

# How to Teach Students about Peace & Genocide: A Kantian Approach to International Diplomacy

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## **Abstract:**

*Teaching international diplomacy to high school students can be a daunting task because the topic requires a keen understanding of tolerance and an ability to recognize cultural norms, both of which are contingent on higher order thinking. Students are continually challenged to mitigate their biases and suspend their disbeliefs in an attempt to learn about the nature of international diplomacy and the peacekeeping process. Teachers, nevertheless, may incorporate a Kantian approach to international diplomacy and a discussion of his ethical concerns, as a pedagogical tool for introducing students to the requisite concepts needed to address international diplomacy and the peacekeeping process.*

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, diplomacy, peacekeeping, tolerance, genocide

## **1. The Need to Incorporate Higher Order Thinking**

Discussing international diplomacy and peacekeeping efforts require students to use higher order thinking as a means of integrating vast amounts of information, which will be used to characterize the demands of each party involved. In my discussion of higher order thinking, I will use the definition offered by Lewis & Smith (1993), wherein they write, “Higher order thinking occurs when a person takes new information and information stored in memory and interrelates and/or rearranges and extends this information to achieve a purpose or find possible answers in perplexing situations” (p. 136). In discussing international diplomacy, students are required to exercise higher order thinking in their attempts to properly characterize and assess the

concerns or grievances of each party. Making such assessments, however, require, first, that they are able to reinterpret relevant bits of information.

Bartlett (1958) suggests that the process of reinterpretation, i.e., a reconfiguration of information, which produces new methods of interpretation, allows the student to actively process information in distinctively new ways. Students are presented with a myriad of interpretative possibilities, which pertain to the cultural norms and the practices of political groups—distinct from their own. Students face the challenge of deciphering stereotypes and caricatures from relevant and substantive cultural differences. Latorre (1985) warns of an inability to properly identify stereotypes, writing, “the distortion produced by focusing on differences, instead of breaking down stereotypes, generously contribute to the perpetuation of cultural misunderstanding, making foreign mores appear more exotic than they really are” (p. 671-672). If students are to be properly equipped to engage with conceptions like international diplomacy and peacekeeping, they must be able to decipher stereotypes from proper representations.

Take, for example, the sustained irony of Jonathan Swift’s (2005) *Modest Proposal*. Certainly, high school students will be appalled by Swift’s suggestion that, “a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust” (p. 5). There are numerous methods used to interpret Swift’s intentions, none of which should include a serious consideration of cannibalism as a means of easing the famine. Such interpretation is no interpretation at all; it takes the text literally, without investigating the possible meaning of the text. Thus, the first step educators can use to incorporate higher order

thinking in discussing international diplomacy, is to have the students extrapolate the meaning of the text from its context, i.e., what does the text mean? What does the text imply?

A reconfiguration of information allows students to uncover otherwise difficult nuances buried within the text. In the example of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, students can be divided into two groups. Rather than debating the pros and cons of Swift's account, students can attempt diplomatic negotiations, wherein they persuade members of the other group as to the relevance of their claims. The goal is to arrive at an agreement—rather than winning or losing—as is the goal for all instances of international diplomacy. This process is an act of higher order thinking because it challenges members of the group to recognize the concerns of others while reassessing how they initially interpreted the information presented. In addition to higher order thinking, however, students will need to incorporate an understanding of tolerance and recognize the multiplicity of interpretations, which will invariably affect attempts toward diplomacy.

## **2.1 Understanding Tolerance**

In discussing tolerance, I will ascribe to the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) 1995 Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, which states:

1.1 Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

1.2 Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify

infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States.

1.3 Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments.

1.4 Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others.

International diplomacy and the peacekeeping process are impossible without a specific understanding of tolerance. As stated in (1.1) of the (UNESCO) declaration, "Tolerance is harmony in difference." Students must learn that world views and cultural norms are comprised of different belief systems, which affect each culture to varying degrees. First, recognizing that their particular beliefs differ from others, encourages students not to measure the degree of difference based on deviations from their own, i.e., students should not approach the concept of tolerance as an attempt to measure how different "they" are from "us," but also how different we are from them. Addressing the "us," "them" distinction is an important aspect to understanding tolerance, as these binary oppositions often reinforce stereotypes and intolerance. Students should strive to transition away from these polarizing terms and arrive at inclusive terms like "we" and "all". We are all similar in that we are different. Addressing these differences without judgment, though a difficult task, prepares the student with the necessary conceptual framework needed to engage in a critical analysis. With respect to the peacekeeping process, students should understand that polemical terms like "us" and "them" inhibit or suppress attempts toward diplomacy, which, within a political context, tend to encourage violence and acts of evil.

Peacemaking is bolstered by a full understanding of tolerance and an appreciation for the diversity of human life and experiences. Simply embracing a global understanding of our shared human experience, which is substantiated by our differences, allows students to recognize that it is our difference that fundamentally make us human.

Tolerance should not, however, as stipulated in section (1.2) of the (UNESCO) declaration, be articulated in terms of condescension. The act of patronizing others implies or suggests that some cultural norms are better, simply in their difference. This assumption quickly leads to intolerance, insofar as the student refuses or is unable to recognize that differences in cultural norms and practices does not imply qualitatively better or worse conditions, i.e., it does not follow that because there is a cultural difference, one must be better than the other. Actually, the argument is more tautological. Where there is a cultural difference, there is a cultural difference. The goal is to get the student to recognize the difference, without ascribing a judgment of value. Though judgments of value may be important to ascribe to cultural differences, such an approach far exceeds the scope of this introductory approach. As suggested by Wainryb et al. (1998), “tolerance emerges as a product of deliberation...children and adolescents take into account various parameters of what they are asked to tolerate...and the cultural contexts in which people operate and make differentiated judgments” (p. 1153). For an understanding of tolerance to succeed, students needn’t espouse new beliefs as their own. Such demands would surely cripple any attempts toward diplomacy. Rather, the student should learn to accept a variety of cultural differences, without patronizing one’s beliefs. The student sufficiently capable of recognizing difference without also ascribing qualitative judgments is said to have attained an understanding of tolerance.

## **2.2 Tolerance and Human Rights**

Beitz (2001) defines rights broadly as, “Rights of the person refer to life, liberty, and the security of the person; privacy and freedom of movement; ownership of property; freedom of thought, consciousness, and religion...and prohibition of slavery, torture, and cruel or degrading punishment” (p. 271). In discussing human rights, one must acknowledge the relevance of both natural and legal rights. On the one hand, natural rights are pre-social and are fundamental to the human experience. These rights do not require the codification of law to be upheld and are universally recognized as applicable to all human beings. Legal rights, on the other hand, are conferred to respective members of the population after the law has been codified. Human rights, then, arise at the convergence of natural and legal rights. One cannot properly discuss human rights, then, without also discussing both natural and legal rights. Pagden (2003) writes, “Today of course, the definition of “human rights” has been extended far beyond the limits...intended for “natural rights.” The shift from “natural” to “human” reflects a modern unease with the conception of an essentialized “nature” and, in particular since the death of the natural tradition in Kant, with the idea of the existence of guiding natural principles” (p. 176).

Section 1.3 of the (UNESCO) declaration states, “Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights.” There is an inherent responsibility associated with any discussion of rights, viz., the duty a moral agent has to respect or honor a given right. If someone has a right to privacy, for example, others have a duty not to infringe on that person’s right. There are those, however, that deny the existence of rights. There are also those that deny the existence of duties. Nevertheless, in discussing the (UNESCO) declaration of tolerance, one cannot properly address the conception of human rights without also addressing these requisite concepts. With respect to the

relationship between tolerance and human rights, if it is true that one properly understands the conception of tolerance discussed in the previous section, and one acknowledges the existence of rights as Beitz (2001) has broadly defined, then it must follow that the particular moral agent accepts the duty to uphold the human rights of all persons. It would be a contradiction to both acknowledge that the prohibition of torture is a fundamental right for all human beings and simultaneously assert that it is an acceptable practice under desperate circumstances. Thus, students must recognize that international diplomacy requires an acceptance of the responsibilities ascribed by a duty to defend and uphold human rights. Diplomats are obligated, then, by their responsibilities and duties to defend human rights. A failure to accept such a responsibility is necessarily a failure in hopes for diplomacy.

Unfortunately, however, the failure of international diplomacy is typically the initial stages in the deterioration of the peacekeeping process. Langford (1999) writes, “Among the most difficult challenges facing the UN system of conflict management is the internal disintegration of a state...State failure is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that defies conventional methods of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding” (p. 59). As stated in section 1.4 of the (UNESCO) declaration states, “human beings...have the right to live in peace and to be as they are.” In teaching students, especially young students, about international diplomacy, educators must stress the importance of the peacekeeping process. The peacekeeping process is an inherent facet to any analysis of international diplomacy. Without it, there is no use for diplomacy. The student, then, must acknowledge from the onset that the goal is to arrive at an agreement, rather than win an argument. Diplomacy, especially with topics as sensitive as torture and state endorsed genocide, require students to lay aside their biases and embrace a conception of

tolerance, only then, can they engage in diplomatic negotiations, upholding the tenants of the peacekeeping process and a fundamental regard for human rights.

### **3. Kant's Influence on International Diplomacy**

Immanuel Kant's account of perpetual peace can offer students the possibility of actively engaging with the topic of peacekeeping, on the one hand, and war and diplomacy, as a means of preventing war, on the other. In discussing the peacekeeping process, Kant addresses the impetus to war and our moral responsibility to refrain from war whenever possible. Bourke (1942) writes, "There are two main questions which it is possible to ask about war. The first is, whether it is inevitable; the second, whether it is desirable. The former question is one of fact, the latter one of value" (p. 324). Once students have sufficiently demonstrated an understanding of tolerance, applying their knowledge of tolerance to political issues offers them the opportunity to analyze how international diplomacy is used as a means to keep the peace. Kant understood the nature of diplomacy and infused his commentary on the politics of war and perpetual peace with an equal account of our moral obligation to refrain from war whenever possible.

In discussing this conception of perpetual peace, however, students should understand that the state of peace is a difficult state to maintain, i.e., it is easier to destroy than it is to create; it is easier to engage in war than it is to maintain peace. Kant (1983) suggests that, "The state of peace among men living in close proximity is not the natural state; instead the natural state is one of war...The state of peace must therefore be *established*, for the suspension of hostilities does not provide the security of peace, and unless this security is pledged by one neighbor to another...the latter...can treat the former as an enemy" (111). According to Kant, this disposition toward political violence and war is a natural state of affairs, which arises from recognizing an

enemy, i.e., “them” as opposed to “us” and eventually results in war. Engaging students with the difficulties faced by sovereign nations, residing in close proximity, all with varying cultural, religious, and socio-political beliefs, all vying for very limited amount of natural resources, all with access to weapons of mass destruction and the intent on preserving their sovereignty, offers students a very real sense of the multifaceted difficulties faced in mitigating the impetus to war.

Kant, recognizing these difficulties, argues against the conception that war leads to peace writing, “a war of extermination—where the destruction of both parties along with all rights is the result—would permit perpetual peace to occur only in the vast graveyard of humanity as a whole. Thus, such a war, including all means used to wage it, must be absolutely prohibited” (p. 110). In the rhetoric of preemptive offense as the best defense, Kant clearly denies the consistency of such an argument. The goal of international diplomacy is to prevent war and preserve the peacekeeping process. If, however, our first inclination is to engage in battle and that inclination is shared by our enemies, then what results is an all out war. Moreover, if it is suggested, as is often the case, that preemptive strikes are a necessary means of preserving the peace, then, as Kant suggests, perpetual peace will occur at the expense of the entire human race. Thus, war invariably results in its own destruction, and peace will be attained, but Kant suggests that this may be too great a price to pay. Conveying this conception to students, especially high school students, may be difficult task. To ease the difficulty in explanation, however, one can use a short parable from the ancient Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu (1993) writes,

Weapons are ill-omened tools,  
Not proper instruments.  
When their use can't be avoided,  
Calm restraint is best.

Don't think they are beautiful.  
Those who think they are beautiful

Rejoice in killing people.  
Those who rejoice in killing people  
Cannot achieve their purpose in this world (verse 2).

Weapons are tools, and tools are instruments of our creativity. The tools we choose to create reflect the will of the creator; hence, an “ill-omened tool” is a reflection of the ill-will of its creator. Good and evil, then, differ in relation to their purpose, their function, and the intentions of the creator’s will. We all have the capacity for either good or evil and in choosing to create weapons as a means of preserving the peace, in so doing, one undermines the very conception of peacekeeping. The complete destruction of the human race is the only logical conclusion if every nation subscribed to the belief that the preservation of peace can be brought about by, as Kant suggested, “a war of extermination.” Thus, in discussing international diplomacy with students, one should encourage students to conceptualize the consequences of “a war of extermination,” allowing them, if possible, to arrive at the conclusion for themselves. Thinking through the various scenarios, discussing the possible consequences of preemptive strikes, should allow students to, rather skillfully, recognize that the result of a “war of extermination” is the complete annihilation of the human race. In short, then, peace cannot be brought about by war.

For Kant, where there are rights, there is an obligation to recognize those rights through the various duties one has to others. Kant, nevertheless, refutes the idea that one can be burdened with duties without also receiving some degree of rights. He writes, “no one can make a contract to perform some rightful act whereby he has no right but only duties, for in so doing he would cancel it” (1983, p. 74). There is a balance, then, between the obligations one has to others and the rights one attains by obligating others. It is inconsistent to suggest that a moral agent must respect to rights of others and assert that the agent’s rights are inconsequential. Such a stance is contradictory.

Since the concepts of rights and duties are fundamental to any investigation of international diplomacy, educators can divide their students into two groups, one half generating some number of right, and the other half generating corresponding duties to respect those rights. This process allows students to recognize the relationship between rights and duties through a process of higher order think, insofar as it is their responsibility to generate the relevant relationships. Discussing duties, however, within the scope of international diplomacy and the peacekeeping process, becomes complicated when conceptualizing rights and duties on a state level, i.e., can we effectively discuss rights and duties as one attempts to apply these conceptions to the state? One could imagine that one of the rights generated by a student may be a right to life, and the teacher may introduce the students the conception of the sanctity versus the quality of life argument. The question, however, is though a conception of a right to life may hold true with respect to human beings, can such a conception be properly be applied to the state? Interestingly enough, students will quickly learn that generating the list of rights and duties, with respect to state level politics, is an involving process.

#### **4. Genocide & Intentionally**

Where there are rights, there are duties. Kant's duty based ethics, i.e., his deontological ethic, is grounded in maxims, which are simply a set of rules governing moral conduct, and imperatives, which are properly said to apply to all human beings. A Kantian approach to discussing international diplomacy and the peacekeeping process is essentially grounded in the obligations a moral agent has to upholding the moral law. It should be noted, however, and it is equally important that students understand, that the intentions of the moral agent, factor into determining the final moral judgment, i.e., whether the act is moral or immoral is also based on the agent's

intentions *not* the consequences of the agent's actions. Kant addresses this conception by stating, "Both the love of man and the respect for the rights of man are our duty; the former is only *conditional*, while the latter is a *unconditional*, absolutely imperative duty, a duty that one must be completely certain of not having transgressed, if one is to be able to enjoy the sweet sense of having done right" (1983, p. 139). Kant stress this point in his ethic stating, "For, in the case of what it to be morally good it is not enough that it conform with the moral law but it must also be done for the sake of the law; without this, that conformity is only very contingent and precarious, since a ground that is not moral will indeed now and then produce action in conformity with the law" (2001, p. 3).

Defining and addressing possible instances of state endorsed genocide often require that one assess the state's intentions, a difficult process to undertake. Though within the political sphere we discuss legality rather than morality, a Kantian account of deontology provides us with the necessary tools needed to investigate the question of state intentionality. Kuper (1981) suggests, "The crime of genocide under the Convention is not committed simply by the destruction, in whole or in part, of a racial, national, ethnic or religious group. There must be the *intention* to destroy" (emphasis added), (p. 32). By "Convention" Kupler is referring to the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC). Kupler argues that the demonstration of intent is a matter of subjectivity, a matter beyond the realm of empirical and verifiable claims, which undermines any attempt to demonstrate the intent to commit genocide. "The inclusion of intent in the definition of genocide introduces a subjective element, which would often prove difficult to establish" (p. 32).

If the definition of genocide must include the conception of intentionality, and intentionality, as suggested by Kuper, introduces a "subjective element," then identifying acts of genocide may

be a subjective matter. Very dangerously, however, amidst the various attempts to define genocide as the greatest possible threat to international diplomacy, is an even greater threat that it may not be empirically verifiable if it requires demonstrating state intentionality. The difficulty in defining genocide, translates to a corresponding difficulty to ascribe instance of violence and mass murder as instances of genocide, terribly complicating the diplomatic process.

Irrespective of the current debate over how genocide is defined, a Kantian approach to the analysis of genocide or international diplomacy or even the peacekeeping process cannot properly be called a Kantian account of genocide etc., without unifying morality and politics. One should note, however, that Kant accepts the possibility of a moral politician, but blatantly denies the possibility of political moralists. Within *Perpetual Peace*, Kant was adamant that,

If we find it absolutely necessary to couple politics with the concept of right, and even to make the latter a limiting condition of politics, The compatibility of the two must be conceded. I can actually think of a *moral politician*, i.e. one who so interprets the prudence of political prudence that they can be coherent with morality, but I cannot think of a *political moralist*, i.e., one who forges a morality to suite the statesman's advantage (1983, p. 128).

In addressing genocide, on the one hand, and international diplomacy and the peace keeping process, on the other, if one is to offer a Kantian account of the moral politician, then one must incorporate the conception of intentionality in discussing possible instances of state endorsed genocide. If the morality of an agent's actions cannot accurately be assessed without acknowledging the agent's intentions, then one could certainly argue that the legality of state endorsed genocide could not properly be assessed without also discussing the state's intentions. Granted, analyzing the relationship between intentionality and genocide may be too difficult a task for high school students, but students can be introduced to the concept by first taking note of

the morality of an agent's actions versus the agent's intentions. This distinction between action and intention is at the heart of greatest debates among moral theorists.

Kantian moral theorists cannot solely base their assessments of morality on experience. In his discussion of evil, Kant warns, "More modern, though far less prevalent, is the contrasted optimistic belief...that the world steadily...forges...from bad to better...If this belief, however, is meant to apply to moral goodness and badness...it has certainly not been deduced from experience; the history of all times cries too loudly against it" (1998, p. 45). Intentions are a necessary rather than contingent aspect to a Kantian account of international diplomacy. In a contemporary account of genocide, the relevance of intentionality, in defining instances of genocide, is a highly debated topic. Though it is not imperative that students fully understand the nature of the debate, they should be aware of the difficulties in attributing intentionality to the state. Just the recognition of this difficulty will offer students a better insight into understanding the complexities of international diplomacy. Diplomacy is based on open lines of communication and students should recognize the role of intentionality prior the negotiation process.

## **5. State Sovereignty and Domestic Jurisdiction**

In discussing international diplomacy and the peacekeeping process, one of the most difficult concepts to address is that of state sovereignty. While it is important that nations recognize the sovereignty of other nations, it is precisely within the confines of the state's domestic jurisdiction that abuses of state power can be fashioned as a tool of genocide. A balance, then, must be met between noninterference and intervention once human rights violations have occurred. Tesón (2005) states,

Force used in defense of fundamental human rights is therefore not a use of force inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. State sovereignty makes sense only as a shield for persons to organize themselves freely in political communities. A condition for respecting state sovereignty is, therefore, that sovereignty governments (minimally) respect human rights. Delinquent governments forfeit the protection afforded by article 4(2) (p. 217).

State sovereignty is an essential component of political power without which its government cannot function. Kant also acknowledged the importance of state sovereignty in his discussion of forcible interference. He distinguishes between two possible outcomes. On the one hand, Kant addresses the possibility of a divided state, where the state is essentially split into two warring factions. On the other hand, he addresses the possibility of a state, still unified, where the conflict is undecided. In the example of the former, Kant (1983) suggests that forcible interference would be justified if, “as a result of internal discord, a nation were divided into two and each part, regarding itself as a separate nation, lay claim to the whole; for (since they are in a condition of anarchy) the aid of a nation to one of the parties could not be regarded as interference” (p. 109). One can then use this conception of justifiable interference to lay claim to governmental interference when instances of genocide and human rights violations are occurring. Thus, it is important for students to understand that while state sovereignty is an essential component of political power, it is in no sense absolute. The moral consideration for the preservation of human rights and human life outweigh the recognition of a state’s sovereignty. Conversely, however, Kant (1983) claims that forcible interference would not be justifiable if, “this internal conflict remains undecided” (p. 109).

In contemporary genocide scholarship, many theorists are debating how nations are to interpret the UNGC’s acknowledgment of state sovereignty. If genocide is a crime against members of a state’s population, within the confines of the state’s domestic jurisdiction, which in

turn, is protected by state sovereignty, then how is an international community of nations to forcibly intervene on behalf those being systematically exterminated? The United Nations Charter Chapter I, Article 2(7) reads:

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

In recognizing state sovereignty and the power a state has within its domestic jurisdiction, the UN Charter creates a loophole for any state charged with acts of genocide. Simply put, Article 2(7) of the U.N. Charter recognizes state sovereignty to the extent that the very people the UNGC is set to protect is undermined by Article 2(7), which recognizes domestic jurisdiction over the Articles set forth in the UNGC. Thus, accusations of genocide against state officials have no means of combating their domestic jurisdiction. Kuper (1981) argues to close this loophole in the U.N. Charter Article 2(7) writing,

[the] central ideological commitment of the United Nations, [is the] respect for the sovereignty of the state. It is *enshrined* in Article 2(7) of the United Nations Charter...*the protection of domestic jurisdiction is almost inevitably invoked by any state charged with violating the human rights of its subjects...*Human rights are a matter of legitimate international concern. Yet the United Nations remains highly protective of state sovereignty, even where there is overwhelming evidence...of widespread murder and genocidal massacre (emphasis added), (Kuper, 1981, p. 181-182).

## **Conclusion**

A Kantian interpretation of the justifications for forcible interference offers scholars the theoretical framework to argue against the absolute recognition of state sovereignty. Genocide is

a heinous abuse of political power, which fundamentally undermines the peacekeeping process. States engaged in acts of genocide forfeit their sovereignty insofar as international diplomacy cannot allow for the recognition of state sovereignty over human life and the preservation of peace. In teaching students about international diplomacy, educators must convey a sense of the importance of tolerance and the need to acknowledge the rights and thereby duties of all moral agents. If governments allow for efforts to thwart peace, if human rights are being violated and governments are engaged in acts of genocide against members of its population, then, on a Kantian account of forcible interference, nations are justified in their attempts to intervene. Forcible interference, however, is the last resort. Negotiations, and international diplomacy, prior to human rights violations must be recognized as viable tools of the peace keeping process.

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