

Philosophy and Education: The Engines of National Development

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Abstract

Philosophy represents a method of reflective, rational and constructive thinking, as well as a reasoned inquiry, while development designates the ability of a people to appropriate their total essence in a total manner as a people – a holistic vision in which they assume control of their own destiny. Similarly, education represents an enlightening experience or training in a particular subject. In line with this, this paper is an attempt to project philosophy and education as engines of national development. Against the backdrop of the diverse and heterogeneous nature of African cultures (Nigeria in particular), the paper raises two fundamental questions: is it possible for Africa – Nigeria in particular – to develop as a nation in spite of her ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences? Considering the possibility of this quest, what are the critical factors in achieving it? Using historical hermeneutics and philosophical analysis, this paper argues that philosophy and education remain the bedrocks for Africa's (Nigeria's) development in the 21st century.

Keywords: philosophy, education, national development, nationhood, culture, essence.

1. Introduction

Nation-building is no simple process. History has demonstrated the difficult effort needed to unite a people under a government and to create among them a stable cultural, economic, political, and social community. The process has been especially strenuous, where the people to be united include diverse and large groups, distinguished by their customs, languages, or separate identities (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, most of the nations that achieved independence during the decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s have continued to face the challenges of galvanizing the forces for national integration and harnessing the resources for a meaningful national development. This point underscores the fact that building an ideal nation is a difficult task, which requires an approach that is holistic. Admittedly, all facets of human activity must be harnessed, while all indices of nation-building must be taken care of. In doing this, all academic and professional disciplines are involved. Philosophy and education are not exceptions. This paper represents an attempt to project philosophy and education as engines of national development. However, considering the heterogeneous nature of African (Nigerian) cultures, is it possible for Africa (Nigeria) to develop as nation in spite of her religious, linguistic and ethnic differences? Assuming that this quest is possible, what are the critical factors in achieving it? It is against the backdrop of these questions that this paper argues that philosophy and education represent the catalysts for national development as well as the bases for African (Nigerian) unity. But before delving fully into this discourse, a brief conceptual clarification will be apposite.

2. Conceptualizing Philosophy, Education and Development

The first line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* has that "all men by nature desire to know" (Aristotle, 1991). This offers an insight into what philosophy is all about, as the love of knowledge. Admittedly, this Aristotelian assertion presupposes that man by nature is curious to know. Thus, man is a *homo episteme* – a being of knowledge. This ties in with the etymological view of philosophy as the love of wisdom. Although, there is no unanimity in the definition of philosophy, but the word, philosophy, is coined from two Greek words, *philos* and *Sophia*, meaning love and wisdom, respectively. Therefore, philosophy, as hinted above, is the love of wisdom and a philosopher is a lover of wisdom. Thus, it is a critical inquiry into the nature of reality (Ojimba, 2015). Similarly, Dewey views it as the critical reviewing of familiar things – an unceasing effort to discover the general truth that lies behind the particular facts.

The definition of education largely depends upon some set of prior philosophic convictions about nature and human nature, as well as between man and society. As there is a multiplicity of philosophic view points, there is no one single agreed upon definition of education. Etymologically, education is derived from the Latin word, *educare*, and *educatum* meaning to raise up or nourish or the act of teaching or training (Kaur, n.d). Similarly, the Sanskrit origin of education represents it as *skis shah* or *vidh*, meaning to discipline or to know (Kaur, n.d). Following this, Aristotle defines it as creation of a sound mind in a sound body and Tagore, on his own part, endorses this Aristotelian definition, when he represents it as the all round development and drawing out the best from the mind, body and spirit (cited in Kaur, n.d). Therefore, in a sense, one can say that education is that which disciplines a man, makes him self-reliant, selfless and capable of contributing his own quota to the development of his nation.

The definition of development is necessary if one wishes to understand the full import of this paper.

Development, within the purview of this paper, is understood from the perspective of “man’s ability to appropriate his total essence in a total manner, as a whole man” –“a holistic vision in which man assumes control of his destiny” (Nakpodia, 2011. P. 67). Similarly, Ake (1996) represents it as “the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their choices and values” (p. 25).

There is no gainsaying that philosophy and education have been the catalysts to the development of any nation. This is, because, every society requires critical minds and trained intelligence to chart the cause of its past, present and future, as well as harness the available resources for maximum development. Philosophy guides a nation in understanding itself and in acquisition of concrete outlook on life, its proximate and ultimate ends, and seeks to establish for the nation, a scale of values for the conduct of its subjects. It stimulates the fullest power of man to think rationally and eliminate emotional and irrational approach to situations and inculcate the habit of clear, exact, logical and critical thinking. To this extent, it cultivates sound minds in the society and a developed society is nothing but a congregation of sound minds. Thus, it serves as a navigating life compass for any nation and instills in its members the right attitude needed for development. Similarly, education is a critical factor to the development of any nation. This informs why Alfred North Whitehead opines that “any nation that does not value trained intelligence is doomed” (cited in Okafor, 2006, p. 230). The wealth and power of a nation depend on the successful education of its citizens and in the number of highly talented men and women within the national compass a nation succeeds in providing with superior and divergent education (Okafor, 2006, p. 230). The essence of the above discourse is to project education and philosophy as catalysts for national development. But before we proceed with this discourse, an insight into the nexus between philosophy and education will be appropriate.

3. On the Nexus between Philosophy and Education

There is an intimate link between philosophy and education. Both are two sides of the same coin. While the former is contemplative, the later is active. Dewey corroborates this view when he opines that “philosophy is the theory of education in its most general phase” (cited in Kaur, n.d, p. 3). This portends that the art of education will never attain complete clearness without philosophy. In line with this view, Gentiles states that “education without philosophy would mean a failure to understand the precise nature of education” ((cited in Kaur, n.d, p. 3).

Philosophy determines the direction towards which education has to go. It inspires educational theory as well as practice. Thus, education is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested. Philosophy is wisdom and education transmits that wisdom from one generation to another. Philosophy represents a system of thought, while education embraces that thought in the content of instruction. Furthermore, while philosophy embodies a way of life, education represents the preparation for life. Philosophy is the knowledge obtained through natural reason, while education is the development of that reason as well as other powers of the mind (Kaur, n.d).

Every aspect of education has a philosophical base. Philosophy provides aims for education and these aims determine the curriculum, the methods of teaching as well as the school discipline. Furthermore, great philosophers have been great educationists. Philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Gandhi etc, have been great educators. They reflect their philosophical views in their educational schemes. Socrates, for instance, has given the world his Socratic method of questioning and cross-questioning. His philosophical views reflect in his educational scheme.

Every educational system reflects the dominant characteristics of people that produce it. Through education, accomplishments of the past civilizations are reserved; the spiritual life of the race is propagated, and its social heritage of language, literature, as well as philosophies and institutions are transmitted to the youths (Okafor, 2006, p. 20). This implies that “all cultural heritage, whether it be religious, social, aesthetic or political, is examined, evaluated, and imparted within the educational frameworks – these include the truths, ideals, values, customs, mores and other elements that are recognized as indispensable to the next generation, which are passed on from generation to generation through education” (Okafor, 2006, p. 20-1). These values and ideals represent the subject matter of philosophy. What this portends is that education includes philosophy, while philosophy controls and determines the direction of education. This makes it highly imperative to evaluate carefully our educative processes and principles to make it congruent with the nature of the individual and society, as any education that is not founded on good philosophy is doomed. Thus, the developmental goals of any society are deeply rooted and enshrined in the nature of their philosophy and education. This makes education and philosophy the critical tools in the development of any nation. Developing countries, like Nigeria, therefore, should pay more attention to their educational systems and philosophies, with regards to the evolvement of critical and constructive minds, as well as sound and trained intelligence, as these are developmental imperatives and very germane to the growth of any nation.

4. Philosophy and Education as the Engines of National Development

Development has to do with qualitative and sometimes, quantitative changes in the lives of people, group or an individual. At the national level, there is an improvement in the general wellbeing of the people, while at the individual level, this manifests itself in form of “increased skill and capacity, self discipline, greater freedom, responsibility and material well-being” (Rodney, 1972, p. 9). Philosophy and education represent critical tools in the development and growth of any nation. Some people are of the view that philosophy, for instance, engages itself in abstract speculation and, therefore, irrelevant to national development. However, it is our opinion in this paper that it is a grave mistake to entertain such thought. This is the reason why Omoregbe (2003) argues that “it is a dangerous illusion to think that philosophy has no effect in practical life” (p. 193). This paper is an attempt to counter such negative opinions about philosophy as well as project philosophy and education as engines of national development.

One of the factors required for the development of any nation is critical rationality. This requires the members of such society to examine critically their actions before taking decisions. This is, because, a developed nation is nothing but an aggregate of critical minds. This informs the Socratic dictum that “an unexamined life is not worth living.” Philosophy instills in the individual, critical rationality and enables him to act accordingly. It enables the individual to do willingly what others would do because of the fear of the law. This brings to mind the Platonic maxim that “knowledge is virtue, while vice is ignorance” (cited in Cooper, 1997). Philosophy helps the individual develop and act in accordance with the right reason. Thus, the acquisition of philosophic knowledge in a given society will certainly enhance positive human knowledge in such society (Anichebe, 2005). This also informed why Plato opines that either philosophers become king or king become philosophers if orderliness and discipline were to prevail in a society.

The development of a sound moral is a sine quo non for the growth of any nation. This is, because, any nation that is suffering from moral bankruptcy will never attain any meaningful development. Philosophy is a critical factor in the development of good morals in the society, which is an important aspect of national development. This is, because, there can be no meaningful national development, if the members of the society are morally retrogressive and underdeveloped. Immorality breeds corruption and irresponsibility, which constitute an obstacle to national development (Anichebe, 2005). An unbridled corruption among the populace stampedes economic, political and even the social development of any nation. Consequently, only an ethical re-orientation, which philosophy offers, will restore sanity, self-discipline and orderliness in the society, as well as galvanize and mobilize the forces needed for national development.

For development to take place, there must be a unity of the self within the self. This implies that for a person to develop, for instance, there must be critical as well as constructive self understanding. This lends credence once more to the Socratic dictum that “an unexamined life is not worth living.” This emphasizes critical self understanding. Similarly, the state is an extension of the self and this is why Aristotle views it as “a giant person.” As an extension of the self, the state also needs a critical understanding of itself in order to institute meaningful national development. Philosophy is a very potent tool for self understanding. This is why Ricoeur (nd) is of the view that “philosophy is a form of critical pedagogy aiming to bring about a democratic economy, just society and good life.” These factors are ingredients of national development. Thus, philosophy provides the forum not only for reflection on our tradition and history, but in determining who we are, and what our prospects for the future are. This is, because, the moment one understands who he is, one can extend such knowledge to the societal level and eventually create a wave of true national sentiment. Arguably, knowing one’s self estimated the finding of a sense of meaning, and understanding the reason for being (Suazo, n.d). But since the African has been influenced by the western values, his ignorance about his reason for being makes him incapable of threshing out the good influences from the bad ones – something that can drive his nation to the desired stability and integrated development. Philosophy represents the tool for self understanding and direction as well as a solution out of this maze of confusion.

A strong philosophy education is very relevant in the development of a nation. This is, because, if the teaching of values education at the elementary and secondary levels appears to be very functional, at the university or the tertiary level, it is expected not to be functional any more but speculative, meaning, philosophical (Suazo, n.d). This is the reason why Lyotard (2003) states that “the teaching of philosophy is generally recognized to be the basis of all university activity” (p.8) He explains that “philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in laboratories and in pre-university education; it can only achieve this in a language game that links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of spirit, in other words, which links them to a rational narration, or rather meta-narration” (Lyotard, 2003, p. 261).

UNESCO understands the role of philosophy in national development and expresses its importance in the following words: “what is the teaching of philosophy if not the teaching of freedom and critical reasoning? Philosophy actually implies exercising freedom in and through reflection because it is a matter of making rational judgments and not just expressing opinions; because it is a matter not just of knowing, but of understanding the meaning and the principles of knowing; because it is a matter of developing a critical mind,

rampart par excellence against all forms of doctrinaire passion” (UNESCO, 2007, p. ix). Thus, the program of UNESCO in integrating philosophy in all levels of knowing, including primary and secondary schools, is worth considering.

The business of philosophy is ideas and ideas are very necessary in understanding ourselves. This is why Adler refers to ideas as basic and indispensable in the understanding of our society as well as the world we live in. He expresses it as such:

Ideas, as we shall see presently, constitute the vocabulary of everyone's thought. Unlike the concepts of the special sciences, the words that name the great ideas are, all of them, words of ordinary, everyday speech. They are not technical terms. They do not belong to the private jargon of a specialized branch of knowledge. Everyone uses them in ordinary conversation. But everyone does not understand them as well as they can be understood, nor has everyone pondered sufficiently the questions raised by each of the great ideas. To do that and to think one's way through to some resolution of the conflicting answers to these questions is to philosophize (Adler, 1981, p. 3-4).

In line with the above quotation, philosophy, therefore, aims at the “logical clarification of thoughts...[and being] not a body of doctrine but an activity... [thus a work that] consists essentially of elucidations” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 30). This means that it is an eye-opener – “it does not result in ‘philosophical propositions,’ but, rather, in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy, thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: it is, therefore, the task of philosophy to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 30). This is an indication of how philosophy can be relevant to us and in our development, as a nation.

Thus, the importance of philosophy in realizing our dream for national development cannot be overemphasized.

The speed of globalization and the advancement of technology have made a constant re-examination and reevaluation of our culture in relation to contemporary realities a philosophical imperative. Bearing in mind the dynamism and flexibility of culture, this re-examination will culminate into a synthesis of the past and present for a more humane and civilized culture. Admittedly, philosophy ‘serves to challenge a people’s view of themselves and their condition as a pre-condition for redefining who they are and what they can be’ (cited in Anichebe, 2005, p. 133). This presents the philosopher as a physician of the culture. Using his analytic, constructive and logical tools, the philosopher purifies the aspects of cultures that have become anachronistic, obsolete and out of touch with contemporary realities. For instance, before now, it was believed that sickle cell children were possessed by evil spirits (Ogbanje), who use them to torment their parents. Also, previously, when a king dies, heads of human beings are buried with him, because, it was believed that those human beings would continue to serve him in the grave. Philosophy challenges these pre-established values not as deeply rooted in the nature of things, but human constructs. With this, philosophy fine-tunes the culture for positive development and this positive cultural development is an aspect of national development.

Education is a twin sister of philosophy in national development. This is why Whitehead is of the view that “in the conditions of modern life, the rule is absolute; the race, which does not value trained intelligence is doomed” (cited in Okafor, 2006). In reacting to this, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania opines that Africa has not given much thought to the problem of education. This is true. This is, because, “never in any other period of man’s history has it become as evident as it is today that the wealth and power of a nation depend on the successful education of its citizens, and in the number of highly talented men and women within the national compass a nation succeeds in providing with superior and divergent education” (Okafor, 2006, p. 230). Admittedly, education is the catalyst and the wheel-base both for individual self-actualization, as well as national development.

No doubt, Africa has a avalanche of natural resources, but these resources cannot be fully utilized and properly harnessed, without the continent having a good number of well trained and sufficiently educated citizens. Thus, if the government wants to sustain a coordinated and positive development, special attention has to be paid to education, because, if there is no education, no meaningful national development will take place. Thus, proper training and education and specialization of our youngsters should be apparent, because, their expertise should be channeled to nation building and development. This is, because, “the demand for high-talented manpower is imperative in contemporary development on account of the level of technological complexity, which characterizes modern life and due to the complexity of *contemporary* social organization” (Okafor, 2006, p. 233).

The exploration and harnessing of natural wealth need immense machinery and technical know-how. Thus, the importance of education in national development cannot be overemphasized. No country should, therefore, neglect the importance of education. Education should be developed to the nth degree (Okafor, 2006, p. 233). The ablest young men and women must be trained in the fundamental fields of knowledge and made to acquire the critical qualities of mind and the durable qualities of character, which will enable them and the nation to

dance freely to the tune called in modern symphony of change (Okafor, 2006, p. 233).

For national development to make progress, as desired, there must be no waste of talent. Superior talents, refined by the tools of education, are a divine endowment, which give luster, not only to the possessor, but also to the environment. Thus, “to the extent a nation succeeds in extracting and lifting men of high ability and talents in the society, to that extent can she boost her development and modernization. To the extent a cross section of the society attains excellence in education, to that extent does the nation acquire the mental dexterity vital for coping with economic, political moral and other problems of living culture and the world periphery, from which no nation can any longer withdraw into isolation” (Okafor, 2006, p. 235). In a related development, the Jeffersonian warning to the Americans, immediately after their independence, that a country cannot remain both ignorant and free, lends credence to the importance of education in nation building. This is, because, this warning by Thomas Jefferson, to the American nation, crystallized into an embodiment stimuli, which propelled America to invest the prime part of her energies in the educative process from their time of independence to their present period – she sought out talents, nurtured them and brought education within the reach of everyone (Okafor, 2006). This underscores education as a critical tool in national development. Therefore, developing countries, like Nigeria, should devote a greater percentage of her energies to the educational needs of the nation in order to institute and a meaningful positive and national development. Thus, education and philosophy are very germane in nation building, as well as catalysts to national unity.

5. Education, Philosophy and National Integration/Development

There is no gainsaying that no meaningful national development will take place if the country is disintegrated – ravaged by the problems of ethnicity, religious crises and cultural clashes. Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic make-up is not free from these problems. This indicates that nation-building is no simple process. In fact, history has demonstrated the difficult, complex, and varied developments needed to unite a people under a government and to create among them a stable cultural, economic, political, and social community. The process has been especially strenuous, where the people to be united have included diverse, large groups, distinguished by their own customs, language, or separate identities. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, several of the nations that achieved independence during the decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s have continued to be beset by problems of integrating ethnic groups within the nation as illustrated by the experience of the Federal Republic Nigeria (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001). Consequently, this section projects a philosophy of integration using education as a panacea to the problem of national unity in Nigeria.

Nyerere (1967, p. 237) rightly pointed out that “only when we are clear about the type of society we want to build can we design our educational service to serve our goal.” This shows education as a viable tool in nation building. On the other hand, Plato (1961, p. 788) insisted that “the right system of education must be one that can be shown to produce the highest possible perfection and excellence of the soul.” What Plato meant here is that education should not be left to chance; rather, it is something that must be thoroughly thought out, especially, when this is expected to produce a desired result. This indicates that a carefully and thoroughly planned system of education produces particular desired results – meaningful and positive national development and integration.

Aristotle recognized the importance of education in nation building and this informed why books seven and eight of his *Politics* are essentially preoccupied with the state and its educational arrangements. The significance of this lies in the fact that if national integration is designed to be one of the cardinal objectives of our educational system, this will certainly produce the desired results. This is, because, “education can play a significant role in providing new nations with the trained labor force to meet their manpower needs, with the knowledgeable leadership to direct their administration, and with the informed citizenry to sustain their society” (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.3). In pluralistic polities, education has been viewed as a means for diminishing ethnic and other differences that threaten to fragment a new nation into splinters, as each group sticks to its own identity rather than adhering to a common national identity. Yet, articulating this philosophy of integration, based on education alone, is no panacea. Faith in its ability to work as an effective integrator rests on three crucial assumptions. The principal assumption is that “education can and does affect political attitudes and values. The second assumption is that in affecting attitudes and values, education may affect group behavior by eliciting a consensus on attitudes and values. The third assumption is that education’s effect on groups can be controlled and planned so as to achieve a desired or predetermined consensus” (cited in Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.3). This means that “new nations such as Nigeria must better understand how educational structures can influence national integration. Education alone cannot create effective nationalism, but misdirected education can certainly thwart nationalism’s development. Education that prolongs ethnic insecurities, jealousies, and suspicion produces more bane than benefit. Yet, Nigeria’s rapidly expanding school system holds the prospect of extending such baneful results rather than the benefits of integration” (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.3). “The current system virtually assures not simply the possibility but the probability that students go from kindergarten to even the doctoral level without leaving their ethnically-based home states. They can and do attend schools in their own states without ever interacting with any significant number of Nigerians from ethnic groups other than

their own. Such a system defeats any reasonable hope for an (education-based integration strategy) to effect national integration” (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.3).

National integration, as well as development, requires the inculcation of collective attitudes and behaviours. It must result in community. Existing under the same rule or within the same borders is not sufficient as Buber (1958, p.6) believes that “two people can be in the same place but they are not meeting (without relating).” Nor is it enough to use the same official language – a benefit the Nigerian school system has advanced by mandating English as the language of instruction. National community demands living and working together and sharing values and interests. This type of relationship is what Buber describes as “the *I-Thou* relationship, where the *I* takes the *Thou* as a fellow and not as an object to be used and exploited.” “Segregated schools and segregated societies, whether existing de facto or de jure, necessarily fall short of producing national community. Setting or holding groups apart may mask problems but never solves them. Political expediency has often promoted segregation. Under varied disguises, segregation usually has been offered to appease powerful groups or to buffer inter-group hostility. But it has nowhere eliminated the causes of distress. It has simply postponed effective remedies” (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.8). The delay typically has resulted in “eliminating the possibilities of conciliation or in making conciliation more costly in material terms and more painful in human terms. Either the separation will become permanent, dissolving the nation, or the separation must be readdressed through re-intensified national integration. If education is to serve national integration, schools must be integrated. They must operate in some ways as the nation-in-miniature. They must bring the nation’s diverse peoples together in a collective experience that instills cooperative habits and consensus on communal values” (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001, p.8). Students learning and living together in fully integrated schools get to see each other more plainly as fellow persons, thus reducing perceptions of difference and distance between ethnic groups. The elite, who rise from such schools to leadership positions, as David and Nwaiwu rightly pointed out, also have “a common background from which to draw in reconciling disputes.” Schools need not erase ethnic identity but only place it in a perspective dominated by national identity (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001). Education has a crucial and primary role to play in the integration, which is a necessary aspect of national development. Similar to Senghor’s belief that “Negritude opens up a harmonious basis for the integration of black and white values,” (2002, p.48), I strongly believe that this philosophy of integration, based on education, will open up a harmonious basis for the integration of the various ethnic groups in the country. But just like Davis and Nwaiwu rightly hinted: “schools cannot do what society itself is either reluctant or unwilling to do. Schools tend to confirm social realities. They reflect what exists. They can and do stir fresh aspirations, yet they tend to season those aspirations with the salt society provides. A society that provides only salt to rub on the open wounds of ethnicity promotes no healing” (2001, p.4). Thus, the salt of this education-based philosophy of integration must be distributed in order to cure and preserve the meat on which the nurture and sustenance of the society depend – common identity. If that is neglected, the last state may be worse than the first, for as the reflective statement: “If the salt has lost its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again” (Matthew 5:13).

6. Conclusion

It is an obvious fact that philosophy and education represent critical factors in the development of any nation. This informs why Plato is of the opinion that no nation can attain meaningful progress unless philosophers become kings or kings are led by divine providence to become genuine philosophers. This Platonic dictum underscores the importance of philosophy in the unity and development of any nation. In fact, an insightful way to understand the relevance of philosophy to nation building is to go back to its origin, in ancient Greece, and then, trace its adventures through the history of humanity, until we come up to its position in the world today. This will certainly vindicate philosophy as the spirit of human civilization in general and national development in particular (Anichebe, 2005). Similarly, education is the soul of any nation. As such, “when education is negated, the national soul is negated.” When “it is boosted, the national spirit is boosted” (Okafor, 2006, p. 236). No developing nation will achieve any meaningful development, if its educational needs are not given top priority. Even developing nations will start under-developing, if education is relegated to the background. Thus, education is not just a problem to solved, but a life to be lived – it is a repository or a life force, from which proceeds the solutions of the problems of the society in particular, and life in general.

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