

Reincarnation Debunked (article)

In this article I list the alternative explanations for phenomena claimed to be of reincarnation. The upside is that an afterlife is not denied. On the contrary, the real evidence strongly suggests one.

1. There are cases where the new incarnation was born before the “past life” died

Professor Ian Stevenson founded the present cult of ascribing memories of past lives to reincarnation, and the title of his book *Twenty Case Suggestive Of Reincarnation* is self-explanatory. However there are anomalies with his theory.*An Indian boy named Jasbir Jat was born three and a half years before his previous incarnation, Sobha Ram, died!

*A Buddhist monk, Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn, was born a day before the death of Nai Leng, the personality he claimed to have been in his previous life. Ian Stevenson admitted ‘I studied this case with much care but couldn't find an explanation for the discrepancy.’ (1)

2. There are cases where two people have shared the same “past life” memory

*Dr Melvin Morse cites a case where two American boys, thousands of miles apart, shared the same “past life”. (2)

*Among the Druze of Lebanon, two boys both claimed to be Melhem Mlaheb reincarnated. However, a factory boss said that he had never encountered anyone by that name. And one of the boys got the name of his past life spouse wrong: it was Amira, not Bassima. (3)
Hardly pointers towards reincarnation.

3. There are cases where the “past life” has been channeled while the present life is still alive

Probably the best known case of this involves Barbro Karlo who claimed to be the reincarnation of Ann Frank. However, Frank was channeled by psychic, Elisa Medhus, in 2014, some eleven years before Karlen died (4)- another overlap in lives.

4. The majority of “past lives” invoked by Past Life Therapy (PLT) are confabulations (“cryptomnesia”)

This phenomenon is due to the patient reading about a personality at some time in their earlier life (often as a child) before burying the details deep in the subconscious mind.

As one example of this, Ian Wilson cites the case of an English woman named Jan who, under hypnosis, produced an account of a “former life” as Joan Waterhouse, executed as a witch in 16th century England. Jan’s account proved to be correct in almost every detail, and was even accompanied with a regional accent punctuated with realistic sounding language and idioms. Her stressed tones throughout the hypnotic regression persuasively suggested that Jan was re-living the suffering visited upon Joan long ago. However, two main factors helped disprove the reality of Jan’s “past life” memory.

First, Jan recounted the year of Joan’s trial as 1556 and, when asked which monarch was reigning at the time, replied that Elizabeth was queen. Now, the real Joan Waterhouse’s trial was in 1566, not 1556. So, why the mistake with the trial year? It transpired that the Lambeth Palace chapbook which recorded the trial was mis-copied in the 19th century, recording the year wrongly as 1556.

Significantly, authors who based historical dramas on the trial repeated the error and it is highly likely that Jan must have read or seen a play of the trial based on this copy and remembered this wrong date also.

Secondly, additional evidence against the authenticity of Jan's experience materialized when her speech was analysed by an English expert who specialized in historical regional accents. He dismissed Jan's accent after a short time as a fabricated one based upon popular TV and radio renditions of the period, and that could not be reconciled with how the real 16th century Joan Waterhouse would have spoken. (5)

Nevertheless, the case shows the human brain's truly amazing powers of recall.

Dr Ian Stevenson himself rejected Past Life Regression, writing

'In my experience, nearly all so-called previous personalities evoked through hypnotism are entirely imaginary and a result of the patient's eagerness to obey the hypnotist's suggestion. It is no secret that we are all highly suggestible under hypnosis.' 1

5. Children's "past life memories" can be otherwise explained

Clearly, the memories of young children cannot have been confabulated. But this does not mean the child is reincarnated. There are two other explanations:

(i) Fraud

Ian Wilson noted that the children studied by Ian Stevenson in India and Sri Lanka were predominantly those of a lower caste remembering "past lives" as a higher caste. As Wilson writes, 'The trend is so marked across so many of Stevenson's cases that it surely indicates only one thing: a motive. And in reincarnationist countries teeming with so many poor, it is not difficult to guess that motive.' (6)

Also, unknown to many of his followers, Stevenson, via the University of Virginia, received a grant of one million dollars from attorney Chester C Carlson in support of paranormal research: a fortune in 1964 and, some might suspect, a major incentive to "find" for reincarnation. (7)

(ii) Spirits

However, if the case is genuine, another alternative explanation is that of obsessing spirits transmitting the events of their own lives to the child, who is too young to realize the events are not from his/her own experience. This possibility would account for the otherwise mysterious features of these cases, namely:

***why "past lives" can be evicted.**

Dr Carl Wickland, a psychiatrist of the early 20th c., demonstrated how his patients were not hopelessly insane, as believed, but were actually being obsessed by spirits. By applying a mild electric current to his patients, Wickland literally shocked the spirit out of the victim. His wife, Anna, a psychic medium, then hosted the spirit and coaxed it into moving on. Wickland recorded such cases in his book *Thirty Years Among The Dead* (1924).

Significantly, some of the "past lives" were believers in reincarnation when they were alive and had become trapped in the magnetic aura around the body while trying to reincarnate. This also strongly suggests that reincarnation is not a "natural" occurrence: the magnetic aura is there to protect against such spirit intrusion.

* why the children forget their "past life" by around age 8.

Ian Stevenson admitted

‘The children nearly always stop talking about their previous lives between the ages of five and eight.’ (8)

Significantly, this is the time when the child has emerged from the theta stage between fantasy and reality and develops its own identity, thus making it strong enough to resist any obsessing entity such as Wickland described.

* why the child’s personality returns to normal

For example, Wickland cites the case of Jack T had been normal until age five when he began to display an uncontrollable temper, complaining of being ‘ugly’. The spirit of Charlie Herrman was removed. Charlie’s own ‘ugly’ self-image was due to having been horribly pock-marked and he had transferred this to Jack T. Sadly, Charlie had been attempting to reincarnate, and had wanted to start life as a five year old. (9) Instead had become trapped in the child’s magnetic aura, hence the frustration and bad temper shown in Jack T. When Charlie was ejected, Jack T returned to normal. (10)

The reincarnation believer must ask themselves just how a “past life” can be shocked out of its victim, as Carl Wickland did, and how a child can then return to normal?

*** why most “past lives” are of someone who died violently or prematurely.**

Dr Jim Tucker observed

‘In 70% of the cases the previous person died by unnatural means, meaning murder, suicide, or accident... a distinct factor...even in the natural death cases ...where a quarter of the ... cases is under the age of 15.’ (11)

As Dr Susan B Martinez asks

‘How can reincarnation be “natural” as its proponents claim, if this lopsided statistic puts the lie to its normality? Clearly there is something else at work...’ (12)

This aspect of past life research crops up repeatedly in some of the most famous cases. For example James Leininger (“past life” was US navy pilot James Huston, killed in WW2)

Shanti Dev (“past life” Lugdi Bal died just after childbirth)

Cameron McCauley (“past life” killed by a black car)

Om Sety (“past life” ancient Egyptian temple maid who committed suicide)

Barbro Karlo (“past life” Ann Frank died prematurely of typhus in Belsen)

The Pollock twins, Gillian and Jennifer (“past life siblings, Joanna and Jacqueline, killed by a car)

Arthur Guirdham’s patient Mrs Smith (“past life” Cathar burned at the stake)

In Jasbir Jat’s case, too, his “past life”, Sobha Ram was poisoned, and the murderer was believed to have owed him 600 rupees (an added incentive?) (13)

Again, such violent demise supports the idea of a “lost soul/spirit” still attached to the earth plane.

6. “Past Life Trauma” As The Work Of Spirits

Serious illnesses that have defied medical treatment have been ascribed to the patient’s past life and an injury sustained then. John Hamer describes how the cause of one man’s incurable back pain was traced via “past life therapy”(PLT):

'Regressed back to a past life in medieval times, the subject found himself on a battlefield... captured by the enemy and held down by several of them whilst another of their number 'ran him through' with a sword into his back, thus ending his current life.' (14)

Through this experience, the man's pain was resolved. Conclusive? Well, no. Compare the following report was recounted by Carl Wickland:

'Mrs. G.. .had for many years suffered intensely from a peculiar spinal affliction, which baffled all skill of physicians... a spirit who had died of a broken back and neck was removed ...he had drifted into the aura of the patient when she was a child and had become enmeshed in her nervous system, thus transferring to his victim the physical condition under which he had died... ' (15)

With the removal of the spirit the patient suffered no more pain in the back.

*Past lives? No, just spirits in the room...

Sometimes, you have to dump a belief system for a better one. That's what happened to Alan Ross. Back in the late 1960s, he won a prize at a psychic fair, namely, a past life regression with three psychics-something he had believed in. The psychics discovered several "past lives": a Hebrew from biblical times; a Crusader killed in battle; a medieval Frenchman robbed and murdered on the road; a soldier killed in the trenches of World War I. (note again the prevalence of violent death).

Ross first experienced a strange vibration. Then, abruptly, a female director charged into the room, yelling 'Why are all these spirits in the room? Get rid of them! This reading is over!' (16)

Ross realized later that the psychics had channeled the entities competently enough. However, their interpretation had been wrong: the "past lives" regressed to were, in fact, spirits.

Two centuries before, another psychic, Emmanuel Swedenborg had broached the same subject, writing

'If a spirit were to speak from his own memory with a man, the man would not know otherwise than that the thoughts then in his mind were his own....This is the source of the belief held by some of the ancients that after some thousands of years they were to return into their former life...' (17)

If an adult can be duped in this way, how much easier for a young child to be.

7. Strange birthmarks can be otherwise explained

Ian Stevenson regarded strange birthmarks corresponding with the "past life" mode of death as more proof of reincarnation. However, such birthmarks are recorded as being produced in three other main ways.

(i) by the child's mother

Stephen Blake cites recorded examples of how a local woman saw a soldier's arm cut off in a duel and went into labor. Her child was born with only one hand! Similarly, another pregnant woman was recorded as witnessing a soldier's arm cut off before giving birth to a one armed baby! (18)

Far-fetched? Maybe, but is it any more so than the idea of spirits, in the process of reincarnating, transferring the marks of the blows that killed them to a fetus?

(ii) via hypnosis

It is well documented that PLR induced trance can reproduce in the subject the injuries sustained by their "past-life" subject. Thus, Ann Dowling's 19th c. "past life", Sarah Williams, is beaten to death, and next day, Ann's body is covered in bruises. Likewise, Pauline McKay's "former life" hangs herself and a lurid rope mark appears on Pauline's neck. (19)

Dr Raymond Moody regressed a woman to her childhood where she re-lived her father's cruel beatings until bleeding whip marks appeared across her naked body and were photographed by doctors. (20)

(iii) by spirits

The living are reported to have been injured by ghosts. Psychic Holly Joy suffered such an attack which overturned her belief that spirits cannot harm the living.:

'Many recorded cases over decades have demonstrated otherwise, including myself after I was scratched following a paranormal investigation. It can be a traumatic and often life changing experience..' (21)

There is very little difference between such injuries and those purported to be from past lives, because for reincarnation to occur in the context of birthmarks, humans must have some form of spirit. Sadly, some human spirits are earthbound or else occupy the lower astral planes where they can maintain their worldly aggression and spite.

8. Strange languages can be otherwise explained

Otherwise known as "xenoglossy", the history of Spiritualism is full of accounts of people in trance speaking in languages that are not the native tongue. Carl Wickland writes of

'A patient who, although having no knowledge of French or music sang well the "Marseillaise" in French when placed under the influence of an anesthetic.... the uneducated domestic, who, in delirium, recited classic Latin as perfectly as her former employer, a Professor of Latin, had done during his life...' (22)

Observing the phenomenon in young children, who have not had time to learn even their mother tongue, encouraged Ian Stevenson to believe that the child must have been a native speaker in a past life.

However, Dr Susan B Martinez counters Stevenson's notion with a remarkable story set in modern Canada. A toddler had parents who were Canadian, but his Hungarian grandmother spoke only her native tongue until her death. The boy never spoke till aged three, then, one night, he began speaking fluent Hungarian to someone unseen in his bedroom. When he talked again, a year later, he spoke English with a Hungarian accent! (23)

Once more the spirit explanation - that of the boy's dead grandma coaching him- seems the most plausible. The spirit factor is also why the Roman Catholic church regards xenoglossy as one of the four main criteria of possession.

9. Researchers and therapists disagree over the details of rebirth.

(i) A Life Between Life (LBL) versus no LBL.

In his book *Journey of Souls* (1994), Dr Michael Newton documented a Life Between Life (LBL), findings based upon 7,000 patients. This, supposedly, constituted

'a clear, coherent, consistent description of the spirit world accompanied by a concise description of the events experienced by souls from death in one life to re-birth in the next.' (24)

However Newton's findings are wholly contradicted by those of fellow psychiatrist Joe Keeton who found no such LBL among his 9,000 patients. For Keaton's patients, there is

'no limbo, no rest between one life and another. From death to conception is instantaneous'.

(25)

Moreover a Ross Feldon, whom Newton cites (26)was not found by a genealogist on <http://reddit.com> despite an intensive search, which suggests confabulation. (27)

(ii) Similarly, while some believe rebirth is instantaneous, others hold that there can be gaps of centuries, even thousands of years between incarnations.

(ii) Some believe reincarnation is compulsory, others that it is a choice.

Shirley McLaine, Mia Dolan and David Icke all assert that we are reincarnated continually in order to learn “lessons”. As Dolan puts it, ‘If you flunk out of school, your parents put you in another one’.

(28) This means that reincarnation must be compulsory.

However researcher Marty Spellar disagrees:

‘Celestial law is based on individual free will. An endless chain of involuntary reincarnations contravenes this law.’ (29)

* Also, one might inquire, just what “lessons” did Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot come to learn? And the corollary: what lessons did their innocent victims come to learn?

10. Cultures disagree also regarding the details of reincarnation.

(i) Gender Change

Ian Stevenson tells of how

‘The proportion of (sex change) cases varies greatly among cultures... When I questioned the informants in countries where sex-change cases occur, they told me that sex-change from one life to another is possible, but when I questioned the informants of cultures where such cases do not occur, they told me it is impossible’ (30)

The Druze of the Middle East are a sect of Muslims who believe in reincarnation. However, they believe that

* Men can only reincarnate as men, women as women. (31)

(This, of course, repudiates the varied “past lives” of many hypnotherapists and other cultures).

* Death to rebirth is instant, so there is no Life Between Lives (LBL) among the Druze.

* Likewise, in Druze belief there are none of the “announcing dreams” hailed by some as as proof of reincarnation.

(ii) Ethnicity

Genevieve Paulson wrote ‘In our many lifetimes we will experience all races.’ (32)

However, what race you will be born into seems to depend mostly upon your cultural beliefs.

Ian Wilson writes: ‘Almost all Tlingit...cases... reincarnate within the same family, while almost all Asian Indian cases are outside it.’ (33)

(iii) Self v. No Self

More disagreement, even between two major religions. Hindus believe that humans have an immortal soul, the “atman” or self. Conversely, however, Buddhists believe there is no abiding self, but we are merely a stream of consciousness.

(iv) Species

Reincarnationists try to accommodate migration between species but again this won’t work with the Druze:

‘Unlike the Hindu or Buddhist, who believes that souls may be transmitted to any living creature, Druze believe that the human soul can be transmitted only to another human being.’ (34)

That reincarnation is cultural is an absurd situation: the “rules” of re-birth should be universal and consistent. This is especially so if the doctrine of Karma operates, as this commits each soul to a lifetime based upon actions undertaken in its previous incarnation.

However, without Karma, reincarnation cannot work. This is because

‘If reincarnation wasn’t a law-governed process it would be totally random; and if it were totally random there would be no relationship whatsoever between actions and consequences. For example, a mass murderer might be rewarded with a huge fortune in his next incarnation... If Karma cannot work, the doctrine of reincarnation collapses.’ (35)

11. Psychics have discovered spirits of reincarnation believers from past ages who have not reincarnated.

Andrew Jackson Davis, the well-known 19th century mystic described the after-death planes as ‘A wild-west commotion...dominating the lower sectors of Summerland... groups representing... every religious sect...Gnostics...Egyptian mystery cults...ancient Greece, Babylon..the American Indian...Australian Bushman. New-Agers...Pythagoreans... Platonists... groups promoting atheism, polytheism, or animism; groups divided according to country...every nation...’ (38)

Quite obviously, some of these sects are thousands of years old, with some, such as the Gnostics and Platonists, adherents of reincarnation. And yet they have not reincarnated. Why not?

12. The population is ever-increasing. Where are all the extra souls coming from?

There are now forty times as many people on earth as there were in Christ’s time, and twice as many as there were in 1980! There are therefore always too many bodies for available souls.

One way believers try to get around this problem is to bring in the animal kingdom. But the animal population is in rapid decline, with species disappearing and habitats destroyed, thus greatly diminishing such a supply line. Besides which, as we saw, cultures like the Druze believe that humans reincarnate only as other humans. Also, psychics frequently contact spirits who are in the company of beloved pets they had on earth.

Moreover, if reincarnation is argued to be a choice, that infers that some souls will choose not to reincarnate, meaning that the pool of available souls becomes even less.

13. If a soul who lived previously is occupying a present body, then where is the present body’s soul?

Michael Shermer asked Deepak Chopra what happened to James Leininger’s soul if his body is occupied by the soul of a WW2 fighter pilot. Chopra replied with characteristic new age elusiveness: ‘What you call a person actually is a pattern of behavior of a universal consciousness.’ (39)

But Shermer’s point is crucial. If you are now accommodating the spirit of someone who lived previously, then where is your soul? And just what is the difference between this situation and possession? There is always going to be one soul too many in your body and it isn’t yours! And we already met those earthbound souls who are likely prowling around looking for new bodies to “reincarnate” in.

14. Recipients of heart transplants have received the “past life” memories of the donor

An example of this phenomenon is as follows:

An eight year-old girl received the heart of murdered ten year-old girl. She then began to experience vivid nightmares about the murder. A psychiatrist decided that her nightmares were actual events. Police were able to use the detailed information the girl provided: the time, the place, the weapon used, the clothes worn by the murderer, even the victim's last words. The killer was found and convicted! (40) This cannot, of course, be reincarnation as the two girls were contemporaries of each other for eight years.

The above case has similar hallmarks to a case claimed to be reincarnation, that of a three year old Druze boy who identified his "past-life" murderer, and located where his "former" body was buried. (41)

In this latter case, the Druze boy also bore the birthmark on his forehead where his killer's ax had struck him after a fight. However, we saw already how spirits can produce birthmarks on the living. Note, also, the same-sex "reincarnation" in this Druze case.

15. "Shared souls" Won't Cut It!

To help reconcile the deficit in souls caused by population growth, "soul sharing" is suggested. Stephen Blake addresses the only known version of this: bi-location. This is where yogis and saints have been seen appearing in two places at once.- a process involving the physical body in conjunction with the spiritual body. It is the spiritual body which travels to its intended destination at a speed impossible for the physical body. Thus, St. Anthony of Padua had been preaching in his local church at Limoges in 1226, when he was sighted simultaneously at a monastery in another part of the town. Swami Pranabananda was likewise reported to have given a message to a recipient a half hour's walk from his home in Benares, where he was seen in residence. (42)

However, the drawback is that, in each case, the saint and the yogi could only focus their consciousness in one body – the physical or the spiritual- at one time. While the spirit body traveled, the physical was in a type of trance. There are no exceptions to this, even among holy men and experienced mediums. Blake underlines the implications for soul sharing:

'It is evident that if saints, yogis and mediums cannot work through their physical and etheric bodies simultaneously they would be equally unable to work through two or more physical bodies simultaneously; and what cannot be achieved by saints, yogis and mediums cannot, a fortiori, be achieved by anyone else' (43)

16. Ian Stevenson testifies against "walk-Ins"

Dr Stevenson tried to explain the Jasbir case by assuming that the boy died of smallpox and that then Sobha Ram's spirit incarnated into him as a "walk-in". But Stevenson admitted he couldn't find Jasbir in his new incarnation:

'I have from time to time inquired in the area where he lives about the existence of a child who has claimed that in a previous life he was one Jasbir of village Rasulpur who died of smallpox at the age of about three; but I have never found any trace of such a child.' (44)

There are further problems with Stevenson's notion. A "walk-in" is considered to be permanent, which meant Jasbir Jat was now Sobha Ram. However

* Sobha Ram would never have reincarnated in a lower caste Jat body (there seems to have been no karmic compulsion).

*Inconceivably for a Brahmin, Jasbir (now Sobha, remember) married a Jat girl.

*Why did Sobha Ram's spirit did not meet up with Jasbir's spirit, which had just vacated the boy's sick little body?

*By the time he reached the age of nine, Jasbir actually reverted back to his normal personality, and 'he made several statements contradictory with other evidence.' (45) Sobha Ram, as a "walk-in" would not have forgotten details of his past life in this way.

Remember, too, the case we saw earlier of the Buddhist monk, Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn, born a day before the death of his "past life" Nai Leng. No walk-in was claimed for this. I think we may safely conclude, then, that "walk-ins" are out!

17. Spirits Can Be Readily Located

19th century Spiritualist William Howitt declared

'If reincarnation be true...there must have been millions of spirits, who, upon entering the other world, have sought in vain their kindred, children and friends. Has one whisper of such a woe ever reached us from the tens of thousands of communicating spirits? Never!' (46)

Needless to say, the sheer number of spirits thus available can only detract from the pool of souls available for reincarnation.

Reincarnation Is a A Harmful Doctrine

Stephen Blake writes:

'Nothing could be more designed to render the newly discarnate earthbound than belief in re-embodiment. Instead of progressing to more ethereal planes of consciousness, the newly discarnate hang around, waiting to reincarnate but obsessing incarnates instead; and so the cycle continues. The destiny of the self is the infinite eternal. Belief in reincarnation is harmful because it keeps the self imprisoned in the straitjacket of the temporal.' (47)

All the above points and more are dealt with in more detail in the free pdf book

'Reincarnation Debunked: The Amazing Truth About Past Life Memories' by Ron Wilson.

Alternatively, the e-book is currently less than one US dollar at amazon.com.

Other Resources

Here is a list of resources that argue against reincarnation:

Free books:

'Reincarnation Debunked: The Amazing Truth About Past Life Memories' (pdf) by Ron Wilson at

Blog | Willowweb

<http://hemlockweb.com/blog>

(The e-book is also available at Amazon.com. for just \$1)

'Is Reincarnation An Illusion?' (pdf) by Geoff Cutler at <http://new-birth.net/media/Reincarnation>

'30 Years Among The Dead' (chapter XV) (pdf) by Carl Wickland at Rune Øverby's base

'The Gateway of Understanding' (chapter XI) (pdf) by Carl Wickland at Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine details/the-gateway-of-understanding

Free Websites

Botelho, Octavio da Cunha-Reincarnation Under Scrutiny

<http://comparativereligion.com/reincarnation>

Evidence for Reincarnation DEBUNKED (<http://islamsikhism.com/reincarnation-transmigration>)

<http://leewoof.orgcomparativereligion.com-reincarnation>

Reincarnation Refuted Online

Skeptical Enquirer, Fall, 1994 Angel v Stevenson.

<http://Skeptico.blogs.com-reasons to doubt reincarnation>

Skeptoid Podcast - The Boy Who Thought He Was Reincarnated

Sudduth, Michael- The James Leininger Case Re-Examined

The Structure of Heaven-the evidence for possession as an alternative to reincarnation.

<http://wordgems.net/afterlife/reincarnation-on-trial>

<http://spiritsintheroom.com>

Silly Beliefs-Karma

My own free articles/posts

On Quora. com:

'What Evidence Suggests Reincarnation Is Not A Fact?'

'Could It Be Harmful To Believe In Reincarnation?'

On reddit. com:

"Reincarnation Rejected: How Spirits Create Past Life Memories"

'Karma Debunked'

Other Recommended Books

Blake, Stephen. *Reincarnation Refuted: Evidence, Logic and Common Sense* Grosvenor House(2014).

Cutler, Geoff. *Is Reincarnation An Illusion?* Lulu (2021).

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NOTES TO "WHAT EVIDENCE SUGGESTS REINCARNATION IS NOT A FACT?"

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4. <http://channelingeric.com>

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8. Stevenson, Ian Children Who Remember Past Lives p.179. University Press of Virginia (1987)
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16. Spirits in the Room, A Case Against Reincarnation
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