

# No Man Is an Island: The Individual and Society from an Orgonomic Viewpoint

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## Development of Social Armor

Both Freud and Reich studied the relationship between the individual, society and health, but their understanding and views were different. Freud thought that society was immutable, unchangeable, and that people were inherently deficient and had to adapt, had to be guided and molded to fit society. He thought that the individual through sublimation could find outlets that were compatible with social structure to express and satisfy his/her needs. He felt that society provided sufficient, infinite activities for this. Reich broke with Freud over these basic concepts.

Reich saw society as unhealthy, in need of change and not immutable, and thought that individuals were neurotic as a consequence of having lived in and been shaped by an armored society. The neurotic human thus is an aberrant form of life. In Reich's view, with a healthy intrauterine environment culminating in an untraumatizing birth, the human organism enters the world a healthy infant. The healthy infant has the capacity to grow, experience joy, pleasure, anger, and fear; manage the vicissitudes of life; make rational choices; and achieve satisfaction. The infant, however, is also dependent on those around him or her: the mother, father, family, community. And the society surrounding procreation and gestation is ill. The society receiving the infant is poorly attuned, seriously out of sync with, destructive, and sadistic toward the young organism. The natural needs of young, emerging life and the neurotic needs of the already adapted, armored, established, sick individuals collide: the new life is shaped through social forces to the culture. Society remains stable and life-long misery perpetuates. Baker following Reich states,

"We must remember that the child originally is not harsh, he is made so" (Baker 1967, page 14). In Reich's view, it is possible and necessary though difficult to change society to allow life-positive functioning and support health in humans.

Reich thought that people began to armor when they became introspective and aware of themselves and that the "awareness of self perception as an object of attention produced a split" (Baker 1967, page 30). People became frightened, and they armored to control their fear and inner sensations. It is thought that armor began before recorded history, but when and how?

Konia (2007) has expanded the study of the possible origin of armor and humans' panic-filled resistance towards knowledge about themselves. He states that when bipedal locomotion, the vocal apparatus and the opposable thumb appeared 4-5 million years ago, the brain had not yet reached modern size, and "human armor as we know it had not yet appeared" (page 3). He also notes that the fact discovered by paleontologists that upright locomotion and speech occurred *prior to increased brain size* is important in showing that function precedes and determines structure, as it does in all of nature. In describing the influence that the development of the opposable thumb and vocal apparatus had on human functioning and, subsequently, on the structural development of the brain, Konia states:

The prehensile upper limb with opposable thumb, grasping of the hands, and comprehension, grasping of an idea, were expansive functions that attracted and excited each other and led to a dramatic increase in the range of human function.... From the opposable thumb, there was an expansion of manual dexterity leading to tool making, artisanship and artistic expression. From the ability to vocalize, language developed, and with that, the ability to reason. In addition, human beings developed the ability to sing. (pages 3-4)<sup>1</sup>

Thus, manual and vocal movements increased excitation and perception, which stimulated the brain toward growth in shape and size, particularly the reticular activating system.

<sup>1</sup> He remarks that birds are also bipedal. Other research (*Science News*) shows that chickens were the first besides man to use sounds to mean specific things.

Konia points out that as the brain grew from the increase in perceptual and excitatory functions, there was a corresponding increase in organotic charge in the brain. These developments were responsible for the appearance of consciousness and allowed brain functioning to dissociate into irrational thinking and thoughts against the self, rather than to stay with its functions of reason, rational thinking and survival. Konia hypothesizes, "The awareness of self perception made it possible for consciousness to be turned in on the self. This resulted in a disturbance in consciousness (self-consciousness) and, for the first time, armor formation." (ibid., page 5)

Looking at vocalization and respiratory functioning, Konia's postulates another evolutionary development. He states that when speech became a part of human functioning, the vital function of respiration came under voluntary control. By not breathing humans could "voluntarily *hold on* to the conscious state ... and ... [oppose] the loss of consciousness accompanying the sexual orgasm." (ibid., page 6) Thus, setting the muscular contractions and postural changes necessary to achieve the holding back of breathing on a chronic basis, people decreased their frightening sensations and began to function unnaturally-they armored in a way unique to humans.

Let's look more closely at vocalization, emotion, respiratory functioning and society. An infant is born. Is she quiet? Maybe so, or maybe not, depending on the circumstances, but sooner or later she will make sounds to express her needs. What sounds does the growing infant make? Does she cry, scream, coo, and gurgle? More or less? And how does the social world respond? Depending on the infant, a variety and range of sounds are heard-muffled or lusty cries; full, vigorous expression; whimpering; the quick inhaling of breath designed to stop crying. What do humans around her hear? Do they hear what she is "saying" and expressing? Is the infant's wordless vocal expression responded to with warmth and understanding by caretakers? Or is the expression ignored and rebuffed or the infant treated with malice, frightened, and stopped forcibly from vocalizing by pacifiers, jiggling, shaking, hissing, yelling, and being left alone? Society's response to

vocalization leads to a reaction in the infant that can form the basis for an armored pattern dictated by that society's norms. Babies manage to inhibit natural vocalization and crying by developing a chronic pattern of involuntarily holding of their breath. Contracting the chest and diaphragm and jaw at this early stage of development has significant lasting effects and limits the organism's capacity to expand without fear, feel pleasure, express emotion, and communicate with others. Development of vocalization is a prime example of the interface between individual and society that leads not just to the specific language (set of sounds) that the infant develops, but also to specific abiding patterns of biophysical functioning. Vocalization in infancy is a significant time for social pinpricks<sup>2</sup> to begin to create armor and shape the individual to suit the culture.

Manual dexterity, tool-making, vocalization, and cognition involve intricate ways of relating and communicating; they support and increase social functioning, learning, and the sharing of knowledge and information. They have also played a role in the development of defensive functioning and social armor.

With consciousness of the self, then armor and self-focus, Konia concludes, "Everything followed its own inner logic of life-negative design... Destructiveness was no longer only in the service of individual survival. Now it [came to be] in the service of protecting an individual's or a group's way of life" (Konia 2007, pages 6-7). Rather than defensively running as a four-legged animal might, man now could use tools and thought "adapted into defensive weaponry and ideologies of progressively greater degrees of sophistication in an attempt to protect himself and to discharge energy trapped in the armor. Intellectualism and thinking defensively became advantages" (page 7).

Evolutionary material helps us see what sets humans apart from nature, turned against their own nature, estranged from the quality

<sup>2</sup> Reich showed in an experiment that if an ameba is attacked repeatedly by its environment in the form of a pinprick, its natural, normal movement of sending out pseudopodia, of expansion and contraction, is disturbed. It responds by expanding only cautiously and incompletely, and moving out into its environment only partially.

and intensity of their natural functions, terrified of letting go. determined to decrease sensation and natural feelings of pleasure in themselves and in others, and bent on acting out hatred.

### **Environmental Factors in Social and Individual Armor**

Life is a natural process, and orgone energy moves within and between organisms amidst the movement of surrounding free orgone energy. Hence, the human body as a natural living organism must, as Baker says, "affect and be affected by energy from outside it" (Baker 1967, page xix). Influences external to the individual human include other individuals; groups of people with various rules, laws, and habits (in sum, the culture of a society); man-made materials and systems generated by society; non-human living things (plants and other animals); natural events; and processes and energetic factors that are not understood. People feel differently in different groups of people and in different natural and artificial settings, the woods versus a shopping mall, for example. Animals, as pet owners as well as naturalists observe, behave differently or unusually in some places even when the human cannot identify the environmental differences affecting them. In a recent study of chimps, observers noted that threat gestures differed depending on the type of the community the chimps lived in (Gallucci 2007, page 8).

Different cultures show variations in patterns of armor and social functioning, such as the degree of cooperation, liveliness of spirit, attitude towards sexuality, stability or rigidity of the family, layers and stratification of society, and crime. Some connection can be drawn between the type of social structure and the health of a society. Social structures and edicts affecting child-rearing practices and attitudes towards sexuality are particularly relevant to health. Patriarchal society promotes sex-negative, sexually-restrictive attitudes as the patriarch has "ownership" or control of women. Some religions have been and are, especially today in Islamic countries, powerful and destructive shapers of social functioning. They form societies that perpetuate patriarchal social armor and solidify a particular group's ascendancy

and control. Similarly, anti-religious groups may restrict thinking and promote the control and power of certain groups over others. Currently, anti-authoritarian thinking and political correctness in the West provide a destructive atmosphere that distances people from each other and from their emotions, and weakens constructive, rational elements of society. Political correctness, reportedly designed to stop discrimination and protect the weak, in reality stops spontaneity and contact with feelings which are the basis of compassion.

In addition to specific cultural and social structures, other environmental factors of less but still certain significance influence the functioning of society. One is population density. It is estimated that 11,000 years ago there were 5 million people. In the year 1 AD, human population was 150 million; in 1835 AD, 1 billion; and in 2009, 6.786 billion (Wikipedia.org). In early human history the human species seemed to prosper with population concentration; the population increased as humans settled together in the Fertile Crescent and around other river deltas. Humans then also domesticated and cultivated plants and animals; the keeping of plants and animals more densely concentrated within a given space led to more abundant growth in the plants and animals. (This also in time led to other practices such as irrigation and tilling of the soil which increased yield.) Yet research has shown, perhaps proving the obvious, that stress levels increase and stress-related behaviors (including changes in reproductive behavior) rise in animal groups with abnormal increases in population density. Baker (1983) pointed out that the individual's awareness of inner sensations, feelings and responses and the ability to make contact with and communicate with others at a distance are more developed and sensitive amongst people living in more primitive, less densely settled areas compared to individuals in modern cities. The myriad of cues, stimuli, and movements of people around someone walking in a busy city would be overwhelming if they were all consciously perceived.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Humans living in a city adaptively armor visually and aurally in response to the sheer intensity and quantity of stimulation.

Physical conditions are often relevant to social life. Radiation levels, humidity, temperature, conditions supporting natural energetic pulsation of the atmosphere versus conditions that are "stuck" and do not allow energetic pulsation, fertile versus desert conditions, and air movement affect social functioning. Freely flowing air on hillsides creates energetic conditions different from those of stagnant swamp air in bottomlands. Inner city riots increase with the high temperatures of summer. How do society and individuals function in a highly humid, tropical climate at sea level with fertile soil compared to a high-altitude area with low humidity, no pollution, poorer soil and low population density? Consider the differences in social functioning when food is scarce and not sufficient for the population as in wartime or drought compared to times when resources are plentiful and sufficient for the community's needs. What if much versus little group cooperation is needed to provide food for a group? Different environments may bring out or dampen social neurosis. Destructive, secondary layer frustration and envy created by a sex-negative and life negative culture may be more readily acted out and rationalized in certain environments.

The destruction of the natural environment and the decreased availability of nature and natural settings to people have affected and will affect humans in ways that go beyond identified toxicities, pollution, and decreased availability of natural resources. The American Psychological Association's publication, *The Monitor on Psychology*, reports that human ecology researchers at Cornell found "that children with lots of nature nearby coped better with stressors like divorce, a grandparent's death or bullying than children with less natural environments" (Clay 2007, page 55). What happens if a society loses its natural environment, its access to and awareness of it? Reich speaks of the "meadow" as a place of reflection and awareness of perspective. What if man loses emotional contact with himself and his neighbors and has not the quiet, natural place to go to regain at least the degree of clarity possible for armored man when he is at his best; that is, when he is most in contact with himself and nature?

## **Basis for the Emotional Plague**

Armored man fights against movement not only within himself but also in others and in the environment. "What terror to make contact with the cosmos and feel the pulsating environment around him!" (Baker 1967, page xxvii). Baker continues, "Parents and teachers cannot tolerate the natural movements and functioning of childhood and adolescence. Natural ways of behaving cause them anxiety and reawaken their own sexual guilt. They therefore institute methods for stopping this natural function ..... [Right from the start] the infant is blocked in all directions from reaching out into his environment" (ibid., pages 12-13)<sup>4</sup>. Baker points out that if one observes babies birthed and raised in punitive, non-supportive situations, one could get the false sense that all babies are helpless. However, if one observes healthy babies in natural delivery one sees a different picture: these babies are quite "self-sufficient in movement and entertainment" (ibid., page 13)<sup>4</sup>. Think of how society might function if people did not start out and live as helpless, already deadened organisms.

Armored society perpetuates armor starting with the newborn. Present-day societies raise children in ways that thwart natural expression, block release of energy into the environment, disturb natural sexual development and expression, and prevent the capacity for full genital satisfaction at any age—neither charge nor discharge is allowed to be full and complete. This results in a buildup of energy, further holding back, and an increase in tension and anxiety, neurotic symptoms, psychological disturbance, and a loss of the natural sensation of sexual desire. Armored society attempts to stop any thought or sight of things that might threaten the group's way of life and their defensive thinking.

<sup>4</sup> Extending study to embryos, recent research shows that animal embryos even ones just a day old take creative action, show self care, and respond to environmental conditions in ways that may surprise. Research also shows lingering effects of trauma on embryos. Frog embryos who escaped a snake attack due to their wiles "were undersized and underpowered as tadpoles darting away from deadly fish or shrimp. And in wood frogs, youngsters that learn fear don't forage as freely or grow as fast" (Milius 2009, page 29). The self-determination, sensitivity, and responsiveness of embryos (ones referenced by Milius include various types of animals) to environmental stimuli as well as that of infants often go unrecognized.



Impulses are originally soft and tender, but when frustrated, held back, and then strong enough to get through armor, they become harsh and brutal. This brutality leads to destruction. Individually and collectively as a society, humans are destructive toward themselves and other people. Some of society's hostile, repressive measures are partly understandable as attempts to check the acting out of the sadism that comes from frustration, and in this sense social armor becomes necessary.

Other animals fight, harm, and kill, but they do so for what they need—a hawk takes a rodent for food, two birds pull on opposite ends of a piece of straw for their nests, cats growl over food, deer spar for a mate. Animals may be neurotic—they appear so in captivity, and under domesticated conditions they certainly are made to be so. Psychology lab experimenters routinely observe what is called "superstitious behavior" in chickens, pigeons, and other animals in the course of behavior modification. In the presence of experimental reward or punishment, animals repeat strange and irrelevant behaviors such as lengthening their neck or turning on one foot before the targeted behavior (pecking a bar and so on) appears, which then rewarded, increases and stabilizes as the experimenters planned. Also psychology experiments easily produced the "neurotic dog" by putting a dog in a spot he could not leave and then shocking him in the presence of a presented visual square and giving a food reward in the presence of a circle. When circle and square were then gradually modified to resemble the shape of the other until they were indistinguishable, the dog was reduced to dysfunction and lost coherent behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike animals in the wild, armored humans may be unnaturally destructive, but also they frequently lack natural aggression, do not rationally defend themselves, and do not take appropriate action. Human societies and individuals are irrationally cautious, equivocate, give up their ground, and placate unreasonable requests and demands not in their best interest, limiting their satisfaction and allowing their destruction, if not extinction.

<sup>5</sup> This took place in Pavlov's lab in 1914 as one of his students continued studies of conditioned reflexes. Pavlov considered the change in the dog's behavior "to be equivalent to an acute neurosis" (Coleman 1972, page 57).

In addition, there is in armored humans a behavior, a unique capacity that no other species has. It is the willful intent to demean, debase, and viciously destroy others and the means to carry out that intent. This behavior's only purpose is the stopping of natural movement, particularly natural sexuality. Reich called this destructive force "the emotional plague." The emotional plague operates in the social sphere and may appear in one friend to another; parents to child; hospitals and medical institutions toward birthing mothers and infants; a leader to the masses; churches to so-called "infidels"; or one race, ethnic group or country to another. After millennia of killing, maiming, butchering, torturing, and enslaving each other and destroying the vitality of nature—the water, the forests, the air societies continue to develop ever more sophisticated ways to annihilate each other and the natural world. The armored human brain pushes and enables humans to plan and control such sadistic destruction.

One of the most destructive aspects of the emotional plague is intolerance of and the attack on knowledge and learning. The emotional plague is predatory. It particularly seeks out, singles out, and persecutes individuals who study natural functioning and the human condition. Socrates was killed. Aristotle was denounced as "not holding gods in honor" and fled Athens to save his life. Galileo to stay alive had to recant his discovery that the Earth rotates around the Sun. Even so, he was sentenced to house arrest until his death, and publication of his astounding range of work was forbidden. In our time, Reich was vilified, defamed, and imprisoned, and in a 20th century democratic society his books were burned by government agents. Reich pointed out by example and in his writings (1949) that individuals who open others' eyes are persecuted in an intense way; that is, unlike the fiercest acting out and destruction in other instances, even greater social force is mobilized in these attacks. Institutions and sub-groups of society are alerted and join together, vigilance is awakened, and society reacts in a special, "frenzied way" toward any who study, support, and make available the results of

natural research and the works of gifted scientists, pioneers and serious observers of nature (Reich 1949, pages 13-50).

There are certain neurotic, armored individuals, present-day and throughout recorded history, who particularly benefit from and thrive on the suffering of others, and destroy life to relieve their own unease. They restrict others and demand compliance to their views and directives as a way of life. Due to the pattern and intensity of their armor, their character structure, they have no other choice. They disguise their sadistic behavior and justify it with moral superiority. They are particularly intolerant of any reminder of spontaneous, free flowing life and intentionally destroy whatever outside of themselves that stirs or moves deeper feeling in them. These individuals, whom Reich identified as emotional plague characters, go beyond acting out the inevitable sadism that is in everyone-the sadism that results from armor and leads to occasional eruptions of attacks on others. Baker describes plague characters as typically intelligent individuals of high charge with little capacity for genital discharge, the "bulwark of society" (Baker 1967, page xxix). They may act intensely within a small area or on a national and international level; they create and change power balances or imbalances that perpetuate their gain and others' misery. There are greater and lesser-known examples: the office gossip; the purportedly well-meaning neighbor who snoops "out of concern"; the editor who reports "true" statistics and inflammatory information; and powerful leaders like Atilla the Hun, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, perpetrators of anti-McCarthyism, and bin Laden. Note that the emotional plague and plague characters can come from any segment of society or political persuasion.

In current society, ocular armor is increasing, and muscular armor and contact with the biological core are decreasing. Greater ocular armor and less core contact result in less tolerance of pulsation and more distortion in the perception of natural movement. This suggests a likely concomitant increase in the emotional plague; that is, an increase in excited efforts to stop what is natural. This is seen, for example, in the recent, vigorous, new push to swaddle babies and use

constant pacifiers. Another example is the trend toward "scheduled" births wherein for the convenience of doctor, staff and mother, the birth date is planned in advance and labor is chemically induced accordingly. In a society driven by individuals with evermore armored brains and with social and environmental conditions further disturbing natural pulsation and perception, thoughts about society and life that are broadcast and accepted in the culture can become more inaccurate, and ideas of how to improve or conduct societal matters more disastrous.

### **Breaking the Chain of Destruction**

Given the relationship between the individual and society, improvement in the individual's life and health involves changes in society. Individual therapy can be profoundly helpful for the individual, but it is insufficient for the society. Social, not politically mandated, programs are needed to reverse the life-repressive aspects of modern culture. Revolutionary upheavals that legislate and force change too quickly, Reich pointed out, bring chaos and an even greater increase in repressive forces. Similarly, Baker states that society in general cannot function in an unarmored fashion at present (although the individual can), and certainly not until the sex-negative, life-negative aspects of culture change. Freedom peddlers are destructive. Change must come gradually.

To develop a social orgonomy program and encourage orgonomic study of problems in the social sphere is to return to Reich's early work in Europe. There, in clinics, he actively engaged with and educated people regarding sexual, social, and family problems in their daily lives. On one level, creating an effective social program, one that helps, involves emotional contact, common sense, and practical, levelheaded intervention. These commodities are in short supply. There are, however, programs in the country and around the world that are responding in a positive way to social problems: a shelter for battered women; a group home for teens; some preschool programs; village

microcredit programs; midwifery, doula, and home birth programs; visiting nurse/social workers for young mothers. This is encouraging. One such social program in rural South Carolina<sup>6</sup> was written about in the *Wall Street Journal* (McKay 2006) and reviewed in *The Journal of Orgonomy* (Whitener 2007). This program successfully reduced teenage pregnancy and the high school dropout rate and gave hope to a depressed community. Its success can be, it seems, ascribed mainly to the contactful, down-to-earth, life-positive attitude and perseverance of the director and her staff who interacted daily with students and their families in the school and in the community.

However, social programs working with little or no scientific understanding of what they are doing can go only so far—a functional understanding of the human condition is needed to accurately assess problems and to change current conditions and ease human suffering. Also, some programs of social intervention are based on erroneous information or preconceptions, and create worse problems than originally existed. For example, "A friend in need is a friend indeed" at some time, many could use a helping hand, but this attitude, as the basis of social programs, creates problems because misapplied social handouts risk killing the individual's work function. Social orgonomy studies and seeks to understand the human condition, the emotional plague, and life-negative and sex-negative culture, and offers a theoretical perspective to identify the root causes of and solutions to social problems. Orgonomy, a functional way of thinking, allows analysis of complex problems in various aspects of social living.

Changing society to promote healthy, contactful care of infants was Reich's number one social concern. Starting with prenatal and birth conditions, care of infants is the most immediate and essential area of society that needs to change in order to improve human misery and the human condition. Supporting the primacy and the intimacy of mother-infant contact, recognizing the sensitivity and exquisite liveliness of infants, and putting no irrelevant conveniences ahead of the infant's *best* interest are essential.

<sup>6</sup> The program includes every day intervention within the schools, community involvement, and open discussions by the teens (not dictated from staff). There have been other changes in behavior and outlook.



Social ergonomics can be used to envision the nature of social intervention needed but also to study and increase the working effectiveness of the program once designed. Lack of effective implementation of social programs contributes to failure worldwide. Working relationships within an organization, and communication and division of labor, essential to any working group, may be studied from a social ergonomic perspective.

Elaborate complexities, laws, "paperwork," and rules by which "good" is to be accomplished often kill programs. A teacher recently commented that the quality of present-day life is diminished by our frantic, hectic life style and that "helpful" programs that are legislated and assigned to teachers simply add to the fast, encumbered pace of life and leave less time for the teacher, child, parent, and community to talk to each other in a meaningful way. Such programs encumber engagement and distract attention from problems and solutions.

Social programs can increase society's functioning in the areas of love, work, and knowledge—the three areas Reich called "the wellsprings of life." It is also precisely these functions that are the focus of emotional plague attacks, and any social program will have to address the emotional plague. The emotional plague comes in differing forms: outright slander, personal and property destruction, persecution; and more subtle but vicious innuendo, gossip, legal edicts, "red tape," unspoken obstruction, well-voiced matters of political correctness, and bureaucratic rules. The aforementioned program in South Carolina originally made condoms available to teens at school but government rules stopped that. Undeterred and moving forward, the director gave condoms to the local barbershop where the barber keeps them on a top shelf and gives them to whomever stops by and asks, and uses the opportunity to engage the teens in conversation about their knowledge of condoms and their goals and hopes in life.

## **Summary**

Social interaction is a function dictated by nature, and it will and must occur. As a result of armor, it occurs defensively in humans. Core

impulses are frustrated and discharge prevented, and human-inflicted pain, suffering, and even torture are ever present. Society supports a state of emotional and perceptual blindness and disregard so that the true nature of social problems is not seen. Armored thought sustains and mandates sickness. The goal of the social ergonomics education and training programs is to educate and train people who will be in a position to knowledgeably work to address social problems and improve the social milieu. Social systems are hard to change. But life is resilient. Life moves, if it is not dead. If blocked in one direction, it will find another route -it is responsive. Significant changes can and have been made. The separation of church and state, the abolition of slavery, division of power within governments, and the recent changes in birth practices in some societies are profound and essential developments. Being aware, studying and deepening the understanding of natural life and of armored social forces helps current society and the next generation move toward health. Whatever armor we accumulate or break down, whatever successes or failures we have in improving social structure and functioning, we pass onto our successors, whether it be through our genes or through cultural changes we make. How we treat infants and children will allow them to either function in a more healthy way or, through armor development, leave them no choice but to continue in misery. As ocular armor increases, accuracy of perception is further jeopardized. Clear-headed observation and accurate perception of the social sphere are needed. Current social armor puts those seeking knowledge and understanding of natural functioning in danger. In these conditions someone must see, study, learn, and not be afraid to investigate matters that are at the heart of sickness. To do so, one must be able to feel and tolerate, as Reich stated, "the movement and quivering of everything from the atmosphere to your nerves" (1949, page 171). If one is afraid and does not look at social armor as the repressive, life-negative and killer of nature that it is, we all suffer. No man is an island.



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