

# Engage



Quarterly comment from the  
**Jubilee** Centre

Theme:  
**Environmental Responsibility**

**July 2019**



*The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*

Jan Brueghel the Elder 1613

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# Embodied and placed

**Jonathan Tame**

**D**o we have a compelling theology of environmental responsibility? This was the question put to me a few months ago, and since then it's become all the more pertinent as major protests are being made for urgent action on biodiversity loss, climate change, plastics pollution and more.

Are we simply critiquing the environmental debates being played out in public, or is there a solid biblical agenda for engagement? And how might that agenda integrate with the broader biblical mandates for evangelism and social engagement? We've been grappling with these questions in recent weeks alongside our SAGE programme participants, as they have researched into food and the environment from a biblical perspective. This edition of Engage takes environmental responsibility as a theme.

As I reflect on these questions, two concepts are helping to enrich my own understanding: God has designed human beings to be first *embodied* and then *placed*.

To be human is to have a human body; our being is a physical one, and while we have a soul or spirit, these have no enduring existence apart from our bodies. Death is the disaggregating of these aspects of being human – but only temporarily, as the Bible promises that we will receive a resurrection body, one that is suited for the age to come.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made, according to Psalm 139, and a central part of God's physical design is that we need food, water and oxygen to sustain us. Without these we can only survive a few weeks, a few days, or a few minutes respectively. These three resources come from the environment around us – which provides much more than

these basics – and our embodied selves are dependent on the ecosystems of which we are a part. This is the first great theological reason for stewarding the earth well: although in one sense God has set human beings 'over' the rest of creation, our embodied lives are entirely dependent on that creation for our physical existence, and our descendants are too. And when God first created this original dependence, he declared it 'good'.

Secondly, we are all placed: there is one small part of the planet where we grew up and another, perhaps, where we presently reside. Now migration has been a part of human history since God commanded the first humans to 'fill the earth' in Genesis 1 and again in Genesis 9, and many people today are mobile by choice or are forced to move by necessity. Yet God intends for human beings to be rooted, and take responsibility for a part of the earth. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). The land of Canaan was parcelled out and allocated to the different tribes of Israel, and God also assigned land to the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites (Deut 2:5,9,19). Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17 that God 'made every nation of men, to inhabit the whole earth; and he determined... the boundaries of their habitations'.

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# The meaning of gleaning

Guy Brandon



## Learning to Love Leviticus

*'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.'* (Leviticus 19:9–10)

**T**he Bible gives various instructions to farmers – that is, most of the early Israelite population. Some, like the ban on mixing crops in Leviticus 19:19, seem irrelevant for today (though, assuming other articles in this series are to be believed, they are not). Others, like the laws that ensure there is produce left to be gleaned by the needy, appear only of tangential importance. Since very few poor people now attempt to glean grain and fruit from farmers' fields, why should the agricultural industry not use its land to full effect?

### Biblical sustainability

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is not a great deal of overt guidance about how we should treat the environment in the Bible. There are some relevant laws, but little on the issues we might consider most pressing. In a world with a fraction of today's population and decidedly limited use of fossil fuels (though not zero – Noah did coat the Ark with bitumen), consumption of coal and oil was not a major concern.

But that doesn't mean the Bible is disinterested in sustainability. In fact, some of the key laws about land and finance – the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25 – point to an intense concern for both economic and agricultural sustainability. The ideas of financial justice and care for the land are woven together in the Sabbatical laws, where the land rests (lies fallow) every seventh year, but also slaves are freed and debts are forgiven.

There is a sense in the Bible that humans

are predisposed to overwork – not because we're innately hard-working, but because we like accumulating wealth. And when you don't put limits around that, it inevitably results in injustice and oppression. Amos describes this in his graphic depiction of the lengths traders will go to in order to make money: 'Hear this, you who trample on the needy, who do away with the poor of the land, asking, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain? When will the Sabbath end, that we may market wheat? Let us reduce the ephah and increase the shekel; let us cheat with dishonest scales. Let us buy the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the chaff with the wheat!"' (Amos 8:4-6) When money is the most important thing in life, everything else by definition comes second – including other people. Sabbath rest served as a brake on that human tendency to let the wrong thing take priority.

### Gleaning

There is a parallel here with Leviticus 19:9-10. Just as the Sabbath and Sabbatical laws limited the time in which the Israelites should do productive work, so the gleaning laws limited the space of their productivity. Leviticus 19 does not say, 'Harvest to the edge of thine fields, and take a second – yea verily an third – pass of thine olive trees with the beating sticks, for this is good stewardship and an efficient use of the land the Lord thy God has given thee.'

The intentional wastefulness of Leviticus 19:9-10 may not sit well with the modern mindset. Productivity and efficiency are vital for maintaining our ever-rising GDP. Time is money, as Benjamin Franklin said – an utterly corrosive idea that has permeated almost everything we do. So, too, are we indoctrinated with the idea that we must get the most out of every resource – including the land, with intensive farming methods that use up the soil and require the constant addition of new fertilisers, and chemicals to maximise yields.

But in the Bible, wringing the most out

of the land was like wringing every hour and minute out of the week: something that was not just unnecessary, but undesirable. The Bible warns us that an obsession with the 'good' of productivity actually prevents us from doing real good: looking after the alien, the orphan and the widow. Permitting gleaning served a kind of double purpose in this respect. It offered direct benefit to the most marginalised in society, who could come and gather leftover crops – just as Ruth does in Boaz's fields. But it also served as a visible and tangible reminder to better-off Israelites that they were not to prioritise their own harvest and prosperity at the expense of those who struggled to find their next meal.

### 21st century gleaning

The Bible's teaching on gleaning is also a reminder to us that the way we treat scarce commodities – whether time, land or non-renewable resources – has ethical as well as financial implications.

A clear link has now been established between environmentally harmful and unsustainable practices and injustice. It is the poorest in the world who will be most affected by climate change, including extreme weather events and rising temperatures and sea levels brought about by our consumption of fossil fuels. It is those who have no voice, and no money for legal redress, who are most disadvantaged by pollution of their water sources and land. It is also the poorest – often children – who are exploited to mine the metals and create the goods that underpin our western lifestyles. Where there is no brake on consumption, neither can there be a brake on the productivity that fuels it.

Unlike the Israelites, these issues won't be addressed by tinkering around the edges (or in their case, simply leaving the edges alone). For decades – centuries even – our prosperity has been predicated on selling the future. And there isn't much of that future left to sell. Our 21st century version of gleaning needs to be correspondingly radical.

# How everyday eating impacts creation

Hannah Eves, Katherine Martin, Andrew Phillips, Peter Redmayne



The following is an excerpt from our new research publication *Thoughtful Eating: a biblical perspective on food, relationships and the environment*, written by the four participants of Jubilee Centre's SAGE Programme

**E**ating is never a solitary act. However, the modern consumer has little understanding of how 'every sniff, chomp and swallow connects us to vast global trade networks, and thus to biophysical and social worlds far beyond ourselves.'<sup>1</sup> Today, the forces of urbanisation, industrialisation, and global markets have profoundly changed the landscape of economic and cultural life. To that end, they have transformed the meaning of food.<sup>2</sup> The result of this shift has been the loss of practical

connections between food consumers and the social and ecological contexts which make eating possible. 'Food consumers end up having little knowledge or say about where their food comes from. Food producers, in turn, will face considerable pressure to grow what they do not want to grow and in a manner they may believe to be harmful.'<sup>3</sup> Global trade networks disconnect the individual from the complexity and reality of food production, and consumers have been uprooted from the source of their food. In this context, there is serious potential for injustice.

Put simply, the commodification of food and the industrialisation of eating practices has produced an end result in which 'people eat with a diminished sense of the depth and breadth of relationships that constitute a food item', a narrowing which often leads to

a limited sense of sympathy or care for fields, animals and farmers.<sup>4</sup> Food is precious not only because of the human care that went into its production but because it points to the divine creator and sustainer.<sup>5</sup> Eating is a spiritual practice that reminds us of who we are in the global ecology. Forgetting what food is means we also forget who God is, who we are, and the nature of the world we inhabit.<sup>6</sup>

## One solution: gratitude

When food is received as a gift from God, the primary human response to food is best described as gratitude, which leads to joy. There are two worldviews, which have very different perspectives on food. The first views life as a 'business to be managed', in which humans are primarily isolated individuals who, by managing their lives effectively, can generate their own happiness and joy. An alternative worldview understands life as 'a matter of relationships.'<sup>7</sup> This second, more relational model emphasises that originally God created humans to enjoy life in relationship with the Creator and creation. The first worldview tends to approach eating as an uninspiring necessity, but the latter approaches eating as 'an occasion for appreciation and enjoyment, something to be experienced.'<sup>8</sup> It is this second worldview that leads to a response of joyful gratitude for God's gift of food:

*'He makes grass grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to cultivate—  
bringing forth food from the earth:  
wine that gladdens human hearts,  
oil to make their faces shine,  
and bread that sustains their hearts.'*  
(Ps. 104:14-15)

Old Testament Law instructs the people to rejoice when they eat food as part of offerings to God (Deut 12:7, 12:18, 14:26). Prophetic texts use pictures of food production and consumption as images of future joy. For example, Isaiah states that the people of God will rejoice 'as people rejoice at the harvest' (Is. 9:3), and similarly Jeremiah predicts that the restored people of Israel will 'rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—the grain, the new wine and the olive oil.' (Jer 31:12) A utilitarian perspective on food and eating severely limits

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*Thoughtful Eating* is our new book in three parts: the first describes the various ways our food and farming systems are socially and environmentally harmful, the second provides a biblical overview of food and the environment and the third proposes a framework for thoughtful eating - which is joyful, relational and sustainable.

**Find out more and order a copy at:**  
[jubilee-centre.org/thoughtful-eating](http://jubilee-centre.org/thoughtful-eating)

1 Wirzba, Norman (2019), *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (2nd ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.43.

2 Ibid., p.59.

3 Ibid., p.61.

4 Ibid., p.63.

5 Ibid., p.72.

6 Jung, L. Shannon (2004) *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, p.6.

7 Ibid., pp.6-8.

8 Ibid., p.9.

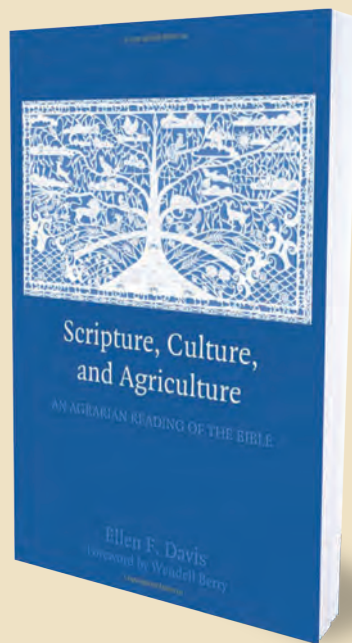
# Reading the Bible through agrarian eyes

## Book review by Peter Redmayne

**L**and is important. It is a source of shelter, food and income and it is at the heart of God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament.

In *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, Ellen Davis (Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School) examines the theology and ethics of land use and agriculture, and helps us to read Scripture through agrarian eyes. As she notes in the book, 'agrarianism is a way of thinking and ordering life in community that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures.' This perspective runs counter to modern agricultural practices, which often focus on maximising productivity at the expense of the long-term health of land, animals and people. The Bible's writers lived in an agrarian society and so learning to see God's creation alongside them can help transform our understanding of the relationships between God, humanity and the non-human creation. In approaching this topic, Davis draws inspiration from the writing of Christian poet and farmer Wendell Berry. Through a series of nine essays, Davis enables the reader to see the Old Testament through agrarian eyes, exploring Genesis, Leviticus, the Prophets and other Hebrew Scriptures to aid us in this and demonstrate the enduring relevance of the Old Testament today.

Davis stresses that she is providing not a *method* but a *perspective* for exegesis: 'how do these texts view the relationship between humans and the material sources of life as an essential aspect of living in the presence of God?' By this she means: what do they tell us about how humans relate to the non-human creation and what can this tell us about their relationship with God? The biblical authors understand that these relationships are of profound importance: Davis argues that 'from a biblical perspective, the sustained fertility and habitability of the earth, or more



particularly of the land of Israel, is the best index of the health of the covenant relationship.' This is the clear pattern throughout the Old Testament where 'the land languishes and mourns' if the people are disobedient (Isaiah 16:8; 33:9; Hosea 4:3). By contrast, when they obey God, the land is blessed (Psalm 85:11; Psalm 72).

Davis also highlights the relevance of an agrarian reading of the Old Testament to food and eating. For example, she argues that because God's provision of food for humans, animals and birds (Genesis 1:29-30) immediately follows humanity's creation (Gen 1:27), humans are granted responsibility for maintaining access for *all* creatures to food. With this and other insights, Davis demonstrates the relevance of the Old Testament texts to our food systems today. *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture* is a profoundly important book for those working toward food systems that are both environmentally sustainable and socially just.

**For more on *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, we would also recommend a podcast episode of *On Being*, which features an interview with Ellen Davis and the poetry of Wendell Berry: [onbeing.org/programs/ellen-davis-wendell-berry-the-poetry-of-creatures](https://onbeing.org/programs/ellen-davis-wendell-berry-the-poetry-of-creatures)**

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Thus families, tribes and nations were all entrusted with land as a lasting inheritance – which provided places for their dwellings, communities, economic provision and security.

In today's globalised world, land and property is more often seen as an economic asset; we have lost sight of the fact that 'the earth is the Lord's' and whether or not we are legal owners of the land we live on or the public spaces in our neighbourhood, we all have a responsibility towards God and neighbour for how we steward the land we use, the buildings we inherit, and the common spaces we share.

Every few weeks I join the community litter picking team around the estate where we live, and I have adapted the parable of the medieval stonemasons to illustrate why I do it.

Three people gathering litter in a local park were asked what they were doing. The first said rather grumpily, 'I'm picking up other people's rubbish.' The second said, 'I'm tidying up our shared spaces so everyone can enjoy them,' while the third declared, 'I am caring for God's creation which has been entrusted to me!'

Our perspective on the environment is shaped by our beliefs, which in turn reflect our worldview, which is ultimately rooted in our theology. Let's discuss the hard questions, engage in the current debates about the environment, and dig deep into God's word so that we won't uncritically adopt the world's perspective, but are transformed in our thinking and renewed in our commitments to see God's will done on earth.

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our understanding of how food expresses God's provision and his delight, and current global food systems encourage reckless ingratitude (seen clearly in the sin of food waste). However, when food is understood as communicating God's love, then gratitude and joy are 'natural' and right responses. The act of eating becomes 'a daily invitation to move responsibly and gratefully within this given life.'<sup>9</sup>

Eating characterised by ingratitude fails to see beyond one's own plate. By contrast, joyful gratitude encourages sharing with others, showing compassion, and working toward sustainable food systems across the world, so that all people can experience the joy of eating food as a gift from God. It encourages gratitude for God's creation upon which all people and animals are dependent for life-sustaining food – a whole ecosystem of which each person is only one member.

9 Wirzba 2019, p.xii.

# Healing, enhancement and the **human future**

Philip Powell



Credit: Tony Alter, via Flickr, CC BY 2.0

In our latest Cambridge Paper Denis Alexander deals with the complex moral issues and questions surrounding new developments in human technological enhancement. He compares two rival worldviews – Transhumanism and Christianity, their contrasting views on life and death, and where these different paths would eventually lead.

Christians have always believed and prayed for healing. *Healing* can be described as the physical, mental and spiritual restoration to the state in which we found ourselves before becoming ill. But describing *enhancement* is more difficult. There are different types of human enhancement and they can be broadly divided into four categories. **Type A** is probably best known in sci-fi films and computer games; it is enhancement that takes a person well beyond the abilities of any human at present. **Type B** refers to enhancement of the individual 'over and above' their previous abilities, but still remaining within the range of abilities found within present human beings. **Type C** involves technological processes that prevent disease. This includes something as familiar as vaccinations, but also includes new technologies such as embryo editing. **Type D** refers to the Christian's vision for God's work in their lives that makes them more like Christ, enhances their relational health, and prepares them for the age to come. Type D enhancement may incorporate aspects of Types B and C, but this raises the challenging question: how much healing should we expect now?

One morally problematic issue is *embryo editing*. In November 2018, Dr He Jiankui, from the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, made the dramatic claim that, for the first time ever, genetic engineering had been used to change the human germline. Since then, a moratorium on embryo editing has been proposed to allow time for further ethical reflection and work on the safety concerns. While there are benefits, there are also risks. Should Christians accept embryo editing as part of God's desire to bring healing to people?

Ultimately these issues must be

considered from the wider perspectives of metaphysics and theological presuppositions. Different worldviews deal with enhancement differently. For the transhumanists, as their name suggests, technoscience should be used to extend human capabilities well beyond their present limitations. There is an underlying commitment to a materialistic, ontologically reductionist, non-relational view of human personhood—a mechanistic view of human life in which the body is a mere device. The *transhumanist* vision is to maximise individual human happiness as interpreted through a purely materialistic lens. What transhumanists ultimately want is the abolition of death, whereby *homo sapiens* are replaced by *homo cyberneticus* in a do-it-yourself new creation.

However, the Christian vision offers something radically different. The salvation inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Christ leads to a great 'looking forward'. While still living in this present sinful age, Christians eagerly look forward to the fulfilment of Christ's kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth. The 'sting of death is sin' (1 Cor. 15:56), but that sting was defeated in the cross. Now, those who belong to Christ will share in his life forever in their radically enhanced resurrection bodies, with moral and physical restoration joined together. In those future bodies in the new earth, 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Rev. 21:4)

Following in Christ's footsteps clearly entails healing but we must be more critical of embracing human enhancement, particularly type A enhancement through techno-scientific means. For the Christian, enhancement is about the perfection we will enjoy in the New Creation. Every other form of enhancement fades in comparison to this. Meanwhile, we should remain committed to the prevention of human suffering and promoting healing whilst on planet Earth, as God gives us the opportunity to do so.

**You can read the full paper on our website and order printed copies using the response form.**

## Jubilee blog highlights

### Wisdom cries out in the public square

No matter the period in history or what might be happening in society, we need Christian leaders in the public square. However, at present the Christian voice in the public debate is either privatised or narrowly politicised, and often finds itself consigned to irrelevance.

In this blog, Philip Powell offers four points of wisdom for living well in the current political situation and communicating the timeless truth and relevance of God's wisdom today. First start with the fear of God. Second, our embodied witness matters; words only have credibility if they are proved true in the lives of real people. Third, we must learn the art of listening well and building bridges. And fourth, transformation comes with the commitment to the 'long game' rather than the temptation to make quick fixes. With patience and perseverance, we can offer so much more to the public square.

### Why do we need the evangelical statement on Artificial Intelligence?

One of the positive legacies of the Christian faith is thought leadership. Historically, the church has been a creative rather than reactive force, yet Christians today are often 'behind the times'—especially when it comes to technology. In this blog, Charlee New argues that technology is a gift from God to develop the social world and shape natural resources; it supports rather than contradicts our creation mandate. She looks specifically at Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an area ripe with potential for positive, creative leadership and draws attention to the recent evangelical statement of principles on AI. She exhorts us not only to participate in, but to re-frame the relevant technological debates of our day.

Every week, we post a new blog exploring current issues from a biblical perspective. You can read the above posts in full, along with other recent blogs, at [jubilee-centre.org/category/blogs](http://jubilee-centre.org/category/blogs)

# A call to leadership: tackling the world's systemic problems

Philip Powell

**O**ver the past two decades, I've been part of many prayer meetings. We gather to pray for diverse issues: from foodbanks and flood victims to political corruption and violence against women. Prayer is important, but we must also ask the question: how does God answer our prayers?

We read in James 2:15-17, 'If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. We should not pray about a problem without also committing to being part of God's answer to these prayers. Prayer and action go together.

One way that God answers our prayers for the world is by raising up leaders who can become part of his response. Not the kind of leaders who offer quick-fix solutions and then move on, but leaders who are willing to stay

for the long-haul and address the underlying causes of the problems.

Sadly, I find that Christians don't always make the link between praying and training leaders for tomorrow's world. **Christian leaders, whose primary vocation is not in the church but in the world, who can make a difference with regards to systemic problems like poverty, flooding, corruption and violence, do not just emerge from nowhere.** They have to be recruited, trained and supported to become world-changers.

Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's palace and Joseph in Pharaoh's court made a difference for God because they were trained for many years in the art and discipline of serving foreign rulers who worshipped other gods. Daniel studied Babylonian astrology and Joseph was trained in Egyptian household management. They both excelled in what they did—without compromising their moral integrity. And God used them to fulfil his purposes in a pagan context.

At Jubilee Centre we have a vision for training leaders who can think biblically about the world and apply biblical wisdom to society's most challenging issues. Social reform doesn't just happen: we need social reformers. The desire for change has to be translated into action, and for the action to be sustained over a long period of time, we need a movement of people who have the vision and commitment to see change take place.

Let me share with you two exciting opportunities for training leaders in social reform. We have the three-day Social Reformers Summer School in July, where the theme this year is *food, relationships and the environment*. We also have the more intensive ten-month SAGE Graduate programme for young leaders who aspire to be like Daniel and Joseph.

If you have ever prayed at a church or Christian meeting about a problem in our world, ask yourself what you can do to be part of God's solution to these problems. You may know some emerging leader wanting to be equipped to make a difference in the world; you could offer them encouragement, support them in prayer, recommend our training programmes and be an advocate for Christian leadership.

**Discover more about SAGE and our Summer School at [jubilee-centre.org/training](http://jubilee-centre.org/training)**

## The Conversational God

**Conference on the Bible, relationships & social transformation**

**Cambridge, 9th – 11th September 2019**

There is a growing movement of Christians who are convinced that being salt and light involves transforming relationships in society – in public as well as private life.

You are invited to join the annual gathering of people who are committed to changing the world one relationship at a time, with back-to-back conferences in Cambridge: *The Conversational God* (9th -11th Sept, from Jubilee Centre), *The Relational Thinking Conference* (12th-13th Sept, from Relationships Foundation) and *Relationism* (14th Sept from Relational Research).

*The Conversational God* provides an opportunity for Christians to deepen their understanding of God's intentions for relationships across society through a 'relational reading' of the Bible. Participants will also explore lessons from applying

these ideas to institutions in different international contexts. Speakers include Martin Goldsmith, Rob Loe, Elizabeth Robar, Dale Kuehne and Cosma Gater.

**For more information, including links to the other conferences, visit [jubilee-centre.org/the-conversational-god](http://jubilee-centre.org/the-conversational-god)**



## About Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre is a research and policy think tank that offers a biblical perspective on social, economic and political issues. Through our research, publications, events and training we equip Christians to be salt and light in the public square.

Jubilee Centre is based in the centre of Cambridge, which is ideal for collaborating with local churches, like-minded charities, students and academics in the two universities and our sister organisations Relationships Foundation and Relational Research.

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