

Colloquī

November 15, 2019
Volume 04, Number 14



A journal for restless minds

Consequential Calculus

Faulty logic and fuzzy thinking

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

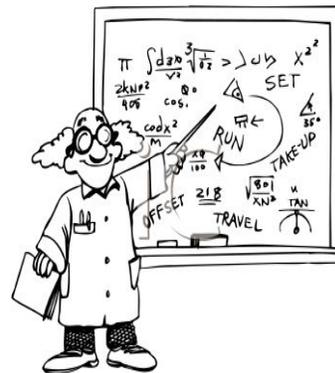
Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

Consequential Calculus

Faulty logic and fuzzy thinking

One must wonder of the weary times now upon us, when the good is oft interred with brittle bones, why no one dares to question or ponder whether "To be, or not to be" holds any relevance to the present age or to the wretched minds otherwise engaged in "wokeness," "inclusivity," "diversity," "identity" and fluid "gender" ambiguity. That, who and what defines a human being proves such a quandary is baffling, given how science has now empirically lifted the veil and uncovered all the necessary ingredients for the mass reproduction and commodification of human life. Or so it would at first—or second or to the nth—blush appear. The media report it as *fait accompli*, so of course, it must be the absolute gospel truth.



It is difficult to know where to begin but begin I shall with a bit of drudgery concerning yours truly. I may well have said this before, though if I have I am quite positive it bears repeating: I am lousy at numbers. There are an infinite number of incorrect answers to $2 + 2 = ?$ and I have tried my best to find each and every one; there is absolutely no hope of ever finding the correct one, so I simply choose not to try. However, being of the mind that nothing could best the better of me I refused defeat; I took college Algebra 101 three times, though I had no particular need for doing so; failure was not an option, I suppose.

The problem, I came to believe, was not mathematics *per se*, but the mathematician. Mathematicians are like airline pilots, they thoroughly enjoy "rough air," the rougher and more difficult the wider the grin on their faces and the brighter the gleam in

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their eyes. You can almost hear them yelling at the top of their lungs “YEEHAH!!!” like Major T. J. “King” Kong (Slim Pickens) riding the atom bomb to earth in *Dr. Strangelove*.

Mathematicians, to my mind, are clearly the worst sort of sadist. Evil geniuses who get their kicks cruelly torturing students suffering severe math dysphoria and numeral dyslexia. Why else would the answers to every exam question be an impossible fraction, like 13313131/97969594939291—clearly improbable nonsense, self-agonizingly incorrect. Automatically and intuitively any student with an ounce of sanity would know it was wrong and lose what little bladder control was left trying desperately to discover before time ran out where the mistake had been made while holding on to the faintest of hope that there had been no mistake at all. Invariably, the answer would be incorrect by a fraction of a fraction of a fraction, but wrong nonetheless by that fraction.

Which is worse, I cannot honestly surmise: to make multiple attempts to understand the incomprehensible or to fool yourself into believing you finally comprehend a thing and then, buoyed with ill-conceived exuberant overconfidence, willingly subject yourself to further embarrassing persecution. Because I now believed in myself—what Chesterton quite correctly determined to be the worst form of madness—I took Calculus to task, the mathematical study of the infinitesimal, the analysis of continuous change.

I had at some point in time read

somewhere that the word *calculus* (plural *calculi*) is Latin (a language interred with the bones of ancient, dead Romans) for “*small pebble*” which I suppose makes some *small* sense given that a rolling stone gathers no moss. I can neither confirm nor deny whether a stone that is not rolling gathers moss but that is another matter altogether.

I have discovered, however, over the many years since my *faux* enlightenment, that calculus is an extremely useful construct, especially when applied to the study and analysis of the ideological theories constantly propounded by liberal progressivists upon the naïve and the ignorant who know little of nothing and are thus easy prey whenever they abandon the safety of the herd. After all, calculus is the analysis of continual change which is *prima facie* what liberal progressivism most earnestly concerns for itself. There are—as throughout the sciences, engineering and economics—a multitude of political and social calculi, but for purposes of this essay, I propose to utilize but one which I have christened *Consequential Calculus*—a mean edition of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s “calculation of consequences”¹ which I will explain in due course.

While I have no reason to reform my drear assessment of mathematicians—they are, for the most part, a cruel and unfeeling brutish lot—I have come to an uneasy rapprochement with the obstinate preciseness of mathematics. If there exists an infinity of wrong answers, then there must, logically speaking, be but one right one and that soothes this tortured soul to infinity and beyond. There is a lilt

logic to mathematics, a beautiful peace attained in knowing that there is, ought and can be but one truth, no matter how many untruths may be peddled or sold under the guise of being the real thing. The difficulty lies in being of a mind to desire to know the truth and to search earnestly until it is well and truly found.

Saint John Henry Newman once suggested that “it is as absurd to argue men, as to torture them, into believing,” and yet paradoxically, it is as absurd to argue or to torture them *out of* believing. Men are a stubborn lot when it comes to their dogmas. “Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.”

From Newman I have learned that intellectual authority is a species of moral authority. Many of us know learned scholars whose conclusions we do not trust. We know clever persons who are capable of subtle arguments that win debates but do not convince. These persons lack the virtue of judgment. By contrast, if we are lucky, we know people who seem capable of synthesizing ideas. They move from scholarly expertise to sound conclusions; they discern the difference between good and tendentious research. Such people are more than well-read; they are well-formed. They take responsibility for what they know—which is a moral achievement, not an intellectual one.

... Our souls are not roused by opinions. Meaning is a weak word. Truth, by contrast, is a word with authority. It hits us hard. Awakened, we must decide: Will I assent or not? Dogmatism is thus the engine of personal responsibility. The sharp slap of a truth asserted forces

us to stand on our feet as individuals who take responsibility for our beliefs. Liberalism in religion relaxes the demands of dogma—and in so doing lowers the stakes of personal responsibility. Is it then surprising how dull and conformist our age has become?²

To be fully human is to be reasonable. That does not mean nor does it imply a soft ambiguity to the truth, rather, quite the opposite, it demands a rigorous exercise of reason to determine what is truth and the reality what truth affirms. Reason is a uniquely human gift from God; it is reason which elevates man above other creatures. It is, therefore, man's highest duty to exercise the gift of reason to the full; to do otherwise is to deny humanity its soul; to deny the gift of reason, then, is to deny the Giver just gratitude.

Unreasonable people, lacking any desire to be reasonable, rely on a surfeit of public opinion to be the source and substance of their surreality. Should the collective opinions of a herd of unreasonable persons pronounce the sky falling and the earth filled with peanut butter, then of course, it must be irrefutably true; contradictory facts must be ignored and summarily dismissed as either irrelevant nonsense or fake news, lest the sky falling should shatter their globus of chunky peanut butter.

Modern philosophies—those inspired by the Enlightenment—are characteristically positivist and anti-metaphysical which ultimately means they have no room for God or for the transcendent. Without God as the ulti-

mate moral authority, the result is the mutilation of man, distorting what man was created to be, a creature with a soul made in the image and likeness of God. "The result is that man no longer accepts any moral authority apart from his own calculations."

Above all, however, we must affirm that this Enlightenment philosophy, with its related culture, is incomplete. It consciously cuts off its own historical roots, depriving itself of the powerful sources from which it sprang. It detaches itself from what we might call the basic memory of mankind, without which reason loses its orientation, for now the guiding principle is that man's capability determines what he does. If you know how to do something, then you are also permitted to do it; to know how to do something, but not be able to do it, is a state of affairs that no longer exists, since it would run counter to liberty—which is the absolute, supreme value. But man knows how to do many things, and this knowledge increases all the time. If this know-how does not find its criteria in a moral norm, it becomes a power for destruction, as we can already see in the world around us. Man knows how to clone human beings, and therefore he does so. Man knows how to use human beings as "storerooms" of organs for other men, and therefore he does so. He does so, because this seems something demanded by his own liberty. Man knows how to build atomic bombs, and therefore he makes them, and he is willing in principle to use them, too. Even terrorism is ultimately based on this modality of man's "self-authorization", not on the teachings of the Qur'an. The radical detachment of the Enlightenment philosophy from its roots ultimately leads it to dispense with man.³

Here, then, I must return to what

was promised earlier: to explain Consequential Calculus. As Ratzinger describes it, "In a world based on calculations, it is the calculation of consequences that determines what should be considered moral and immoral. ... Nothing is good or evil in itself; everything depends on the consequences that may be thought to ensue upon an action."

According to Newton's third law of motion for every action there is always an equal and opposite reaction. This, applied to human activities, can be rudely paraphrased to state that for every cause there are consequences which may well be as intended, but, will necessarily produce one or more unintended results. One of the reasons this is so is due to the inability of human beings to know and foresee all the forces that come into play whenever a decision or action is executed. No one owns perfect foresight; only in hindsight is vision 20/20.

To illustrate this, when I was a wee lad of ten, my maternal grandmother took me to see the Walt Disney movie *Old Yeller*. As far as I can recall—which is not as far these days—I thoroughly enjoyed the movie. Nevertheless, there were unintended consequences which resulted in (caused) recurring nightmares long after. One of the previews (now they are called trailers) was for *Godzilla*, which now seems completely silly and dull, but to a ten-year old who had never experienced television (yes, I am of that ancient vintage) and had no exposure to horror or monster schlock, such scenes violated my innocence and sense of

normalcy, deeply scarring my psyche and my soul.

The most confounding issues of our day are deeply rooted in the consequential actions of those who would brook no submission to a higher power. This is not of recent vintage, far from it, for man has desired to sole source his existence since the beginning. Man's desire to elevate himself outside his nature has consequentially diminished the essence of human life, established the human species of equal nature to brutish beasts, thus enslaved and forfeit to the slightest whim.

The modern age has its roots in the so-called "Age of Enlightenment" (also known as the "Age of Reason") of the 18th century. The Enlightenment emerged out of a European intellectual and scholarly movement known as humanism. New and often startling philosophical and scientific ideas abounded, often undermining the authority of the monarchy and the Church. Many of these ideas paved the way for political movements such as liberalism and the political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Enlightenment included a range of ideas centered on the sovereignty of reason and the evidence of the senses as the primary sources of knowledge and advanced ideals such as liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government and separation of church and state. In France, the central doctrines of the Enlightenment philosophers were individual liberty and religious tolerance, in opposition to an absolute monarchy and

the fixed dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. The Enlightenment was marked by an emphasis on the scientific method and reductionism, along with increased questioning of religious orthodoxy—an attitude captured by the phrase *Sapere aude* (Dare to know).

Galileo, though of the previous century, unaware of the unintended consequences that would result, may have inadvertently started the proverbial ball rolling that would soon snowball into the Enlightenment. In an attempt to avoid conflict with the Church over the relationship between Copernican astronomy and the interpretation of Scripture, Galileo proposed two theses. The first, which might be called the *thesis of convergence* posited that Scripture correctly interpreted is necessarily in agreement with astronomy, that is, there is a *unity* between science and Scripture. The second, the *thesis of separation* or of *diversity* posited that Scripture and astronomy are separate matters, that Scripture deals with the salvation of men while science pertains to factual questions. Of this second thesis Galileo wrote to Madame Cristina di Lorena in 1615:

Here, I would repeat something I once heard from an ecclesiastical personage of the most eminent rank, namely, that it is the intention of the Holy Spirit to teach us how to go to heaven, not how heaven goes.

Galileo, a great scientist and a deeply convicted Catholic, insisted the two theses were not incompatible, both maintained the possibility of reconciling science and religion, although in different ways. Although they appear incompatible they look at the relationship between

science and religion from radically different perspectives. The practical consequences, however, would have a significant and profound impact on European and Western cultures.

The unintended consequences of Galileo's theses cannot be underestimated. The thesis of separation is seen as foundational proof for the authentic authority of scientific knowledge whereas the discourse of faith is not knowledge at all but merely what someone believes. Scientific knowledge is objective and publicly known; faith is subjective and privately held belief.

This is the "great division" that Galileo set in motion. It was the first such division, and others soon followed: between truths of faith and truths of science; divine truths and truths of the state; public truths and private truths. Everywhere—from science to society to the individual life—European and Western man has produced and experienced a schism, a separation between that which *is* and as such can be verified scientifically ... and that which *ought to be* and which is based on sources that are not scientific or rational (customs, belief, the faith).⁴

The rationality of the Enlightenment was its key characteristic. Though often called the "Age of Reason" it was more the age of rationality. Rationality implies conformity of belief to the reasons to believe, and action with the reasons to act. Rationality is relative. If the goal of some action is to optimize the personal benefit derived from an action, then rationality is based on selfishness; if, however, the goal is the optimization that benefits

a group then personal selfishness is *irrational*. Without full knowledge of the problem or situation, rationality cannot be determined.

Enlightenment philosophers were confronted with how to respond to the disunity of knowledge initiated by Galileo. What can I know? What ought I to do? What am I permitted to hope?

If the unity of knowledge is shattered, there is no longer any relationship between these three questions. Each is left to its own devices, without any hope of receiving a reply that would be valid for the other questions, too. Kant, who asked himself these questions more systematically than anyone else and who saw more clearly than anyone else the danger of separating them, hurried to repair the breaches. In his endeavor to provide a proper foundation for science without destroying morality and faith, he made the existence of God, of liberty, and of the immortality of the soul “Postulates of the practical reason”, without which it is not possible to act in a moral manner or to attain the highest good. Following this line of argument, morality and religion must accept that which science excludes (because it cannot be contained within the limits of reason). Science does not prove the existence of good or evil, and it demonstrates neither the existence nor the non-existence of God; but morality and religion have need of God. Scientific knowledge prescind from God, but moral action requires him. Here we have a genuine schism. The solution thought out by Kant did not succeed in overcoming it, because once it had taken hold, the logic of separation was more powerful than the logic of unification.

The rationality of the Enlightenment bore prodigious and precious fruit. Without this, the great scientific, technological, economic, civil, and constitutional advances that have irrevocably changed the face of Europe and of all the West are inexplicable. The chain is long, but there is no break in it: after the scientific revolution came the technological revolution, the industrial revolution, and then the revolutions in politics, in the life of society, and in the rights of the individual.⁵

But, when we apply the formulations of consequential calculus to all that has been achieved, are the advances in and of themselves sufficient? What unintended consequences have resulted from all the advances? At what price? Benedict XVI tells us: “marginalization, the triumph of subjectivity, and the imprisonment of the divine, of the sacred, of God in a ghetto.” He goes on to say, “Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner hitherto unknown to humanity, excludes God from public awareness.” The fact that “the Enlightenment has a Christian origin” is vanishing before our collective eyes, vanishing from our memories and in its absence, science and technology are producing an exclusive orthodoxy, an autonomous dogma, a canon of non-religious secular ideologies. This “secularization” which for centuries was a gain for individuals, peoples, and states has now turned against itself.

The unintended consequences: individual alienation, lost identity, weakness, uncertainty, inertia, and fear. In a nutshell, we no longer know who or what we are. We have become afraid of the answers we might find on the other side of

memory.

God has endowed man with *free will* which is neither free nor willful; *free will* is not license to do as one will *want* but rather as one will *ought*. There is a difference. The laws of consequential calculus state the free action in one area often, if not always, interacts negatively with the free action in another. If God is expunged from science, religion is expunged from the hearts of men. If morality is excised from law, laws are enacted and enforced without values. If science and technology enjoy unfettered progress, progress becomes blind and destructive.

Christians should be well aware of the effects of original sin; at least those who have gone further than to wipe the dust off the cover of the Bible they have prominently displayed on the coffee table. What most either forget or—using their free will—choose to ignore is that the consequences of that one fatal bite are both deeply personal and still very much in play. “Once one has eaten from the tree of knowledge, paradise is lost.” How many times will we take that bite before we learn there are serious consequences to doing so?

Of all the consequences from the Age of Enlightenment, the most deleterious to humankind has been the loss of moral virtue. Absent God, morality becomes subjective and relative, changeable and malleable, of less importance than a missing tooth or a worrisome wrinkle. Good enough is good enough; why bother with gooder or goodest. Bad is not so bad when you stop to think about it; but why

bother?

A similar line of thought follows as it pertains to the divine: God may or may not be, is there any merit to knowing whether there is a God or not? There are those who believe and those who don't and those who care not in the least. What difference does it make, anyway?

In the age of the Enlightenment, the attempt was made to understand and define the essential norms of morality by saying that these would be valid *etsi Deus non daretur*, even if God did not exist. ... We ... reverse the axiom of the Enlightenment and say: Even the one who does not succeed in finding the path to accepting the existence of God ought nevertheless to try to live and to direct his life *veluti si Deus daretur*, as if God did indeed exist.⁶

The importance of the pope's challenge is in itself important to note: for those who do not accept the existence of God but act *veluti si Deus daretur* morality is removed from the subjective and relative realm of man and placed back into the hands of God where it rightfully belongs. Morality becomes immutable, objective, and unmalleable, no longer subject to the desires of men.

By refusing to listen to the serpent's hiss, refusing to bite of the forbidden fruit, man relieves himself of

the burden of his self-divinization, he changes the calculus. Man can return to being man, made in the image and likeness of his Creator.

There is another consequence to *veluti si Deus daretur* which is this: that in doing so one must look to all that God has made and to all he has done out of love and submit to his will, his moral and ethical law.

mands of dogma—and in so doing lowers the stakes of personal responsibility.”

I was struck by this because it seems to me we have forgotten what it means to be a creature created in God's image and likeness. As such, we are called to worship him and to love him and him alone. We have bitten too much of the apple and

as a consequence have lost our fear of the Lord. We no longer know what is moral, what is sinful, what is right or wrong though we have no good reason to not know, for the Bible tells us so.

Recently, I read an article that made me stop and really question myself and whether I was or had ever been guilty of the greatest of mortal sins. I submit myself to the judgment of Almighty God for I must confess my guilt and plead for mercy.

Considered in itself, idolatry is the greatest of mortal sins. For it is, by definition, an inroad on God's sovereignty over the world, an attempt on His Divine majesty, a rebellious setting up of a creature on the throne that belongs to Him alone. Even the simulation of idolatry, in order to escape death during persecution, is a mortal sin, because of the pernicious falsehood it involves and the scandal it causes. Of Seneca who, against his better knowledge, took part in idolatrous worship, St. Augustine says: “He was the more

KNOW PAIN, KNOW GAIN

God's punishments are never vindictive or arbitrary; they are the inevitable consequences of our free choices. Indeed, His punishments are the safeguards of human freedom and assurance of divine love. For no love can be coerced. We must be free to choose God's love or reject it. If God did not permit us to say "no" to Him, our "yes" would be inauthentic and worthless.

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God's law, written on the human heart, as well as on the tablets given to Moses, are the foundation and strength of our morality and our humanity. Man has too easily rejected that with disastrous consequences.

Liberalism and present day progressivism—along with communism, fascism, and socialism—are products straight out of the worst ideological philosophies of the Enlightenment. “Liberalism in religion relaxes the de-

to be condemned for doing mendaciously what people believed him to do sincerely". The guilt of idolatry, however, is not to be estimated by its abstract nature alone; the concrete form it assumes in the conscience of the sinner is the all-important element. No sin is mortal — i.e. debars man from attaining the end for which he was created — that is not committed with clear knowledge and free determination. But how many, or how few, of the countless millions of idolaters are, or have been, able to distinguish between the one Creator of all things and His creatures? and, having made the distinction, how many have been perverse enough to worship the creature in preference to the Creator? — It is reasonable, Christian, and charitable to suppose that the "false gods" of the heathen were, in their conscience, the only true God they knew, and that their worship being right in its intention, went up to the one true God with that of Jews and Christians to whom He had revealed Himself. "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. ... the gentiles who have not the law, shall be judged by their conscience" (Romans 2:14-16). God, who wishes all men to be saved, and Christ, who died for all who sinned in Adam, would be frustrated in their merciful designs if the prince of this world were to carry off all idolaters.⁷

Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman so much abhorred idolatry that he would use the word "idol" in a broader, metaphorical sense to mean "any falsely held belief in important matters. We end up serving this falsehood—this idol—as if serving a false god. If we cling to this "idol," it keeps us from coming closer to the true God.

It is commonly recognized that Newman in his Biglietto Speech at the end of his life identified "liberalism" in religion as the error which he had spent his whole life battling. This impulse of his really is the unifying strand in his thought. Or, more obviously, that unifying strand is the opposite of "liberalism"—that is, his commitment to what he calls "the dogmatic principle." This principle means that you believe there is a single truth in religion, that you seek it with courage and tenacity, and that you embrace it completely when you find it, even at cost to your life if necessary. (In Newman's case, he gave up his standing in Oxford and his reputation in English society.)

If you see an analogy here between the First Commandment and "the dogmatic principle," on the one hand, and idolatry and "liberalism" in religion, you would be correct. Another way to put it was that for Newman, relativism in religion was the same as polytheism, and polytheism is a kind of relativism. His battle with liberalism, and his hatred of idolatry, were one and the same.⁸

1. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006), 31.
2. R. R. Reno, *The Dogmatic Principle*, First Things, November 2019, 63-65.
3. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 41-42.
4. Marcello Pera, *Introduction: Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 11.
5. Marcello Pera, *Introduction: Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 12-13.
6. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 50-51.
7. From the Catholic Encyclopedia: Idolatry etymologically denotes Divine worship given to an image, but its signification has been extended to all Divine worship given to anyone or anything but the true God. St. Thomas (Summa Theol., II-II, q. xciv) treats of it as a species of the genus superstition, which is a vice opposed to the virtue of religion and consists in giving Divine honor (*cultus*) to things that are not God, or to God Himself in a wrong way. The specific note of idolatry is its direct opposition to the primary object of Divine worship; it bestows on a creature the reverence due to God alone.
8. Michael Pakaluk, "Liberalism and Idolatry Go Hand in Hand", *Crisis Magazine*, November 6, 2019.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

Salvation

Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press
2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press
2018, 269 pages.

The Day Is Now Far Spent

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Ignatius Press
2019, 350 pages.

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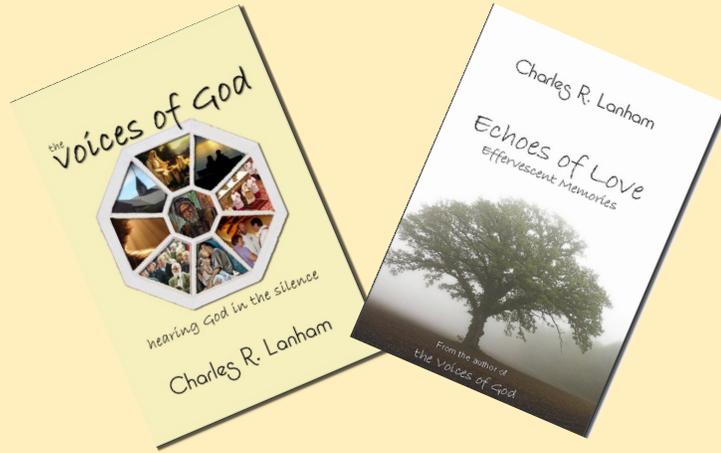
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