

**THE COSMO-THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF JACOB L. MORENO:
UNIVERSAL SPONTANEITY-CREATIVITY**

**Paper presented at the Sixth International Congress
in Psychodrama and Sociodrama in Amsterdam, Holland, 1971
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Ever since the time of Lamark and Darwin, and more recently with Teilhard de Chardin, science has presented us with an evolving universe. Philosophy has also kept pace, with Schelling and Hegel and more recently with Whitehead and process theologians. However, it is one thing to see creativity in the universe by looking on from the outside; it is quite another to become an active participant in the creative process itself. In this paper I will approach evolution as it works within each of us, to see how in Moreno's view we can foster it.

This is not just a theoretical question. Our vision of God and the universe has a definite bearing on our action. A change of vision frees us to act differently. The Hindu scriptures have a saying: "As you believe, so you become." If we learn to believe in creativity at work in us, we can hope to become ever more creative. In this paper, we will look at Moreno's experience of cosmic creativity, examine it in light of Christian theology, and let this view challenge us to reconsider our place in the universe.

When he was a child, Dr. Moreno loved to "role-play" God. He would stand on a table and direct his playmates from God's point of view. This child's game became a living reality through a God-experience he had shortly before World War I. Outwardly his situation seemed far from creative. He sensed a deep disillusionment in his fellow humans and an anxious questioning about the meaning of his own life. He described the experience in these words:

"I began to try to find a meaning in an existence which is meaningless in itself... It was in those days of deep loss of faith in my fellow man that I began to hear voices... one which gives, our life hope...that the universe is not just a bundle of life forces but basically infinite creativity... that we are all bound together by a principle of all-inclusiveness. I began to feel that I am responsible . . . everything belongs to me and I belong to everyone ... I, it is my responsibility."¹

Thus in the midst of his disillusionment with humanity, Moreno was led to the source of creativity within, ever fresh and new. He ran up to his pent house room and with a marker wrote on the walls the words that poured out of him, "I am God, the Father, the creator of the universe. These are my words, the words of the Father...I am a God of the present. My words are words of might. They are of the present...I am the Father. I am the Father of your son, I am the Father of your mother and of your father, and of your great grandfather...I create, I am not created. I bless, I am not blessed...Help me! I, who gave birth to all, must be fulfilled by all."² He never lost this "mystical" sense. In 1968, at the First International Congress of Sociometry, he wrote:

“The mystic inclinations of my youth have never left me. Against all contrary opinion, it is the religion with which I started which made me productive as a scientist. Religion is the spiritual soil upon which science grows best.”³

In fact, it was this God-hypothesis that turned Moreno to the United States instead of Russia. He wrote in *Who Shall Survive*:

My God hypothesis has made me enormously productive; all conclusions which I drew from it and translated into scientific terms have been correct. I had no reason to assume that the original hypothesis itself is false just because it is not popular with scientists. My God idea. . . was therefore ultimately the greatest barrier to my going to Russia, accepting the Soviet doctrine and, so to speak, not letting my left hand know what my right hand does.”⁴

We will examine this experience in some detail to see what challenge it presents to us for religion and our view of humanity. My paper will discuss five points: three concerning the God-hypothesis, one concerning its implications for creativity in daily life, and a final point concerning the healing of humans and humankind.

I. THE CREATOR WITHIN:

As was said, Moreno’s experience came in the midst of deep and anxious questioning. He asked himself:

“...Am I this perishable thing, a hopeless existence, or am I at the center of all creation of the entire cosmos? I began to wonder whether I do not have besides the responsibility for myself, also a responsibility for all people around me..., a responsibility for all the nations. Responsibility cannot stop anywhere. Is not the whole universe, my responsibility?.....”

And he let his thought deepen and develop:

“If there is responsibility, it must be for more than mere existence, it must be for a bigger role. How can I assume it unless I had a function in creating this universe, unless I am a partner in its creation. I must have been there in the beginning billions of years ago, and I must be there billions of years hence. I created myself, therefore I exist.” (Recording of “Words of the Father”)

And as his thought thus deepened, the overpowering answer to his quest came out of the depths of his subjectivity:

“I am the Father. I am, the Father of your son.I am the father of the sky above your head and of the earth beneath your feet.”⁵

The novelty of this revelation of God was that the Words were not spoken from far away, nor to God as a “You,” but they welled up from within him. It was an “I-God” who spoke, not a “He-God” or a “You-God.” The answer to his question, “Am I Nothing or

Am I God?" was "I am God." If creative responsibility was within him it could have no limits, he must have been there at the beginning of the universe billions of years ago, and must continue to exist billions of years hence.

If this experience had not been so productive, we might dismiss it as the ravings of a madman. However, on his own testimony, the conclusions from this God-hypothesis had given rise to his psycho-dramatic and socio-dramatic principles which had proven effective. We cannot simply put it aside. And if we let it challenge us, we will see how different it is from the religious views that most of us hold. For most people God is outside, giving laws, or assuming for Himself the obligation of saving us. Often, unable to come up to the standards He sets, believers become crippled with guilt or remain personally uncreative, bound by "eternal laws." One reason for the revolt of many today against religion is due to a desire for freedom from such an outside power.

Yet we shouldn't be too quick to think Moreno's experience of God is an easy one. It is frightening to find the responsibility for creation centered in oneself. Freud spoke about a fear of sex, and Adler about a fear of aggression. Moreno found an even deeper fear in us -- the fear of being responsible, the fear of creating? We want a leader to praise or blame, we want causes and groups to join up with and submit to. To say, "I am responsible" for the world is a frightening thought, and Moreno was all too aware of the misuse of that responsibility in the ravages of World War I and World War II. Yet if we let his idea challenge us to question our Judaeo-Christian tradition, we will be surprised to find it was similarly creative. God worked in Christ to heal and transform lives. And Christ told his followers "whoever believes in me will do the works I do, and will do greater ones than these because I am going to the Father." (Jn 14:12). Moreno has challenged us to believe in this creative God within us. Who knows what works we might do if we learned how.

II. THE SELF-EFFACING GOD

A second aspect of Moreno's God-hypothesis is perhaps even less reflected on. He is accused of being a megalomaniac with his view of God, and yet the theoretical result is just the opposite. If God is within, an "I-God," then God is within each and every subject and withdraws, as it were, hidden within the many God expresses himself through. Moreno comments in a paper given at Barcelona in 1966:

"Actually, when the I-God is universalized, as it is in my book [*The Words of the Father*], the whole God concept becomes one of humbleness, weakness, and inferiority, a micro-mania rather than a megalomania. God has never been so lowly described and so universal in his dependence as he is in my book....Another aspect of the micromania of the book is its anonymity, which blatantly proclaimed that it is not the "I" of a lonely, singular person, but the "I" of everyone."⁶

It would seem that the closer God gets, the weaker he gets since He withdraws in favor of the many "I"s through which he acts. This is far from the all-powerful God-image in most of our minds. Nor is it an easy idea to live out. It seems the mark of creative

people is to have strong ego's, and yet the mystery of God's creativity is that it empowers others.

In a beautiful passage Moreno described the tension this caused in his own life when he yielded the editorship of the periodical he fathered (*Sociometry*) to the American Sociological Association in 1956. He wrote:

“I have a well-developed ego and self-concern; a good part of my dreams have been preoccupied with an intensive drive for recognition. On the other hand, however, a contrary force towards self-denial is prompting me to liberate and separate my work from my own ego and aspirations and giving it to the world without any strings attached. It is creating the position which every man will be in after he has departed from this world when he can look at himself with the most objective eyes, from there where nothing matters. The great difference is only that I wanted to establish this position for myself during my own life time, gaining this objectivity towards myself by an act of free will. It is obvious that there is here a relationship between the insistence of the Buddhist to attain nirvana in the midst of life, to die in spirit before he really dies, and gain emancipation of some part of himself at a time when he is at the height of his energy and not when he has come to the end of his tether.”⁷

Our focus here is on the aspect of withdrawal in favor of one's creation. We can be grateful for Moreno's example of what creativity demands on all levels, whether of a father for his son, or an artist for his work of art. History testifies to how difficult this principle is for humans and how creativity has been suffocated through its lack. Arthur Koestler, in his book, *The Act of Creation* (1964), mentions several instances where the scientific establishment resisted innovations, whether of Galileo or Freud. If we hold to the principle of creativity rather than to what is created, to let go of one's present creation in favor of a larger growth in others is not weakness but strength. In fact, only those who have found creativity within seem able to do it. And again, we find this insight of Moreno's closer to original Christianity than our philosophical God of power. John's Gospel has Jesus saying: “It is good for you that I go away, for if I do not go away the Advocate (or Divine Spirit) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” (Jn 16:7) The creative Spirit that was at work in Christ will work also in them, but only if He goes away. Then they will do the “greater works” Jesus spoke about.

We can see this principle behind Moreno's description of the director in a psychodrama. The psychodrama begins with the director “warming up” the group with exercises to increase spontaneity or freedom to respond. When the protagonist, whose psychodrama it is, is selected, the initiative goes to him or her, and all other directives are to facilitate the protagonist's own work, and at the end the director is simply one of the group giving feed-back.

We also glimpse in this principle the basis of role-reversal. God sets those He creates free of Him -- with an existence of their own. He does not impose Himself or His view but enters into the other as different. In fact, God's creativity sets the other apart as

different. God reverses roles in creating, letting the other come to be in his/her own individuality. God's ability to withdraw lets the other advance.

Scripturally, this view of God's humility lies in God's respecting human freedom. This is the basis for God's allowing sin, and for not removing it through a divine "fiat." God loves, and love does not impose, but actually identifies with human weakness and sin, as we see in God sending his Son "to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor 5:21) "Learn of me," Jesus said, "for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for yourselves." (Mt 11:29) Jesus alone reveals who God is. (Mt 11:27; Jn 14:9) This same principle is lived out in Theophostic and Immanuel Healing, that releases the client to God's enlightenment and Jesus' direction and healing, and takes the focus off the therapist.

III. THE NOW OF CREATION: THE ONGOING UNION IN DIFFERENCE OF CREATOR AND CREATURE.

Moreno stresses that creativity is always now. Without a continual union with God as source of creativity there could be no ongoing creation. But also required is a continual withdrawal to yield spontaneity to the other as other. The process does not remove this tension of union in difference but rather seems to increase it. Contrary to what we might expect, Moreno does not clearly state this continuing dialectic. He is more struck by the union of God and humans than he is by their continuing opposition. Thus, he says in *Words of the Father*:

"Once it is created, the universe is never separated from him. It expands, in continuous interaction with Him...due to God's co-identity with every creative agency throughout the universe. He is not only in the center but at every point between....Hence it can well be said that God does not interfere with the course of events because that would mean interfering with His very Self, for what happens is in essence God Himself."⁸

This passage seems to submerge the drama of human autonomy in face of God, whereas in practice, opposition plays a large part in Moreno's thought. In one passage, he notes how man is tempted to consider God's love as similar to his own narrow affect rather than expanding his to God's. He writes:

"Man made the mistake of believing that he could identify himself with God, the Father, the Arbiter of Love, without any particular effort, whereas, actually, only the reverse was true; the spontaneous identity of the Godhead with every being—and thus, also, with man."⁹

In psychodrama, the director, whose role is derived from the God-hypothesis, does not lose his individuality except for the time when the protagonist takes the center. As the group matures he is reintroduced as an individual member.

Further, if we took the analogy of evolution we would expect differences to increase with increasing union as Teilhard de Chardin pointed out. Extending this principle to the creative source, we might expect our difference from God to increase as

our union increases. In fact, the growing secularization of religion and the experience of God as “dead” does indicate that as we come of age our difference from God is heightened; but at the same time our growing rediscovery of spontaneity-creativity shows our union, in this difference. This tension between increasing concreteness and finiteness and increasing awareness of infinity is evidenced in both scientific and artistic creativity. Thus, Arthur Koestler in his stimulating book on the act of creation locates the ultimate source of creativity in the bi-sociation of eternal and temporal. He writes:

“The *locus in quo* of human creativity is always on the line of intersection between two planes, and in the highest forms of creativity between the Tragic or Absolute, and the Trivial Plane. The scientist discovers the working of eternal laws in the ephemeral grain of sand, or in the contractions of a dead frog's leg hanging on a washing-line. The artist carves out the image of the god which he saw hidden in a piece of wood.”¹⁰

Both difference and union change together, hence the beauty of the principle of role reversal, which allows both oneself and the other to remain independent while at the same time being united in creative interaction. In this dialogue with God, not only does the person change, but God also, or our view of God, seems to change. Moreno noted the historical changes from a He/She-God, to a You-God, to an I-God or co-partner in creation. Religion is not just a celebration of past events or eternal ideas – it is a drama, happening now.

Scripturally, we see this principle of ongoing creativity in the changes of God-image throughout the Old and New Testaments. I have described stages of faith development from this scriptural data that illustrates how one’s view of God changes as humans develop so that ultimately our final understanding of Scripture is fulfilled in only in Jesus.¹¹ The “Now” experience of God emerges in the “individuating faith” stage, but its full flowering is only in the “mission faith” stage of Jesus’ death/resurrection/sending of the Spirit.

IV. SPONTANEITY-CREATIVITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

If true creativity is grounded in the divine, how can the principles we have seen help us distinguish true creativity from its imitations in our lives? Only God combines both spontaneity and creativity at all times. The principle of spontaneity has more to do with the freedom of the self; creativity concerns more the product of creativity and God’s withdrawal in favor of it. The union of spontaneity and creativity is a dynamic process. Imitations of creativity can concern one or the other pole, whereas true forms lie in their union. Thus, what passes for spontaneity may simply be novelty. We are bombarded with new designs for cars, new places to go, new luxury items, new group experiences. We are living in an exciting age of change, yet we have to ask how much of all this is really creative. Spontaneity with no substance gives rise to what Moreno has named the “spontaneous idiot.”

Real spontaneity is a “readiness of the subject to respond as required. It is a condition – a conditioning of the subject, a preparation of the subject for free action.”¹²

By warming up to real spontaneity one gets sensitized to life forces in a certain direction. The amount of spontaneity needed depends on the difficulty of the situation one is facing. I might be quite spontaneous with one or two people but approach panic in a talk before a large audience. Such spontaneity cannot be had by an act of will. It grows by degrees as the result of training in spontaneity. When one produces too little spontaneity for the job at hand, anxiety results.

Experience shows that spontaneity can be learned and that freedom to act can increase in areas that before were rigidly bound by defenses. By role reversal, growing trust, sensitivity to people and situations, we take back into ourselves and integrate the spontaneity we had transferred onto others. Our subjectivity increases as it includes more and more subjectivities of those in our world. Only the creator embraces all. God's universal spontaneity is thus the goal and norm of true spontaneity. 1 John said, "Perfect love casts out fear." If we could rediscover this divine love within us, God's ability to take the perspective of each individual God relates to and act to increase their freedom and self-gift, we might have courage to be creative in our complex world.

Secondly, creativity may be false if it lacks the inner life of spontaneity. When God creates, God begins ever anew and breathes life into creatures. We can grow in technical proficiency – in space programs, computerized factories, even skillful group interaction – without integrating them into human life. If this progresses, our technology can enslave us and kill off our creativity.

Real creativity is a blend of both objective growth and synthesis and subjective freedom and spontaneity. Both together fill the universe with everything from the birth and rearing of children to new art creations, new social organizations, new technologies, new revolutionary ideals. Thus, really creative scientific insights, like that of Copernicus, are not mere novelties. They arise from the data of the past or from additional data and integrate it in a more simple and vital way. Creation is a whole, growing ever more complex and articulated and calling for ever developing organizations.

V. THE HEALING OF INDIVIDUAL HUMANS AND HUMANITY

Ultimately, the objective of Moreno's vision is the healing of humankind. As he introduces Who Shall Survive?: "A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less of an objective than the whole of mankind." Quite simply, he conceives this healing as the renewal of spontaneity/creativity in humans. Only creative-spontaneous humans will survive. In keeping with the points developed here, Moreno's goal is to renew in humans the likeness of the creator god: spontaneous, creative and in joyful communion.

Spontaneity is blocked by an inability to cope with certain aspects of one's world or oneself. These aspects retain a power of their own and drain spontaneity from the individual. Moreno's explanation of the healing of spontaneity is similar psychologically to that of C. G. Jung, though more realistic. Jung described the individuation process as a progressive confrontation of the archetypes of the unconscious that are first projected onto external reality – the archetypes of evil, the anima (or animus) and God. With such power outside one's self, one is personally weakened and in bondage to these forces. By letting

their power enter consciousness, the individual gradually integrates it and can utilize the power. For Moreno the way one images the persons of one's world drains one's spontaneity, and through psychodrama one can regain it. He writes:

“As the subject takes part in the production, and warms up to the figures and figureheads of his own private world he attains tremendous satisfactions which take him far beyond anything he has ever experienced. He has invested so much of his own limited energy in the images of his perceptions of father, mother, wife, children, as well as in certain images which live a foreign existence within him, delusions and hallucinations of all sorts, that he has lost a great deal of spontaneity, productivity and power for himself. They have taken his riches away and he has become poor, weak and sick... When he can be the persons he hallucinates, not only do they lose their power and magic spell over him but he gains their power for himself. His own self has an opportunity to find and reorganize itself, to put the elements together which may have been kept apart by insidious forces, to integrate and to attain a sense of power and of relief, a "catharsis of integration." (in difference from a catharsis of abreaction.) Thus the psychodrama provides the subject with a new and more extensive experience of reality, a 'surplus' reality...”¹³

By assimilating this ‘surplus reality’ the subject increases his spontaneity, and extends his inner world to the three dimensions of time: past, present, and future, to the full extent of space, to the full degree of reality, and finally to the entire cosmic dimension. To be fully healed one must be increasingly at home and spontaneous with life and death and the whole universe. Spontaneity cannot be limited.

Some therapies may stop there, but if one's goal is to heal all humankind, and not just some who are sick, healing must go further and include the ability to create. Only the creative can survive in an increasingly complex world. One must gain the freedom to cease being centered in oneself if one is to take responsibility for others. A group member grows to being a director, and a director withdraws from the center to free others to create. Responsibility cannot stop anywhere. Psychodrama is an exploratory technique to help the creator in the director and in the group.

Finally, there is the joy of the creator, the joy of parents in communion with their children, the joy of their shared history and drama, like the joy of God in dialogue with His creatures. The deepest joy of the creation is His creature come to fullness. Such joy is the goal of healing and all who have taken part in psychodrama have gotten some taste of it. Moreno once said: “I would like my tombstone to carry an epitaph which reads: ‘Here lies the man who brought joy and laughter into psychiatry.’”

CONCLUSION: MORENO’S VIEW IN LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

In conclusion, as I summarize this presentation of Moreno’s position in five hypotheses or statements, I will examine how they relate to Christian faith, especially as understood in the Catholic tradition.

1. God acts from within. As we become grounded within our subjectivity, we tap the source of spontaneity-creativity, the God-within. I am responsible for all creation. That statement, as we saw, is similar to Jesus saying, “greater works than these will you do because I am going to the Father.” But by that word, are we actually taking responsibility for the whole of creation, or only what follows after Jesus’ going to the Father. From the experience of praying for ancestors, we can begin to see that once we are baptized into the Body of Christ, we believe we do receive the gift of being able to intercede for those who have gone before us just as Jesus is considered to be a “New Adam,” a new progenitor, replacing Adam, of all humanity (1 Cor 15:20-28). As we deepen our union with Christ who is God and human, we share in his healing of those who came before us. We do this by choosing to be transformed in Christ and modeling the new creation, the new divine family Jesus has earned for us. This is not just grace, which Jesus has already “finished” earning (Jn 19:30), but a personal choice to own it as the principle of our lives in Jesus. God has empowered our “I” to be a “co-redeemer” through the interpersonal gift of the Holy Spirit who unites persons in God and now in the church if we so choose it and allow our lives to be transformed in God’s creativity.

2. God withdraws as God creates. Continuing creativity depends on one’s ability to let go of focus on oneself as we let the Holy Spirit work in us to empower life in the other. As Paul said, “death is at work in me and life in you.” (2 Cor 4:12) This, as we saw, is true of Jesus, who had to withdraw for the Holy Spirit to come to us (Jn 16:7), and it is also true for our ministry to others as we see in Theophostic ministry and Immanuel Healing, as well as other ministries that focus on the deep Self, our “god-connection” within, as the guide to healing.¹⁴ This is also true of mature parents who don’t tie their children to their needs, but release them to their true God-given call.¹⁵

3. As union with God grows, so does independence. Ongoing creativity consists in this continuing dialectic or interchange between the infinite and the finite and between finite beings (*tele*). Scripturally this is a principle of spiritual growth as I illustrate in my stages of spiritual growth based on the Old and New Testaments. The closer we get to the fulfillment of spiritual growth, the more individuated we become as well as the more united. Jesus prayed that we would be one as he is in the Father and the Father is in him, and he and the Father are so different personally that Jesus could experience our abandonment from God on the cross (Mk 15:24; Mt 27:46). The final culmination of God’s intention for us is often experienced as a “dark night” as God restores us to our original goal to be “holy and blameless” as Eph 1:4 says.

4. In God spontaneity and creativity are always united. The more these principles are united in human action, the more truly creative will we be. The more we are united to Jesus in his cross, as we see in the lives of the saints like Padre Pio, and Mother Teresa, the more we will bear abundant fruit. As we share Jesus’ sufferings with him, so we will give birth to more believers. See Is 54:1: “More numerous are the children of the deserted wife than those who have a husband.” Jesus is the ultimate example of this, as his death for us gave rise to the mission to the gentiles. As Paul wrote, those that he has “fathered” in the faith are his glory (1 Cor 4:15; 1Th 2:20), and he continues to pray that

they be “born again” into this new life (Gal 4:19), for, as to the Corinthians, “death is at work in me and life in you.” (2 Cor 4:12)

5. The goal of healing is to increase spontaneity-creativity in humans and humankind, which will result in increased joy. Jesus prays that in him we might have joy, complete joy. (Jn 15:11) That joy will come when we remain in Jesus’ love as he remains in the Father’s love. If we remain in Jesus’ love, we can ask the Father for whatever we will, and it will be given (Jn 15:16). Remaining in God’s love is exactly what would increase spontaneity-creativity, for God’s love is free and freeing, and always furthers creation. This is what God intended in the beginning for Adam and Eve, and what God has restored through Jesus’ death/resurrection/sending of the Spirit. Through Jesus death and resurrection and our Baptism, we have been given a new Adam (Jesus) and Eve (his mother and the Holy Spirit), which re-grounds us in the ongoing creativity of God. What we choose in that Spirit will be given.

Footnotes

¹ This quote is from a recording by J. L. Moreno, “The Words of the Father”

² See J. L. Moreno, *The Words of the Father* (1941) quoted from 2011 edition, The Northwest Psychodrama Association), pp. 23-36 passim

³ See J. L. Moreno, *Handbook of Sociometry*, (1968) Vol. V, No 3-4, p. 6.

⁴ See J. L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive? A New Approach to the Problem of Human Interrelations*. (1934) (Washington, D.C.: Nervous and Mental Diseases Publishing Co.), p. xxxix.

⁵ See *The Words of the Father*, *op.cit.*, pp 32-33.

⁶ See Mimeographed notes, p.13; also in *Psychodrama III*, pp. 21-22.

⁷ *Handbook of Sociometry*, Vol V, *op. cit.*, pp 8-9

⁸ See *Words of the Father*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

¹⁰ See Koestler, Arthur, (1964). *The Act of Creation: A Study of the conscious and unconscious in science and art*. (N.Y.: Dell Publ. Co), p. 565.

¹¹ See Sears, Robert T. (1983), “Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems,” in *Journal of Christian Healing*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 10-23.

¹² *Words of the Father*, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180.

¹³ *Who Shall Survive*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁴ See, for example, Richard Schwartz, “Releasing the Soul”, in Froma Walsh, (1999). *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*, (N. Y.: Guilford Press), .pp. 223-239.

¹⁵ See Sears, Robert T. (2016) “Theology of Prayer: A Presentation from the *ACTheals* International Conference September, 2016, *Journal of Christian Healing*, vol 32, 2, pp.5-16, here p.9.

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