

European Values: Solidarity

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Abstract. This text will address three questions. Firstly, what roles has the appeal to solidarity been playing in the process of European integration? Secondly, what does solidarity in the normative sense of an obligation really mean? Thirdly, to what extent can we and should we rely on appeals to solidarity as we fight for a better Europe?

1. Solidarity and European Integration: Three Connections

There are three quite different senses in which the concept of solidarity has been playing an important role in the process of European integration.¹

First, there is solidarity as a fact. This is the solidarity invoked in a famous passage of Robert Schuman's declaration on May 9, 1950, commemorated every year as the opening shot of European integration: "L'Europe ne se fera pas d'un coup, ni dans une construction d'ensemble: Elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes créant d'abord une solidarité de fait."² This passage was undoubtedly penned down by Jean Monnet and reappears the following year in the preamble of the Treaty of Paris, the treaty that created the European Coal and Steel Community, the first component of what was to become the European Union. The word *solidarité* here simply means *interdependence*. It is still occasionally used in this sense, for example, when architects

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¹ For a set of well-documented essays covering all aspects of solidarity in the European context, see Coman, Fromont, and Weyembergh 2019.

² "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." Full text of the Schuman Declaration at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en. The French original at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_fr.

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speak of beams being *solidaires*. But it was commonly used in this purely descriptive sense before the normative sense became dominant.³

This *solidarité de fait* is central in the so-called Monnet method of European integration: Each step forward calls for another step forward because of the intensified interdependence it generates. It is also central in the so-called neofunctionalist theory of European integration first formulated by Ernst B. Haas (1958), which suggests an irresistible and irreversible march forward towards an “ever closer union”—analogously to historical materialism asserting an irresistible and irreversible march from one mode of production to the next, or to some theories of modernization, secularization, or development. One may sensibly reject the deterministic inclination of neofunctionalism and other “grand theories.” But one cannot deny that a mechanism of the sort it postulates was, is, and will remain present in the dynamics of European institutions. Most obviously, the *solidarité de fait* created by the adoption of the euro or the Schengen Agreement creates strong tensions that can arguably be resolved only through further steps that would deepen integration or by undoing previous steps at a prohibitive cost.

Next, there is solidarity in the normative sense of an obligation. This obligation is sometimes simply of an informal, moral nature. This is the “warm” solidarity between generous contributors and grateful beneficiaries. The obligation is also often of a formal, legal nature. This is the “cold” solidarity between contributors complying with their obligations and beneficiaries exercising their rights. Whether warm or cold, solidarity in this normative sense can apply between individuals but also between collective entities such as states.

Solidarity *between member states* or their governments is playing a significant role in the process of European integration because it is often invoked in public discourse, for example when a member state is affected by adverse economic conditions, by an inflow of refugees, or by an acute public health emergency. An appeal to solidarity between member states is particularly compelling when the occurrence or the intensity of the adversity is arguably due, at least in part, to the *solidarité de fait* created by European integration itself, for example by the adoption of a common currency that rules out devaluation as a national adjustment policy or by a principle of free

³ This is the case, for example, in the writings of Léon Bourgeois, the founder of so-called solidarism, an influential moral and political doctrine in early-twentieth-century France that claimed to provide both a “scientifically” grounded morality and a “third way” between liberalism and socialism. Bourgeois saw solidarity, understood as interdependence among all beings, even among the stars. However, as best illustrated by the spreading of epidemics, this *de facto* solidarity is particularly strong among human beings, and this “grounds” an obligation of solidarity (see Bourgeois 1896, esp. 21–3, 30, 59–60). Emile Durkheim also occasionally uses *solidarité* in this sense of interdependence, but the key concepts of his classic book on the division of social labour—*solidarité mécanique* and *solidarité organique*—must rather be understood as sets of moral rights and duties of *sociabilité* that are reflected in legal rules and produce social cohesion, while being themselves the product of two different types of interdependence, namely, the sharing of a collective conscience and the division of social labour (see Durkheim 1967, esp. 30–1, 78, 402–3).

circulation that strongly constrains border control by each member state.⁴ Appeal to this solidarity between member states is not only a frequent feature of public declarations. Starting with disputes between the European Commission and France (in 1969) and Italy (in 1973), it is also occasionally reasserted by the Court of Justice of the European Union as a corollary of the principle of loyalty to European institutions. Moreover, solidarity between the member states and between its peoples features explicitly in the Maastricht Treaty and more prominently in the Lisbon Treaty.⁵

The third sense of solidarity that is centrally relevant to European integration is still normative but it refers to solidarity *between individuals* or citizens rather than between states or their governments. Solidarity in this sense is regarded as forming the core of the “European social model,” i.e., of what the European rhetoric often heralds as Europe’s *differentia specifica* with the rest of the Western world, especially the United States. Along with dignity, equality, freedom, citizenship, and justice, it is solidarity in this sense that provides the title of one of the chapters in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, as incorporated in the Lisbon Treaty. It is, however, also solidarity in this sense, as embedded in our national welfare states, that is often said to be threatened by the grip of the single market and its four freedoms. This is the threat cheerfully anticipated by Friedrich Hayek (1939), militantly invoked by so-called Lexiteers, i.e., left-wing Brexit supporters, and systematically denounced by left-wing critics of the EU’s “negative integration” such as Fritz Scharpf (1999, 2015) or, more vehemently, Wolfgang Streeck (2013).

2. Solidarity, Insurance, Charity

The factual sense of solidarity as interdependence is sufficiently clear for our purposes, but the normative sense needs clarifying. Acting out of solidarity typically consists in helping, at some cost to oneself, some other individuals or collectives when they are in trouble, struck by bad luck. For example, a person catches a disease, a country is hit by a recession.⁶ Now, protecting against bad luck is also what insurance does. What insurance arrangements do, whether they are voluntary or compulsory, is ensure that others will help us if and when we are in trouble in exchange for

⁴ Claus Offe (2007, 127) suggests insightfully that the EU’s fundamental challenge derives from the fact that solidarities that are “functionally necessary in the interest of system integration as a response to the increase in interdependencies” are “insufficiently robust in motivation”: Solidarity in the normative sense of a mutual obligation has not managed to keep pace with solidarity in the descriptive sense of interdependence. The link here made between interdependence and (normative) solidarity is distinct from the analytical link to be found in the analysis of solidarity gradually developed by Andrea Sangiovanni in his (published and unpublished) writings on the subject, starting with Sangiovanni 2013.

⁵ For references, see Coman, Fromont, and Weyembergh 2019, 17–23.

⁶ Typically, but not quite exclusively. Solidarity with members of one’s ethnic group, for example, may not only make one help them find some job when they are unemployed, but may also help them get a better job, or even the top job. Note also that *solidarity* in the normative sense is not only used to characterize some actions. One can “show solidarity” or “express Solidarity” without “acting out of solidarity”—for example, by writing a letter of support to a colleague facing difficulties or by clapping for health workers from one’s balcony. To the extent that what is being expressed is solidarity, rather than just sympathy or gratitude, the feeling expressed must amount to a willingness to act out of solidarity if one could do so, or could usefully do so.

our helping them if and when they are in similar trouble. But between solidarity and insurance, there is a crucial difference.

Consider our welfare states. They include an insurance component. Indeed, a large part of them is commonly called “social insurance.” But we know that they are not actuarially fair. The benefits they provide often have floors and ceilings and the services they provide are generally equally accessible to all those entitled, while they are standardly funded by proportional social security contributions or progressive taxation. It follows that some of us are *ex ante* gainers—most obviously those born with a serious handicap—while others are *ex ante* losers. This is not a flaw or an anomaly. This is precisely what makes our welfare states instruments of solidarity, not just of self-interested insurance. The same distinctive feature applies to solidarities between countries. For example, if Belgium is being asked to take its share of refugees out of solidarity with Italy, this is not meant to be part of an insurance contract that would symmetrically secure assistance by Italy to Belgium in case Belgium had to cope with massive arrivals of refugees on its tiny coast.

The key difference, we intuitively feel, is that there is an element of altruism, of generosity, in solidarity that is entirely absent from insurance. Altruism, however, is also present in charity, pity, or benevolence. But these, too, are crucially different from solidarity. For example, we are not—or no longer—saying that charity is at the core of our welfare states. Nor is anyone saying that Germany should help Greece out of charity. One important difference is that there is a relationship of symmetry and hence of equality that is intrinsic to solidarity, not to charity, pity, or benevolence. I may be in a position to help, and you may be in a position that calls for help, but my helping you out of solidarity is consistent with the relationship remaining fundamentally a relationship between equals. This is due to the fact that solidarity, unlike charity, involves a form of reciprocity. However, this is not the self-interested probabilistic reciprocity of insurance: I help you because I believe that I may one day be in your position and want to be able to count on your help in that case. It is rather an altruistic virtual or counterfactual reciprocity: I help you because I assume that I could have been you—even though I know that I am not you and may also know that I shall never be in the sort of trouble in which you are now.⁷ It is because of this symmetry that there is nothing demeaning or humiliating about solidarity, whereas there is about pity or charity.

Such counterfactual reciprocity only makes sense against the background of the assumption of a common identity: I could have been you because you are “one of us.” Solidarity can therefore be characterized as an obligation of mutual help between individuals or collectives sharing an identity and in this sense belonging to the same imagined community.⁸ When we are helping another person out of solidarity—as

⁷ I propose such a characterization of solidarity as located “between” insurance and charity in Van Parijs 1996, chap. 1. It is largely in agreement with David Miller’s (2017, 62–6) thorough discussion of the concept. Unlike him, however, I do not believe that there is a significant distinction to be made between “solidarity with” and “solidarity among,” nor that there is any conceptual connection with the idea of limiting distributive inequality.

⁸ Solidarity is sometimes meant much more widely, for example by Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (2017, 4), so as to cover, in addition to “redistributive solidarity” (a large part of what is here characterized as “solidarity”), “civic solidarity” (or mutual respect) and “democratic solidarity” (or support for equal rights). This may reflect a different use of the word *solidarity* (and its quasi-homonyms in other languages) in North America and in Europe.

distinct from charity or insurance—that other person is not entirely another person. It is not just that we can be classified as belonging to the same category, but we *identify* with that category. It is not just that we are part of that category, but that category is also part of us. This is why doing something for other members of that category is also to some extent doing something for ourselves. And because this identification is assumed to be shared by these others, the help provided is experienced as mutual help: When acting out of solidarity, one implicitly trusts that, had positions been swapped, help would have been forthcoming in the other direction. Solidarity, for this reason, could be said to be less purely altruistic than charity.

The common identity of individuals often consists of membership of actual communities, in the sense of sets of people interacting with one another—from families to villages, associations, labour unions, or nations—but it can also consist of membership of categories of people who need not have had any contact with each other—say, backpackers, academics, or people with the same religion or ethnic origin spread all over the globe. At the limit, the common identity can also simply be that of being a member of the human species. But by appealing to “solidarity” to motivate or justify the help we offer to someone, we are necessarily asserting that, whatever the differences, (s)he is “one of us.” This applies also to collectives acting out of solidarity, whether soccer clubs, universities, NGOs, or member states of the EU. In some cases, the common identity is not self-evident, and expressing solidarity may then simply consist in asserting this common identity: “*Ich bin ein Berliner*,” said President Kennedy. “*Je suis Charlie*,” proclaimed the T-shirts of many people who never thought of working for a satiric magazine.

The help driven by solidarity is also typically of a material sort. But again it need not be. For example, one could act out of solidarity with people whose freedom of expression or freedom of religion is being threatened. And when some languages, and thereby cultures, are being threatened by the invasion of stronger languages, allowing the weaker linguistic communities to protect themselves by imposing coercive rules on language use in public education and public communication can be justified on grounds of linguistic or cultural solidarity.

Just as the content of the assumed common identities can vary greatly, so can their strength, i.e., the strength of the assumption that we could have been the individual or collective entity that needs help. The stronger this assumption, the easier it will be to trigger solidarity-driven spontaneous actions and public support for institutionalized solidarity. Suppose I am a rich German, for example. If being German is of no importance to me, I may still be doing something out of charity to help the poor in my country. It is only if I regard myself as a German who happens to be rich that I shall help out of solidarity other Germans who happen to be poor. Similarly, if I regard myself as a European who happens to be German, I shall more easily frame my country's help to Greece as solidarity with other Europeans who happen to be Greek—rather than as charity by one nation in favour of another.⁹

⁹ The fact that the strength of the duty of solidarity increases with the strength of the common identity does not mean that helping those with whom we identify most should always prevail over helping those with whom we identify least. The needs of the more “alien” may be far greater, and other duties may override solidarity.

3. Is More Solidarity the Same as Greater Justice?

Because of its altruistic element, solidarity is generally not in the immediate self-interest of the individual. Indeed, one can even be led to sacrifice one's life out of solidarity. But solidarity is generally in the interest of the community among whose members it prevails. Generalized solidarity between the members of a community will therefore tend to benefit *ex ante* the average member of the community. Unsurprisingly, therefore, instinctive solidarity with other members of a genetically related group has developed and spread through the evolutionary process.¹⁰ Moreover, the institutionalized solidarity of our welfare states can be regarded as producing a whole range of collective benefits more securely than a strict insurance scheme, from macroeconomic stabilization to social peace, from the reproduction of a healthy workforce to an income security that helps the market work more smoothly. Analogous benefits can be invoked in support of solidarity across and between the member states of the EU.

It does not follow, however, that solidarity can be assessed positively across the board. There can be solidarity among mafiosi, among terrorists, among wealthy people protecting their privileges, among dwellers of a "white" neighbourhood trying to prevent its being invaded by "immigrants," between Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orbán. More generally, many cases of systemic corruption can be framed as instances of solidarity between members of the same family, the same tribe, or the same political faction. Solidarity between Polish citizens fighting for freedom from Soviet domination or solidarity between Uber drivers fighting for better working conditions are assessed more positively, not because they are cases of "real" solidarity or of a different species of solidarity, but because the aims they help pursue score better by our standards. This does not mean that we do not ascribe some value to solidarity whatever the circumstances: We shall probably find the mafioso who defects out of self-interest more despicable than one who honours his duty of solidarity. What it does mean is that we should not sacralise solidarity. It is even often precisely the refusal to do what solidarity requires—or what is demanded by solidarity with those with whom one identifies most naturally—that is regarded as most praiseworthy, indeed sometimes movingly so, for example when a commitment to fairness wins over solidarity-driven favouritism, or reconciliation over revenge.

This suffices to indicate that there is no pre-established harmony between the requirements of solidarity and those of justice. Nonetheless, is there not more than a contingent connection when focusing on solidarity at the level of a nation as a whole or of the European Union? Can strengthening institutionalized solidarity at those levels not be regarded as entailing greater social justice, roughly understood as the equalization of life chances?¹¹ What institutionalized social solidarity amounts to is, after all, the systematic alleviation of misfortune and its consequences.

There is no denying that whatever goes beyond insurance in our welfare states tends to make our domestic institutions more just. The institutions that most contribute to domestic distributive justice are largely the result of turning warm, informal solidarity into cold, institutionalized solidarity. And whatever warm solidarity

¹⁰ See Bowles and Gintis 2011 and the use they make of the sociobiological literature.

¹¹ Van Parijs 2019 develops the conception of EU-level social justice on which I am relying in what follows.

between member states can be turned into cold solidarity is likely to contribute to EU-wide distributive justice. However, there is a limit to what solidarity can achieve in increasingly diverse countries and at the level of an entity like the EU, unavoidably more diverse than each of its components.

Solidarity can work smoothly if there is a common conception of what counts as misfortune and of what can be reasonably expected from the victims of this misfortune, whether in order to avoid bringing it upon them or in order to escape from it when it hits them. Solidarity, it is often warned, must go hand in hand with “responsibility.” Its beneficiaries must “deserve” it by having behaved or behaving appropriately. However, in a culturally diverse society, there can be diverging interpretations, first of all, of what counts as “misfortune.” For example, does the inability to have children or an unwanted pregnancy enter that category? Next, there can also be different interpretations of what counts as “responsible” behaviour. For example, do single parents who persistently refuse to take a full-time job do what can be “reasonably expected” from them to escape from the misfortune of unemployment or poverty?

Similar issues are raised by solidarity between member states of the European Union. For example, does Greece do what it can “reasonably be expected” to do in order to reduce its public debt if it persistently refuses to tax the orthodox Church? In the absence of a sufficiently shared way of life, a common culture, a common set of norms about what counts as misfortune and what can be reasonably expected in various circumstances, the appeal to solidarity becomes problematic: “If you keep behaving like this, OK with me. I can respect your way of life, just as I want you to respect mine. But then, do not expect my solidarity.” The more cultural diversity, the likelier the resentment of the contributors about the “irresponsible” behaviour of the beneficiaries and the likelier the resentment of the beneficiaries about the “meddlesome” behaviour of the contributors.

It follows that there are two challenges to be addressed, two reasons why solidarity is easier to trigger or stabilize in a more homogeneous population. One is that it is easier to turn the latter into an imagined community with a common identity. The other is that greater homogeneity makes it less problematic to rely on a common understanding of what counts as a misfortune that calls for solidarity and as responsible behaviour that makes one deserve it. By contrast, the more culturally heterogeneous the population, the more far-fetched the assumption that “I could have been them” and the less plausible the supposition that they think of a misfortune in the same way as me and that they will act in the same way as I would, whether to avoid that misfortune, to get out of it if it hits them, or to help me if it were to hit me. This cannot feed much optimism about EU-level solidarity—with an EU-wide population far more diverse than national populations—nor indeed about the future of country-level or city-level solidarity, as cultural diversity keeps swelling as a result of immigration.

4. Fairness beyond Solidarity

Is this a problem? Definitely, for anyone who believes that greater social justice among European citizens—less inequality in life chances between them—is of primary importance, and agrees with the following three factual statements: (1) Solidarity, both informal and institutionalized, has been and is an important tool in the pursuit of that objective; (2) the single market undermines the economic sustainability of

institutionalized solidarity at the national level; and (3) there is no feasible way back, whether towards full national sovereignty or towards migration-free nation states. How can the problem be alleviated?

Firstly, one can and must try to nurture and develop, from the local to the European level, an inclusive collective identity and a corresponding imagined community that does not require a common ancestry, religion, or mother tongue. The common identity that supports solidarity must be framed as fraternity without consanguinity, patriotism without a common fatherland. This inclusive common identity can take shape and flourish if there are enough opinion leaders, media, and politicians to illustrate and propagate it. It can be strengthened by multiplying contacts across cleavages, by fostering bridging in addition to bonding social capital. It can be further strengthened by developing both the reality and the perception of *solidarité de fait*, of interdependence, of a community of fate, of sitting in the same boat or the same fortress, if not in the same bunker or the same tank. And it can also be strengthened by erecting an institutional framework that articulates a coherent multilevel citizenship status.¹² The conjunction of these strategies can help preserve, despite growing diversity, city-wide and country-wide collective identities and help build, despite international diversity, a common European identity. This inclusive common identity is unlikely to become as strong as that of homogeneous populations, however, and it does not address the second challenge faced by solidarity in the presence of diversity: cultural divergence as to what solidarity should cover and what should be expected from its beneficiaries.

Secondly, therefore, it is essential to go beyond solidarity and appeal to a conception of justice that combines equal concern with equal respect for diverse conceptions of the good life. The pursuit of social justice is not only a matter of helping people with whom we can identify on condition that they act, by our common standards, in a sufficiently “responsible” way. It is more fundamentally a matter of allocating fairly, among all of those to whom decisions need to be justified, opportunities which they have done nothing to deserve. The most robust justification for free and compulsory education, for example, or—from Thomas Paine onward—for a universal basic endowment or basic income, cannot comfortably be framed in terms of solidarity, but fits perfectly into a conception of fairness so understood.

At the European level, consider the *euro-dividend* proposal, i.e., the idea of distributing to all residents of the European Union a modest unconditional basic income funded, for example, out of an EU-wide value-added tax (see Van Parijs 2018). Some arguments in its support are of a pragmatic nature—macroeconomic stabilization, demographic stabilization, legitimization of the European institutions—but some are phrased directly in terms of social justice, not in terms of solidarity, let alone of charity or insurance. Such a euro-dividend can, for example, be presented as a tangible

¹² These four strategies correspond largely to the theories about the sources of solidarity listed by David Miller (2017, 69–75): the identity theory, the associational theory (Alexis de Tocqueville / Robert Putnam), the interdependence theory (Émile Durkheim), and the institutional theory. As regards this last one, I am here singling out the aspect persuasively emphasized by Rainer Bauböck (2017) in the case of the European Union. I am leaving out the expanding circle theory (Edmund Burke / Richard Rorty), which, as Miller (2017, 70) also points out, is descriptive rather than explanatory: It provides no mechanism for the gradual expansion of the community to which the duty of solidarity applies.

share in the real or alleged benefits that flow from European economic integration, one that saliently accrues to the stay-at-homes no less than to the movers. More fundamentally still, it can be viewed as an equal sharing of a fraction of the benefits produced by past capital accumulation and technological and institutional innovations, for which no one in the present generation of earners can claim any merit. Admittedly, some countries have contributed more than others to these innovations, but justice is a matter of fair distribution between individuals, not between states.

How can we hope that such a conception of justice can impact the reality of our European institutions? Ultimately, any such hope must hinge on the power of something that can be called deliberation, on developing the material conditions and political institutions that will enable and induce us and our representatives to talk to each other and justify our aims, proposals, and decisions to all the people potentially affected by them. What must do the work is the civilizing force of common deliberation, rather than the solidarizing force of a common identity and a common culture. To enhance it, we need a stronger European demos, one that will never be and does not need to be a culturally unified ethnos defining its members' unique political identity. We need a stronger republic of co-citizens that will never be and does not need to be a nation of compatriots. For this purpose, we need a European assembly with more competences. We need some of its members to be elected on a transnational constituency. We need a further strengthening of the pan-European civil society closely interacting in the EU's capital. And we need a democratization of the lingua franca as a cheap and efficient means of communication and deliberation.

A robust pan-European civil-society network and a democratized lingua franca are not only required to strengthen EU-wide deliberation. It is equally necessary to arm the struggles of those who stand to gain from reforms towards greater justice. The creation and stabilization of the institutions of our national welfare states were not the pure products of the feelings of solidarity or sense of fairness of the contributors. They also needed the mobilization of the beneficiaries, partly driven by self-interest, but also fuelled by a framing of their demands in terms of social injustice, understood initially mainly as exploitation, later increasingly as exclusion. At European level, such mobilization is made more difficult by a diversity that hinders joint action by those who stand to gain. But if appropriate material and linguistic conditions can be met, communication and mobilization should be effective enough to help secure a fair consideration of their interests in the deliberative process. Even under the best circumstances, this process will be far from perfect and its outcome far from certain. Yet, in part because of the intrinsic limits of solidarity in a superdiverse polity, there is no better anchor for our hopes.

Is this EU-wide deliberative conversation already underway? Modestly, some would say pathetically, but nonetheless undoubtedly. In pre-corona times, I was thinking of this every time a helicopter circled over my house in Brussels's European quarter, thereby indicating that all twenty-seven heads of government were gathering a few hundred meters away, without a single one missing despite their busy domestic agendas, and not four times a year as initially planned, but sometimes closer to ten times in a single year. Every time they met, they had to argue with each other in order to reach decisions that each of them could sell to their own governments, parliaments, and public opinions. They had to explain and justify to each other the policies and decisions they took and intended to take that would impact other member states. They had to listen to criticisms, think about them, and sometimes take them

into account. Hopefully, they are still doing something of this sort when being forced to meet online. Even more hopefully, both the European Council and the European Parliament will soon resume in-person meetings. The connivance fostered by proximity and the pressure flowing from looking into each other's eyes matter even more for activating a sense of fairness than for prompting feelings of solidarity.

To motivate and frame decisions at EU-level, the language of solidarity will not disappear, and luckily so. But fairness to all those affected is what will and must provide the most secure moral resource. In this respect, what is happening at intergovernmental meetings and even in the European Parliament and in the pan-European civil society is much better than what it used to be and also much better than what it could have been. But it is still very far from what it should be. There is a lot of work ahead for all of us Europeans, and perhaps even for the political philosophers among us.

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