The Scientist and His “Theory” and the Christian Creationist and His “Science”

Assuming that I have something significant to contribute to the evolution vs. creation debate, many ask me to speak and write concerning my thoughts on the topic. However, I do not have anything substantive to say about it. I am a layman on the subject. Although I have read about a half dozen books on the debate, maybe a dozen, and though I can speak authoritatively on complex chemical synthesis, I am not qualified to enter the public discussion on evolution vs. creation. So please don’t ask me to be the speaker or debater at your event, and think carefully about asking me for an interview because I will probably not give you the profound or even salient quotations that you seek. Even here I will primarily quote others who are far better trained than I am on the subject.

I have been labeled as an Intelligent Design (ID) proponent. I am not. I do not know how to use science to prove intelligent design. I am sympathetic to the arguments on the matter and I find some of them intriguing, but the scientific proof is not there, in my opinion. So I prefer to be free of that ID label. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaise_Pascal), one of the finest scientists, mathematicians and inventors that the world has ever enjoyed, and also among the most well-respected and deepest thinking Christian apologists, wrote in his Pensées 463, “It is a remarkable fact that no canonical [Biblical] author has ever used nature to prove God. They all try to make people believe in him. David, Solomon, etc., never said: ‘There is no such thing as a vacuum, therefore God exists.’ They must have been cleverer than the cleverest of their successors, all of whom have used proofs from nature. This is very noteworthy.” As Kreeft (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Kreeft) points out in his commentary on Pascal’s Pensées, “If the Scripture does not use nature to prove God, it can’t be the best strategy. Notice that Pascal does not say that there are no good proofs of God or that none of them begin with data from nature. Elsewhere, he specifies merely that such proofs are psychologically weak, but he does not say they are logically weak. More important, they are salvifically weak, [meaning that] they will not save us. If nature proved God clearly, we would not have to search for him with all our hearts.” Pascal further writes in his Pensées 429, “This is what I see that troubles me… Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety…if there is a God supporting nature, she should unequivocally proclaim him, and that, if the signs in nature are deceptive, they should be completely erased; that nature should say all or nothing so that I could see what course I ought to follow.” Though 350 years since Pascal penned his dilemma, as a modern-day scientist, I do not know how to prove ID using my most sophisticated of analytical tools. I share Pascal’s frustration. Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if, when scientists had obtained the first molecular resolution images of human DNA, it had self-assembled (a thermodynamic process) into the Hebrew script to say, The God of Heaven and Earth was here. But it did not, and I suppose that the wonder would have elicited no love from the skeptic anyway. Therefore, God seems to have set nature as a clue, not a solution, to keep us yearning for him.

Not that it matters much, but since many want to know, I will ask the question for them: Where does Jim Tour stand on the evolution vs. creation debate? I do have scientific problems understanding evolution as it is usually presented. I simply can not
accept it as unreservedly as many of my scientist colleagues do, although I sincerely respect them as scientists. Some of them seem to have little trouble embracing many of evolution’s proposals based upon (or in spite of) archeological, mathematical, biochemical and astrophysical suggestions and evidence, and yet few are experts in all of those areas, or even just two of them. Although most scientist leave few stones unturned in their quest to discern mechanisms before wholeheartedly accepting them, when it comes to the often gross extrapolations between observations and conclusions on evolution, scientists, it seems to me, permit unhealthy leeway. When hearing such extrapolations in the academy, when will we cry out, “The emperor has no clothes!”?

Furthermore, most of my scientist colleagues do not discuss evolution very often because they are too busy with their own fields of interest to be sidetracked by such tangential matters. Though the acceptance of evolution is rather implicit within their core understandings, most science professors are simply too harried to take much notice of the details. Pondering and thoughtfulness has been pounded and distilled out of many of us; there’s another meeting to attend, another proposal to write, another manuscript to proof, yet another lecture to deliver, 100 more emails to answer, and the anxieties about our futures must be allayed. “The peace which passeth all understanding,’ is beyond reach, nay beyond understanding.”

Likewise, I do not well-understand the stance of many of my creationist colleagues regarding their scientific evidence for creation or intelligent design, but they seem to be quite comfortable in most respects with the natural and historical suggestions for its claims. I am happy for them, but I hope that their position does not cause them to trump brotherly love or charity in thought or words. When they write on these topics, they are too quick to cite each other or to refer to 40-year-old studies, and slow to consider the newer findings in the mainstream scientific literature. The scientist is not the creationist’s enemy, and most scientists are quite sincere in producing research that is accurate to the best of today’s measurement abilities. For example, the gross dismissing of radiometric dating experiments that use even multiple corroborating nuclei, not by a mere 20% or even 100%, but by 4-5 orders of magnitude, based on antiquated “scientific” arguments, is unscientific and unfair. Moreover, to simply suggest that “God made it look older than it really is” is also unreasonable. What else is God deceiving us with? The virgin birth, the crucifixion or the resurrection, perhaps? Never! God is not in the business of deception, but in causing man to seek so that he could find. And my creationist friends need some thoughtful explanations for their children because, in my experience, young college-aged people seek truth, and if you threaten them, try to brow-beat them, or show them a select set of cloistered “scientific” data, they’ll smell hypocrisy, and sooner or later in life, reject it altogether.

What a comfort it must be to be pleasantly settled in one camp or the other, but I can not be so settled, and hence I have few tent-fellows. Based upon my faith in the Scriptures, I do believe (yes, faith and belief go beyond scientific evidence for this scientist) that God created the heavens and the earth and all that dwell therein, including a man named Adam and a woman named Eve. As for many of the details and the time-spans, I personally become less clear. Some may ask, What’s “less clear” about the text that reads, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth…”? That is a fair question, and I wish I had an answer that would satisfy them. But I do not because I remain less clear.
I hope that’s OK—I mean for me, a scientist and a Christian, to be unsure of a few things in both science and Christianity since the question is neither fundamental to my standing as a scientist (which is based primarily upon my scholarly peer-reviewed publications) or to my salvation as a Christian (which is based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, my confession in him as Savior and my belief in his resurrection from the dead). Therefore, I prefer to address here the topic of The Scientist and His “Theory” and the Christian Creationist and His “Science” rather than the well-worn debate of evolution vs. creation. I think that my topic has freshness about it. Until we are comfortable with the contestants, how can we be satisfied with their conclusions? And I can best address my topic by citing extensively from “A Christian Critique of the University,” 1982, by Professor Charles Malik, whose credentials are too great to list here, so I will refer you to the encyclopedia for that: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Malik.

First, let us consider the scientist himself. Four things happen to him. First is what I call the pride of knowledge and power. This is the subtlest failing. Because he controls his subject matter, the scientist slips into the feeling that he is a kind of god. People speak of the humility of the scientist; in truth I find very little humility among scientists. They know, it is true; but what they do not know is not only greater but far more important than what they know. They control, it is true; but they are controlled far more than they control. Would that they had the humility to ponder exactly what Paul meant when he wrote the Corinthians: “For we know in part....” “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” But who is Paul to teach the scientists anything?!

Second is what I call the illicit transfer of authority. Many scientists think...that their recognized competence in their own field qualifies them to pass judgment on matters pertaining to other spheres. (This does not apply to Einstein... for Einstein was humble when it came to realms outside his own. [It is] people’s abuse of [this] great man’s opinion, which he had every right to express freely, to bolster their own views which they had already arrived at independently of and apart from what the great man had expressed as a mere opinion. He would probably object to this abuse and ask the abusers not to take him as an authority in the fields they were quoting him on but consult the proper authorities in these fields.) Mathematicians or physicists or biologists or physicians or engineers or even experts on government often speak on questions of man, morals, philosophy, theology, history, truth, freedom, destiny, trial, suffering, God, Christ, the Spirit, the church, as though they knew what they were talking about; in truth they are no better than the man in the street with respect to these realms. The habit of speaking authoritatively within their own specialties has been so ingrained in them that they appear incapable of
resisting the temptation to speak authoritatively also on matters in which they are babes. The spectacle they display then is ludicrous in the extreme. When a great philosopher or theologian or historian or statesman, or a man who has survived, through some grace, great trials and sufferings without losing his integrity, hears them talk, he quietly laughs: just as they would when they hear a theologian or a statesman or a poet or a saint speak with an air of authority on mathematics or physics or biology or medicine. The scientists should humbly acknowledge that there are authorities in other fields too, and should seek them and sit at their feet; and should never pretend to know what they really know little or nothing about. This is the real scientific spirit which human beings (and therefore scientists), being human, can never perfect enough.

Third is the error of naturalism. Because scientists give themselves to nature all their lives they often end up by worshiping it. The really believing scientist who does not consider the fundamental tenets of Christianity (the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the resurrection, sin, repentance, the new creature in Jesus Christ, the Second Coming of Jesus, the life to come) nonsense is a great rarity. The scientists who worship nature develop their own subjective faith, their own private interpretation of these doctrines; they do not want to be bound by these “dogmas.” Most scientists are sheer naturalists: nature is all in all. Christ, not as a more or less vague moral principle but his very being and his claims about himself and what the church believes him to be, is hidden from their sight. They see only nature and its potencies and processes. And they radiate this atheistic naturalism all around them.

One reason for the remarkable spread of atheism among the intelligentsia of the world is the ease with which atheistic naturalism, through the prestige and power and “success” of science, passes on from master to pupil, without perhaps the master noticing or willing it. Because scientific naturalism is deeply entrenched in the university, the university has become a principal disseminator of atheism.

Fourth, the scientist, wrapped up in and dedicated to nature, forgets himself. The fact that he is “human,” in that he suffers, loses his temper, is tempted, often falls, is selfish, is terribly limited, envies, resents, schemes, hates, is caught up in frenzied rivalries with his colleagues, rejoices in the misfortunes of others, is in desperate need for fellowship and love, faces death any minute, often does not stand up for truth and justice, often lends a hand to slander, often is not fair in his judgment of others, often wishes others did not exist and therefore murders them in his thought—all these common human frailties he is as much heir to as any other person. Science cannot save the scientist from them. In fact, like other people, scientists are prone to flee from them. These things are mightily there all the time, but one gets the impression sometimes that scientists pay little attention to them.

These frailties are, to use a Whiteheadian term, mere “subjective forms,” of no special metaphysical importance. The scientists as persons are not
important (and yet how much they are jealous for their name, their reputation, their dignity, their place in society, their place in history, what people think of them!). What is important are the experiments they are performing, the completion of their work—that seventh volume on the snail! The ability of scientists to be so utterly dedicated to their work is most admirable; one praises God for having given people such wonderful power. But one also stops to think: at what cost? The danger is that it be at the cost of themselves. When this is the case, then this admirable self-giving becomes tragic self-losing.

And now the scientist's evolutionary “theory”:
The doctrine of evolution permeates university existence at every level. It is taken for granted as an indisputable fact, almost as divine revelation. In the atmosphere of the university you inhale it as the air you breathe. To question its validity is almost to cause one to appear a fool. It purports to explain everything: beauty, goodness, malice, mind, honesty, holiness; or if it does not bother to explain them, it dismisses them as “relative” and unimportant. These things “evolved,” and that settles the matter. Let any fundamental question arise and forthwith the mind jumps, as to a deus ex machina, to the doctrine of evolution for the rescue. It has almost replaced truth as the first principle of the university: it is itself the truth.

Since university existence is wholly identified with this doctrine, even to hint at the possibility of questioning it or limiting the scope of its validity has the effect of placing one outside the pale of the university altogether. A doubter of this doctrine simply does not belong to the university: he is ruled out. I mean a real doubter, not one who doubts it in private but would not dare raise his voice against it with his colleagues.

Therefore, a Christian critique of the university must confront this situation with the utmost sense of responsibility and with total scientific competence. Such a critique would marshal three arguments from different orders of being:
(a) From the strict scientific evidence—is the objective, scientific evidence as compelling as the votaries of the doctrine claim? Or may their original, existential, a priori predilection for the doctrine (a predilection that antecedced the evidence and had something to do with it and did in fact determine the search for and the selection of the evidence) itself not have compelled them to the doctrine? The strictest scientific integrity should govern this argument.
(b) From the fateful confusion between idea and fact, between theory and phenomenon (in the phenomenological sense of the term). The “truth” of evolution is the truth of an idea, a theory, an inference, and not the truth of immediately given phenomena, such as the fact that we are limited, we are fallible, we are mortal, we are vain, we gossip, we scheme, we love, we hate, we are lonely, we are anxious, we get embarrassed and then act in funny ways, we often make fools of ourselves, we are miserable when our rivals best us.
Therefore, the evaluation of the truth of the theory of evolution awaits the working out of the truth of any theory in contradistinction to the truth of immediate phenomena. The Christian can say to the evolutionist: your theory is cogent and beautiful; it has impressed me no end; but it is a theory all the same; it is not an immediate phenomenon reflecting existence, being; and, my friend, it is not theories, no matter how beautiful and “true,” but such phenomena that matter most in your life and mine, including the life of the theorizing mind itself.

(c) From the original, irreducible, spiritual nature of human beings. By this I mean asking the evolutionist really to make an effort to acquaint himself firsthand with authentic religious existence. This entails knowing, really and personally, the life of the church in all its richness including its wonderful variegated liturgy; reading the Bible again and again, especially the Psalms and the New Testament; contemplating the great religious art in Rome, Paris and Madrid, and wherever it is to be found in palaces and museums; visiting, spending some time at and studying the great cathedrals, including Agia Sophia of Constantinople; soaking oneself in sacred music, both Western and Eastern; contemplating Byzantine, and especially Russian, iconography; reading the lives and writings of some twenty great saints; absorbing, as much as possible, the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century; and living for some time in an existing rooted Christian community. There is no truth without gathering in all the evidence, and authentic religious existence in all its modes and forms throughout the ages belongs to the total evidence about the nature of man. It purports to be dealing with nothing else. It unconceals a side of human nature (creatureliness, adoration, love, community, self-overcoming, self-giving, self-forgetting, hope, trust) that no other side dreams of. A man really seeking, seriously seeking, honestly seeking to understand the nature of man, I mean the seeker’s own nature including even his biological origin, cannot, without being “unscientific,” limit himself to the study of fossils, of primitive forms of life, both human and subhuman, and of comparative morphology and physiology. Shouldn’t actual living-dying human existence itself be sought and consulted? When an evolutionist, or any human being, liberates himself from the cage of his professional deformation and personally seeks and discovers the religious evidence, he is likely to see awakened in himself a certain “original, irreducible, spiritual nature” which was there all the time, dormant, concealed and covered up, awaiting unconcealment and release. He will then laugh at any theory, “scientific” or otherwise, whose effect would be either to deny the existence of this “spiritual nature” which he has discovered in himself, or, which amounts to the same thing, to derive it from something other than itself or from nothing.

When the theory of evolution is adequately confronted with these three orders of being it will take its rightful place in the scheme of things, a place that turns out to be not very interesting, and in any event very subsidiary. The philosophical, moral, human, spiritual and ontological consequences
that have been erected on the base of the doctrine of evolution will then all crumble.

Finally, to the Christian creationist himself, and his "science":

The "creationists" missed the whole point in their dispute with the evolutionists in a trial at a Court in Little Rock, Arkansas, recently. They argued that there is such a thing as "creation science." The truth is that there is no such thing. They cannot "scientifically prove" that God created the world, including man, according to the biblical account, whether in Genesis or elsewhere. The word science means something very precise today. According to this meaning the sciences are one thing, the Bible is something else altogether.

Science operates according to special procedures (observation, experimentation, verification, precise description, measurement, public scrutiny by experts, world recognition and acceptance, etc.) which have been progressively refined since Pythagoras, Hippocrates and Archimedes. Science is what takes place in the laboratories and departments of science in the great universities and technical institutes, and in the great industrial and defense establishments, and certainly the Bible is not part of what takes place there.

Science has acquired such overpowering prestige today that, according to some people, you cannot hope to get a hearing for what you are talking about unless it is science. Therefore, conclude the "creationists," let us show that we too are scientists! This attitude is called scientism: the worship of science as understood today as the only or the highest avenue to the truth. What if there are things in life (life itself, love, freedom, tragedy, decision, fellowship, friendship, community, loneliness, rebellion, suffering, resentment, ambition, hope, hopelessness, death) which have nothing to do with science? And what if these things are more important than anything that science deals with? Insofar as the scientist knows these things and experiences them in his own life, he does not draw them out of his science: he already brings them with him to his science. Thus to want to show that the Bible is also science is not to understand either the nature of science or the dignity of the Bible. It is to demean the Bible rather than to exalt it. It is in effect to look upon science as superior and to subordinate the Bible to science. The exact opposite is the truth if the two are to be compared at all: the Bible and what it means and stands for is superior, and science and what it means, asserts and delivers is subordinate.

Science is the product of the community of the scientists, the Bible the product of the community of the faithful as inspired by God. Neither is the creation of individuals in isolation; both are expressions of the life and activity of rooted communities. The spirit, the principle, of the community of faith, which is the church, is love and self-sacrifice, and this is not the spirit of the community of science. The scientists are not noted for loving or sacrificing to one another, and if they do so they bring the spirit of love
and sacrifice from outside their science. They are more celebrated for their rivalries and jealousies, and for making sure that their ideas and discoveries are not plagiarized by others but are exclusively attributed to them while some of them do not mind plagiarizing others themselves. They, their name and their authorship rights are uppermost on their mind.

If we are to characterize the spirit of the scientific community we will have to say that in the final analysis it is passion for knowledge with a view to power. Scientists want to control and dominate their material and through it, if possible, the world, both the material world and the human world. Science is an expression of the will to power.

In the community of love, the church, it is not a question of power and control; it is not even a question of knowledge in the scientific sense of the term. It is exclusively a question of remembering and loving, in a communal celebration or act, him who loved us and gave his life for us, even Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Those who do not know him and his love do not belong to the community and cannot be expected to share our faith.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?”

Faith in God the Creator of heaven and earth and of everything visible and invisible is the natural expression of a living order of love, grounded in Jesus Christ, both historically and ontologically, and not of any scientific ratiocination. If we live our faith—taking part in all the feasts and occasions of worship of the church, rejoicing in the Lord with the community, reading the Bible regularly, repenting for our sins and infirmities, bearing part of the burden of the church, fulfilling our church obligations, accepting suffering for the sake of the community of faith, witnessing to Christ in life and word, educating ourselves in the literature of the church, really interesting ourselves in what is happening today to the Christian communities all over the world, following the movement of evangelization all over the world, steeping ourselves in the great sacred literature, art and music, leisurely meditating with friends in the Holy Spirit on the mystery of the life of the spirit, thinking of Jesus Christ all the time and loving him above everything in the world including ourselves, always giving God the praise and glory—then faith in God the Creator of everything from nothing is the most natural and unshakable thing we acquire, and we neither ask nor care to ask for any certification of this faith from any science. “All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.”

Therefore, instead of the “creationists” worrying how to prove that they too are “scientists,” which they cannot prove, they should worry about why they cannot produce a single Nobel Prize winner in medicine or physics or chemistry or biology or any of the sciences, who is at the same time a firm and outspoken believer in the crucified and resurrected Jesus whose glory
is that he is now and forever at the very right hand of God, and who therefore is Lord of lords and King of kings, and the savior of himself and the only real hope of the world. They simply cannot produce such a man because such a man does not exist: I mean a man who is recognized and quoted by the scientific communities all over the world (in Tokyo, Peking, Delhi, Moscow, Freiburg, the Sorbonne, Oxford, Harvard) as a world authority in his own field, whose contributions are organically incorporated in world science everywhere just as, for instance, the contributions of Maxwell or Einstein or Planck or Fermi are recognized and made use of by the scientific communities all over the world, and who at the same time will stand up in public and recite the Nicene Creed and declare that he believes every word of it, as an expression of the community of love to which he belongs, I mean the church, exactly as Athanasius and the Council of Nicea meant it in the year 325 and as the church has affirmed and taught it since. He need not be a Nobel Prize winner, but he must be a recognized world authority; neither need he go to the court in Little Rock, Arkansas, to deposit his testimony: he can write it in rigorous fashion, setting forth both his scientific credentials and his personal witness to his Christian faith, and then publish it in Time magazine or The New York Times or Science (the organ of The American Association for the Advancement of Science). It is such a public deposition by such a man that will produce the greatest wholesome shock possible in both the scientific and the religious communities, serving the interests of both of them: the interests of the scientists by humbling them with the objective-existential proof that faith in creation is not incompatible with whatever “truth” the theory of evolution might hold, and the interests of the religious community by liberating it from any worry lest “science” contradict the most orthodox expression of the Christian faith. I repeat, the “creationists” must produce such a man, and that is their real problem. The man the creationists must produce does not exist, and this is what they should worry about, this is what they should anxiously inquire into. He does not exist either (a) because the scientific community, for reasons of its own, does not accept, whether by set policy or by subtle discouragement, real Christian believers to join its fellowship but only non-Christians; or (b) because scientists, coming from homes, backgrounds and traditions of authentic Christian faith, soon lose their faith’s hold on them and take on, by the natural workings of laws of social assimilation, the preponderant naturalist-immanentistagnostic-atheistic-secularist color of the general scientific community with which they live and interact; or (c) because, whether or not they are originally excluded or discouraged, and whether or not their original vibrant faith withers away by sheer social and professional contamination, there is essential incompatibility between worshiping and loving Jesus Christ and dedicating oneself to the pursuit of science. I doubt (a) and (c) and am inclined to pin the cause on (b). If (a) is the reason (and I see no evidence of the scientific community discriminating
against believing Christians provided they really excel in their science), we are dealing with an accidental phenomenon which can be exposed and remedied. If (c) is the reason, then we are in the presence of a most serious situation: Christ hates our investigating and knowing the truths which science explores and discovers, and we are to choose between Christ, letting go scientific knowledge, or scientific knowledge, letting go Christ. I do not believe the Eternal Logos, who is Jesus Christ himself, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” is essentially opposed to the knowledge of any truth whatever it be and however it be arrived at. This does not exclude the possibility, due to our natural infirmities, of getting so fascinated ourselves by our human knowledge as to bow down before it and worship it and therefore worship ourselves. Only the compassionate God, who constantly reminds us of and brings us back to himself, can safeguard us against this Satanic pitfall. If we are thus reduced to alternative (b) then the question arises: Why has the naturalist-immanentist-atheistic-secularist bent of mind preponderated in the scientific community to the extent that the radical Judaeo-Christian-Islamic transcendentalism can no longer be maintained in that community?

A couple of years ago a Muslim Pakistani won a Nobel Award in physics. Many other people were also honored with Nobel Prizes for their diverse accomplishments. The press interviewed most of them about their reactions to the awards when they first heard of them. With the exception of the Pakistani, they all said that they were overjoyed, that they celebrated with their families and friends, and they expressed the normal feelings of satisfaction that people experience on such occasions. Only the Pakistani said that his first act was to pray to Allah (God) and thank him for having illuminated his mind and enabled it to penetrate some of the mysteries of his creation. Knowing Islamic piety, I am sure the Pakistani scientist was most truthful and sincere. I do not know the religion of the other recipients of the Nobel Awards, nor indeed whether any of them belongs to any religion, but none of them, it seems, so much as thought of God. One of the many admirable characteristics of Islam is its absolute faith in the transcendent “Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them,” who is exalted above every thought or description. And the Muslim scientist first thought of Allah (God) and not of himself or of science or of truth or of nature or of his own achievement. The Christian scientists, if a scientist could still be or remain Christian, can emulate the Muslims in their total fidelity to their faith and in the courage with which they confess it from the housetops.

Christian believers who call themselves “creationists” (a term which simply signifies what I have just called “the radical Judaeo-Christian-Islamic transcendentalism”) must inquire into and ponder these questions. They should set about producing great scientists who receive Nobel Prizes and still recite the Credo and sincerely and unstammeringly believe every word of it.
I am challenged from all fronts. God help me.

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