The Phenomenon of Dancing in Sholawat Assemblies Viewed from the Moral Perspectives of Ibnu Miskawaih and Jean-Paul Sartre

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the phenomenon of dancing in the *sholawat* gatherings. This issue has sparked a debate on whether or not dancing in these gatherings is acceptable, with opposing views from both proponents and opponents. The group in favor of this phenomenon argues that dancing in *sholawat* gatherings is a form of expressing joy. Meanwhile, the group opposed to it believes that dancing in such gatherings is inappropriate. Given this polemic, the aim of this research is to examine the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* gatherings from the moral philosophy perspectives of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean-Paul Sartre. This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach. Data collection is carried out through the review of relevant literature. The results of this study show that, according to Ibn Miskawaih's perspective, dancing in *sholawat* gatherings is an excessive act and thus can be considered immoral. This is because Ibn Miskawaih's moral concept is based on balance, avoiding both extreme excess and extreme deficiency. On the other hand, from Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective, dancing in *sholawat* gatherings is not an issue, as it is part of an individual's expression of their existence. According to Sartre, an individual expresses their existence through freedom in taking action.

Keywords: Dancing Phenomenon, Sholawat Gathering, Ibn Miskawaih, Jean-Paul Sartre

1. Introduction

The *sholawat* assembly is currently an activity that is loved by all groups, from the young to the old. In various Muslim communities, *sholawat* is usually sung with a distinctive rhythm or melody in accordance with local musical traditions (Alifah et al., 2024). For example, in Middle Eastern cultures, *sholawat* is often sung with typical Arabic rhythms and musical instruments. While in Indonesian culture, there are variations of shalawat with a touch of traditional music such as hadrah (Amelta, 2023). Among the Indonesian cultures that have been mentioned earlier is *sholawat* using hadrah. Hadrah is an Islamic art that is accompanied by the chanting of verses and qasidah praises that glorify the Prophet (Azizah & Warisno, 2022). Currently, improvisation in *qasidah* arrangements performed by hadrah groups is increasingly varied and developed so that it is very appealing to listeners and is used as a medium for da'wah.

The phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies is an interesting and public concern, especially among Muslims in Indonesia. *Sholawat* as a remembrance tradition that refers to the praise of the Prophet Muhammad is usually associated with a solemn and profound atmosphere (Ramdani, 2024). However, recently, in a number of regions, we have seen the emergence of a new tradition, namely the participants of the *sholawat* assembly expressing their love for the Prophet through body movements or what we often call *'joget'* or dancing. This expression also raises polemics in society, especially when there is an impression of entertainment in worship rituals. This phenomenon can be





understood as a form of local cultural adaptation that tries to familiarise *sholawat* with the wider community.

Dancing in *sholawat* assemblies can be regarded as a modern form of this approach, where body movements as a form of joy are integrated to add to the attractiveness of the assembly. However, this more open form of expression also triggers concerns about the potential blurring of the sacredness of worship. In addition, the dancing phenomenon demonstrates the growing influence of pop culture among the younger generation in *sholawat* assemblies. Not a few young people feel closer to *sholawat* when this activity is packaged in a more lively and joyful atmosphere (Fadilla, 2023). *Sholawat* songs that are composed to be more modern, with rhythms that are pleasant to hear and feel, encourage the audience to move and even dance. On the one hand, this shows how pop culture and religiosity can collaborate and merge in a format that is accepted by the younger generation. However, on the other hand, too much pop culture influence also risks shifting the meaning of *sholawat* from sacred to mere entertainment (Lail & Mawardi, 2024)

Polemics have emerged between those who support and oppose the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies. For those in favour, they argue that dancing can be a medium of expression of happiness and a form of joy for the love of the Prophet Muhammad. According to this view, the dancing movement is considered a manifestation of love and joy, not as a harassing action. In contrast, the opposing group views dancing in *sholawat* as an act that deviates from the shari'a. They are concerned that the more the *sholawat* ritual is performed, the more it is likely to be abusive. They fear that the *sholawat* ritual will turn into entertainment without deep religious meaning, and potentially cause fitnah in the community. The phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies invites attention to reflect on the boundaries that should exist in religious expression. This phenomenon is very important to discuss wisely, without getting caught up in counterproductive debates.

Thus, the purpose of this research will examine the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies based on the moral perspectives of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre. The reason for choosing Ibn Miskawaih is because he is the father of morals or ethics in Islam. While the reason for choosing Jean Paul Sartre is because he is one of the Western moral or ethical figures. So that by looking at the two moral perspectives of the two figures, at least an example can be taken of the views of Islamic and Western figures in seeing this dancing phenomenon in the *sholawat* assembly. Previous studies have only discussed the moral concept, both from the moral concept of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre to other things. So that there is no research that relates the moral concepts of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre to see the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies. Therefore, this research will examine the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies from the perspective of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with two types of approaches, namely through library research. The researcher will analyse the dancing phenomenon in the context of *sholawat* assemblies based on two different moral perspectives, namely from Ibn Miskawaih, an Islamic philosopher, and Jean-Paul Sartre, a Western existentialist philosopher. This research is descriptive-analytical, which describes the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies and analyses the phenomenon using two different moral frameworks. The main data sources in this research are Ibn Miskawaih's books on morality, such as 'Tahdzib al-Akhlak' and Sartre's moral concepts, especially from works such as 'Being



and Nothingness' and 'Existentialism is a Humanism'. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are scientific journal articles, books, and relevant previous literature.

The method of data accumulation in this research is through literature review, namely by collecting and examining various relevant references, including books, journals, and scientific articles that discuss morality, the dancing phenomenon in Islamic culture, and the study of the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Ibn Miskawaih. The method of data analysis in this research uses descriptive analysis, which illustrates the phenomenon of dancing in *sholawat* assemblies, both in terms of historical and contemporary practices. The focus of analysis is on the differences in the principles of morality of the two figures where according to Ibn Miskawaih, how dancing in the context of *sholawat* assemblies is viewed in Islamic ethics which emphasises the balance of soul and morality. Meanwhile, according to Jean Paul Sartre, how this phenomenon can be analysed from the point of view of existentialism, especially the concepts of freedom, authenticity and individual responsibility.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Biography of Ibn Miskawaih and his Moral Concepts

Ibn Miskawaih's full name is Abu Ali Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ya'qub (Encyclopedia of Islam: 1997, 162). He grew up in the land of the Mullahs (Iran) more correctly in the city of Ray in 320 AH/932 AD and died in Isfahan on 9 Shafar in 412 AH/16 February 1030 AD. He also bears another name Abu 'Ali Al-Khazin. Ibn Miskawaih grew up during the Abbasid Daulah in the Buwaihiyah (632-1062 AD), most of whose leaders were of the Zaidiyah Shia sect (Abdullah, 2020). Ibn Miskawaih himself is more popularly known as the Father of Islamic Ethics/Moral Philosophy (Novanto, 2024). In addition, he was also a doctor, poet, linguist and studied chemistry. He learnt history from Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Kamil al-Qadi in 350H/960M, while philosophy he studied with a teacher named Ibn Khamar, a famous Aristotle exegete. Abu at-Tayyib ar-Razi was his chemistry teacher (Santalia, 2023).

In terms of profession, it is written that Ibn Miskawaih's main profession was treasurer, secretary, librarian and teacher of the children of the Buwaihi dynasty. In addition to being greeted by the ruler, he also mingled with many scholars, such as Abu Hayyan, Yahya Ibn Adi and Ibn Sina.

Ibn Miskawaih was also called the third teacher (al-Mualimun al-Tsalits) after al-Farabi who was called the second teacher (al-Mualimun al-Tsani) while the first teacher (al-Mualimun al-Awwal) was Aristotle. Ibn Miskawaih is known as a prolific scholar who produced many works. As the father of Islamic Ethics/Morals, Ibn Miskawaih has described the foundations of ethics in his work Tahdzib al-Akhlak wa Tathir al-A'raq (ethical education and moral cleansing). In his work, Ibn Miskawaih mentions that the peak of happiness of a person is a healthy moral intermediary (Rahayu, 2019). Meanwhile, the roots of Ibn Miskawaih's ethical philosophy stem from Greek philosophy, Persian civilisation, Islamic Sharia teachings, and personal experience (Omar, 2003).

The mindset brought by Ibn Miskawaih, regarding morals, he began by understanding the human soul. He saw that the science of the soul has its own advantages compared to other sciences. Humans are not able to achieve a science unless they have understood the science of the soul beforehand. Therefore, understanding about the matters of the soul as a basis to facilitate understanding other sciences. Thus, one has the tools to see between what is true and false, good and bad in matters of belief. Therefore, the style of Ibn Miskawaih's moral thinking is structured on his view of the soul (Amin & Maruf, 1993).

Ibn Miskawaih argued that the realisation of man depends on God's destiny, but the good and bad of man is based on man's own behaviour and depends on his own will. Humans have three models of innate: reason (the highest), lust (the lowest), and courage (among the other two) (Abdullah, 2020).

Moral according to Ibn Miskawaih can be referred to in two pieces, namely first to the pure innate itself (fithrah) and second with effort (*iktisab*) then turned into a habit. However, Ibn Miskawaih is more inclined to the second, namely that all morals are the result of effort (*muktasabah*). He views that humans have opportunities for all types of morals, whether the procedure is slow or fast (Santalia & Awal: 2020). In moral issues, Ibn Miskawaih believes that goodness is in all aspects that become the object of the target, and what is useful to achieve the object of the target is also good.

According to the Sufism view, a person's morals depend on the kind of soul that dominates over him. If what is dominant in his soul is animal or vegetable lust, what will appear in his actions are animal or vegetable actions as well. Conversely, if the dominant one is human lust, automatically what will appear in his actions are human deeds as well (Solihin & Anwar, 2024). Regarding this, according to Ibn Miskawaih, in reality it is not natural, even though we are born with the tabi'at of receiving character, but this character can be cultivated through education and teaching. So, the education and teaching that is done endlessly, will automatically build character based on its habits. More simply, ethics according to Ibn Miskawaih is the particulars of the soul that triggers the emergence of actions without the process of thinking or reflection because it starts from human habits that build his character.

Regarding the sketch design of humans, Ibn Miskawaih believes that humans have three powers or strengths. First, the power of thinking (*al-quwwah al-natiqah*) or called the king of organs, which he uses is the brain to think, see, and consider the facts of everything. Second, the power of lust (*al-quwwah al-syahwiyyah*) or called the animal organ of the body that it uses is the heart, motivating the will to the pleasure of food, drink, sexual intercourse, accompanied by other sensory pleasures. Third, the power of anger (*al-quwwah al-ghadhabiyyah*) or called the beast the organ of the body it uses is the heart, which motivates to act angry, brave, want to master, and want a variety of honours (Abdullah: 2020).

These forces will be experienced by each person differently. The strength of the strength depends on his temperament, customs or education. Man will be honoured when he has many thinking souls, and if he devotes himself to these thinking souls, then man is at the level of perfection. When there is a level of perfection, then there is an imperfect level, namely the level where people are weak in thinking, they are in the animal realm who are subject to their lust which is satisfied through the sensory organs (Miskawaih, 1978).

Furthermore, Ibn Miskawaih is of the view that goodness is at the midpoint between the two ends. Conversely, badness is found at both ends. Goodness is at the midpoint, as noticed by the existence between the two vices and the situation that is farthest from both. Therefore, if the good shifts even slightly from its situation to a lower one, it will potentially fall into one of the vices, and the value of the good will decrease according to how close it is to the vices. It is not only difficult to reach the middle point, but it is also difficult to maintain it after obtaining it (Assidiqi & Soleh, 2023).

Ibn Miskawaih based his most important moral theory on the *wasatiyyah* (middle) bench. The teaching of this middle way has been introduced by previous philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle from Western philosophers while from Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi (Hidayat & Kesuma, 2019). Ibn Miskawaih believes that the ultimate peak of this morality is when it is in the middle bench from the extremes of deficiency and extremes of excess. The weapons used as a measure to get the middle behaviour according to Ibn Miskawaih are *shari'a* and also reason (Novanto, 2024). This middle way theory can be considered as a theory that has a dynamic meaning. Thus, based on the teaching of the middle way, humans will not lose their way in any case. It holds that every virtuous behaviour has two negative aspects: the middle is good, and the ends are bad. The desirable middle stool is a general principle that applies to everyone, and one virtue is the actual middle position. The middle positions



include 'hikmah' which is wisdom, '*iffah*' which is chastity, '*shaja'ah*' which is courage, and '*adalah*' which is justice (Rohmaniyah, 2010). The following is an example of the above information.

Table 1. Example of 1011 Miskawain's Middle Dench			
Extreme Deprivation	Centre Position	Extreme Excess	
Ignorant	Wise (hikmah)	Sassy	
Not Passionate	Keeping oneself pure (iffah)	Gluttonous	
Loser	Courage (shaja'ah)	Reckless	
Oppressed	Justice ('adalah)	Tyrannical	

Table 1. Example of Ibn Miskawaih's Middle Bench

3.2. Biography of Jean Paul Sartre and his Moral Concepts

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre is his full name. He grew up in Paris and was born on 21 June 1905. He is part of the main philosopher figures in the doctrine of existentialism published in the 20th century, even familiar as the father of existentialist philosophy. Not only that, Sartre is also familiar as a political activist, moral activist, and writer who published many novels, journals and even performance scripts in his time (Siswadi & Cahyana, 2024). Sartre's existentialist views are expressed in his famous books such as 'Being and Nothingness' and 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (Elsyifa, 2018). As a teenager he spent his time studying at the Ecole Normale Superieuri from 1924-1928, then when he was 21 years old he studied at the undergraduate level and graduated with honours. After that he joined the military, Sartre unfortunately did not go into the field because he had vision problems that did not allow it, so he then accepted the offer of a chair as a professor of philosophy at Lyeum, Le Havre, in 1931-1933. He continued his relay from 1933-1935 as a student investigator at the French Institute, Berlin and the University of Freiburg (Muzairi, 2002).

While in Germany, Sarte met and learnt from Husserl, which was a part of his own historical journey for the development of his thought in the future. It was through Husserl's phenomenological structure that he truly stabilised his position as a philosopher with his own model and distinctiveness. With the structure of phenomenology, he developed a philosophy of human existence. After completing his studies from Husserl, Sarte returned to his homeland and practised his knowledge in La Havre and later at the Lycee Pasteur. As the world was in the midst of World War II, Sarte was forced to join the military. On his thirty-fifth birthday (21 June 1940), he was taken prisoner by the Germans in Laroine. But a short time later, in 1941, Sartre managed to escape clandestinely and returned to Paris (Nugroho, 2013). The cessation of World War II was Sartre's first step as a teacher. The object of his study was only focused on writing. Around 1943, Sartre had completed his greatest work entitled *L'Etre et le Neant*. The book later became the foundation of all his works. In 1946, Sartre held a speech entitled 'Existence and Humanism', unexpectedly his speech was able to attract an audience so that it was booked and a best seller (Siswadi, 2023).

Sartre's philosophy has a style of thinking more inclined to humans as individuals and the bonds between humans from the aspect of existence. Where Sartre's perspective is that humans have different characteristics in each person, and each person is then referred to as an existence that has its own uniqueness and characteristics. Such as intuition, feelings, intellectual will and so on, all of which must have a relationship with human consciousness itself, because every human being will have the motivation to show his existence and try in his perspective to be able to influence the environment around him (Ali, 2009). Based on Sartre's perspective, there is no one thing that can prevent the ability of humans to choose a decision regarding their freedom, because they have full rights in this freedom (Haqqi et al., 2024).



Sartre was an atheist philosopher. It was stated by him openly. The consequence of this atheist perspective is that there is no God in this world, or at least humans are not God's creation. Therefore, his concept of man is that man is not a product of God. From this point of view, he found the value that human existence precedes his essence (Haqqi et al., 2024). Sartre also considers that human beings do not have a permanent essence, and he thinks that human beings must determine their own way of life through their actions. This means that every human being has the right to freedom of action and is able to take responsibility for themselves, without being instructed.

Sartre again emphasised that the foundation of his values is freedom within oneself, where each individual has the right to declare themselves consciously. With that sense of freedom they will never feel confined and shackled by the past, he has the right to be what he wants to be now, as well as in the future. It is not perfect if humans are only limited to *Etre-en Soi* without any awareness, and only as objects of study. Therefore, it must be perfected in Etre-pour Soi where we are in the realm of consciousness, and not just an object of study for others (Siswadi & Cahyana, 2024). Such is human freedom according to Jean Paul Sartre's perspective. More simply, humans have the freedom to position themselves as beings in general, not limited by the past, and also not limited by ratio and form. Certainly not limited by the small scope of other human perspectives. Because by accepting our freedom as human beings, we can in fact prevent the generalisation of human beings or ourselves as individuals, moreover, we can determine all decisions related to the meaning of life that we want through consciousness.

Freedom for Sartre is not only the freedom to be able to choose, but also to be responsible for those choices. The freedom that Sartre proposes is not merely the freedom to act, but this freedom is a freedom that involves full awareness that implies the morality of the actions taken, which of course this freedom is followed by responsibility for every action that must be borne (Strathern, 2001). Humans are responsible for their actions, and this freedom means that humans are not determined by moral rules or natural laws in making choices, but rather humans create their own values through their actions. Thus, there are no eternal values in a world above humans. Morals must be created by man himself. With freedom man makes himself into anything, and will continue to make and create, because man is basically never identical with himself.

The concept of individual freedom in Sartre's existentialism has a significant impact on his ethical/moral perspective. Sartre's views emphasise personal responsibility and individual freedom in taking action and making moral choices. According to Sartre, humans are free beings. There is no predetermined human essence, and we are free to create meaning and values in this life. This view leads to the thought that individuals are fully responsible for their own actions, without relying on external authorities or objectively determined moral norms.

In the context of ethics/morals, this view implies that each individual has absolute freedom to determine what is right or wrong for them. There are no fixed or standardised moral rules that can be applied universally. Each person must look within themselves and take full responsibility for their moral choices. Sartre's approach to ethics also emphasises on the aspect of subjectivity in moral decision-making. Individual freedom in existentialism means that individuals have the authority to determine what is right based on their unique situation. There is no universal or fixed moral formula; morality must be lived through individual judgement in a complex situational context.

3.3. A Review of the Dancing Phenomenon in *Sholawat* Assembly in the Moral Perspective of Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre

Ibn Miskawaih was a philosopher known for his moral views that emphasised the balance between reason, soul and action. In his work, '*Tahdzib al-Akhlaq*,' he emphasised that virtue lies in the



balance between merits and demerits (Mubin, 2020). He categorised morals into several levels, including courage, temperance, and wisdom. Ibn Miskawaih's ethics focuses on human efforts to achieve balance in every action. In the context of *sholawat* assemblies, this principle can be applied to evaluate whether jogging as an expression of joy is still within the bounds of virtue or if it exceeds the limits to become an excessive action.

Dancing in *sholawat* assemblies is often interpreted as a form of overflow of joy and love for the Prophet. For some people, the physical movement is a way to internalise the meaning of the chanted *sholawat*, as if the body is involved in worship. However, this has become controversial when dancing has been perceived as disturbing the religious atmosphere or deviating from the purpose of the assembly which should bring calmness and sincerity in worship. Ibn Miskawaih emphasises the importance of moderation or balance in everything, including in expressions of joy (Mustafa, 2023). According to him, all forms of virtue can be achieved if humans are able to place themselves in a balanced position between deficiencies and advantages (Kurniati, 2021). Ibn Miskawaih also emphasises the importance of morals in every action. Morals are a reflection of a person's inner character that appears through outward behaviour (Fatih, 2022).

One of the main problems with dancing in *sholawat* assemblies is the disruption of the religious atmosphere that should be maintained. Ibn Miskawaih taught that a good action is one that does not harm others or disturb public peace (Syawaluddin, 2024). In this context, physical movements that are too excessive or uncontrollable will disrupt the sacred atmosphere of the assembly. Therefore, in accordance with Ibn Miskawaih's moral principles, there needs to be a limit or control on the expression of joy in the *sholawat* assembly so that it remains in accordance with ethical or moral values so as not to disturb others. In Ibn Miskawaih's view, every action must pay attention to aspects of propriety and appropriateness (Kahwash: 2020). Excessive expression of joy is considered inappropriate because it can exceed the limits of decency. Therefore, in *sholawat* assemblies it is best to maintain propriety and calmness. As a spiritual tool, *sholawat* assemblies are expected to be able to balance outward and inward aspects in order to bring goodness without crossing ethical boundaries.

Jean-Paul Sartre emphasised that human beings are free beings so that they cannot avoid their freedom to choose to act. Sartre believes that humans are free to determine any action, without being constrained by certain dogmas or norms (Haqqi et al., 2024). In the context of *sholawat* assemblies, the decision to dance or not can be seen as part of individual freedom. For those who choose to dance, the act may be seen as a way to express religious joy. However, Sartre also emphasised that this freedom comes with great responsibility (Jaya & Stanislaus: 2023), where one must consider the impact of his actions on others and his social environment (Stratehrn, 2001).

Sartre introduced the concept of a freedom project as a form of action that is consciously performed and self-chosen by the individual (Rahman, 2024). Dancing in *sholawat* assemblies can be understood as a freedom project in which individuals consciously choose to express themselves in the form of physical movement. This action becomes part of an individual's identity and authenticity in seeking a way of worship that feels more meaningful. Jean-Paul Sartre emphasised the importance of living authentically, a life that is true to oneself and free from social pressure (Elsyifa, 2018). For some, dancing in a *sholawat* assembly may be considered a more authentic way of expressing their joy. Sartre would see this act as a form of individual courage to exercise their freedom even though it may be seen as strange or inappropriate by others. However, this authenticity also requires individuals to understand the limits of their freedom (Nirasma, 2021), especially when in a collective space such as a *sholawat* assembly.

While Sartre emphasised individual freedom, he was also aware of responsibility (Hakim & Fauziati, 2022). This responsibility is especially present when one's actions affect others in a shared



environment. In the context of *sholawat* assemblies, individuals who choose to dance must consider whether their actions will disturb others or even create an atmosphere that is less conducive to worship. Sartre suggests that in every free action, individuals must recognise that there are limits to everything (Nursabit, 2024) and think about others in order to try to avoid actions that could harm others. In other words, the freedom to dance in the *sholawat* assembly must be accompanied by an awareness of the impact on others who are also in the assembly.

However, for Sartre, individual actions must be in line with the values he believes in, even though these values are contrary to the prevailing social norms (Mahfiid, 2007). So again, dancing in the *sholawat* assembly is part of freedom for individuals, and not an immoral act in Sartre's view. Although a person will later be considered not in accordance with the prevailing social norms, because it is the consequence and responsibility. With this freedom, it means that humans are not determined by moral rules or social laws in making choices, but rather humans create their own values through their actions (Siswadi & Cahyana, 2024).

4. Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that the moral perspective between Ibn Miskawaih and Jean Paul Sartre in seeing the dancing phenomenon in the *sholawat* assembly has a significant difference. If Ibn Miskawaih departs from the concept of moderation or balance, then Jean Paul Sartre departs from his existential concept. So that according to Ibn Miskawaih's moral perspective, dancing in the *sholawat* assembly is an excessive action. Because these activities should still maintain propriety and decency, especially in the context of worship. Meanwhile, according to Sartre's moral perspective, dancing in the prayer assembly is not an immoral act. Because humans themselves have freedom of action. Because of this freedom, humans themselves determine their values. So that someone who jogs in a prayer assembly is a form of showing his own existence for his freedom of action as an expression of his joy.

Although Sartre also suggests considering one's actions in relation to the collective. In this context, considering whether or not one's actions disturb and harm others, as it relates to one's responsibility. But again, one may do dancing in a *sholawat* assembly, because it is part of individual freedom of action.

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