

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN.

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ABSTRACT:

The world is challenged with lots of environmental hazards such as; water pollution, air pollution, global warming, over population, solid waste management (waste disposal), deforestation, acid rain, climate change, ozone layer depletion, etc. Most unfortunate is that this situation has a direct consequence on retarding economic, political, cultural and social development. Nigeria is not immune from these hazards but more arching is the notorious poverty of environmental care, protection and management. Our environment faces several server and unmitigated challenges which seem to be worse as the days go by, hence there is urgent need for adequate attention to draw prospects towards arresting these challenges. This paper aims at raising awareness of the prevailing unethical approaches to environmental care, protection and management. Also, this paper seeks to chat the path for proactive prospects towards better care, protection and management of our environment. In the attempt to address the aim of this paper, the methods of exposition and analysis are used to expose matters of environment and interpretation of its ethical implications respectively. This paper considers four philosophical and ethical approaches to environmental care, protection and management such as; Anthtropicentric, Biocentrics, Ecocentrists and Animal rights. Thus, looking at the incessant environmental hazards of the Nigerian society at present; the role of environmental ethics towards sustainable development is irreplaceable. Thus adequate application of environmental ethics would boost holistic and sustainable development in Nigeria

Keywords: Environment, ethics, development, Nigeria,

INTRODUCTION:

There are basic issues of environmental hazards not only in Nigeria but in the world at large; issues ranging from water pollution, air pollution, global warming, over population, solid waste management (waste disposal), deforestation, acid rain, climate change, ozone layer depletion, and so on. Some scholars argue that there are three fundamental environmental issues that affect the majority of others: global warming and climate change, water pollution and ocean acidification and loss of biodiversity. These environmental problems are endless and with the persistent and existential challenges embedded in them; the hindrance it poses not only to the human being, animal and environment, one may argue that an urgent attention needs to be given in order to forestall future occurrence. Thus, these basic issues that affect the environment needs to be looked into, to know the extent they affect the human being, animate and in-animate objects and the environment itself; then set proper long term plan to avert the future occurrence.

Therefore, the role of environmental ethics as a discipline is inevitable as it studies these challenges and its implications for the future. In environmental philosophy, environmental ethics can be seen as an established field of practical philosophy which is aimed at protecting natural entities and the sustainable use of natural resources. It is a holistic approach to understanding and evaluating our moral obligations to protect and preserve the environment. It seeks to bring together the interests of both humans and the environment, recognizing that both are independent and of intrinsic value. One may say that it is a philosophical discipline that studies the moral relationship between human beings, the earth or the environment and the environmental contents like plants and animals. Environmental ethics studies a wide range of disciplines such as environmental Law, environmental sociology, eco-theology, ecological economics, ecology, environmental geography and it ask questions on ethics of environmental sustainability in all its ramifications.

Generally, environmental ethics is a philosophical discipline that is focused on the moral principles guiding human interactions with nature and the environment, exploring responsible stewardship, preservation, thereby leading to sustainable care/protection of human, animal, in animate objects, the land (soil), the sea (waters), plants and general environment. This general principle of environmental ethics will be the center of focus of this discourse and how to manage the present prevailing circumstances and more so, find possible proactive steps to be taken for the environmental care and management for the betterment of the future.

TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

There are types of environmental ethics but three are basic; namely- Libertarian; Ecological extension and Conservation ethics.

Libertarian: This is an environmental ethics that focuses on an individual right to do whatever they want with the environment and its resources. The Libertarian ethics also argues that an individual should not impose their own values on others and should respect the choices of others.

Ecological Extension: Ecological extension is a type of environmental ethics that focuses on preserving the natural environment and its sources in order to maintain the balance and health of the ecosystem. This concept stresses the importance of human working with nature, and at the same time maintaining balance with nature and ecosystem.

Conservation Ethics: This is an environmental ethics that is aimed at preserving natural resources for future generations by ensuring that the current resources are not depleted or damaged beyond repair. It focuses also in making good use of the present natural resources in such a way that there is a plan for future use of those natural resources. Thus, this encourages individuals, groups, Institutions and all to use the natural resources responsibly and judiciously so that there will be enough for future generations.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental Ethics is intrinsically about extension of ethical consideration. When some objects have intrinsic value, they should naturally be treated with respect for their own sake and their rights should not be violated without basic reasons. Thus, Anthropic advocates for right of human beings over the environment and the creatures, then Biocentrics advocate for rights for some or the whole biological system; then Ecocentrists advocates for the right of the whole eco system and the Animal rights advocates for moral status for animals.

From the above postulation, there are 4 philosophical approaches to environmental ethics among others namely:

1. Anthropocentrism or The Human centered Approach
2. Biocentrism or The Life Centered Approach
3. Ecocentrism or the ecosystem centered Approach
4. The Animal Liberation / Rights

ANTHROPOCENTRIC OR THE HUMAN CENTRED APPROACH

Anthropocentric consists of two words namely “Anthropo”- meaning “human” and “centrism” meaning “centre”. Hence, etymologically, anthropocentrism means “human centered.” or “centred on human being.” Therefore, this branch of discipline refers to a belief or world view that humans are at the centre of the universe. This idea can be fundamentally interpreted from religious and social concepts. The religious concept can be interpreted with the creation account in the Bible. In the book of Genesis after the creation of man, God gave man dominion over all animate and in-animate beings and in fact, over all the earth. God blessed man and said to him: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”(Cf Gen 1:26-28). This biblical periscope summarizes this anthropocentric view or human centred approach to environmental ethics.

From the social perspective, the western ethical thinkers argue that human beings alone are the ones who have the intrinsic value than any other creature- animal or objects. Aristotle argues that “nature made all things specifically for the sake of man.” This view has it that non-human beings in nature are instrumental and as such cruel treatment of non-human beings and objects is allowed. Immanuel Kant, for example, holds that the cruelty towards a dog might encourage a person to develop a character which would be desensitized to cruelty towards humans.¹ From this perspective, cruelty towards non-human animals would be instrumentally, rather than intrinsically, wrong.

Generally, this field of study argues that human beings have the moral values and fundamentally argues that natural environment does not have an intrinsic (non-instrumental, non-derivative) value beyond human beings. Thus, the proponents of this thought argues that value of nature is measured by the benefits and happiness it provides to human being. Therefore, to increase this happiness, it is considered legitimate for humans to do everything and to utilize nature as they wish. In fact, they argue that Anthropocentric regards human as the most important part of life form and views other life forms as important only to the extent that they have a desirable effect

on humans. One short fall of this view was captured by Sarkar who argues that anthropocentrism is the main cause of today's eco-crisis, overpopulation and endangered species.²

THE BIOCENTRIC OR THE LIFE CENTRERED APPROACH

The Biocentric approach to environmental ethics argues that all living things have moral status and as such should be respected. Albert Schweitzer, for example, based his support of biocentric approach based on reverence for life.³ There are divergent views on this Biocentric approach as some scholars hold that some living beings are more important than the other and that value of life is just one among other values. Some scholars hold that there are plural set of values conveying moral relevance and as such should be respected in all its ramifications.

In addition, some scholars argue that all living beings are of equal value and some scholars, on the other hand, hold that some living beings are more significant than the others. Taylor and Sterba, for example, argue for the biocentric egalitarianism.⁴ Biocentric egalitarian scholars hold that all living beings are of equal significance and as such ought to be respected. Moreover, contemporary biocentric ethicists disagree like R. Attfeild, G Warner and D Schmitz all disagree, arguing that the possession of more complex psychological capacities, such as sentience, gives beings that possess them a higher level of moral significance.⁵

THE ECOCENTRISM OR THE ECOSYSTEM CENTERED APPROACH

This is basically a philosophical cum ethical concept that holds that environmental ethics should not only focus on the individual organisms but argues that focus should be more on the ecological collectives, e.g., ecosystems or the land.⁶ The proponent and the father of this ecocentrism thought –Aldo Leopold, argues that moral sphere should not only be accorded to the human community but that it has to be extended to the biotic community. Hence, in his work, particularly in his Essay, “The Land Ethic”, he argues that the land ethic extends to boundaries to include soil, waters, plants and animals.⁷ Leopold further holds that land ethic perspective implies that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It will be wrong if it does otherwise.”⁸ For Leopold, he does not doubt if human beings are ethically relevant, but he also adds that we also need to ethically take land directly into account.

Modern environmental ethicists have tried to develop this concept, a discourse in which they argue variously that ecological communities or ecosystems should be accorded moral status. Callicott, for example, drawing his arguments from Hume and Darwin holds that as we have emotional and moral responsibilities towards the human communities so should we also have such loyalties and responsibilities towards the ecological communities.⁹ Rolston on the other hand argues that ecosystem could be referred to as a wild process that create and nurture life; we should not value, the organism, the product of the system without recognizing the systematic value of the processes that produced them.¹⁰ Then, Johnson, on the other hand, argues that the ecosystems should be understood as quasi or semi individuals and that we can make sense of the idea that they have interests that do not coincide with the interests of their members.¹¹

In all, ecocentrism ethicists hold that eco-system- land, soil, waters, plants and animals should be considered as ethically relevant and as such should be given a moral status.

THE ANIMAL LIBERATION RIGHTS

Animal Liberation Rights ethicists advocates and argues for basically for animal welfare, that is, it ensures that animals are treated well and humanely. It focuses on minimizing animal suffering and promoting well-being, recognizing animals as sentient beings. It fundamentally seeks to ensure that their basic needs are met and advocates for responsible treatment and compassionate relationships between human and animals.

The scholars and proponents of this thoughts concerns itself from ethical consideration of individual non-human animals- particularly those living in spaces outside of direct human control- and conceptual entities such as species, populations and ecosystems. Thus, these ethicists placed well-being and interests at the centre of their concern. Their main focus is on the moral status, and ethical treatment of individual animals.

Singer, one of the leading proponents of Animal Liberation Rights, argues that beings have morally relevant interests and similar interests, irrespective of species; and that these interests should be taken equally into account.¹² He argues that sentience is a sufficient condition for moral status and has to be accepted in environmental ethics and by those who do not regard it as a necessary condition. Singer, on the other hand, argues that in addition to sentience, some animals are self-conscious and have preferences to live, and that killing a being that has a sense of itself as a distinct entity with a future and that prefers to live is worse than killing a being without such preference.¹³ Tom Regan also holds that all adult mammals have equal have equal moral significance because they are “subjects-of-a-life.”¹⁴ He argues that this encompasses being able to feel pain, to have desires, to have end of one’s own, to have memories and expectations, to have a sense of oneself as persisting over time.¹⁵ Some other scholars like C. Palmer and S Donaldson both argue that even though we have some obligations to all sentient animals, but then we have additional and even stronger obligations towards certain animals particularly those we have domesticated.¹⁶

All in all, the proponents of this view fundamentally argue that there should be proper treatment towards animals both those living in the wild, domesticated and all living animals and we have the basic obligation for their welfare and care.

Having seen the philosophical approaches to the environmental ethics, it is important to briefly highlight the environmental related problems in order to appreciate the importance of the environmental ethics and its discourse to national sustainable development.

ENVIRONMENTAL RELATED PROBLEMS IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Environmental issues and problems should be a matter of concern for all and sundry because environmental degradation affects not only human beings but it also affects, animal, plants, tress and the environment as a whole. In our contemporary society, care should be taken on these environmental issues so as to guard against them not only at the present but also safeguard

ourselves and our environment for the future. There are a lot of environmental problems and I will now discuss some of them.

Pollution:

This means the introduction of a substance that is harmful or poisonous to a person, plant or animal or environment. In other words, it is an undesirable change in in physical, chemical, or biological characteristics. Agents that cause such undesirable changes are called pollutant. There are various types of pollution: water, air, soil, noise, radioactive pollution etc.

Water Pollution: This is the contamination of water bodies like Lakes, rivers, seas, oceans with harmful products. The factors responsible for the water pollution are: Agriculture run off, fertilizers, urbanization, industrial waste etc.

Air Pollution: By air pollution, we mean, the contamination of air with harmful gases, dust, and smoke. The major cause of air pollution is the burning of fossil fuel, automobile, burning and smoke from industries, smelters, etc. Air pollution has adverse effects on human health, reduces crop yield, and can cause premature death on plants and environmental pollution leading to other environmental hazards.

Soil pollution: This can be defined as the presence of various pollutants, toxic substances and other contaminants on the soil beyond the threshold limit which can be harmful to the soil ecosystem or to the plants.

Noise pollution: Noise pollution means any unwanted or disturbing sound that affects the health and well-being of humans and other organisms.

Radioactive: This happens when there is emitting or relating to the emission of ionizing radiation or particles. When such happens, there is pollution of the environment which could be harmful not only to the human beings but also to plants and animals.

Solid Waste:

Solid waste is known as trash or garbage. It includes waste of home, office, hospitals, stores, etc. It usually consists of paper, food wastes, plastics, glass, metals, rubber, leather, textile, etc. The waste is either burnt to reduce its volume or is dumped in sanitary landfills.

Agro-Chemicals:

It is on record that after the green revolution, the use of fertilizers has increased tremendously the crop production. However, experience from research shows that these agro-chemicals are also on the other hand dangerous to on target organisms present in the soil and biomagnifies in the terrestrial ecosystem.

Radio-active Waste: Radiations from the radioactive waste are extremely damaging and it causes mutation at a very high rate. Nuclear radiations are lethal at high doses and can cause serious disorders like cancer at lower doses.

Global Warming and Greenhouse Effect:

Global warming means the rise in the surface temperature of the earth. The main factor responsible for global warming is the increase in the level of greenhouse gases which has led to incessant heating of the earth. This phenomenon of heating of the earth's surface and atmosphere is known as the greenhouse effect. The greenhouse gases are released from automobile emissions, industries, fossils fuels, etc.

Ozone Depletion in the Stratosphere:

Research and various studies have shown that ozone layer in the upper part of the atmosphere³ absorbs harmful UV radiation from the sun. There is a balance between production and the increased use of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC), which degrades the ozone layer. This often resulted in the formation of an ozone hole that allows UV radiation to pass through it. UV radiation can cause the aging of the skin, skin cancer, cataract, mutation of the DNA, etc.

Deforestation:

This means the conversion of the forested areas to non-forested areas. The growing human population has led to an increase in the conversion of forest areas/lands to Agricultural lands and sometimes to housing. Deforestation causes an increase in the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, loss of biodiversity, disturbs the hydrological cycle, causes soil erosion, and may lead to desertification in extreme cases.

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Having seen the environmental issues and the harm they do the human being, plants, trees, animals and our environment at large, there is then the need for philosophical table of discussion on the importance of environmental ethics and sustainable development in Nigeria and more so, the need for proactive steps towards environmental care and protection.

One may not be wrong to say that in Nigeria today and the world over, human beings boast of their superiority to animals and on the other hand, they do not use their intellectual ability to care for or maintain their environment. For example, there are issues of cutting down trees without any concern on animals who are dependent on it for survival; using of fossil fuels uncontrollably; Industrialization, pollution of the air or water, radioactive waste, Agro-chemicals, ozone depletion in the stratosphere, global warming, solid waste etc. which directly and indirectly affect not only human beings but our environment. These environmental related issues occur either due to human causes or can be natural and can vary in dimension from local, regional, to global levels. As the population increases and with the depletion of the ozone layers, we need to be concerned about the environment. This is because environmental degradation

threatens the existence of humankind. Thus, with the increase in population; the demand for food, clothing, housing, etc., there is an urgent need for the protection and care of the environment. More so, with the pressure on natural resources which has led sometimes to environmental pollution, depletion of resources and biodiversity, there is a need for environmental ethics studies in order to forestall future environmental problems.

Sustainable development, on the other hand, is development that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future needs, thereby working harmoniously with present and future prospects in mind. In the discourse of sustainable development there are three main pillars or distinct areas of concentration: human, social, economic and environmental.

The importance of environmental ethics to sustainable development in Nigeria is very apt. This is because it reminds us of our environmental responsibilities; awakening our ecological consciousness. It reminds us that every object in nature has its own purpose and use, neglecting its uses is a disaster to the environment and the society at large.

Thus, the importance of this discourse is to make us be a responsible consumer, as human beings do not have the right to destroy nature's richness and diversity. Environmental ethics has as its target to be the safeguard against cruelty to all creatures: it helps to maintain ecological balance and provides for a peaceful, harmonious, beautiful living and sustainable environment. Environmental ethics argues that the human being even though he is the most dominant and superior being in nature, we are also expected to be responsible for keeping our environment, habitable and clean.

One of the contemporary challenges we have in environmental ethics is climate change. Climate change affects not only the human being but also animal, plants, trees, and the environment as a whole. Thus, it is an important contemporary discourse. Environmental ethics has the duty of stepping into the climate changes and see how the environment can be protected and guarded not only for the protection of human being but also for the protection of trees, plants and animals and our environment.

The importance of the environmental ethics hinges on ecological consciousness and striking a balance for sustainable future and the enrichment of our environmental diversity. Environmental ethics teaches us to become considerate not only of ourselves but also of plants, animals and every object in nature. The Importance of environmental ethics is such that it advocates that human beings responsibly use natural and mineral resources in ways that it does not cause degradation or destruction.

All in all, the importance of environmental ethics cannot be overemphasized. We need it now more than ever so as to take proactive steps in order to safeguard ourselves, our children, animals, plants, trees and our environment not only for the generation but also for the future generation. Time to act is now and proactive steps should begin now so that we do not live in regrets of what we can avoid.

PROACTIVE ACTIONS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CARE/PROTECTION LEADING TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Nigeria should be proactive towards environmental care and protection in order to prevent future environmental hazards and thus, enable a future whereby there is an environmental sustainability for future national development.

In Nigeria, there are some ways environmental ethical action can be of help in various aspects of environmental hazards.

Sustainable Agriculture:

In the area of Agriculture, ethical action should be taken in the use of sustainable agricultural methods. Sustainable agricultural methods are those that are designed to ensure that the land and resources used in Agriculture remain productive and can continue to be used in the future. Example of sustainable agricultural methods like crop rotation, integrated pest management, conservation tillage and so on can be steps in the right direction for environmental protection and management.

Sustainable Forestry:

In the area of forestry, it is important also for some basic ethical actions to be taken for the sustainable environmental care and protection. Sustainable forestry practices are designed to ensure that forests are managed in a way that preserves their biodiversity and ecological integrity. In Nigeria, forestry practices like selective harvesting, reforestation, and the protection of old-growth forests should be encouraged in every ward, at Local Government level, at State level and at the national level.

Industrialization:

Industrialization naturally gives way to pollution and imbalance. Efforts should therefore be made to keep industrialization from causing environmental pollution and other natural hazards in the environment. To achieve this end, the Government must lay down some guidelines or rules that should guide Industrialization so that the environment is not bastardized or polluted: This implies action on the part of the Government and the Companies. On the part of the Government; they have to lay down rules, guidelines and principles and then on the part of Companies, they ought to abide by these laid down rules, principles and guidelines for the protection of people and the environment.

Recycling of Waste Materials to conserve Natural Resources:

Nigeria needs to strive towards zero environmental impacts in the area of production and use of materials. When materials are produced and used, efforts should also be made to recover the waste products and materials and put them to further use through recycling of the materials. There are materials that can be recovered and put to use after they are used. For example

recycling of materials through the bio-technology as enabler –enzymatic recycling can be a step in the right direction towards environmental protection. This contribution helps the reduction, recycling, and the reuse of products to sustain the environment and future generations.

Unfortunately, plastics, bottles, polythene bags, papers etc. are not recycled as it is done in overseas like Europe and America. In Nigeria, particularly in various states like in Enugu State, there is no recycling process or machines and this have impacted negatively on the environment. This is true of almost all the states in Nigeria. Thus, I argue that recycling is a solution to Nigeria’s environmental challenges and we need to act fast by introduction of machines for recycling of these materials at ward level, local government level and state level. Every Governor should make it a point of duty to establish and procure these machines for daily use. This will not only protect our environment but it can also increase employment opportunities and thus, boost our economy, thereby leading to sustainable development.

Population Control:

Overpopulation poses a very serious effect to the society and the environment. Nigeria as at today has the population of over 22 million and the UN projects that Nigeria will be nearly double of its population by 2050 to an estimated 377 million. Thus, Nigeria will leap-frog Pakistan and Indonesia and end up in a virtual tie with the USA as the third most populous country. Thus, In Nigeria and in developing countries, population control is important so that human beings can be properly taken care of. If population control is not given the required attention, then human beings may be forced to live in inhuman conditions which could also elicit environmental problems. Then the adverse effects will be unimaginable as it will not only affect human beings but also the society and the environment.

Crop Rotation:

Crop rotation is the practice of growing a series of different types of crops in the same area across a sequence of growing seasons. The practice reduces the reliance of crops on one set of nutrients, pest and weed pressure, along with the probability of developing resistant pest and weeds. Crop rotation therefore can reduce the need for synthetic fertilizers and herbicides by better using ecosystem services from a diverse set of crops. It can also improve soil structure and organic matter, which reduces erosion and increases farm system resilience.

Mono-cropping depletes the soil of certain nutrients and selects for both a highly competitive pest and weed community, thus, crop rotation balances the nutrient use and diversifies pest and weed communities which is very important for soil’s fertility and environmental protection and care.

Hence, the practice of crop rotation should be encouraged for environmental protection, care and sustainable development.

Reduction of Food Waste:

This often refers to foods not ultimately or optimally consumed by humans that is discarded or recycled; such as plate waste, (food that has not been served but not eaten); spoiled food, or peels and rinds considered inedible. We can reduce food waste globally if we adopt these principles:

- *Adopt a healthier, more sustainable diet.
- *Buy only what you need
- *Pick Ugly fruits and vegetables
- *Store food wisely
- *Understand food labelling
- *Start small
- *Love your leftovers
- *Put your food waste to use (Recycle your food waste).

Conservation of Water and Energy (Wind, Electric and Solar Energy):

Water conservation is the practice of using water efficiently to reduce unnecessary water usage. According to Fresh Water Watch, water conservation is important because fresh clean water is a limited resource, as well as a costly one. Water conservation includes all the policies, strategies and activities to sustainable manage the natural resource of fresh, protect the hydrosphere, and to meet the current and future human demand. Population, household size and growth and affluence all affect how much water is used.

Energy conservation is the decision and practice of using less energy. Primarily, to save energy, switch off power point rather than leave the appliances standby. Turn off your air condition, heater, cooling units, and all appliances when you go to bed or when you are going out. Switch off your computer and equipment such as printers or Wi-Fi routers overnight or whenever you are away.

Water and energy are closely linked. A clean reliable water source consumes energy. Water consummation leads to energy conservation. The law of conservation of energy states that energy can never be created or destroyed- only converted from one form of energy to another. This means that a system has the amount of energy, unless it's added from outside.

In Nigeria, there are issues of conservation of water and energy and thus needs to be given attention for environmental protection and national sustainable development.

There are other proactive actions that should be done for environmental protection like: supporting the local and environmental practices (Sustainable Construction), promotion of green innovations (Green Space) and promotion of clean and affordable energy etc.

In all these proactive steps, it is important to note that for it to work in Nigeria, professionals in environmental ethics must collaborate with the Local, State and Federal Government and thus propose an action plan for immediate execution to safeguard our environment. When this is done, we will be able to protect our environment for our generation and for future generation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is an urgent need for the application of environmental ethics for sustainable development in Nigeria. This we can do by putting into the practice at ward level, local Government level, State level and at Federal Government level all the proactive steps and actions proposed. If this is done, Nigeria will be on the path of greatness and would be able not only to be able to handle environmental challenges of the present but will be able to forestall future environmental problems, thereby leading to overall wellbeing of human beings, plants, trees, animals and the entire environment and society. Professionals in the environmental ethics and the councilor, local Government, state Government and Federal Government should all partner together, co-operate and collaborate in this discourse and seek to ensure immediate implementation of workable plans for environmental care and protection.

End Notes

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