Probable Scenarios of Future Ethics

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Abstract

Life in today's global village has two ontological and epistemological aspects. One problem of the globalized world related to these two aspects, which will be discussed in this article first is the fact that the civilization of the globalized world has, in some ways, been disconnected from its culture, since civilization moves towards *collectivism* whereas culture moves towards *individualism*; this will be the most problematic issue in the realm of ethics, the major subset of culture. Afterwards, using the scenario planning method, four possible scenarios of ethics in future culture will be put forward, and the content of these scenarios will be discussed.

Keywords: globalization, global village, global culture, global ethics, collectivism, individualism, egoism, altruism.

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1. Statement of the Problem

According to Hegel, the German philosopher, the World Spirit consists of two realms: objective and subjective; therefore, the meaning of "culture" can be interpreted as the spirit of human beings, their acquisitions, activities, approaches, and behaviors, and the meaning of "civilization" can be understood as the external manifestation of human activities. The historian Oswald Spengler distinguished between culture and civilization by using this bipolar approach (Pahlevan 2003). On this basis, the process of globalization can be studied in two different aspects: ontological and epistemological.

1.1 Civilization: The Ontological Aspect of Globalization

In its ontological aspect, globalization is seen from the perspective that, regardless of our awareness, today's world has continuously become a smaller whole. As if in a jelly-like whole, a small vibration in one part spreads through all the other parts. The occurrence of any phenomenon in the outside world can have an ontological impact on the lives of all humans. This is an ontological fact that does not depend on human awareness.

The important point is that this interconnectedness of human life is no longer optional. The global climate change, which is almost proven scientifically, has linked the fate of all the inhabitants of the earth. The atmosphere is shared by every individual on earth; the oceans are interconnected, and the earth's ecosystem as an interconnected and complex system is changing with unprecedented speed. Human beings are moving from living in different worlds to a new stage of living in a single world; a world in which artificial boundaries, such as countries, nationalities, and races, will gradually lose their significance (Singer 2009).

Although the civilizational and economical dimensions of globalization are of great importance, the cultural dimension is equally worth considering. "Globalization may be seen as the emergence of global economic systems; however, the view of sociologists is more focused on the globalization of culture" (Turner 2002).

1.2 Culture: The Epistemological Realm of Globalization

The more fundamental aspect of globalization, which, according to some thinkers, is behind its other institutionalized dimensions, can be called cultural globalization. "Cultural globalization means the dissemination of components of the culture of liberalism and the advancement in the field of information technology, particularly the universality of the use of mass media and modern information and communication technologies" (Jafari, Parnian, and Khajenoori, 2013).

Human beings live in a global village as a result of the advancement of communications; that is, as in a village, the news of every single event spreads through and affects all places. The human world today witnesses immense proximity and adjacency, and its various components act on and react to one another and strongly influence each other, whereas this was not the case in the past when the races, tribes, nations, countries, cities, and neighborhoods were unaware of and unaffected by each other (Malekian 2010, 31).

As Giddens points out, notions such as identity, personality, lifestyle, and relationships between people have been transformed along with the process of integration, since global integration invades local culture and life and forces us to live more flexibly and individualistically. In fact, through this process, the lifestyle contributes to shaping the individual and public domains of the members of society, and affects all areas of intellectual and material life in both private and social realms (Giddens 2000).

Two important points should be mentioned here. First, these two cultural and civilizational dimensions interact in a dialectical and two-way relationship. It can be said that the combination of technology and information revolution is the main ground for the new phase of human civilization (Rajaee 2003, 110). Second, the impact of the new phase is contrary to those of the previous civilizations that emerged in particular regions of the world, because the new civilization includes every human being and civilization (Rajaee 2003).

1.3 The Paradox between Cultural Individualism and Civilizational Collectivism

Globalization is a new phenomenon with its own unique characteristics, crises, and approaches. The contemporary world, which is changing rapidly, is in turmoil and filled with crises, the main causes of which are rapid scientific-technological changes. The most important foundations of individual and social life are the values and norms that used to facilitate understanding and problem-solving in the past but are now considered by the new generation obsolete, problematic, and not balanced or efficient. The problem is that a new and better system has not yet replaced the old one (Kharazmi 2007).

Cultural globalization has changed value systems, semantic systems, and lifestyles in societies (Jafari, Parnian, and Khajenoori, 2013). Two of the most well-known cultural patterns are collectivism and individualism. In collectivist cultures, people feel deeply attached to their group and community, and the integrity of, and loyalty to, the group are emphasized; the decisions of the group are superior to individual decisions; and the behavior of individuals is checked against the rules, goals, and values of the group. However, in individualist cultures, the individual himself and his desires and feelings are more important. In such cultures, there is no vast interdependency, and the

needs and interests of others are less taken into consideration. In other words, in individualist societies individual interests, and in collectivist societies group interests are prioritized (Asadi et al. 2006).

Individualism is a belief in the primacy of the individuals over the community and all the phenomena with a collective identity. Individualism in ethics means that every person and his personal interests are authentic, and his values are not dependent on social interests; rather, social goals and values must be justified on the basis of the wishes and values of the individual (Tavassoli 2011).

Among philosophers, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Marx are the most prominent figures who view humans as social beings; in contrast, Kant, Max Stirner, and Theodore Adorno are the major representatives of the view that a human being is a solitary creature.

One of the most important consequences of cultural globalization is the gradual movement of value systems towards individualism. In the present era, the lifestyle has become a personal choice, which means that people can do whatever they want and can become whoever they wish; a procedure indicating individualization. In other words, people today act based on their own benefits and interests (John Gibbins and Bo Reimer 2005).

The elimination or fading of boundaries is not limited to natural or geographical boundaries. As some thinkers maintain, the new way of thinking promotes the worst forms of extreme individualism. Such individualism ignores the tensions between the corporal needs of society, especially its nuclear unit, i.e., the family, and the individual's individualized desires (Rajaee 2003).

We are actually faced with a paradox. On the one hand, we are witnessing a culture that is shifting toward individualism, and, consequently, ethics as one of the subsets of culture is changing to ethics with individualistic values. On the other hand, what is necessary for this unified and interconnected world is exactly an ethical system with collective values. In other words, the civilization of the present world is inconsistent with its culture; the civilization of today's world is collectivist, but its culture is individualistic; the progress of this globalized civilization brings us closer, but the cultural progress distances us from one another. In this regard, Manuel Castells correctly points to the increasing dichotomy that is taking place due to the means of communication in the lifestyles of individuals (Castells 2006).

The aim of this study is to examine proposed solutions to this paradox and to investigate possible future scenarios.

2. Future Studies According to Possible Scenarios

According to our classification, the issues of a globalized world can be divided into two dimensions: civilization and culture; and the solution for each requires its own strategy. A large part of solving civilizational problems pertains to the works of scientists in the area of new technologies, while the other part is related to the cultural aspect. Here, the strategies for solving the ethical dilemma of the globalized world—i.e., the aforementioned paradox—will be discussed.

2.1 Ethical Egoism and Altruism

Given the above discussion on egoism and collectivism, it is necessary to differentiate between two things in the possible scenarios for ethics in future culture: egoism and altruism.

Based on the egoistic outlook, humans only do things from which they can gain the utmost benefit, interest, or advantage. According to psychological egoism, humans, perhaps out of necessity, act for the benefit of themselves (Edwards 2011). According to ethical egoism, what indicates the right action or intention is for the personal benefit of the one who decides (Bloomfield 2008). In brief, it could be stated that based on ethical egoism, humans are to act always in a way that results in the maximum benefit for themselves (Frankena 1997).

On the opposite, psychological altruism is defined as a motivational situation, the purpose of which is to increase the benefit of others—in contrast to psychological egoism, which involves motivations for enhancing and increasing the benefit of the individual (Darity Jr. 2008). In order to define ethical altruism, some believe that the maximum benefit should be taken into account for a specific group of people (e.g., the family, city, nation, or race), and there are those who seek the utmost benefit for the entire mankind and conscious beings (Gensler 2008).

2.2 Possible Scenarios for Overcoming the Paradox

In order to find a solution for the mentioned paradox, many intellectuals emphasize the necessity of transforming ethical egoism. For instance, Peter Singer believes that for such fast and profound developments a new approach to ethics is essential, built upon the benefit of all humans rather than a specific group (Singer 2009). The following are some of the other solutions suggested for the paradox between cultural egoism and civilizational collectivism.

2.2.1 Returning to the Collectivist View

Socialists believe that ethical values should be understood and put into action according to the social and collective life to which individuals belong. In fact, by criticizing egoism, individual right precedence, instrumental rationalism, moral decay, and the universal conceptual

pattern, socialists argue that the "self" is not a reality outside social belongings, and it is defined through the society to which one belongs (Abolfathi and Nouri 2012). For instance, by reviving virtuosity, which had become obsolete during the modern era, as well as placing emphasis on the relationship between virtues and the individual's moral perfection inside the social atmosphere, MacIntyre somehow restores the Aristotelian philosophy of ethics (Malekian 2000).

According to Durkheim, modern society is not a contractual society resulting from free, rational agreement between the individuals. The contractual element is merely a subsidiary derivative constructed by the society or even a derivative revolving around the collective conscience in the modern society. Through this approach, this type of individualism can be regarded as social individualism, which contradicts individuality that is not bound by necessities, duties, and ethics (Durkheim 1980).

According to Hegel's philosophy, the concept of ethical life is based upon a fundamental sociopolitical ideal: the institutionalization of the society and individual. Ethics is related to the individual's inside world, which entails moral intentions and religious conscience; it is distinct from abstract rights or legality, which solely deal with extrinsic actions and their accordance with the law regardless of the doers' intentions. Ethics and abstract rights both deal with the rights and duties of a person as an individual (Beezer 2012).

To put Hegel's ideas into simpler words, individual satisfaction and freedom could be integrated when the social beliefs, values, and criteria of an organic community are followed. According to Hegel, as the society forms the individuals' needs, the organic community encourages those needs and requirements which are most beneficial for that. As a result, an organic community never neglects the benefits of

its own members. If this organic pattern of the society is accepted, the longstanding contradiction between the benefits of the individual and benefits of the society comes to an end (Singer 2000).

Charles Taylor is another significant thinker in this regard, who calls this type of extreme individualism "atomism," criticizing its social and political consequences. According to Taylor (2014), the autonomous individual or moral-normative actor could conserve his identity only in a specific type of culture, albeit this or other indices do not emerge immediately and simultaneously; they can emerge in institutions and associations which are of constancy and consistency and are supported by the entire community. Taylor considers a special role for the society, the relations among the individuals and their commitment to the community in terms of both ethical analysis and judgment, as well as the individual's identity and its involving factors; subsequently, he is viewed as a socialist thinker (Tayassoli 2006).

In this scenario, the intention is not the negation of human egoistic drives; rather, the intention is to say that there are also *altruistic* drives in humans, which should be taken into account and ultimately try to form a balance between the two. As Savater (2005) states, no one could completely be a human in loneliness; we make each other humans. Similarly to many other thinkers, he believes that we, as humans, are now who we are due to our social relationships.

Confirming such a strategy requires accepting the theory that there is also an altruistic desire in humans in addition to the egoistic desire. There have been many discussions as to whether mankind is capable of psychological altruism or not (Batson 2011). The social exchange theory claims that altruism exists only when the benefits gained are more than what was paid by the individual (Maner et al. 2002).

On the opposite side, Daniel Batson is a psychologist who has examined the above question and rejected the social exchange theory. In his studies, he mentions four main motivations for altruism: (1) altruism ultimately in favor of the individual himself (egoism), (2) altruism ultimately favoring others (altruism), (3) altruism in favor of a group (collectivism), and (4) altruism in line with confirming and accepting an ethical principle (principlism). According to Batson, it could be claimed that empathy-included altruism is distant from self-centeredness (Batson, Ahmad, and Tsang, 2011).

According to empathy altruism hypothesis, psychological altruism exists and may be provoked through empathic desires to help an individual who is suffering from something. Emotions related to empathic interests are against the personal emotions of frustration in which individuals' motivation is to reduce their own unpleasant feelings. Individuals with empathic interests would help those in distress, even if it endangers their well-being. Meanwhile, individuals with no empathic interests would refuse to help others unless there is nothing threatening their well-being (Darity Jr. 2008).

Psychological studies on altruism have often observed and examined this trait in behaviors representing social benefits, such as helping, cooperating, comforting, philanthropy, and social services (Batson 2012). The willingness to help others usually manifests itself in humans after the age of two, when a toddler is capable of understanding subtle emotional gestures (Svetlova, Nicholas, and Brownell 2010).

2.2.2 Expanding the Ego through Altruism

In this scenario, it is assumed that humans solely have egoistic tendencies; however, the ego is not a static, sealed notion; it is a dynamic, open concept capable of being expanded. The ego begins from the self but does not end with it, and to expand it, social relations

are required. Consequently, in order to meet our egoistic end, we are inevitably bound to have ethical tendencies, which may appear to be altruistic, though our ultimate goal, considered within the realm of intention and desire, is nothing but egoistic.

There are a set of diverse theories on how the ego could be expanded: (1) Epicureans, such as Epicurus himself, believe that increasing happiness and reducing pain lead to the expansion of the ego. Accordingly, if we regard helping and caring for others as an enjoyable act, and consider social relations as a means to experiencing joy, then we will not be immersed in egoistic views, and we will turn to altruism so as to attain greatest joys. By helping others when we are in need of help, we could reduce our suffering more effectively.

- (2) Some believe that the humane "I" can only be expanded through knowledge. According to this view, along with the fact that knowledge is a dialectic notion, it cannot exist individually; as Socrates stated, it manifests itself only through dialogue. Consequently, through retreating into one's shell, a seeker of knowledge may only indulge in mere fantasy and fail to succeed. It is only through constant dialogue that one may add on to his knowledge and get closer to his goal.
- (3) One of the most important foundations of anthropology in religious views, whether Western or Eastern, is the emphasis on the growth and eminence of humans, which may yield its fruits in this or other worlds. Sole egoistic desires could also be a motivation for following these schools; yet, one of the most important principles of, and necessary means to, achieving the ultimate end in all of these religions is following their ethical instructions regarding others. If an individual were to approach these schools with the intention of achieving personal salvation, he is to follow a set of ethical rules that

are of altruistic nature. Subsequently, expanding the ego depends on adhering to morality in relation to others.

(4) The expansion of ego in Hegel's opinion is accompanied by the notion of self-actualization. In his view, during the course of history, humans have always been involved in a constant expansion and can understand their position relative to the whole spirit when they achieve self-actualization. To expand themselves, individuals ought to follow the collective spirit of their society and era, or the most fulfilled society of their time. As a result, a collectivist approach is essential for even a personal expansion. Nevertheless, is such an approach an ethical one? According to Hegel, yes, because one may achieve the true freedom of the soul merely through a Christ-like sacrifice (Hegel 2003).

2.2.3 The Necessity of Collective Pragmatism for Personal Gain

In this scenario, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of our actions in the long run, we will see that the profit of others is a means by which we earn our own profit, and vice versa. In other words, our long-term benefit depends on a collective gain, and a purely individual interest will be disadvantageous to the person in the long run.

Among the followers of this kind of pragmatic ethics are John Stuart Mill, Bentham, and Bertrand Russell. Russell believed, "Without civic morality communities perish, without personal morality their survival has no value; thus, civic and personal morality are equally necessary in an ideal world (Russell 1970). He mentions give-and-take and social compromise as sources of ethical principles that have existed in society along with taboos and religion, often due to people's desire to have a peaceful life. Russell's view is based on the consequentialist theory of ethics; he believes that in expediency ethics the mind has forethought, since it sees its own interest in it. According to Russell, honesty, being fair to others, and respecting their interests are rooted in the fact that we

would like others to treat us with such morals; in other words, shared interests require ethics (Russell 2008).

Two other thinkers in this field are Bentham and Mill. The former believed that the person's happiness can be completed by conducting the best action that leads to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (hence his being known as a collectivist consequentialist, not an individualist) and concluded that the only motive to obey the essential rules of social life is the pleasure of obeying them or the pain of disobeying them. Thus, by going from natural necessity to social necessity, utilitarianism links behavioral psychology to ethics (Mill 2009).

Mill believed that in utilitarianism the happiness and benefits do not belong to the individual but to both the individual and the community. Epicureanism is not necessarily exclusive of egoism, because there is a more or less social sense in every ordinary person (Mill 2009, 205). According to Mill (2009), happiness is good for each person; thus, the happiness of all people is good for the humanity.

A criticism of this approach is as follows. Values and criteria are as personal and diverse as the choices and experiences of different individuals. Everyone is seeking his own personal gain unless there is a common interest, in which case each person will act for his own benefit with an objectified attitude towards others. In such a society, the degree of solidarity and adherence to social conventions and collective standards will be very fragile. Based on the logic behind this thought, a canny and clever person, adheres to the principles as long as his interests are secured; however, as soon as he finds an escape route, he does not hesitate to secure his own interests by choosing that particular route (Tavassoli 2011).

2.2.4 Adherence to the Common Ethical Principles of all Ethical Systems

In this scenario, we are moving towards a global morality that is derived from commonalities among the moral principles of all schools of thought, religions, and cultures. In the fifth century BC, the Chinese philosopher Mozi, while indignant about the damage caused by the wars of his time, raised the following question: "What is the path to universal love and public benefit?" In response to his own question, he said, "The answer is to consider the other countries as our own country." It is reported that the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic was asked which country he belonged to, and he replied, "I am a citizen of the world." In the late twentieth century, John Lennon said in one of his songs, "Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do/ Imagine all the people, sharing all the world." Until recently, thoughts of this kind were considered fantasies, but now they are real possibilities (Singer 2009).

In traditional ethical systems, one's attention is usually paid to a particular group. For instance, in any system of tribal ethics, the focus and the domain of the responsibility of each individual are restricted to the population of his own tribe; consequently, the person does not feel responsible for the people outside the tribe. Even in the modern world, although people more or less believe in human equality, ethical systems are practically nationalist. In other words, in the best situation, humans extend their scope of attention and sense of responsibility to their compatriots. The grinding poverty that more than a billion people in the world are struggling with is a clear indication of this reality. With the continuation of the process of globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of the destiny of humans, the ethical system that prefers the interest of a particular group to the benefit of others needs to be revised (Singer 2003).

Although cross-fertilization of civilizations has been widespread, the industrial progress of these civilizations has been tightly intertwined during recent years such that we have never had such a need for peaceful life and the appreciation of each other's achievements. It is one of the fundamental moral teachings of every great tradition that one has to treat others as one wants to be treated. This golden rule has been explicitly mentioned in the teachings of Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and implicitly in the teachings of other religions. The great tendency of mankind to avoid suffering as well as having an idea of the principle of moral equality among humans are essential references and strong bases to support any attempt to establish global ethics (Rajaee 2003).

In this regard, it should be noted that the idea of global culture does not demand the establishment of a single unified culture throughout the world and eliminating all the differences; rather, it is essentially an organizer and regulator and in fact against the idea of eliminating all the differences (Pahlevan 2003).

In what follows, the theoretical efforts towards achieving common grounds will be presented.

2.2.4.1 Commonalities of Ethical Systems

Since the end of the twentieth century, moral philosophers have been looking for commonalities among various ethical systems, and have accepted some elements as common grounds among them, though they disagree as to the number of these commonalities.

In his book *Common Morality* (2004), Bernard Gert tries to put forward such a morality, which, in his view, is a moral system that most

thoughtful people implicitly accept and apply in their moral judgments. According to Gert, this system is based on five basic harms (death, pain, disability, deprivation of freedom, and deprivation of pleasure). These five basic harms form the basis of the ten principles of common morality (Gert 2004).

Another effort towards a global moral consensus can be found in the Declaration toward a Global Ethic, which was issued—like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—after World War II by the Parliament of the World's Religions to resolve conflicts, and to reach a common moral agreement among all nations (Gharamaleki 2004). Mentioning the dreaded and shameful face of the modern times that threatens human civilization, the Declaration emphasizes that the new global system is not possible without global ethics; meanwhile, with a discussion entitled "The Basic Requirement: Every Person Should Be Treated in a Humane Manner," a fundamental principle is introduced in order to provide four unchangeable guidelines for universal ethics (Gharamaleki 2003): (1) commitment to the culture of nonviolence and the sanctity of life, (2) commitment to the culture of solidarity and a fair economic system, (3) commitment to the culture of tolerance and honesty, and (4) commitment to the culture of participation and equal rights for men and women (Malekian 2006).

A further attempt at developing a global morality was made by Harry J. Gensler in his book *Formal Ethics*, where he mentions nine principles as the subsets of a common rule that can be agreed by the philosophers of ethics and become the basis of the validity of an ethical system. His suggested system has four axioms—(1) Prescriptivity, (2) Universalizability, (3) Rationality, and (4) Ends-means—which are used to derive theorems, as well as five groups of theorems: (1) Logicality, (2) Omni-perspective (Universal Law), (3) Golden Rule, (4)

Impartiality, and (5) Conscientiousness. In this book, Gensler has applied the formalization process that takes place in other sciences in ethics. He claims that there are principles that—regardless of our views in normative ethics—must be followed, and that an ethical system is preferred to its rivals according to the extent that it adhere to these principles (Gensler 2012).

To apply this solution, we need to find a way, so that these principles can go beyond the level of the *Declaration toward a Global Ethic* and be enforceable similarly to the international conventions.

3. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, we focused our attention on culture as a topic in the epistemological dimension of globalization. In order to state the problem, we first described individualism and collectivism, mentioned the positive and negative aspects of each of them, and then discussed a paradox of the globalized world: on the one hand, the civilization of a globalized world moves strongly towards collectivism, and, on the other hand, it is dependent on a culture that becomes increasingly individualized. Civilizational and technological strains are shrinking the world and reducing the distances, while cultural strains are driving human beings away from one another. This will be the most problematic issue in the realm of ethics, because the most important foundation of ethics, based on which it is defined, is altruism, whereas the individualist culture, at least at first glance, is more prone to egoism and is thus against altruism. Consequently, in the future studies of global culture, a kind of growing crisis in the realm of ethics is predictable.

There are four possible scenarios that can solve this crisis. The first scenario is used to show the importance and necessity of collectivist attitudes and emphasize the existence of altruistic motivations in humans in order to balance altruistic and egoistic motivations as well as individualistic and collectivist tendencies. In this scenario, human beings' egoism and individualism are not neglected; nonetheless, the emphasis is on altruistic and collectivist motivations and tendencies to come together and be balanced. The second, third, and fourth scenarios are totally based on the individuality and egoism of human psychology; contrary to the first scenario, they do not emphasize collectivism and altruism from a psychological point of view. In the second scenario, a dynamic and expanding concept of ego is presented, and the necessary condition for achieving such an extension is said to be ethical altruism. More precisely, the individual is, psychologically speaking, completely egoistic, seeks merely to extend his personal ego, and nothing changes in his nature; however, because the necessary condition for this expansion is helping others and following other ethical rules, the individual follows them. The ego expansion can range widely from secular to religious. In the third scenario, our conception of a human being is not necessarily dynamic; however, it is shown that the universe is a continuum of causalities, and thus each human action has unintended consequences that affect its agent as well. Therefore, even if we merely seek to gain personal interests, we should know that this goal can be achieved through altruism and collectivism. In this scenario, as in the second scenario, no change takes place in the egoistic nature of the individual; however, he appears to behave altruistically to benefit from its results in the future.

Consequently, the second and the third scenarios, which are based on the ethical outcome or consequentialism in ethics, are not expected to be accepted in the view of deontologists such as Kant, since they believe that morality exists when we value another individual for who he or she is and that an ethical act is that which is based on psychological altruism and has its roots in human nature. The fourth scenario demonstrates the designation of legal requirements and the guarantee of the execution of common ethical guidelines and principles among various ethical systems and schools. In all these scenarios, the attempt is made to add the collectivist aspects to culture and ethics in order to adapt them to civilization's inevitable move towards collectivism.

The most important theoretical response should be formulating new grounds for understanding another person at local and global levels. These new grounds ought to include everyone, and at the same time give each individual the feeling that their uniqueness is recognized and appreciated. Understanding the concept of "another being" is an important starting point. In the civilized society, we all depend upon each other. The notions of "each" and "other" can contribute to the continuity, sustainability, and flourishing of civilization.

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