

# TRANSVERSALITY AND COMPARATIVE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION\*

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## Abstract

*Taking a cue from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is widely known as “the first American public intellectual,” this essay is an attempt to define the critical function of comparative political philosophy in today’s world of multiculturalism in the era of globalization which is in dire need of dialogue on a global scale. In the first place, Western modernity has overlooked and marginalized the non-West, the phenomenon of which is called Eurocentrism. All ethnocentrisms, including Eurocentrism, are myopic and have no place in the globalizing world of multiculturalism. This essay proposes that Eurocentric universality be replaced by transversality which is consonant with the multiple realities of the changing world. Transversality as a global imaginary allows all kinds of border-crossing and thus blurs traditional disciplinary genres. Thus it is at once intercultural, interspeciesistic, and interdisciplinary. In the second place, the role of comparative political philosophy radically shifts from the individualistic and anthropocentric tradition of “rights talk” to the ethics of responsibility based on the primacy of alterity. If, according to Levinas, ethics is “first philosophy,” then responsibility becomes “first ethics.”*

For deeply caring MM

Where there is no vision, the people perish. The scholars are the priest of that thought which establishes the foundation of the earth.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

True theory does not totalize, it multiplies.

-Gilles Deleuze

The solution to the problem of identity: Get lost.

-Norman O. Brown

If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history.

-Luce Irigaray

## Prologue

This essay explores the idea of transversality in the globalizing world of multiculturalism. Let me begin with Emerson, who is regarded as the first American “public intellectual.” He is an unrivaled essayist whose pithy words and passages are often quoted and misquoted in the American intellectual circle. I do have, however, one serious reservation concerning Emerson’s epigraph. It is the designation of “scholars” as “priests.” I take a cue from Leszek Kolakowski’s (1968: 9-37) contention that throughout ages there is an incurable antagonism between “a philosophy that perpetuates the absolute” and “a philosophy that questions accepted absolutes.” There is, in other words, the antagonism between the “priestly” and the “jesterly” which are the two most general forms of intellectual disposition at any given period of time and in history. The “priestly” attempts to preserve the absolute and established ideas, while the “jesterly” distrusts the absolute and a stabilized system and intends to deconstruct it.<sup>1</sup> In this context, it is worth quoting in full a passage from Harvey Cox’s (1969: 82) work *The Feast of Fools* that describes the anti-ideological “political vision” of carnivalesque culture as follows:

The rebirth of fantasy as well as of festivity is essential to the survival of our civilization, including its political institutions. But fantasy can never be fully yoked to a particular political program. To subject the creative spirit to the fetters of ideology kills it. When art, religion, and imagination become ideological tools, they shrivel into caged birds and toothless tigers. However, this does not mean that fantasy has no political significance. Its significance is enormous. This is just why ideologues always

try to keep it in harness. When fantasy is neither tamed by ideological leashes nor rendered irrelevant by idiosyncrasy, it can inspire new civilizations and bring empires to their knees.<sup>2</sup>

By making the existing world upside down and inside out, the aim of the carnivalesque dispositif is to bring about a “reversible world.” It symbolizes a culture of *dissensus* (*dis-sensus*).

The carnivalesque is the “jesterly” play of difference that aims at the creation of an alternative or “reversible world” order. As a ludic form of transgression and subversion, it intends to transform playfully a “real” world into a “possible” world: in short, it nonviolently deconstructs the world. Carnavalesque culture attempts to create a “reversible world” in which the “master” is placed at bottom and the “servant” on top. Humans as players (*homo ludens*) dethrone the stable and established hierarchy of all kinds. In the Bruegelian and Rabelaisian themes of Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogical body politics, which is opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and contains a hidden critique of Stalin’s totalitarianism based, rightly or wrongly, on the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, to carnivalize the world is to dialogize it: in them carnivalization and dialogization go hand in hand. As a protest against the monological “misrule” of (Soviet) officialdom, the carnivalesque model of life transgresses and transforms the canonical order of truth and the official order of reality. As Bakhtin (1984: 33-34) writes forcefully:

[It] is past millenni’s way of sensing the world as one great communal performance. This sense of the world, liberating one from fear, bringing one person maximally close to another (everything is drawn into the zone of free familiar contact), with its joy at change and its joyful relativity, is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order. From precisely that sort of seriousness did the carnival sense of the world liberate man. But there is not a grain of nihilism in it, nor a grain of empty frivolity or vulgar bohemian individualism.<sup>3</sup>

As it is exemplary of *dissensus*, the carnivalesque celebrates dialogue and community; it liberates people and brings them together and invites them to participate in communal living. In this light, the scholar is a

(Kolakowski's) jester and (Camus's) rebel rather than a (Emerson's) priest and dialectical revolutionary. He/she changes the world by *first* changing the conception of it.

As her epigraph makes it clear, the paradigmatic French feminist philosopher Irigaray, who calls herself *une philosophe*, means to *reverse* the mainstream (i.e., "malestream") tradition of Western philosophy. She offers a helping hand to a paradigm shift in philosophizing. Notably in the East with which she attempts to familiarize herself, the reputed Chinese *Book of Changes (Yijing)* is predicated upon the basic thesis that change is the order of things in the cosmos, i.e., everything changes except change itself without a philosophical baggage of linear progress as in Western modernity. Standing by a river, Confucius, too, remarked that everything, like a river, flows ceaselessly, day and night. Time, however, does not travel only in a uni-linear direction. It travels multi-directionally: it travels forward and backward and even multilaterally. In this sense, the past is never prosaic and irrelevant. Even the prodigal son of the past is allowed to come back home again. Here again, the invocation of Bakhtin, who admires the personages of Dostoevsky as well as Rabelais, is helpful. For him, the recycling of past meanings for today and tomorrow is infinite. To use his own expression, it is "unfinalizable." According to the often-quoted epigram of the American novelist William Faulkner, "The past is never dead, it's not even past."<sup>4</sup> Meanings in the past can be recouped for the present and can conserve them for the future. Bakhtin is immeasurably profound when he (1986: 170) writes:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)-they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. . . . *Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival* (italics added).

Indeed, Bakhtin's dialogism, which is totally open-ended, transcends the facile ideological dichotomy between "conservatism" (the preservation of the past tradition at all cost) and "radicalism" (change for the future by abandoning the past altogether) because radical changes can be

made by the use of the past or past meanings.<sup>5</sup> As the American philosopher George Santayana puts it wisely, those who forget the past or past mistakes are condemned to repeat them.

### **The Missionary Position: Europe on Top**

The Enlightenment is the soul of mainstream Western modernity. Its legacy continues today.<sup>6</sup> Some speak of modernity as an unfinished project, a second modernity, even the modernization of modernity, or the second coming of Enlightenment itself. They have an unflinching faith in it as the absolute “end of history.” Enlightenment’s unbridled optimism is alleged to promote and crown the Promethean progress of humanity based on the cultivation and universalization of pure and applied reason. Kant, who had a dim view of non-Europe (especially Africa), spelled out the civilizing mission of Enlightenment in the clearest and simplest term: to sanctify the autonomous benefaction of reason in rescuing and emancipating humanity—perhaps more accurately European humanity—from its self-incurred immaturity. In so doing, he institutionalized the major agenda of European modernity whose rationality was never seriously challenged until the auspicious advent of postmodernity in Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, and others in the twentieth century. While privileging and valorizing the authority of reason for allegedly human progress and emancipation, European modernity unfortunately overlooks, marginalizes, and disempowers the (reason’s) other whether it be the Orient (or so-called non-West), body, woman, or nature at the altar of Enlightenment’s reason. Orient, body, woman, and nature are not randomly isolated but are four interconnected issues: most interestingly, it is no accident that Orient, body, and nature are invariably genderized as feminine, while their counterparts—Occident, mind, and culture—are masculine or “malestream” categories (see Jung: 2002a).<sup>7</sup>

The institution of Western thought called Eurocentrism as well as the practice of imperialism is that habitus of mind which privileges Europe or the West as the cultural, technological, political, economic, and moral capital of the entire globe. “Modernization” is nothing but the all-encom-

passing catchword given to the totalizing and hegemonizing process of this Eurocentric phenomenon. As the astute interpreter and critic of modernity Zygmunt Bauman (1987: 110) relates:

From at least the seventeenth century and well into the twentieth, the writing elite of Western Europe and its footholds on other continents considered its own way of life as a radical break in universal history. Virtually unchallenged faith in the superiority of its own mode over all alternative forms of life - contemporaneous or past - allowed it to take itself as the reference point for the interpretation of the telos of history. This was a novelty in the experience of objective time; for most of the history of Christian Europe, time-reckoning was organized around a fixed point in the slowly receding past. Now, . . . Europe set the reference point of objective time in motion, attaching it firmly to its own thrust towards colonizing the future in the same way as it had colonized the surrounding space.

Indeed, this Eurocentric idea of colonizing the future gives a new meaning to the conception of modernity as an unfinished project or the end of history.

### **The *Dao* of Transversality**

Transversality is a keyword in the existential phenomenology of Calvin O. Schrag in pursuit of discovering a “diagonal” crossing (Xing) in resolving the deadlock between Western modernity and postmodernity.<sup>8</sup> Sitting in a philosophical cockpit, as it were, it is a balancing act of navigating through the stormy time and space between the dichotomous poles of the modernist obsession with identity and universalism, on the one hand, and the postmodernist exhaustive drive for difference and pluralism, on the other. Transversality actively seeks a transformation. It is, according to Schrag (Ramsey and Miller, 2003: 26), the recognition of difference that keeps open “the prospect for invention, intervention, transgression, re-creation, etc.” It looks for “convergence without coincidence”—to use his repeatedly emphasized expression. Thus, it broadens the “in-between” for the sake of the “beyond” by splitting the difference between modern identity and postmodern difference.

Transversality is primarily a derivative concept of geometry. It denotes the crossing (Xing) of two diagonal lines in any given parallelogram. Schrag exacts *l'esprit de finesse* by way of a geometric configuration: in addition to the two “diagonals” crossing or intersecting each other at the epicenter of any rectangle, there are also the hermeneutical “circle” and the rhetorical “triangle.” By way of the “middle voice” of transversality, he means to subvert and transgress particularly the dichotomy between “the Scylla of a hegemonic unification”/“a vacuous universalism” on the one hand, and “the Charybdis of a chaotic pluralism”/“an anarchic historicism” on the other. Insofar as it is a negotiated or compromised “middle voice,” transversality touches the soul and heart of Buddhism. The newly emerging face of transversality may be likened to the famous wooden statue of Buddha at a Zen temple in Kyoto whose face marks a new dawn of awakening (*satori*) or signals the beginning of a new regime of ontology, ethics, politics, and culture. From the crack in the *middle* of the old face of the Buddha’s statue, there emerges an interstitial, liminal face that signifies a new transfiguration and transvaluation of the existing world. The icon of the emerging new face symbolizes the arrival of Maitreya (the “future Enlightened One” or bodhisattva) or *Middle Way*—the third enabling term of transversality which is destined to navigate the difficult waters of intercultural border-crossings. We are warned not to take it as a middle point between two poles. Rather, it breaks through bipolarity (e.g., modernity and postmodernity, nature and society, mind and body, femininity and masculinity, and East and West). What is important here is the fact that transversality is the paradigmatic rendition of overcoming bipolarity itself. The bipolar solids melt into the air of transversality, as it were.<sup>9</sup>

As disenchantment calls for transcendence, transversality is used here as a deconstructive concept. It deconstructs Eurocentrism the mission of which is to proselytize the universal and the “‘catholicity’ of the rational” (see Sartre, 1965: 113). Transversality first dismantles or unpacks the status quo and then goes beyond what is given, received, or established by constructing a new formation of concepts. It, in short, attempts to challenge the assumed transparency of truth as universal and overcome the limits of universality as the Eurocentric canon of truth in Western modernity. It means to decenter Europe as the site of “universal

truth” whose “identitarian” and “unitarian” motivation fails to take into account the world of multiculturalism. The pluralist Johann Gottfried Herder (1969: 199) challenges: “I find myself unable to comprehend how reason can be presented so universally as the single summit and purpose of all human culture, all happiness, all good. Is the whole body just one big eye?”

The French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien (2002 and 2003) calls the effort of this decentering Eurocentrism or Western modernity—with Kant in mind—“a new ‘Copernican reversal.’” He contends that in “shaking up” Western modernity, China becomes a “philosophical tool.” He uses Chinese thought to interrogate Western philosophy and to liberate it from its own “mental cage.” Most radically, he wishes to replace the very concept of “truth” itself with that of “intelligibility” because the concept of truth is bound up with the history of Western philosophy. Jullien puts Foucault to test in order to vindicate the Eurocentric “legislation” of truth for all global humanity. In his 1978 visit to Japan, the vintage Foucault remarked that as the warp of knowledge and the woof of political power are interwoven as one fabric, European imperialism and the era of Western philosophy together have come to an end. Foucault is not alone in conjecturing that philosophy of the future must be born “outside Europe” or in the “meetings and impacts” between Europe and non-Europe (see Jung, 2002b: 1).<sup>10</sup> The interlacing of the East and the West, in other words, will give birth to a new philosophy. For too long, the East has been living in the dark shadow of Western modernity. In this background there lurks an intriguing question that the Singaporean intellectual/statesman Kishore Mahbubani, who is now Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, asked a few years ago: “Can Asians Think?” (1998).

Long before Foucault and Jullien, Maurice Merleau-Ponty spoke of the “lateral universal” and the lateral continuity of all humanity both “primitive” and “civilized” across history. He was unmistakably a consummate transversalist *avant la lettre*. The lateral universal is for him a new paradigm for world-making as well as philosophy. “Lateral” rather than “vertical” thinking is paradigmatic in that instead of digging the same hole deeper and deeper in which there is no exit in sight, it digs a new hole in another place. For Merleau-Ponty, all history is not only contempora-



neous and written in the present tense but also an *open notebook* in which a new future can be inscribed. It is rather unfortunately, I think, that his deconstructive effort for comparative philosophy and his sensitivity to the global scope of philosophy have escaped the attention of comparativists as well as specialists alike. I would venture to surmise that this inattention is woven out of the same fabric in our Eurocentric propensity and orientation in philosophy.

Merleau-Ponty's deconstructive effort in philosophy, in comparative philosophy, is evidenced in his critique of Eurocentric Hegel who was a priest and missionary of the universal and the rational.<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1964, see Appendix) is critical of Hegel who arbitrarily draws "a geographical frontier between philosophy and non-philosophy," that is, between the West and the East. Merleau-Ponty argues that philosophy is destined to examine its own idea of truth again and again because truth is "a treasure scattered about in human life prior to all philosophy and not divided among doctrines." If so, Western philosophy is compelled to re-examine not only its own idea of truth but also related matters and institutions such as science, economy, politics, and technology. Besides philosophy's own constant vigilance on what it is doing, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological orientation demands its attention to the ethnography of the socio-cultural life-worlds without which philosophy is a vacuous if not fatal abstraction.

The way of ethnography's thick description practiced by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who also taught at the Collège de France, provides Merleau-Ponty with the idea of the lateral continuity of humanity between the "primitive" and the "civilized," that is, with the incessant ethnographic testing of the self by the other and the other by the self which has a "diacritical value" for humanity's coexistence and its planetary solidarity. Ethnography redeems Western narcissism precisely because it is the human science of understanding the "foreign other." Merleau-Ponty contends that while for Hegel philosophical truth as absolute and universal knowledge is notarized and certified by the Occidental seal of approval alone, the Oriental past must also have an honored place in the famed hall of philosophies to celebrate its hitherto "secret, muted contributions to philosophy." He (1964: 139) writes resolutely: "Indian and Chinese philosophies have tried not so much to dominate existence as to be the echo

or the sounding board of our relationship to being. Western philosophy can learn from them to rediscover the relationships to being and an initial option which gave it birth, and to estimate the possibilities we have shut ourselves off from in becoming ‘Westerners’ and perhaps reopen them.” “If Western thought is what it claims to be,” he challenges further, “it must prove it by understanding all ‘*life-worlds*’” (italics added) as multiple geosociocultural realities.

Thus Merleau-Ponty suggests that in contrast to the “overarching universal” of objective sciences or, we might add, Western metaphysics, the “lateral universal” is acquired through ethnographical experience as the way of “learning to see what is ours as alien and what was alien as our own.” His lateral universal is a passport, as it were, that allows us to cross borders between diverse cultures, enter the zone of intersections and discover cross-cultural connections and convergences. While the European geophilosophical politics of identity claims its validity as universal truth, the lateral universal takes into account “local knowledge” prior to planetary knowledge (dubbed by some as “*glocalization*”) and allows the hermeneutical autonomy of the other who may very well be right. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty’s lateral universal is contextualized as an open-ended and promiscuous web of temporal and spatial (i.e., chronotopic) interlacings.

The (Eurocentric) universalist has failed to take into account seriously the question of diversity or multiplicity in the world of multiculturalism. He is still entangled in the cobweb of absolute universal truth and cultural relativism. As difference marks multiplicity and all relationships, Heidegger’s *Differenz* as *Unter/schied* edifies our discussion here because it plays and feeds on the coupled meaning of the words which connects, preserves, and promotes both difference and the relational in one breath. In *Differenz* as *Unterschied*, the other is neither assimilated/incorporated nor erased/segregated: the integrity of the other is well preserved.<sup>12</sup> Here we would be remiss if, in light of Merleau-Ponty’s above-mentioned “lateral universal” including a critique of Hegel’s Eurocentrism, we fail to recognize the seminal contribution of the Caribbean francophone Edouard Glissant (1989 and 1997) to the making of the transversal world. Educated in philosophy and ethnography in France, he is a philosopher, a poet, and a novelist whose “poetics of relation” shaped Caribbean (*antillais*) discourse on “diversality” and “creoleness”.

Glissant has an uncanny convergence in the name of transversality with Merleau-Ponty in his critique of Hegel the Eurocentric universalist and absolute rationalist when he articulates without equivocation that transversal relation means to replace “the old concept of the universal.” “Thinking about One,” Glissant puts it concisely, “is not thinking about All.” Speaking of Hegel’s conception of history, Glissant (1989: 49) retorts:

History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone “made” the history of the world. If Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian peoples to the prehistorical, in order to reserve history for European people exclusively, it appears that it is not because these African or American peoples “have entered History” that we can conclude today that such a hierarchical conception of “the march of History” is no longer relevant.

Glissant unpacks Hegel’s history by dissolving it as irrelevant or passé in the postcolonial world of diverse cultures which rejects “the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History.”

Transversality is proposed and constructed by Glissant in opposition to and as a replacement of universality. For him, it is the “poetics” of cross-cultural encounters. It is the way of *crossing* and going *beyond* (i.e., creolized) ethnic, lingual, and cultural boundaries. It is indeed the site of hybridity. As Glissant himself puts it, transversality is “the site of converging paths” or the “convergence that frees us from uniformity.” The British postcolonial theorist Robert J. C. Young (2001: 68), who regards Eurocentrism as a “white mythology,” makes an interesting and unusually astute observation that “[p]ostcolonialism is neither western nor non-western, but a dialectical product of interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from the long-running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism.” It may be said that the postcolonial mind works like a “double helix.” More specifically, Paul Gilroy’s (1993) reputed thesis of “the black Atlantic” is in favor of hybridity or “double consciousness” that sums up the transcultural intermix of African and European things. Hybridity is a converging middle path of “multiple, inter-connecting axes of affiliation and differentiation.” In the final analysis, Gilroy’s “black Atlantic” is constructed quintessentially as “a counter-culture of modernity.”

The so-called “recognition” or “acknowledgment” of difference, which is not one but many, is not the final but only the first step in the making of hybridity. In *In Praise of Creoleness/Éloge de la Créolité*—a Caribbean manifesto which is purposely written bilingually (in French and English), “diversality” (*la diversalité*) in opposition to universality is defined as “the conscious harmonization of preserved diversities” (*l’harmonisation consciente des diversités préservées*). When harmonization is understood musically, it enriches the totality and even coloration of “diversality” when two or more tones are put together (i.e., orchestrated), there emerges harmonization (or symphony) in which each individual tone is not lost but preserved, whereas when two colors are mixed together, there is no “harmony” but another color. In the name of “a polyphonic harmony,” “diversality” frowns upon “the obsessional concern with the Universal.” The above-mentioned Caribbean or “creolized” manifesto begins with the sentence: “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles” (“*Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles*”). The Creole (as hybrid) is neither unitarian nor separatist, but is likened to be a hybrid “butterfly” who frees himself/herself by breaking off from an “ethnocentrist cocoon.” Glissant (1989: 98) himself describes the principium of creoleness as the end of “diversality” which can hardly be paraphrased:

Diversity, which is neither chaos nor sterility, means the human spirit’s striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence. Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship. Sameness requires fixed Being. Diversity establishes Becoming. Just as Sameness began with expansionist plunder in the West, Diversity came to light through the political and armed resistance of peoples. As Sameness rises *within* the fascination with the individual, Diversity is spread *through* the dynamism of communities. As the Other is a source of temptation of Sameness, Wholeness is the demand of Diversity. You cannot become Trinidadian or Quebecois, if you are not; but it is from now on true that if Trinidad and Quebec did not exist as accepted components of Diversity, something would be missing from the body of world culture—that today we would feel that loss. In other words, if it was necessary for Sameness to be revealed in the solitude of individual Being, it is now imperative that Diversity should “pass” through whole communities and peoples.

Sameness is sublimated difference; Diversity is accepted difference.

### **Ethics as “First Philosophy” and Responsibility as “First Ethics”<sup>13</sup>**

Philosophy as made the “ethical turn” in the latter part of the twentieth century which was previously unthinkable in the heyday of logical positivism when I was a graduate student in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Is this ethical turn a right turn, a left turn, a wrong turn, or a U-turn? None of the above. I would venture to call it a “Copernical turn” after the fashion of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1966) who discovered (the importance and primacy of) “Thou” in speculating the future of philosophy. The reason for my proposal is twofold. First, it is an alternative to the American exceptionalism of “rights talk” whose (Daniel Bell’s) “end of ideology” and (Francis Fukuyama’s) the “end of history” are tantamount to the triumphant declaration of Anglo-American liberalism turned into one universal ideology in disguise.<sup>14</sup> The American exceptionalism of “rights talk,” I would contend, is a misfit for the world of multiculturalism in the age of globalization which demands the maximum of cooperation and harmony on its way to cosmopolitanism. Instead, it results in “clashes” the end of which is resolved by way of violence rather than dialogue toward the domination of one single ideology and one single nation. In other words, “rights talk” magnetizes, magnifies and even glorifies the self and one nation at the expense of others. Second, a new humanity for the future is in need of the ethics of responsibility for nature or the nonhuman world as well. Unlike the old tradition of humanity, this new humanity is no longer going to be anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism eventually brings the death of humanity as well as that of nature.

The ethics of responsibility has been overshadowed by and subservient to “rights talk.” The hegemony of Anglo-American “rights talk” has obscured and misguided the importance of responsibility. “Rights talk” is directly founded in and funded by the liberal thought of John Locke which is judiciously characterized by the late Canadian political theorist C. B. Macpherson (1962) as “possessive individualism.” Possessive individualism places the individual at the center of the inviolable rights of

possession which Locke called “property.” Property is for him a composite of “life, liberty, and estate.” “Estate” has been replaced with the “pursuit of happiness” in the American exceptionalism of “rights talk” (cf. Ignatieff, 2005).

The American political theorist Louis Hartz accurately measures the temperament of American ideology when he remarks that all Americans are born Lockean. In *Rights Talk*, Mary Ann Glendon (1991) characterizes the American “rights talk” as the dialect of the “*I’s have it.*” She explains its pervasiveness and dominance when he writes concisely that “The American rights dialect is distinguished not only by what we say and how we say it, but also by what we leave unsaid.” As America is the world, the so-called American “rights dialect” has become the universalized language of the world. To repeat: Fukuyama is the “last American liberal” whose “end of history” is a celebration of the global triumph of American liberalism. His “endism” is disguised in the garment of one ideology. Is the twenty-first century becoming American? Perhaps so. In his philosophy of history, Hegel envisioned America as “the land of the future” (see Chisolm, 1963: 25). However, it is far too early to tell with certainty (cf. Valladão, 1996).

Lockean liberalism conceives of society as “a series of market relations” in which each and every individual enters voluntarily or contractually into a relationship with others with a view to maximize his own interest. As it heralds “economic man” (*homo oeconomicus*), economic rationality underwrites it. As the proprietor of his own person, the individual carries on his daily life as if he owes nothing to society. The theory of social contract stipulated in Lockean liberalism insures and warrants its individualism. What must be recognized in Lockeanism is a sea change or paradigmatic shift from the primacy of the political to that of the economic when Locke makes unequivocally clear that the sole function of government is the protection of private property. With Locke political categories have become subservient to economic ones (i.e., economism). Economism is the distinct herald of Lockeanism which shook and made Western modernity. Notwithstanding its fundamental opposition to Lockean liberalism as possessive individualism, Locke’s economic rationality—especially its labor theory of value—is also the linchpin of Marxism in particular and socialism in general. To put it otherwise, economism is the ideological

underpinning of Western modernity. The theory of “economics as a vocation” is yet to be written.

For Levinas, who is regarded by many as the most important moral philosopher of the twentieth century, ethics is “first philosophy” (*philosophie première or prima philosophia*).<sup>15</sup> As such it precedes both epistemology (Descartes) and ontology (Heidegger). “When I speak of first philosophy,” he declares, “I am referring to a philosophy of dialogue that cannot not be an ethics.” For him, heteronomy alone is the site of responsibility if not ethics itself.<sup>16</sup> By heteronomy, he means to favor the other in an asymmetrical relationship. The heteronomic ethics of responsibility is anchored in the *primacy* of the other over the self where the other (“Thou” or “you”) rather than the self (“I”) is placed at the altar (“higher place”) of all relationships. Altruism for its name sake, therefore, is exemplary of responsibility. The ethics of responsibility based on the other-centeredness (“heteronomy”) is a radical shift from “rights talk” which magnetizes the self in everything we do and think. The former is “otherwise” than the latter. What “rights talk” is to Ptolemaic geocentrism, the heteronomic ethics of responsibility is to Copernican heliocentrism. Responsibility thusly defined is a Copernican reversal of social and ethical thought which began with Ludwig Feuerbach who discovered “Thou” at the center of human dialogue for the future of philosophy. In this connection, it is of utmost importance to note that Hannah Arendt’s (1963) controversial reportage concerning Adolf Eichmann’s “banality of evil” is correlated to “thoughtlessness.” By “thoughtlessness,” she means Eichmann’s *utter inability to think from the standpoint of an Other*, i.e., the amnesia or erasure of the other’s difference. Eichmann’s “banality of evil” is indeed a sobering reminder that the politics of identity or the abolition of the other’s difference results in the inhumane politics of cruelty, suffering, violence, and extermination.

The infliction of violence and terror by the invisible enemy was transparent in the faces of Americans on the fateful day of September 11 (9/11), 2001. September the eleventh and its ensuing events unmistakably prove that violence has its own vicious cycle. Shashi Tharoor, who was a high senior United Nations official, summed up the magnitude of the demolition of the twin towers of the World Trade Center as birthing of the twenty-first century. It began with a big bang rather than a little whimper.

Its birth pang is likely to last for some time.

The famous or infamous dictum of Karl Clausewitz's *Realpolitik* may be incontrovertibly true. It pertains to the inseparability of violence from politics since for him "war is the continuation of politics by other means." In his *Humanism and Terror* (1969/1947 in French), the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty declared that "humanism"—Machiavellianism notwithstanding—is not immune to violence. He asserted with firm conviction that one who abstains from violence toward the violent is an accomplice of violence itself. Not only is violence the common origin of all political regimes, but also violence is our lot as long as we humans are incarnate beings. However, we should not confuse "what is" with "what ought to be" on the one hand and hope on the other. The Southern Confederate General Robert E. Lee was pensive when he warned that we became too fond of war.

Violence based on the politics of identity (e.g., imperialism, colonialism, and assimilation) is without doubt an utter failure of human dialogue, of communication.<sup>17</sup> It eschews responsibility: it is intrinsically an irresponsible act because it intends to efface, harm, or kill an Other. The abolition of difference courts violence, while the acceptance of difference is an act of civility (see Ozouf, 1988: 12). Disagreement, too, governs our academic interdiscourses. To contradict or deny it is to authenticate it. As a freshman in college in 1954, I was introduced to Alfred North Whitehead's inspiring work *Adventures of Ideas* (1954) which left an indelible impression on me. It taught me the enduring idea that human civilization or human civility is the victory of persuasion over force (Whitehead, 1954: 105). Whitehead convinced me to date that violence has no place in civilization. As a measured failure of persuasion, violence takes a heavy toll on humans and nonhumans alike in abolishing differences. The breach of civility is predicated upon one's epistemological infallibility and moral inculpability which is a deadly mix: I can never err and be morally wrong. J. Glenn Gray's *The Warriors* (1959) is a classic and superb study of *homo furens* (warriors). Among the issues that Gray describes such as the appeals of battle, camaraderie, death, guilty, and even a delight of "fearful beauty" in destruction, there is the "abstract" image of the enemy that anesthetizes man the fighter. It is the monstrous—totally dehumanized—image of the enemy who is at best "subhuman." To repeat:



violence is an irresponsible act because it intends to eradicate the other's difference.

I would be remiss if I fail to bring Václav Havel into my discussion here. He is a playwright who turned into a statesman of extraordinary courage, sagacity, and moral tenacity in coping with the political exigency of his time: he is truly a postmodern philosopher-statesman of our time. He has been the most prominent voice of post-Communist Eastern Europe. Havel was deeply influenced by Jan Patočka who was a student of phenomenology, an admirer of Masaryk's democratic humanism and Comenius's pansophic humanism, and an active political dissident who died in 1977 during a police interrogation. From the side of conservatives, Havel represents the death of communism as a totalitarian political system and the "end" of ideology and history as the transparent triumph of American liberalism. From the side of political radicalism, he is a champion of the powerless.

Havel is above all a Levinasian. He closely read Levinas during his prison years in Czechoslovakia. Following Levinas, he considered responsibility as the innermost secret of moral humanity. Havel's is an ethics of responsibility as humanity's "destiny" and "first politics." For Havel, freedom and responsibility are interlocked. Freedom is a requisite element of responsibility. The former, however, is not independent from responsibility. Responsibility is more inclusive than freedom because humans can be free without being responsible but they cannot be responsible without being free.

Havel's signature idea of "living in truth" (1987) marks the heart of his conception of morality. He may also be likened to Bakhtin's dialogist who transgresses and subverts the canonical or "priestly" order of truth and the monological "misrule" of hierarchized officialdom. Havel's "dissident" is first and foremost Camus's "rebel" (*l'homme révolté*) (1958) who is a critic of Marxism as the dialectical metaphysics and eschatological politics of revolutionary violence. For the rebel is one who justifies the existentialist thesis that the human is the only creature who refuses to be what he/she is. He/she protests against death as well as tyranny, brutality, terror, and servitude. Havel's dissident is a true rebel who senses and cultivates his allegiance to human solidarity with no intention of obliterating the other. He is able to say that I rebel, therefore we exist. In an interview

published as “The Politics of Hope,” Havel (1991: 165-206) also talked about the role of an intellectual as a perpetually “irritant” rebel (or gadfly) who is self-consciously capable of detaching himself/herself from the established order of any kind and who is vigilant to and suspicious of belonging to the “winning side.” Havel shows that—to borrow the eloquent language of Roger Scruton (1990: 88) in writing about Masaryk and Patočka—“the individual soul is the foundation of social order and . . . the care of the soul, and the care of the polis, are two aspects of a single concern.”

For Havel, in conclusion, morals are the basic stuff of all politics. Thus, politics is never a tetragrammaton (or four-letter word) precisely because it is deeply rooted in and inseparable from the moral makeup of humanity. He often speaks of politics as “morality in practice” “practical morality,” “anti-political politics,” and even “the art of the impossible” (1997) with Machiavelli’s politics as the “art of the possible” in mind which for Havel promotes “living in untruth,” that is, manipulation, image-making, deception, and above all violence. In the end, the heteronomic ethics of responsibility is for Havel the postmodern alternative to *Realpolitik* as the modern “art of the possible.”

## Epilogue

Transversality replaces universality: it is spelled and comprehended as “trans(uni)versality.” It is, as I have above proposed and intimated, the touchstone of correlating and negotiating differences in the postmodern world of multiculturalism. It makes connections—as Carol Gilligan (1982) puts it<sup>18</sup>—“in the face of difference.” Instead of coming to hasty judgments and conclusions, therefore, we are obliged to study an anthropology of globalization thoroughly rather than selectively by taking stock of its losses as well as its gains. The transversalist is a “fox” rather than a “hedgehog.” I am alluding here to Isaiah Berlin’s line (1986: 1) from the fragments of the Greek poet Archilochus which reads: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” For the transversalist is one who has both deftness and agility to weave many ideas, whereas the universalist has one big thought.

I am hesitant to use unconditionally the term *humanism* both new and old because it is more or less anthropocentric. Therefore, I prefer to use the expression “a new philosophy of life” which is intrinsically organic rather than artificial. The *hope* of constructing a new philosophy of life for the future, more specifically for the twenty-first century, is hitched onto the very existential thesis that humans are capable of *making/remaking* and unmaking themselves and their world. Hope is nothing but the passionate and never-ending pursuit of the “impossible.”

Interbeing (or “Midworld”) has been the pivotal concern of Eastern thought, while Western philosophy has been preoccupied with and consumed by the question of Being. The way of transversality demands drawing insights from both East and West. What is deficient in one is augmented and supplemented by the other. Sinism, which is embodied in Confucianism, Daoism, and Chan (Zen) Buddhism, provides us with two indispensable ideas for a new philosophy of life in which the fabric of nature and humanity is inseparably interwoven—one is woof and the other warp: (1) Interbeing and (2) *homo ecologicus*. They are the two sides of the same coin, as it were, because they share the common ontological assumption that everything or every event is connected to every other in the cosmos and nothing exists in isolation. *To be in isolation is no longer to be*. It follows, therefore, that there cannot be just one center, the center is everywhere or multitudinous. Consequently, Eurocentrism or Sinocentrism must be decentered and unpacked.

A new philosophy of life is intrinsically organic rather than artificial. Life encompasses all life-forms. As such, according to the principle of Interbeing, there is no reason why the helping hand of heteronomic responsibility cannot be extended to the *life-world* of nonhuman beings and things. What *homo ecologicus* is to the heteronomic ethics of responsibility, *homo oeconomicus* is to “rights talk.” There is no need to emphasize here that human prosperity can never be measured solely by material things. To put it philosophically, “Being” cannot be identified with “Having”: the former cannot simply be reduced to the latter. Economics, however important it may be, is only a means to the end (*telos*) of life. The heteronomic ethics of responsibility is based on an asymmetrical relationship which favors the other, while “rights talk” favors the self. Ethics in general and responsibility in particular, according to the long and cher-

ished tradition of Sinism, is grounded in “fidelity” (*hsin*—literally, “the human standing by his/her words”) and “sincerity” (*cheng*—literally, “word-performed” or “word-accomplished”). Sincerity is quintessentially *performative*: it means “we perform in action what we promise in words.” To be sincere, speaking cannot be rendering just a “lip service.” In sincerity, therefore, knowledge and action are correlative: knowledge without action is empty, while action without knowledge is blind. Sincerity is a prescription for what and how to do things with word and deed. It embodies the moral foundation of humanity.

Ultimately, the future cultivation of humanity in the world of multiculturalism depends on the interchange (inter-change) of thinking and doing at the “crossroads” (X-roads) of the East and West on the one hand and the North and the South on the other. This transversal interchange may be called an “intercritique” (Dosse, 1999: 345) in search of cultural confluence/convergence, hybridity, or creolization. Globalization is nothing but the way of cross-pollinating and cross-fertilizing cultural meanings, ideas, and values in multiplicity.<sup>19</sup> The new phoenix of postmodern cosmopolitanism, whose language is governed by the important prefix *inter*, *con*, or *trans* has risen from the ashes of sovereign nation-states which the modernist Hegel deified as the ultimate *telos* of his dialectic. With the newly rising phoenix, the “rights” of sovereign individuals, including their moral self-righteousness, give way to the heteronomic ethics of responsibility which is accompanied by a *declaration of interdependence*. In the postmodern age of cosmopolitanism,<sup>20</sup> the virtue of civility promotes our communication and interaction with “foreign” others without holding their “foreignness” against them (i.e., xenophilism) (see Bauman, 2000: 104). In the end, the good fortune (*fortuna*, *moira*) of globalization will be determined and sustained by the generosity or hospitality of the earth which provides all earthlings both human and nonhuman a natural habitat (see Derrida, 2001 and Toulmin, 1990).<sup>21</sup> In concluding my thought on “humanity in transition” or the cultivation of humanity, let me recite the celebrated devotional meditation of the English poet John Donne in its old original English: “No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; . . . Any Mans *death* diminishes me, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; it tolls for thee”

(quoted in Jung, 2002b: 10).

## Endnotes

\*This paper was given as a lecture at Pusan National University in Busan, South Korea in June, 2008.

<sup>1</sup>There is a contrast between the masculine “priest” and the feminine “jester.” Arendt (1972: 144) notes that “The greatest enemy of authority, . . . is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter.” Cf. Woolf (1938: 182) who says: Laughter is “an antidote to dominance.”

<sup>2</sup>Cox (1969: 162) writes elsewhere: “The world symbolized by the Feast of Fools is neither [B. F. Skinner’s] *Walden Two* nor [George Orwell’s] *1984*. It is much more heterogeneous, messier, more sensuous, more variegated, more venturesome, more playful. It is a world for which a fiesta or even a love-in is a better symbol than a computer or a rocket. Technology need not be the enemy of the spirit in the modern world. But it should be a means to man’s human fulfillment, not the symbol or goal of that fulfillment itself.”

<sup>3</sup>It is more interesting to note that “He [Bakhtin] felt that Rabelais drew his inspiration primarily from the comic grotesque of the Carnival, of life turned upside down and of the parody of everyday life: This was Rabelais’s language. Bakhtin condemned the mistaken interpretations of Rabelais as the poet of the flesh and of gluttony (Victor Hugo) and those who saw in him the expression of the bourgeois interest in the economic individual; Rabelais’s style could only be understood as the translation of a popular, comic effect lay a whole cosmogony in Rabelais, and *his focus on orifices, protuberances, and outgrowths corresponded to corporeal parts that put the individual into contact with the external world*” (Dosse, 1997: 55. Italics added).

<sup>4</sup>Raymond Aron is quoted as saying that “we must accord to the past the uncertainty of the future” (see Dosse, 1999: 308).

<sup>5</sup>Hobson (2004: 283) speaks of “a kind of intellectual apartheid regime in which the superior West is quarantined off from the inferior East.” Noteworthy is Russell’s work (1945) which is properly entitled *History of Western Philosophy*. Russell (1922) had knowledge of China which he admired because, unlike Japan, it appreciated the social and cultural values of the West.

<sup>6</sup>Gadamer (1991: 270) wisely speaks of “the fundamental prejudice [*Vorurteil*] of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power.”

<sup>7</sup>For a decade, I have been on a transversality binge, so to speak. See (Jung, 1995, 2002b, 2002d, 2006b, 2007a, and 2007b).

<sup>8</sup>It is interesting to note that David Farrell Krell sketches *das Geviert* envisioned by Heidegger in the diagram of a rectangle which connects sky, earth, gods, and mortals with two diagonal lines having Being at its epicenter: the cross of Being is not a crossing *out* (*Durchstreichung*) but a crossing *through* (*Durchkreuzen*) (see Jung, 1987: 243n.27).

<sup>9</sup>Recently I stumbled on the very important and interesting “garden theory” or *Gartenkunst* in Germany in the mid-eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century whose notable proponents were Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (1764-1801), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), and Johann Christian August Grohmann (1769-1847). Instead of detailing it, I wish to note here only its importance for the concept of transversality. The core concept of garden theory is “*Mittelweg*” (middle way). First of all, it is an expression of eighteenth century “German identity” or “German exceptionalism” by carving out the German “middle path” between the two English and French extremes. Second, the *Mittelweg* was intended to be the way of resolving binary oppositions such as art and nature, freedom and determinism, rationality and sensibility, and the city and the country. Third, Heydenreich is most noteworthy for our purpose here. He was influenced by Kant and Kant’s third aesthetic critique (*Critique of Judgment*) in particular. The idea of the *Mittelweg* or *Mitte* includes the “‘between’ condition as a form of unification that incorporates elements of both [extremes whatever they may be].” My reading of “garden theory” in general and the idea of “*Mittelweg*” in particular is confined to Lee’s (2007) secondary source. There is an important difference between garden theory’s *Mittelweg* and transversality. That is to say, the former focuses on the idea of “mediation,” whereas the latter is intended to create the face of a new paradigm. Be that as it may, I intend to explore fully in the future the implications of the *Mittelweg* and their relevance to the conception of transversality.

<sup>10</sup>Before he became interested in Japanese aesthetic culture and the Iranian revolution, Foucault (Afary and Anderson, 2005: 18) wrote with the inerasable sense of a great divide between the East and the West: “In the universality of the Western ratio, there is this divide that is the East; the East thought of as the origin, dreamt of as the dizzy point that is the place of birth, of nostalgia and promises of return, the East which offers itself to the *colonizing reason of the West* but is indefinitely inaccessible, for it remains always as a boundary, the night of beginning in which the West was formed but where it drew a dividing line, *the East is for the West everything which the West is not*, yet it is here that it has to seek whatever might be its originating truth. It is necessary to do a history of this great divide.” The Foucauldian Said (1978) wrote the best-known critique of Eurocentrism. See also Ansell-Pearson, Parry and Squires (eds.) (1997) for an excellent collection of

essays on a critique of Eurocentrism with a focus on Said. For a critique of Eurocentrism, see also Hassan and Dadi (2001). It is worth noting that Heidegger (see Jung, 1987: 217-218) expressed his bewilderment that the Japanese tend to forget the beginnings of their own thinking in their pursuit of the newest and latest in European thought.

<sup>11</sup>Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy in three volumes were concerned with "Oriental Philosophy" (Chinese and Indian) in thirty-one meager pages in English translation. However, he was willing to make rather rash judgments about it. Hegel (1892: 121) asserted with no substantiation whatsoever: "We have conversations between Confucius and his followers in which there is nothing definite further than a commonplace moral put in the form of good, sound doctrine, which may be found as well expressed and better, in every place and amongst every people. Cicero gives us *De Officiis*, a book of moral teaching more comprehensive and better than all the books of Confucius. He is hence only a man who has a certain amount of practical and worldly wisdom—one with whom there is no speculative philosophy" (italics added).

<sup>12</sup>In her critique of the French politics of the veil or headscarf (*hijab* in Arabic and *foulard* in French) in school, Scott (2004: 182) judiciously writes that "oneness" or "unanimity" produces "exclusions that are contrary to democratic ideals of inclusiveness," whereas the concept of "wholeness" recognizes "the existence of disagreement and differences within a 'multitude of citizens' and thus opens the way for the kind of political engagement that negotiates rather than excludes."

<sup>13</sup>In developing the heteronomic ethics of responsibility, I am deeply indebted to four philosophers: the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, the Jewish-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and the émigré American philosopher Hans Jonas. See Jung, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002c, and Jonas (1984). Here I have not explored Jean-Luc Nancy's (2008) neologism *exonomy* which is proposed to move out of "the binary familiarity of the self and the other" (p.10). It signifies "neither the same nor the other" (*ibid.*). It may work as a "social imaginary" because by invoking the term *exonomy*, Nancy "enthusiastically give[s] the last word to [the French playwright Samuel] Beckett: 'Imagination dead, imagine.'" The translator Manjali of Nancy's work (2008) offers his interpretation of this passage as "the reinvention of an entire mode of existence": "*Exonomy* is the name that Nancy gives to this alternative law or mode of existence, distinct from heteronomy but conceptually akin to exogamy. The space of exonomy is outside the space of both self and other; it is an in-between space, always not yet given" (p.xii). Exonomy may and can be tied to Nancy's (1991) idea of human existence as "Being-in-Common" or of the commonality of common beings (i.e., "communalism"). Moreover, it would be worthwhile to relate Nancy's exonomy or the space of in-betweenness to the East-Asian conception of the human (*inkan* in Korean and *ningen* in Japanese) (see particularly Watsuji, 1996). Nancy's exonomy is perhaps an attempt to move into the Eastern "in-between-

ness” or Interbeing out of the Western bipolarity of self and other. There is a radical difference between the East-Asian geography and the Western geography of philosophical difference, that is, the difference between Interbeing and Being from Heraclitus to Heidegger and Derrida.

<sup>14</sup>As contrasted with Fukuyama’s Kojevian “end of history,” Mahbubani (2008) speaks of “the irresistible shift of global power to the East.”

<sup>15</sup>Eaglestone (2004: 182) suggests that “postmodernism is first an ethical position before anything else.” Perhaps he has Levinas in mind.

<sup>16</sup>Gould (2004) attempts to “universalize” and “globalize” democracy on the basis of interculturalism and “human rights.” Although she focuses on “rights,” Benhabib comes close to the heteronomic ethics of care and responsibility when she speaks of the “rights of others.” For an attempt to “internationalize” or “globalize” the feminist theory of care, see Robinson (1999).

<sup>17</sup>Glover (1999) is concerned with the moral history of humanity in the twentieth century. It is so littered with violence that the twentieth century may be characterized as the century of humanity’s inhumanity to humanity.

<sup>18</sup>Gilligan’s work (1982) is considered to be a ground-breaking basis of “care ethics.” However, Mayeroff (1971) developed earlier the idea of “caring” as heterocentric or other-oriented.

<sup>19</sup>Multiplicity is typically a postmodern concept. According to Calvino (1988: 110), it refers to our “inability to find an ending.” For him, there are five other memos or categories in addition to multiplicity: they are “lightness,” “quickness,” “exactitude,” and “visibility.” Ambiguity in its etymological sense is an intrinsic property of pluralism. It cannot be otherwise. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty is often regarded as a philosopher of ambiguity in that any meaning is not univocal but has an element of bothness. For a discussion of the issue of plurality and ambiguity from a perspective of postmodern hermeneutics, see Tracy (1987).

<sup>20</sup>Woolf (1938: 109) defines cosmopolitanism succinctly when she writes: “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”

<sup>21</sup>Arendt (1958: 2) affirms humanity’s dependence on the earth or nonhuman world: “The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms.” In dealing with the issue of humanity’s dependency on the earth or the natural world, a large number of us, unfortunately and sadly, belongs to what Woolf (1938: 87) calls the “ignorantsia” as opposed to the “intelligentsia.”



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