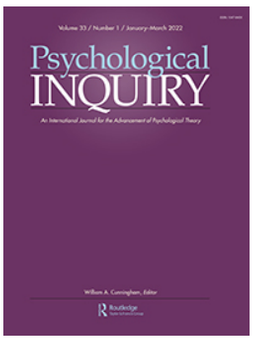

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Maxim Milyavsky & Marina Chernikova

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REPLY

Agency and Assistance Are Compensatory When They Are Perceived as Substitutable Means: A Response to Commentaries

Maxim Milyavsky[a] and Marina Chernikova[b]

[a]Faculty of Business Administration, Ono Academic College, Kiryat Ono, Israel; [b]University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

We are grateful to the commentators for their insightful commentaries. Most of the commentators praised our theory highly and agreed with its basic tenets. They also drew our attention to additional data that supports our theory. Yet, some commentators pointed to data that seems to be at odds with our theory. In what follows, we will set out more clearly the main propositions of the Agency Assistance Model, discuss the new supporting data that we've become aware of, and try to clarify the apparent contradictions between our theory and some evidence indicated by the commentators.

The starting point of our theory is the idea that human cognition is goal-driven, and that the same goal can be pursued by different means. We tried to explain the relationship between the individual and society from this point of view. To achieve goals, individuals can rely either on their own means or on the means of others. The principle of substitutability of means from Goal Systems Theory describes the relationship between equifinal means as compensatory (Kruglanski et al., 2002; Kruglanski, Chernikova, Babush, Dugas, & Schumpe, 2015). Based on this principle, we derive two hypotheses regarding the relationship between individual and social means. Hypothesis 1 (H1) states that the higher the effectiveness of personal means to achieve the goal(s) (i.e., personal agency), the more an individual can rely on himself to achieve the goal(s), and the higher will be his valuation of the self; as a result, the less s/he needs to rely on others to achieve the goal(s), which accordingly reduces their value in his/her eyes. Analogously, Hypothesis 2 (H2) states that the higher the perceived effectiveness of social means for achieving the goal(s) (i.e., social assistance), the more an individual can rely on social means and the higher will become their worth in his/her eyes; as a result, the less s/he needs to rely on his/her personal means and the lower will be their valuation of the self.

Additional Supportive Evidence

In the interval between writing the main paper and this response, we have discovered some additional data supporting our theory, which we will briefly discuss below. First, according to H1, a higher sense of agency increases people's valuations of themselves. In line with this prediction, higher-class individuals both view themselves as better performing than others across various contexts (i.e., more agentic; Varnum, 2015) and score higher on measures of self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002) and narcissism (Piff, 2014) than individuals of lower social class.

Secondly, according to H1, less agentic people should be more interested in others' assistance. In support of this prediction, Lim, Tai, Bamberger, and Morrison (2020) review multiple findings showing that people who typically have a lower sense of personal agency, such as women (*vs.* men), younger (*vs.* older) adults, lower (*vs.* higher) ranked employees, and people with lower (*vs.* higher) socio-economic status are more likely to seek resources from others (e.g., information, advice and help; Kuhn, Galloway, & Collins-Williams, 2016; Lim et al., 2020; Siciliano, 2015).

Third, according to H1, when people's agency decreases, they become more prosocial. Evidence from the literature on mortality salience is in line with this prediction. Specifically, when people are prompted to think about their physical death, they become more generous to other people (so-called Scrooge effect; Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002; Zaleskiewicz, Gasiorowska, & Kesebir, 2015). Although Terror Management Theory postulates the unique status of death *vs.* other forms of physical suffering (e.g., dental pain), we propose that death just constitutes a stronger manipulation of physical vulnerability than thoughts about dental pain, which in turn lowers people a global sense of agency. A recent paper by Motsenok and her colleagues supports this idea, showing that people's generosity increases gradually as their sense of physical vulnerability increases (Motsenok, Kogut, & Ritov, 2022). Moreover, financial vulnerability associated with the lower socio-economic class makes people better at identifying others' emotional states and taking their visual perspectives (Dietze & Knowles, 2021).

In turn, according to H1, the abundance of money should increase personal agency and thus reduce one's need for other people. Gasiorowska and Zaleskiewicz (this issue) cite additional evidence showing that thoughts about money lead to less generous behavior among children (Gasiorowska, Zaleskiewicz, & Wygrab, 2012). Importantly, children who were allowed to hold money (*vs.* other objects) not only behaved less generously toward other children, but also exhibited *more* effort and persistence in their task, which again supports our proposition that abundance

CONTACT Maxim Milyavsky mchernik1@gmail.com Faculty of Business Administration, Ono Academic College, Kiryat Ono, Israel.

of money increases people's reliance on their personal agency (Gasiorowska, Chaplin, Zaleskiewicz, Wygrab, & Vohs, 2016).

Finally, according to H1, various personal means (resources) are functionally fluid in their influence on the sense of agency. For instance, whereas thoughts about the abundance of money should heighten people's sense of agency, thoughts about death should lower it. It follows, then, that thoughts about money can serve as a buffer for thoughts about death, and indeed, evidence shows that priming of money reduces people's fear of death (Zaleskiewicz et al., 2013).

There is also additional evidence for H2. Duckworth (this issue) cites evidence showing that when parents do their child's homework for them, there is a decrease in the child's autonomy, motivation, self-efficacy, and achievement (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2001; Trautwein, Ludtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2006). A recent paper mentioned by Duckworth nicely illustrates H2 (Leonard, Martinez, Dashineau, Park, & Mackey, 2021). The researchers videotaped parent-child dyads while children were trying to solve challenging puzzles and examined how various types of parents' behaviors predicted the children's persistence in the task. Among various behaviors, such as encouragement, direct instructions, and pedagogical questions, only *taking over* (e.g., parent places a piece of the puzzle for the child) was significantly and negatively related to children's persistence. That is, only when the assistance was truly substitutable for children's personal means was it demotivating for the children. In the same vein, Fishbach (this issue) cites evidence showing that the presence of external controls, such as parental supervision undermines self-control in pursuing academic goals (Fishbach & Trope, 2005). Finally, Fishbach cites evidence supporting our idea that constant help from a partner in a particular area of housekeeping (finance) can reduce their partners' motivation to develop their skills in this area and lead to the division of labor (Ward & Lynch, 2019).

Clarifications on the Agency-Assistance Model

First, we would like to clarify that our theory describes one mechanism that can explain the relationship between personal agency and social assistance, which we believe to be fundamental and applicable to a wide range of phenomena. That said, other not-mutually exclusive mechanisms may also exist, and we speculate about some of them below.

Clarification 1: An Increase in Personal Resources Decreases the Need for Others but Increases the Ability and the Expectancy of Successful Attainment of Other-Oriented Goals

Our predictions regarding the shifts in other-oriented attitudes and behavior are based on the idea that more agentic people feel more self-sufficient and less needy in social means for attaining their goals. This decrease in the need for social others may in turn decrease people's sensitivity to other people's needs, emotions, and perspectives. Since attitudes constitute an antecedent of behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Allport, 1929), the mechanism proposed in the Agency-Assistance Model may explain the corresponding effects of personal agency on other-oriented behavior (e.g., help-seeking, help-giving).

However, attitudes are not the *only* antecedent of behavior. Since behavior requires effort, it is also determined by other considerations, such as the target goal's desirability and attainability (Kruglanski, Chernikova, Rosenzweig, & Kopetz, 2014), its importance among other goals, the instrumentality of the potential behavior to the target goal and other goals (Kruglanski, Jasko, et al., 2015), and the costs required for enacting the behavior in terms of psychological and non-psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2012; Lim et al., 2020). Thus, although fluctuations in the personal agency should influence people's need for others as predicted by our model, those fluctuations may not always be sufficient to produce a corresponding behavior.

Moreover, beyond the psychological mechanism proposed by the Agency-Assistance Model, there may be other mechanisms that explain other-oriented behavior. For instance, whereas people with a higher (*vs.* lower) sense of agency *ceteris paribus* need other people *less*, they are nonetheless likely to be *more* confident in their ability to find help when help is needed. Thus, a higher expectancy of getting help may make the more agentic people more likely to seek and find help when *they* believe they need help.

On the same note, whereas according to the Agency-Assistance Model more agentic people should be less *attuned* to others' needs, they may nevertheless be more *efficient* in helping others than less agentic people. To illustrate this idea, imagine two students Alex and Jamie. Alex is a strong student. She is very competent and feels highly agentic, so she is less interested in others' assistance in the domain of studies than, say, Jamie, who is a weak student. Alex may appear a bit haughty to her classmates, since she's not interested in studying together for exams, whereas Jamie seems a nice guy because he never declines invites to study together. Yet, because Alex is a better student than Jamie, other students realize that her ability to help is higher than Jamie's and tend to ask for her help more often. Moreover, she may agree to help more often than Jamie because she is more confident in her abilities. Thus, eventually, Alex may turn out to be a more helpful person than Jamie.

To sum up, the Agency-Assistance Model predicts that an increase in personal agency decreases people's *need for others*, which in turn decreases the likelihood of their other-oriented behavior. Yet, other-oriented behavior is also influenced by other factors, such as individuals' ability to attain their goals and their belief in their ability to do so. Since more agentic people typically have more resources and stronger beliefs in their ability to attain goals, they may eventually be more likely to behave prosocially when they feel they need it even though they usually need help less often than less agentic people.

Clarification 2: Compensatory Relations Between Equifinal Means Stem from Their Substitutability for Goal Attainment

Our prediction about the compensatory relationship between personal and social means stems from the axiom of their *substitutability* for goal pursuit. Yet, there may exist other situations not covered in our model where personal and social means are not perceived as substitutable to one another. First, one's personal means may be insufficient for attaining the goal on one's own. In this case, it is hardly possible to talk about the substitutability of means, and we would not predict compensatory relationships between them, since social assistance is necessary for the attainment of the goal.

Second, when a person pursues several goals that compete for his limited resources (e.g., time, energy) receiving assistance for one goal frees some resources for other goals. Thus, though assistance should undermine the person's agency with respect to the first goal it may help him achieve other goals thereby increasing his sense of agency with respect to those goals. Moreover, some goals may be auxiliary for other goals. Assistance with an auxiliary goal may not only free resources for the major goal, but even promote the major goal directly. According to our model, assistance with the auxiliary goal should undermine the person's agency with respect to this goal but should still increase one's agency with respect to the major goal.

Third, the assistance provided by other people may not be interpreted as others' assistance. For instance, the recipient of assistance may interpret it as others' *commitment* to the goal or to their relationships, which in turn may encourage him to exert more effort toward the goal either out of gratitude or for the sake of their relationships. Another possibility is that people may ascribe others' helping actions to themselves if they initiate these actions. Then, others' actions should enhance people's agency to the extent that they construe them as their own actions and other people as mere instruments in their hands.

Clarification 3: The Effects of Social Assistance on the Sense of Agency and Self-worth Can Be Goal-Specific, Domain-Specific, and Global

The logic of the Agency-Assistance Model predicts a compensatory effect of social assistance on *agentic engagement* and *self-perception* when the assistance is perceived as substitutable to personal means. On the local level, when a person detects that his goal (e.g., submitting a term paper) can be achieved by the means of others (his partner's work) he is likely to perceive his efforts as less necessary and hence relax them. As a result, he may feel less agentic about the attained goal, and the valuation of his ability to achieve that goal is also likely to be relatively lower. To the extent that this goal is central among a larger set of goals related to a certain domain (e.g., academic success) these effects should influence his beliefs about his abilities in this domain (i.e., domain-specific self-efficacy) and his aspirations in this domain. To the extent that this domain is central among his life goals, these effects should influence his global beliefs about his abilities (i.e., global self-efficacy) and self-worth. Since more global valuations of own competence and worth depend on agentic success in other goals as well, we anticipate that the effects get weaker for more global valuations.

To sum up, the size of the compensatory effect of social assistance on the valuations of one's competence and worth and on one's agentic aspirations should be proportionate to the centrality of the target goal for larger domains of competence and personality and should be inversely related to the level of construal of these valuations and aspirations.

A Response to Commentaries

Objections to H1

Objections to H1 can be summarized as: "higher agency is not always associated with less others-oriented behavior." Specifically, Abele (this issue) cites studies that find either null of positive correlations between self-reported agentic traits (or closely related scales, such as self-esteem) on the one hand and self-reported communion traits and attitudes to others on the other hand (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Hauke, 2020; Hauke & Abele, 2020; Wojciszke, Baryla, Parzuchowski, Szymkow, & Abele, 2011). In addition, she cites experimental evidence showing that priming of power through power postures increased participants' self-ratings of agency but did not decrease their self-ratings of communion traits (Abele & Yzerbyt, 2021). Similarly, Duckworth cites studies that found positive correlations between self-enhancing and self-transcendent values (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004), and between self-efficacy and perceived instrumental support (Karademas, 2006). In the same vein, Fitzsimons (this issue) mentions findings showing that high- (*vs.* low) self-esteem people rely on others more readily *when encountering threats and risk* (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

These findings indeed seem to be inconsistent with our model and with the findings cited in our main paper. Note, however, that most of this evidence relies either on null effects or on evidence obtained in correlational research that employs self-reported data. Needless to say, correlational research does not have strong internal validity and is particularly vulnerable for alternative explanations because of its inability to control for the possible extraneous variables. Moreover, self-reports may reflect respondents' naïve theories and their tendency to provide socially desirable answers. Below, we suggest some explanations for these findings, but, of course, further research is needed to reconcile them with the supporting evidence cited in the main paper.

First, when people rate themselves or other people on agency and communion traits the valence of these traits constitutes a potential confound that may explain why in some studies positive correlations between agency and communion traits are obtained. In support of this idea, in their review chapter, Abele and Wojciszke (2014) argue that "when the two contents [agency and communion] are independently rated for a large pool of traits, and the traits' valence is either held constant or partialled out, then

negative correlations between the agency and communion ratings result" and that "in a purely descriptive sense agency and communion are negatively related." (p. 238).

Second, people's self-ratings may reflect their ideal self-images rather than their actual personalities. Our society praises both agentic and prosocial values, so more agentic individuals may be tempted to rate themselves higher on positive communion traits as well. Indeed, evidence shows that more agentic people tend to view themselves as better than others across various contexts (Piff, 2014; Varnum, 2015). Yet, when it comes to actual behavior, people often need to choose between pursuing their selfish goals and being considerate of others' needs. Thus, it may be more informative to rely on observers' evaluations of people's behavior or to observe their actual behavior in a lab. Indeed, when people's self-reported values had been cross-validated with their peers' ratings of their behavior negative correlations between people's self-reported values of power and achievement and peer-reported benevolent behavior were found (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). Moreover, experimentally inducing people's sense of power decreased their perspective-taking and made them make more selfish decisions in a dictator game (Bendahan, Zehnder, Pralong, & Antonakis, 2015; Galinsky et al., 2006).

Third, according to Clarification 1, more agentic people may be more successful in seeking and recruiting help when they feel they need it. This mechanism can explain why more self-efficacious people report receiving more instrumental support (Karademas, 2006) and why people with high- (*vs.* low) self-esteem report relying on others more readily *when encountering threats and risk* (Murray et al., 2006). It is still consistent with the prediction of our model and supporting evidence cited in the main paper showing that all else being equal more agentic people need help less than less agentic people.

Objections to H2

Objections to H2 can be summarized as: "social assistance is not always demotivating and self-deprecating." We agree with this statement and apologize if our paper made it sound otherwise. Our model describes one mechanism through which social assistance influences agentic motivation and self-worth. Other not-mutually exclusive mechanisms as those described in Clarification 2 are possible. In fact, in our Agency-Assistance Model, social assistance becomes demotivating and self-deprecating when a person perceives social assistance as substituting his/her own efforts. Clearly, there are situations in which social assistance is not perceived as such, and hence no compensatory relations between social assistance and personal agency are expected.

Assistance Can Enhance Agency When It Is Necessary for Goal Attainment

One class of situations in which social assistance is not substitutable for individuals' personal means is when people perceive their own agency as insufficient for attaining the goal. Piff et al. (this issue) argue that individuals who receive help on a difficult task may feel more—not *less*—capable of completing that same task on their own in the future. They cite recent research showing the benefits of social support in the form of UBI programs for lower-class individuals' feelings of autonomy (West, Baker, & Coltrera, 2021). Similarly, Fishbach argues that social assistance may be complementary rather than compensatory to personal means when the latter is insufficient for attaining a goal. It could happen either because the person lacks the required competence (e.g., novice *vs.* expert) or because a goal is too challenging to be attained on one's own. Duckworth (this issue) refers to the latter case as "a goal [that requires] a synergistic combination of both personal action and the assistance of other people" (p. 26). Also, Gasiorowska and Zaleskiewicz (this issue) makes a similar argument about social means recruited through market relationships.

In the main paper, we refer to this possibility in postulate 1, saying that "individuals engaged in purposive action recruit means deemed adequate to the desired ends." We define means as adequate when they are above the threshold of perceived likelihood of goal attainment. Imagine a 2-year-old child who wants to tie his shoelaces, but still is not capable of doing it. If he does not get help, he will not be able to attain his goal; hence his momentary sense of agency is not going to increase and may even decrease due to the experienced failure. If he does receive help, he will attain the goal and his sense of agency may increase because of the experienced success in the goal attainment. Note, however, that an adult's assistance in this example does *substitute* the child's personal means. It would be substituting though if the child were 10 years old and could tie his shoelaces on his own. In such a case, an adult's taking over would undermine the child's sense of agency with respect to this goal.

Assistance Can Enhance the Sense of Agency with Respect to the Target Goal When It Is Provided to Other Goals

Another class of situations in which social assistance is not substitutable for individuals' personal means for attaining a particular goal is when this assistance is provided for an *alternative goal(s)*. Some of the examples discussed by the commentators may refer to this class of situations. Specifically, Piff et al. cite evidence showing that social support increases individual agency and self-efficacy among lower-class individuals (Castleman & Page, 2015; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Stephens, Townsend, Hamedani, Destin, & Manzo, 2015; Yeager et al., 2016). Duckworth makes a similar argument regarding the benefits of social support from parents, teachers, and classmates, arguing that social support is positively correlated with the agentic personal quality of grit (Clark, Dorio, Eldridge, Malecki, & Demaray, 2020).

Foreseeing these counterarguments, in the main paper, we distinguished between social assistance and social support, arguing that "whereas support involves encouragement, and provides a 'safety net' that may enhance one's self-confidence and sense of agency, assistance, doing other's tasks in their stead, may reduce it." Yet, the commentaries made us rethink and refine this reservation. We agree with McMillan

and Milyavskaya (this issue) that moral and instrumental support should not be treated differently in our model. In fact, neither moral nor instrumental support is expected to be demotivating *with respect to a target goal* when the recipient of this support does not perceive it as substitutable to her own efforts. Moreover, if support is provided for alternative goals, it may even boost one's sense of agency and valuation of the self with respect to the target goal.

To illustrate this idea let's imagine the following example. Alex, a college student, pursues two goals in her life: *studying* and *making money*. If her parents provide her with financial support, they will undermine her agency relative to her second goal (making money). At the same time, their financial support will free Alex's resources (e.g., time, energy) from work and will allow her to allocate these resources to the first goal (studies), which in turn will increase her chances to accomplish that goal. That is, parents' financial support can decrease the student's sense of agency in the domain of work yet increase her sense of agency in the domain of studies. Thus, when social assistance is provided for an alternative goal that shares resources with the target goal, it frees resources for the target goal and thus promotes the pursuit of that goal, which in turn should increase one's sense of agency with respect to the target goal.

In some cases, the alternative goal(s) may be auxiliary to the target goal. Receiving assistance on the auxiliary goal(s) not only frees resources for the target goal but also directly helps pursue it. This seems to be the case with the examples mentioned by Duckworth, McMillan and Milyavskaya, and Piff et al. (this issue) where assistance is provided to students either by the academic institution, teachers, parents, or classmates in the form of structuring the student's learning environment. The goal of studying a subject may involve auxiliary goals, such as getting the material and scheduling the time for learning. Assistance in pursuing these goals cannot substitute the students' personal efforts in reading, understanding, and memorizing the material. Thus, others' assistance in attaining these auxiliary goals is not expected to decrease students' agency with respect to their major goal (studying the subject). On the contrary, it may even increase the likelihood of attaining this goal and thus increase their sense of agency with respect to it. Note though that the Agency-Assistance Model predicts a decrease of the student's sense of agency with respect to the auxiliary goals.

The same logic can be applied to the moral and autonomy support discussed by Duckworth, McMillan, and Milyavskaya (this issue). When people receive these types of support, it helps them solve their psychological problems (alternative goals), which in turn frees their attention and energy to the target goal (e.g., studies). Moreover, it may put them in the right state of mind for promoting their major goal. Thus, we agree with Duckworth that in more complex situations where multiple goals are involved, assistance with alternative goals can increase one's agency relative to the target goal if the former shares resources with or are auxiliary to the latter.

The question arises: how social assistance in such complex cases will influence one's global sense of agency and self-worth. We suggest that the global sense of agency is calculated as a weighted mean of goal-specific senses of agency where the weights depend on the centrality of the goals to one's personality, as explained in Clarification 3.

Assistance Can Enhance the Sense of Agency When It Is Not Perceived as Assistance

The third class of situations in which assistance can exert a facilitating (rather than a compensatory) effect on agentic motivation is when help-recipients do not interpret the assistance as *others' means* that *promotes* their goal.

In this issue, this class of situations is referred to by Duckworth, Fitzsimons, McMillan, and Milyavskaya, and explicitly elaborated by Fishbach. Specifically, Fishbach argues that others' actions can be interpreted as indicating either a *progress* or a *commitment to a goal* (Fishbach, Koo, & Finkelstein, 2014). When people interpret others' helping actions as progress toward their goal, in line with our model, Fishbach predicts disengagement from the goal. However, when people interpret others' helping actions as an expression of their commitment to the goal, Fishbach predicts that the recipients of the assistance will increase their efforts for pursuing the goal. We agree with Fishbach's second prediction. Indeed, if people do not perceive others' assistance as progress toward their goal, it is not perceived as a substitutable means, and the psychological mechanism outlined in our model should not be at play.

In addition, there is another possibility mentioned by several commentators, where a person interprets others' assistance as a signal of *commitment to their relationships*. Such situations are more likely to occur when people are engaged in long-term relationships. In such cases, the target person may enhance his efforts toward the pursued goal to reciprocate and to strengthen the relationships for the future. This mechanism does not exclude the mechanism proposed in our model. Both can influence one's decisions simultaneously, and the stronger at the current moment will win.

There is a third possibility when others' assistance may not be perceived as *others'* means for promoting one's goal, that is, when a person ascribes others' assistance to himself. This possibility is described by Gasiorowska and Zaleskiewicz (this issue) as a market or exchange relationship. We agree with these authors that when people initiate others' assisting actions, they may construe them as their own actions toward the goal and subsequently ascribe the attainment of the goal to their own agentic effort. In our opinion, these situations are not confined to exchange relationships, since the crucial feature of these situations is that help-recipients construe others' actions as initiated and conducted under their own control and not the fact that the help will be adequately rewarded. For example, imagine a professor who has the goal of adding references to his manuscript. He could hire someone for this job or ask his graduate student to do it. Even if he made someone else do it, he would derive some sense of agency with respect to this

goal to the extent that he construes this action as his own and others as mere instruments in his hands.

Summary

To summarize, Agency-Assistance Model proposes a fundamental psychological mechanism that explains the relationship between personal agency and social others. This model predicts a compensatory relationship between personal and social means when those are perceived as substitutable for the attainment of the target goal(s). This relationship, however, does not have to be compensatory when one of the conditions in the model is missing: (1) personal means are not sufficient for attaining the goal and assistance is perceived as necessary; (2) assistance is provided for alternative goals that are either competing or auxiliary to the target goal; (3) assistance is not perceived as *assistance*, but either as others' *commitment* either to the goal or to the relationships, or is not perceived as *others'* but as a result of own agentic effort. In addition, other not-mutually-exclusive psychological mechanisms may underly the effects of increased agency on others-oriented behavior, such as higher *ability* and the *expectancy* of attainment of other-oriented goals.

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