

Being in Conscience

A Theory of Ethics

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Series in Philosophy



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Introduction

Humans, beginning with the Greeks, have long been caught in the problem of the relationship between the Heraclitean evolutionary flow of a world governed by justice, and the Socratic ascetic upon the subjective conscience. In other words, the relationship of the subjective microcosm to the cosmic microcosm. Two fundamental questions have been posed pertaining to the subjective position in a flow of forces that are beyond its grasp. Christianity inserts itself in human historicity by registering the problem and by arresting the motor of human evolution. Universal love, forgiveness and sympathy are institutionalised as marking points toward the future. Still, this did not offer a solution to the problem of subjective conscience and cosmic evolution. Hegel's attempt to throw the subjective consciousness into historical progressive evolution was less successful. It is much later, with British philosophers, that ethics and Darwin's evolution are brought into the picture. But still, such analyses did not escape from extremities, racism and eugenics. I believe fundamental questions have not been addressed, nor have they been solved.

In this book, I am trying to answer these fundamental questions: What is the root of the moral sense and how does it connect with reflection? What is evil? How does subjective conscience root itself in the objective world? Why are some worldspheres functional and others dysfunctional? Why does human thought incline towards universality?

In this analysis, I use concepts pertaining both to biology and to general ideas on how change is effected. I believe philosophy cannot proceed without the aid of many disciplines, amongst them biology and sociobiology. Thought, as E.O. Wilson has argued through his term of consilience¹ – the unity of knowledge – has much to be gained by inscribing itself on an evolutionary plane. Evolution is in the nature both of humans, institutions and of history. Grasping its dialectic is enormously beneficial for human thought to understand the world. In the first chapter, drawing from Arendt's connection of conscience with self-reflection and sociobiology's argument that humans have an innate moral sense, I develop a theory about conscience. I specifically argue that conscience is a distilled essence of the subjective and objective collective human experience inscribed both within the corporeal structure and that of the worldly composition. The examination of conscience's productive and evolutionary movement is analogous to the development of humans in the

¹ See E.O. Wilson (1999, p. 12).

historical process. Nevertheless, while conscience is embedded in the corporeal, mental, common and reified world, its dialectic relationship with the functional field is blurred by theoretical and ideological schemes that are considered autonomous, each obeying time-specific practices and historical conditions. In the second chapter, on the basis of my theory of conscience, I analyse both subjective and collective evil. In the third chapter, I examine the presence and the role of enhanced conscience in human historicity. In the fourth chapter, I examine the movement of the subjective consciousness within the field of intersubjectivity, objective time, and place. In the fifth chapter I approach the problem of distorted worldspheres, arguing that distorted worlds have an undeveloped functional depth and are regulated by a mode of temporality that nurtures distortions. In the sixth chapter, I develop a theory about the synergy of forces that make a world functional. I maintain that functional worlds have reached a stage of functionality that is based on the intermingling of the subjective and collective conscience that are deeply rooted upon the functional field. In the seventh chapter, I examine the inner-worldly temporality, the rhythm that regulates the reflective process within a worldsphere but also the degree, the speed and the quality of the divergence from it. In the eighth chapter, I examine the interaction of worldly temporalities. Each worldsphere is positioned on a different scale according to the developmental stage of functionality it has attained; a scale that defines the functional distance or functional affinity with other worldspheres. Functionality is the primary force that regulates, monitors and directs the mode relationships among various worldspheres. In the ninth chapter, I examine the creation and force of trans-worldly, planetary models of functionality. Planetary conscience sets the new parameters for survivability and transcends the functional model that governs a nation-state. This functional model concerns the survival of the planetary world, serving as the new yardstick in the assessment of claims of functionality and constituting the new motor for progressive evolution. In the tenth chapter, I argue that humans identify the idea of God with the properties of conscience, and that the idea of God lies not in the past but in the future. I moreover argue that we can only think of the future as the dialectic process of conscience. In the eleventh chapter, I examine economy from the point of view of conscience and rehabilitate the “autonomous” economic game within the functional field. In the final chapter, I argue that the motor of evolution can be no other than the functional dialectic.

A Theory of Conscience

1.1 The traces of a generative process

As Arendt remarks, the ethical genius of Socrates is identical to the documentation of the dialectical movement of conscience.¹ Socrates subjects himself to a constant division, and within the disparity that ensues, locates the essence of human existence. Socrates does not equate thought and thinking activity.² Thought belongs to the figurable ontological world, to those things that have been frozen and cannot be unfrozen. However, these things – which we have done and are connected with our being – are not identical to us, though we carry them within ourselves. We constantly become the creative divergence of ourselves. It is to the actualisation of the split between thought and the activity of thought, between tangibility, visibility and the invisible mental world, to which we might assign this notion of an endless production of conscience.

My words, my thoughts and my acts belong to the past. They have been confiscated and are held in public space and time. The thinking activity operates within an invisible mental time and space that does not share the spatio-temporal attributes of the common reality; rather “thinking annihilates

¹ Socrates refers to a divine, supernatural sign (daimonion) in the form of a voice that restrains him from doing something but never dictates to him what to do, see Plato (*Phaedrus* 242e; *Apology* 31d; *Theaetetus* 151a). Socrates says: “I would rather suffer wrong than do wrong” in Plato (*Gorgias* 469c). Arendt (1971) examines whether thinking activity, or reflection, is correlated with conscience. See also Arendt (1990, pp. 87-90). Jaeger (1947, p. 76) calls Socrates’ daimonion “an instinct and not the voice of knowledge.” Aristotle (*The Nicomachean Ethics*) also relates virtue with a contemplative life upon the truth. Hegel (2004, p.269) calls Socrates the “inventor of morality” in the sense that he goes beyond the “customary morality” of the Greeks and connects morality with self-consciousness.

² Socrates refers to a “talk that the soul conducts with itself about whatever it is investigating,” Plato (*Theaetetus* 190a). Arendt (1978, p. 185) comments that “it is this *duality* of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who asks and the one who answers.” Smith (2002, part. 3, ch.2, par. 32) expresses this duality as the tribunal of “the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of man within the breast.” Castoriadis (1997, p. 158) says that to put oneself as an object of examination “implies the possibility of *scission* and *internal opposition*.” Hegel (1977, p. 34, par. 55) says that “having its otherness within itself, and being self-moving, is just what is involved in the *simplicity* of thinking itself.” See also Kojève (1980, p. 39); Jung (2003, pp. 77-78); Shaftesbury (2000, p. 77); Sorabji (2014, p. 12).

temporal as well as spatial distances.”³ The thinking activity reopens and re-examines my reified self from the perspective of its own composition, which is under constant energy. Both what has been done and a process of its revision coexist within me. That which has been pursued are my acts and thoughts that have been locked into the unaltered nature of the common time. What is occurring at a certain moment belongs to an external reality. It is part of the flowing temporality of thought that is activated when it distances itself from the public time. It is displayed as a reaction and response to the need for a mental conception and a practical positioning that is posed by the external-to-self environment. This need is effectuated by the fact that thought becomes reality and its functionality is enlightened. This imaginary relationship with the world is bound together with my reified thought and the testimony of my actions. And because words are never identical to the things they endeavour to address, these residues of meaning and these orphaned islands of disparity actualise anew my thinking activity.

Arendt’s account confines itself to pointing out that the absent reality is represented within the mental time by virtue of imagination with the aid of remembrance.⁴ Therefore, the field in which I attempt to synchronise my being with the world is reconstituted by reflective time. But one may ask, what is the nature of this field? This field is generated by a supervisory entity, a universal drive of thought⁵ which, as such, does not take the form of ontological schematisation. In this analysis, conscience will be called a drive because it has all the properties of the concept of drive in the Freudian sense; it cannot be dissolved, it cannot be checked and it cannot be silenced. It has also been generated by forces that exceed the powers of ontological thinking and its limited lifespan. It is the power of forces and energy upon ontological figures. This entity drives thought to scrutinise the ontological formations it employs

³ Arendt (1978, p. 85).

⁴ As Arendt (1978, p. 51) put it, “thinking is not only itself invisible but also deals with invisibles, with things not *present* to the *senses* though they may be, and mostly are, also sense-objects, remembered and collected in the storehouse of memory and thus prepared for later reflection.” Castoriadis (1997, p. 159) calls this “radical imagination.” As he points out, “reflectiveness presupposes that it is possible for the imagination to posit as existing that which is not.” See also Bergson (1912, p. 94, p. 124); Spinoza (1996, p. 110); Locke (2008, book.II, ch. XIX, par. 1); Dewey (1933).

⁵ Freud (2003, p. 24) calls conscience a “special censorial entity” in the psyche that scrutinises everything and owes its existence to the embodiment of the prohibitions of society (super-ego) that suppress the ego. Freud clearly rejects a human ethical impulse that drives us towards perfection; hence his stance towards the Christian commandments for universal love and forgiveness, see Freud (1962, pp. 56-57). Jung (2003, p. 11) on the other hand, refers to universal unconscious predispositions, that have the form of instincts – which other animals have too. As Bergson (1977, p. 161) remarks, “intelligence is kept under observation by instinct.” As de Wall (1996, p. 87) points out, “moral sentiments came first; moral principles, second.”

in order to address an external reality. My reified acts are reconnected again with reality and their conformity is re-examined. The constant flow of the external world is imperceptible through ontological schemes, except in the form of an ontological arrest of a flowing process which will always remain as such.⁶ As Bergson remarks, perception “marks out divisions in the continuity of the extended.”⁷ Therefore the measurement of my reified self against the flow of the external world, by means of a thinking activity irreducible to ontology, reveals fractures in my attempt to connect with the inner-worldly sphere on an ontological and practical level. Reflection, that is, the thinking of the fixed aspect of the self in light of a renewed response to the functional field – the sum total of the shifting external reality in which environment, culture and nature are indissolubly linked and with which corporeal subjectivity converses by virtue of processing its signals for correction – brings about a disequilibrium. The drive of thought is now undertaking the task of restoring, reviewing, modifying and bettering the thought. Through the reconsideration of the relationship between the frozen self and the functional field, the need for modification and correction appears as an imperative. This unfreezing of the frozen self and its reconnection with the flow of reality has no end.⁸

Arendt argues that conscience – the compulsive inner force that demands to do or to avoid doing something, regardless of the risk that the external environment may present – is the by-product of this reflective exercise within the splitting of the self.⁹ The questions that arise from Arendt’s account are: why

⁶ Spinoza (2004, p. 202) calls the external environment “nature,” and believes that it exceeds the laws and the power of human reason. Darwin (1985, p. 133, p. 189) calls the external environment “natural selection,” while Bergson (1946, p. 89) refers to this reality as a “a universal mobility,” a “tendency and consequently mobility,” fully perceived only through intuition. Durkheim (1995, p. 209) calls it “society”, Jaspers (1971, p. 18) calls it “encompassing”, Luhmann (1990) calls it “environment”; Lefebvre (1991, pp. 416-417) describes it as “trial by space” wherein everything from ideologies to institutions undergoes a test and questioning. Wilson (1980, p. 284) understands culture “as a hierarchical system of environmental tracking devices.” In this analysis it will be called a functional field, wherein – with all the exteriority to natural and cultural consciousness it relates to – it develops a dialectic-conversational relationship in space and time. The functional field has the capability to synthesise the whole and to inform consciousness about both its own functional stage and its products. For an account that presents biology and culture as intertwined, see Richerson and Boyd (2005). As they put it, “culture is neither nature nor nurtured, but some of both (2005, p. 11).

⁷ See Bergson (1912, p. 278).

⁸ Arendt (1958, p. 171) points out that “the activity of thinking is as relentless and repetitive as life itself.” Moreover, she considers a concept “*something like a frozen thought that thinking must unfreeze* whenever it wants to find out the original meaning” (1978, p. 171).

⁹ As Arendt (1978, p.180) remarks, “if there is anything in thinking that can prevent men from doing evil, it must be some property inherent in the activity itself, regardless of its objects.” Thus, Arendt considers that Socrates’ moral statements are by-products, a moral side effect of the experience of thinking, “although he did not start his enterprise

is conscience the by-product of the activity of thought? Can we elaborate further on the mechanisms that produce conscience and the constitutive parts of conscience itself? What is the relationship of conscience to existential conditions? What is the relationship of conscience with human corporeality? What is the relationship of conscience to time? What is the relationship between conscience and its biological history? What is the relationship between conscience and the functional field? Departing from Arendt's account, I endeavour to develop a theory conscience.

Conscience is not solely the by-product of a reflective exercise, yet the act of reflection is one of the tools of its generation. For this reason, it is important to further elaborate on the connection between reflection and conscience. Thus, we must distance ourselves from the singularity of the moment in which a reflective exercise occurs, and link conscience to an accumulative growth that assimilates and unites a mental and mood-wise web to become a condensed essence. The production of conscience is a by-product of the distillation of the sum of the human experience. It is the essence of being that is composed of both the reflective disposition and the web of what Heidegger calls moods. According to Heidegger, there is no perception without a mood, a state of mind that conditions and accompanies its understanding. As Heidegger says, "Dasein's openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state of mind."¹⁰ Thought and perception become spiritless when we do not have them at our disposal and we do not actualise the moods that its perceptions presuppose. We truly understand when we are endowed with the existential conditions the words address. This existential field, by being part of the sphere of our being, is accumulated and fused, and is attracted to affiliated ontological schemes and forces. It is ruled by a compulsion to build them in

in order to arrive at them" (1978, p. 181). Butler (2006, p. 310) calls conscience an "approving and disapproving faculty." Heidegger (1962, p. 319) defines conscience as a "call", an "appeal to the they-self in its Self; as such an appeal, it summons the Self to its potentiality for Being-its-Self, and thus calls Dasein forth to its possibilities." Kant (1996, p. 189), referring to conscience, talks about a dual personality, a double self within the self. He remarks that "this original intellectual (since it is the thought of duty) moral predisposition called *conscience* is peculiar in that, although its business is a business of a human being with himself, one constrained by his reason sees himself constrained to carry it on as the bidding of *another person*." Durkheim (1995, p. 266) remarks that "although our moral conscience is part of our consciousness, we do not feel on an equal footing with it. We cannot recognise our voice in that voice that makes itself heard only to order us to do some things and not to do others."

¹⁰ See Heidegger (1962, 177). Hume (2007, book 2, part 1, sect.11, par. 7) connects sympathy with the impression, feeling and sentiment of the affections of others. See also Hutcheson (1728, treatise 2, sect. 5, p. 261); Butler (2006, p. 75); de Wall (2006, p. 6). Smith (2002, part 1. Sec.1. ch. 1., par. 10) notes that we sympathise because we experience a state of mind, and Mills (2007, p. 24) says that conscience is connected with feelings of love, sympathy and so on, though he believes it is not innate, and moreover, is not present in all people.

order to find a refuge in them; the disposition of the layers of the moods we have inside us form a bridge that leads us to the order of the external world and to other subjectivities. The proclamation of an existential condition before us may pass unnoticed if it does not energise the thrust of the moods that have produced it. Our subjective connectivity with the objective world is based on a mental and existential web that helps us to detect its various manifestations and to align ourselves with them.

To understand the generation of conscience, we must first analyse the relationship between thought and the structure of moods. If words and things, ontological schemes and existential moods, are mismatched, why then is conscience considered a by-product of this orphaned scheme? Clearly, the time of fixed thought is distinct from that of the activity of thought. Likewise, the life of an ontological construct is not to be found within it, but in the depth, the duration and the configuration of the existential conditions that built it. However, the time of conscience is neither that of the activity of thought nor that of existential conditions. Therefore, we need to trace the mode of temporality that regulates conscience. Strictly speaking, we cannot trace the movement of the production of conscience, or what I call “islands of functionality.” This is because they are autonomised processes that are divided, each time, by the mechanisms that produce them, both within and outside the self.

The web that is comprised of reflective exercises and existential moods produces, and is produced by, a field which does not obey human-made adjusted laws of time and space. It has been generated by biological time – through which the individual retains a mode of relationship with a spatio-temporal dimension that eludes its own faculties. As Darwin points out, “certain actions, which we recognise as expressive of certain states of mind, are the direct result of the constitution of the nervous system and have been from the first independent of the will and, to a large extent, of habit.”¹¹ This field constitutes what the human being, throughout its biological and historical existence, selects to be permanently spirited without being liable to the laws of the existence of any ontological formation. The human being is flooded with reflective and existential experiences. These experiences are not autonomous but depend on an internal, corporeally generated distilling faculty that

¹¹ See Darwin (2009, p.69). From Darwin’s remarks, it seems that there is an intertwined web composed of states of mind, reflection and conscience. As Darwin (2009, p. 336, note 6) maintains “the result of all the facts I have mentioned is that the senses, the imagination, and thought itself – elevated and abstract as we suppose it to be – cannot operate without arousing corresponding feeling.” For a discussion of perspective taking and of attributing mental states to others for the point of view of neurobiology, see Churchland (2011, pp. 135-156).

endlessly extracts whatever it needs for its construction. This faculty detects what it perceives as functionality and sustainability. This field autonomises from both consciousness and the existential conditions, building a repository of models of functionality. When consciousness is called on to construct its ontological and practical orientation within the world, it employs tools from this functional pool. When something is judged to be a conscience-yielding element, it is correspondingly absorbed by the field of conscience in order to construct the functional network for which it is destined. This very element, from the moment it becomes part of conscience, loses its distinct identity. The identity loss is immediate, because the field of conscience continuously supplements a core that is irreducible to the elements that form it. While this core discharges whatever it stores from its spatio-temporal and ontological dependencies, it places it in its own autonomous processes. Therefore, when an island of functionality is placed within this core, it is ordered in a mapping of models of functionality that is under energy. It supplements and verifies existing models of functionality; that is, whatever the human being has crystallised from the whole of their experience.

The functional zones are those within the human being that survive time. They can be neither obliterated nor forgotten; they maintain a corporeal-like presence. Neither consciousness, reflection, nor being can retain a durable presence, but can become easily uprooted from their source. Only conscience has this property of being a permanent presence. Being in conscience excludes falling into instrumentality. Aristotle notes that, “no function of man has so much permanence as virtuous activities.”¹² We cannot be uprooted by our conscience. While we can be betrayed by our memory, we can never be betrayed by our conscience. The core of conscience is in itself autonomised and operates according to its own processes of restructuring and accumulation, which are related to the models of functionality that it constructed. These models obey a communicative network: one part informs and adapts in relation to the others, and this interaction itself manufactures models of functionality. Therefore, the field of conscience forms its own productive mechanisms which, in turn, reposition, supplement and augment it. This process is irreducible to consciousness and belongs to a different energetic field within the human which extracts models of functionality.

¹² See Aristotle (*The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b). Heidegger (1962, p. 319), by situating the being-guilty before conscience, says: “Conscience summons Dasein’s Self from its lostness in the ‘They.’”

1.2 The islands of functionality

What, more precisely, are these islands of functionality? Islands of functionality are the outcome of the autonomous composition and enhancement of the residue of functional meaning, which is the result of the intensive juxtaposition of thought, reason and the functional field. The islands are built through the detachment of meaning and its elevation to another state of maximum proximity whereby actual reality and its mental conception reach a coincidence that cannot be altered by the flow of the time. Thereafter, meaning no longer resides within the imaginary field because it has accomplished its mission – which is that of the closest approximation of the thought and object. The relationship between the mental sphere and actual reality attains such a scale of refinement that any divergence is impossible to detect. This means that thinking cannot operate any further, and thus gives way to a different conscience-registering process. At this point reflection ceases; words penetrate reality and vice versa. The meaning is absorbed, compartmentalised, and fixed by the zones of functionality that settle in the being. The islands of functionality emerge from the accumulation of meaning at the moment when the distance between words and actual reality is lessened to such a degree that the possibility of the duration of their existential and mental relation is erased. The intensity of this approximation creates a semblance of the functional islands, which absorb the newly-formed material that is discharged within the entire zone of conscience.

The functional islands are created by a crisis and, therefore, out of a series of corrective responses to it. Their main trait is their durability, continuity and viability. By sustaining their juxtaposition with the external reality, they reveal their ontological endurance. Therefore, what cannot survive the movement from one point to the next and cannot be attested to by the worldly sphere, cannot become a model of functionality. The reflective ascetic is moved by the predisposition to construct sustainable mental schemes. But what can be viable needs to be functional as well. That is, the communicative condition must not raise doubts about itself but, instead, should provide a lasting mental and existential possibility for its synchronisation. The islands of functionality, through condensation of the essence of human experience, attract the subjective population by actualising within themselves the mental and existential material that is necessary for their adjustment to the islands of functionality.

1.3 The islands of functionality as ontological formations of the will of the being to evolve

The islands of functionality are formations that result from a being's resolute, organic will to survive. The human being has an internally-mapped orientation

for its own biological and social survival, resulting from the bio-rhythmic equilibrium and its recognition that manifests itself in this very equilibrium. As Lefebvre points out, “long before the analysing, separating intellect, long before formal knowledge, there was an intelligence of the body.”¹³ These mutable parameters of survival¹⁴ have deep biological roots, just as the compulsion to build and rebuild conscience is biologically rooted. They are the guidelines that determine an organic form of conscience; that is, cooperation, altruism, goodness and love. The human corporeal structure is itself the product of the evolution of a corporeal conscience that has transmitted its energy and effectuated conscience as a specific entity.

There is no gap between biological and social evolution; rather there is an intersection of their moral systems. E.O. Wilson’s¹⁵ sociobiology, although it

¹³ See Lefebvre (1991, p. 174). Spinoza (1996, 40) points out that the human mind “should be understood by the union of mind and body.” Kant (1996, p. 13) remarks that “human choice, however, is a choice that can indeed be *affected* but not *determined* by impulses.” Schopenhauer (1966, p. 16, p. 245; 1969, p. 326) notes that the human body is the objectification, the representation and the visibility of the will. Freud (1991, p. 105) hypothesises that there is “an organic basis for the mental event” that needs to be examined. Castoriadis (1997, p. 179) refers to “corporeal imagination”; as he argues, “the body is already imagination, because it transforms external shocks into something.” From the perspective of neurobiology, Churchland (2011, p. 30) affirms that “brains are organised to seek well-being, and to seek relief from ill-being.”

¹⁴ P. Thompson (2002) describes these parameters of survival as “fitness-enhancing” for a specific population. See also Richards (1986, p. 272); de Wall (1996, p. 207); Sober and Wilson (1998, p. 150); Krebs (2011, p. 27); Axelrod (1984, pp. 136-139) and Kitcher (2011). I include utilitarianism in the moral theories that contribute to the definition of the parameters of survival of a moral community. See specifically Sidgwick’s (1981, pp. 199-216) analysis where he attempts to reconcile intuitionism with utilitarianism. As Mill (2007, p. 15, p. 44) remarks, the principle of utility prescribes the association between one’s personal happiness with the happiness, interest or security of society. See also Aristotle (*Politics 1253a*); Spinoza (2004, p. 298; 1996, p. 126, 138); Locke (2008, book I, ch. III, par. 5); Shaftesbury (2000, p. 192); Hutcheson (Treatise 2, sect. 1, 211; 2008, p. 141); Durkheim (1992, p. 24; 1995, p. 209); Piaget (1948, p. 204).

¹⁵ E.O. Wilson’s (1978; 1980, pp. 278-279, 1984, p. 56, 1999, pp.197-228) attempt to correlate sociobiology and social sciences is at least as troublesome and sometimes as problematic as Darwin’s (2004, pp. 194-230) endeavour in some regards. For a critique of E.O. Wilson, see Kitcher (1984); Ayala (1987); Singer (2011, pp. 64-86). For different accounts of sociobiology, see Richards (1986, 2013); Alexander (1987); Thompson, P. (1999, 2002); Ruse (2012, pp. 175-177; 2019); Petrinovich (1995); de Wall (1996); Sober and Wilson (1998); Boehm (2001, pp. 129-272); (Hrdy 2011) and D.S. Wilson (2015). Cultural evolution sets its own rules of morality that surpass those of biological evolution, see Dawkins (2006b, pp. 200-201). Nevertheless, morality has a deeply programmed predisposition, and this must be taken into account. Hegel (1977, p.377, par.622) points out that moral self-consciousness is not “in earnest with the elimination of inclinations and impulses, for it is just these that are the *self-realising self-consciousness*.” As Bergson (1977, p. 273) formulates, “since these dispositions of the species subsist, immutable, deep within us, it is impossible that moralists and sociologists should not find it necessary to take them into account.” For an analysis that seeks to accommodate some basic axioms of biology, see Fukuyama (2011).

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