

Practical Intentionality: A Balance Between Practical and Theoretical Acts ^{*}

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of my research is to examine that kind of *intentionality* which underpins every *decision*. By the help of Husserl's phenomenology, I would answer to the following questions: Is every decision determined by a logical reasoning and an axiological evaluation? What do we commonly mean with practical intentionality and how does it affect a *decision-making process*? Usually the idea of intentionality has been linked up to the activity of giving meaning about what one wants to do. I can intend something to acquire information on it and then deed. Although it is simply a matter of opening a window. However, I retain that even in these early stages of the intending, the practical acts convey their own kind of intentionality which could be occasionally covered up by theoretical acts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of my research is to examine that kind of *intentionality* which underpins every *decision*. By the help of Husserl's phenomenology, I would answer to the following questions: Is every decision determined by a logical reasoning and an axiological evaluation? Or is it a result of mood and instinct? What exactly flows in a mood? Why are my decisions not always successful?

For instance, when one decides to go out for a walk, he/she could be compelled to make this decision because of a logical inference. I know that outside is a warm and sunny day, so I evaluate the situation in a positive way

^{*} I am grateful to Federico, Valeria and the staff of Humana.Mente for their helpful contribution to this article.

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and I decide to go out and enjoy the pleasant day. Yet the example becomes more complicated when one thinks fit to want something, but his/her body does not seem agree. Namely, I want to get that job, because it is commonly held in great esteem and it is well paid, but once I reached it, I begin to suffer from daily migraines or worse I behave myself so as not to keep it even if I am sure to do my best.

Thence my research aims mostly to a definition as clear as possible of what we commonly mean with practical intentionality and how it affects a *decision-making process*. Usually the idea of intentionality has been linked up to the activity of giving meaning about what one wants to do. I can intend something to acquire information on it and then deed. Although it is simply a matter of opening a window. However, I retain that even in these early stages of the intending, the practical acts¹ convey their own kind of intentionality which could be occasionally covered up by theoretical acts.²

To carry out this analysis I will rely on Husserl's *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis* (Husserl 1966³) and *Active Synthesis* (Husserl 2000⁴). Following Husserl's path I should be able to draw an analysis of will conducive to put in evidence both subordination and superiority of willing respect to knowing. In fact, by Husserl's former works (Husserl 1975⁵, Husserl 1984⁶ and Husserl 1988⁷), I will emphasize why he conceives will subordinated to the logical reason. On the contrary, quoting some passages of his latter studies (particularly Husserl 2004), I will be able to display how Husserl combines his former with his latter idea of will and accordingly his theory of knowledge with his idea of decision-making process.

2. AFFECTIVE AND SIGNITIVE ACTS

In this paragraph I will try to provide with a tentative definition of what Husserl

¹ Although the rank of practical acts is quite wide, here I will refer to Husserlian definition of practical acts as it is given in his lectures on ethics (Husserl, 1914). The practical acts encompass the acts of will, evaluations, emotions, instincts, feelings, sentiments.

² In the class of theoretical acts Husserl usually puts the acts of judgment and knowledge.

³ From now on: Hua XI.

⁴ From now on: Hua XXXI.

⁵ From now on: Hua XVIII.

⁶ From now on: Hua XIX.

⁷ From now on: Hua XXVIII.

means by *intentionality* and which kind of rationality lays at the basis of this idea.

Intentionality is mainly the term by which phenomenologists describe the movement of consciousness to mean something. In *Logical Investigation*, Husserl mainly uses the term of intentionality in the meaning of *Bedeutungsintention* (Benoist 2004 and Souche-Dauges 1998). As Føllesdal remarks, the Husserlian perspective consists in the description of *Richtung* not of the object toward which the act is aimed, but of a certain structure of consciousness (Føllesdal 1990).

Das determinierende Beiwort *intentional* nennt den gemeinsamen Wesenscharakter der abzugrenzenden Erlebnisklasse, die Eigenheit der Intention, das sich in der Weise der Vorstellung oder in einer irgend analogen Weise auf Gegenständliches Beziehen. Als kürzeren Ausdruck werden wir [...], das Wort Akt gebrauchen. (Hua XIX, p. 406)

The *Erlebnisse* of pure consciousness are intentional acts that for economy's sake can be called 'acts'. It is relevant to note here that we are going to handle this term in the sense of *mental act*, that is the act as we perceive it (Hua XIX, p. 406).⁸ In fact in this quest, we have no interest in describing the action as a bodily movement or an external intended action, rather we want to figure out how the mental act of a practical decision comes to realization. In the fifth *Logical Investigation*, Husserl employs two definitions to classify all the acts of consciousness; he writes that all the psychic phenomena are characterized by an intentional reference and «sie entweder Vorstellungen sind oder auf Vorstellungen als ihrer Grundlage beruhenit» (Hua XIX, p. 406). Therefore the *Erlebnisse* of consciousness can be either acts (*reel*) or non acts (*real*). All the acts are intentional; on the other hand, non acts are not intentional because they do not relate to any represented object. They are tied to the psychological sphere of consciousness. «Dass nicht alle Erlebnisse intentionale sind, zeigen die Empfindungen und Empfindungskomplexionen» (Hua XIX, p. 382). Sensations arise without an object being represented or sensed. Accordingly these are not properly intentional. Nevertheless acts of feeling can also be taken up into the range of intentional acts: «Sie alle 'verdanken' ihre intentionale Beziehung gewissen ihnen unterliegenden Vorstellung» (Hua XIX, p. 404).

⁸ Husserl borrows the distinction between mental and physical acts on the basis of an inner and external perception from Brentano's *Psychologic* (1874).

Ein Kentaurenkampf, den ich mir in einem Bilde oder in der Phantasie vorstelle, 'erregt' ebenso mein Wohlgefallen wie eine schöne Landschaft der Wirklichkeit, und wenn ich die letztere auch psychophysisch als reale Ursache für den in mir seelisch erwirkten Zustand des Wohlgefallens auffasse [...]. Das Wohlgefälligkeitsein, bzw. das Wohlgefallenempfinden 'gehört' zu dieser Landschaft nicht als physikalischer Realität [...], sondern in dem hier fraglichen Aktbewusstsein gehört es zu ihr als so und so erscheinender evtl. auch so und so beurteilter, an dies oder jenes erinnernder usw. als solche ‚fordert‘, ‚weckt‘ sie dergleichen Gefühle. (Hua XIX, p. 405)

Here it can be pointed up the influence of Brentanian thought. In fact a feeling of pleasure may be intentional whenever it is provided with the representation of the object.

Findet man eine Schwierigkeit darin, dass nicht jedes Begehren eine bewusste Beziehung auf ein Begehrtes zu fordern scheine, da wir doch oft von einem dunkle Lagen und Drängen bewegt und einem unvorgestellten Endziel zugetrieben werden; und weist man zumal auf die weite Sphäre der natürlichen Instinkte hin, denen mindestens ursprünglich die bewusste Zielvorstellung mangle, so würden wir antworten: Entweder es liegen hierbei bloße Empfindungen vor [...], also Erlebnisse, die wirklich der intentionalen Beziehung ermangeln und daher auch dem wesentlichen Charakter des intentionalen Begehrens gattungsfremd sind. Oder wir sagen: es handle sich zwar um intentionale Erlebnisse, jedoch um solche, die als unbestimmt gerichtete Intentionen charakterisiert sind.

[...]

Die Freude ist nicht ein konkreter Akt für sich und das Urteil ein daneben liegender Akt, sondern *das Urteil ist der fundierende Akt für die Freude, es bestimmt ihren Inhalt* [...], denn ohne solche Fundierung kann Freude überhaupt nicht sein. (Hua XIX, p. 405, *my emphasis*)

Thus, judgment is always an ultimate act with respect to an act of feeling, because it gives a meaning about which we can feel the sentiment. Joy could be an intentional act only when it relies on the epistemological contents given by the logical reason. We can feel joy just after we know at what we are rejoicing. The content (*Inhalt*) is determined by the judgment.

Nevertheless, also theoretical acts, like those of judgment, can determine their contents by the tools of intuition and perception. They are able to collect all the data which are going to be represented. Every intuitive act is an objectifying act and it encompasses the act of perception. In the sixth *Logical Investigation* Husserl seems to construe intuition as a distinct and particular

property of perception and vice-versa. Intuition is a sort of perception of the universal and then a way of perceiving, which is exploited in order to account for the fullness of meaning, the truthfulness of our perception and the possibility of its representation (Hua XIX, pp. 64-84 *passim*). At large, it is posed on the same stage of perception, even if it seems to work just from the inside of consciousness.

Die Anschauung als Perzeption [...] – gleichgültig ob sie kategorial oder sensual, ob sie adäquat oder inadäquat ist – wird in Gegensatz gebracht zum bloßen Denken als dem bloßen signifikativen Meinen. (Hua XIX/2, p. 731)

Both intuition and perception can be addressed to an ideal or empirical object which could even be not respondent to reality. Yet both contribute to the effectiveness of any intentional or objectifying act by the meaningfulness fulfilment of signitive acts (which could be considered empty boxes until then).

Therefore intentionality could be defined as the skill of mental acts to be directed to an object. Objectifying acts are for Husserl «vorstellig machende Akte»: the acts which make present the intentional object for the consciousness, the acts which institute the intentional relation between consciousness and the object. They do this job also for non-objectifying acts (hence also for affective acts). Objectifying acts are both signitive acts (judgment and representation) and intuitive acts (external and internal perception, eidetic intuition, imagination, remembering, empathy, etc.). Accordingly objectifying acts are both acts of meaning and thinking (signitive acts) and acts of intuition. Yet, affective acts are not fully acts as they require the empty boxes of signitive acts to express at all their intention or even to exist. As Husserl wrote about the joy, it calls for the judgment in order to be an effective act. Without the judgment, it could not have its object on which it operates.

Das determinierende Beiwort *intentional* nennt den gemeinsamen Wesenscharakter der abzugrenzenden Erlebnisklasse, die Eigenheit der Intention, das sich in der Weise der Vorstellung oder in einer irgend analogen Weise auf Gegenständliches beziehen. (Hua XIX, p. 46)

In this sense the act of feeling has its essence (*Wesenscharakter*), but it is founded on a judgment because it needs the predicative voice of logical acts (or the boxes of signitive acts) to determine its object. This is still more evident in Husserl's ethical lectures of 1914, when he talks about a *Verflechtung* between practical and logical acts to explain completely how an affective

intention works.

In ihr <Parallelismus> drückt sich eine gewisse Wesensverflechtung des doxischen Bewusstseins mit dem Gemütbewusstsein und so jedem Bewusstsein überhaupt aus, dergemäss jedes Stellungnehmen, jedes Schön- oder Gut-Werten *apriori* in ein urteilendes Stellungnehmen umgewandelt werden kann. (Hua XXVIII, p. 63)

The will could not know what to want if it has not a box where to put its feeling. Therefore it is necessary to display the process of practical intentionality by the device of interlacing and parallelism between affective and signitive acts.

3. PRACTICAL INTENTIONALITY

Now if the signitive acts are fundamental to express an affective act and if they represent or judge just what I can already represent or know, how do I make a decision on what I just feel but not understand? How could I make a decision if I do not know all that I am feeling? Still, if intentionality is the skill of mental acts to be directed to an object and if this skill is balanced on the complicated relationship between objectifying (signitive and intuitive acts) and not objectifying acts (affective and conative acts, i.e., practical acts), how could I justify these mental acts or their objects? How could I fill the lack of the object of practical acts and their inability to create ‘new boxes’? To answer these questions, I should deepen the understanding of how Husserl define *will* in his former and latter studies.⁹

In Husserl’s former work, namely in the lectures on ethics (Husserl 1988)¹⁰ will is defined as one of the several regions of consciousness and it holds a prominent function to connect consciousness with the outside world (Hua XXVIII, p. 59). In his *Husserl’s Phänomenologie des Willens*, Melle (1992) helps us to sketch out the main influences on Husserl’s idea of will. Namely, he refers to the work of James (1950) and Ehrenfels (1887), since the former retains that the main characteristic of will is the attention and its *fiat*, the ‘act of mental consent’. The latter construes the act of will not as a founding act, because it is just a pretension (*Forderung*) of something and thus it needs the representative and theoretical acts. As it concerns the present research, it

⁹ I will refer to Hua XIX, XXVIII and Hua XI, XXI, XXXVII.

¹⁰ These lectures are the result of the ethical researches carried out by Husserl since 1902.

could be fruitful to pay attention to the influence exerted by both philosophers. In fact, the will could be depicted not only as a region of consciousness but also as a kind of intentionality which underpins every action even if it is always interlaced with its founding signitive acts.

In 1914 Husserl conceived will as a way of consciousness' being which needed the represented objects to exist. In other words, its object is a represented content which is already explained, at least formally, by signitive acts. The distinctive characteristic of will is not the intended object, but its “*fiat!*” (Hua XXVIII, p. 107), i.e., that kind of power addressed toward the object. Will adds something to the structure of intentionality, since it is the motor of any act and it yields new reality. As a matter of fact, every act of will modifies, in a certain way, reality or leads it toward new directions. As Husserl remarks, the thesis of will (*Willensthesis*) is mainly a position of realization and creation which is interwoven with the position of theoretical acts (in virtue of their ‘Allwirksamkeit’ or predicative voice, see Hua XXVIII, p. 58). When one wants to go for a walk, one should know before what a walk means or rather what he needs, then one decides to go. During the walk new situations could be generated by his/her decisions.

Another element, which should be emphasized in this analysis, is the axiological component. According to Husserl of 1914 every decision arises from an epistemological intention which is evaluated by the axiological reason (Hua XXVIII, pp. 70-71). The inference of any decision should be drawn by the evaluation of what it is given. One should decide what to do, after having understood what to do and evaluated what is the best for him/her. Consequently, citing Husserl's words

Das Alles ist Sache der vernuenftigen Konsequenz. Aber solche Konsequenz verbindet auch das intellective Gebiet mit den Gemütsgebieten; theoretische und wertende Vernunft sind miteinander überall verflochten. (Hua XXVIII, p. 72)

Thus, will makes its decisions on the predicative voice of theoretical acts (i.e., its meanings) and on the evaluation of the axiological acts. Consequently, will is a rational region of consciousness which depends strictly on theoretical acts to interact with reality.

3.1 SECOND VERSION OF PRACTICAL INTENTIONALITY

In Husserl's *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (Hua XI, XXXI)

the definition of will is not exactly the same, as though, like Peucker (2008) claimed, Husserl will keep in a certain way the former view. In this latter version of practical intentionality he will also seek to give an answer to the following questions: what happens when one begins to pay his/her attention to an object, such as a dawn or a laughing child? Why is one attracted to an object more than others? There could be a kind of objects which pertains specifically to the sphere of practical reason? Then does practical intentionality exist?

At first glance, I believe that the beginning of knowing is practical. Effectively it is quite easy to show that the intention to know is driven by the choice to know and intend the object. I want to focus on a dialogue between two friends of mine instead of the noise of a barking dog (or vice-versa), because I decided so. Husserl explains this attitude by the key concepts of *affection* (*Affektion*) and *attention* (*Aufmerksamkeit*). In the *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*, Husserl explains that the affection is the first striving which exerts its influence on attention and then on intention (Hua XI, p. 152). Affection arises in contrast with what is used to perceive – «Affektion ist also Kontrast» (Hua XI, p. 149). We can take the example of the walk given in the first paragraph: one is walking in a sunny day and a sudden outburst could interrupt all that he/she was perceiving. This event will change the focus of his/her perception. Affections are located exactly in this feeling of contrast which arises from what one is used to perceive. Affections are driven also by the mixture of attention and interest. The act-motivating passive sphere does not only consist of merely neutral presentations, but it is rather penetrated by elementary strivings and feelings which carry evaluative features. Affection is a sort of ‘emotional’ emergence which comes out so strongly that one is compelled to move his attention to another field of perception (Hua XI, p. 149). It drives the direction of evaluation, representation and attention. Another example could be the one given by Husserl himself, I am listening to a music and everything around me is stimulating my senses, when a sudden loud noise attracts my attention. I am affected by that noise and my previous affections has been interrupted by this new event. In this case, I have been stricken by an event which is not consistent with all that I used to perceive. Consequently, I can claim that «Affektives Relief» (Hua XI, p. 168) characterizes the passive foundation of what we can call a *practical*

intentionality.¹¹ These acts are always combined with certain evaluative features that are given in feelings, and only these qualitative differences inside the passive sphere of affection can explain why the ego turns toward an affection but not toward another. Therefore, attention (and then perception) is a tension got in motion by affection. «Das Affektion zur Aufmerksamkeit, zur Erfassung, Kenntnisaufnahme, Explikation sich auswirkt» (Hua XI, p. 151). The attention is that form of tension which allows the practical and passive intentionality to become active and operating. If these blind drives work themselves out, they neither involve the activity of a genuine act of will nor the ego. Husserl describes these subjective occurrences as the intentionality of drives (*Triebintentionalität*) and he even calls them a very “low form of the will” or “passivity of will”. As he wrote:

jedes [...] *ego cogito* ist an die Voraussetzung gebunden, dass vorher das Ich affiziert wurde, das sagt, das vorher eine passive Intentionalität, in der das Ich noch nicht waltet, einen Gegenstand konstituiert hat, von dem aus der Ichpol affiziert und zum actus bestimmt worden ist. (Hua XI, p. 209)

The antichamber («*Vorzimmer*», Hua XI p. 166) of every decision is a combination of passive affections which strike the attention and its activity.¹² Thus the intention to know or to give a meaning about what I am living is always preceded by a practical intention. The interlacing between these two positions has not necessarily a theoretical prevailing thesis.

Moreover, in *Analyses concerning Active Synthesis*, Husserl emphasizes the role played by the *Willensintention* and complains about its misinterpretation. The consistency between attention and affection is the first step of any practical or theoretical decision. «Der Wille ist kein bloßes Begehren; er gehört in die allgemeiner Sphäre der reinen Aktivität» (Hua XXXI, p. 10). Will represents a very activity which involves aware and discretionary acts.

Es will mir immermehr scheinen, dass Wille nicht eine eigene Weise des Bewusstseins ist, sondern eine besondere und höhere Form der Aktivität, die unter gewissen Wesensbedingungen, die in vorausgesetzten Objektivierungen

¹¹ See Hua XXXVII, pp. 339-340: «Allem Triebmäßigen, mich affektiv Motivierenden oder zu motivieren Tendierenden schleudere ich mein ewiges Nein entgegen. Die willensbestimmende Kraft aller passiven Motive durchstreiche ich. [...] Triebe dürfen mich nur motivieren, wenn ich sie an der Leine habe, wenn ich ihnen ihre Funktion und den Rahmen ihrer Funktion vorzeichne».

¹² See expressions as «eine niedere Form des Willens», «Willenspassivität» (Ms. M III 3 102f).

und Fühlungen liegen, überall auftreten kann. (Hua XXXI, p. 10)

The will represents a particular and superior aspect of the rational activity of consciousness and it can ‘come into play’ under certain conditions. These conditions coincide with those of 1914, namely with those objects of meaning that the acts have to assume before making a decision. The activity of will is considered as a particular and superior kind of rational action, in virtue of the key role played by affection and attention with driving the interest to perceive something. Attention is a *positive* feeling, or better it is an act that *makes* the interest real. This feeling makes a simple act of perception, an act of interest. Attention is in fact the tension ‘to be’ in the things that we perceive. As it was in the *Psychology* of James, taken by Husserl as a model to his investigation¹³, the tension of attention is the main instrument to fix the direction of will. It can change perception in interest and interest in will. As a matter of fact, it adds to the interest ‘the tension’ which unifies the *ego* to the object of perception and will to its productive characteristic (namely, the skill to modify reality and to yield new reality by its *fiat*). For instance when one is listening to music, his/her perception is focused at all on that. A sudden outburst moves the focus of attention on itself. The affection is driving the attention to change the aim of his/her interest. Then, the simple act of perception becomes an act of interest and active will.

Differently from the lectures on ethics (1988), now the affective acts, particularly the volitional ones, are not totally subordinated to the representations of signitive acts to be effective, because the very first beginning of their intention is a passive and instinctive strive. In fact, Husserl wrote in his manuscript that the reason is always a practical reason and it is servant of will (Ms, E III, 7, 85). There is an intertwined coexistence between practical and logical position within practical intentionality. Will is a primitive form of action; it is ‘*superior* and *particular*’ because it is at the basis of all kinds of acts, also of the logical acts. Indeed, the first step of any acquaintance is not a real form of knowledge but a ‘will to know’. The true knowledge consists in the productive action of the ego. The logical reason can be really

¹³ In 1891/92 Husserl took a class on psychology and on that occasion he read for the first time the *Principles*. In may 1894 he came back on *Principles*, while he was working on his logic and its elementary concepts and he praised Jamesian effort of “depsychologizing psychology”. At that time he had planned to publish a series of articles in the *Philosophische Monatshefte*, but he published only the first and decided to wait to see what James had done, before publishing the others. The next article is probably his *Psychological Studies for Elementary Logic*.

directed to the knowledge, only if the will realizes itself in the will of doing. As Nam-In Lee wrote, every kind of intentionality should be regarded as a practical intentionality (Lee 2000), because every act of consciousness is always a practical act. Also Hart remarked that only by volitional acts it is possible to put in light all the contents of the other kinds of reason (Hart 1992). In fact, the theoretical reason does not understand its representations until they do not reflect on them. And even the acts of reflection are the result of the *fiat* of will. As Husserl wrote, every act is an act of will (Ms A V, 22, 5). The predicative activity of logical reason is still necessary to give voice to the reality we know, but differently from the lectures of 1914, now (lectures of 1920) the process of communication between consciousness and the world is not due to theoretical but to volitional acts. Even if the former are still essential to make possible the expression of what we know, the latter are the starting point of every logical act.

4. HOW DO WE MAKE A DECISION?

To elucidate all that we acquired until now, we can claim that the practical intentionality is explained on the complicated balance with signitive and affective acts. Both are equally relevant in the making-decision process (*even a decision to know!*). I make a decision because: 1) an affection moves my attention toward a certain object, 2) I can represent what the object is and fulfill my representation with meaning thanks to my intuition and perception, 3) I can evaluate how much this object is important to me. Yet, if my intention remains just a passive level, the second point is not always needed. In fact, I can decide instinctively what to do just on a dim sensation without knowing exactly why I decided so.

Generally, I perceive a dawn and not a barking dog because at that time, my attention is attracted to the dawn and I want to admire it. If I want to understand why one has a particular affection rather than another, I have to keep in mind that affections are not just neutral theoretical data. Conversely they work on the emergency of contrast in our habits to perceive. The emotional objects toward which the acts are directed, are epistemological and represented data lived in a practical way (a passive, affective or instinctive way). In 1920 Husserl is not so far from what he stated in 1914. He simply added new elements to explain the practical components of intentionality. In his

lectures course on ethics from the 1920s he explicitly says that

Wertende Akte und Willensakte sind in Erkenntnisakten, eventuell schon in bestimmenden Urteilen, fundiert [...]. Was ist nicht mindest vorstelle, kann ich nie werten.

Consequently the founding of the volitional acts has to be understood against the background of this passive sphere in which theoretical, emotional, instinctive and drive-related tendencies are already mutually intertwined. The acts of willing are not based on mere presentations and some higher ordered feelings, but rather on the dynamic processes of the passive subjective life in which a separation of independent spheres of acts would make no sense. As a matter of fact, the feeling consciousness presupposes a cognitive act, while the volitional consciousness in turn presupposes the feeling (Hua XXXVII, p. 274).

Therefore, when one seeks to decide what to know, one is equally led by theoretical and practical intentions which are intertwined in the same act of intending the outside world. In the making-decision process, sometimes it happens that what I perceived from my practical instincts (i.e., from all the practical components of my will) is put aside by my theoretical acts of knowledge. Consequently, it would take place a processes of detachment. Therefore, a successful decision should be based on a perfect consistency between theoretical and volitional acts. The reasons provided by knowledge become usually stronger than those given originally by practical acts. It could even happen that I forget all that I originally felt about a certain object, a job for instance, because I assign higher values to what theoretical acts say. Then I decide to follow what is *logical* without reflecting on all the components of my will. Nevertheless, in this complicated balance between logical and practical acts it remains an open and unsettled issue how my feelings could be represented if I do not know well all that I am feeling. I can make my decision just on what I already know about my practical acts (feelings, instincts, sensations) because of the cognitive limits of signitive acts. This kind of communication could be a term of a new philosophical research.

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