Pedagogy of Time and a Decolonial "Present"

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Introduction

While reflecting on the concept of "trace" during an interview, Jacques Derrida elaborated on a pedagogical tradition in philosophy classes in which philosophers start a course with a question, e.g. "What is...?" After alluding to the problems of opening a course with questions in general, Derrida recalled how questions such as "What is?" are concerned with Being and, therefore, put *the present* and *the now* in positions of advantage: "Haven't we in our interpretation of Being privileged a modality of time that is the present?" He then explained that he has sought to interrogate, "displace," and "re-inscribe" this desire for the present in different terrains or corpuses, and has attempted to ponder on a past or a future "that is not just a modified present," but a "different experience with regard to the past or the future."

In this article I will elaborate on how a pedagogy that is committed to provoking thinking about modified presences and different experiences of pasts and futures can be a decolonial engagement. I argue that this endeavor - what I will hereafter call a pedagogy of time - aims to disrupt what "regulates" students and readers' "economies of knowledge," without appointing conclusive endpoints for this disruption. Moreover, a pedagogy of time does not aim for oversimplified and hurried theoretical reflections. As such, it is committed to confront the politics of speed in thinking. I maintain that this confrontation with the politics of speed is an important commitment for decolonial endeavors in education. This is especially true in times when decolonial pedagogies have been examined and critiqued for having been too "fixated on a simplistic decolonization of Western knowledge and practices," 5 and for too often favouring resorts to a quick re-claiming of indigenous practices as superior to Western ones as opposed to "fostering analytical arguments," and furthermore, when there is a call by indigenous pedagogues to "encourage openness to further inquiry in and through complex and contested knowledge terrains."⁷ Hence, decolonial educational philosophies can benefit from a pedagogy that aims for a different regulation of economies of knowledge in the classroom: one that confronts the politics of speed by refraining from rushing to simplistic conclusions when analyzing modified presences.

The idea of the politics of speed is not a recent conceptual trademark exclusive to neoliberal times and to capitalism.⁸ It can also be traced in, or be founded on, oversimplification: a sense of epistemic hurriedness to reach a predefined conclusion in favour of one structure of thought. Perhaps indigenous pedagogues weary of hasty decolonization would agree that the goal of decolonial pedagogies is not to quickly assimilate into a decolonial structure of knowledge and resistance, but rather to provide the space and time (for non-European presences, pasts, and futures) that eurocentric philosophies took away from us in the first place by labeling Non-European presences/beings as primitive and unworthy of pedagogical sustenance and evolvement.

Thus, here I will reflect on how the pedagogy of time strives for a different regulation of the economy of knowledge through the following commitments: it has a different pace and different (epistemic) moves in depicting the points it wants to make; and it tackles the present, well-established meanings in order to free a multitude of secondary ones. Such commitments, specifically the slow disabling of the primary meanings in favour of freeing "a plethora of secondary ones," are what make this pedagogy a decolonial engagement.

To illustrate what I mean by a pedagogy of time and its decolonial potential, I will examine one of Derrida's lectures published in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. ¹⁰ This lecture is Derrida's first lecture in this series, in which he shares his pensive investigations into the politics of concepts such as boredom, sovereignty, and solitude. He does so through a reflection of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which is about an ambitious British man who turns down the opportunity to become a lawyer and takes off to sea instead, experiencing both successful and failed voyages, including ending up shipwrecked on an island. I will try to imagine how Derrida, *qua* teacher, planned his lessons and his pedagogy so as to disrupt the students' conventional regulation of the economy of knowledge. Just as Derrida reads Heidegger and Defoe in his course as faithfully yet as *freely* as possible, and does his best to keep to the heading of the course, ¹¹ I will try to interpret Derrida's pedagogy as faithfully but nonetheless as freely as possible in order to maintain my heading, a trajectory of the decolonial pedagogy of time.

WINDS AND PEBBLES: AN OTHERWISE-THAN-LOGICAL PEDAGOGY

The pedagogy of time pledges to carry out different epistemic moves in order to put forth its points. Derrida refrains from advancing his points in the classroom in a stringently logical way. His pedagogy aims to question the ethics of rigid logocentricity, and he therefore commits himself to making his points in rigorous, yet other-than-logocentric ways: he mentions he wants to "try out a few sentences ... like warm-up notes for one's voice or vocal chords." He asks us to imagine we have found a stone on a shore, and wants us to look at an imaginary statement ingrained on that stone. He opens his lecture with seemingly unrelated and grandiloquent ways to address serious issues. For example, he starts the course with a question: "What is an island?" saying: "[i]f you hear ... this sentence, or these sentences come to you borne by the wind or an echo: ... if you hear them without reading them, you think you understand them, but you are not sure."

He asks us to abandon and isolate the question, leaving it "floating in the air that is carrying it." Sure, we heard it "but we have to yet read it." In order to read it, Derrida asks us to continue "to stroll on the shore where we have just set foot" in order to "stumble" on another sentence. He says: "[t]he beasts are not alone;" "[1] et's act as though the seminar were now starting this way, on an island, in an island, starting with this sententious aphorism." For Derrida, these warm-up notes are serious. They have the "authority and cutting edge of an aphorism, i.e. a sentence that is ... a judgment in the form *S is P*, subject + predicate," but they are presented in different ways; they are "inscribed in stone, given over, entrusted to a stone found on the beach, on an island where we would have just come ashore." He wants to

make sure we know for now at least that "they are not proceeded or followed by other sentences," logic, or theories. They are not there to condone any theory or structural analysis of the world as absolute, even though the lecture is founded on structures and analyses, chief among them Marx's critique of *Robinson Crusoe*.

He soon abandons questions of the island "on the high seas," only to come back to them later: "we'll see where they come ashore." It seems as though he has forsaken the questions, because he moves on to other people's ideas about *Robinson Crusoe*. He nonetheless slowly tries to distort the positively connoted idea of being alone on an island through Joyce and Woolf and, with them, he brings in a history and politics of this celebratory feeling. He reads how Joyce treasured the representation of a "national type of a rational that an English man is," and how this is a prefiguration of the "colonialist sovereignty" for Britain. He thus brings ashore another representation of the novel in the classroom by disputing the notion of a venturesome European individual seeking to be a sovereign on an island he has landed on, knowing nothing about its inhabitants, and resorting to reduce them to beasts and savages.

For Derrida, these petrified sentences are non-logocentric preludial attempts to disrupt the regulation of students' economy of knowledge. As if he tries to interfere with students' ways of knowing to shed light on how this knowledge can itself be Euro-logocentric, and to show how this "knowing" can have a reputation for being geopolitically violent, thereby attempting to show how knowledge is subject to ethical questions. These different epistemic moves speak to specific pedagogical intentions, such as bringing the history (especially the political history) of the concepts²⁰ to an audience that perhaps wishes to see concepts (loneliness, individualism, adventures on islands) or works of art (*Robinson Crusoe*), or rationalities (the Robinsonian rationality admired by Joyce) as unencumbered by any imperial vestiges or with the current world order.

WITHSTANDING THE POLITICS OF SPEED

To present its central concerns, the pedagogy of time as an ethico-decolonial undertaking is committed to a different pace. It does not dispatch a series of points, essentially because the objective is to disrupt what methodically determines students' regulation of the economy of knowledge and experience. This commitment to a different, unhurried pace is mostly in order to provide enough time to generate space for the "whats" and "whos" that were excluded or relegated (and thus subjected to epistemic violence) in works of philosophy or art. Hence, Derrida unhurriedly invites in concepts and people who have been refused admittance to texts. This purposeful un-hurriedness, the slow invitation of other meanings for students, is a conscious move in Derrida's pedagogy.

One example of these unhurried moves is the way Derrida handles the investigation of the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The question is similar to other philosophers' questions, such as those of Marx and Deleuze, but the way he provides the answers is markedly different. Derrida embarks on the same thinking journey that Deleuze did before him. Deleuze had also asked the same question Derrida is asking: "What is the meaning of the fictional 'Robinson'?" and Deleuze's answer is, to a great

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extent, similar to Derrida's: "A world without others." Derrida's concern, though, is that the answer is accelerated. It is not that the answer is completely wrong (although he substantially critiques it), but that the answer is made hastily, and fast. Perhaps not epistemically unhurried enough to disrupt what regulates the economy of students' knowledge in favor of providing space for another thought, one that has excluded concepts in order to have a chance of appearing pivotal. Derrida knows this. As he mentions: "Deleuze's answer comes fast."²² Deleuze's *phenomenology* that associates Robinson Crusoe's adventure only with perversionism and sadism seems hasty. Derrida's pedagogy tries to avoid that: "Deleuze hurries to add that this perversion is not constitutional but linked to an adventure, to a story that can be both the story of a neurosis and the proximity of a psychosis."²³ Derrida cautions against an accelerated closure: "Conclusion: We must imagine Robinson to be perverse; the only Robinsonade is perversion itself."²⁴ By cautioning against Deleuze's hurried attempts to answer the question, Derrida aims to provide a space, through his pedagogy, for more questions to be created. The final answers of these questions are not determined by Derrida, although they are definitely multiplied by him. He therefore aims to regress to the stage before Deleuze's conclusions on the figure of Robinson Crusoe, and finds an excuse through Deleuze:

These are the last words of this chapter, the last sentence that, by associating the adjective "only" to "Robinsonade" ("the only Robinsonade is perversion itself"), leaves open the possibility of not reducing the book *Robinson Crusoe* to a Robinsonade, nor even to Robinson Crusoe himself, in his insular solitude, isolated from his history, his past, his future, the process of his socialization, his relation to many others, including slaves and animals.²⁵

Derrida's pedagogy aims for the slow unfolding of the political and colonial aspects of Defoe's novel. Deleuze does not go beyond perversionism: "But," Derrida reads, "that will be *our* story."²⁶

FOR BEASTS AND SAVAGES: THE PEDAGOGY OF DISABLING PRIMARY MEANINGS

One essential commitment of the pedagogy of time, as I see it, is *un-strengthening* well-established meanings to free other ones, yet not decisively assigning any "one" meaning as ultimately virtuous. Derrida's lecture is devoted to disabling these primary meanings through two movements: peering into commentaries on *Robinson Crusoe* made by established figures; and dissecting well-rooted meanings. Derrida reflects on commentaries by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Defoe's work has received praise from all three for its authenticity and creativity.

APPROBATING DEFOE

In Derrida's classroom, the primary meanings that are investigated are the ways *Robinson Crusoe* has been judged and evaluated "in our modernity." One example is Joyce's admiration for Defoe's work. Derrida rereads Joyce and, through this reading, explores the epistemological underpinnings that have been influential in shaping the present identity of Europe. Thus, Derrida, who mentions at the beginning of the class that he wants to try out a few sentences like warm-up notes, initiates a "theologico-political" and Marxist critique of *Robinson Crusoe* and its approbation in the history of modern European thought, in the hopes of addressing the violence for modernity embedded in this appraisal.

In his classroom, Derrida examines how, in Joyce's eyes, Defoe has saved the English nation from Shakespearean "pitiable characters of boorish peasants," "half-lunatics and half-fools," "Venetian Jews," and "princes of Denmark." For Joyce, by abstaining from adapting foreign works, Defoe "infuses a truly national spirit into the creatures with his pen." Derrida sees the spectral presence of words such as "foreign works," "English," and "truly national spirit" in Joyce's panegyric on Defoe as indicative of the fact that *Robinson Crusoe* is not just an apolitically naïve artistic contribution. He breaks down how Joyce despises the gravediggers and half-lunatics, yet revels in the "national type of a rational animal" that Crusoe is. How Joyce loves the embodiment of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the sexual apathy, the well-balanced religiousness, the calculating taciturnity, and overall the embodiment of the true symbol of the British conquest, the ideal prototype of the British colonist.

Derrida's discussion of Joyce canvasses ways in which Crusoe's celebrated rationality is filled with violence against others, invading others, and building empires on others' lands. It is as if Derrida wants to enervate Joyce's praise to invite in the dark sides of Crusoe's quest, which was aided by much revered European thought. For Derrida, Joyce's delight in Crusoe's rationality has subtext. What is delineated in Joyce's admiration is "the prefiguration of an imperialist, colonialist sovereignty, the first herald of the British Empire" and, as discussed earlier, it is about "the great island setting off to conquer other islands, smaller islands (like Ireland) but above all islands bigger than it, like Africa, New Zealand or Australia."³²

While Joyce believes "[w]hoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of subsequent history cannot help but fall under its prophetic spell," Derrida tackles the historico-geographical harms of this enchantment. In this light, through a rereading of Joyce's ideas on *Robinson Crusoe*, Derrida tackles the primary meanings and takes an interrogative turn to the epistemological *status quo*. Prior to designing this lesson, Derrida might have cogitated on how to generate, through his pedagogy, the notion of guilt in a classroom in France, in order to disrupt the regulation of the economy of knowledge by incorporating dark sides of established knowledge, all in an epistemically unhurried manner. Once one reads that Crusoe's isolation on an island is not a geographically abstract concept, it seems like the novel is no longer the same. It is no longer an innocent book, the product of pure imagination of a creative artist from the past. It is, in this present, a geopolitically, imperially guilty artifact.

The other figure that is persistently present in Derrida's classroom is Rousseau, whose two texts, Émile and *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Derrida refers to time and again. Derrida is interested in investigating Rousseau's infatuation with Crusoe in Émile. Although Rousseau hates books "because they teach us to talk about what we do not know,"³⁴ he nonetheless favors Crusoe for teaching us about the unknown. Indeed, it is the only book that Rousseau wants to turn Émile's head, for him to be constantly occupied with in his castle, the only book he wants Émile's imagination to be enlivened by.

By showing Rousseau's admiration for *Robinson Crusoe*, and his assigning it such a principal role in Émile's education, Derrida makes one reflect upon how education

for modernity can entail, among other things, shaping Crusoe-like characters, as well as Crusoe-like ways of knowing. An "individual" who wants to be a sovereign on an island on which he has accidentally set foot, a place whose history, whose past, whose present, and whose people he is not familiar with, a man who believes his rationality justifies him being the present sovereign on that land.

After having discussed the Rousseaudian passions for Émile, a student in Derrida's class has a feeling that Derrida is insinuating the existence of the spectral presence of Rousseau in our current times, as though we are living in an actualized Rousseaudian dream, an actualized Rousseaudian education. Derrida's probing into Rousseau's aspirations for Émile make us ponder that we - or Europeans sitting in a classroom in France - have inherited a dream filled with colonial baggage and without us knowing its violence. Through a pedagogy committed to creating genealogical returns to how our knowledge is shaped, Derrida adds layers of historical and political complexity to Rousseau's wish for Émile. Just as he said that we would continue to turn over a polished stone and the enigmatic sentence about the beasts not being alone, "in order to find the beginning, the end, its hidden meaning, perhaps the signature,"35 he turns over Rousseau's admiration for Crusoe to reflect on the beginnings and the signatures of structures that have shaped our knowledge, as well as the hidden corners of our (and his students') epistemologies. By doing so, he invites in ethical concerns about the violence embedded in our knowledge and generates thoughts about what non-Rousseaudian dreams would have looked like He also makes us imagine how many were sabotaged and ignored because his dream was considered the only dream, perhaps the only future.

CONCEPTS WANTING TO BE JUST CONCEPTS

The second way in which Derrida commits to freeing excluded secondary meanings in the classroom is by addressing concepts that are well-established and present in quotidian European thought, in order to prompt students to ponder their political subtexts. One such attempt can be seen when he looks at Crusoe's ostensibly adventure-laden and ambitious concept of loneliness.

The lecture starts with the sentence, "I am alone," in an attempt to impart Crusoe's fear of being the only "human being" on an island; "either that I should be devoured by wild Beasts, murder'd by Savages, or starv'd to Death for Want of Food." Derrida's next pedagogical move is to invert the latter to *the beasts are not alone*, in order to invite other meanings and other feelings into the classroom. It is as though Derrida wanted, through his lecture, to compel students to identify with the feared beasts and the savages instead of feeling for Crusoe's loneliness. The beasts are not alone; Robinson Crusoe is now there on an island. It is because Crusoe is seeking sovereignty that the beasts and the savages are not alone anymore. The beasts and savages *no longer* have the existential right to be left alone; they have been reduced to beasts and savages and not to radically different others. This side of Crusoe's trajectory of solitude is thus examined in Derrida's class in terms of seeking mastery and the prefiguration of imperialism.

Once other concepts crowd in to the discussion through the distinct, unhurried move of inverting a sentence from the text, Derrida's students' feeling and knowing

are likely to be inverted. One might put aside identifying with Crusoe's anxiety of being alone among savages and beasts and become worried instead for entities other than Robinson on that island; those who Crusoe calls beasts and savages. One might feel uneasily fearful for others who were not, in their own eyes, beasts and savages, but now are (and since then have been) beasts and savages due to the fact that Crusoe does not understand their logics of being in this world, their rationality for being the way they are.

Derrida expands on how this is a political and pre-political wish, a rather intentional "historical configuration" and "an epochal ensemble," which had its roots in the economic ambitions of Europe. He invites in Marx's critique that states how philosophico-political fictions such as these are "aesthetic superstructures at once significant, symptomatic and dependent on what they signify." It so happens that Rousseau's written wish was also symptomatic of "an anticipation of [European] bourgeois society which had been preparing itself since the sixteenth century and which in the eighteenth century was taking giant strides towards maturity."

The next meaning Derrida wishes to approach is the temporal violence of a Crusoe-inspired Rousseaudian dream. This dream is not an ephemeral moment of art. There is a "constructed world" in Rousseau's wish: this is a Rousseau that "recognizes himself in Robinson Crusoe, recognizes in him a brother." The wish, as a pre-political dream, seemed to have not only shaped the world but also to have endured as a marvelous fascination. This is something that scares Derrida: this world or this epoch of the world that goes well beyond the period of the eighteenth century, "in that the fascination exercised by *Robinson Crusoe* will survive for a long time; a fascination exercised not only on Joyce or Woolf but on every child and adult the world over."

Many have read *Robinson Crusoe*, and many more will do so. This book has not only shaped the present as Derrida is implying, but also it will continue to shape both pasts and presents: a European dream from the past that has molded (colonized) the past and the present of non-Europeans, and has prevented their future from being a prosperous one. Hence Derrida's worry about the violence of perpetuating a fascination built on dichotomous savage/human, human/beast logics. The disabling turns that Derrida makes are in the hope of allowing in a different present in the classroom: a present that might be able to breathe itself out of a colonial historical canon by looking precisely at the coloniality embedded in the heroes of modern European heritage.

Derrida's pedagogy of time disables the primary theses through a radical ushering in of other concepts that were supposed to remain outside of the conversations on Defoe's novel in the classroom. The pedagogy of time is thus committed to an "ultra-political" regulation of students' economies of knowledge, in the sense that it is committed to addressing the violence of texts, meanings, and knowing, but does not have its definitive endpoint and answers *normatively* assigned, i.e. they are not already designated by a specific political theory. Derrida's pedagogy undertakes capitalism, colonialism, and dark sides of modernity. Yet it consciously and painstakingly abstains from resorting to oversimplified dialectical assimilations into another

structure that declares to have explained the roots of all problems by reducing them to one cause. The pedagogy of time thus gives time to historical, decolonial becoming as opposed to snatching away time in favor of fixed conclusions.

This is why a pedagogy of time, with its deliberate epistemic un-hurriedness and its withholding from assimilation in to a theory that is already created by others, can find itself closer to what Frantz Fanon had in mind as an authentic configuration for resistance. In his book *Black Skins*, *White Masks*, he objects to Sartre rushing him to opt for a Marxist solution to fight racism, ⁴³ something he did not need to know. ⁴⁴ Fanon did not need to know the endpoints of his resistance, and he especially did not need his theoretical and dialectical threshold in "becoming" to be suggested or enforced by someone else. Even though the colonial injustices "ignited fervor," he did not trust, nor did he want, truths about colonial injustices "to be hurled in men's faces." ⁴⁵ For Fanon, historical becomings entailed losing yourself completely in what has caused harm, violence, colonialism, or, for him specifically, negritude. You need to forget what you never knew. ⁴⁶ It is as though hurrying to a theoretically circumscribed solution belongs to those philosophers/pedagogues "who heat the iron *in order* to shape it at once." ⁴⁷

Perhaps the pedagogy of time in its undertaking to create an ultra-political regulation of the economy of knowledge and modified presences would be something Fanon would condone: it tends to give time as opposed "to snatch(ing) it away." After all, a pedagogy such as this is committed "to warm(ing) man's body and leav(ing) him," as opposed to "heating it and shaping at once," ultimately nudging them to wear a "trampoline" of resistance made and already created by others. 49

Derrida's slow, unhurried moves to disable primary meanings and destabilize modified presences regulate the economy of knowledge or resistance the way Fanon would have wanted. Perhaps such moves are what we ought to demand in times when there is a need for *radically slow*, Fanonian decolonial pedagogies. Pedagogies that warm thoughts and yet let individuals retain their fire through self-combustion: self-combusting thoughts that endow students with epistemological turns and make it possible to dig into our/their own flesh to find meanings. These are pedagogies of giving time.

^{1.} Jacques Derrida, "What Comes Before the Question?" YouTube Video, September 9 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2bPTs8fspk (1:45).

^{2.} Ibid., 3:19.

^{3.} Ibid., 6:05.

^{4.} See Jacques Derrida, Given Time I. Counterfeit Money, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 29.

^{5.} N. Martin Nakata, Victoria Nakata, Sarah Keech, and Reuben Bolt, "Decolonial Goals and Pedagogies for Indigenous Studies," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 120-140.

^{6.} Ibid., 121.

^{7.} Ibid., 120.

^{8.} See Simon Glezos, *The Politics of Speed: Capitalism, the State, and War in an Accelerating World* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

- 9. See Ian Almond, Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn' Arabi (New York: Routledge, 2001), 46-47.
- 10. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and The Sovereign*, vol. 2, ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- 11. Ibid., 13.
- 12. Ibid., 3.
- 13. Ibid., 3.
- 14. Ibid.
- 15. Ibid.
- 16. Ibid.
- 17. Ibid., 2.
- 18. Ibid., 15.
- 19. Ibid., 16.
- 20. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, "Editorial Note," in Derrida, *The Beast and The Sovereign*, 14.
- 21. Derrida, The Beast and The Sovereign, 26.
- 22. Ibid.
- 23. Ibid., 27.
- 24. Ibid. On the notion "Robinsonade," see Derrida's critique of Deleuze's analysis, *The Beast and The Sovereign*, 27.
- 25. Ibid.
- 26. Ibid.
- 27. Ibid..14.
- 28. Ibid.
- 29. Ibid., 15.
- 30. Ibid.
- 31. Ibid., 16.
- 32. Ibid., 16.
- 33. Ibid.
- 34. Ibid., 18. See also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile ou de l'éducation, ed. Michel Launay (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), Book III, 239.
- 35. Ibid., 5.
- 36. Ibid., 4.
- 37. Ibid.
- 38. Ibid., 25.
- 39. Ibid.
- 40. Ibid.
- 41. Ibid., 24.
- 42. Ibid., 21.
- 43. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press 2008), 103.
- 44. See Robert Bernasconi, "On Needing Not to Know and Forgetting What One Never Knew: The Epistemology of Ignorance in Fanon's Critique of Sartre," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 231-238.

- 45. Fanon, Black Skins, 2.
- 46. Bernasconi, "On Needing Not to Know," 231.
- 47. See Fanon, Black Skins, 2-3, emphasis added.
- 48. Fanon, Black Skins, 101.
- 49. Ibid.

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