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# PSY428: Critical Psychology (Winter 2023)

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*Lectures:*

Thursday 12-3 pm

*Location:*

SS1084

*Course Prerequisites:*

PSY201 (or equivalent), PSY220

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*Instructor:*

Prof. Romin Tafarodi

*Drop-in Office Hours:*

Tuesday 2:30-3:30 pm & Thursday 3:30-4:30 pm in SS4032

*Phone:*

416-946-3024

*E-mail:*

[romin.tafarodi@utoronto.ca](mailto:romin.tafarodi@utoronto.ca)

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*Teaching Assistant:*

Siobhan Flanagan

*Drop-in Office Hours:*

Wednesday from 11 am - 12 pm in \*location TBA\*.

Some of the TA's weekly office hours may be offered through Zoom instead of in person. Students will be notified in advance of any Zoom sessions throughout the term.

Siobhan's Zoom meeting details are: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/81765939690> [Links to an external site.](#) | Meeting ID: 817 6593 9690 | Passcode: 546790.

E-mail:

[siobhan.flanagan@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:siobhan.flanagan@mail.utoronto.ca)

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*Required and Additional Readings:*

Accessible within modules on Quercus.

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*Videos:*

Accessible within modules on Quercus.

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## Overview

In his 2001 book *Return to Reason*, the philosopher Stephen Toulmin pointed to the intellectual cost of institutionalized or “disciplinary” training: “Problems begin when people forget what limits they accepted in mastering the systematic procedures of their disciplines. Once forgetfulness sets in, the ground is prepared for misunderstandings and cross-purposes: the selective attention called for in a disciplined activity is elevated to the status of being ‘the one and only right way’ of performing the tasks in question, and the possibility of approaching them from a different standpoint, or with different priorities, is ignored or, as we may say, ‘bracketed off.’” My own experience as an academic psychologist leads me to agree with Toulmin. Our education (training?) of undergraduate and graduate students increasingly emphasizes formal research methods without promoting the critical reflexivity needed to understand the assumptions, implications, and limitations of those methods. Students trained in this manner become adept at *doing* something called research, but ill-equipped or even motivated to understand the justification for, and broader significance of, what they are doing and, as it happens, not doing.

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates proclaims that “the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings.” I believe that the same ethical claim can be made in relation to scientific practice: The unexamined science is not worth doing. For Socrates, examination meant “testing” our beliefs and commitments through dialogical questioning and the exercise of reason. It is that kind of critical questioning that this course hopes to encourage in students. My intention is to help undergraduates develop a deeper understanding of psychological science and their participation in it.

Critical psychology begins with the moral recognition that taking responsibility for our science and what it becomes over time requires continuous interrogation of ourselves and our practices. This involves reflecting not only on our individual actions but also the institutional significance of psychology for our society and culture. Through select readings, videos, and class discussion, this course aims to bring the background and context of psychological research into view so that we better understand the choices implicit in our work. Only then can these choices be subject to critical questioning in relation to real or imagined alternatives. The goal is not to steer students toward prescribed questions, sanctioned answers, or favoured ideological positions, but to help them develop the confidence, vision, and conceptual ability to ask penetrating questions that they never thought to ask before. How they then pursue those questions is up to them.

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## Evaluation

Evaluation is based on two in-class tests (February 16 and April 6 from 12:10-2:50 pm), a formal term paper (due by 12:10 pm on March 30), and two thought papers (due by 12:10 pm on February 9 and March 23).

The first test accounts for 34% of the course mark, the second test for 25%, the term paper for 35%, and the thought papers for 3% each. Note that the second test will address only those topics covered since the first test.

**Tests.** Both tests will be hand-written in class in standard U of T test booklets. Access to notes, readings, and electronic devices is **not** be permitted during the tests. Example test questions from previous years are available [here](#) to aid students in their preparations. These will provide familiarity with the sort of broad and encompassing questions that will be asked. Both tests will consist of three such questions, each worth 10 marks. Students are given the fullest latitude to bring together, interpret, and integrate content from the readings and lectures in responding to each of the test questions. Course content should be used to justify and support the position taken on the issue and the claims made in that regard. Students will not be evaluated on their positions and claims per se, but on how effectively they support them. The focus of evaluation is on quality of argument, not on the presence or absence of a target piece of course material. Students are expected to “make a case” in answering each question and will be judged on how convincingly they do so.

Each test response will be evaluated holistically, as a unified argument, and assigned a mark of 0-10. Quality will be assessed according to three equally weighted criteria. These are:

1. comprehensive inclusion of relevant content from readings and lectures
2. sound interpretation and effective integration of that content

3. clear articulation of a summary position based on (1) and (2)

According to this scheme, there are no categorically “right” or “wrong” responses, only better and worse arguments for various positions that might be taken. Few important and enduring questions in the study of mind, society, and culture can be approached otherwise.

The tests will be marked by the TA, who will provide brief evaluative comments on each test response. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the TA **within two weeks** after the marks are posted. Only if there is a well-founded allegation of bias/prejudice or obvious error of judgment should the instructor be approached about a specific mark assigned by the TA. In such cases, the instructor will evaluate the test response independently and decide on a final mark. This final mark may be lower than, higher than, or the same as the original mark and is not open to further appeals to the instructor.

Marks for the first test will be posted on Quercus within two weeks, along with evaluative comments by the TA. Marks and comments for the second test will be posted on Quercus within three weeks.

Make-up tests will *not* be offered, with the exception noted at the end of this section. Students who miss a test due to illness or other adversity beyond their control must email a letter of petition to the course instructor within one week of the missed test. The petition must be accompanied by proof of submission on [ACORN](#)'s Absence Declaration Tool. The declaration must indicate that the student was unable to take the test because of a clearly debilitating or otherwise disabling condition. Claims that illness or adversity prevented adequate *preparation* for the test will not suffice in most cases. Late petitions will *not* be considered. Successful petitions will result in re-weighting of the remaining test. In the case of exemption from the first test, the second test will be re-weighted to 59% of the course mark to maintain the contribution of testing to the overall grade. Similarly, in the case of exemption from the second test, the first test will be re-weighted to 59%. Unsuccessful petitions will result in a test mark of zero.

In the unlikely event that a student is granted exemption from **both** tests, an **in-person** make-up test worth 59% will be written so that the course mark does not depend only on the term paper and thought papers. This make-up test will be cumulative, addressing topics covered before **and** after the first test. Access to notes and readings will **not** be permitted during the writing of the cumulative make-up test. The test will be scheduled to take place within **one week** of the date of the second test in a reserved seminar room in the Department of Psychology. Failure to write the cumulative make-up test will result in a mark of zero for the test component of the course.

Please note that missing a term test is a serious matter. Exemption will be granted only in clearly legitimate and properly documented cases, in accordance with the guidelines of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

**Term paper.** A similar frame of evaluation applies to the term paper, which is to be a critical examination, or "critique," of any single, full-length article published in *American Psychologist*, *Psychological Review*, or *Psychological Bulletin* since 2013. Your critique will be judged holistically on its merit as a carefully researched, well-conceived, cogent, and clearly presented argument and assigned a mark of 0-100. An evaluative summary will be provided. We will be discussing different kinds of critique in class. The extent to which empirical "findings" (the results of formal scientific studies) are cited should depend entirely on the kind of critique you decide to write. **Students are encouraged to seek approval of their initial plans for a critique from either the instructor or the TA through email or during office hours. Please do so by February 24 to give yourself enough time to research and develop your ideas.** Although this approval is not a credited requirement, it is *strongly* recommended. Students who do not bother to share their plans with us run the risk, however small, of writing a paper that is ill-suited to the aims of the course. A poor choice would be reflected in a poor mark.

A few additional pointers on writing a good term paper:

- begin reading and organizing information early; this is a *long-term* project, and the quality of your argument will reflect the time you devote to conceiving and developing it
- feel free to approach the TA or instructor if you need advice in developing your ideas
- outline your argument in capsulized form near the beginning of the paper so the reader has a map of where you intend to go
- state and defend any debatable assumptions that are crucial to your argument
- do not include material that is not directly pertinent to your central argument; do not digress
- present your argument as a logical and well-ordered progression of ideas
- argue in as clear and convincing a manner as possible
- avoid circular argument and other forms of bad reasoning

The term paper must conform to APA format (refer to *Publication Manual of the APA*, 7th ed.) and consist of 2,500-3,500 words of text excluding the title page, references, and any tables/figures/appendices. Do *not* include an abstract. Please don't ask us "how many" bibliographic references your paper should have. That is a misguided question. We won't be counting your references. You shouldn't either. The number of works cited in a paper is not itself an indicator of quality one way or another. Some arguments demand more extensive citation than others. If you spend sufficient time seriously researching the topic of your critique, as is expected, you should have no reason to worry about how many references end up in your paper.

As you plan, research, and write your paper, feel free to visit the instructor and TA during their office hours if you have questions or need guidance.

Term papers must be submitted before the deadline through Quercus. E-mailed papers will not be accepted. **Papers submitted late will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty.**

Unlike the tests, the paper is a long-term project requiring sustained effort over many weeks. Therefore, requests to submit late papers without penalty will in most cases be denied. Please plan and work accordingly. Marks and evaluative comments for the term papers will be posted on Quercus within three weeks of submission. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the marker (either the instructor or the TA) **within two weeks** after the marks are posted.

**Thought papers.** The two thought papers are structured opportunities for students to relate the issues explored in the videos to their own lives. They are personal explorations, not scholarly reports, and should not include any formal references or citations. Each paper must be 500-600 words in length. Each should be based on *one* of the optional videos listed in the syllabus. This means that you will need to watch at least *two* videos across the course. You are free to choose the ones that interest you most. The first thought paper must be submitted through Quercus by 12:10 pm on February 9. The second must be submitted by 12:10 pm on March 23. Emailed papers will not be accepted. Late papers will not be accepted unless otherwise arranged with the instructor due to special circumstances. Please plan and work accordingly.

The question to be addressed in each thought paper is:

*What is the main argument, observation, or interpretation offered in this video? Do you feel that this argument, observation, or interpretation is relevant to your own life or the lives of those you know well? Why or why not?*

Thought papers should be well-written, thoughtful, and well-reasoned. Each paper will be evaluated by the instructor and assigned a summary score of 0-5 mark in accordance with the following scheme:

- 0     • no submission before deadline
- 1-2   • example does not meet instructional requirements
- 3     • meets requirements but is limited by poor understanding of the film and/or weak writing
- 4     • good comprehension, writing, and quality of thought
- 5     • excellent comprehension, writing, and quality of thought

Marks for each thought paper will be posted on Quercus within two weeks of its submission deadline. Brief comments will be provided along with the mark. Students are welcome to seek elaboration or clarification from the instructor during office hours.

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## Course Policies

**Plagiarism Detection.** Normally, students will be required to submit their papers to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their papers to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the

purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation [website](#).

**Writing.** The ability to write effectively is key to academic and professional success in the information age. To find resources aimed at helping you develop your writing skills, start by visiting [Writing at the University of Toronto](#).

**Grading Policy.** Please note that all course marks are tentative until approved by the Department Chair and the Dean's office, and recorded by the Office of the Faculty Registrar. For more information on what grades mean at U of T, please see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/general/grading-policy>.

**Penalties for Lateness.** Late thought papers will not be accepted unless otherwise arranged with the instructor due to justifying circumstances. Late term papers will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty.

**Email Policy.** Please check the syllabus before sending me an email. You will find answers to many of your questions there. Feel free to email me for any other questions or concerns, or attend my drop-in office hours.

**Religious Accommodation.** As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a test) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

**Students with Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements.** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/new-registration>. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

**Academic Integrity.** All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as

your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me for advice on anything that you find unclear. To learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at [Writing at the University of Toronto](https://www.utoronto.ca/writing). Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity> and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>.

**Specific Medical Circumstances.** Students who are absent from academic participation for any reason (e.g., COVID, cold, flu and other illness or injury, family situation) and who require consideration for missed academic work should report their absence through the online absence declaration. The declaration is available on [ACORN](#) under the Profile and Settings menu. Students should also advise their instructor of their absence.

If an absence extends beyond 7 consecutive days, or if you have a non-medical personal situation preventing you from completing your academic work, you should connect with your College Registrar. They can provide advice and assistance reaching out to instructors on your behalf. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

**Digital Devices in Class.** Technology can support student learning, but it can also become a distraction. Research indicates that multi-tasking (texting or going online) during class time can have a negative impact on learning. Out of respect for your fellow students in this class, please refrain from using laptops or mobile phones for entertainment during class. Do not display any material on a laptop which may be distracting or offensive to your fellow students. Laptops may be used only for legitimate classroom purposes, such as taking notes, downloading course information from Quercus, or working on an assigned in-class exercise. Checking social media, email, texting, games, and other online activities are not legitimate classroom purposes. Such inappropriate laptop and mobile phone use is distracting to those seated around you.

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## Academic Resources

### English Language Learners (ELL)

**Program:** <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>

ELL offers a range of programs/workshops/resources to assist all Arts & Science students who wish to improve their English language skills (including reading, listening, speaking, and writing). Please visit their website for more information about these resources.

## Other Resources

Student Life Programs and Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>)

Academic Success Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc>)

Counselling and Psychological Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>)

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## Lectures

**Students are expected to attend all lectures in person and participate in class discussion, which is a vital part of the social learning experience in this course.** Lectures will **not** be recorded by the instructor and made available to students afterward. Students are, however, free to record lectures using their own devices if they wish. PowerPoint slides used in lectures will be posted on Quercus within a day following each lecture.

Please note that there are **no** prepared lecture notes for this course. **It is strongly recommended that you arrange a notes partnership with a fellow student as soon as possible.** You and your partner should turn to each other for notes from any missed lectures.

As the overlap of lectures with readings will vary considerably across topics, you must complete all required readings **and** attend lectures to perform well in this course.

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## Readings and Videos

**All readings and videos can be easily accessed through the course modules.** Some of the readings may be challenging and require thoughtful consideration. The effort invested will be repaid with a deeper understanding of the nature and significance of our discipline. Allow yourself sufficient time to read and think about the material. Reading should be done not to memorize incidental details or references, but to understand the main arguments, positions, and/or frameworks presented by the authors. Make notes accordingly. As you read, you should be asking yourself the following questions:

- What major questions, concerns, or issues are being addressed in this reading?
- What are the authors claiming about these?
- What is the logical, conceptual, or empirical basis of these claims?
- Do I agree or disagree with these claims? Why?
- How would I express my position in dialogue with others?

A helpful online resource for clarifying many of the concepts and ideas mentioned in the readings and elsewhere in the course is the [Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology](#). [Wikipedia Links to an external site.](#) is often a good option as well.

The required readings must be completed *before* each lecture, which will be difficult to follow and participate in otherwise. There are two required readings to be completed before each substantive lecture except the last on March 30. An additional, *optional* reading is assigned for each lecture except the last. This reading is intended for those students who are especially interested in the topic and would like to explore it further, as well as those who want to excel in the course and prefer more content to draw from in supporting their positions on the term tests.

The videos are *optional*, with the qualification that at least two must be viewed to write the thought papers. Students are not required to watch more than two of the videos. But again, those wanting to further their understanding of specific topics or issues will profit from watching more of them. Let your personal interests guide you here.

Finally, note that this is not a course you can “coast” through or “cram” for overnight. If you fail to keep up with the reading schedule, attend lectures, write the tests, and submit the thought papers and term paper on time, you are bound to end up frustrated and disappointed with your experience in this course. Please plan accordingly.

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## Lecture, Reading, and Viewing Schedule

### January 12 – Introduction

### January 19 – What is Critical Psychology?

Required readings:

Yanchar, S. C., Slife, B. D., & Warne, R. (2008). Critical thinking as disciplinary practice. *Review of General Psychology, 12*, 265-281.

Teo, T. (2015). Critical psychology: A geography of intellectual engagement and resistance. *American Psychologist, 70*, 243-254.

Additional (optional) reading:

Parker, I. (2007). Critical psychology: What it is and what it is not. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 1*, 1-15.

Optional video: *Mind Field's (2018) The Stanford Prison Experiment*

### January 26 – The Rhetoric of Psychology

Required readings:

Smyth, M. M. (2001). Fact making in psychology: The voice of the introductory textbook. *Theory & Psychology, 11*, 609-636.

Billig, M., & Marinho, C. (2015). Rhetoric and psychology: Ending the dominance of nouns. In J. Martin, J. Sugarman, & K. L. Slaney (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of theoretical and philosophical psychology: Methods, approaches, and new directions for social sciences* (pp. 117-132). John Wiley & Sons.

Additional (optional) reading:

Dumas-Mallet, E., & Gonon, F. (2020). Messaging in biological psychiatry: Misrepresentations, their causes, and potential consequences. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 28, 395-403.

Optional video: David Huron's (2014) *The Rhetoric of Science*

## **February 2 – Psychology's "Double Hermeneutic"**

Required readings:

Hacking, I. (2007). Kinds of people: Moving targets. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 151, 285-318.

Sugarman, J. (2009). Historical ontology and psychological description. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 29, 5-15.

Additional (optional) reading:

Fay, B. (1983). General laws and explaining human behavior. In D. R. Sabia & J. Wallulis (Eds.), *Changing social science* (pp. 103-128). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Optional video: ABA's (2017) *Hidden Injustice: Bias on the Bench*

## **February 9 – Crises, Past and Present**

Thought paper 1 due.

Required readings:

Wieser, M. (2020). The concept of crisis in the history of Western psychology. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*.

Wiggins, B. J., & Chrisopherson, C. D. (2019). The replication crisis in psychology: An overview for theoretical and philosophical psychology. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 39, 202-217.

Additional (optional) reading:

Yarkoni, T. (2022). The generalizability crisis. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 45, 1-16.

Optional video: PBS Nova's (2017) *What Makes Science True?*

## **February 16 – Test 1**

No lecture.

## February 23 - Reading Week

No lecture.

## March 2 – The Neuroscientific Turn

Required readings:

Schwartz, S. J., Lilienfeld, S. O., Meca, A., & Sauvigné, K. C. (2016). The role of neuroscience within psychology: A call for inclusiveness over exclusiveness. *American Psychologist*, 71, 52-70.

Broer, T., & Pickersgill, M. (2015). Targeting brains, producing responsibilities: The use of neuroscience within British social policy. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 54-61.

Additional (optional) reading:

Farah, M. J. (2018). Socioeconomic status and the brain: Prospects for neuroscience-informed policy. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 19(June), 428-438.

Optional video: RSA's (2011) *Neuromania? The Possibilities and Pitfalls of our Fascination with Brains*

## March 9 – Diagnosing Psychiatric Diagnosis

Required readings:

Roy, M., Rivest, M.-P., Namian, D., & Moreau, N. (2019). The critical reception of the *DSM-5*: Towards a typology of audiences. *Public Understanding of Science*, 28, 932-948.

Graham, G. (2021). *The disordered mind* (3rd ed.). Routledge. (pp. 35-62)

Additional (optional) reading:

Faucher, L., & Goyer, S. (2015). RDoC: Thinking outside the DSM box without falling into a reductionist trap. In S. Demazeux & P. Singy (Eds.), *The DSM-5 in perspective: Philosophical reflections on the psychiatric babel* (pp. 199-224). Springer.

Optional video: TVO Docs' (2012) *Allen J. Frances on the Overdiagnosis of Mental Illness*

## March 16 – Whose Psychology?

Required readings:

Rutherford, A. (2020). Doing science, doing gender: Using history in the present. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 40, 21-41.

Bizumic, B. (2018). *Ethnocentrism: Integrated perspectives*. Routledge. (pp. 137-149)

Additional (optional) reading:

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33, 61-135.

Optional video: ShortCutsTV's (2015) *Psychology and Ethnocentrism*

### **March 23 – From Psychology to Self-Help**

Thought paper 2 due.

Required readings:

Nehring, D., Hendriks, E. C., Kerrigan, D., & Alvarado, E. (2016). *Transnational popular psychology and the global self-help industry: The politics of social change*. Palgrave Macmillan. (pp. 17-29)

Cabanas, E., & Illouz, E. (2019). *Manufacturing happy citizens*. Polity Press. (pp. 111-145)

Additional (optional) reading:

Madsen, O. J. (2014). *The therapeutic turn: How psychology altered Western culture*. Routledge. (pp. 69-91)

Optional video: RSA's (2010) *Smile or Die*

### **March 30 – Epilogue**

Term paper due.

### **April 6 – Test 2**

No lecture.

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