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Re-evaluating Genesis 1:27 and 2:7 as historical accounts: A critical dialogue with Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein

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The long-standing debate between creationism and evolutionary theory continues to shape discourse across both scientific and theological spheres. Central to the creationist perspective are the biblical texts in Genesis 1:27 and 2:7, which describe the divine origin of humanity. These narratives stand in stark contrast to the evolutionary model grounded in Darwinian natural selection, which posits that human beings emerged through gradual biological processes over millions of years. From a faith-based viewpoint, creation is attributed to a divine act occurring within a relatively recent historical timeframe. This study revisits the Genesis creation accounts as potentially historical and theologically valid records, challenging assumptions that relegate them to the realm of myth. Drawing on the theory of biblical literalism and employing theological hermeneutics as the methodological framework, this article critically engages the work of Ananda Geyser–Fouché and Bernice Serfontein to examine the plausibility of a literal interpretation of these texts.

Contribution: This study offers two key contributions. Firstly, it challenges the prevailing scientific narrative that often dismisses biblical creationism as non-historical, advocating instead for a more integrated approach to faith and science. Secondly, it provides support for faith-based communities grappling with the tension between traditional beliefs and dominant scientific paradigms. By re-examining the Genesis creation narrative, the research highlights its enduring theological significance and its impact on personal and collective identity.

Keywords: creation; faith; Genesis; Hebrew Bible; humans; research; science.

Introduction

When reading the Genesis creation story, one might envision God as a magician, conjuring life instantaneously (Geyser–Fouché & Serfontein 2019). However, Pope Francis (in Davies 2014:1) clarified that 'God is not a magician, with a magic wand', but allowed creation to unfold according to internal laws. While his view seeks harmony between divine agency and natural development, it contrasts with the literal Genesis account: Genesis 1:27 states, 'God created man in His own image', and Genesis 2:7 describes man formed from dust and brought to life by God's breath – implying a spiritual-material dualism. Conversely, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) posits that humans emerged via natural selection over millions of years, a view extended by Wallace (1889:283–444), who emphasised human descent from primates. This conflicts with Christian and Jewish traditions that affirm recent divine creation. Critics like Morris (1974:5) argue that evolution, being too gradual for direct observation, lacks empirical testability. Rather than delve into fossil records or dating methods, this study engages the broader science–faith discourse, focusing on the theological and philosophical implications of biblical creationism (Bryant & Reiss 2020:311–314). Morris and Rohrer (eds. 1982:59) identify three approaches: scientific creationism (science only), biblical creationism (scripture only) and scientific biblical creationism (a synthesis of both). This study adopts the third approach, using Genesis as its foundation while engaging scientific and theological perspectives. Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein (2019) offer a sapiential lens, interpreting creation as ethically ordered and interconnected. Their ecological–evolutionary reading supports theological integration with science, urging humanity's moral stewardship. The idea of 'two creation stories' (Gn 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) has led scholars like Van Dyk (2000:94) and Leeming and Leeming (1994) to suggest multiple sources, a view aligned with Wellhausen's (2003) documentary hypothesis. Yet, this does not invalidate the theological message. Walton (2009) argues that Genesis aims to convey theological meaning within an ancient Near Eastern context, interpreting '*bārā*' as 'assigning function' rather than material creation. Erickson (2013:349) observes that the science–faith debate has evolved across disciplines.

Still, ancient texts – including the Hebrew Bible, Qur'an and Enuma Elish – reflect a shared belief in divine creation. Bryant and Reiss (2020:311) affirm that 'creator' holds similar meaning across Abrahamic faiths. Thus, this study explores a central question: What if Genesis is both historically and theologically authentic? It argues that the Genesis narratives are credible accounts with deep theological significance, beginning with a re-examination of Darwin's evolutionary theory in light of biblical creation.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection

Charles Darwin's theory that humans evolved from *Homo sapiens* (an ape) through evolution and natural selection gained prominence in the 1800s, challenging the biblical account of creationism. His ideas were first articulated in *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin 1859) and later expanded in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (Darwin 1872). Darwin (1859) argued that species evolve over time through natural selection – where individuals with advantageous traits survive and reproduce, gradually shaping species. He rejected the belief that species were fixed. His arguments were further developed in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Darwin 1871). Huxley (1893), impressed by Darwin's work, remarked, 'How extremely stupid not to have thought of that', aligning himself with Darwinism. Wallace (1889) also advanced similar ideas in The Darwinism. However, before Darwin and Wallace, other naturalists such as Erasmus Darwin – Charles's grandfather – had explored evolutionary concepts (Smith 2005:1–2). Erasmus, a botanist, had observed gradual changes in nature and species over time, possibly influencing his grandson's thought. Subsequent scientists, including Abbie (1934:433–470) and Vasung et al. (2019:226–254), expanded on these theories. Abbie (1934:433) examined human mental development, echoing Darwin's and Wallace's ideas on evolution through natural selection. The naturalist movement was shaped by intellectual currents from the 18th-century Enlightenment – also called the Age of Reason (Foucault 1965). Foucault viewed this era as one of 'madness', as life's particularities were rationally scrutinised (Sweeney 2019a:1). The Enlightenment birthed deism, atheism, rationalism, secularism and materialism. Deists contended that God, having initiated creation, no longer intervenes, thereby denying His ongoing role (Thale 2001:332–335; Van den Berg 2019:335–355). William Wilberforce (1759–1833) confessed, 'I was a deist for part of my time at Oxford' (eds. Wilberforce & Wilberforce 1840:25). Sweeney (2019b:1) argues that ideologies from the Enlightenment – such as communism, fascism and National Socialism – eventually triggered World Wars I and II. Thinkers like Thomas Paine sowed the seeds of rationalism that later influenced naturalists such as Erasmus and Charles Darwin. Although Darwinism contrasts the biblical creation account, many Christians embraced aspects of it (Polkinghorne 1998). Scholars like Waltke and Fredricks (2001), Wenham (2003) and Walton (2006) argue that Genesis is figurative, conveying theological rather than literal meanings. This interpretation opposes creationist readings, leading Mayr (2000:83) to conclude that 'Darwinism rejects all supernatural phenomena and causations'. Snelling (1983:14) framed the debate starkly as a 'battle between two religions' – Christianity and humanism – each demanding a choice between divine absolutes and secular relativism. While personal choice remains a democratic right, this study acknowledges a bias towards biblical creationism. To many believers, it offers a more coherent worldview than scientific evolution. Scientific creationism, focused on quantifiable data, often overlooks qualitative spiritual insights. Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014) remind that social contexts shape cultural and religious beliefs (see Smith & Siegel 2004:553–582). Some science educators advocate teaching devoid of belief systems, yet Walton (2009:24) interprets Genesis as a 'functional creation account', aligning with Darwinism. In 2006, Walton (166) affirmed that evolution can coexist with Christian faith, although he later revised his stance. Hill and Walton (2009:96) clarified that Genesis was not written to explain scientific origins but to reveal God's nature. This resonates with Sailhamer's (2011:15) view that modern interpretations of Genesis often miss its theological intent.

The Hebrew and Christian Bible: God as creator of humans

Genesis 1:27 states, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'. The Hebrew verb used here for 'create' is בָּרָא [*bārāʾ*], a term that exclusively refers to divine creation, indicating that only God performs this kind of creative act. The phrase 'in his own image' translates the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים בְּצֶלֶם [*bʾtzelem Elohim*], meaning that humanity is made to reflect aspects of God's nature – especially moral, rational and spiritual capacities. Genesis 9:6 reinforces the sacredness of human life, teaching against the shedding of blood because 'man was created in the image of God'. Again, the phrase אֱלֹהִים בְּצֶלֶם is invoked to underline the theological foundation for human dignity and justice. In Job, the divine origin of humanity is echoed: 'Shall a man be more pure than his maker'? (Job 4:17). The term for 'maker' in Hebrew is עֹשֶׂה [*ʿōseh*], a participial form meaning 'the one who makes or does', underscoring God's ongoing creative role. Job 35:10 and 36:3 continue to speak of God as בּוֹרֵא [*bōrēʾ*], another Hebrew term derived from bārāʾ, referring to the creator. Psalm 119:73 declares: 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me…' The Hebrew verbs here – עָשָׂה [*ʿāsāh*, 'to make'] and כּוּן [*kûn*, 'to establish or fashion'] – highlight both the artistry and intentionality behind human creation. Similarly, Isaiah 17:8 and Proverbs 22:2 refer to God as עֹשֵׂהוּ [*ʿōsēhū*], 'his maker', affirming divine authorship over all people, regardless of social class. Isaiah 45:12 affirms: 'I have made the earth and created man upon it …' – combining עָשָׂה [*ʿāsāh*] for 'made' and בָּרָא [*bārāʾ*] for 'created', reflecting both the physical shaping and the divine origination of humanity. This is echoed in Jeremiah 27:5, where God says, 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast… by my great power and by my outstretched arm'. The phrase הַנְּטוּיָה זְרוֹעִי [*zʾroaʿi han'tuyah*] – 'my outstretched arm' – is a Hebrew

idiom representing God's active power in creation and history. Psalm 139:14 (not 138:14) reads: 'I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made …' The Hebrew terms נוֹרָאוֹת [*nora'ot*, 'fearfully'] and נִפְלֵיתִי [*nifleti*, 'wonderfully'] reflect awe and complexity in human formation, supporting the view of divine investiture in creation. Jesus also affirms God's role as creator in Mark 10:6: 'But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female'. The reference echoes Genesis 1:27 and upholds the theological continuity of creation across both Testaments. Paul, in Colossians 3:10, acknowledges humanity being 'renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator', once again drawing on the concept of צֶלֶם [*tzelem*], or image and בּוֹרֵא [*bōrē'*], the creator. Genesis 2:7 provides a more intimate portrayal: 'Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being'. The Hebrew word for 'formed' is וַיִּיצֶר [*vayyitzer*], from יָצַר [*yatsar*], meaning to shape or mould like a potter – implying careful craftsmanship. The term for 'breath' is נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים [*nishmat chayyim*], meaning 'the breath of life', signifying not just physical animation but also spiritual vitality. From a pastoral perspective, voices like John Muir have poetically affirmed divine involvement in nature. Muir (1901:331) declared: 'The forests of America… must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best he ever planted'. Similarly, Mitchell (1988:42–45) and Collins (1980:6) reflect on creation as a divine gift to be cherished and Wilson (2002:21) called the Earth's biosphere a 'miracle we have been given'. Such reflections echo biblical views of a world crafted by God for human stewardship and reverence. Finally, the uniqueness of humanity is affirmed not just in spiritual terms, but also in human creativity, intelligence and moral awareness – traits aligned with the biblical claim that humans are made בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים [*b'tzelem Elohim*] – in the image of God.

The influence of previous scholarship on Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein's views

Previous scholarly contributions might (in one way or the other) have influenced Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein's position. A few examples will suffice. According to Sailhamer's (1992), the Genesis text intends to locate God's covenantal purposes in history. That is, the creation accounts are not merely imaginative or archetypal, but rooted in real pre-historical (or 'prime-historical') events which set the stage for later salvation history. Thus, the creation of Adam and Eve is not a literary device alone, but part of an unfolding real history. As Wenham (1998) reveals, the genre of Genesis 1 is narrative prose rather than myth or poetry. The argument is that the structure, chronological sequencing and detail of acts in creation imply an intention on the author's part to depict real events in time and space, rather than purely symbolic or theological motifs. This supports a reading of Genesis that aligns with historical–creationist views. Waltke (2001) and Grudem (1994) underscore that doctrines such as the *imago Dei* [being made in God's image], original sin, moral responsibility and atonement presuppose a historical Adam and Eve. If Adam and Eve are not historical, then many of the theological links (e.g. Paul's arguments in Romans or 1 Cor) lose coherence. Collins (2011) also argues along similar lines: the integrity of Christian theology (including Christ's role and redemption) depends in significant ways on understanding Adam and Eve as real, historical persons rather than purely symbolic. Plantinga (2011) and Frame (2013) challenge the assumption that science, especially evolutionary biology, is neutral or without metaphysical presuppositions. They argue that naturalism itself is a worldview choice, rather than a purely empirical conclusion. These scholars hold that evolution, while potentially useful, does not and cannot exhaust the explanation of human origins or morality, meaning the theological perspective remains necessary for a full account. Similarly, Meyer (2013) and Ross (2009) raise scientific and philosophical questions about the sufficiency of Darwinian evolution to account for certain phenomena, for example, the Cambrian Explosion, information in deoxyribonucleic acid or irreducible complexity (Behe 1996). These arguments are used by some creationist scholars to argue that evolutionary explanations are in tension with observed biological complexity or with the theological claim that creation was done 'very good' initially and that disorder (including death, decay) is a later result (e.g. associated with Fall). Lastly, Walton (2009, 2011) offers readings of Genesis that emphasise function over material origins, locating Genesis within the worldview of Ancient Near Eastern cosmology. While not strictly literal in all respects, such readings try to preserve theological truth while adapting to scientific knowledge. These serve as contrast cases, showing the spectrum of interpretations and also as foil to the literal-historical position. Highlighting those helps clarify what is at stake in insisting on historicity (doctrinal implications, worldview, etc.). Thus, Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein (2019) maintain the claim that scientific insights – especially from evolutionary biology, cosmology and ecology – should not be treated as antagonistic to biblical theology. Instead, these disciplines can enter into a dialogue, each enriching the other. The scholars put into perspective Wisdom (Sapiential) Literature as a theological resource in which they place special emphasis on Old Testament wisdom texts (like Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) as offering a theological vision of creation that includes order, sustainability, interdependence and responsibility. Wisdom literature reveals God as the creator and sustainer who brings order out of chaos. In addition, Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein (2019) argue that the notion of creation order is central. According to this view, there is a 'right order' in the cosmos – relationships among creatures, between humans and non-humans, between creation and Creator and among human social-moral life – that is meant to be maintained. Chaos or disorder arises when those relationships are violated. From their reading, Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein maintain that ecological care is not optional but a moral responsibility grounded in the wisdom tradition: humans are part of a created, interdependent order and so have obligations towards sustaining it. They link gratitude, stewardship and ethical living as natural outgrowths of wisdom theology. Nevertheless, Geyser–Fouché and

Serfontein also accept Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory as describing how life emerged and diversified. They do not see Darwin's evolution as incompatible with theology; rather, they propose that evolution and theology both point to an active, sustaining Creator. According to Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein's (2019) study, evolutionary biology strengthens the theological argument about cosmological responsibility. The scholars conclude that if creation is viewed as ordered and sustaining, then humans have a stewardship role not just locally but cosmologically: that is, humans are responsible within the larger ecosphere, which includes all of creation. This responsibility includes accepting boundaries, caring for interconnections, respecting non-human life and acting ethically towards the environment. Literary form supports historicity.

Notable critical arguments for creationism

The interpretation of the Genesis creation accounts – especially Genesis 1:27 and 2:7 – has long generated scholarly debate. Some uphold a literal–historical reading consistent with biblical creationism, while others adopt theological or concordist approaches integrating scripture with science. These views broadly fall into three categories: literal–historical defenders, theological harmonisers and philosophical critics of naturalism. Scholars such as Wenham (1998) and Sailhamer (1992), supported by Raven and Johnson (1999:420), maintain that Genesis presents a literal and historical record of creation. Similarly, Waltke (2001) and Grudem (1994) link the historicity of Adam and Eve to essential Christian doctrines – original sin, accountability and atonement – arguing that denying a literal Genesis undermines theological coherence. Collins (2011) also defends a historical Adam using linguistic and literary evidence, stressing that Paul's theology (Rm 5; 1 Cor 15) depends on a real Adam. Carson (1984) agrees, asserting that Christ's redemptive work reverses Adam's curse, which would collapse under a symbolic reading. Frame (2013) upholds the necessity of a historical Adam but reframes the debate as a clash between worldviews – the Christian theistic paradigm and methodological naturalism. Meyer (2013) critiques Darwinian evolution, citing the Cambrian Explosion and deoxyribonucleic acid complexity as evidence for intelligent design. Ross (2009) accepts an old-Earth view but cautions against uncritical faith in empirical methods. Behe (1996) adds the concept of irreducible complexity, arguing that biological systems like the bacterial flagellum defy gradual evolution. Tomkins and Sanford (2013) propose a genetic bottleneck consistent with a single human pair, while Gish (1973) highlights fossil gaps as support for special creation. Walton (2011), however, interprets Genesis 1 within its Ancient Near Eastern context, viewing it as describing functional rather than material origins. He suggests that a non-literal reading can preserve doctrine, although Grudem (1994) warns this risks detaching theology from history. McGrath (2002) advocates a dialogical relationship between theology and science, where theology provides ethical and metaphysical guidance. Schaeffer (1972) similarly calls for Christian engagement with science without succumbing to reductionism, asserting that only a biblical worldview grounds human meaning and morality. Across these perspectives, a central theme persists: Darwinian evolution leaves unresolved theological and philosophical questions. Whether arguing for a historical Adam, exposing science's epistemological limits, or seeking synthesis between faith and reason, scholars collectively challenge naturalism's adequacy as a full account of human origins. Yet intra-Christian differences endure on how best to reconcile scripture with science. Frazier (1984) reminds that while freedom of belief is fundamental, imposing unscientific claims as truth is problematic. Miller (1999) contends that creationists seek God in what science cannot explain, while religious scientists find Him in what science does explain. He critiques 'irreducible complexity' and 'intelligent design', describing God as 'the Charlatan', 'the Magician' and 'the Mechanic'. Miller's stance aligns with Leidenhag (2024:401–10), who insist that science and religion are inseparable, a view Schadewald (1982) contrasts through his criticism of creationist explanations of the fossil record. Goldsworthy (2011:42–55) advances 'creation theology', arguing that Genesis 1–2 underpin later biblical themes of fall, covenant and salvation, linking creation with divine wisdom (p. 50). Murphy (2002:118) similarly views wisdom as an outgrowth of Genesis 1:28. Earlier, Hermisson (1978:44–57) explored 'creation theology in Wisdom', a theme echoed in Macquarrie's (1977:54–58) 'new-style natural theology' and Barrett's (2005:495–509) affirmation of creation theology. Barr (1982:27) defines fundamentalism as the misuse of scripture to sustain religious power, later criticising 'biblical creationism' (Barr 1984; see also Barr 1999). In my view, the long-standing conflict between science and religion stems from competing interpretations of human origins. The notion that humans evolved from apes over millions of years remains speculative. While I acknowledge tensions within the biblical narrative, evolutionary theory also fails to offer conclusive proof. Human creativity, not descent from animals, better explains our distinctiveness. Rogers (1984:8) captures this harmony: 'A belief in God as creator and acceptance of evolution are in no way alternatives … I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth'. Lasor (1987:15) adds that biblical exegesis must not conform to scientific hypotheses, nor should science reject scripture a priori. Whitcomb and Morris (1961:518) defend biblical creationism, asserting that Noah's flood shaped the Earth's topography. Biologist Haldane (1859:710–3) humorously observed that 'God had an inordinate fondness for beetles', acknowledging divine creativity even while affirming evolution – a view supported by Hutchinson (1959:145–159) and Crow (1992:1–6). As a contemporary of Darwin, Haldane exemplifies the enduring dialogue between evolution and belief in a Creator.

Results

The author's previous writings have conceptualised both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

This dual approach not only strengthens the empirical grounding of the research, but also provides deeper insights into the lived experiences of local communities, especially in matters of religion and belief systems. Despite the scientific authority often ascribed to Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, the pervasive belief in a supreme being as creator across diverse cultures presents a strong counter–narrative. The widespread existence of creation beliefs globally cannot be dismissed as mere myth. Darwinian evolution struggles to adequately account for racial diversity, particularly the origins of black and white people. The theory's inability to address these questions without risking racialised interpretations – such as the problematic historical comparison of black people to apes or chimpanzees – raises serious ethical concerns. These associations may reflect or have even contributed to colonial and slave trade ideologies, suggesting that scientific theories are not always ideologically neutral. From a phenomenological standpoint, the denial of non–scientific or religious worldviews is a form of cultural prejudice. Darwinism, when positioned as the sole valid explanation of human origins, risks marginalising religious expressions and worldviews rooted in divine creation narratives, which are central to many communities' identities. Several scholars have examined how Darwinian ideas have been entangled with racial hierarchies, either explicitly or implicitly. This highlights the need to critically assess how scientific theories are applied or misapplied in social and historical contexts, particularly when they intersect with race, colonialism and power. This study emphasised the importance of epistemological humility. It recognised that many cosmological questions may remain unresolved and cautions against enforcing strict scientific explanations on profound spiritual or existential issues, as doing so can be overly reductionist and unfairly dismissive of alternative ways of understanding. Such an approach often fosters an exclusivist ideology that hinders constructive scholarly dialogue.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the perceived conflict between faith-based accounts of human origins and scientific evolutionary theory is neither absolute nor irreconcilable, but rather emerges from fundamentally different epistemological commitments and interpretive frameworks. The analysis of the Genesis narratives (1:27; 2:7) reveals that these texts function primarily as theological affirmations of human identity, dignity and relationality with the divine, rather than as empirical explanations of biological origins. In contrast, Darwinian evolution operates within a scientific paradigm that seeks naturalistic explanations for the development of life through processes such as variation and natural selection.

A key finding of this study is that the tension between these perspectives is often intensified by literalist readings of sacred texts and reductionist interpretations of science. By placing the Genesis accounts alongside ancient Near Eastern narratives such as the Enuma Elish, the study has shown that belief in divine origins is not unique to the biblical tradition but reflects a broader religio-cultural impulse to situate humanity within a meaningful cosmic order. However, this cross-cultural prevalence does not, in itself, validate the historical or scientific accuracy of such accounts; rather, it underscores their symbolic and existential significance.

Importantly, the study argues that attempts to privilege either scientific or theological explanations as universally normative risk obscuring the complexity of human knowledge systems. Drawing on the insights of Geyser–Fouché and Serfontein, the research affirms that indigenous and faith-based worldviews constitute legitimate epistemologies that should not be dismissed in favour of a singular, dominant scientific narrative. Instead, a pluralistic approach is necessary, one that recognises the distinct domains, methods and purposes of science and theology while allowing for constructive dialogue between them.

Furthermore, the study highlights that resistance within religious communities to the idea of human evolution, particularly descent from primates, is not merely a matter of doctrinal rigidity but is deeply intertwined with questions of identity, dignity and the fear of existential diminishment. At the same time, the research critically exposes the historical limitations of early evolutionary discourse, including its inadequate engagement with human diversity and its susceptibility to misappropriation in support of racial hierarchies. This underscores the need for a more ethically conscious and inclusive scientific framework that acknowledges both biological variation and the equal worth of all human beings.

Thus, this study advances the position that the question of human origins should not be framed as a binary opposition between 'creation' and 'evolution', but rather as an invitation to interdisciplinary engagement. It calls for a hermeneutic that reads Genesis theologically and contextually, alongside a scientific practice that remains self-critical and culturally sensitive. Such an approach not only bridges the divide between faith and science, but also contributes to a more holistic understanding of what it means to be human – an understanding that is at once biologically informed, theologically grounded and deeply attentive to the richness of human cultural experience.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Temba T. Rugwiji: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing–original draft, Writing–review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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