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However, I was wondering if the Copy On Write logic maybe is shortcircuited on pass-by-reference and whether that has any performance impact. ETA: To be sure, I assume that it's not faster, and I am well aware that this is not what references are for. So I think my own guesses are quite good, I'm just looking for an answer from someone who really knows what's definitely happening under the hood. In five years of PHP development, I've always found it hard to get quality information on PHP internals short from reading the source.