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Responsibility and idea of Slavism in Kollár's and Štúr's thinking

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Abstract

The study focuses on the ethical aspects of decision-making by national elites in the context of the thinking of Ján Kollár (1793–1852) and Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1856) on the issue of Slavism. Attention is paid to the issue of responsibility for preserving the greatness and unity of the nation in the context of the formation of national identity and individuality. The concepts of the mentioned authors had an impact on the cultural-civilizational orientation of Slovak elites with an emphasis on the role of moral obligations in shaping the value orientation of the nation. In this context, the analysis focuses on the works *Reciprocity between the various tribes and dialects of the Slavic nation* and *Slavdom and the world of the future*, which, at the same time, represent alternative concepts of the cultural and political orientation of the Slavs. The study simultaneously analyses these concepts as alternative programs of cultural and political development of national identity, as well as concepts aimed at humanist and political goals.

Keywords: reciprocity, responsibility, Slavdom, nation, culture, nationalism

Introduction

Kollár's concept of Slavic reciprocity, which represented the vision of the nation-forming program of cooperation of the Slavic cultural elites, occupies an exceptional place in Slovak national-revival thinking. Its importance is still noticeable not only in philosophical, but, also, in political discourse, which concerns the cultural and civilizational orientation of Slovakia. Kollár's vision of Slavdom was later followed by Štúr's concept of nation-building thinking. Štúr first modified the concept of reciprocity and, later, broke with it in his work *Slavdom and the world of the future*. While emphasizing the importance of Russia's powerful position for the formation of the Slavic nation, he completely rejected the humanitarian focus of cultural reciprocity. Kollár's concept, unlike Štúr's, was a non-political project of national institutionalisation and, therefore, emphasized cultural cooperation.[2] His intention was to establish a large, though culturally defined, nation.

Kollár's idea of reciprocity was supposed to elevate the Slavs to spiritual life and cultural independence.[3] In this context, he emphasizes the responsibility of great nations and their elites, which should have been reflected in their spiritual orientation. At the same time, he did not consider the formation of a nation as the principal ideal.[4] However, the idea of literary reciprocity was supposed to lead the national elites to the responsibility of forming and concentrating the spiritual forces of the Slavs (Štefánek, 1937, p. 17). Therefore, the goal of Kollár's literary reciprocity was not only the formation of Slavic culture, but the national elites had a moral obligation to preserve the greatness and unity of the nation. (Štefánek, 1937, p. 17). However, the history-forming mission that Ján Kollár connected with the ideal of humanity could only be carried out by sufficiently large nations that overcame their particular limitations.[5] Based on this, he believed that the integration of smaller cultures and the associated concessions

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[2] In this context, Viera Bilasová writes about the loss of European orientation (Bilasová, 2019, p. 159).

[3] According to Vasil Gluchman, Kollár's understanding of humanity is based on a religious idea, because it makes the realization of love for people and humanity dependent on religion (Gluchman, 2012, p. 13).

[4] Városssová states that, for Kollár, humanity is synonymous with goodness, beauty, nobility, justice, Christian virtues that have been attributed over the centuries and brought to their true state, love for one's neighbour and love for the country, patriotic heroism, and respect for all people and nations (Városssová, 1963, p. 68).

[5] Vasil Gluchman states that it was Herder's concept of history that became the basis of Kollár's perception of human history aiming for humanity headed by Slavs as the pioneers of humanity (Gluchman, 2022, p. 130).

would benefit the whole. Therefore, in this context he put the emphasis on the responsibility of elites for national unity.

The problem of the nation's viability

Kollár, influenced by Herder's philosophy, considered mother tongue to be the most typical manifestation of national culture (Kollár, 1892, p. 9). Therefore, in his conception, nations transcended the borders of states. At the same time, language boundaries were defined by national cultures (Maxwell, 2009, p. 96). Kollár's view of history was influenced by Herder's philosophy as well (Herder, 2002, p. 378). Based on this, he considered nations as subjects through which the universal ideas of humanity, tolerance, brotherhood, and mutual understanding were achieved in history. The spiritual values that were created by one nation in the past were developed by others and perfected by their spiritual life (Kollár, 1954, p. 144). The literary reciprocity program had as its ambition the formation of a culture-forming nation that can raise the stagnant European spiritual life to a new life force.[6]

It may be stated that, for Kollár, the nations that participated in the history of mankind were primarily carriers of a cultural-civilizing mission, and the responsibility of the national elites not only to the nation, but also to mankind was based on it (Brock, 1976, p. 22). For this reason, he emphasized the importance of the greatness of a nation that has the ability to establish a universal culture that develops the values of humanity. Based on this, he concluded that only a nation of sufficient size can establish a viable culture that develops universal human values. Such an ideological focus of culture was supposed to elevate the Slavs to spiritual greatness, not to shape power in political intentions. Therefore, it can be said that Kollár's thinking inclined to the philosophy of history before political thinking. Thus, Kollár did not define nations politically, but in his conception, they appeared as actors involved in history. This was also the reason why Kollár's thinking focused more on changing the cultural epoch and the spiritual mission of nations than on social institutionalization and development of civil rights.

For that reason, he did not consider the political competence of the elites, which would be practically manifested through participation in political institutions, to be decisive for the definition of national identity. At the same time, he argued that small nations are threatened by assimilation and therefore inclined to unnatural solutions such as cultural isolation. Based on this, he emphasized the need to overcome provincial cultural problems, among which can be included the orientation of culture to the needs of everyday life and literacy and specific interests of small nations (Kollár, 1954, p. 134). Manifestations of cultural particularism, such as excessive interest in one's own ethno-cultural specificities, were, according to Kollár, a manifestation of irresponsible decision-making by elites and egoism (Štefánek, 1937, p. 17). In contrast, the reciprocity program was supposed to shape a culture that would represent universal values. Therefore, he linked the responsibility of national elites with the obligation not to divide and, thus, not to diminish national cultures (Kollár, 1846, p. 111).

The issue of national unity and cultural diversity

Kollár's idea of reciprocity aimed at cultural rapprochement, the goal of which was to create a common culture by reducing the number of literatures and dialects. However, this vision of non-political unification of Slavs would inevitably require transformation. Therefore, Kollár's understanding of the relationship between cultural unity and diversity was ambivalent when he stated certain limits of his nation-building program by defining the linguistic and tribal diversity of the Slavs as a characteristic feature of the nation (Várossová, 1963, p. 130). In accordance

[6] According to Miloš Weingart, Kollár's emphasis on rapprochement and mutual cultural exchange between the Slavs testifies precisely to their lack of connection. Thus, he considers reciprocity more as a postulate of requirements than a reality (Weingart, 1926, p. 7).

with this idea of diversity, he also distinguished four Slavic tribes – Russian, Polish, Illyrian, and Czechoslovak, which were supposed to form a unified nation.

On the one hand, Kollár argued in favour of a standard culture, which he considered a sign of the nation's maturity, while, at the same time, appreciating the existing political and religious diversity of the Slavs, which was supposed to bridge formal and partial restrictions. At the same time, the diversity of the great nation was supposed to overcome formal and partial restrictions and thereby form a universally oriented culture. Although he was aware that the excessive linguistic disparity of the Slavs limited the possibilities of mutual cultural development, he also rejected the formation of a pan-Slavic literary language.[7] At the same time, cultural diversity should allow for the purification of language and the possibility of mutual enrichment, along with the competition of ideas and adequate cultural exchange. Its result was to be ennobled and enriched with new ideas and new purely Slavic terminology. Similarly, according to Kollár, the existing political division of the Slavs was supposed to guarantee the appropriate status of smaller tribes and their literatures, which would otherwise lose their cultural distinctiveness under common rule.

Kollár later rejected Štúr's concept of Slovak cultural individuality, replacing the missing cultural institutionalization with the idea of literary reciprocity (Kollár, 1846, p. 111). One could say that, for Kollár, Slavic reciprocity was a means against national smallness (Masaryk, 1924, p. 8). Moreover, one of the layers of reciprocity was the extrapolation of the interests of the Slovak movement to the whole Slavic territory (Városssová, 1995, p. 660). Kollár also pointed out this fact in his own way by stating that the Slovaks were the first to promote the idea of reciprocity, because they had almost nothing of their own in literature (Kollár, 1954, pp. 121–122). On the basis of this, it can be said that Kollár's idea of a new historical epoch compensated in a sense for the lack of cultural development in Slovakia.

Nationality and patriotism

Kollár understood patriotism primarily as an obligation of citizens in relation to existing states. Based on this, he saw states as a purposeful instrument of the political order, which was primarily focused on particular power and economic goals (Štefánek, 1937, p. 24). He considered political relations as an obstacle to the achievement of universal goals, the cause of social intolerance, and the unnatural division of national cultures into several states. Simultaneously, he stated that, in the political system, the national principle is not decisive for the selection of state representatives, because states often cover several nations politically and economically (Pichler, 1998, p. 21).

Therefore, while he equated patriotism with loyalty to the state, he considered nationality to be an orientation towards universal values, which has a culture-creating value that surpasses the importance of patriotism. At the same time, he characterized the relationship of citizens to the state as material, physical, or blindly instinctive. Consequently, for Kollár, patriotism did not have a permanent nature and value, because individuals with a change of citizenship pledge their loyalty to the new state. On the other hand, he considered the culturally defined national identity to be natural and did not consider its change or loss possible (Kollár, 1954, p. 127). Although Kollár emphasized that the aim of the reciprocity program was not to change political-territorial relations, politics was hidden in its concept, which he indirectly proclaimed by favouring the cultural-emancipation principle (Pichler, 2004, p. 79). Based on that, he did not consider the state as a natural community and attributed to it the role of protecting and guaranteeing cultural plurality, tolerance, and the equal status of nations. In doing so, he argued that the relationship to nations as natural communities does not conflict with loyalty to the sovereign. At the same time, it can be stated that, for individuals, the given relationship resulted

[7] Alexander Maxwell notes that Kollár saw the Slavs as one single nation speaking one language, in which Russians, Poles, etc., formed different "tribes" speaking different "dialects" (Maxwell, 2006, p. 158).

in conflicting obligations, which naturally bring with them social tensions (Kollár, 1954, p. 112).

Nationality and national enthusiasm

The lack of cultural and political institutionalization led Ján Kollár to formulate a nation-building vision, which was aimed at shaping Slavic identity through national enthusiasm. Through the determination of nationally passionate elites, it was possible to overcome unfavourable social and political conditions, a low level of national awareness and cultural development. For Kollár, Slavdom represented what Benedict Anderson calls an abstract community.[8] Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm wrote in these contexts about the need for nationalism to fill the emotional void created by the absence of real communities and structures. (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 46). Kollár's enthusiasm was oriented towards the formation of cultural relations through nationally conscious and soulful elites. Therefore, like other national revivalists, he equated his determination with love for the nation.[9] So it was not a critical, but a committed view of national interests, which was oriented towards the development and promotion of national culture.

Kollár considered nationality as a morally binding orientation of individuals towards national interests (Kollár, 1892, p. 11). From it, he derived the obligation to expand and deepen national awareness. However, the fact that Kollár considered enthusiasm for nationality as a value orientation indicated the presence of the mentioned tension between national and civic principles. Thus, Kollár attributed the principle of individuality to nations, not to individuals (Pichler, 2006a, p. 573). In this context, he formulated a moral obligation not to reduce Slavic national culture, but to form a standard culture by reducing the number of dialects. It was the favouring of the development of tribal culture at the expense of national unity that Kollár considered an obstacle to the establishment of mutual Slavic ties and the development of further cultural cooperation. Therefore, he understood the later efforts of Ľudovít Štúr to formulate a Slovak ethno-cultural identity as a manifestation of cultural separatism and disunity, which contradicted the universal goals of the Slavic nation.

Equally for Kollár, he did not count on the possibility of forming civil individualism, which would give the individual the option of choosing a national identity, he rejected disunity, which would disintegrate Slavic culture. In other words, Kollár rejected the possibility of ethno-cultural emancipation outside of the tribal cultures defined by him within the Slavic nation. And as long as he connected the formation of national consciousness with a change in value orientation, the enthusiasm for national issues should overcome the particular interests of the emancipation of small nations in favour of universal goals. At the same time, favouring such emancipation, over Slavdom's interests, he considered a moral failure. Simultaneously, the moral superiority of the elites was supposed to enable the inculcation of the ideas of the nation in its members. Therefore, he considered national elites to be representatives of higher, suprapersonal values (Városssová, 1963, p. 69). At the same time, he attributed to the representatives of the national movement the responsibility for the cultural unity and not reducing the size of the nation by atomizing national culture. It can be added that, in practice, the mentioned responsibility was particularly related to Czechoslovak literary reciprocity. Kollár thereby connected national unity with the necessity of cultural standardisation and integration of smaller language groups in favour of the four already established Slavic cultures.

[8] Anderson calls nations *abstract community*, because the members of even the smallest nation never know most of their fellow citizens, and therefore the image of their community lives in the mind of each of them. However, in the case of Kollár's Slavdom, it is a relatively multi-layered community that is politically, religiously, and linguistically different (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

[9] Ernest Gellner states that national movements are set in motion precisely by feeling for nations. At the same time, the principle of nationality is often defended in the sense of morality (Gellner, 1983, p. 1).

In this context, he stated that excessive cultural variability reflects insufficient spiritual development of individual nations (Kollár, 1846, p. 139). At the same time, he assumed that such differentiation leads to cultural separatism. Therefore, he considered manifestations of disunity as a sign of spiritual stagnation and a harbinger of the loss of national freedom (Kollár, 1846, p. 111). Therefore, he connected the formation of the nation with the culture-creating process together with the change of value orientation from individual goals to the whole of the nation and mankind.

Štúr's understanding of Slavism

The revision of Kollár's concept can also be seen in Štúr's modification of the meaning of reciprocity and later, also, in the redefinition of the Slavdom concept. Štúr's philosophical-political conception was characterized by several turns prompted by social and political conditions, revolutionary developments, and the post-revolutionary situation in the nineteenth century. In the period 1845–1846, his thinking was philosophically and politically based on Kollár's conception of Slavism, which he revised by formulating Slovak national identity and emphasizing unity in diversity. Under the pressure of revolutionary circumstances, Ľudovít Štúr re-evaluated his view of the gradual national institutionalization and development of Slovak culture, although, in the pre-revolutionary period, his attention was focused on the purposeful development of social, economic, and social relations (Štúr, 2003, pp. 431–432). Štúr's program was oriented towards the expansion of political rights, also practical economic relations and the need for industrialization. Nevertheless, he did not reject feudal conditions only from a political or historical-philosophical point of view, but also from the point of view of the economic backwardness of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Habsburg monarchy (Štúr, 1953, p. 127).[10] At the same time he considered serfdom to be the cause of Slovaks' passivity in public life, their unfree mentality, and alcoholism. It was in the expansion of rights and freedoms that he placed his hope for social transformation and the modernization of relations, which would be reflected in a greater involvement in the public life of the lower layers of society.

After the collapse of the revolutionary event in 1848–1849, Štúr formulated questions about the historical mission of the Slavs in the work *Slavdom and the world of the future*. Disappointment with the results of the revolution led him to re-evaluate his previous ideological concepts along with a change in his view of the unity and diversity of the Slavs. Although his romantic program aimed at realization was not based on a realistic assessment of social and political conditions and did not take into account the realisation of political intentions, his post-revolutionary thinking was marked by disappointment. Despite the sudden changes in Štúr's attitudes in the previous period, the revolutionary events were a breakthrough in his thinking (Pichler, 1998, p. 59). Štúr did not return to the program for the development of Slovak culture. We could say that retrograde tendencies in the understanding of the nation led him to revise his attitude towards individual freedoms and Slovak national individuality as well. In this period, his concept was oriented towards the powerful role of the Russian Empire, which for Štúr replaced the concept of the unity of the Slavs. From this point of view, Štúr revised his relationship to Kollár's conception of Slavic reciprocity. He negatively evaluated the ethnic divergence between the sovereign and their subjects, as well as the socio-political arrangement and historical forces. He replaced his conclusions about cultural diversity, Slavic reciprocity, and the importance of civil rights with an effort to politically unite the Slavs in one state (Štúr, 1931, p. 174). At the same time, unlike Kollár, he evaluated the contemporary political division of the Slavs as an obstacle to national development and unity. Simultaneously, he wanted to subordinate smaller Slavic cultures to the power of Russia. Thus, Štúr did not take into account their cultural diversity and did not even pay attention to the Slovak question.

[10] The territory of today's Slovakia was a part of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918 when Czechoslovakia was founded.

After being disappointed by the failure of the revolutionary performance, Štúr also re-evaluated his opinion on the importance of democratizing society (Martinkovič, 2020, p. 134). His pre-revolutionary course, focused on gradual change, was replaced by a critique of democratic institutions and a description of the decline of the West. Instead, he focused his program on pan-Slavism and Russian autocracy. At the same time, he claimed that the Russian Empire was in agreement with the principle of the original Slavic spirituality. It was this type of political arrangement, in contrast to the atomized and therefore decaying democratic institutions of the West, in his opinion, that was supposed to politically establish the Slavs as a historical subject. From the above positions, he also questioned Kollár's program of literary reciprocity, which, according to him, only led to a vague feeling of cultural kinship and, therefore, could not bring about the unification of the Slavs. Štúr did not consider Kollár's program aimed at cultural cooperation to be sufficient. In his conception, he categorically broke with cultural nationalism in favour of great-power political pan-Russianism (Martinkovič, 2005, p. 813). At the same time, he emphasized that awareness of the kinship of the Slavs did not prevent them from mutual violence and conflicts. Based on this, Štúr rejected Slavic reciprocity as an integrating vision because, in his opinion, it did not represent a program that could transform diverse cultures into an institutionalized community. For this reason, he emphasized the importance of Russia's power to shape the nation as an organized history-making unit. At the same time, he presented the argument, which he had already mentioned in *Nárečia slovenské*, that Kollár, in the concept of literary reciprocity, indicated a means, rather than a nation-building goal.

It is also possible to state a turn in Štúr's understanding of Slavism. According to Štúr, the unity of the Slavs could only be revived through the decisive power of Russia, which was supposed to overcome all separatist and particularistic tendencies, including the tribal cultural and linguistic diversity he appreciated. Considering the political conditions, Štúr allowed the possibility of only three solutions to the Slavic question. However, all of them were oriented towards the political centralization of the Slavs. Štúr also rejected the possibility of creating a federation of Slavic nations, as well as Austro-Slavism, while he considered the political unification of all Slavs under the authority of Russia to be the only realistic program. Štúr's view of unification was thus narrowed down to the defence of an absolutist and centralized arrangement of relations (Osuský, 1926, p. 163). According to Štúr, only Russia, as the sole historical subject and "*world representative*" of Slavism, could cover such unity (Štúr, 1931, p. 179). According to Štúr, it was the Russian Empire that had the potential to adequately organize Slavic society.

It was this failure to promote the romantic program that led Štúr to deviate from the original approach to democracy and Western culture. It could, therefore, be said that these failures led Štúr to turn to the East, where he sought an alternative in supposedly authentic Christianity and humanity, which he identified with Russian Orthodoxy and an idealized version of Slavism, which he connected to Russia (Štúr, 1931, p. 157). In him, he found the realization of original spirituality, which should predestine him to the future historical and civilizational mission. In doing so, he portrayed the Slavs as people with true humanity, deep-rooted respect for the rights of each individual, and love for man (Štúr, 1931, p. 142).

It seems that the search for national specifics led him to a dead end towards the idealization of Russian Orthodoxy, which he considered to be closely related to the spirit of Slavism, which allegedly never abused its position to realize power intentions. Similarly, he idealized a harmonious relationship between the Russian Empire, the tsar, and the people. In doing so, he idealizes the role of the tsar in society. His idealization of Russia is not limited to the issue of Russian autocracy and feudalism, which, according to him, has a milder nature than in other countries. His admiration for Russia was not weakened by the assessment of the loss of rights of the Russian nobility. According to him, it was the absence of rights that prevented disunity,

saved the state from possible disintegration and arbitrariness (Štúr, 1931, p. 143). Based on this, Štúr's idea of social order assumed a close relationship between the rulers and the ruled, as well as the absence of competitive social relations (Pichler, 2006b, p. 801).

Štúr's post-revolutionary conception of Slavism is marked by a departure from democratic principles to anti-modernist and anti-liberal attitudes, criticism of the allegedly declining Western culture and capitalism, along with idealization of traditional Russian agrarian society and commune. In doing so, he portrayed the perspective of the life of the Slavs in a social arrangement which, according to Štúr, should enable the solution of social problems by focusing on the whole, which he interpreted as the common good. The description of the moral, cultural, and economic decline of the West led him to predict the historical role of the Slavs. He considered Russian autocracy and Orthodoxy to be a real alternative to democracy, Western industrial and capitalist development, which, according to Štúr, failed in the social sphere. Štúr was critical of capitalism because it led to an increase in social tension and the impoverishment of the lower classes. Similarly, he subjected democracy to criticism along with individual rights, the goal of which was allegedly non-life liberty. At the same time, he accused the West of selfishness and of losing the sense of sacrifice and in the period before the revolution, he appreciated the place of the people in the process of emancipation and attributed to them the place of the bearer of nationality and the creator of spiritual culture, after the revolution, he also questioned their civil capacity. According to Štúr, affairs of state are decided by millions of people, most of whom are uneducated, incompetent, and poor. Therefore, they are unable to subordinate their personal interest to the interests of the whole (Štúr, 1931, p. 80).

Conclusion

Ján Kollár understood nationality as a worldly virtue and considered it to be the privilege of nationally passionate elites. Based on this, he attributed, to the members of the nation, the obligation to change their value orientation from individual goals to the whole of Slavdom and humanity (Kollár, 1892, p. 10). However, the ethical superiority of national elites led to the notion that they could instil responsibility in other members of the nation. It was especially about the responsibility to preserve the national unity of Slavdom, which, however, assumed Kollár's view of Slavdom as a whole and established culture (Kollár, 1846, p. 124).

However, Štúr's understanding of the position of the national representation was also based on the relationship between elites and other members of the nation indicated by Kollár. The connection of the view of the nation as a whole and the status of Slavic cultures was most evident in the work *Slavdom and the world of the future*, where the diversity of Slavic cultures is subordinated to the political power of tsarist Russia. At the same time, he claims that Russia is the world representative of Slavdom (Štúr, 1931, p. 179). It seems that this is precisely the reason why he gave him the power, mission, and right to suppress all separatist tendencies and claim hegemony in Slavdom (Štúr, 1931, p. 174). At the same time, it can be said that Štúr, thus, intensified the tendency regarding national institutionalization carried out from above (whether it was ideas of revolutionary change or a one-time constituting intervention of the monarch), which also has a parallel in Štúr's understanding of national representation. Štúr's proprietary relationship to national culture was also pointed out by Ján Kollár in a polemic concerning Slovak national identity and individuality. In this context, Kollár noted the uncritical way of promoting the nation-building program and the attempt to monopolize national representation (Kollár, 1846, p. 136).[11] The similar monolithic nature of Štúr's conception and the rejection of other views was precisely manifested to the greatest extent in his work *Slavdom and the world of the future*, when he rejected as irrelevant all alternative nation-building concepts (Štúr, 1931, p. 234).

[11] According to Kobylińska, Falski and Filipowicz, Štúr acted as a sovereign by codifying the Slovak language (Kobylińska, Falski & Filipowicz, 2016, p. 23).

Although Kollár's concept of Slavic reciprocity represented a program of cultural development of the Slavs and was oriented towards the universal goals of humanity, it also emphasized the value of responsibility for the unity and greatness of the nation. If we consider that Kollár attributed the principle of individuality to entire nations, not to individuals, and, at the same time, formulated the obligation to spread national awareness, we can state in him a tendency to holistically prioritize the whole over the parts of society. A similar feature of thinking can also be said in the case of Štúr's *Slavdom and the world of the future*. In this case, too, one can observe an orientation towards the Slavs as a whole, which Štúr confuses with imperial Russia and marginalizes smaller cultures, including the Slovak one. This emphasis on unity and history-making subjectivity led Štúr to the defence of a powerful and centralist project of political integration of Slavic cultures into an idealized imperial Russia. Naturally, Kollár's Slavism had higher goals of humanity, tolerance, brotherhood, and mutual understanding. However, the doubt remains as to whether the nation and nationalism are subjects that can realize universal goals.

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