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Ethics in Western Academia: An Evaluation from Islamic Perspective.

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Abstract

Islamic ethics is not Kantian ethics. Islamic ethics is not borrowed from Greek ethics. Islamic ethics is rather to reform Jews and Christian ethics. Does Islamic ethics maintain rationalistic approach in contemporary world to bring peace and harmony in society. This research uses qualitative approach. The content analysis has been used to understand the position of Islamic ethics. This article finds that Islamic ethics are far more superior than jew and Christian ethics. This research also finds that Islamic ethics can respond the Nietzsche's critique of western ethics. This research hopes to open avenue for future researchers to study on Islamic ethics in response to western ethics.

Keywords: Islamic ethics, Greek ethics, Kantian ethics, Utilitarianism.

1. Introduction

Islam came to make sure peace and justice and harmony in society. The question is how? Islamic ethics can answer that question perhaps. What is Islamic ethics? To understand Islamic ethics, we need to go to primary source of Islam which is Quran. Then, the next criteria are to look for if Islamic ethics mentioned in Quran can be applied in real life. Who can practice and can be as example? The answer the messenger.

The living example of that primary text. There is another source that is called Hadith. Hadith contains the sayings, actions of prophet. He led his life based on Quranic ethics. He implemented Quranic ethics in society. What was the outcome? Was there any peace and harmony in society? The biography of Prophet and early history of Islam gave the signature about the nature of Islamic society during the time of prophet and his companions. The history tells us he showed practically how a society should run based on divine ethics. People got peace and prosperity under Islamic rulings. This is historical actuality by Muslims. For centuries the earlier generation put the signature of Islamic ethics and showed how peace is possible through this religious ethics.

In contemporary time, due to rise and practice of secular ethics, the misconception and rumor is rampant against Islamic ethics as backdated and cannot adapt with modern secular world. This article tries to draw the picture from Greek ethics at the first place. Then, it discussed about utilitarianism. After that it described about Kantian ethics. Then, we will explore Nietzsche's critique. Then, we will discuss about Jews ethics, Christian ethics and Islamic ethics. Then, we will finally discuss about similarities and differences. The article used qualitative methodology. We did library research in which we will look some books and internet resources to understand Islamic ethics and other ethics.

2. Part I: Socrates and Greek Ethics

Socrates was ordered to kill by Greek rulers and students of Socrates asked him to flee, but he refused. He was given some other options, but Socrates negated all the options and drank Hemlock.¹ It is not the story of tragedy in William Shakespeare

¹ "Socrates." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Accessed February 8, 2023.

like Romeo and Juliet, rather this is the tragedy for maintaining ethics. Knowledge is virtue and virtue is ethics. We learned this from Greek ethics.

Sophists were skeptics of those Greek ethics during the time of Socrates areas. There were few sects in fact during that period of time. For example, we can see stoics. These philosophers had their own version of ethics. Their slogan was mainly gone with nature. The root of Greek ethics we can point towards Socrates if we read Plato's work. Unlike Democritus like committing suicide from on top of Mountain, Socrates drank Hemlock for different reason. Socrates knew the decision was unjust, yet he decided to drink hemlock to keep the order of the country. This is indeed a great sacrifice for Socrates for his land. We see how social contract was taught by Socrates to his students.

Now obviously if we look from the perspective of Sophists, it is utterly stupid decision made by Socrates. For Sophists, they were in doubt about the existence of God. Therefore, for any type of truth you brought in front of them, they look from skeptic point of view. This ethics is just man made and therefore it is not compulsory to obey. This sort of accusation comes for the ethics of Socrates. Next section will explore Bentham and Utilitarianism.

3. Part II: Bentham and Utilitarianism

Bentham is famous as an atheist. He criticized template of declare of Independence in USA and also declare f Independence in France during French revolution.

Bedau discussed anarchical fallacies explain how Benthem technically is against human rights .²Bentham discussed about maximum happiness for maximum people. He talked about utilitarianism. To understand utilitarianism one example can be beneficial. A bus driver is driving and suddenly he has two choices only. If he drives on right track, he has to kill one man, however, if he drives left track, he has to kill 5 men. Utilitarianism asks to kill one man to avoid greater harm by killing 5 men. However, this system of ethics undermines religious ethics to establish justice. It also against Kantian and Socratic ethics because it does not confess for the categorical imperative or universal ethics rather it focuses on end result. That's why the utilitarian ethics cannot be applied in society to make sure justice. Next section will explore on Kantian Ethics which is considered most important ethics dominating in modern world.

4. Part III: Kant and Kantian Ethics

Now we can turn into German Philosopher Imanuel Kant. Kant was famous for his synthesis idea for ethics. He criticized Hume and Christian religious authority and he proposed his version of universal ethics based on his understanding. He introduced the idea as categorical imperative. He explained about *Pririori* and *postiriori*. However, he himself confess that the root of pririori is unknown to him, but using empirical evidence for the outcome of action, Kant can predict necessity of categorical imperative. Buroker stated, "Kant believes that both theoretical and practical

https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy/Socrates.

knowledge have metaphysical parts. The metaphysics of each type of knowledge consists in the a priori or pure rules originating in reason alone. The Critique of Pure Reason is Kant's account of the metaphysical foundations of theoretical reasoning. Kant presents his metaphysics of practical reason in The Critique of Practical Reason, where he argues for the validity of the categorical imperative."³

Boroker further discussed about sense and intellect when he talked about how Kant gave the credibility of rationalism and empiricism:

Since the ancient Greeks, philosophers disputed the origin of ideas. Plato and Aristotle established the debates between rationalists and empiricists. Plato believed that knowledge derives from innate ideas, which he thought were present at birth, unconsciously, in the soul. Reasoning consists in recollecting these ideas – bringing them to consciousness - and yields necessary knowledge of eternal Forms. Recollection could be aided by sense perception, although the content of innate knowledge is independent of sense experience. In the modern period, the rationalists Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz held versions of this theory. Empiricists, following Aristotle, denied the existence of ideas not derivable from sense experience. Locke, for example, devoted book I of the Essay Concerning Human Understanding to refuting the theory of innate ideas. Hume codified the empiricist theory of ideas in his doctrine that all simple ideas are faint copies of simple impressions; he argued that complex ideas not based immediately on impressions were constructed from them by the imagination. Not only did empiricists reject innate ideas, some even denied that there are general ideas. Berkeley and Hume explicitly argued against ideas that are not particular sensible images. They admitted, however, that language contains general terms such as "human" and "gold," and they attempted to show how such terms function in the absence of general ideas. In one respect Kant's categories resemble innate ideas, since their content is not derived from sense impressions. But Kant denies that the intellect has any ideas independent of its operations in experience. Kant believes neither rationalism nor empiricism provides an adequate account of the relation between the intellect and the senses.⁴

The confusion of Kant cannot be removed without any religious foundation since rationalism and empiricism both got defects: Earlier I discussed Kant's claim that the thesis positions represent the "dogmatism" of pure reason, and the antithesis positions the "pure empiricism" of the understanding (A466/B494). Following that description in the third section, Kant evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of each position. The dogmatic theses have the advantage of supporting practical interests: Kant describes them as "so many cornerstones of morality and religion" (A466/B494). By contrast, the antithesis "robs us of all these supports," and as a consequence, "moral ideas and principles lose all validity" (A468/B496). On the other hand, in rejecting reason's demand for completion of the series, the antithesis arguments promote the interests of speculative reason by making continuing inquiry possible. By contrast, the dogmatist introduces "ideas with whose objects it has no acquaintance because, as thought-entities, they can never be given" (A469/B497). Dogmatism thereby abandons

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² Bedau, Hugo Adam. "Anarchical Fallacies': Bentham's Attack on Human Rights." *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2000): 261–79. https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2000.0003.

³ Jill Vance Buroker (2011) Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason": An Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.19

⁴ Ibid, p.74

natural inquiry, "certain that it can never be refuted by facts of nature because it is not bound by their testimony." Given the nature of these conflicts, in the absence of 254 Transcendental illusion II practical and speculative interests, one "would be in a state of ceaseless vacillation" (A475/B504), one day persuaded by the thesis, the next by the antithesis.⁵

One astonishing quotation that Kant stated, "Strictly speaking no concept given a priori can be defined, e.g., substance, cause, right, equity, etc.... But since the concept ... as it is given, can contain many obscure representations, ... the exhaustiveness of the analysis of my concept is always doubtful, and ... can only be made probably but never apodictically certain. (A728–9/B756–7 6

Also, we know that how to implement this Kantian ethics? Kant emphasized on law to maintain ethics within any society since we depend on reason rather than divine revelation. Without law it is not possible to maintain Kantian ethics practically. In fact, morality does not work always if law is implemented in any society. Some love to obey and some love to disobey and law can protect all for not being harmed by evil intention. We established United nation being inspired by Kantian Ethics. Universal ethics is being promoted through this project and because of UN, we have been able to reduce nuclear War that could happen very easily at any time. Next section will discuss on Nietzsche's critique on Western ethics

5. Part IV: Nietzsche's Critique on Western Ethics

Nietzsche accused Kant of supporting Christian ethics⁷. He categorized philosophers as 1. Worker 2. True philosopher in his Book 'Beyond God and Evil'.⁸ He called Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant and other philosophers as workers. Then, he introduces about who are true philosophers. For Nietzsche, true philosophers are those who can create ethics for society and asked them to obey these ethics, otherwise these citizens will get punishment. These lawmakers and rulers are considered as true philosopher since they made ethics into reality.

Then, in the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche discussed about Master and slave morality. For slave morality refers to religious ethics and for Nietzsche he gave the example of Christian morality. This slave morality perfectly works even if nobody can observe them. Like the concept of God and punishment in Hell can work as pushing factor for this morality.

For Master morality, Nietzsche talked about laws and ethics that do not apply to Kings and upper class of society. For example, King daughter got caught for fornication or theft case, the general law would not be implemented for these aristocrats because they are might and powerful in society.

Then, Nietzsche discussed how morality evolved with human evolution to control society. This is obviously maintaining secular

⁵ Ibid, p. 223

⁶ Ibid, p. 296

perspective. Next section will discuss about ethics in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Nietzsche also did not like the passive mentality like Stoics rather Nietzsche proposed an alternative for individual growth after getting messed up by life. For instance, you lost a girlfriend whom you loved most. For stoics, it is just let it be since we can not change our fate. For Nietzsche, he asked this experience into power and to be the better .Thats how Nietzsche gives meaning of life after being meaningless by surrounding.

6. Part V: Ethics in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

a. Ethics in Judaism:

Ismail Razi Al Faruqi wrote a book called *Christian Ethics*. He discussed Ethics in Judaism there. He accused Jews ethics as racist ethics. ¹⁰ In other word, it is not universal ethics. There are two types of ethics in Judaism. First is ethics for God and second is ethics for people. In the first ethics, jews strictly maintain monotheism and they practice according to religious scriptures. In the 2nd ethics, ethics with people, it is racist in terms of human treatment.

For example, it is prohibited to take interest from jews, but it is allowed to take interest from none-jews. We can see the clear-cut example of injustice to treat other humans if the person is not jews. This caused hatred towards Jews nation. We experience holocaust on Jews by Nazi Germany in 19th century. In Shakespearean drama also we see Jews nature for taking interest to create suffering for general people. If certain Jews ethics were removed, Jews would be considered as great nation. T

b. Ethics in Christianity

Obviously Christian ethics derives from Jews ethics as Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.", but Christian ethics has been universalized for whole of humanity. If we read Thomas Aquinas, he in fact try to make Christian ethics based on rational approach for everyone. 11 Christian ethics is similar to Islamic ethics. However, in terms of monotheism, Christianity is far from Judaism and Islam, because they mostly promote divinity in Jews. Therefore, it contradicts with Islamic ethics.

c) Islamic Ethics

M.A. Draz (2008) wrote a book ' *The Moral World of The Quran*'. Draz discussed about Kantian ethics and western ethics and showed how Islam is far superior in terms of explaining ethics practically in every sphere of human life. He discussed about ethical theory of Quran and talked about obligation, responsibility, sanction, intentions and inclinations, Effort. Then, he shows how

⁷ Maze, Gilbert. *Nietzsche's Critique of Morality*, 1996.

⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1998. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Dover Thrift Editions. New York, NY: Dover Publications.

⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1998. On the Genealogy of Morality

¹⁰ Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas. By Isma'il Ragi al Faruqi. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967

¹¹ "Thomas Aquinas and the New Synthesis between Philosophy and Theology." Thomas Aquinas and the New Synthesis between Philosophy and Theology | Inters.org. Accessed February 8, 2023. https://inters.org/Benedict-XVI-Thomas-Aquinas.

¹² Draz, M. A. *The Moral World of the Qur'an*. London: Tauris, 2008.

Islam maintains practical ethics. He discussed in order personal ethics, family ethics, social ethics, state ethics, religious ethics: duties to God. Draz's presentation on Islamic ethics showed how Islam uses practical approach to maintain ethics from personal level to international level when dealing with the world.

7. Part VI: Discussion and Analysis

Now we come to discussion part. We will explore similarities at the first place. Then, we will discuss about differences.

If we keep apart the ethics for God, we can go for ethics for people. Notice weather it is from religious leaders or philosophers, all of them are trying to fix and overcome the problems of society. Ethics derived from individual morality and it became ethics for society and to the extent it transforms into universal ethics.

There are some ethics we noticed like in Jews ethics got some sort of racist ethics treating none-jews differently. On the other hand, Jews also hold some ethics that is universal. Stealing is wrong weather it is jews or none-jews, for example.

When it comes to deciding ethics related to stealing, we can see nobody went against this. If we see Kantian analysis how an action determined as ethical and none-ethical, we can pin point why all the philosophers agreed upon stealing is wrong.

Now if we compare Islamic ethics with other religious and secular ethics, we can see how Muhammad (pbuh) trained his companions to be objective judgement to consider something ethical or none-ethical. Islam promotes Human reasoning in deciding ethical acts. It does not only depend on revealed texts rather Muhammad himself used his critical thinking skills to standardize some ethics which is universal to all. Muhammad (pbuh) in fact trained his companions to use independent thinking to solve the problem. There is famous hadith of Muaz when he travelled Yemen as Governor. Muaz was asked how he will judge there and Muaz replied that he will judge based on Quran, teaching of prophet and if he does not find anything, then he will judge based on his critical thinking approach.

This tradition clarifies how Islamic ethics evolved from human reasoning. Islam has partial similarities with Kantian ethics.

Then, if we compare with Nietzsche's critique of ethics, we can see it does not apply to Islamic ethics because Muhammad dismissed the idea of master and slave morality and the ethical criteria is same for Kings and general people. Quran also emphasized on this saying Muhammad was sent to be obedient slave at the first place to teach others how to obey Islamic ethics. Islamic ethics does not negate religious ethics or secular ethics rather it reforms the best method and how to practice in society.

In fact, Nietzsche's explanation of true Philosophers and true ethics can perfectly suit with Prophet Muhammad. Because for Nietzsche true philosophers are those who make ethics and these ethics are maintained by general people. Muhammad was the ruler and commander and leader at the same time, all people were bound to listen his ethics. From secular point of view, Muhammad would be the best example of Ubermen that Nietzsche addressed.

Moreover, if we compare Islamic ethics with Bentham's utilitarian ethics, we can also observe that Islamic ethics also make sure maximum happiness of people but in safe manner. Islam will make sure justice using religious ethics that can undermine Kantian

ethics and utilitarianism if these man-made ethics goes against religious ethics.

To cite an example, beer got only 6% alcohol and it does not allow a person to get easily drunk, therefore, it is legal within a country. Kantian ethics somehow justified beer based on reason. Now utilitarianism also supports since majority of people supported for legality of beer. Now Islam comes and see the bigger picture of benefits for society and negate logically the beer. First, it is religious ruling of Islam. Hence, it is prohibited. But if we think in bigger picture like a group of young boys and girls drink so many cans of beer for their party and they fight, kill, do adultery. They did not perform these under normal circumstances rather they did these due to their drunkenness. Islamic ethics by prohibiting beer helps in better way then Kantian and Utilitarian ethics.

Now we can compare the closest one which is Greek ethics. We focus on Socrates and his ethics. He drank hemlock and died for his ethical principle. Islam has similar ethics when it comes to religious ethics. If anyone forced to convert to other faith, for example, Islamic ethics promote to stay in faith till death. If we look at Sumayiyaa (Ra), Bilal and other companion of prophets, it is easily to comprehend. In fact, Quran itself contains this kind of ethical principle among earlier generation. For example, we learned about the magicians who were killed by Firaun in Egypt during the time of Moses. Ibrahim (pbuh) was thrown into fire for his religious ethics. Then, Ashabe Ikhdud in Surah Buruj.

There are other examples in Quran related Socratic ethics. In fact, Prophet Muhammad himself had to face challenge for his ethical principal. It was offered by the leaders of Makka through Abu Talib for not spreading religious ethics, Muhammad (pbuh) replied ,as a result, that he would not move away for his religious ethics in exchange of Moon and Sun. We can see the Socratic mentality of Muhammad for Islamic ethics in early period of Islam. The companions of prophets were determined to follow Islamic ethics as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to maintain Islamic ethics.

Next, if we proceed comparing with Jews ethics, we can see the 10 commandments in old testaments are similar to Islamic ethics. In fact, Jews religious ethics are closest with Islamic ethics. Monotheism is strictly practiced and maintained in both religions. In fact, Islam came to just remove some jews ethics that were adapted by jews leaders for their selfish interest and these ethics were wrongly attributed to Allah whereas these manmade ethics were spread by the name of Allah , but in reality that is not true. Therefore, Muhammad was sent to amend those ethics like taking interest is completely prohibited for all. No racism in the religion of Allah.

If we learn the story of Firawun, we come to know that Firawun was not jews but Moses went to give him message of monotheism and asking worshipping Allah alone. This incident shows how jews ethics is corrupted by jews religious leaders over time as racist religion.

Moreover, the very last one we need to compare now is Christian ethics. In terms of universality of Islamic ethics and Christian ethics, we can see the similar pattern. In other word, both religions welcome all of humanity to embrace their teaching. Unlike jews, Muslims and Christians open their door for every race, color to embrace Islam and Christianity.

Differences in Ethics

Now it is time to discuss about differences on ethics. The very unique characteristic of Islamic ethics from Greek ethics, especially if we think about Plato's ideal state using Greek ethics, we can see only Islamic ethics got pragmatic approach due to its fundamental basis which is Allah. Allah works as living reality for Islamic ethics whereas in Greek ethics they do not have the focus on this principle.

Though Socrates did discuss about ontological existence of God but when it comes to ethics, he rarely mention about God. For drinking Hemlock, we heard not any name of God. Islam has its root in God. That's why Plato's ideal state never came into existence whereas Islam's ideal state was established by Muhammad and his companions maintaining Islamic virtue and ethics. Aristotle was more like Kant and it seems Aristotle and Kant emphasize on science and reasoning for the ethics rather than any religious dogmas.

Therefore, we see these ethics are not maintained in practically, even if it is used in contemporary times, we can see the shortcoming behind the scene. If a person has chance to sneak through laws and ethics behind the camera, they will take this approach. Islamic ethics prepare a person for the accountability in hereafter. So, even if a man can sneak through this time, the person does know well that it would not work always.

Now Bentham's utilitarianism also contradicts with Islamic ethics in a way that Islam does not care about majority when it comes to justice and truth. Imagine the concept of Tawhid. Let's say all the people of world are in maximum happiness just because they abandon Islam as true religion and Allah is real creator. Even though all the people are happy because of this joint consent not accepting Allah as real creator. That's is just happiness of illusion in Islamic ethics and Utilitarianism can never be right in ethics when it comes to this kind of religious ethics.

Now if we look at the differences between jews ethics and Islamic Ethics, we can see we got fundamental problem in practicing religious rituals. Believing Allah and Last prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are under religious ethics, however, during the time of prophet Muhammad, we have observed their negation of prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The religious practice like praying approach is also different. The fasting approach is also different like they need to break the fast in late sunset whereas Muslims need to break fast on time. Again, in terms of business interest is out of question for Muslims but in jews ethics they are allowed to take interest outside of their race.

In Christian ethics, we can see some differences as well. For instance, in Islam it is strictly prohibited to worship any prophet and claim divinity, but we have noticed in Christian they have the concept of trinity and they claim divinity in Jesus which is against Islamic ethics. Also, they do not want to confess Muhammad as messenger and they think only Jesus is the last savior of this world. They also maintain that Jesus is son of God and Maryam as mother. Hence, this is confusing in Christian religion. On the other hand, Islam maintains clear stance when it comes to Jesus saying he is nothing more than a prophet and human being.

Lastly, I will deal with Nietzsche's introduction of morality and ethics and see the differences in Islam. Nietzsche completely denied the existence of God whereas Islamic ethics completely confess existence of Allah as living reality of the universe. Morality evolved from human whereas Islam confirms that morality and ethics are intrinsic by Allah swt and Allah defines some universal ethics to maintain strictly to maintain peace in life. Nietzsche asks to be active from passive from secular perspective but Islamic ethics asks to be active from passive from Islamic perspective. In other words, when it comes to difficulties in our live, Nietzsche asks to take these difficulties as source of inspiration and work harder. On the other hand, Islamic ethics asks to be patient when difficulties come and we should work hard depending on Allah (the concept of tawakkul). These kinds of ethics are lacking in Nietzsche's ethics.

Nietzsche also criticized Kantian ethics and Greek ethics along with religious ethics. In the case of Islam, Islamic ethics has some unique features that are lacking in philosophies and other world religions. To draw a vivid picture, Nietzsche went mad when he saw a man beating up his horses. He got this picture earlier from Crime and punishment in Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky also portrayed the jews as bad character as monster for exploitation. We see how religious people are depicted in this. From martin Luther, it is also seen the problem in Christianity. Then, scientific revolution. Then if we look at the history before Nietzsche we see the atrocities. Two things anyone can predict. First is philosophers ethics are good for nothing in reality and the second is religion works as just consolation without its any true basis.

Now if you look at Islam and Islamic ethics. Islam and Islamic ethics is emphasizing on truth then it discussed about God and hereafter. Islam sees God as living being and day of judgment is for sure and neither prophets nor general people can respite from this day. Hence, we can notice how Islam is using Allah as the truth of the universe and based on this message how Islamic ethics were practiced by messenger himself. This depiction of Islam actually refute the wrong concept about religion when it comes to Islam.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be concluded that Islamic ethics got its unique features and unlike other ethics Islamic ethics make sure peace, justice and harmony in society to live together. Moreover, Islamic ethics can be practiced in modern society for all of humanity without any kind of difficulties.

Islamic ethics can make sure real justice that we look for in society. This man made rules are not maintained in off the record whereas Islamic ethics creates sense of accountability for any individual who has trust on Allah. More importantly, even if it is practiced in none-Muslim society or multicultural society, it will make sure no injustice with people regardless of their religion and faith. The laws are for all. This strict Islamic law will prevent anyone committing bad actions. Therefore, it is suggested that Islamic ethics can be studied more to understand its nature and to grasp how it can be implemented in multicultural society.

So far what this research paper is first it introduced about Islamic ethics. This article then sketched the picture from Greek ethics at the first place how Socrates preferred to drink Hemlock to uphold his version of ethics to teach his students. Then, we discussed about utilitarianism and how Bentham is against Human right movement in contemporary time. After that we described about Kantian ethics how Kantian ethics is baseless without religious

principles. Then, we explored Nietzsche's critique on western ethics. Then, we finally discussed about Jews ethics, Christian ethics and Islamic ethics. Lastly, we provided a lucid discussion showing similarities and differences in ethics.

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