

Reviews

The Moral and Religious Predicament of Modern Man. Edited by BENJAMIN F. LEWIS. New York: Pageant-Poseidon, 1972. 152 pages. \$6.95.

This book is the report of a series of lectures given by Pitirim A. Sorokin, F. S. C. Northrop, and W. T. Stace in the late sixties at Transylvania University. Each contributor was asked not only to present his thoughts on the subject denoted by the title of the series but also to offer hopeful alternatives. One cannot fault the tone of moral urgency maintained throughout most of this work or the seriousness of intent of the contributors. However, I question the relevance of the results as answers to our contemporary predicament. Let us turn to our lecturers to see.

One cannot find Sorokin's message anything but unexceptionable. The trouble is, one hears it on every street corner. That does not make the message wrong, but it does make it worn. Religions must put their combined force behind the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." They must preach that "God is Love" and "Love is God." The tribal standpoint must fall away into the universalistic. Religious differences must be not only tolerated but welcomed. But, unfortunately for Sorokin's account, there seems no recognition on his part that variety might be the heart of religion—a variety which is not tolerant of differences. Neither Judaism, Christianity, nor Islam has been noted for its tolerance, and its deepest, most impressive age has been that in which tolerance was little practiced or called for. One hopes, yes. But the job will be one far more difficult of attainment than anything Sorokin's heavy enthusiasm can bear.

As for the argument itself, there is precious little of that. It is difficult to follow an argument made up of elements such as the following: We are told that, "From 500 to 1300 A.D., the percentage of materialistic, sceptical, agnostic and critical philosophies were zero while that of various idealistic philosophies and *Weltanschauungen* was 100 percent." In the next paragraph, Sorokin claims there has been a "decline of the Universalistic, the Eternalistic, and the *Realistic Weltanschauungen* congenial to the Christian theology and philosophy, and growth of the opposite philosophies of Singularism, Temporalism, and Nominalism, contradictory to the teachings of Christianity, have occurred [*sic*] during the last five or six centuries" (pp. 18–19; italics are Sorokin's). There are two difficulties standing in the way of understanding: One has to do with the statement concerning idealistic philosophies, that they hogged the show from A.D. 500 to 1300. How can one interpret such a statement? By any philosophical measure of the meaning of idealism—either as a theory of universals, as a metaphysics of what there is, or a theory of knowledge—the Middle Ages were not dominated by idealistic philosophies. For instance, metaphysical idealism would make hash of Christianity, with Christ occurring as a mere idea in the mind of God. Perhaps Sorokin means merely that the philosophy was not skeptical and recommended ideals which

were edifying. If this is what he means, one does not know whether his view is so much true as simply indifferent to the distinction of view—so plentiful in the thirteenth century—which it glosses over. But there is worse to come. For the second paragraph appears to be inconsistent with the first. We are now told that it was the realistic world views which were congenial to Christian theology and philosophy, and the idealistic philosophies of the paragraph before are forgotten. Perhaps there is no inconsistency, and Sorokin merely shifts the meaning of the philosophies in question from paragraph to paragraph. I for one am not able to tell, for there is no comment by the author to help clear the confusion from the reader's mind.

No one reviewing a work of Sorokin can fail to deal with his use of figures. I am neither a statistician nor a scientist, and my mind is bare of sophistication of any sort on the subject. But there are claims, advanced under the garmenting of numbers, which are difficult for me to understand, much less evaluate. In a chart on page 23 presented graphically to display the "decline of Christian moral teachings" we read the following:

PERIOD (A.D.)	SECULAR ETHICS OF HAPPINESS	RELIGIOUS ETHICS OF
	(Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Eudaemonism)	CHRISTIANITY
400-1300	0	100.00
1300-1400	0	100.00
1400-1500	8.7	91.3
1500-1600	43.5	56.5
1600-1700	38.4	61.6
1700-1800	36.3	63.7
1800-1900	38.0	62.0
1900-1920	43.0	57.0

For details of this computation we are sent to the author's *Dynamics*, volume 2, but I admit to a doubt so severe as to amount to near certitude that there is no way one could justify the assigning to the century from 1500 to 1600 the highest percentage of works devoted to secular ethics and the lowest percentage devoted to the ethics of Christianity—even lower than the figure assigned to the nineteenth century and the first twenty years of our present era. The sixteenth century is the period of Montaigne and Rabelais, true, but it is as well the time of the protestant Reformation, of Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, Zwingli. And, of course, some works of late antiquity, secular in their import, were being produced in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.

There is much, much more in the lectures dedicated to showing the bloodiness of the present and that we are at that point between "the dying Sensate culture of our magnificent yesterday and the ideational culture of the creative tomorrow" (p. 5). But, beyond that indicated in the first paragraph of this review, there are no indications of the promise or the program of this creative time.

The second two lectures in this series were delivered by Northrop and were dedicated to the present worldwide religious reformation. The first lecture takes on its conflicting components, the second its deeper meaning. The second should have been far the more important of the two, but it suffers from such conciseness of exposition as to be almost without instructive value. Northrop regards the world of the present as one in which secularism is overthrowing

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the morality of our religious traditions, but this secularism, as the editor of this volume points out (p. 6), is one with religious roots. Everywhere men are reassessing what is God's will for man, and it is now being seen as "a democratic and secular view more attuned to a Lockean-Stoic philosophy" and represents a turning away from "an aristocratic, patriarchal familistic understanding of life and the world" (p. 7).

The second lecture attempts to answer the question, How can we know what is the distinguishing mark of religion? This is done in order to enable us to "get a criterion of what God's will for man is." Northrop asserts that the essential mark of religious experience and knowledge is "its concern with those factors in the cosmos and in man that are timeless" (p. 101). He dwells only for the briefest time on confirmation of his claim, thinking, I imagine, the claim is so obvious it needs little discussion. But is it so? In particular, is it so of the Hebrew tradition of the Old Testament? Northrop tells us the central role of immortality of the soul in most religions suggests his contention. What is one to do, then, with the Old Testament, surely a work that has had something to do with the shaping of our religious awareness? How often does it talk of timeless, eternal matters? It speaks with the deepest eloquence of God as everlasting, of the grass withering and the flower fading, and of God's word from everlasting to everlasting. And yet eternity hardly ever is spoken of. God endures through the creation and wearing out of the world, but He is forever involved in time and history. As for immortality, much of the very poignancy of, say, the Psalms, to mention no other source, stems from the soul's ephemerality, as in: "Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks." Christianity moves more toward a sense of the timeless, from the everlasting to the eternal, but there is a delicate balance between the two, always ready to burst forth into open conflict. Northrop's insensitivity to this makes one wonder whether he can deal with religious issues in a way which can harken back to the soul's understanding of the sacred. But I recognize that what I am saying probably constitutes a minority opinion.

How then are we to say this factor is to be known? The rest of Northrop's last lecture is devoted to the epistemology of religious knowledge. The author, treating of issues in the theory of knowledge which dominated its study in the teens, twenties, and thirties of this century, attempts a brief statement of a way in which we can be said to know something of the timeless. But, before I summarize his argument, a brief caveat is in order. The purpose of the second lecture was to illuminate the problem of knowledge of that which distinguishes religion. He decides that concern with the timeless is fundamental. However, there are a large number of forms of timelessness, of Platonic ideas—of the form of bed, for instance—of propositions, of truth, to mention but a few. But, surely, such timelessness would be only of tangential interest to a discussion of religion. I think the reason for this is that, at least in the West, religious devotion has been centered on God as an everlasting existent in whose presence the biblical Jews, most particularly, came to acknowledge their own existence. The ancient Hebrew most often prefaced his oaths of obligation as sanctioned and sanctified by the living God before whom he stood. He lived, by his place before the Lord who lived, and by whom he was addressed through the patriarchs, prophets, or singers. And he knew in that presence—revealed not perceived—that his days were swifter than a weaver's shuttle but that in the Lord is everlasting strength. That is a timeless factor unique and strange. And

this brings us to two most profound questions, for both Northrop and me as well: (1) There are many forms of timelessness which have nothing to do with any of the main religious traditions of the world; some of these forms have been mentioned above. (2) Even supposing one dealt with a form of timelessness which all forms of religion recognizably practiced today, would one not, in one's attempt to be so general as to make one's analysis apply to all, ignore differences which are essential to the core of each of the religions, a core without which the religions would lose their hold upon their community of believers? This latter question could be put to many today whose universalistic enthusiasms lead them to ride roughshod over the rock-hard centers of the distinct communions. What would be left should they succeed, aside from a shapeless, though nonetheless worthy, sense of brotherhood and fragile desire for love? What place would there be in such an undifferentiated faith for the Lord of Hosts? Would one still hear the voice from the whirlwind?

And now for Northrop himself. It may be that I am blind to the religious relevance of Northrop's discussion on religious epistemology, but it seems to me to err in two directions. First, there is nothing in what he says that draws on the extensive work in the theory of knowledge and ancillary efforts in language since the time of Whitehead's logical realism, nothing of the recent work in logical positivism (and it is not dead), or of Wittgenstein or Austin and their followers, and these schools have much indeed to say concerning the nest of linguistic confusions that need to be cleared away before one can develop a genuine epistemology freed from misuses of ordinary and formal language conventions. Second, since nearly all of Northrop's discussion is devoted to the discussion of the epistemological concerns of sense perception, it is unclear how the briefly stated and undetailed conclusions concerning epistemology could be applied to religious knowledge. Let me illustrate: Northrop pits Whitehead's logical realism against radical empiricism and naive realism and, unsurprisingly, argues for the superiority of Whitehead's theory of knowledge over its rivals. He prefers Whitehead's position because it is realistic, unlike radical empiricism, and yet allows for empirical knowledge to be related to the observer, unlike naive realism. But note the language in which he states his preference: "Also, unlike the aforementioned undifferentiated eternal factor in radical empirical knowledge, this logically realistic knowledge is determinate and differentiable in character. Furthermore, being not given to the senses, its entities cannot be defined in terms of sensed qualities. Instead, it has to be speculatively discovered and imagelessly, and many-termed relationally syntactically constructed. The result is that all entities in logical realistic knowledge receive their defining properties not from sensed or imageful predicates that are assigned to substances, but syntactically from formal properties of the many-termed relations in which they function as terms. This requires the use of nonordinary language. In other words, it requires the symbolic logic of many-termed relations and its more complex derivatives in pure mathematics" (p. 112). I submit that such an explanation—and he presents logical realism in no more revealing garb than this—simply obfuscates the relevance of philosophical thought to problems of the sacred. There is some passing mention of the timeless, however, and Northrop insists he has given us an affirmative answer to the question, "Does logically realistic knowledge provide any meaning for religion?" How? As follows: "If we follow our previous criterion of religion as that which is timeless, the answer is in the affirmative. The indirectly verified many-termed

relational constructs of modern physics are cosmic, theoretically dynamic concepts. This means that time as well as space is an independent variable and that their many-termed relational universal laws embrace the whole of space and time. In this sense they are timeless. They are equally remarkable, however, for distinguishing between the timeless factor in them and their relativistic frame-of-reference space-time components. The criterion that distinguishes the timelessly objective from the spatio-temporally relative is mathematical invariance through any possible transformation of coordinates. Historically, the name for this invariant relatedness was 'Logos.' This is the Greek word for ratio in Euclid. It is also the Greek word for 'the Word' in the first verse of the Fourth Gospel. Interpreted in the Stoic Roman and Lockean-Jeffersonian manner, this gives Stoic Roman cosmopolitan Judaic Christianity and the transformation in the meaning of God's will for human beings the substance which we have described in such terms in the previous lecture" (pp. 113-14). The sudden identification, stemming from the popular presentation of special relativity, of the invariant relatedness of the many-termed relational universal laws of physics with the Word in the Gospel of St. John is simply—on the face of it and on the back of it, too—false.

Stace's work is far less ambitious than that of his predecessors, and the argument is, in welcome fashion, bare of presumption and jargon. His two lectures are entitled, respectively, "Science and Morals" and "Mysticism and Morals." However, it does appear paradoxical that Stace should be included in a series devoted to the moral and religious predicament of modern man because, despite some considerable discussion of the problem of free will and of Christianity and various types of Buddhism, Stace concludes there is no moral problem with respect to free will, and the mysticism he chooses to discuss—though various religions of the East and West have courted its exercises and results—is not to be identified as a uniquely religious phenomenon.

Science has introduced into our thought the notion of mechanism, but Stace sees no reason why that should drive from our minds the possibility of purpose since the two, mechanism and purpose, are consistent with each other (p. 122). Ethical relativity has come more to the fore with the practice of modern anthropology, but Stace argues that all that anthropology has shown or can show is that there is a difference of opinion between cultures on "what is *thought* to be right" (p. 124). But Stace argues that though moral opinion is variable moral truth is not. I am sure that many philosophers would be sympathetic with his position, and, given the brief space Stace devotes to the question, he argues persuasively for his claim, presenting his candidate for the supreme end of morality (a eudaemonistic one purged at least of some of the faults found in Mill's formulation of the thesis), and pointing out the loss to us of our ability to make the simplest distinctions of moral value if there be no standard. Stace is equally sanguine that a few words will dispose of the problem of free will and will show that freedom is consistent with determinism. An act is to be called free for Stace if "its immediate cause is a psychological state in the mind of the agent. It is called unfree if its immediate causes are all external to the agent. Both free and unfree acts are determined by causes and are theoretically predictable, but they differ in the kinds of causes from which they proceed. Among the casual [*sic*] conditions of my free actions are my own desires. The causes of my unfree acts lie wholly outside me" (p. 132). There are two severe objections to supposing that an act is free if its immediate cause is a psychological state of the agent. The first objection

is itself psychological: Many psychological states of a conative sort are of such an obsessive nature—kleptomania or acrophobia, to mention two of a host of possibilities—that no one would say that a man was free who acted under their influence, neither a judge nor a philosopher. But there is a more fundamental objection than this, for it is possible to so specify the desiring state as to exclude those of a neurotic or psychotic order, and a number of philosophers have done it. This objection can be brought out best by a criticism of a case Stace imagines in which a putative philosopher argues that one relevantly cannot ask whether the prisoner's confession was caused by his conscience or by police pressure because "in either case his confession was determined by causes and could not therefore be a case of free will" (p. 132). Stace argues that we would all see that the philosopher was making a mistake: "He must be using the phrase 'free will' in some peculiar way of his own which is not the way in which common sense people like the judge and other jurors usually use it. In the English language free will is the phrase we apply to cases where a man acts from his own inner motives. That is what the phrase 'free will' means in correct English" (pp. 132–33). But is it? Surely, it is true that one of the conditions of free will is that the agent acted from his own uncompelled motives (either from within or without), but there is a further element unmentioned by Stace that most persons feel has to be present. The agent must have been able, under the circumstances of his act, to have acted otherwise than he did; and this requirement is inconsistent with causal determinism. At least, if it is not, it is up to Stace to show it is not.

In "Mysticism and Morals" Stace finds that the peculiar mystical experience "everywhere consists of the direct and immediate apprehension of an ultimate non-sensuous unity, or oneness, or One, in or beyond the world of space and time" (p. 140). But he claims there is nothing peculiarly religious about it. This "One" can be "called God, or Brahman, or Nirvana, or what you will" (p. 140). He quotes as authority a Canadian doctor who wrote a book called *Cosmic Consciousness* in which we are told this consciousness is not "anything more than a natural growth" (p. 138). The trick is concentration on one single thing: "It does not matter *what* you concentrate on. Anything will do [breathing in and out, repeating a phrase over and over until it beomes meaningless, etc.]. . . . Religious persons are likely to choose some religious phrase, for example, something from the Lord's Prayer. But this religiosity is quite unnecessary" (pp. 143–44). Tennyson got a mystical high merely by repeating his name over and over again to himself. Finally, the experience is everywhere and always alike: "Mystical experiences are basically the same all over the world, in all ages and in all cultures and in all religions," though he admits the interpretation will differ—"the same experience which a Christian Saint will interpret as 'union of his soul with God' would be interpreted by a Hindu mystic as 'absorption in Brahman, or the Absolute,' and by a Buddhist as a glimpse of Nirvana" (pp. 138–39).

So much for mysticism. What of morals? Stace points out that mysticism need not be used as a form of escapism but can function to carry us into personal self-sacrifice, as in the case of Mahayana Buddhism and Christian mysticism; however, Stace acknowledges that many feel that concern for others is not a characteristic of the mysticism of Theravada Buddhism. That is the end of the matter. We are not told what there may be in the mystical experience—"the same all over the world," this nonsensuous unity which urges one on to concern for one's fellows in some cases but not in others. He

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merely points out that in some cases the mystics did return to play an active part in the world.

Throughout the whole account by Stace there is a strange heaviness, almost a leaden quality, a bourgeois steadfastness. Nothing supernatural about it, nothing miraculous; only people living in a prescientific age, from which, blessedly, we are delivered, could be so deluded. Indeed, there is nothing religious about the phenomenon; only persons taken in by religiosity would think so. Just a good, solid, natural psychological event worthy of investigation and, since in some cases at least it seems to lead to good ethical therapy, curing us of our unconcern for our fellows, worthy of being indulged in as a matter of moral policy. Throughout the whole account Stace, surely no mystic himself, presumes to lecture the mystics themselves on just what it is they are doing and knowing, condescendingly assuring them, with a light rap of the pedant's pointer across their knuckles, that to arrive at the soul's union with God is in every respect precisely the same as experiencing Brahman or Nirvana, and any difference they might claim is so much interpretation, culture bound, thank you.

But, ultimately, the message is absurd, not merely supercilious. For he literally advocates the following: concentrate, concentrate, concentrate; on your breathing, or a word or phrase, even your name will do (especially if you are Alfred, Lord Tennyson); and, if you try hard enough, there suddenly will arrive a wonderful emptiness (or fullness if you will) which will convert you, sometimes, to interest in your fellowman. One, two, three: morality.

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A Strategy for the Future: The Systems Approach. By Ervin Laszlo. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1974. 238 pages. \$3.95 (paper).

In this book Ervin Laszlo makes two valuable contributions to the attempt to restructure the world system so that humankind might endure and prosper. The first is that he provides a lucid summary, one of the clearest statements known to me, of the theoretical foundations of systems philosophy. Chapter 1 and a valuable appendix provide an outline of the theory of systems philosophy, of which Laszlo is a foremost advocate. His second contribution, which is based upon the first, is a prophetic program for constructing a future world order on this theoretical foundation.

Laszlo invites readers unfamiliar with systems thought to view the world from the standpoint of a conceptual synthesis (what seems to be a metaphysics) extrapolated from concepts of organismic biology, cybernetics, and systems analysis. These varied disciplines all seek to understand "systems" of complex, organized structures—organismic, cultural, and artificial; and systems philosophy discerns four basic invariances in these structures: (1) order and irreducibility, (2) self-stabilization, (3) self-organization, and (4) hierarchization. Laszlo's book is an attempt to apply these categories to the world system and to suggest a procedure whereby the world can be ordered upon these normative invariances. In a functional sense the four invariances replace traditional philosophical categories. In another place Laszlo has stated that humankind's purpose lies in organizing the world system in keep-

ing with these norms, for he declares that this purpose is "the self-regulation of human life and civilization in accordance with the objective requirements of its existence" ("The Purpose of Mankind," *Zygon* 8 [1973]: 322).

The first two chapters of the book set the stage for his proposed new world order. Laszlo holds that every civilization requires the glue of a conceptual synthesis in order to exist and endure, and his paradigmatic example is the medieval synthesis of Greek and Christian elements. The present problem of a precarious world order calls for a new strategy and a new synthesis because Western civilization has disintegrated due to the breakdown of its conceptual foundations in the light of a new social, political, cultural, and technological context. In brief, humanity has not adapted to the new world understanding created by scientific knowledge and technology. Moreover, the problem is exacerbated by the potential of global conflict resulting from the confrontation of mutually incompatible conceptual syntheses. Thus, having diagnosed the world's ills, Laszlo prescribes a cure in part 2, "A Strategy for the Future." Three phases of the movement toward a new global conceptual synthesis are outlined.

In phase 1 the world is informed of its condition: "The objective of the first phase is to raise the level of world-system consciousness through the widespread discussion of current practices" (p. 85). The "word" is spread in a somewhat informal fashion through existing channels of communication by informed people who see the problem, believe in the systems philosophy cure, and share the good news with others (pp. 92-96). (The religious allusions are my own and they underline the fact that Laszlo's proposal calls for something akin to missionary zeal. The entire thesis is presented with nothing less than religious fervor.) At the beginning the disseminators of the "word" are a "growing but influential group of people in the majority of Western technological societies" (p. 96), but at the end of the ten years of projected life for phase 1 the hoped-for result is "a widespread demand for international cooperation; for accurate and unrestricted information; and for creating a citizen-participation system to permit concerned persons and interest groups to take an active role in the determination of public policy" (p. 110). Laszlo's first-phase strategy has a decidedly Western and democratic bias which presents difficulties for its universal application. I cite but two: the negative political baggage associated with anything "Western" in some parts of the globe and the assumption that free interchange of ideas is reasonably possible on a worldwide scale, given the pervasive repression of free speech.

Phase 2, "the ecofeedback information-decision flow," develops the decision-making process necessary for information flow and regulatory control. This phase assumes that the grass-roots populace and the international scientific and business communities will share with national governments in making policy decisions. This phase 2 "is premised on the assumption that when people's awareness is raised and their motivations harnessed, their private and public behavior produces modifications in domestic political structures which in turn have repercussions in the international sphere" (pp. 111-12).

Phase 3 moves beyond phase 2 when the world system comes under regulatory control as a "homeostat system." The norm of phase 3 is the protection of "present and future generations from the evident dangers of out-of-phase development" (p. 143). The world which results from this eschatological future is described in a utopian-sounding passage: "The optimum long-

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term scenario foresees a world order where human needs are adequately satisfied. The greatest number of persons find the highest levels of satisfaction, thanks to the equitable distribution of resources that represent the necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for the fulfillment of the hierarchy of human needs. Such distribution is achieved with the minimum of coercion and the highest humanly attainable degree of voluntary cooperation between individuals and groups. This, truly, is the route to paradise on earth" (p. 199).

To move from Laszlo's description of paradise to critical reflection, let us first note that, while the book is grounded in highly sophisticated philosophical and scientific concepts, Laszlo has effectively popularized technical jargon into a digestible volume for a much wider audience than readers of *Zygon*. Anyone who has faced the massive linguistic challenge of moving from theory to practice knows that this is no small accomplishment.

But, at a deeper level, it is not sufficient for the book to be merely clear; it must be convincing also. For Laszlo's project, it is imperative that his views not only be understood but also be believed, else a new world order can never be actualized. Whether the book convinces enough acting people (the purpose of phase 1) to implement the mechanism for a new world order (the purpose of phases 2 and 3) remains to be seen, though we should know by 1984, given the projected ten-year length of phase 1 (p. 109). That date suggests comparisons we have resisted making.

There is an assumption underlying Laszlo's thesis that theologians in the science-religion discussion will find problematic. Laszlo has great confidence in the power of right thinking and true knowing to issue forth in right action and correct doing; that is, he naively believes that convinced people around the world will act in unity of purpose to actualize the new world order. Once people know what "ought" to be done and are convinced that it "can" be done, they will do it (pp. 66-83). There is in this view a very heavy load of responsibility placed upon right-thinking humanity's voluntary cooperativeness and moral good will to bring a homeostat world order into being, and that load may be too heavy to bear. Human responsibility for the future cannot be denied, of course. But what must be taken into account is not just our ability to do the good but also our concomitant legacy of inhumanity to one another. The latter seems inadequately accounted for in Laszlo's strategy. There is an inflated view of humanity's moral goodness—to know the right and to do it—and, correspondingly, there is a deflated view of the pervasive demonic element which infests and infiltrates all human strategies.

In spite of these reservations, that Laszlo has attempted at all such an all-encompassing program for the future is refreshing. Here is one possible antidote to a world of disintegration, despair, and impending disaster as described in Robert L. Heilbroner's *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*. Heilbroner's diagnosis of the world's condition is one requiring corrective treatment; Laszlo's readers will judge whether or not *A Strategy for the Future* is the cure.

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