

NIETZSCHE ON THE METAPHYSICAL PROBLEM OF TRUTH

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Abstract: *Truth plays an essential part in traditional metaphysics; however, what is truth? Can this truth be found? These inquiries are the inner quests for Nietzsche to re-evaluate traditional values in which truth, as the highest value, is deserved to be searched for. Searching for truth and denying untruth in the transient world causes the prejudices of opposite values, which creates the dilemma between truth and untruth, thing-in-itself and phenomenon, I and thought. Nietzsche repudiates Kant's thing-in-itself, immediate certainty in Descartes' cogito ergo sum since there is no such truth in the stream of inner experience. This truth, according to Nietzsche, has nothing to do with life, which is the universal flux of transient experience. Life is more important than anything else and one has to struggle for the preservation and growth of life in any precarious condition. It is life that presupposes knowledge, and knowledge as such is kind of self-knowledge, "psychological observation", "reflection on human all too human" to "alleviate the burden of living" (Nietzsche, 1878/2005, p. 31). This inner phenomenon is in universal flux, as the biological and internal process of becoming, in which the natural drive manifests itself as the battle of the wills incessantly overcoming one another. Nietzsche traces the cause of this metaphysical problem to the deception of an inner world and demonstrates that not only there is no found truth, but also that searching for truth will degenerate the growth of life. There is truth only in life, that is the overcoming of suffering and terror during the process of becoming, striving toward happiness and preservation of life.*

Key words: *truth, thing-in-itself, immediate certainty, metaphysical problem, life, suffering, psychology, becoming.*

PREAMBLE

The metaphysical problem arises from the belief in opposite values in which truth as the highest value is especially worthy being searched for. Nietzsche states

explicitly that traditional philosophers regard truth as the highest value; accordingly, this truth must not originate from the transient and illusionary world (Nietzsche, 1886/2000, p. 2). There must be an ultimate being, thing-in-itself or eternity from which truth is driven. Nietzsche finds that the will to truth degenerates life growth and so, it is untenable because of two reasons. First, one can live without concern for traditional values, but nobody can live without one's own existence. Life here is essentially associated with various mutual relations and conditions in which each human being comes to be in the process of becoming. So, if one denies the transient world, one denies life. We can realize the value of life so far as we exist as human beings in this world, where we have to struggle for living and fighting for the needs of existence. As such, the will is to live, not to search for truth. Second, to be a human being is to accept that suffering and happiness are the indispensable aspects of life. So, the preservation of life depends on the psycho-emotional growth and transformation of suffering into happiness, not on searching for truth, as Stephen Michels (2004) states: "Nietzsche's new philosophy breaks from the moralistic tradition of philosophy and uses life as the standard for judgment". This study is an attempt to examine this trend of Nietzsche's thought in order to show that truth in the traditional philosophy has nothing to do with life, in which suffering and happiness relate to the value of life and the meaning of existence, regardless of searching for truth. To reach this conclusion, I explain first Nietzsche's critique of traditional philosophy of truth by dint of appraisal of knowledge. Next, the psychological investigation of metaphysics is brought out to validate the metaphysical problem of truth. My conclusion is that there is truth only in life, that is, the transforming of suffering into happiness for the sake of life growth.

THE CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

Metaphysicians believe that absolute truth, which is eternal and immortal, cannot be derived from this deceptive world. An example is Schopenhauer's search for truth. Why does one search for truth? Why not untruth? Can that truth be shared? The moment one searches for truth, at the same time one denies untruth. The love for truth creates the prejudice between truth and untruth. Nietzsche regards this search for truth and metaphysical dualities as illusionary and starts reevaluating the concept of knowledge in the traditional philosophy.

Kant was one of the main philosophers whom Nietzsche critiqued. Kant believed that knowledge is possible only when there is a synthetic unity of apperception through the categories of understanding. Considering this, he says that there must be some pure percepts so that the categories of understanding are possible. So space and time are preconditions to constitute of experience:

If I am able to say, *a priori*, that all external phenomena are in space, and are determined, *a priori*, according to the relations of space, I can, according to the principle of the internal sense, make the general assertion that all phenomena, that is, all objects of the senses, are in time, and stand necessarily in relations of time. (Kant, 1781/2001, p. 52)

Here Kant accepts that the conditions of our knowledge are space and time, which is *a priori* experience by means of which objects appear. This indicates that there is the boundary between the objects that we conceive and the objects in themselves. The appearance of objects and objects in themselves are in contradiction. So, Kant deals with how knowledge is possible, but not with the stimulus for such knowledge.

Nietzsche points out the errors committed by Kant in his judgment in order to reject this view. He asserts that Kant's rhetorical question of "how is knowledge possible?" is a nonsense statement: "if we do not know what knowledge is, then we cannot possibly answer the question as to whether there is knowledge" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 286). This implies that if there is an answer for such question then the question itself is self-contradictory. Moreover, when the question is answered, then that knowledge turns out to be a judgment: knowledge is so and so... a judgment may be true or false since it is based on belief. A belief in Truth or Certainty is originated from feelings and emotions, which may not serve for life enhancement. So, the possibility of knowing, if knowledge is possible, does not hold.

Further, Nietzsche rejects the idea that if we do not have data *a priori* how we can conclude that such *a priori* succeeding experience is true. Any judgment should be based on experience in relation to other judgments; "an isolated judgment is never 'true', never knowledge" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 530). Criticizing the concept of a 'thing in itself', Nietzsche says that if every thing has its own 'thing in itself', then no things in themselves can be related to another. Nietzsche implies that a thing exists in relation to two aspects, that is, in relation to its properties and in relation to other things. The concept of a thing-in-itself is nonsense if all qualities and properties of a thing are eliminated. Such an elimination results in the non-existence of the thing and of a thing in itself. If a thing exists in relation to others and then suddenly the other things are taken away, then the original thing does not exist as it is, it cannot existentially maintain itself: "The properties of a thing are effects on other «things»: If one removes other «things», then a thing has no properties, i.e., there is no thing without other things, i.e., there is no thing-in-itself" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 302).

Nietzsche asserts that the essence of a thing is a human conceptualization, an invention, if you will, based on cognitive processes. This invention is for the sake of life. It is in the form of the will, which is propelled ever onwards by the process of becoming. Appearance is an invented and arranged world that is designed

according to our needs and our instincts, since it is the world we live with. If it is true, then it is only true for *us* as our desires (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 306).

Nietzsche says that we cannot squeeze the world, as the condition of living, into our psychological prejudices since it is a world of various relations, perpetually dynamic. The world appears as it is due to the effect of the conditions in which we live. A diamond has no value compared to the value of water for one who is thirsty in the desert without water. In this sense, it is because we evaluate things always in relationship with our changing needs that the value of those things is altered accordingly.

In short, Nietzsche denies the duality between thing-in-itself and appearance. Such distinctions are absurd, since the world exists in mutual interconnectedness (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 306). He further asserts that whatever concept of the world a person might have, it is her or his creation emanating from their dualistic valuations and beliefs. This of course is pointing at a psychological basis wherein the individual creates in order to be able to live in and endure their existence in the world. It is life which presupposes knowledge of the world. Any knowledge should concern human need and psycho-emotional growth.

Nietzsche not only rejects the prejudices inherent in the concept of dualistic structures of knowledge and the concept of thing-in-itself, but he also repudiates the view of a duality between body and mind in human individual.

Descartes searches for certainty. He finds out the immediate certainty:

I am, I exist - that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. (Descartes, 1641/1984, p.18)

Descartes' "I think" indicates the intentional consciousness process, so it excludes all activities without intention of consciousness. For example, 'I go' cannot be extended to 'I go, therefore I am'. Intentional consciousness can manifest in different modes of imagining, that is to say, in the thinking processes, but without concerning the extension and properties of the body. This capacity of internal experience is a "transcendental-descriptive egology" (Kant, 1781/2001, p. 38), which creates its sharp distinction from and beyond the limits of the body. Hence, Descartes believed that body and mind mutually exclude each other.

Nietzsche rejects Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) on two grounds. First, the dichotomy between thinking and thinker is absurd since there is no thinking separate from the thinker. It is a habit to infer that since thinking is a process, there must be an agent who is cause for the activity of thinking. So the "I" here is such an agent who is independent in determining the process of thinking. Nietzsche calls the conceiving of an "I" as agent a 'grammatical habit': "thinking is an activity; every activity requires an agent, consequently" (Nietzsche, 1886/2000,

p. 214). This asserts that if one thinks, it is one who is thinking oneself. There is no new knowledge in this statement. So, Nietzsche regards *cogito ergo sum* as a tautology.

Secondly, Descartes searches for an *immediate certainty*, which is involved during the process of thinking. This “*immediate certainty*” is none other than a substance or soul, the requisite of existence. Thinking is the continual entity, but the “I” here directly indicates the existence of an unchanging entity as Descartes’ *immediate certainty*. This implies a contradiction.

Nietzsche then proposes that the only thing that could be seen as an ‘*immediate certainty*’ is the stream of continual experience. Along this line, it can be said that Descartes was correct to say that there is thought, but went too far in assuming that there was a substantial ‘I’ doing the thinking. The concept of soul as a substance, as a reality in and of itself, is illusory. He sees the belief in soul as originated from the illusory experience of a subject being distinct from an object. So, inner experience is devoid of both subject and object (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, pp. 263-266). A search of the insightful stream, instead of bringing forth a soul, rather brings forth what Nietzsche called the “mortal soul”, which is to say the stream of a continual flux and flow of experience (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 271). So, “there exists neither «spirit» nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use. There is no question of «subject and object»” (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 266).

Nietzsche seems to accept that, if one searches for truth or happiness, one cannot find it out. When one ceases to search for it, it will come: “Now I bid you lose me and find yourself; and only *when you have all denied me* will I return to you” (Nietzsche, 1878-1880/2004, p. 103). For Nietzsche, happiness, i.e., the cessation of suffering, is a newness of becoming, it has a creative value. He says that redemption is the creation of oneself: “Creation – that is the great redemption from suffering, and life’s easement. But that the creator may exist, that itself requires suffering and much transformation” (Nietzsche, 1883-1885/1961, p. 111).

Nietzsche sees truth as being what one experiences from insight by dint of having life, of being alive. He sees that each individual has his or her own truth and draws out the conclusion that truth must not be conventional. In drawing out the implications of this idea, truth then should be beyond any metaphysical duality such as good or bad, right or wrong. The only truth is what one experiences in one’s own conscious continuum. This is truth as one’s psychological structure. So, Nietzsche says there is no metaphysical truth to search for. Just as the value of life is for the life of each plant, the value of existence is for the existence of each individual. All opposite values arise from the needs and desires of each human being rather than being something independently existent. They are the manifestations of the human needs; they arise from the prejudices inherent in the experience of

bodily feelings, which is a psychological phenomenon. Bodily feelings are part of life and they are not dualistic, but rather form a stream of an inseparable and continuous experience. Nietzsche proposes how the psychology of metaphysics arises in the domain of the ongoing experience in order to repudiate the concept of absolute truth in the traditional philosophy.

PSYCHOLOGY OF METAPHYSICS

Nietzsche traces the inception of the fundamental errors of the dualistic values to the process of the psychological experience, wherein the inner transition of becoming is wrongly interpreted resulting in metaphysical systems of the moral dualistic values.

It is due to this deception of the senses that metaphysical prejudices arise. Nietzsche argues that in experience there is no substance without a bodily feeling. In other words, it is bodily feelings that are interpreted and explained in terms of concepts and words. With knowledge considered in a biological sense, Nietzsche states that the only obvious experience is when the brain is stimulated [by sense objects], and bodily sensations arise (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 335). So, if there is any substance in experience, this substance must have bodily sensation as its 'property':

Properties of things were sensations of the feeling subject: at this point the properties cease to belong to the thing ... [As such] Beings will have to be thought of as sensations that are no longer based on something devoid of sensation. (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 303)

The above quotation indicates that knowledge is something 'human, too human' and it must concern the individual's experience. Properties of a thing do not belong to the thing, but to the bodily sensation of the feeling subject. Reified knowledge attempts to classify facts and search for truth, overlooking the primacy of the individual in life. Nietzsche sees that each individual is a unique existence; each person has one's own truth that is psychologically experienced within.

The direct observation of the inner experience reveals the constant flux and flow of bodily feelings and their conditioned thoughts. Nietzsche asserts that the rapidity of the bodily feelings is such that they are always followed by thoughts. They succeed one after another with "lightning speed". Ultimately, there is no metaphysical basis for the psychological process:

There come to be constructed habitual rapid connections between feelings and thoughts which, if they succeed one another with lightning speed, are in the end no longer experienced as complexes but as *unities*. It is in this sense that one speaks of the moral feelings, of the religious feelings, as though these were simple unities: in truth, however, they are rivers with a hundred

tributaries and sources. Here too, as so often, the unity of the word is no guarantee of the unity of the thing (Nietzsche, 1878-1880/2004, p. 19).

The result is that the bodily felt experience appears not as an intermittent streaming of feelings, but rather a unified flowing stream of feelings. Nietzsche then draws out the implications of this by deducing that this seemingly unified stream of feelings creates the illusion of the veracity of the moral or religious feelings and that these feelings come to be taken as granted. In fact, they are nothing more than feelings in the body and have arisen due to contact with sense objects, including thought and memory. Such religious feelings condition further related religious thoughts and, ultimately, the complex systems of metaphysics that formed an important part of the European philosophical investigation.

Nietzsche analyzed how such bodily feelings and their related thoughts serve as the ground of all metaphysical problems. He brings to our attention the idea that the common belief that God and the soul are eternal existents is usually accepted as if people actually experience them. Nietzsche counters this with the point that a profound feeling will produce a profound thought. The strong feeling will manifest as strength of belief, not in the truth that one believes:

A feeling is profound because we regard the thoughts that accompany it as profound. But a profound thought can nonetheless be very distant from the truth, as, for example, every metaphysical thought is; if one deducts from the profound feeling the element of thought mixed in with it, what remains is the *strong* feeling, and this has nothing to do with knowledge as such, just as strong belief demonstrates only its strength, not the truth of that which is believed. (Nietzsche, 1878-1880/2004, p. 19)

Again, the strong belief causes the strong emotion. Indeed, then, it is the emotion that, powerful as it is, is believed; it is not the truth that is believed. Nietzsche asserts: "at the bottom of all belief there lies the *sensation of the pleasurable or painful* in respect to the subject experiencing the sensation" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 21). In other words, the experience of the emotional valence of the bodily feeling as being either pleasant or unpleasant is the foundation of belief. When he states that the relation one has with God or a supreme power is the result of the fear and terror when humans face difficult problems, this then would be based on unpleasant feelings. They need something higher and stronger to help. The pleasant and affirming valence of the bodily feelings that are experienced in relation to believing and praying to God then facilitates one to take courage and face the current danger, fear or other problem. In this way, also metaphysical concepts spring from belief, bodily feelings and appropriately strong emotions.

Nietzsche appears to have been very receptive to the conditions of cognition. As I mentioned above, he argued for a lightening fast speed of the arising and

passing of the bodily feelings. He saw these processes of cognition as being deceptive:

Here reigns the coarse sensualistic prejudice that sensations teaches us truths about things that I cannot say at the same time of one and the same thing that it is hard and that it is soft. (The instinctive proof “I cannot have two opposite sensations at the same time” - quite coarse and false.)

The conceptual ban on contradiction proceeds from the belief that we are *able* to form concepts, that the concept not only designates the essence of a thing but *comprehends* it. (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 208)

It is illusory to think that we can have two opposite physical sensations at the same time. We cannot indeed experience two opposite sensations such as “hard” and “soft”, “cruel” and “kind”, “pain” and “joy”... at the same time. This creates the basis of a moralistic dualism, moralistic beliefs that ‘this excludes that’, for example, that truth excludes falsity, that the soul, that God is eternal while the human body is ephemeral. Of course, what follows from this is that there exists the world of eternity beyond the world of phenomenon. Eternity is regarded as something belonging to the supreme power, to God and Truth not to this phenomenon in which human beings struggle for survival. Though Nietzsche considers metaphysical concepts as contrived, he, for the sake of life preservation, accepts the conventional truths on which human relations are based.

Here I have begun to look more closely at Nietzsche’s psychological views. The quote sees Nietzsche analyzing the human propensity towards taking a fixed attitude regarding the moral values in what respects the situations in life: something is good, bad, right, wrong, heaven, hell, etc. What is of import here is that he sees bodily feelings as the base of all the fixities in attitude. He says there is a human habit of trying to stabilize bodily feelings into a single unchanging flow, or perhaps it is better to say that the human condition is to experience bodily feelings as an unbroken unitary flow: “Through it, ceasing to treat oneself as a *single* rigid and unchanging individual, one takes an intelligent interest in the life and being of many others” (Nietzsche, 1878-1880/2004, p. 196). Here, his assertion is that conscious awareness of the discursive thought and images emanate from psycho-emotional phenomena that transpire at the pre-conscious level. This for Nietzsche is also a proof that conscious experience cannot be understood to be a substantial, unchanging and controlling Self (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 284). Kolossowski also remarks that Nietzsche sees the body as the battlefield of emotions. When the conscious identification with various phenomena is peeled away, all that remains are the bodily feelings, whether the body is still or in motion:

This flux and this reflux will intermingle, fluctuation within fluctuation. Like the figures that rise to the crest of wave, leaving behind them only foamy

froth-such are the designations through which the intensity signifies itself. And this is what we call thought. (Kolossowski, 1969/2005, p. 48)

Nietzsche sees the bodily feelings as being varied. It is then critically important to break free from the reification of the feelings into a monolithic, unchanging felt flow of experience; this is the basis of the reified, dualistic experience. What is important to consider is that above and beyond this is the fact? that the human condition is generally one of obliviousness towards one's bodily feelings. What he implies is a view that bodily feelings are basic to human emotions rather than to one's thinking, with its dualistic boundaries. Nietzsche's use of the terms 'affect', 'drive', 'impulse' may be seen as reflecting the functioning of unconscious phenomena, including the bodily felt experience of emotion (D. Mellamphy & N. Mellamphy, 2005). Nietzsche believes that there is a force and a feeling of force that compels us to believe that one follows the other (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 350). This force arises and conditions the thought that an event will happen in such and such a way. He says that we cannot really know the process of an actual activity of the outer world since we never perceive a fact. A fact as an element of the outer world is without name and concept. But we can never cognize any element in the phenomena that does not have any name or image. We never encounter "facts" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 264) since cause and effect must have the causal link with the subject, which is the process of inner experience. But the inner world is the sequence of bodily feelings and thinking. It is not possible to separate what is cause and what is effect in this process. Hence, the elements of the outer world have their meaning only when they are projected onto the inner world. Therefore, the link between cause and effect amounts to the sequence of the continuous stream of inner experience with feelings, images.

What is the factor that pushes the process of the inner phenomenon in motion? Nietzsche considers three aspects indispensable and inseparable in the process of knowing; they are bodily feelings, thinking and willing. We can perhaps conceptualize this as follows: an object is seen, perhaps a beautiful painting. This conditions a feeling to arise, which then conditions a thought to arise, which in turn causes another sensation. This is an endless cycle. Of course, a thought can be of any category whatsoever. It can be a classification, a memory, an interpretation, etc. With this etiology, it can be seen why Nietzsche refused to accept thought as being part of an ultimate reality. Therefore, for Nietzsche, metaphysical concepts are not at the primary level of experience; that is the position of bodily feelings, while the thinking processes, whatever they may be, are at a secondary level of experience and, as such, not holistic, not 'real' experience:

We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word "I", the word "do", the word "suffer": these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not "truth". (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 267)

Nietzsche tears the old maps of the philosophical thought to pieces. He sees the explanations or interpretations of the external world as “purely fictitious”. In other words, for Nietzsche, the world of the duality between “appearance” and inherent existence, subject and object, doer and deed... is the fiction of thought. Seeking for truth, eternity or certainty amounts to be futile. He states that our interpretations and thinking, reasoning of the empirical world originate from what Nietzsche terms feelings, bodily felt experience. In short, bodily feelings are the basis of the human meaning: “All our categories of reason are of sensual origin: derived from the empirical world” (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 270). In this sense, Nietzsche concludes that the historical, cultural view of the world as a series of moralistic dualisms has far reaching consequences. Good and evil, the idea of justice (which is unjust), of sin and punishment, all these are false ideas because they arise from the prejudices inherent in opposing moral values and are not existent in the internal flow of experience. This is why in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra kills God. Clearly, this is meant to restore the strength and vitality of the individual and to return the individual to center stage as the only true master of one’s life. It is an end to fear and suffering. Each individual, with his power and will, is the core of the universe and phenomenon and of one’s own salvation from suffering and truth, while the traditional truth amounts to be a life degeneration.

With this rejection of the traditional values in which truth is something eternal and certain, worthy of searching for while denying untruth and appearance, Nietzsche proposes a revival of the psychology based knowledge to prove the destructive value of the searching for truth.

First, it is life which presupposes knowledge, since, without life, no forms of life will exist. Knowledge is essentially a living phenomena and the manifestation of life. It is the process of the flower reaching for the sun-filled window to grow and maintain its life. So, “the way of knowing and of knowledge is itself already part of the conditions of existence” (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 272). This implies that Nietzsche considers knowledge as the process, conditioned and based on the ground of becoming, toward growth and self-preservation. One cannot define knowledge in terms of the prejudices of dualistic values in which truth is deserved to be searched for in denying untruth. Dualistic values are reified, in that sense, dead; there is no process for them. If life has no further process of becoming, it amounts to be barren, fruitless. This means that searching for truth will run counter to the flow of life, which is new and creative in every instant. Nietzsche believes that every individual has the potential to be a value creator in the course of life. Whatever truth is, this truth should be valid for that individual, since life is a privilege for each human. If everyone has one’s own truth, there is no truth at all. So, searching for truth is not only a denial of life, but also delineates the capacity of each individual as one’s own master of values.

Second, Nietzsche's crucial problem is not how knowledge is possible, but how knowledge grows to sustain life. The growth of knowledge is understood in the sense that knowledge is "the tool to power", which is considered in "a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense" (Nietzsche, 1901/1968, p. 266). It is here essential to repeat that the psycho-emotional growth does not take into account the values of the conceptual world in which the ego, the soul, God, and things-in-themselves reside, and that it is not a matter of knowing truth or classifying facts, but it is a matter of inner experience in which bodily sensation and will are based. In this sense, knowledge is a 'revival of psychology' as the humanness of life that traditional philosophers had neglected. It is life that presupposes truth, and then this truth should condition life growing in the course of becoming, in which right and wrong, suffering and happiness are mutually mingled. Human perception can comprehend only the world of concepts and words according to conventional communication of the daily life, but these are not absolute truth since one cannot experience a world that becomes new in every moment.

In sum, Nietzsche opposes truth from the traditional philosophy in order for showing that life is of utmost importance for each individual in which value of life comes to be. He elaborates the process of psychological metaphysics to prove that there is no truth to search for in the process of becoming. In this stream of inner experience, one could not find out truth and untruth, thing-in-itself, I as certainty ... It is feelings and wills that conditions interpretations and thoughts to arise in the process of conceptualization. It is from the deception of the cognitive process that the metaphysical prejudice of opposite values arises. So, the denial of untruth and searching for truth and certainty will preclude this flow of life, new in every instant. Truth from the traditional philosophy not only is proved futile, but also negates the vitality of life to grow in every moment. If there is truth, then it would be given to each individual who has the potential to be value creator for life growth. Just as a rose comes out from thorn bushes, truth is the will to transform human conditions in which suffering and terror are the undeniable predicaments of life.

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