

December 18, 2014

Roger Simon posts on Diane Feinstein's report.

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Matthew Continetti says "national conversations" are worthless, especially when Al Sharpton is talking.

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So it is today. What the campaign and election of the first black president brought forth was nothing less than an unofficial national conversation on race, now about to enter its seventh year. First Bill Clinton was accused of blowing racial dog-whistles. Jeremiah Wright became a celebrity, and then it was Sarah Palin who was said to be exploiting white anxieties.

Holder called America a cowardly nation, Obama held a White House beer summit after calling a white policeman stupid, the Tea Party was written off as racist, the president said that if he had a son he would look like Trayvon Martin. Democrats accused Republicans of using voter ID laws to return to Jim Crow. Ferguson, Staten Island—these are just the latest topics in an ongoing racial gabfest.

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Talent exists in so many places that hiring managers who rely on a few schools are using it as a crutch and missing out. Bock says:

"When you look at people who don't go to school and make their way in the world, those are exceptional human beings. And we should do everything we can to find those people."

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"We were surprised that many alternative vehicle fuels and technologies that are put forward as better for the environment than conventional gasoline vehicles did not end up causing large decreases in air quality-related health impacts," Tessum says. "The most important implication is that electric vehicles can cause large public health improvements, but only when paired with clean electricity. Adapting electric vehicles without taking steps to clean up electric generation would be worse for public health than continuing to use conventional gasoline vehicles."

EV batteries are a problem, too, but a changing one. According to Tessum, previous studies have suggested that emissions from electric car battery production make such vehicles worse for public health than gasoline vehicles, even when the electricity to power them comes from non-polluting sources. "However, battery technology is evolving quickly," he explains. "Using updated estimates of emissions from battery production, and accounting for the fact that much of the pollutant emissions from the battery production supply chain occurs in remote areas far from people, we found that the health impacts of electric vehicle battery production are much lower than previously estimated." ...

John Tierney, mostly retired now, writes on how not to try too hard.

The advice is as maddening as it is inescapable. It's the default prescription for any tense situation: a blind date, a speech, a job interview, the first dinner with the potential in-laws. Relax. Act natural. Just be yourself.

But when you're nervous, how can you be yourself? How you can force yourself to relax? How can you try not to try?

It makes no sense, but the paradox is essential to civilization, according to Edward Slingerland. He has developed, quite deliberately, a theory of spontaneity based on millenniums of Asian philosophy and decades of research by psychologists and neuroscientists.

He calls it the paradox of wu wei, the Chinese term for "effortless action." Pronounced "ooo-way," it has similarities to the concept of flow, that state of effortless performance sought by athletes, but it applies to a lot more than sports. Wu wei is integral to romance, religion, politics and commerce. It's why some leaders have charisma and why business executives insist on a drunken dinner before sealing a deal.

Dr. Slingerland, a professor of Asian studies at the University of British Columbia, argues that the quest for wu wei has been going on ever since humans began living in groups larger than hunter-gathering clans. Unable to rely on the bonds of kinship, the first urban settlements survived by developing shared values, typically through religion, that enabled people to trust one another's virtue and to cooperate for the common good.

But there was always the danger that someone was faking it and would make a perfectly rational decision to put his own interest first if he had a chance to shirk his duty. To be trusted, it wasn't enough just to be a sensible, law-abiding citizen, and it wasn't even enough to dutifully strive to be virtuous. You had to demonstrate that your virtue was so intrinsic that it came to you effortlessly. ...

Roger L. Simon

What Dianne Did

The dust is far from settled regarding the condemnatory Senate report on the Central Intelligence Agency's use of so-called torture with terror detainees. [CIA Director John Brennan](#) is disputing the report's claim that those enhanced terror techniques were worthless and netted no information, while Intelligence Committee chairwoman Dianne Feinstein insists that her report is correct. Former DCIA Michael Hayden and, not surprisingly, Dick Cheney had weighed in on Brennan's side the day before.

My first thought was that this was all much ado about nothing. We have been hearing the same arguments about waterboarding and the like for the last six — or is it ten — years with the same people lined up pro and con. None of it is very new, although Feinstein and the media are pretending it is. Moreover, the release of the report was clearly timed to distract from the embarrassing appearance of Obamacare architect Jonathan Gruber before Congress. It also was rushed out before the new Republican Congress can deep six it after they are sworn in next year.

(They had a point. No Republicans or, more importantly, CIA operatives who actually *participated* in the actions in question were interviewed for the report.)

All this is SOP in heavily politicized Washington, as was Feinstein thinking about her and her Democratic cohorts' "legacies," although a fair number of them (Pelosi, etc.) were fully aware of the CIA's techniques from the get go and never uttered a peep against it at the time. Again, the standard hypocrisy. Also at play here was a bit of vengeance on Feinstein's part. Her committee's computers were apparently hacked by the CIA, nervous about what was being said about them, possibly with some justification.

And, while we're pointing out the obvious hypocrisy, nothing could be *more obviously hypocritical* than the Obama administration that putatively abhors torture employing drones that simply *murder* enemy combatants and often a host of innocent people who happen to be nearby into the bargain. Wouldn't you rather be waterboarded? Nobody dies being waterboarded. In fact, it's designed so you won't.

But still I put this all down to the usual liberal roundelay with Dianne Feinstein competing against many of her ilk for "Moral Narcissist in Chief," until I heard an outraged Dennis Miller on the radio Wednesday. He was treating this report as if it was the end of our country as we know it — and he had a point. His reason: who would join the CIA now knowing your own government doesn't have your back? And we need the CIA more than ever in the covert struggle against the likes of ISIS, Iran, al Qaeda, North Korea, China and Russia.

Indeed we do and indeed just who would want to join our intelligence agencies, knowing they could be so easily sabotaged by people they thought were supporting, not to mention employing, them?

Feinstein herself seemed a little worried about what she had wrought, fighting a defensive battle with Brennan on Twitter even as the DCIA was speaking. One of her several tweets was unconsciously telling. She wrote: "*CIA, FBI, NSA, DIA, DOD, NGA, State Dept, DHS and many other agencies help keep us safe. Torture does not. #ReadtheReport.*"

Note that the CIA, those purveyors of supposed torture, are in first place in her tweet. No, Dianne, you can't have it both ways. If you want the mantle of "Moral Narcissist in Chief," you must urge the *dismantling* of the CIA. You're doing a good job discouraging recruits. Just go whole hog.

ADDENDUM, LET'S REVIEW: Looking around the world today, Libya (under control somewhat while Khadafy was alive) is an unholy mess; with no real end in site to negotiations, Iran is continuing to develop nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles while expanding its influence into Yemen and maintaining strength in Syria and Lebanon and cementing its alliances with North Korea and Venezuela (among others); putative NATO member Turkey is becoming more Islamist by the day under the rule of Obama's pal Erdogan; ISIS continues to control large portions Syria and Iraq and may secretly be in cahoots with Turkey; Russia has moved into Ukraine and has everyone from Moldova to Finland nervous; China controls more of the Pacific every day, our Japanese and South Korean friends worried if they can trust us anymore; Europe is a weak sister with an increasing Islamic population they don't police and that runs rampant in their own ever-growing neighborhoods, the influence of Sharia law expanding over that continent and hardly anyone doing anything about it; and America, under Obama, has turned into the "pitiful, helpless giant" that it was accused of being during Vietnam, but really wasn't (until now)... And with all that, my senior senator Dianne Feinstein is worried the CIA has become a little brutal??? What an unbelievable, self-righteous idiot!

Free Beacon

National Conversations Are Worthless

Epecially when Al Sharpton is talking

by Matthew Continetti



Matched Set of Miscreants

Activists outraged at the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner are not only causing traffic jams and disrupting holiday shopping. They have a new target: President Obama, who the radicals say isn't doing enough to rectify injustice.

What about opening investigations into the white police officers who killed the unarmed Brown and Garner, what about inviting Al Sharpton and Bill De Blasio to the White House, condemning the decisions of grand juries not to indict the policemen, and calling the ensuing unrest, which has included looting and arson, "[necessary](#)" to prick "the country's conscience"?

Meh. Those things do not appease the left, which never takes yes for an answer.

"Mr. Obama has not been the kind of champion for racial justice that many African-Americans say this moment demands," [reports a disappointed New York Times](#). For example, Obama "has not stood behind the protestors." He has not "linked arms with civil rights leaders." He hasn't even posed in [an "I Can't Breathe" t-shirt](#).

The activists don't want Obama in the Oval Office. They want him on the picket line. They want to bully the president "into seizing on the post-Ferguson anger." And they might be winning: "White House advisers say addressing the nation's racial conflicts is now an imperative for the president's final years in office."

Uh-oh. If the president has any sense, he'll make sure this pledge is as worthless as his red lines in Syria. [Sixty-seven percent of adults rate their local police good or excellent](#), according to a recent poll. A majority of the public already disapproves of Obama on race. [As do 57 percent of whites](#). Does the unpopular Obama (or his potential Democratic successors) really want to see how high this president's disapproval rating can go?

America does not need another “national conversation on race.” The previous one, which lasted from 1997 to 1998, was so utterly useless that hardly anyone remembers it. President Clinton delivered speeches, convened town hall meetings, empaneled an advisory board, and issued a report on race relations. It went nowhere.

Why? Because the public forums were characterized by self-indulgence, protest, confusion, miscommunication, and acrimony. The advisory board presented the view of race from Harvard Yard. Affirmative action was defended when it was not ignored, its critics muted.

There were racial gains during the Clinton years. But those advances did not come from any “conversation.” They came from a vast reduction in crime and from a booming economy.

Conversation itself is overrated. When someone tells you it is “time to have a conversation,” he is about to fire you, deliver criticism, or relay other bad news. A friend of mine has a saying: You rarely get in trouble for what you do not say. And the more you say, the longer the conversation, the more “honest” and “open” it becomes, the more likely it is to devolve into soliloquy, recriminations, passive aggression, insults, tears, and bad feelings.

“National conversation” is a misnomer. An ideal conversation is free flowing; a discourse between friends; a meandering and pleasant exchange of ideas, of opinions, of gossip, of knowledge. There is no program to such conversations, no objective, no overriding purpose. A nation encompasses too many people with too many divergent and opposing views for such casual and edifying talk.

Especially when the government is involved. Who is invited to speak, what the terms of dialogue are, how long the parties engage—in a “national conversation” these are questions not freely answered by individuals but deliberately settled by collectives. Which is why the advocates of such conversations often seem more interested in acquiring a platform than a parley.

The very notion of a free-flowing symposium is undermined by the time the ground-rules of conversation are established. Cutting the pretense of free exchange and true diversity of opinion would be more honest. But no politician is going to call for a “national lecture” on race. Who would show up?

Conversation implies voice, analysis, abstraction. But politics is not merely theoretical. There are tangible consequences. And so a “national conversation” is more than an exercise by which power determines the ground of acceptable debate. It also provides cover for unelected academics and technocrats to implement controversial agendas the voters may not want.

National conversations are worse than useless. They are harmful. They presuppose, they live off of, the racial, ethnic, and sexual divisions they intend to mend. Separate the public into competing tribes, and not only will disagreements between them fester. Other tribes will feel unrecognized, excluded, alienated from the proceedings. Differences will become entrenched. Slightings and peevishness will multiply.

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The result? [The public says race relations are worse than when Obama took office](#). Nor has anyone explained how matters might improve by further highlighting cultural antagonisms and historical abuses. Quite the opposite: The most passionate race activists may actually want to incite conflict and distrust and Balkanization. It keeps them in business. And it's good for ratings.

There is an alternative to conversation: argument. Rather than the posturing, self-absorption, and moral vanity of a national conversation, let us offer the public a reasoned debate befitting a liberal democracy. Let the public choose between rule of law and mob justice, between security and disorder, between colorblindness and race talk. Let all people get on with their day, tend to their families, conduct their business, live in peace.

[A tax cheat as famous as Al Sharpton](#) has plenty of ways to justify theft and the destruction of property, to publicize fables in the pursuit of power and profit, to impugn the country for failing to satisfy his fantasies, ambitions, and desires. Don't give him another one.

QZ

[Why Google doesn't care about hiring top college graduates](#)

by Max Nisen

Google has spent years analyzing who succeeds at the company, which has moved away from a focus on GPAs, brand name schools, and [interview brain teasers](#).

In a conversation with a New York Times writer, Google's head of people operations, Laszlo Bock, detailed what the company looks for. And increasingly, it's not about credentials.

Graduates of top schools can lack "intellectual humility"

Megan McArdle [argued recently](#) that writers procrastinate "because they got too many A's in English class." Successful young graduates have been taught to rely on talent, which makes them unable to fail gracefully.

Google looks for the ability to step back and embrace other people's ideas when they're better. "It's 'intellectual humility.' Without humility, you are unable to learn," Bock says. "Successful bright people rarely experience failure, and so they don't learn how to learn from that failure."

Those people have an unfortunate reaction, [Bock says](#):

"They, instead, commit the fundamental attribution error, which is if something good happens, it's because I'm a genius. If something bad happens, it's because someone's an idiot or I didn't get the resources or the market moved. ... What we've seen is that the people who are the most

successful here, who we want to hire, will have a fierce position. They'll argue like hell. They'll be zealots about their point of view. But then you say, 'here's a new fact,' and they'll go, 'Oh, well, that changes things; you're right.'"

People that make it without college are often the most exceptional

Talent exists in so many places that hiring managers who rely on a few schools are using it as a crutch and missing out. Bock says:

"When you look at people who don't go to school and make their way in the world, those are exceptional human beings. And we should do everything we can to find those people."

Many schools don't deliver on what they promise, Bock says, but generate a ton of debt in return for not learning what's most useful. It's an "extended adolescence," he says.

Learning ability is more important than IQ

Succeeding in academia isn't always a sign of being able to do a job. Bock [has previously said](#) that college can be an "artificial environment" that conditions for one type of thinking. IQ is less valuable than learning on the fly, [Bock says](#):

"For every job, though, the No. 1 thing we look for is general cognitive ability, and it's not IQ. It's learning ability. It's the ability to process on the fly. It's the ability to pull together disparate bits of information. We assess that using structured behavioral interviews that we validate to make sure they're predictive."

A behavioral interview, in contrast with those that ask people to figure out how many tennis balls fit into a tennis court, might ask how you've reacted to a particularly difficult problem in the past. They can also help find people who fit the company's definition of leadership. It's not about leading a club at school or an impressive prior title, Bock says, but the ability to step up and lead when it's necessary.

Popular Mechanics

[Why Your Electric Vehicle Might Not Be as Green as You Think](#)

Electric vehicles don't reduce air pollution and improve health unless they're combined with a move toward alternative ways to generate electricity, scientists confirm.

by Charles Choi



Will electric vehicles really lead to cleaner air and healthier people? Only if they are coupled with cleaner ways of generating electricity, [scientists say in a new study today](#).

It's a familiar back-and-forth: Advocates alternative energy vehicles point to their positive environmental qualities, such as reducing carbon emissions from the tailpipe. Their opponents point out the hidden costs, such as the fact that the energy for electric cars comes largely from burning coal. Scientists want to attach some hard numbers to this debate. And so a team led by Christopher Tessum, an environmental engineer at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, set out to study the effects on human health of various alternative ways to power a car. Their findings are presented today in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The researchers investigated ten alternatives to gasoline. They include diesel, compressed natural gas, ethanol [derived from corn](#), and [ethanol derived from cellulose](#), as well as electric vehicles powered in six different ways: by electricity from coal, natural gas, corn leaf and stalk combustion, wind, water, or solar energy. They then modeled the effects of replacing 10 percent of U.S. vehicles that currently run on gasoline by 2020.

Jason Hill, study co-author and environmental engineer at the University of Minnesota, says it's important to note that this is a study about pollutants and how they affect human health—not about climate change. "We looked all the way from all the stages of production and use of a fuel, such as extracting, refining and transporting it, to the way it changes ozone levels and atmospheric pollutant concentrations," he says. "We also looked at where people live in the United States and used meteorology and chemical transport models to see how often and how much people would be exposed to pollutants, calculated damage to health, and the economic costs associated with this damage."

The findings showed a dramatic swing in the positive and negative effects on health based on the type of energy used. Internal combustion vehicles running on corn ethanol and electric vehicles powered by electricity from coal were the real sinners; according to the study, their health effects were 80 percent worse compared to gasoline vehicles. However, electric vehicles powered by electricity from natural gas, wind, water, or solar energy might reduce health impacts by at least 50 percent compared to gasoline vehicles.

"We were surprised that many alternative vehicle fuels and technologies that are put forward as better for the environment than conventional gasoline vehicles did not end up causing large decreases in air quality-related health impacts," Tessum says. "The most important implication is that electric vehicles can cause large public health improvements, but only when paired with clean electricity. Adapting electric vehicles without taking steps to clean up electric generation would be worse for public health than continuing to use conventional gasoline vehicles."

EV batteries are a problem, too, but a changing one. According to Tessum, previous studies have suggested that emissions from electric car battery production make such vehicles worse for public health than gasoline vehicles, even when the electricity to power them comes from non-polluting sources. "However, battery technology is evolving quickly," he explains. "Using updated estimates of emissions from battery production, and accounting for the fact that much of the pollutant emissions from the battery production supply chain occurs in remote areas far from people, we found that the health impacts of electric vehicle battery production are much lower than previously estimated."

In the future, Tessum says, the team wants to explore the potential impacts of alternative fuel use outside the United States. "We can also investigate if some areas might benefit more from electric

vehicles than others, to know if there are ways to deploy electric vehicle fleets for optimal impact," Hill says. "Perhaps subsidies or tax breaks could help those areas benefit most."

NY Times

[A Meditation on the Art of Not Trying](#)

Just be yourself.

by John Tierney

The advice is as maddening as it is inescapable. It's the default prescription for any tense situation: a blind date, a speech, a job interview, the first dinner with the potential in-laws. *Relax. Act natural. Just be yourself.*

But when you're nervous, how can you be yourself? How can you force yourself to relax? How can you try not to try?

It makes no sense, but the paradox is essential to civilization, according to [Edward Slingerland](#). He has developed, quite deliberately, a theory of spontaneity based on millenniums of Asian philosophy and decades of research by psychologists and neuroscientists.

He calls it the paradox of wu wei, the Chinese term for "effortless action." Pronounced "ooo-way," it has similarities to the concept of flow, that state of effortless performance sought by athletes, but it applies to a lot more than sports. Wu wei is integral to romance, religion, politics and commerce. It's why some leaders have charisma and why business executives insist on a drunken dinner before sealing a deal.

Dr. Slingerland, a professor of Asian studies at the University of British Columbia, argues that the quest for wu wei has been going on ever since humans began living in groups larger than hunter-gathering clans. Unable to rely on the bonds of kinship, the first urban settlements survived by developing shared values, typically through religion, that enabled people to trust one another's virtue and to cooperate for the common good.

But there was always the danger that someone was faking it and would make a perfectly rational decision to put his own interest first if he had a chance to shirk his duty. To be trusted, it wasn't enough just to be a sensible, law-abiding citizen, and it wasn't even enough to dutifully strive to be virtuous. You had to demonstrate that your virtue was so intrinsic that it came to you effortlessly.

Hence the preoccupation with wu wei, whose ancient significance has become clearer to scholars since the discovery in 1993 of bamboo strips in a tomb in the village of Guodian in central China. The texts on the bamboo, composed more than three centuries before Christ, emphasize that following rules and fulfilling obligations are not enough to maintain social order.

These texts tell aspiring politicians that they must have an instinctive sense of their duties to their superiors: "If you try to be filial, this not true filiality; if you try to be obedient, this is not true obedience. You cannot try, but you also cannot *not* try."

That paradox has kept philosophers and theologians busy ever since, as Dr. Slingerland deftly explains in his new book, ["Trying Not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity."](#) One school has favored the Confucian approach to effortless grace, which actually requires a great deal of initial effort.

Through willpower and the rigorous adherence to rules, traditions and rituals, the Confucian “gentleman” was supposed to learn proper behavior so thoroughly that it would eventually become second nature to him. He would behave virtuously and gracefully without any conscious effort, like an orator who knows his speech so well that it seems extemporaneous.

But is that authentic wu wei? Not according to the rival school of Taoists that arose around the same time as Confucianism, in the fifth century B.C. It was guided by the [Tao Te Ching](#), “The Classic of the Way and Virtue,” which took a direct shot at Confucius: “The worst kind of Virtue never stops striving for Virtue, and so never achieves Virtue.”

Taoists did not strive. Instead of following the rigid training and rituals required by Confucius, they sought to liberate the natural virtue within. They went with the flow. They disdained traditional music in favor of a funkier new style with a beat. They emphasized personal meditation instead of formal scholarship.

Rejecting materialistic ambitions and the technology of their age, they fled to the countryside and practiced a primitive form of agriculture, pulling the plow themselves instead of using oxen. Dr. Slingerland calls them “the original hippies, dropping out, turning on, and stickin’ it to the Man more than 2,000 years before the invention of tie-dye and the Grateful Dead.”

Variations of this debate would take place among Zen Buddhist, Hindu and Christian philosophers, and continue today among psychologists and neuroscientists arguing how much of morality and behavior is guided by rational choices or by unconscious feelings.

“Psychological science suggests that the ancient Chinese philosophers were genuinely on to something,” says [Jonathan Schooler](#), a psychologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “Particularly when one has developed proficiency in an area, it is often better to simply go with the flow. Paralysis through analysis and overthinking are very real pitfalls that the art of wu wei was designed to avoid.”

However wu wei is attained, there’s no debate about the charismatic effect it creates. It conveys an authenticity that makes you attractive, whether you’re addressing a crowd or talking to one person. The way to impress someone on a first date is to not seem too desperate to impress.

Some people, like politicians and salespeople, can get pretty good at faking spontaneity, but we’re constantly looking for ways to expose them. We put presidential candidates through marathon campaigns looking for that one spontaneous moment that reveals their “true” character.

Before signing a big deal, businesspeople often insist on getting to know potential partners at a boozy meal because alcohol makes it difficult to fake feelings. Neuroscientists have achieved the same effect in brain scanners by applying magnetic fields that suppress cognitive-control ability and in this way make it harder for people to tell convincing lies.

“Getting drunk is essentially an act of mental disarmament,” Dr. Slingerland writes. “In the same way that shaking right hands with someone assures them that you’re not holding a weapon, downing a few tequila shots is like checking your prefrontal cortex at the door. ‘See? No cognitive control. You can trust me.’ ”

But if getting drunk is not an option, what’s the best strategy for wu wei — trying or not trying? Dr. Slingerland recommends a combination. Conscious effort is necessary to learn a skill, and the Confucian emphasis on following rituals is in accord with psychological research showing we have

a limited amount of willpower. Training yourself to follow rules automatically can be liberating, because it conserves cognitive energy for other tasks.

But trying can become counterproductive, as the Taoists recognized and psychologists have demonstrated in an experiment with a pendulum. When someone holding the pendulum was instructed to keep it from moving, the effort caused it to move even more.

“Our culture is very good at pushing people to work hard or acquire particular technical skills,” Dr. Slingerland says. “But in many domains actual success requires the ability to transcend our training and relax completely into what we are doing, or simply forget ourselves as agents.”

He likes the compromise approach of Mencius, a Chinese philosopher in the fourth century B.C. who combined the Confucian and Taoist approaches: Try, but not too hard. Mencius told a parable about a grain farmer who returned one evening exhausted from his labors.

“I’ve been out in the fields helping the sprouts grow,” he explained, whereupon his worried sons rushed out to see the results. They found a bunch of shriveled sprouts that he’d yanked to death.

The sprouts were Mencius’ conception of wu wei: Something natural that requires gentle cultivation. You plant the seeds and water the sprouts, but at some point you need to let nature take its course. Just let the sprouts be themselves.



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WE RELEASED THE
REPORT ON TORTURE
BY THE CIA
BECAUSE WE'RE COMMITTED
TO TOTAL
TRANSPARENCY.



EXCEPT WHEN IT
COMES TO
OBAMACARE,
BENGHAZI,
THE IRS SCANDAL...

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