

## **An Investigation of Obligatory Anthropoholism as Plausible African Environmental Ethics**

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**Abstract:** African ontological discourse revolves around a few principles, the interrelatedness of being, what is variously interpreted as communalism, ubuntu, Holism, communitarianism etc. This is the view that every being in the world, animate and inanimate are interconnected into a whole. This makes it possible for African environmental attitude to claim to be holistic. Since we are one, we care for each other, humans care for animals, plants, and mountains not because of what to gain from them but because we are the same and harming the river is same as harming oneself. The weakness of seeing African environmental ethics as only holistic is that it is not African enough as the paper will argue. The second principle in African ontological discourse is the human being. This principle has made scholars like Callicott and even some African scholars to describe African environmental ethics as anthropocentric. The paper also argues that branding African environmental ethics anthropocentric is not African enough. This is because Africans live in an interconnected world, comprising both the living, the dead and nature. Humans are only one privileged part of the whole and this is because of her obligatory role to nature and the world as a result of her capabilities. Through the method of analysis, the paper argues that a plausible African environmental ethics will be one that will blend the holistic nature of the African ontology and its pride of place given to humans. It will be discovered that obligatory anthropoholism can comfortably blend these two principles without necessarily being anthropocentric.

**Keywords:** African ontology, African environmental Ethics, Obligatory Anthropoholism.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Challenges to our environment in the 21st century have been an issue of great concern. Few factors in the writer's view have contributed to these challenges. The first is nature. By this, this study means an aging world and its implications. This means that an old man cannot but be old in the bones with a shrunk body no matter how much health care and food that is given to him/her. The world is not getting any younger and so we see some of its implications on the environment. The second factor and the most important one is the activities of man. Science and technology brought with its industrialization. Even though man has tried to explore and improve her life on earth, it came with some disadvantages such as deforestation, global warming, ozone layer depletion, overpopulation, earthquake, biodiversity loss etc.

In the face of these developments, human ethical sensibilities and responsibilities are urgently called for. As human beings, we carry the whole weight of moral responsibility and obligation for the world on our shoulders. In African background, this search for harmony is important for few reasons; African perspective is important because the world is searching for theories which will help man conserve the environment, Africa being a part of this whole can contribute through their thought towards this project. Secondly, if the world will come to value their environment, they have to be conscientized and taught to. Eugene Hargrove commented that teachers of environmental philosophy in developing or evolving theories should be careful importing from other cultures but to look into the ontology of their people for rich cultural or ontological materials which will enhance effective communication of values for the conservation of the environment [1]. Huttington's clash of civilization also teaches the world that every culture or civilization brings something important to the world's table. Africa is rich in culture and civilization can lend a voice to the search for an ethical attitude of mankind to the environment. Variety is the most remarkable attribute of the African continent. Africa is one of the richest and most variegated continents on earth, ecologically, geographically, climatically biologically, historically, culturally and linguistically.

The paper is divided into five sections, one is the general introduction, two is a discourse on African ontology, while the third section looked at some theories in African environmental ethics. The fourth section discussed the theory the researcher calls obligatory anthropoholism as a plausible nonanthropocentric African environmental theory. The final section did an application of the theory and then the conclusion.

## **AFRICAN ONTOLOGY**

Looking through African thought system or what is often called ontology, from Ogotemeli's vision of the Dogon [2] to Tempel's Vital force [3], Kagame's classification of things [4], Iroegbu's Uwa ontology [5], few questions come to mind should we see these ontologies as ethnocentric or raw materials with which to do real philosophy? If we accept them as real philosophy where then is the criticality, rationality, coherence, and universality with which philosophy has been associated? Or should African Philosophy now be a different type of philosophy? Finally, how do these questions relate to our discourse on African environmental ethics? Scholars have branded some of these philosophies as ethnocentric. For instance: Asouzu with his concept of Unintended ethnocentric commitment [6] criticized many African ontologists and philosophers who according to him tend to hide under the shield of Africa to express their individual thought, a show of cowardice on their part. Since philosophy prides not in the wisdom of the elders or the villagers as Socrates claims that people everywhere are only interested in the here and now of life and that it is only a few persons that transcends the here and now of life acquire philosophic knowledge and those few persons are those who are wise [7]. This, therefore, makes it true to say that philosophy is better of as opinion or thought of individuals rather than thought of continents. Thus John O' Donohue in his work *New Wine in Old Bottle* [8] also classified some of these works (Tempels, Ogotemeli, and Kagame) as ethnocentric even though he went ahead to discuss them. If we accept these works to be ethnocentric, it then means that real philosophy will not do much with them, but this also implies a great deal of doing away with some of the ideas of the Ionian philosophers and even the ancient Greek philosophers to some extent as some of their works also contain ethnocentric ingredients. It can be argued that because some of them posited those views as their personal reflective view, it can make a stronger impact than the overgeneralization often seen in African philosophy. This study views these ethnocentric inclinations as a developmental stage in philosophy. It can be argued and strongly too that it was until Tempels' work *Bantu Philosophy* came that African philosophers began from his work to climb to professional philosophy. In some sense, we can argue that ethnocentric inclinations of some of these early African philosophers were the first stage from where African professional philosophy began to develop to what we have today. Thus, their works should not be and cannot be discredited even though they are not philosophy in the real sense.

The second argument around these views is the peculiarity of the African experience. By this study mean the way African philosophy began. While Western philosophy began by cosmological wonder about the universe, Chinese philosophy dates back to their religion, African philosophy in a professional sense began as a response against dehumanization, colonialism, and slavery. The likes of Hegel, Bruhl Levy and others who to a great extent influenced Western understanding to believe that Africans are either not humans or not human enough. This way of beginning may have its peculiarities in the subject matter or method of approaching realities. Thus, Tempel similarly was not writing to Africans but to his Flemish brethren to prove a point that Africans in general and not him (Tempels) or necessarily Bantu speaking Africa has a philosophy that may be the origin of the overgeneralization of experience. Obviously, this approach of overgeneralization of both African experience or African thought system even though may not go down well for professional philosophy, may arguably have a strong root to the way philosophy began in Africa. Lewis Gordon also posits that historically Africa descended from the same culture, also Chimakonam posited that because Africans shared a similar experience: slavery, colonialism, dehumanization, and neocolonialism, they share similar views about life [9].

Worthy of note, however, is Iroegbu's Uwa ontology [10], Ramose's Ubuntu ontology [11] and Asouzu's Complimentary reflections [12]. These can be said to be individuated African ontologies and thus sound. Whereas Uwa ontology is an aspect of the interconnectedness of being where Iroegbu discussed the concept of Uwa to mean much more than just the physical world but includes the spiritual world of our ancestors. Its implication for our discourse is that we are all one. We, therefore, live in a holistic world. Ramose's Ubuntu also reiterates the holistic nature of African ontology. We are one with both ourselves and nature. Harm to one is a harm to all. He did a beautiful job on his concept of humanness as against the Western concept of humanism. Humanness for him is a movement, not a static thing. An unfolding of being, a relationship. However, he posited that the human being is a privileged part of this whole, but didn't tell us why. Asouzu's Ibuyidanda ontology [13] is yet another perspective to the interrelatedness of being in African ontology. For him, everything in the world fills a missing link. We all complement each other in our holistic world. All beings animate and inanimate, physical or spiritual contribute or compliment each other beautifully. Thus, nature complements humans and vice

versa, just as nature complements humans, so humans are missing a link to nature. We all care for each other and fills the missing link.

What then do we say to concepts like African philosophy, European philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Jewish philosophy should they then be seen as nothing but cosmologies of different societies which cannot pass for professional philosophy? Considering the fact that here philosophers indirectly directs the mind to the way different cultures view the world but the reason is one and philosophy is one. However, there is a sense in which these philosophies make meaning and can be said to be important. This is in the area of environmental philosophy.

These ontologies even though they may not pass for real philosophy as it were, may be useful in the area of environmental philosophy. This is true as African ontology should inform African attitude to the environment. It is from African ontology that a truly African environmental philosophy can infer and prescribe attitudes that will be beneficial for the African environment. Few reasons why these different philosophies may be important for a healthy world approach to environmental issues may suffice. Firstly, different philosophies will enrich the world's environmental attitude. In essence, if the western individualistic anthropocentric view of the world exists, African communalistic and the holistic view will come to enrich this western view for the better and show the way to relate with their environment differently from the one they use to know. This may also answer for various other cultures or societies of the world. Secondly, different philosophies bespeak to peculiar environments and attitudes. In essence, it portends that different environmental challenges exist for different societies Africa suffers majorly from deforestation, desertification, and erosion while Haiti suffers from an earthquake, flooding. In principle, the traditional people of these different societies had a way of acting that were both negative and positive to these challenges around them. To bring them all under one umbrella may be neglecting the peculiarities inherent in these different cultural experiences. Thirdly, Eugene Hargrove posited and truly too that educationist should be careful in evolving environmental theories not to import attitudes and theories that are not part of a society's cultural experience. Since environmental philosophy has an end which is practical; valuing the environment. And since the ecological challenges to our world environment are highly increasing, theories that will be in line with society cultural experience will spur and concientize them much more than other theories [4]. In essence, to teach environmental protection in Africa, educationists should make sense of the traditional positive cultural experiences, values, and attitudes employed by Africans which will be easily acceptable by Africans. This goes for effectiveness. This is why Tangwa in the opening pages of his article in the Encyclopedia on African philosophy wrote that good practice without theory is better in environmental issues than good theory without practice [5]. The import of this becomes obvious, African ontology should inform African environmental ethics and in that sense, African philosophy is important. An African environmental philosophy that lacks mastery of African ontology is incomplete, and in fact not African. This does not in any way mean that lessons cannot be drawn from other ontologies to enrich our African Environmental theory, but new lessons should be interpreted in the light of the traditional ones, with this, our theory will be enriched and broadened. Bearing in mind that the simpler and more practical a theory is as it relates to the environment, the better. The implication of these arguments is that some African ontologies may be ethnocentric and therefore not acceptable for real philosophic business but is always acceptable in the peculiar terrain of environmental philosophy, if we are to get humankind to cherish, value, protect and conserve their environment both for future generation and for the intrinsic worth of the ecosystem.

## **AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIES**

The simple task of this work is to assert that in African ontological discourse, humans have a pride of place and to give a sense in which that place of humans cannot be said to be anthropocentric. The researcher argues however that these African environmental theories did not capture the rightful place of humans as a privileged part in the ecosystem and where it was captured, there was no sense in which they are privileged thereby making it seem anthropocentric. No doubt in African relational environmentalism and in fact in Thaddeus Metz's model of relational theory [14] it is the relationship with humans that confer moral status or considerability. Thus the more you relate closely to humans in the African context, the more moral standing you have. The implication of this to the environment is that beings in the ecosystem that relates more closely to human beings will definitely have more moral considerability or status. Water, land, some animals will have more moral status than mountains, valleys,

some animals. This view is African well enough and this explains to a great extent the privileged part man plays in the ecosystem. It only did not give the sense in which it should be human whose closeness should confer moral standing and not, maybe, cows. This theory is African in the sense that it brought humanity to a place where it belongs but the single problem is its failure to give a sense in which this pride of place differs from anthropocentrism. This pride of place of humans was interpreted to be anthropocentric by Mbiti, Bugo but may not be so at close scrutiny. For Tempels, the human is at the centre between the gods and things in the physical nature, in principle, they both relate with God and with things and can manipulate both to their ends. In Mogobe Ramose's Ubuntu ecology [15] he made a beautiful rendition of African togetherness, brotherhood, socialism, communalism or what he calls humanness i.e. the unfolding and continuous unfolding of the human being and not the static, finished business of western humanism. In his article, he asserted and rightly too that in African ontology, interconnectedness, interrelatedness of the whole of existence is in existence. He captured it in a holistic sense (Holism). Holism is simply a concept that posits that all that exists in ecosystem intermingles and interrelates with each other. We care for the whole of the ecosystem and not parts of the group. But he did not mince words when he reiterated that in the holistic view of the environment, that humans are no doubt a privileged part of the whole. In what sense are humans privileged? This is an opening which although is African in ontology can be anthropocentric. He failed to give the sense in which humans are privileged. One can argue that humans are privileged because they dominate, conquer and use whatever they like as the lord of the Land. But this is western in thinking and capitalist in orientation. This weakness is also present in most of the theories on the environment that have been put forward by Africans so far. Tangwa Eco-bio-communitarian [16] grounds his work on ancestors and spirits. except that he reiterated the holistic understanding of African ontology which in my view is African but not African enough.

A holistic approach to African environmental philosophy is incomplete. This is because the human place was merged into that whole without exception. This is the sense in which it is worthy to praise some of the environmental theorists for not shying away from asserting the place of humans even if it is interpreted as anthropocentric.

#### **OBLIGATORY ANTHROPHOLISM: A PLAUSIBLE NON ANTHROPOCENTRIC AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY**

The theory this study wishes to pursue as a possible alternative to these theories should be one that will have the following characteristics; firstly, it should show mastery of African ontology. Thereby being African enough. Secondly, it should highlight holism as an important aspect of African ontology which informs our relationship to the environment. Thirdly, it should in some sense be my view, that is this study individual conception of what African environmental ethics should be, being informed and also standing on the view of other African environmental ethicists. In this sense, this work shall be held accountable for flaws, misinterpretations, and misappropriation of other concepts and not hide under the cloak of African ontology to make a submission. This study of the view that individualism in this light is not pride but humility and accepting responsibility and criticisms. Fourthly, the theory will have and retain a special, privileged place for humans in line with African ontology. This pride of place has been the subject of misunderstanding in African environmental ethics as it is often branded anthropocentric. It is worthy of note here that African ontology has that place for a man from Tempel, Ogotemeli, Ubuntu, Uwa ontology, Ife and Onye ontology, Relational moral status, etc. fifthly and more importantly, there should be a sense in which humans are a privileged part in the holistic ecosystem. This sense brings to fore the non-anthropocentric understanding of African environmental attitude. This portends that even though humans are a privileged part of the ecosystem, it cannot be interpreted as anthropocentric. Sixth, this study will give an application of my theory into real environmental issues like Ekwulobia erosion at Oko and Ekwulobia Nigeria and attempt using the theory to try resolving this environmental menace.

This study calls the view of African environmental theory Obligatory anthropoholism. This underscores both the place of man (Anthropos) the holistic interrelated community, communitarian concept of being in African whereby all existing things penetrate each other (Holism) and I give a sense in which humans are singled out of the whole. This sense is the facts of obligation. It is human who is under obligation to care for the whole ecosystem. This study avers because it wishes to prescribe to humans and not cows, how to relate, care, tend and conserve the ecosystem. This is practical and simple. Humans special place is not a right busse placement, which is somewhat alien to Africa, it is in the

light of obligations that humans are privileged. Right based conception is what brought anthropocentrism, Obligation based ethics will strike a balance in the ecosystem.

Most act-oriented ethical reasoning looks at required action, at rights, and at obligation, rather than at preferred outcome. Act-centred ethics, in its many forms, seek to establish certain principles of obligations which are to constrain not only individual action but institutions and practices. Yet act-centred ethics is often seen as hostile to the environment because its explicit anthropocentric starting point is thought to entail an ineradicable preference for the human species. This criticism is often directed specifically at forms of act-oriented ethical reasoning which treat rights as central. Several criticisms are recurrent. First, although not all rights need to human rights, rights for other animals can be fitted in only with a bit of pushing and shoving. [6] second, some supposedly central human rights (such as certain property rights) and perhaps some animal rights (such as rights to habitat can have high environmental cost [7]. Third, rights-based thought appears every bit as blind as utilitarianism to concern for non-sentient particulars and abstract or dispersed features of the natural world.

However, these criticisms pale in the face of more general, structured problems in rights-based thought. The great advantage of rights-based ethics is that it is so beautifully adapted to making claims; its great disadvantage is that these claims can be made with flourish and bravado while leaving it wholly obscure who if anyone has a duty or obligation to meet them. Yet if nobody has an obligation that corresponds to a supposed right, then, however loudly it is claimed or proclaimed, the right amounts to nothing. Proclaiming rights is all too easy; taking them seriously is another matter, and they are not taken seriously unless the corollary obligations are identified and taken seriously. Although the rhetoric of rights has become the most widely used way of talking about justice in the last fifty years, it is the discourse of obligations that address the practical question who ought to do what for whom? The profound structural difficulties of the discourse of rights can be obscured because many discussions of rights veer unconsciously between claims about fundamental natural or moral rights and claims about institutional or positive rights. Identifying the obligations which are the counterparts to institutionalized or positive rights is unproblematic: here the move back to practical discourse is easily achieved. However, appeals to institutional and positive rights are not the justification of those rights. Institutional and positive rights are objects rather than the sources of ethical criticisms and justification. In some societies some humans have had the positive rights of slave- masters; in others bear who kill or maim other animals have had positive rights to a trial. Neither fact establishes anything about the justice or the ethical acceptability of slavery or about the capacities of bears to act wrongly or unjustly, or their rights to due process. To establish what is right or wrong, just or unjust, right-based reasoning would have to appeal to fundamental, moral or natural rights- yet these are the very right whose counterpart obligations can so easily be overlooked, with the consequences that they are merely proclaimed and not taken seriously, and that a theoretical rather than a practical approach to ethics is adopted [17].

These are ample reasons for act-oriented ethical reasoning to take obligations rather than rights as basic. A switch of perspective from percipience to action, from rights to obligations, carries no theoretical costs and may yield considerable gain: a focus on obligations will incorporate everything that can be covered by a focus on rights (since any genuine right must be matched by a converse obligation) [8] and can also incorporate any other less tightly specified obligations, which lack counterpart rights. (These obligations, traditionally termed imperfect obligations may be the basis of certain virtues [9])

Moreover, this switch of focus from rights to obligations is productive for environmental ethics. The main advantage of taking obligations as basic is a simple gain to clarify about obligatory Anthropoholism. Even if some rights are not human rights, all obligations will be human obligations. Or putting the matter more carefully, obligations can be held and discharged only where capacities for action and for reasoning reach a certain degree of complexity, and we have no knowledge of such capacities except among human beings and in an institution created and staffed by human beings. And so in obligatory Anthropoholism, humans, having pride of place in Africa are only defined in terms of their obligatory role to the environment. It is humans as agents who will care for the holistic ecosystem. Same view can justify an anthropocentric approach but this study think the slight difference is the fact that in obligatory anthropoholism, the obligation is not targeted at just human ends, for human benefit or for his economic enrichment, rather the African concept of holism; the interrelatedness, interconnectedness, inter-penetration between both the seen and the unseen elements put humans under

obligation to tend, care and conserve the environment. It is nonanthropocentric when we look at the end to which obligatory anthropocentrism aims. The chief end or purpose for anthropocentrism is human benefit but not so for obligatory anthropocentrism, the purpose or telos end for which obligatory anthropocentrism aims is holistic, the whole of the ecosystem, humans are just the agent which can simply fulfill this end. Thus, this study proposed that African environmental philosophy seen from this light provides a promising non anthropocentric, practical and very simplistic approach to the environmental concerns of both Africa and the world at large

Few objections and criticisms can be made against obligatory anthropocentrism in my view. The first is that it is anthropocentric because it makes humans the agent of obligation and sees human from a privileged perspective. This by implication will make humans exploit rather than tend the environment, at the end of the day, we are back to anthropocentrism again. Secondly, there can be criticisms about its Africanness, where scholars have argued that African environmental perspective is simply anthropocentric. Thirdly, is the question of how this theory can comfortably fit into the issues and challenges in the African soil, fight and defeat them.

In attempting but not exhausting these criticisms, it is worthy of note that mine is only an attempt at evolving an Africa theory of environmentalism that can match and defeat the challenges of the environment in Africa and elsewhere, my theory does not boast of mastery, it does not in any way dismiss or counter the views or themes of other Africa environmentalist it is only a humble contribution to the understanding of Africa environmentalism. As much as possible, it is a personal understanding made out of African ontology, it, therefore, cannot be said to authoritatively assume "the African environmental approach". The implication of the above statement is that it is puncturable, it can be criticized and can be built upon; it is a contribution among other contributions which does not claim to exhaust all there is to African environmental philosophy. This position is really worthy of note for critics of obligatory Anthropocentrism.

In reply to the first criticism of obligatory anthropocentrism, being anthropocentric and thereby falling into the pit it has tried to fill up, it is important for me as well as for all to understand that for whatever position you choose to take anthropocentric, non-anthropocentric and ecocentric, the humans are the one who will still be the agent in all these discourses. Humans are the ones who should care for the whole of the ecosystem, they are the ones we are writing to, they are the ones who should be obligated to protect the ecosystem, whether an institution or as parastatals, action-based ethics can justify anthropocentric ethics but can also justify Africa obligatory anthropocentrism. The simple difference in African obligatory anthropocentrism is that the purpose and end (telos) of humans obligation in African ontology is interconnectedness, togetherness and this fulfills her humanness as Ramose asserts. It is in working for the betterment of all, both humans and physical nature that the human in Ubuntu finds fulfillment and satisfaction. It is in respectful relationship with the environment that eco-bio communitarian of Tangwa finds satisfaction. It is that relationship defined from the obligatory role that makes African relational environmentalism worthwhile. It is the obligatory role of humans to the environment that makes it necessary to assert as Metz does, that it is relating to humans that somewhat confers moral status. The implication of this theory is germane, the humans have a pride of place in African ontology and this place is the place of obligation to care for not just herself in the sense of using the physical nature for personal gains but rather in holistic sense of being the one who enforces holism. This means in practical terms that humans should eat cow or goat, they should also protect rivers and the atmospheric air for the sake of the circle of ecosystem and since the end is holism, it differs from anthropocentrism. The purpose of anthropocentrism is human benefit, while the purpose of obligatory anthropocentrism is ecocentric or holistic. In the end, all theories if seen from an obligatory action perspective will come back to an agent (humans) and thus nonanthropocentric view can as well be justifiable with this. On the question of the Africanness of obligatory anthropocentrism, a theory in African environmental philosophy is African to the extent that it imbibes the values extracted from African ontology. It, therefore, requires a theorist to show mastery of African ontology, ethnophilosophy or what Innocent Asousu calls unintended ethnocentric commitments. However, this may question the criticality of some African ontology, for instance, arguments from ancestors, deities, and gods. Asousu posits that these sociological or cultural postulations are simply not philosophical because of two reasons, firstly, they are not critical or rational and secondly, some of these philosophers hide under African communal thought to express their individuality, oftentimes seen as overgeneralization. Philosophy thrives on individuality and not communal thought. This study argued elsewhere, however,

that even though African ontological discourse of some philosophies are ethnocentric, they are raw materials for philosophy and necessary tool for the evolution of a promising African environmental ethics. This is true in the sense that it is from African experience, ideologies, worldviews and cosmologies that a promising African philosophy can be formed, since going outside the African experience will not foster or motivate Africans effectively to care for their environment, scholars like Hargrove will suggest that theorists should enrich their theories with the peculiarities of their different cultures so as to motivate and persuade men and women to care for their environment. African ontology holds values such as togetherness, holism and a special place for humans and it is based on these values when well interpreted that a promising environmental non-anthropocentric philosophy can emerge. Obligatory anthropoholism inculcates these values example humans, holism and also gives the sense in which human beings are.

## CONCLUSION

As to how this theory can be comfortably applied to the African peculiar environmental situation, obligatory anthropoholism is not a complex theory but a simple practical one. The factors involved are simple humans and enlightenment as to the best practices as regards to environmental protection. At Ekwulobia and Oko, serious gully erosion has greatly affected the land on different sides. These erosions are not just one but many. There is this superstitious belief that a god called Ududo Nka who is a big python, is responsible for the erosion and continues to open it once it is provoked by the natives. Obligatory anthropoholism will simply task the human around to protect first the rest of the land by planting trees and crops and not falling trees. The theory blames humans and not the goddess nor the ecosystem. The theory is not ethnocentric and therefore does not thrive in superstition. It blames humans because of their incessant falling of bush trees to build houses for themselves without adequate replacement and care for the land thereby leaving the soil porous to be overrun by the flood. It posits that humans should be adequately educated as to the ecosystem and the implication of obstructing the circle of ecosystem causing erosion thereby. If such menace will be prevented, humans have a role to play. Government is however beckoned to help out as the natives can only prevent further occurrence but not control the heavy gully erosion already in existence.

In conclusion, Obligatory anthropoholism conceives that if adequate enlightenment is given, even to the uneducated on how best to protect the environment and the reasons why, it will go a long way rather than simply ascribing rights to humans, animals, and land.

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