Seasons Tapestries" exhibition opens on Feb. 13, 2022, and runs until Feb. 19, 2023. To find out more, visit ClevelandArt.org

FILM REVIEW

From Sundance '22 a Film of Unfinished Business

JOE BENDEL

“The Exiles” is all about unfinished business. In 1989, documentarian Christine Choy started filming the exiled Chinese student leaders who were trying to continue their movement in America, shortly after the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Since she had not been there in the square, she did not feel a close connection to her subjects, so when she ran out of money, she simply dropped the project. She also assumed that the world would force the communist government to come to some sort of understanding with the student protesters.

Obviously, the campaign for democratic reform in China remains just as unfinished as her film, if not more so, since now some of her footage will finally be seen by audiences. Decades later, Choy reconnects with three of the most prominent activists she nearly documented, in Violet Columbus and Ben Klein’s “The Exiles,” which premiered during the 2022 Sundance Film Festival.

Choy is best known for the Oscar-nominated “Who Killed Vincent Chin,” but for former students like Columbus and Klein, she is the blunt-spoken, chain-smoking,

vodka-swilling “Ab-Fab”-ish film professor who constantly inspired them. She was born in Shanghai but raised in South Korea, before moving to America to study and work. The first 15 minutes of “The Exiles” establishes her leftist credentials in glorious detail. That might alienate some viewers, but no Chinese Communist Party trolls can credibly accuse her of being a CIA plant or the like.

Choy was originally approached to document the student leaders-in-exile, because she spoke Mandarin and had the necessary micro-budget skills. For years, Choy kept the resulting film cans in storage, with no clear plan for them. Then, with financial assistance from a famous colleague, she started the process of restoring the footage. In the light of current events, her previously unseen film takes on fresh new significance, especially in light of the ongoing Uyghur genocide in Xinjiang.

Of the three focal student-activists, Wu’er Kaixi was the most widely known during the demonstrations. In the film, he is probably the most emotionally honest and revealing interview subject, and he is Uyghur (describing himself as “Uyghur by blood, Chinese by birth, Taiwanese by

choice”), which is significant.

Ostensibly, he is still wanted in the PRC, and he has tried to turn himself in, in the hope that he might finally see his family again by doing so. But Chinese embassies have perversely rebuffed his attempts to surrender himself.

Yan Jiaqi should have been one of China’s greatest scholars, but he remains haunted by the People’s Liberation Army’s assault on the square. Like most of his colleagues, he never believed the government would open fire on the students—a nightmare that still haunts him.

In contrast, Wan Runnan was not even a student at the time. The entrepreneur was well on his way to becoming a tech tycoon, but he believed that his country needed the modernizing reforms the students advocated, so he financially supported their demonstrations. Yan Jiaqi and Wan Runnan also have plenty to say about the price they paid and the dismal state of human rights in mainland China.

Their testimony is gripping stuff, but “The Exiles” is most powerful when Choy shows the three men in the previously unseen footage she shot of the exiled activists in their idealistic youth. It is a bittersweet viewing experience for them and us. With brutal honesty, they admit that they are not sure whether they would do it all again if they had the choice. Yet, they also admonish the West for emboldening the CCP regime with its weak response to the massacre.

This is a profoundly sad film in many ways. It intimately documents the acute pain and survivor’s guilt of the three aging activists, while supplying solid context to understand the full enormity of the Tiananmen crackdown. At a time when Beijing’s puppet government in Hong Kong is tearing down Tiananmen Square memorials, the rest of the world should redouble our efforts to remember the massacre. A film like this definitely helps toward that end.

Frankly, the caustic Choy is sometimes a bit of a distraction, but she still deserves credit for shooting the footage and keeping it secure over the subsequent years. It needed and needs to be seen. Highly recommended for the exiles themselves and the warning they issue regarding the danger represented by the CCP regime, “The Exiles” premiered at this year’s Sundance.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [JBSpins.blogspot.com](https://www.jbspins.com)

When Beijing’s puppet government in Hong Kong is tearing down Tiananmen Square memorials, the rest of the world should redouble our efforts to remember the massacre.

‘The Exiles’

Directors:
Violet Columbus and Ben Klein

Starring:
Christine Choy

Rated:
PG

Running Time:
1 hour, 35 minutes

Release Date:
2022

★★★★★

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE



Promotional photo of Christine Choy for “The Exiles.”

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