

PEACE AND LOVE
The Violin and the Oboe

Adam Curle



THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE FOR 1977

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I OFTEN receive letters, particularly from my younger friends, which end by wishing me peace and love. Their generation, I believe, is wiser than mine, for if we can learn the true meaning of peace and love, and the significance of their relationships, many things will be revealed to us.

The ensuing lecture explores some aspects of these themes. In the hopes of making what is perhaps a compressed and clumsy argument easier to follow, I will begin by outlining the sequence of ideas.

To start with, I give a brief description of the objective qualities of peace. I move on to the more difficult question of subjective peace, describing three of its manifestations, of which only the last is entirely positive. I identify the main obstacle to attaining this form of inner peace as what I term the computer—the process by which we think and act mechanically, often unpeacefully and violently and at variance with our true natures. I then devote some attention to how we might behave if we were more closely in touch with ourselves, and conclude that the more we are so, the more deeply we experience love. But there is a powerful need to seek unity with what is beyond ourselves, a cosmic drive of which human love is a manifestation. It is through love that we find peace, and in love and peace we find the capacity for right action. But in order to achieve this to the fullest extent it is necessary to be reborn, to evolve inwardly.

It might have been expected that a lecture by someone holding a chair in peace studies would sagely analyse the global situation, suggest policies for the United Nations and our own government, denounce violence, propose panaceas for Northern Ireland and Southern Africa, and so on. Now, although I have not withdrawn from outward action I realise that the human being I am determines the value and effect of what I do; and that what I am is a function of my capacity to give and receive love, and to experience peace.

I have consciously been concerned with the quest for peace for about fifteen years. I say consciously, because I now realise that much that I had always done was a part of the same quest. There was, however, a definite period of my life when I began to concentrate my attention on war and violence and, shortly after, I became involved directly in mediation efforts in various parts of the world. But although I do not avoid this work, I now see peace as being very much more than the absence of war. An unpeaceful situation, to my mind, is one in which human beings are damaging each others' potential for fulfilment and development in any of a number of ways: not merely by killing and maiming, but by oppressing, exploiting, manipulating, cheating, making excessive demands on others, corrupting, enslaving, humiliating, deriding, frightening, or deceiving. These are all forms of violence (the etymology of the word implies the "unlawful use of force"), of violating a person, of doing wanton damage. The fact that the

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damage need not be physical in no way affects the degree of potential harm for the victim and, albeit in a different way, the perpetrator.

To widen the definition of peace so greatly may seem to make its achievement impossible. How can human affairs possibly be ordered so as to eliminate all harm? Obviously they cannot. But to the would-be peace-maker this should be taken as encouragement rather than the reverse, for whereas the great conflicts may seem grimly intractable there are many on a lesser scale which are soluble. Moreover, sometimes the vast and lethal issues are built on a foundation of many smaller and less intractable ones which, if dealt with, render them less daunting.

These unpeaceful conditions are based upon relationships dominated by injustice, or violence, or—very often—both. Peaceful conditions, to reverse the definition, would be those characterised by both justice and the absence of violence. But such a negative description is hardly adequate. We must add to it the positive qualities of mutual respect, toleration, co-operation and, above all, love. Indeed, a peaceful society could hardly exist without these, but I mention them to emphasise that peace must be positive, not merely a condition from which certain ills are absent.

So much for the outer conditions of peace. The question of defining inner or subjective peace is far more difficult. We may talk about feeling peaceful, enjoying peace of mind, finding certain places peaceful; and of course we also speak of feeling unpeaceful, and so on. These inner states are clearly very important for both our happiness and our actions, but they are nebulous, fluid and highly personal: when I say that, for example, I feel peaceful, do I mean what you mean when you say the same thing? In attempting to describe three types of experience which might all be considered as forms of inner peace, I shall try to be as precise and factual as possible, because, although we are bound to touch upon matters which are virtually ineffable or transcendental, it is good to go as far as we can on the relatively solid ground of common experience.

When we say we are feeling peaceful, or use some equivalent phrase, I believe that we may be referring, without much discrimination, to one of three levels or dimensions of feeling. These levels are separate, although it seems to me that they may overlap in certain circumstances, and that at times the second may lead naturally to the third. I would refer to these three, for brevity and clarity, as lethargy, the release of tension, and bliss.

Lethargy, which could equally be described as indolence, sloth, inactivity, passivity, a condition of being neither agitated nor excited, may be either appropriate and desirable: or the product or some excess or of physical or psychological imbalance. For example, it is good to feel "peaceful" and quiescent before going to bed, but the heavy drowsiness which follows a large Christmas dinner is much less functional—it is not a part of the process which maintains our strength by ensuring a good sleep. Still more non-functional are those heavy moods by which we are all at times over-

come for no easily identifiable reason: there is no desire for activity, one is sleepy, one's incentives are blunted. In a certain limited sense one is peaceful, but this state is hardly the psychological equivalent to the positive peace of co-operation and mutual support we look for between groups.

The peace following release from tension could also be related to satisfied desire, or the removal of worry. We may experience this in many different contexts: relaxing with friends, walking in calm and beautiful surroundings, after danger, after love-making, after reaching a difficult decision, when freed from a nagging anxiety, returning home after a journey, and so on.

This facet of inner peace consists of a quietening of those thoughts, feelings and emotions which normally to some extent keep us active and busy and on occasion tense and distracted. Perhaps most of us associate this quietening with things that are good, positive and constructive—love, companionship, beauty, or the overcoming of difficulties. But they need not be. What if we are driven, as some are, to seek release from tormenting inner stress by sexual assault, or if the worry from which we are freed came from fear of discovery in some crime; or if our desires are satisfied by great profit from a shady business deal? These are, of course, extreme cases. But most of us must recognise that we too have experienced states in which we were less inwardly restless precisely because we had done something unworthy. We have experienced a sort of peacefulness because we have got our own back on someone who annoyed us, or we have assuaged our sense of inadequacy or guilt at the expense of someone else whom we have manipulated, embarrassed, or made to feel foolish or unhappy.

This dimension of inner peace may, then, be selfish and arise from violence, but not necessarily so. The elements of love, awe, reverence, selflessness can transform it, or at least add a transcendental element. Loving God and loving our neighbours are, after all, our two greatest obligations and they may lead towards each other.

It is mainly love which, I believe, forms the bridge to the third dimension of inner peace. This form of peace is not negative, as is the lethargy characterising the first dimension; nor is it the quiet—which may be good or bad—following the release of tension of the second dimension. It is a condition of untroubled joy, strength and bliss out of which will come very effective and purposeful activity when it is required. One could say that the second form of peace is the *sequel* to activity, and the greater the inner stress leading to that activity the more was it hectic, exhausting, energy consuming, and inefficient. The third type of inner peace is the *precursor*, even the source of energy and efficiency. It appears to be one which is natural to humankind and one we have all known on rare occasions. Nevertheless, we have somehow lost much of our understanding of it.

I may be correct in believing that these three levels of peace correspond to the three kinds of happiness described by the Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. Please note that they are described in the reverse order to that in which I have described lethargy

(*Tamas*), release of tension or the fruit of action (*Rajas*), and bliss (*Sattwa*).

Who knows the Atman
Knows that happiness
Born of pure knowledge:
The joy of *Sattwa*.
Deep his delight
After strict self-schooling:
Sour toll at first
But at last what sweetness,
The end of sorrow.

Senses also
Have joy in their marriage
With things of the senses,
Sweet at first
But at last how bitter:
Steeped in *Rajas*,
That pleasure is poison.
Bred of *Tamas*
Is brutish contentment
In stupor and sloth
And obstinate error:
Its end, its beginning
Alike are delusion.

How is it that we have become ensnared by negative forms of inner peace? From a very early age, society impinges upon us, first through our parents and the pattern they impose upon our behaviour coupled with their expectations of us and increasingly through our contacts with the wider world of people and things. As a result, we become what the sociologists call socialised—that is to say, we learn to respond, and to want to respond, to social stimuli in an acceptable fashion. In the process, we all acquire our individual experiences and so build up sets of ideas and beliefs which are peculiar to ourselves. But we also all have some things in common. The first is that we bear the imprint of our society, whatever it may be: this enables us to make recognisable generalisations, though often inadequate so far as any individual is concerned, about various groups.

The second thing we have in common is that the ideas, information, prejudices, desires, needs, etc. that we receive through various media, are fed into the great computer we call our brain, the mechanism through which we experience mind. There they are stored, some lying dormant virtually forever perhaps, some constantly activated. Every circumstance of our lives, however trivial and minute, calls for a response from the computer which will, literally with the speed of light, assemble through its infinity of associative channels the information needed to make the appropriate response. In addition to the acquired information, there is no doubt

some which could be termed hereditary or instinctual which will help to shape our reactions. Thus we behave, to a large extent, automatically. Consider how we can fly, as the saying goes, into a rage and do unkind or violent things, for reasons which we afterwards recognise as petty or absurd. Consider how little careful or conscious thought goes into a casual conversation with an acquaintance at a party. The situation calls for certain things we have already learned—a tone of voice, manner, topic of conversation; we can speak with animation, joke, mention matters of current interest without reflection or much subsequent remembrance—the computer had taken over. I could use another analogy, less accurate but perhaps more illustrative—we become like an airman who has switched on the automatic pilot while he rests. But I would not wish to give the impression that the work of the computer is confined to insignificant or what we sometimes call mindless occasions, such as parties or quarrels, in which our main interests may not be engaged. It is just as much in operation when two academics are debating some controversial point in their own field. The machine responds equally to an intellectual stimulus by retrieving the appropriate information, arranging and presenting it; the stimulus will probably not, however, be wholly intellectual—there may also be the impetus of hurt pride, the desire to show off, to prove the other person illogical or ill-informed, to prop up flagging self-esteem. The computer is in operation the whole time and its operation covers every aspect of our lives—intellectual, emotional and physical. Even when we are in a condition of passivity and subjected to minimal external stimulus, the computer is, so to speak, idling. If we can stand back from ourselves at such times, we will be aware of a constant flickering flow of thoughts, feelings, memories, ideas, some pleasant, some unpleasant, as one association triggers off another.

The computer is, of course, very useful. It turns us into fairly competent machines, although some computers are less well stocked with information and the channels of association may have broken down—this, I believe, is what has happened in many cases of what we call mental illness—so that the response does not relate properly to the stimulus. But we pay a heavy price. The continuous activity of the computer uses up psychic energy, just as a normal computer uses up energy in the form of electricity, and we waste precious resources in spurts of depression, anger, self-pity, anxiety and so on. Its constant noise drowns out our ability to listen to more subtle sounds. The everlasting flow of associations drives us to unnecessary—indeed, at times frantic and obsessional—mental and physical activity. Most importantly, in the context of a discussion of peace, the fact that our computer-controlled activity is mechanical implies that violent and destructive behaviour is also automatic. Thus unpeaceful behaviour is an inescapable product of the human condition, which can be avoided only by changing that condition. I have often wondered whether this is not the psychological essence of the theological concept of original sin.

I will approach this from a slightly different direction. The chatter of our

computer makes it hard for us to hear other people. Who has not gone to a meeting where every one spoke past everyone else, and where people were so busy making their own speeches that they never listened to the person actually talking? Sometimes, in my experience, a proposal made early in a meeting is rejected because no one really heard it, but is accepted when repeated later because for some reason the group have become more able to listen. Many of the Native Americans, whom we used to call American Indians, make it a regular part of their children's education to teach them to listen. When my Native American friends came to visit me, they would sit very quietly for a few minutes. They were stilling the noise of their own thoughts and feelings so that they could better listen, not only to my words, but to my feelings, to sense my mood, and to understand what they could best do to help, encourage, or strengthen me; and this they were always able to do.

However, if one really listens to others, one also listens to oneself. By the very fact of quietening oneself, switching off the computer, which usually requires a conscious effort, a purposeful giving of attention to a task or—in this case—another person, one is in touch with the non-automatic part of the self, the part below or beyond the computer. What one then says in response to the other person constitutes a very profound contact. It is not one machine reacting to another machine, but one inner self, or whatever term one uses, communicating with another inner self. This communication may seem like a meeting on common ground, as though below the computer there were a shared base of universal knowledge. We might use fingers and a hand as an analogy. We are like fingers joined by a hand in which we have a common existence, but we have forgotten about the hand and behave as though we had been severed; thus we communicate with each other very ineffectively.

It could be argued that what I am talking about is only another more sophisticated computer. I can only say that, in so far as my experience goes, it feels quite different. Not only is it lighter, happier, more effective and constructive, and completely non-violent, but it appears to reach beyond what I thought I knew. Let me give a couple of examples. A friend was discussing a strange personal problem with me. My computer dredged up every possible scrap of relevant knowledge and experience in an attempt to say something helpful, but I could see he was increasingly disappointed by my failure to be at all constructive. I then decided I must switch off the computer and made the effort to compose myself in quietness. Very soon and without any premeditation, words simply came out of me, and I could see by my friend's expression that I had said something which had real meaning for him. A second example concerns a recent trip to America. I visited several universities and in one of them gave as many as five lectures a day, to different groups and on different topics. Since it was out of the question to do detailed preparation for them, I decided to go to the opposite extreme and give them

no advanced thought whatsoever. Before each lecture I made myself as inwardly quiet as possible, trying both to reach into my own depths and to listen to the group I was to address. Then I spoke spontaneously, and really believe that I have seldom given better talks. Moreover, at the end of what might have been gruelling days, I was perfectly fresh. I was perhaps helped in this because, being a Quaker, I am accustomed to waiting quietly for what we call "a moving of the Spirit", and I have also learned something of forms of meditation emphasising inner stillness.

I am sure it will be obvious where this discussion is leading. We are to a large extent dominated by potentially destructive automatic responses which derive from a combination of heredity and conditioning, and the first two dimensions of what we might refer to as inner peace are, apart from the saving grace of love in some, as much a part of this conditioning as is unpeacefulness. To this extent they are neither positive nor purposeful, being either a product of lethargy, or of the release of tension. If, however it is possible to get below, or beyond, what I have been calling the computer, we touch an entirely different level of our being. It can tap great springs of energy and has access to extraordinary knowledge. There is no need to debate whether this knowledge is "esoteric" or "supernatural": it is enough to recognise that there are within us and all creatures incredible mechanisms which regulate our growth and the functioning of our organs, enable us to adjust to changed conditions, mobilise our defences against disease and respond, as in the case of menstruation, to extra-terrestrial forces.

The wisdom inherent in the human organism is so amazing that we need not bother with mystifying or controversial epithets. This universal human knowledge is quite apart from the specialised knowledge stored by the computer, much of which, such as knowledge of a particular language or set of circumstances, is special to a particular person. The deeper knowledge could be thought of as an ocean in which our individualities are dissolved, so that we are in touch with—indeed, perhaps form a part of—all other human beings. Or it could be considered as something which all human beings have in common, such as two arms and legs and a head; and that when we enter our own deeper territory we can understand that same territory in others. But again, such a debate is academic. The fact is indisputable to all—which means most of us—who have experienced it and recognise that they have done so: there are within us endless sources of strength and wisdom. In addition, there are capacities for communication which go infinitely far beyond the normal exchange of verbal symbols. Once again, I would not wish to discuss whether or not this constitutes telepathy: I would simply suggest that the level beyond the computer retains the capacity to communicate in ways the computer cannot.

To the extent that we can switch off the computer and reach this more universal and far greater level of awareness, we may experience the third, and true, dimension of inner peace. By disconnecting the associative and retrieval mechanism however temporarily we achieve stillness, and in still-

ness can we experience that calm and radiant bliss, which is not only in itself delightful, but transforms our whole self and replenishes our depleted stores of energy. This peace, although infinitely restorative, is far from passive. The energy it enables us to draw on or create is given a teleological direction, because inner peace and knowledge which makes clear demands on us, coming from the same level, are one. We are enjoined to "be still and know that I am God". Am I then asserting that the third level of inner peace is the peace of God? I do not know, and can only be sure that there are many spheres of which I have no awareness. I must indeed apologise for discussing things of which I have such limited experience, but my experience, such as it is, points me in this direction and I am following the shadowy sign-posts as far as I dare without irreverent and presumptuous claims.

It seems to me that if we can approach, however briefly, this ground of our being where inner peace truly dwells, we find love. I suggested earlier that the element of love in the second dimension of peace could transform it, leading it deeper and farther. It may eventually lead us to the source of all love, the element in which we and all creation exist and without which we should be nothing. The love which we individual human persons feel for each other draws us, unless we use it selfishly in the hopes of enhancing our identities, to a universal love which is the energising dimension of universal knowledge, powering the whole creation. At some moments of inner peace, we may be privileged to glimpse the stupendous reality of objective love.

I would now like to return, from a slightly different direction, to the definitions of peace and its relationship to love. I can add to my original definition of outer peace as a situation or relationship in which damage is done by suggesting that it is also one from which love is absent. As a consequence of the absence of love, people are separated from each other, sundered by hatred, fear, suspicion, prejudice, pride, ignorance or traditional enmities, or by barriers of colour, politics, religion, caste, class, language, or sex. Peace, by contrast, is a condition in which people are united, in which those who were separated are reconciled, in which they are joined in love.

Love and peace, however imperfectly we understand them, are forces which have enormous power over us. We yearn for what we conceive as peace; we constantly seek, both to give and to receive, what we call love. The reason, I believe, is that we all have a deep longing for a union which transcends the painful limitations of our constricting individualities. Even though we pass through life half-awake to reality, we have a faint and unformulated memory of a state in which our loneliness is dissolved by merging with a greater whole, uniting with what is beyond us.

This striving for oneness might be thought of as an expression of the sexual drive. I would think rather that the opposite is true. Apart from its specifically reproductive function, sex could be thought of less as the

motive force for union than as an instrument to be employed in the quest to achieve it. Indeed, sex may have nothing to do with union, or only at the crudest physical and loveless level as in rape or the coupling of two people without mutual affection. Equally sex may be completely irrelevant to love, to the love of children, of old people, of friends, of many for whom we may feel deep but not sensual affection. Sex may well be quite unnecessary to the true closeness of those who, such as long-married couples, have experienced and enjoyed the fullness of pleasure and fusion. Even more important and utterly separate from sex is the burning yet in a sense impersonal love for the poor, the oppressed, the suffering, the deprived, which has impelled so many fine human beings to lead sacrificial lives of service: this is perhaps the most noble dimension of human love. Yet we all, in whatever circumstances, yearn to be closer to each other, just as a lover yearns to be closer to the beloved; there is a slight, wistful melancholy that we must be forever apart.

In some settings sex may, of course, have an important role in bringing about greater closeness between individuals and indeed leading them towards an even wider union. It may provide for many people their nearest approximation to the spiritual states significantly described by many mystical writers in allegories of physical love. Here sex is the tool of love, helping men and women to move beyond their painful and artificial isolation to a state of peace in which they are freed from the burden of conflict, doubt and illusion. It can serve as a mechanism for both actualising human oneness, and vouchsafing a glimpse of the transcendent, a foretaste of the mystical union. The sexual union of people who are in tune with each other is not only physically fulfilling: it also helps them to escape from the normal limitations of time, space and personality and enter a world of wider and more vivid reality, an experience from which their lives may derive greater purpose.

All who love deeply, not only lovers in a physical sense, make love, or—to avoid ambiguity—create love. This is to say they together weave a beautiful filament of warmth, comfort and caring, which of course is of incalculable value to them as individuals and has I believe an even deeper significance. Loving, the creation of love by whatever means is, I am sure, our most important task. In carrying it out we replenish the world's supply of this most precious fabric—perhaps fuel would be a more appropriate word—and approach our own rebirth. Through loving, that is through right action conforming to the eternal principles, we draw nearer the centre of things, the still, everlasting, vibrant source of creation both within and outside ourselves. Then we begin to understand the reality behind such overworked but perhaps little understood sayings as "God is love", and learn that through love of each other we have been led towards the great objective love that rules the universe; that quite literally, in the words of another cliché, makes the world go around. All the world loves a lover, goes yet another saying, and it is true. People who love each other deeply create

around themselves an atmosphere of calmness and joy which is enormously attractive. This is because they have reached the constant and universal in each others' being and those who meet them cannot fail to be touched by what is revealed. At the same time we learn the inner meaning of peace. It is only as we move towards the eternity of love that we free ourselves from anger, fear, pride and ignorance that are the source of disquiet in our minds, and sow disunity between ourselves and others.

I had sometimes wondered why peace makers are referred to in the Beatitudes as the children of God, that highest of all designations. I now understand it is because they must not only be at peace within themselves, that is free of inner disharmonies, but also carry the crucial responsibility for establishing unity, of bringing together what had been separate. This, it seems to me, emphasises that our striving for oneness is far more than a dislike of loneliness. We have a potentiality for spiritual evolution, however dimly we perceive it, and the way of growth is the way of union. This we seek, often vainly and foolishly, driven by a half-remembered dream. But our underlying motive is not selfish satisfaction, because the evolution of individuals into wider consciousness serves the purposes of creation. Those who do evolve become the salt, that is to say the preservative, which protects the world from decay.

In those final words of counsel and comfort which Jesus gave his disciples, according to the Gospel of St. John, the themes of love and peace are brought together with compelling power. "I give you a new commandment", he admonished them, "love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another". Later he said, "Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give", and later again, "Dwell in my love". But the whole message is one of love, recurring time after time: the love of God, the love of Jesus for the disciples, of them for him and of their love for one another; and of peace, the complement of love. These great themes can be identified in another inspired but very different work, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which actually ends with the words Shanti. Shanti. Shanti. Peace. Peace. Peace.

I have just mentioned rebirth and evolution, related themes common to many of the great teachings. We must change; we must be reborn. As I have tried, over the past years, to grapple with the problems of violence and injustice, I have realised increasingly how little I can do as I am. Without an inner evolution I cannot act wisely, I cannot predict the results of my actions, I cannot understand the nature of the problems I am presumptuously attempting to solve because I view them through the same distorting lens as those who created them. Above all, I am the slave of my computer, with its stock of mind-cluttering ideas and information and consequently am just as prone to violence as those I might wish to curb. The world is awash with political, economic, psychological and technological panaceas, some of which I have tried with naive enthusiasm, but my experience has led me to the

boring and old-fashioned conclusion that to act with effectiveness and knowledge, I must be a knowledgeable and effective human being. I do not mean, of course, that I should do nothing until I am perfect—in that case I would indeed do nothing. I must do what I can in the faith that if I try with inner stillness to act for the good my efforts will not be wasted; and in humility recognise their limitations.

Like many others, I know some of the answers theoretically, both at a practical and a philosophical level. For example, I believe I know how to bring to a conclusion one of the world's more violent situations, but I cannot act on my knowledge—which means that it is not in the real sense knowledge! I know that we should love our enemies, and if we did that we would have made peace, because when we loved them they would cease to be our enemies. But this we cannot do until we are reborn, until we become again as little children to whom belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus did not refer to them in this way because of a sentimental liking for young people, but because he knew them for what they are: beings whose computers have not developed, whose vision has not been swamped by the myriad trivia of ideas, prejudices, misconceptions, and so-called facts. Children in time become adults, but adults have the chance, if they have the courage and strength to take it, of burning off their conditioning and becoming once more as children, that is being reborn and developing anew so that their inherent knowledge and strength may be properly used, for peace-making as for all other purposes.

Return to the purity and accuracy of childhood vision is associated, at least in my mind, with return to the Garden of Eden. In the infancy of the world, according to the legend, all creatures dwelt there in peace and harmony. There then occurred a crisis comparable to the invasion of the mind by the computer, replacing its knowledge with lies and illusions. But if we are reborn and return to childhood it is not merely a personal return, in some sense we return to a different world, or perhaps I should say we discover we had always lived in Eden. We suddenly see that the people whom we had disliked or feared, or felt alien to are very like ourselves, and that below the surface of quirk and ideosyncrasy, they are wise and good, and we can be at peace with them.

I have gone as far as my limited knowledge and the equal limitation of words to express it, enable me to go. Peace and love constitute a kind of celestial double helix, a glorious pattern of interwoven powers reaching from our inner selves to the depths of eternity. They are like the solo instruments in Bach's concerto for violin and oboe, separate but absolutely interdependent in the creation of ordered beauty.

I cannot do better than conclude with the valediction of the young, thus repeating the title of this lecture: peace and love.

NOTE: Part of the Bach concerto in D minor for violin and oboe was played before the delivery of the lecture.

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