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Ethics and Pedagogy: The Pedagogical Thought of Jacek Woroniecki in Relation to Contemporary Education

ABSTRACT

The article addresses the pedagogical achievements of Jacek Woroniecki. Reference is made to his works, in which he made ethics and the moral aspect the basic manifestation of educational activity. Guided by a concern for the proper moral level of people in all manifestations of their lives, Woroniecki created a body of work and thinking from which we can draw, regardless of the current conditions. The reflections resulting from them, prompting the reader to build morally good relationships between educators and pupil, make the subjectivity of a human being the basic paradigm of education, which is so important and inalienable in today's reality as well.

The subject of this article is therefore the topicality of Woroniecki's views in relation to the contemporary space of educational influence. It points to the very important aspect of the integrity of ethics and pedagogy, which the thinker raises to constitute a pillar of his pedagogy, or more precisely, of aretology, a synthesis of the humanism of Greek *paideia* and Christian pedagogy. A separate section is devoted to epistemological references to the idea of *paedagogia perennis*, pointing to the cognitive inseparability of philosophy and pedagogy and—in relation to pedagogical practice—of upbringing

KEYWORDS

pedagogy, education, virtue ethics, virtue theory, moral education, Jacek Woroniecki

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and education. Taking into consideration the need for contemporary educators to constantly search for new educational paths, to take sometimes difficult directions in their professional practice, Woroniecki's classic thought in the world of relativized values may turn out to be "the path leading man to moral maturity." Woroniecki's achievements in this respect definitely have a great, timeless pedagogical value.

Introduction

The essence of pedagogy is
to teach the student how to "want"—how to properly want.
(Woroniecki 1961a: 196)

Searching for the idea of *paedagogiae perennis* in the contemporary model of education, which is the objective of this article, is to encourage the readers to receive the thought of Jacek Woroniecki, one of the classics of Polish pedagogical ethics, irrespective of the historical context of his works. The following considerations constitute an attempt to present the universal nature of the Dominican priest's theory due to its educational meaning. The cognitive realism emerging from Woroniecki's thought, which makes the pedagogy of virtues the foundation of teaching and upbringing, may encourage the readers to reflect on the current educational reality.

At present, due to the transformation of social life, the scientific and technological progress, as well as consequences of those processes in a human being's work and environment, the necessity for changes in education is often discussed, as schools are to prepare a young person for functioning in the world full of new civilization challenges. Such reflections have, for example, been included in educational strategies of contemporary international educational reports (Klim-Klimaszewska 2011; Komisja Europejska 1997). Searching for solutions results in the adoption of the methodology called "*rezolutyka*" [*resolutique*] (Botkin, Elmandjra, Mazlitza 1982) as the only effective strategy of solving contemporary problems. The process of education and upbringing can no longer boil down to providing students with knowledge. It should also provide them with a holistic view of the world. Some pedagogues postulate the idea of involvement into Christian humanism based on human solidarity, as well as

affirmation of family, group and territorial identity. The foundation of these aims is the call for valorizing the ethical and cultural aspect of education. Also, in 2019, pope Francis suggested that the educational curriculum should be filled with the idea and rhetoric of new humanism (Ojciec Święty Franciszek 2020). In the opinion of the pope, the contemporary world needs education that makes it possible to provide the space for the “culture of a meeting” characterized by open and true relationships among people. Education perceived in this way is to be based on four pillars: “study to know, to act, to live together, and, first and foremost, to be” (Delors 1998). Thus, the holistic approach to education is to be focused on a person’s development, on their “flourishing of *be*,” in the whole richness of their personality and in various forms of expression and involvement in building the individual identity. Such education is to give life individual meaning and functioning in the subjective standard (Klim-Klimaszewska 2011: 9).

As the basic assumption of personalistic pedagogy, subjectivity in education is expressed in a free response to truth, in love and in supporting the student in the development of his/her personality (Chudy 2007: 27). Also, freedom in education is independence, deciding about oneself and responsibility for one’s own development, including education. Such self-education is an inseparable determinant of subjective education, becoming its synonym. A similar interpretation of self-education was already made in the first half of the 20th century by Jacek (Adam) Woroniecki (1878–1949) who said that “education is, in fact, self-education” (Woroniecki 1961c: 24).

The universal nature of Woroniecki’s ideas with reference to contemporary educational and upbringing reality makes his pedagogy valid in each time. Thus, within the last few years, his pedagogical texts have become of great cognitive and research interest to many people interested in the topic. Woroniecki’s works are republished¹, and new texts on his educational ideas are written. Particularly

1 In particular, it is worth mentioning the new, three-volume edition of Woroniecki’s fundamental work: *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza* [*Catholic Educational Ethics*] (Fundacja Servire Veritati Instytut Edukacji Narodowej, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2014; earlier edition in 2013). The full list of Woroniecki’s publications can be found in: Mazur, Kiereś, Skrzyniarz, Płazińska 2019; Bareła 1959; Filipiak 2000: 277–297; Majewska 2006: 157–174.

valuable are those focused on aretological pedagogy in which the author gave virtues an educational meaning (Krasnodębski 2009b: 29–30; Boużyk 2015: 221–240). Thus, it is worth reaching for their inspiration for didactic or educational work and reading them anew (Krasnodębski 2009a: 127). The fact that the teachings proclaimed almost a hundred years ago are still valid today can be confirmed by the words of Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec: “Woroniecki’s work presents the everlasting truth about a human being, their lives and related moral problems” (Krąpiec 2000: VIII).

Ethics and pedagogy

Woroniecki’s pedagogy is based on existential and epistemic realism, and it proclaims the necessity for integral and universal education and upbringing of a human being. That is why, in his opinion, pedagogy cannot be separated from philosophical anthropology and ethics which outline the image of who a person is and what moral good is, and thus determine the objective of pedagogy. This determines the complexity and multithreaded nature of our existence, but it also shapes modern pedagogical dilemmas. Therefore, if we are to become the continuators of Woroniecki’s thought, “we must discover the complexity of the space in which a person is being upgraded,” as Wanda Kamińska says (Kamińska 2001: 138). This will be possible due to the knowledge of other sciences, i.e. contemporary philosophical anthropology, ethics, sociology, cultural studies or psychology. Such knowledge makes pedagogy an interdisciplinary science. Woroniecki talked about this many times, proving that despite the separateness of pedagogy as a science, its full discovery may only occur if we use ethical and psychological reflection. “It is those spheres of intellectual reflection, so complex and consistent in their searches, that formulate today’s widely understood *status quo* of pedagogy” (Kamińska 2001: 138). This confirms the awareness of the signs of the time and reflection on trends maintained in culture and philosophy, and, in consequence, also in science and social life. Woroniecki also had this knowledge while formulating his pedagogical thought. This awareness led him to suggest the common building of the *paedagogiae perennis* idea, and this is what we should try to implement as modern educators.

Contemporary education also searches for many new paths. According to Elżbieta Wolicka, “pluralism typical of the modern landscape of knowledge is not an obstacle in aiming at the idea of common philosophizing” (Wolicka 1997: 118–119), What is more, such multitude may result in the right conclusions that may lead us to the area of *philosophiae perennis*, and then—*paedagogiae perennis*” (Kamińska 2001: 143).

It is characteristic that the pedagogy of Woroniecki has the features of “practical ethics,” i.e. a part of philosophy the task of which is to recreate a human being from within (Woroniecki 2013: 329). Woroniecki evaluates ethics in the context of its educational usefulness. In his opinion,

education is one of important aspects of ethics and determinants of its value; ethics is only good and true [...] if it not only teaches about good and bad acts, but also about attitudes towards them, and about virtues and vices; about how to attain virtues and how to avoid and become free from vices (Woroniecki 2013: 329).

Woroniecki’s reflections on ethics are built around the moral subject, and they are not focused on the correctness of applying abstract principles, which makes his considerations compliant with those of modern ethicists who refer to virtue as the basic moral category. Woroniecki’s ethics is centered around a human being, and not around a collection of norms and laws. The same attitude is shown by contemporary supporters of virtue ethics who are against formulating universal moral principles as the basic criteria of moral valuation. They assume that moral subjects and decisions or situation choices are so individual and complex that they cannot be subject to the same rules (MacIntyre 1996). In this regard, the only determinants respected by the ethicists of virtues are so-called principles of virtue (e.g. the principle of being honest, loyal, fair) which are not so universal and abstract as those suggested by the ethicists of principles (Szutta 2013).

Since Woroniecki placed a person in the center of his attention, in his ethics he approached the contemporary paradigm of pedagogy, i.e. paedocentrism. At the same time, he pointed to the interdependency of those sciences. In his approach, without axiology there is no auxology in upbringing and education. He suggested returning to the interpretation of these sciences as identical, as in pedagogical

activity such perception seems to be a necessary warrant and basis of aiming at the holistic search for a person's educational structure.² Woroniecki emphasized this directly at the beginning of *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*:

Giving my work [...] the title: *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza*, I wanted to strongly emphasize what constitutes its main thought, i.e. the inseparable connection between ethics and pedagogy that exists in the Catholic doctrine. Pedagogy, as a separate science with its own inner unity, does not exist; it is—in terms of education—one of the main constituents of ethics, and for a moralist there is nothing more important than bearing in mind this organic connection that is between them (Woroniecki 2013: 7).

What Woroniecki finds important is that in the connection between those two sciences the content is important, and not only the form. At the moment, theoreticians of education who deal with the relationship between pedagogy and ethics, usually emphasize their close connection (e.g.: Ablewicz 2003; Brighouse 2009; Cichoń 1996; Homplewicz 1996; Leś 2017; Morszczyńska 2009; Ostrowska 2006). According to these authors, pedagogy is an axiological-normative science which, in the descriptive and explanatory layer, deals with educational facts, but in normative categories, i.e. in what these facts should be like: “it is not a science *sensu stricto* (a natural science), but a normative system based on philosophical premises (especially on philosophical anthropology)” (Leś 2017: 32).

Similarly, Woroniecki's pedagogy, which perceives a human being as a central point of educational and upbringing influences, carries out tasks provided by philosophy. In his idea, “*paideia*, which draws on the output of Christian thought and the classical Greek philosophy, combines an individual and the society; creative development and respect for universal norms, into a harmonious whole”

2 In his considerations, Woroniecki pointed to negative consequences of not interpreting ethics and pedagogy as sciences standing together to achieve the common aim, i.e. integral education. Their separation may lead to pseudo-educational influences on a human being's personality. “We have already emphasized that separation of ethics and pedagogy, which started in the 16th century, had bad influence on both them. Now it is time to consider this issue and to discuss, *ex professo*, that component of our moral behaviour that is to provide it with its steadiness and effectiveness, i.e. to work out the general outline of a person's educational structure” (Woroniecki 2013: 329).

(Gałkowski 1998: 118). At the same time, Woroniecki suggests how we should perceive the ideals of education. He describes them as follows: „ideals are signposts, and signposts show how to reach destination” (Woroniecki 2013: 65). Thus, the objective of education is giving the student the strength of will due to which he/she will be able to fulfill the objective aims of his/her life. The essence of pedagogy is to teach the student how to “want”—how to want something in a proper manner (Woroniecki 1961a: 196), i.e. to make his/her will strong enough to choose objective good, i.e. “truth in good.” Therefore, such pedagogy is a science that is practical and oriented at life (Woroniecki 1961c: 11), because, in everyday life a person needs food, but also wisdom, prudence, moderation, justice, and patience. For Woroniecki, education also has a religious dimension because a person’s objective includes the supernatural order (Woroniecki 1961b: 108–152; Woroniecki 1930). Woroniecki’s works fall within the scope of Catholic pedagogy which we perceive as a scientific system of teaching and upbringing that is compliant with Christian theology and philosophy, and that is “closely connected with them and formulating its principles from educational experience viewed in their light” (Woroniecki 1961c: 12–13; cf. Albański 2001: 147–148).

Woroniecki’s educational concept assumes integral upbringing and education. He offers that concept to everyone who is subject to these processes. Also, the concept is related to the idea of upbringing teaching because

harmonious [...] cooperation between upbringing and education is absolutely necessary. Here is the weak side of pedagogy of the last centuries in almost all intellectual trends: teaching of the mind was perceived as crucial, and upbringing, with its developmental laws, became less important (Woroniecki 2013: 344–346).

This is pedagogy which emphasizes the importance of building a personal relationship between the teacher and the student. It includes the postulate of personal and social improvement of people within the scope of moral competences.

“Truth in good”—education in the cotemporary world

Integral pedagogy is concerned with a person’s development and moral shaping of his/her will and character (Woroniecki 1961c: 17; Gałkowski 2003: 57–83). That is why, Woroniecki believes that moral development is the basic warrant of a human being’s inner freedom, and the above-mentioned moral competences, closely connected with doing good, are important for the shape of social contacts (Boużyk 2016b: 236). For Woroniecki good was the superior value in building all interpersonal relationships, and it was the foundation of educational influences. The principle of a person of “beautiful good” (gr.—*kalos kagathos*), which the author introduced into the reality of social life in the interwar period, must be transferred by contemporary pedagogues into the reality of modern education and culture. Good perceived in this way makes it possible for us to go beyond the biological dimension of human existence, both in individual and social dimension. Such an idea has also been promoted by other thinkers. John Paul II said that “all man’s ‘having’ is important for culture, is a factor creative of culture, only to the extent to which man, through his ‘having,’ can at the same time ‘be’ more fully as a man, become more fully a man in all the dimensions of his existence” (John Paul II 1997: 270). Doing good and being good in the community dimension builds social unity and bonds, creating the intergenerational civilization output irrespective of the time in which we are to exist. Irrespective of the fact that tradition, including educational one, which is being formed in this way, constantly evolves, such tradition is maintained and passed from generation to generation, which makes a person rooted in their community life (Kuraciński 2005: 421). This spiritual dimension of education and upbringing in Woroniecki’s pedagogy is particularly valid nowadays. Zofia Zdybicka also claims that “first of all, spiritual culture, which includes four basic and interconnected areas: cognition (education), morality, art and religion, where cognition plays the fundamental role” (Zdybicka 1995: 76), is one of the key dimensions of individual identity. And any limitations in a person’s self-creation and fulfillment of his/her cognitive abilities and spiritual potentiality, restrict the cultural humanitarianism.

In the present reality of mass culture the form and content of which often alienate a person from the circle of values that belong to classical culture that prefers the ideal of a man, but, at the same time, requires effort, reasonable will and creative involvement in self-fulfillment, people are often led to axiological emptiness and loss of the connection with social reality. Through the visual transfer of contents, which does not require increased intellectual effort and is satisfied with shallow perception, popular culture builds individual consciousness which functions accordingly, i.e. on a low level. Such culture makes individuals isolated and lonely, or even symbolically imprisoned. It makes a man a recipient only, which forces him to passive perception. As a result, creative searches and social interactions are scarce, which makes an individual excluded from the culture-forming process and may eventually lead to cultural reductionism and human gap (Botkin, Elmandjra, Mazlitza 1982). And, irrespective of the fact that each cultural sign “comes from a human being,” “social alienation and enslavement in the artifact of virtual reality makes it impossible to achieve real cultural creativity perceived as transforming one’s own nature in the process of its intellectualization” (Krapiec 1982: 121). This phenomenon is accompanied by eliminating universal and permanent moral foundations, as well as “rationalism void of axiology and religious uncertainty” (Sztompka 1997: 11).

While defining modern society, Maria Boużyk enumerates its features, such as individualism, as well as richness of worldview differences, professional and educational interests or lifestyles, and so-called social mobility. At the same time, the author emphasizes that “these determinants of modernism need connection with the field of moral values, which is not only confirmed by contemporary pedagogues, but also by ethicists, including ethicists of virtue” (Boużyk 2016b: 236; see also: Śleziński 2016; Szewczak 2020; Nowak, Magier, Szewczak 2010: 7–15).

It is the same with Woroniecki, who, referring to Thomism in his ethics, acknowledged the existence of objective moral principles, and, in pedagogy, particularly appreciated the role of faith in the internal formation of a human being (Woroniecki 2002). Through faith, one can make an educational effort in order to protect the good of a person, using the suggestions of virtue ethics, i.e. the ethics of character, which is today perceived as one of the most important ethical

theories (Szutta 2013; Boużyk 2016b: 232–234). Especially now, in the modern educational space, which is so closely connected with technological progress that often implies ambivalence of values, this theory must be analyzed by today’s pedagogues. Woroniecki, by giving pedagogical meaning to the theory of virtues and by calling it the pedagogy of virtues, in a way worked out a remedy for the current cognitive and moral relativism, and especially for the decline of the authority of truth (Krasnodębski 2009b: 30, 57). By calling a man’s education an act of improvement through virtues, Woroniecki, at the same time, emphasized that it cannot be a process of ideologization or manipulation, or a form of training that takes the form of pseudo-upbringing (Woroniecki 1947: 28–36, 165–174; see Andrzejuk 2000). His ethics, anthropology and pedagogy are full of the concern for making a person able to rule oneself and people he/she takes care of (Skrzydlewski 2020; Andrzejuk 2000). Thus, education, “that difficult, but interesting work on forming characters [...], should always follow one factor with which other fields of human activity fail to deal with such an intensity, i.e. with the student’s free will” (Woroniecki 1961a: 195–196). That is why, Woroniecki defines will as the power of spiritual desire, and the proper exercising of power over the pupil is the subject of his considerations (Woroniecki 1961d: 59–92). In traditional pedagogy, education of a human being was strictly connected with exercising power over him/her. However, Woroniecki perceives such education as a form of humiliation, injustice and great evil, and when it actually takes place, this is based on a utilitarian compromise or violence, blackmail or dominance. In this case, power is an immoral phenomenon that can even take the form of self-restriction. Woroniecki notices that anthropological individualism would like to change all kinds of power into a spontaneous act of free, causeless expression, in which the first and most precious value is authenticity and involvement, selflessness and autonomy (Skrzydlewski 2020). In a traditional approach, power is in conflict with voluntary achievement of an aim (good) because “it is to take place not only reasonably, but also freely; because the aim must be wanted and loved by the one who does something for it” (Woroniecki 1947: 165–174).

What is more, individualism and egotism, which are so strongly present in pedagogy and culture, and which force a man to do good for himself and his own freedom of action, in the very existence of

power of one person over another see a kind of enslavement or violence (Skrzydlewski 2020: 138–139). Thus, according to Woroniecki, what is necessary in the process of education is the selection of “truth in good” and doing good, which may only take place through mastering the intellect and the will. This requires constant effort to choose what is true and good (Woroniecki 1999: 363).

Aretological pedagogy as a path to moral maturity

In the opinion of Woroniecki, the existence of moral order is a necessary condition for justifying the purposefulness of the process of upbringing and education. “Who disagrees with that superiority [of the moral law], loses any logical bases for judging people and directing them; the whole social order collapses, and even the ability to raise new generation declines” (Woroniecki 2013: 294).

In the modern search for the best educational directions, the need to return to valuations such as Aristotelian ones, is emphasized (Szewczak 2020: 99). In this approach, aretological pedagogy of Woroniecki may be very helpful. In the context of education, this concept defends the absolute nature of good. By referring to the assumptions of such pedagogy, we can improve our knowledge of the moral condition of the contemporary society and recognize the mechanisms of human behaviors in various situations of life. Woroniecki interprets these mechanisms as “enabling powers responsible for desire—both related to senses (emotions) and to the intellect (will)—to act” (Woroniecki 2013: 344–346). He gives those powers a nature of internal abilities to act, calling them virtues. For Woroniecki, a virtue is a morally positive ability. In his works, Woroniecki uses the words “virtue” and “ability” interchangeably, which modern pedagogues find acceptable as these notions are identical from the perspective of moral education (Gałkowski 1998).

The system of virtues adopted by Woroniecki combines cardinal virtues, elaborated by Plato, with theological virtues. It is related to all human powers. Each power is supported by a cardinal virtue that enables that power to act. The superior cardinal virtue, i.e. prudence, which is described as *auriga virtutum*, is perceived by Woroniecki as particularly important in the educational system. Prudence is, “in a way, part of each of the other virtues” (Woroniecki 1923: 235; see:

Polak 2007: 82–90; Szewczak 2020: 103–106) and models the whole behavior of a human being. It makes it possible to maintain the autonomy of the intellect in choosing resources to achieve the proper aim. However, the complexity of prudence is a great challenge for the participants of the educational process. The teacher should focus his/her actions on the intellect and will of the student while shaping the real attitude towards the reality among the youngest ones. Woroniecki called the latter skill perceptiveness (Szewczak 2020: 105). This issue may be analyzed in the context of today’s information society created by the modern mass media. In the world in which the difference between reality and fiction is blurred, perceptiveness understood as the awareness of perceiving and receiving the environment in which a person functions makes it possible for them to make good choices. Thus, abilities require moral and intellectual effort from us. This belief in combining knowledge and action is typical of Woroniecki’s approach (Gałkowski 2000: 83–84; Boużyk 2016a: 359). A good use of power was to result from the will and the intellect. However, in order to be able to regulate one’s own behavior, we cannot neglect moral virtues even for a minute. Woroniecki emphasizes that

without prudence, persistence, moderation and honesty we cannot do anything right, so these features should be active in each moment of our life. Where they are not present, sooner or later vices appear that will exert their destructive influence on the course of moral behavior. Taking into account the internal solidarity which connects all virtues, the lack of one of them [...] exerts destructive influence on other virtues, as each of them is highly dependent on the moral development of the others (Woroniecki 2013: 342–343).

Such unity and inseparability of all virtues, which excludes the development of moral vices, is characteristic of Woroniecki’s ethics and *paideia*, forming the “everlasting theory of education called *paedagogia perennis*” (Krasnodębski 2009b: 31). Thus, the basis for the unity of a man’s virtues is his existential unity (Krapiec 1991: 229). The achievement of this status through the acquisition of abilities by the student results in that he/she attains independence and intellectual-moral autonomy. For Woroniecki, making it possible for the student to decide about themselves in abilities, determines the way of understanding the process of education and upbringing (Woroniecki 2013: 319). For a philosopher, combining those two dimensions

of education on the level of theoretical considerations and practical instructions is necessary in “leading a person towards maturity” (Bouzyk 2015: 226). On the path to this stage we need

wisdom, and not only knowledge or erudition concerning a human being and his/her education. Wisdom, which enables us to be open to the person we meet and make personal relationships with him/her. What is needed is the cooperation between the educator and the student, i.e. their mutual relationship (Krasnodębski 2009b: 42).

Within the scope of pedagogical relationships that were built, the intensity of interactions occurring in this process depends on the personality of the teacher (Albański 2001: 150). Among many traits of a teacher Woroniecki enumerates patience, joy, good, and persistence. The latter is usually associated with patience. It makes one undertake difficult tasks and sacrifice to achieve a goal in future. Persistence falls within the category of the virtue of fortitude because it controls anger resulting from one’s failures and defeats. Thus, this is a virtue that includes “long sightedness and the ability to wait, and, as such, it takes the form of a personal relationship of hope that is a relationship of persevering in good” (Woroniecki 1961a: 189–200). For each teacher, the student’s good is a superior value in formulating educational and upbringing objectives irrespective of the time in which they both live.

Summary

Woroniecki wants to educate a person in a holistic manner, towards one goal, i.e. good. He perceives good itself in the Aristotelian manner, i.e. as a personal optimum. Just like in the thought of the ancient thinker, moral maturity, which is the goal of educational efforts, in this case means a living model of a good and wise man. Thus, Woroniecki’s ethics is of empirical nature, contrary to the ethics of Socrates or Plato for whom it is intellectual or, actually, deductive. In the opinion of the Dominican thinker, pedagogy, as part of aretology, should aim at good understood in a realistic manner, i.e. good which is possible to attain. In the pedagogical approach, Woroniecki’s concept of virtues became a signpost; a form of self-improvement; an everlasting theory of education (*paedagogia perennis*). However, in

the contemporary reality, restoration of the proper meaning of good and virtue as normative categories is not an easy task. Woroniecki's "moral order," which is the basis of education and upbringing, seems to be a concept that is a response to the modern crisis of education caused by, i.a. ambivalent perception of the world of values. However, the adoption of such model of education would require changing the function of the contemporary school. Separating education from upbringing and emphasizing the former in the system of education are, according to the Dominican priest, the greatest obstacles in building *paideia*. The virtue pedagogy is volitional, and its task is to arouse the person's desire for conscious being and their "wanting," i.e. aiming at self-education. However, this task is only possible in a school which brings the student up, i.e. a school focused, in the first place, on the integrally perceived good of a human being.

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