

# Philosophy and Governance in Contemporary Africa

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## Abstract

*Philosophy as a discipline is central in every aspect of human existence. This is as it imbues human persons with rationality, foresight, criticality and dynamism, as well as analytic and innovative characters necessary for quality performance. The present poor governance in African nations which gives rise to all manners of social ills is therefore not unconnected with the dislocation or disregard for philosophy in the practice of politics and exercise of governance. This paper, therefore, examines philosophy; its essence and indispensable role, the problem of governance in African nations and the imperative of philosophy and ‘philosopher-kings’ in contemporary Africa. The study finds that based on the essential rudiments of philosophy, philosophers stand to perform better in policy formulations, implementations and governance of African nations. The paper, therefore, concludes that further negligence of philosophical contributions and philosophers in the governance of African nations will continue to promote the existing culture of mediocrity that is the bane of African sustainable development.*

*Keywords: philosophy, governance, philosopher-kings, contemporary, Africa*

## Introduction

The triumph of democracy in most African countries was viewed as panacea to poor governance bedeviling the continent. To the contrary, democracy, as envisaged by Plato and Aristotle, has fostered oligarchy, plutocracy, tyranny, predatory political parties and poor governance. Consequently, governance in many African nations is not of, by or for the people, but by an organized clique, cabal, political jobbers, looters and robbery consortium, that collaborate with imperialists and convert governance into breeding ground for unemployment, insecurity, hunger, hopelessness and instability (Odey, 2002). As such, governance in most African states has remained a futile exercise; lacking the form that propels growth of common good or commonwealth (Aghamelu & Ani, 2011).

With democracy still, many African nations view mineral deposits as solutions to poor governance. This is in the sense that its prospects will boost governance and welfare of the citizenry. However, the prospects of these mineral deposits have lured touts, uneducated, ‘never do wells’, and mediocre into governance. These have dominated African states; creating instabil-

ity and indulging in all forms of corruption as they advance their egoistic interests and those of their cronies. Thus, governance in most African nations is replete with 'democratic' monarchs, tyrants and despots, who are also grossly characterized by ethnicism, tribalism, nepotism, and persecution of rational opponents and intellectuals. This gives credence to the fact that mineral deposits without philosophic managers cannot translate to real wealth. However, this situation of poor management is exacerbated by support from western imperial powers, who take advantage of African leadership mediocrity to enrich their countries.

Against this despairing political situation, therefore, is the need for philosophy and 'philosopher-kings', who will ensure political firmness, objectivity, logical and critical competence required for effective governance of the state. Such competence consists in critical identification, construction and evaluation of proposals, detection of inconsistencies and common mistakes in governance, and healthy and balanced relations with other nations. It as well consists in systematic solving of problems and reflection on relevant ideas and public opinion. Thus, the prevailing backwardness in most African nations predicates on absence of philosophical revolution and resolution of ultimate existential problems and questions in governance (Alatas, 1997). Such revolution and resolution are the propelling factors behind stable governance and robust economy of Western and East Asian nations. Hence, Ulrich (2004) observes that the guiding intellectual forces of the resolution and governance of Western nations stem from greater subjective reflections and postulations of classical thinkers like Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Dewey, Immanuel Kant, Georg Simmel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Goethe, Herder, Humboldt, and others. In congruence with this view, Otonti (2006) affirms that many leading world economies in the West and Asia are till date being run on more philosophical and scientific principles. As such, Nkrumah was quick to remind African patriots that African philosophers will be of immense help to the rediscovery and sustainable governance of Africa (Ndianefo, 2011).

These, therefore, mean that philosophy in today's world is a core element in the development strategy and governance of many nations. This is more so because the unfettered reason is the engine of governance, with indubitable capacity that drives economy and sustains development. It is as well the basis of present comparative advantage among nations; an advantage replete with competitive human resources with capacity of effective and efficient services. The malady of most African nations, therefore, lies in neglect of philosophy and African philosophers in governance; policy formulation, state decision-making and implementation. As such, governance tra-

jectory in Africa is dislocated from philosophical thoughts and principles. The consequences of these have been tyranny, political instability, poverty, harsh economic conditions, hunger, militancy, agitation and terrorism. Thus, the modern Africa that once teemed with tribes that built empires and stable socio-political institutions acknowledged globally, is now backward in governance and development based on global standard. So, this study tends to expose the theoretical and practical relevance of philosophy in governance, as well as the need for African nations to cue into the global political trend where philosophy and 'philosopher-kings' are given central places in governance in order to ensure sustainable development.

### Conceptual Analysis

Unexplained concepts are largely misnomers that obstruct understanding and knowledge (Ezeugwu & Chinweuba, 2018). But analysis sets the limit of concepts and unveils the meanings inherent in them. Since philosophy thrives in distinction, clarity, explicitness and creation of better insight into the meaning of words, there is need to analyze philosophy, governance and 'philosopher-kings', which are outstanding concepts in this discourse. Philosophy is that academic discipline that positively shapes and sharpens human reasoning faculties, abilities, thoughts, expressions and actions, and urges human inquisitiveness to know. In this way, the concerned persons are made capable of consistent, sound and valid reasoning that give rise to positive ideas necessary to surmount the vicissitudes of life and initiate, facilitate and foster development. Philosophy is indeed a critical thinking, a rational habit of the mind, a manner of perception and reasoning that employs the principles of logic, dialectics, hermeneutics and analysis in tackling life issues; hence its centrality in human existence.

Governance, on the other hand, is the process of administering public policies and exercising sovereign authority. Governance also consists in exercising political power and managing a nation's affairs (Alumona & Mohammed, 2011). It is thus the act of ruling or governing a political or civil state, through decision-making, policy formulation and implementation. Governance extends to restraining, regulating, controlling or influencing the actions or behaviours of people in a civil state. Madu (2006) conceives it as series of leadership activities carried out by legitimate authorities in human societies, which affect the existence of the masses. Such leadership activities include the control of society's resources and its distribution within and outside the state (Mackenzie, 2009). As such, governance means to pilot a government, which consists in being in-charge of a territory and exercising the required functions.

Due to increasing democratic practices in various nations as well as the discovery that governance is the fulcrum of societal development, much priority is now accorded the concept. As such, there is also a constant definition and redefinition of the concept. Thus, governance is now viewed as the exercise of authority and power by the people or citizens of a political state (Dunu, 2013). But this popular view is in principle as the reverse is the case in African democracies that breed oligarchs that rather control the masses and exercise absolute political power.

To save the state from such oligarchs, however, Plato proposes that competency attained in acquisition of genuine philosophy should be the qualification for governance (Plato, 1997, Russell, 2007). Hence his idea of 'philosopher-kings'; characterized by knowledge of the good, interrelation of truths, difference between visible and intelligible world, realm of opinion and knowledge as well as appearance and reality (Plato, 1997, Stumpf, 1994). As such, Plato believes that through genuine philosophical studies, 'philosopher-kings' attain high rational capabilities essential for effective performance, and control of appetites and other psycho-biological drives that foster poor performance in governance. He then calls on leaders to become philosophers or philosophers to become leaders so that commonwealth, common good and national stability can be protected (Plato, 1997). However, we must understand that by 'philosopher-kings', Plato did not mean mere degree holders in philosophy, but those who have achieved a high philosophical and intellectual capacity that have instilled the virtues of good human relationship and governance in them. These people for Plato possess the capacity for theory and practice that manifests in quality governance, stability and development of human societies. The position of Plato in this context therefore means that one can study philosophy as a course and acquire degrees and yet he is not a 'philosopher-king', whereas one who has acquired rigorous philosophical training and capacity in other studies and objectively puts it in practice is truly a 'philosopher-king'. Thus, philosopher-kingship does not necessarily lie in acquiring degree in philosophy, but in acquisition of philosophical knowledge of diverse subjects, cosmic dynamism and rational application of this knowledge in practice.

### **Essence of Philosophy**

The essence of philosophy consists in the fact that it is a search for wisdom. This nature underscores the etymology of philosophy as love of wisdom. And wisdom is a rational behaviour in all areas of life; the capacity of determining what is good or bad, and the ability to make good choices or wise decisions, whereas love is an attitude of the mind towards what exists (Chin-

weuba, 2019). This, thus, means that in essence, philosophy is a rational exercise. It privileges reason as its sole tool when compared to other disciplines. And of all the attributes bestowed on humankind; none surpasses rationality (Asiegbu. 2011). Rationality as synonymous with, and as an essence of philosophy however, depicts man's ability to think differently and proactively. It as well connotes:

The positive intent to galvanize available means to desired and approved ends; an intent that must be backed up by the qualities of efficiency, impersonality, objectivity and neutrality. It (Rationality) means that at their deepest levels many of our problems, just as the problem of African identity itself, are philosophical problems (Wiredu, 1985:222, Bodunrin, 1985:41).

It thus means that the essence of inculcating the character of critical reflection in the human person stands philosophy out. Along this line, philosophy as a discipline builds rational mind in an individual which produces pragmatic ideas and translates to socio-economic policies, ideologies, achievements and solutions to society's problems. Thus, society's meaningful innovations and development stem from philosophical endeavours, and are sustained by philosophical endeavours. As such, human societies owe its progress, development and sustainability to adequate rationality and ability to think critically and differently (Oguejiofor, 2006).

However, the speculative nature of philosophy also makes it central in governance and human existence. This is as this character fosters a logical movement beyond empirical investigations in the search for answers to societal predicaments. Thus, empirical investigations as characterizing science produce truths which are valid only in the realm of experience. But through the power of reason, philosophy produces results which are universally valid and sound in the realm of experience and beyond (Chinweuba, 2019). Hence, philosophy is highly relevant and indispensable even in the midst of scientific exploits, methods and results which are applicable in human and societal development. This is why Scrutton (1995:7) argues that "a discipline like philosophy constitutes a superior virtue; one of attaining the realm of necessity, where the real contents of the true world are revealed." Plato adds that the existing states are bad because their resolutions are ineffective remedies lacking radical measures emanating from true philosophy, which enhances the true view of public and private rights and the end of human troubles. (Asiegbu, 2011). He then avers that only philosophy can effectively provide a good way of life and determine the right course humanity ought to take in life (Ejeh, 2009). Another essence of philosopher however lies in the fact that it is

“a rational search for answers to the questions that arise in the mind when we reflect on human experience”. (Omoregbe, 1990:22).

Moreover, philosophy is characterized by self-criticism, study of its own methods, aims and contents, as well as the possibility of other sciences reaching valid conclusions that are relevant to the growth of governance in human society. This again underscores the conspicuous edge, enormous influence and universal appeal to every sector which philosophy has over other disciplines. Consequently, Philosophers are well equipped to be aware of their surroundings and to contribute practically to the positive change of their societies (Chinweuba, 2019).

### **The Role of Philosophy**

As a speculative discipline, philosophy broadens human mind and equips it with essential tools of criticality, consistency, logicity, comprehensiveness, profundity and coherence. It as well inculcates different ways of viewing realities and creates better insight into the meaning of realities. Thus, philosophy enhances human rational ability to apprehend the transcendental objects of the ideal world (Asiegbu, 2011). For it imbues one with mental power that fosters discovery of abiding elements (substances) that remain after the accidents have disappeared. As such, philosophy facilitates the transformation of the raw data given to our senses into a coherent and related set of elements to ensure human unified grasp of the world and a unity of experience. Philosophy moreover enhances mental abstraction of realities, reminiscence and dialectics, which give rise to authentic knowledge. Thus, the discipline leads leaders step by step from mere subjective perception to synthetic objective thought, and eventually to pragmatic and realistic knowledge that positively transforms governance and translates to sustainable development.

With enlarged mental capacity provided by philosophy; fears, misconceptions, prejudices and underperformance are reduced. But drive towards quality governance which is vital for sustainable development is enlarged. The function of philosophy also extends to provision of ideas that form the content of governance. Philosophy as well fosters criticality and objectivity in governance, and frees those in authority from the instinctive tendency to interpret everything in terms of self. In these ways, leaders are enabled to solve pervading and prevailing societal problems which are formidable obstacles to national development.

Philosophy equally plays a significant role in harnessing the goals and objectives of governance. Along this line, philosophy ensures and maintains a perfect harmony between goals, objectives and their implementation. As such, Amaele (2005) asserts that well formulated policies in governance built

on strong philosophical footing, are sure guides to getting things right in a political state, and consequently in the development of a nation" (p. 68). Indeed, philosophy necessitates flexibility and adaptation of government policies in the changing human societies. Hence, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2002, in its Paris Headquarters inaugurated the World Philosophy Day (WPD), to be celebrated as an annual event of global import. According to UNESCO, the aim of this inauguration is to bring the indispensable relevance of philosophical knowledge to all nations and people, to relive the perennial importance of philosophy to mankind's search for global peace, justice, development and good governance; and to inspire people and leaders to live the examined life of philosophical reflection (Ndianefo, 2011).

### **Problem of Governance in Africa**

The problem of governance in Africa stems from absurd reasoning. This absurdity is historically and empirically evident in the sentimental governance, incoherent and non-inclusive policies, government lip-service and corruption, tribal and party consciousness. Indeed, the irrationality of most political authorities and aspirants of governance in Africa is also glaring in the desperation of the ruling parties and incumbent authorities to capture, exercise and retain power by hook or crook, absolute control of public institutions, neglect of quality education, other arms of government and rule of law, spate of leadership apathy and mass killing of innocent citizens. More so, large number of African leaders use governance to advance their personal interests and needs, that of their families, tribes and cronies. As such, it is extremely difficult to get a government policy in Africa that is strictly objective and for collective interest. As such, Africa is globally viewed as a dark continent, where absurdities take precedence and poor governance remains unabated.

Worst still, governance in Africa is mostly managed by mediocre and touts who are draconian in character. These do not often emerge from the will of the people at the polls, but from the culture of electoral rigging and manipulations. This ruling class however, hardly meddles with genuine thinkers or hinge government activities on philosophical thoughts and principles. In fact, genuine Philosophers and intellectuals are largely excluded in policy making, implementation and governance. Often, these intellectuals are even labeled critics and dissidents to justify the persecutions meted to silence them. This have encouraged massive brain drain, redundancy of best talents and human resources in the continent.

To be true, most countries in Africa are not developing but under developing; for the little development in these countries is fast dilapidating.

This is as the so-called development as well as its processes lack indigenous philosophical thoughts and foundation. In other words, such development is in the words of Hegel not the objectification or externalization of African indigenous mental infrastructure (Chinweuba, 2019). As such, the little alien philosophies and ideologies implemented by most African leaders have remained counterproductive; for such philosophies lack the capacity to drive indigenous governance and people towards industrialization and sustainable development. The predicament of governance in Africa therefore predicated on lack of essential philosophical ideas, will and discipline on the side of the leaders. Hence, Plato's imperative of 'philosopher-kings' in African continent.

### **Imperative of 'Philosopher-kings' in the Governance of African Nations**

The imperative of 'philosopher-kings' in the governance of African nations is proper in order to save the continent from backwardness, poverty and instability. It is more proper because solution to African predicament lies in "launching a philosophical analysis of the problem, with the belief that it is better to approach the problem from all angles rather than using standard and set models" (Aghamelu & Ani, 2011:94). 'Philosopher-kings' are competent personalities based on their acquisition of sufficient measure of genuine philosophy that consists in knowledge of the good, interrelation of truths, visible and intelligible world, opinion and knowledge, appearance and reality that are catalysts of good governance (Stumpf, 1994). Through rigorous philosophical training, 'philosopher-kings' have also attained seasoned character; high discipline, rational faculties, openness to change, mastery of persistent drives of appetites and emotions, consistent logical and critical connections between ideas, and between these ideas and realities. Based on these, 'philosopher-kings' possess that critically penetrating and illuminating qualities, necessary in tackling the problems of governance in Africa and proffering effective solutions.

The imperative of 'philosopher-kings' is also necessary because each African nation comprises of diverse tribes, socio-political and cultural groups. For instance, Nigeria has more than 400 heterogeneous ethnic groups. The conflicting nature of the contents and aspirations of these cultures and groups has made governance in Africa more complex and unattainable. This is coupled with the dynamic complexities of individuals within these African states. It therefore takes the qualities of 'philosopher-kings' to run inclusive governance that will sustain the integration of these tribes, groups and individuals. Besides, adherence to the rule of law, public order,

good governance and socio-economic development are not the natural order of things but depend on sound and rational individuals enriched with the knowledge of understanding, analysis and logic (Yew, 2011).

From all indications, therefore, the 'philosopher-kings' have the ability to deconstruct the dire trend of governance in Africa. They also have the dialectical ability to accommodate opposing views and epistemology of other continents in the promotion of good governance. Thus, the 'philosopher-kings' are capable of subjecting proposals, theories, doctrines and practices associated with governance to rigorous critical investigation and evaluation, so as to arrive at the synthesis that will advance African societies. They are also capable of "conceptual decolonization"; a critical self-awareness against unexamined assimilation of western categories, concepts and theories (Wiredu, 1995:22). Within this philosophical transformative condition, African states will be enabled to respond effectively to the challenges of governance; nation building and sustainable development.

Since African thinkers have direct experiences and better knowledge of poor governance in the continent, the duty of African transformation lies on their shoulders. This embraces Keita's (2004) observation that development in the western world was spear-headed by its philosophers, but that of Africa should be handled by her thinkers. Working with facts provided by culture and environment, African philosophers, like their western counterparts have all it takes to evolve effective concepts and theories that will speak to African situation, and efficiently direct governance towards actualizing conceived goals. Within this ambience, these 'philosopher-kings' are capable of critical interrogation of the entire present human existence in its African multi-aspects. As agents of positive change with elevated observation, they are too capable of subjugating assumptions, theories, values, laws, policies, modes and goals of governance to critical analysis and appraisal in order to create a more enlightened existence to Africans. With 'philosopher-kings' therefore, reason will be applied to governance with the aim of facilitating the abundant growth of every sector, proffering solutions to fundamental problems of existence and improving human condition. These are in fact the reason why Socrates describes the place of philosophers in human societies as that of midwife and gadfly. The contention, therefore, is to the effect that 'philosopher-kings' should be given a chance in leadership of African nations; involving them in policy-formulation, decision-making, implementation and governance. However, the change of leadership to 'philosopher-kings' requires the full support of African public, authorities and stakeholders for it to come to fruition.

## The Philosophical base of the Argument

In theoretical and practical ways, philosophers have through the ages demonstrated the potentials of philosophy and its great need in governance. Aristotle (2004:4) for instance documents that great nation builders like Pericles did not rely entirely on his mother wit to control the Athenians for thirty almost uninterrupted years. His association with the great natural Philosopher, Anaxagoras led to his incorporating in his political speeches some of the jargon and conceptual subtlety that had developed even in the infancy of natural philosophy.

However, Russell (2007) congruently adds that Anaxagoras taught governance mechanisms and true nature of realities and intellect that shaped Pericles and Euripides into outstanding leaders and achievers of ancient period. Indeed, the philosophical teachings of Sophists (Protagoras, Trasymachus and Gorgias) on essential rudiments of governance in the early epoch of Greek democracy which consists of rhetoric, logical and critical formulation of policies and political speeches are applicable in many contemporary societies (Chinweuba, 2019). Along this line, Aristotle's philosophical contributions in 343 B.C were the influences behind the policies and governance of Alexander the great, son of king Philip of Macedonia who expanded the Greek empire. More so, Aristotle's philosophical works; *Politics* and *Art of Rhetoric* are till date shaping governance of most western countries. And these great works not only posit philosophy as the foundation, but unravels the processes of good governance.

In similar manner, contents of Plato's *Republics* till stand among the most quoted in the arena of politics and governance. And his thought that until philosophers become kings or kings and their potentates imbibe philosophical knowledge, human society will continue to crumble, has remained the watch words in the governance of developed and developing nations (Popkin & Avrum, 1973). Indeed, governance, according to Plato and Aristotle, originated for the sake of human economic needs and good life (Stumpf, 1994). As such, its end should be the provision of the best life for the people (Appadorai, 2004). And the best state, for them, is that whose governance promotes the welfare of the greater number of the citizenry (Nwoko, 1988). By and large therefore, governance predicates on a sort of natural or unnatural philosophy, which for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle must gear towards protection of common good.

In fact, tradition of good governance in France as well as the 1789 Revolution that strengthens it was inspired by the social contract philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau. And up until second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Brit-

ish constitution and pattern of governance was based on John Locke's philosophy (Russell, 2007). In his 'Two Treatises of Government' for instance, Locke echoes the connection between governance and philosophy by reflecting on natural right to private property and the duty of the state to protect life, liberty, property and general good of the citizenry (Appadorai, 2004). Indeed, Locke's philosophical theories influenced the English revolution of 1688 which brought William of Orange from Holland to occupy the throne (Agbanusi, 2011).

In addition, the utilitarian Philosophers John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham stress that since happiness is the highest human value, the structure of governance should be adjusted to gratifying it. Thus, they taught that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the criterion of morality and the end of politics and governance in the state (Stumpf & Abel, 2002). To these, Peikoff and Ayn Rand insist that the idea of governance in civil society is based on ethics. As such, the exercise of governance should gear towards ensuring adequate application of ethics to social questions (Peikoff, 1993). Till date, the philosophical ideas of social contract theorists coupled with utilitarian philosophy of Mill and Bentham remain the basis of electoral processes, political referendum, governance, policy making and implementation trajectories of many countries.

Consequent upon these bases, Karl Marx acknowledges that philosophers have interpreted, and are changing the world in various ways. Through his dialectical materialism, he unravels the mechanism of human societies; the quantitative change of poor governance and its consequential qualitative change as well as class conflict. Marx's dislike of the bourgeoisie however results from governance of exclusion and oppression which alienates the people and impoverishes them. In other words, Marx views governance as a superstructure that shapes economic substructure (Marx & Engels, 2008). Hence for him, socio-economic inequality; instability and poverty are more of social creation brought about by capitalist egoistic governance (Fawole, Ogunkan, & Omoruan, 2011). This underscores Marx's conclusion that conflict of classes and socio-economic revolution are means to qualitative change in governance. With these principles, Marx changed the governance trajectory of most European nations.

It therefore stands that governance is replete with philosophical beliefs, convictions and positions. Even the fundamental presuppositions and suppositions that give rise to theories and praxis in governance come from philosophical thoughts (Odimegwu, 2008). This is proved by the fact that the being of governance or the possibility of its conception and definition denotes the necessary existence of the ground that serves as its source and ba-

sis. Philosophy is thus the source and fulcrum of governance in the sense of reasons, evidence, arguments, analysis and criticism wherewith philosophy justifies the grounds, terms, positions, advantages, structures, ends and concept of governance. It thus means that philosophy provides the consciousness and cognition of governance, as well as its logical and factual consistency which makes it desirable to the citizenry.

Therefore, the crisis of contemporary African governance, which is plunging the continent into cluelessness and natural state where life is deplorable, nasty and brutish, is not unconnected with the dislocation or disregard for philosophical foundation in the practice of politics and exercise of governance (Nze, 1989). This is why Okolo (1985) insists that the duty lies on Philosophers to define and clarify the meaning of daily use concepts and terms in governance for better application. Therefore, the clarion call for 'philosopher-kings', is raised and sustained by present African poor governance and the fact that philosophical conceptions, convictions, beliefs, postulations and positions stand to change this dire socio-political condition.

### Conclusion

From the discourse so far, it stands that philosophy is a mega discipline that will liberate African nations from conditions that rob them of good governance, productivity, sustainable development and quality life. For philosophy brings transformation that is replete with liberty, freedom and feats as it combats the challenges of governance. Besides, philosophy is a veritable tool for moral and intellectual enrichment of the human persons who drive governance (Omoregbe, 1990). It thus means that any governance devoid of genuine philosophy is bound to fail; as is presently the case in most African nations. For drivers of such governance will find it difficult to "consistently construct rational arguments, proposals, bills, policies, determine correct or fallacious reasoning, reach fruitful decisions, and embark on steady and systematic implementation" (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2018:5). Consequently, no agent of nation-building and sustainable development; the scientists, historians, lecturers, lawyers, engineers, doctors, educationists, politicians, business tycoons, industrialist, etc. can have an orderly and result-orienting work or governance without passing through the rigorous philosophical training; for to be orderly and result orienting is to be philosophical (Otakpor, 2000). Here then lies the centrality of Plato's imperative for philosophers to become kings or for kings to become philosophers for the growth of the commonwealth and stability of human societies.

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