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**From Authoritarian Discourse to Psychoanalytic Discourse: A  
Psychoanalytic View of Ethics**

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As a therapeutic method, psychoanalysis provides one of the means for working through traumatic situations stemming from social conditions. Other modalities of elaboration of traumatic situations may exist through many forms of social activity. At least theoretically, however, the psychoanalytic method implies the possibility of integrating the individual's disruptive and reparatory aspects so as to diminish the risk of becoming trapped in an owner-slave, submitter-submitted, sadistic-masochistic dialectic. In this paper we attempt to offer certain ideas on how psychoanalysis as a science can help illuminate two types of social phenomena: some as evident and disruptive as genocide (Nazism, National Reorganization Process in Argentina, 1976-83), others more covert and permanent, such as authoritarianism and its derivatives, which, though less dramatic, may provide the necessary conditions for the former.

Using psychoanalytic theories that refer to ethics as our exploratory starting point, we analyze some of the ways in which human groups sustain their identity in the face of disruptive social conditions.

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## The Military Discourse

In Argentina, from 1976 to 1983, military power rested on a so-called doctrine of national security. This doctrine was based on dividing the world into two blocks: occidental and communist, which were thought to be engaged in total and permanent war. The struggle against the advance of communism was the argument that justified everything, and the method of application was always the same: taking power through a military *coup d'état*, a declaration of martial law or a state of emergency, with the intent of legitimatizing what was an exceptional condition. All means are considered legitimate in this struggle which assumes the airs of a crusade. Alleged prevention is intimately linked to repression, and the citizen's security is inversely proportional to the degree of "national security" alleged by those who uphold it (**Bousquet, 1984**).

Here are three examples of the declarations made by some of the military leaders of the National Reorganization Process (the name the dictatorship coined for itself).

"First we will kill all the subversives, then we will kill those who aid them, then those who are in favor of them, then those who are indifferent to them, and finally we will kill all of those who are in doubt" (**Saint-Jean, 1977**). "We will not fight until death, we will fight until victory, which is beyond death" (Massera, 1977). "No disappeared has been left alive ... I assume all responsibility, I feel proud.... If I am guilty of anything it is only of not having also achieved a political victory, but the fight is not finished and neither is my own role" (Camps, 1977).

How can such arguments win the partial approval of a social group? In what follows we attempt a psychoanalytic understanding of this question.

## Ethics and Morals

We approach our subject from two sides: the philosophical and the psychoanalytic. Our principal philosophical source is Kant, the

other, two Argentine philosophers, Rabossi and Nino. From the psychoanalytic point of view we review Freud's and Klein's ideas pertaining to ethics and the elaboration of the Kleinian viewpoint developed by Money-Kyrle (1944).

According to Rabossi (Nino, 1984), we can distinguish three levels of ethics: descriptive or sociological, which offers a context for investigating moral patterns of individuals and societies; normative or substantive, which addresses the question of what we should do and which institutions are fair; and analytic or metaethics, which attempts to give the basis for the character of moral concepts and judgments.

Ethical discourse exists at different times and among different peoples and provides the possibility of recognizing moral judgments as such. Nino believes that there must be a common nucleus between the actual moral systems in different societies and ideal moral concepts, in spite of the enormous differences between their contents. It is this common nucleus that must be identified in order to avoid the assumption that the validity of our critical moral judgments depends on personal, spatial, and temporal conditions. A distinction between actual or positive morality and critical or ideal morality made by Nino allows us to overcome a kind of moral positivism according to which it is the majority in a society that determines the standards of goodness and what is morally correct.

To clarify our own use of terms, we will call ethics only that which was described by Nino as ideal or critical moral (and by Rabossi as Analytical Ethics, referring to what gives the basis for moral concepts and judgments). We use ethical to define an area of human conflict that lies between biological determinism and causality, and the exercise of liberty and responsibility connected to feelings of guilt. Kant addresses that essential human duality by declaring that man is both, free, and as phenomenon, a part of the order of nature.

Korner (1955) states “Man as a rational being experiments with the formal principle of morality as a Kantian categorical imperative

If completely governed by causal need, man could not determine his own will. He could perhaps experience conflict between duty and desire, but would not have the power of doing his duty in opposition to his desires.... Every rational being, whatever the nature of his wishes, must be taken as the point of origin of moral principles ... rational beings thus are not only submitted to the categorical imperative but are also its creators.... In this way we arrive at the idea of *the will of every rational being as a universal legislative will.*"

### **Psychoanalytic Concepts Regarding Ethics and Morals**

In the context of characterizing what is ethical as an area of conflict, we begin with what Freud (1937p. 244) says: "We are forced to the conclusion that the tendency to conflict is something special, something which is newly added to the situation, irrespective of the quantity of libido. An independently emerging tendency to conflict of this sort can scarcely be attributed to anything but the intervention of an element of free aggressiveness."

Freud's description contains a causal explanation postulated as free aggression. It is in a reformulation of this explanation and from Kleinian theory, through a detour (Money-Kyrle) that we see our addition to the psychoanalytic concept of ethics.

Our way of approaching ethical conflict is to conceive of it as part of the human tendency to live in constant disequilibrium between different forces that finally result in shaping man as a creator of symbols, in turn included in a symbolic linkage structure (Lores Arnaiz et al., 1986). We will therefore speak not of conflict between drives but of the integration of a biological substratum that becomes human through meaning and word. The consequence of that tension between the inescapable force of biology and the symbolic world is an eternal contradiction between submission and freedom.

## Freud's Theories

The conflict implicit in ethics is developed by Freud on two levels: an individual one (1923) in his theory of the mental apparatus, specifically of the superego, and that of the relation of the individual to his culture (1930), which elevates man beyond his animal condition and which includes two aspects, the effort to control nature and obtain goods for his needs and the norms that regulate reciprocal relations and the distribution of these goods. The knowledge of death is a primary factor in the development of collective illusions, such as religion, which try to eliminate the terrors of nature and reconcile the cruelty of destiny and make up for the pain and deprivations that living with others imposes on human beings.

Freud discards religion in favor of reason and experience, mainly science and knowledge. He therefore defines ethics as the ideals and claims of the cultural superego that evolves from reciprocal links between human beings. Culture restrains the aggression of the individual through this moral instance, in which aggression directed against the object is introjected, and is opposed to the ego as the superego. The tension between these two structures produces “guilt conscience,” which becomes manifest as a need for punishment. Freud asks how one gets to feel guilty or — what amounts to the same thing — how one discriminates between what is good and what is evil. He rejects the existence of a natural original capacity for this differentiation, since it is not true that what is evil is harmful for the ego, and concludes that an external influence must exist. This is anxiety produced by the loss of love, which stems from the infant's condition of helplessness and dependence. What is bad is therefore loss of love or its derivative, the aggression of the object. Danger derives from being discovered by authority. This is what he calls anxiety from the loss of love and what Freud calls “social anxiety.”

During development an important change comes about with the internalization of authority and the establishment of the superego. Only then can one speak of a conscience and guilt feelings; the

anxiety of being discovered disappears and is replaced by recognizing the distinction between doing something bad and wishing it. Conflict between ego and superego is installed as moral conscience and guilt feeling. Anxiety forces giving up of satisfaction, or a different situation: “paying the bill,” which Freud relates to repentance. In the case of moral conscience, an internal state of unhappiness is produced which forces punishment as a result of conflict with the superego. This moral tension is not static. Freud extends this guilt feeling to humanity, saying it springs from the Oedipus complex and from the primitive union of the brothers against the father (**1913**). Freud stresses the enormous importance of love in the genesis of the superego and the unavoidable presence of guilt feelings, which are at the same time an expression of the conflict between Eros and Thanatos.

Conscience related to a moral value appears only after the establishment of the superego whereas guilt conscience appears earlier, arising from external authority. Freud considers repentance a conscious phenomenon and guilt a result of unconscious conflict. Both the individual and cultural development of humanity are vital processes governed by Eros. For the individual, development is ruled by the pleasure principle and its transformations, for the culture by the libidinal linkage of human beings.

An unavoidable condition on the path to individual happiness is the concurrence between the individual “egoistic” happiness and the “altruistic” need of being together with others. Freud concludes that also from civilization a superego emerges with exigencies and ideals. The individual superego as a product of the identification with the parental superego (**Freud, 1933**), provides a bridge with the cultural superego.

Ethics emerges as an intent to achieve through the cultural superego (a specific group of ideas and claims) the removal of the greatest obstacle to civilization — that is, the constitutional inclination to be aggressive to others (**Freud, 1930**). Freud points to conflict between the individual and society from the viewpoint of justice; later on he considers this conflict the strongest defense against human aggression and an important example of the

difficulties the individual goes through in fulfilling his social ideals, difficulties that can make him as unhappy as aggression itself.

We quote from the final paragraph of “Civilization and its Discontents” (Freud, 1930p. 145), which has a disquieting and astonishing prescience:

The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two “Heavenly Powers,” eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?

We differentiate Freud's formulations, for example, the nonexistence of a natural disposition toward good and evil from any ontological-religious outlook or an empirical foundation of ethics. Freud's ideas on the prehistoric origins of guilt and taboos and the delimitation of their nature seem to derive from his evolutionist orientation. Freud does not discuss the roots of ethics or the basis of reason. For him being ethical is a specific human characteristic, as are language and symbolization, which separates man from the rest of the animal kingdom. He conceives of ethics as a superstructure, which appears at some moment in human development, as it does phylogenetically. Ethics promotes and regulates relations with other human beings. At some moment in his evolution, man came to know about death and not only to suffer it. Metaphorically, Freud imagined that moment as when the sons murder the primitive father and experience of destructive aggression. The

constitutional endowment of the species, which includes aggression and love, is dialectically involved with the experiential and individual realization of every human being, with feelings of guilt having a universal regulatory role.

### **Melanie Klein and Money-Kyrle**

Money-Kyrle (1944), a Kleinian author, tries to account for the sources and development of ethics and of moral patterns. In our view he richly and convincingly describes the origin, development, and vicissitudes of moral patterns, although he addresses only the psychoanalytically descriptive level.

He begins by reformulating the question implicit in the moral problem, “What aims must we look for?” into “What does the normal individual feel he must look for?”

For metaphysics the question “What aims must we look for?” requires an answer based not on experience but on pure logic, an a priori synthetic judgment. It is easy to see the impossibility of an answer, since logic cannot obtain from a proposition more than what is in it. For theologians the question means “What does God want us to look for?”. The question is empirically unanswerable.

For psychoanalysts the equivalent to the theological question would be: “What does our superego want to look for?” But this leads to a subjective relativism.

The question has to be restructured so as to admit an empirical and general answer. Money-Kyrle introduces the word *normal* and asks: “What is it that the normal individual feels he must look for?” He uses normality as an optimum of freedom from neuroses and not as a statistical average. Although he admits that normality is in itself unattainable, many individuals can approximate it as a result of a favorable environment or a successful psychoanalysis. (Insofar as Money-Kyrle's ideas are derived from Kleinian theory, it is striking that he does not mention the constitutional factor.) A pattern of moral values emerges from common positive as well as negative characteristics that can be found in every normal individual, despite the individual differences.

Negative characteristics are paranoia, negation and placation, pacifism, and moral negativism, which he describes as follows:

Paranoia: there is a predominance of aggression and projection, constituting a threatening world which must be destroyed.

Negation and placation: the extreme opposite of the persecutory delusion is denying the danger when it is real. For Klein both the paranoid exaggeration as well as the negation of the internal persecution originate in a hypochondriacal feeling of internal persecution, but whereas in one case the relief comes through projection, in the other the mechanism is negation.

Pacifism: linked to the previous case, here the evil of the enemy is recognized; there is no intention to placate him or to attack him. There is neither express submission nor active resistance. Original aggression is inhibited by guilt and anxiety because the primary objects contain a high degree of paralyzing confusion.

Moral negativism: an attitude of cynical disappointment in which no end is worthy of any effort or struggle. It is a defense against depression; the individual does not trust his good objects to face the persecutory strength of the evil ones.

In sum: the paranoid type is militaristic and authoritarian, and considers himself just. He sees enemies where there are none, and his greatest wish is to destroy them. The pacifist does not deny the fear of his internal and external objects but is unable to exercise aggression and needs peace at any price. The moral-negativist type is so frightened of his internal persecutors and his internal enemies identified with his fantasy that he gives up all his values if he feels threatened or attacked.

The positive characteristics of normality are independence of inhibitions and compulsions, in both the sexual drives and their derivatives, with maximum capacity for work and pleasure. The normal mind is freer, having less unconscious anxiety and a less distorted inner world. Even if the objects of primary fantasy still exist, the interchange with reality is always present and the internal objects correspond more to the external world. The bad objects are less dangerous, and therefore their external representatives do not require idealization or denial. In the same way the good

objects are less threatening and damaged. These differences are reflected in the way the normal individual selects his aims. In contrast to the negativistic position, he will have values, wishes, and aims to which he will give great importance and which he will defend and repair. In contrast to the pacifist posture, he is trained to attack the enemies of these aims. In contrast to the paranoid stance he will not imagine enemies if they do not exist and will reserve his aggression for the real ones. His aims can be characterized as militant constructivism.

This concept of normality has a rich descriptive value, especially if it is taken as descriptive of the ideal observer or impartial witness and as related to the existence of consensus and the free acceptance of values. But it should not be viewed as an attempt to establish an absolute, which would be incompatible with its scientific character.

Having established something akin to what constitutes normal morality, Money-Kyrle maintains that the origin of individual morality is intimately related to the concept of guilt. He develops Kleinian theory, defining guilt as the peculiar tint of anxiety and despair that follows the real or fantasied attack on a loved object. It is aggression and the feeling of having damaged and destroyed this object that evokes the drive to reparation — a concept unique to this theory and responsible for all forms of humanitarian and creative behavior. He postulates three kinds of morality: negative, which forbids attacking the loved object or its symbols; positive, which aims at reparations of harms done; and aggressive, which tries to defend the loved object from the threats that come from a third object.

Through the concepts of incorporation and expulsion and their connection with love and hate, Money-Kyrle approaches the mechanisms of introjection and projection, which can be used in the service of both. Thus the primary concept of good and bad object is the object endowed with love and hate. He then postulates three “objective principles of primary morality”: it is bad (it provokes guilt) to damage or threaten a good object, it is good to love, make reparation to, and defend a good object, and it is good

to hate and attack a bad object, that is, any event or person who threatens or destroys a good object.

### **Klein's Theory of Envy**

We consider Klein's (1957) theory of envy a valuable contribution to the understanding of ethics and morals. It is appropriate to make a distinction between envy as a theoretical term and envy as the description of a feeling.

Envy as a theoretical term is related to the death instinct; it is a constitutional element and as such operates from the very moment of birth; it is related to the perception of the threat of annihilation, which implies an innate sense of the existence of an object and is responsible for defense mechanisms against it.

Envy as a description of a feeling implies a deep state of humiliation, pain, and self-destruction (derived from the narcissistic wound) and a feeling of hate and the need to attack the envied object.

The violent feelings of hate, the attack, and the defense against this attack can be found in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (I, i), as was observed by Freud (1916):

But I am not shaped for sportive tricks,  
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;  
I that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty  
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;  
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,  
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
And that so lamely and unfashionable,  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them,  
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
To entertain these fair, well spoken days,  
I am determin'd to prove a villain,  
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

In Klein's formulation envy predates the establishment of the two positions (paranoid and depressive), yet it is imbricated in a permanent relationship with defense mechanisms, attributions of the object, and guilt. For Klein the capacity for love gives impetus both to integrating tendencies and to a successful primal splitting between the loved and hated object. This sounds paradoxical, but since integration is based on a strongly rooted good object that forms the core of the ego, a certain amount of splitting is essential for integration, for it preserves the good object and later on enables the ego to synthesize its two aspects. Excessive envy, an expression of destructive impulses, interferes with the primal split between the good and the bad breast, and the building up of a good object cannot sufficiently be achieved. Paranoid-schizoid factors and excessive envy impair successful splitting between the good and the bad breast; thus confusion in the infant is reinforced. If primarily, the good food is confused with the bad, later the ability for clear thinking and for developing standards of values is impaired.

Freud conceived of death as not representable (or symbolizable); he articulated his theory around the concept of castration. In contrast, we believe that the "knowledge of death," which Freud attributed to the human species as the motor of culture (and of ethics), is present in the individual through the concept of the "threat of annihilation" and that, his opinion to the contrary, it can be apprehended psychoanalytically. For Klein this realization is related to the operation of envy, which provides a different level of interplay between desire and castration.

We hypothesize that this basic feeling of envy, stemming from the death instinct and aggression, and the way in which the human being can manage and perhaps transform these, not only influences the organization of mental functioning but also illuminates an ethical aspect of the personality.

Money-Kyrle (1944) relates envy to megalomania and describes a state in which the ego claims greatness for itself, and the (delusional) idea of identification with the admired object becomes a conviction. For this purpose it is necessary to create

outside oneself a disdained object which contains the feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness that promoted the identification. Within the principle of aggressive morality the exercise of aggression makes possible a maximum degree of deviation. Thus the concept of envy could explain the characteristics of the megalomaniac delusion regarding the good object while mobilizing the destructive paranoid projection for the defense of the good object, that is, any event or person that threatens or destroys a good object. This gives us a model to be used for understanding social ideologies.

Depending on the principle of primary aggressive morality, we can approach the ethical characteristics of different groups. We will consider delusory or illusional identifications and their relevance to establishing a group identity. We will therefore compare the nature of ethical standards implicit in the discourse of two opposing groups: we will consider relevant characteristics of Jewish tradition and history, contrasting them with the ideological Nazi discourse and praxis and fragments of the military discourse belonging to the so-called Process of National Reorganization (the Argentine dictatorship, 1976-1983).

### **Some Elements of Jewish Tradition and History**

The Jewish people's pact with God is a promise of protection (chosen people, preferred child), in exchange for strictly following a code that begins with birth and regulates every daily act until death; acts which in themselves have an ethical-religious connotation. The reward is the Promised Land, a place with all the characteristics of a protective container. We choose a moment in the history of the Jewish people, then in Judea, during which the moral and religious norms had degenerated and fidelity to one God was under special attack, possibly owing to successive invasions by neighboring people. The Prophet Jeremiah warned of the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and other disasters unless their behaviors were corrected. Events occurred as he prophesied, and a large part of the people found themselves in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah, speaking for God, instructed the

Jewish people on how to insure their cohesion in the Diaspora (see Jeremiah, 29) (5) “Build houses and live in them, and grow plants and eat their fruits. (6) Take women and conceive sons and daughters and take women for your sons and give your daughters to men, and let them deliver children, sons and daughters, and multiply and do not diminish. (7) And require peace in the city where I sent you and pray for it to the Eternal One so its own peace will also be your peace.” It is significant that the precepts refer to construction as a symbolism for cohesion, reinforcing the eternal pact with God through the rigidity of these norms or mandates.

Dubnov (1951) speaking of the ruin of the kingdom of Judea says

The salvation of the nation after the destruction of the state was linked firmly with spiritual change, which had been prepared for by the prophets for some time. The fundamental idea of the prophetic doctrine was that the vital force of the nation was not in its external power but in its spirit, not in the political activity of the state but in the moral resolution of the individual and society aimed at realizing the highest ideals of justice. The nations that are strong only militarily and politically disappear with time, devoured by more powerful and predatory people. A politically weak but spiritually vigorous nation, made solid through the commandments of its religious moral doctrine and its particular culture, will manage to maintain its capacity for life and its unity in all possible circumstances. Political nations exist temporarily, spiritual ones, eternally [our translation].

### **Some Elements of the Nazi and the Argentine Military Philosophies<sup>1</sup>**

We consider Nazism an ideology that maintains the cohesion of a human group using techniques and methods that are radically

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<sup>1</sup> Both Argentine military and democratic discourses are discussed in a previous paper (Siquier, 1987).

opposed to the previous one. In the crisis that followed the first world war Hitler emerged with a political platform that promised glory and provided scapegoats — Jews, liberals, and other considered “traitors.” The inequality between “races” was considered to be “part of an invariable natural order”; the Aryan race was “the only creative element of humanity.” In addition to founding the ideology of Marxism the Jews represented the incarnation of the devil, mythical figures onto whom everything feared and hated was projected. Hitler held a power that had no precedents both in his field of action and in his technical resources (for mass extermination), but he made no permanent or material contribution to humanity. Racism was used as a technique which helped to unify Germans through the identification of the “enemy,” giving people a high degree of megalomania and confidence in themselves, justifying economical exploitation and slavery. Racism was used to convince Germans that they would never be defeated in war. (We have abstracted from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.)

During the military rule in Argentina, the government tried to destroy whatever had the capacity to threaten it. The potential enemies, including left-wing militants, priests, adolescents, families, children, old people, free-thinking people, union members, all fell. The military objective was their total annihilation.

Analyzing the peculiarities of these two groups from what Money-Kyrle calls the empirical psychological point of view for the evaluation of ideologies, we could try to place them within his principles of primary, negative, positive, and aggressive morality. It is the third principle “it is good to attack a bad object” that, through the action of aggression, allows the highest degree of deviation. We believe that the inclusion of the concept of envy can throw light on this “principle of aggressive morality”: according to this principle the good object can acquire characteristics of megalomaniac delusion and, the paranoid projection can appropriate the “defense of that loved object.” Applying Money-Kyrle's model, Jewish identity is maintained through the first two principles of primary morality. The deviations of the third principle are expressed in disavowal of aggression or in a placating pacifism. In

the case of the Jewish people this description corresponds more to the Diasporic group before the establishment of the State of Israel.

In Nazism as ideology and in the military discourse quoted at the beginning of this essay, we do not see, not even in a deviated form, the first two forms of primary morality, which have to do with responsibility for one's own aggression (guilt) and the possibility of reparation. Instead we see the paranoid deviation of the third principle of morality in the militaristic and authoritarian discourse and its correlate of moral negativism in the attitude of cynical disappointment in which a large part of German and Argentinian society participated.

Summarizing, we believe that in one kind of group, identity and cohesiveness are maintained through endogenous modes of growth; in the other type of group cohesiveness is maintained through identity based on delusional greatness and the extermination of what is perceived as threatening external factors.

### **Final Considerations**

Kant (**Korner, 1955**) tells us that “man, as a rational being, exists not as a means to another's arbitrary use, but as an end in himself.” A rational being implies a biological being and a symbolizing being, that is, an ethical free being. The recognition of our own uniqueness implies that we recognize the uniqueness of others — that others are also free and do not expect to be used as mere instruments.

In all concepts related to ethics, and more precisely to the moral codes implicit in Freud's hypothesis about the superego, both individual and cultural, the theory of the death instinct as aggression or self-annihilation plays a decisive role. We connect these concepts to Klein's theory of envy, and we suggest that the domain of ethics is related to the way man, individually and in groups, works with and through the tendency to self-annihilation. Constitutional factors related to the death instinct and aggression

both in Freud and in Klein, should be added to Freud's (1937) "bedrock." These conflicts relate to the most basic areas of man's relationship with death and with life.

A psychoanalytic vista on ethics implies the need for a permanent process of inquiry and integration and the renunciation in fantasy as well as in reality of methods that imply the use or destruction of other human beings for the purpose of sustaining identity or protecting against a personal threat of annihilation.

As expressed by the prosecutor of the military torturers in Argentina in 1985, "Excellent Jury: death cannot be a form of political activity. Law condemns homicide and does not distinguish its perpetrators or its victims by their ideology" (**Alegato de la Fiscalia, 1985**).

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