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978-1-108-00962-1 - Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates, Volume 1

George Grote

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Best known for his influential *History of Greece*, the historian and politician George Grote (1794–1871) wrote this account of Plato's dialogues as a philosophical supplement to the *History*. First published in 1865 and written in dialogic form, Grote's account of Plato's works includes substantial footnotes and marginalia. This first volume focuses on Plato's early and transitional dialogues, all of which feature Socrates. It also includes a preface to the whole project which discusses the meaning and importance of philosophy itself, and extensive introductory material on Pre-Socratic philosophy, the life of Plato and history of the Platonic canon. With two volumes each running to over six hundred pages, Grote's scholarship is formidably comprehensive. The publication of *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates* confirmed him as one of the greatest authorities on Plato in the nineteenth century.

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VOLUME 1

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108009621](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108009621)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1865

This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00962-1 Paperback

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## P L A T O,

AND THE

## OTHER COMPANIONS OF SOKRATÈS.

BY GEORGE GROTE, F.R.S.,

AUTHOR OF THE 'HISTORY OF GREECE:'

D.C.L. OXON., AND LL.D. CAMBRIDGE:

VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON:

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ROYAL ACADEMIES OF ST. PETERSBURG, KHARKOFF, KÖNIGSBERG, MUNICH,  
AMSTERDAM, BRUSSELS, AND TURIN:HON. MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETIES OF MASSACHUSETTS, AND OF  
PHILADELPHIA, U.S. OF AMERICA.

~~~~~

Κάλλιστα γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο καὶ λέγεται καὶ λελέξεται, ὅτι τὸ μὲν ὠφέλιμον  
καλὸν, τὸ δὲ βλαβερὸν αἰσχρόν. PLATO, *Republ.* v. 457 B.

Τὸ μὲν οὖν περιττὸν ἔχουσι πάντες οἱ τοῦ Σωκράτους λόγοι, καὶ τὸ κομψὸν  
καὶ τὸ καινοτόμον, καὶ τὸ ζητητικὸν· καλῶς δὲ πάντα ἴσως χαλεπόν.

ARISTOTEL. *Polit.* ii. 6, 1265 a 10.

~~~~~

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1865.

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## P R E F A C E.

THE present work is intended as a sequel and supplement to my History of Greece. It describes a portion of Hellenic philosophy: it dwells upon eminent individuals, enquiring, theorising, reasoning, confuting, &c., as contrasted with those collective political and social manifestations which form the matter of history, and which the modern writer gathers from Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

Both Sokrates and Plato, indeed, are interesting characters in history as well as in philosophy. Under the former aspect, they were described by me in my former work as copiously as its general purpose would allow. But it is impossible to do justice to either of them—above all, to Plato, with his extreme variety and abundance—except in a book of which philosophy is the principal subject, and history only the accessory.

The names of Plato and Aristotle tower above all others in Grecian philosophy. Many compositions from both have been preserved, though only a small proportion of the total number left by Aristotle. Such preservation must be accounted highly fortunate, when we read in Diogenes Laertius and others, the long list of works on various topics of philosophy, now irrecoverably lost, and known by little except their titles. Respecting a few of them, indeed, we obtain some partial indications from fragmentary extracts and comments of later critics. But none of these once celebrated philosophers, except Plato and Aristotle, can be fairly appreciated upon evidence furnished by themselves. The

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Platonic dialogues, besides the extraordinary genius which they display as compositions, bear thus an increased price (like the Sibylline books) as the scanty remnants of a lost philosophical literature, once immense and diversified.

Under these two points of view, I trust that the copious analysis and commentary bestowed upon them in the present work will not be considered as unnecessarily lengthened. I maintain, full and undiminished, the catalogue of Plato's works, as it was inherited from antiquity and recognised by all critics before the commencement of the present century. Yet since several subsequent critics have contested the canon, and set aside as spurious many of the dialogues contained in it,—I have devoted a chapter to this question, and to the vindication of the views on which I have proceeded.

The title of these volumes will sufficiently indicate that I intend to describe, as far as evidence permits, the condition of Hellenic philosophy at Athens during the half century immediately following the death of Sokrates in 399 B.C. My first two chapters do indeed furnish a brief sketch of Pre-Socratic philosophy: but I profess to take my departure from Sokrates himself, and these chapters are inserted mainly in order that the theories by which he found himself surrounded may not be altogether unknown. Both here, and in the sixty-ninth chapter of my History, I have done my best to throw light on the impressive and eccentric personality of Sokrates: a character original and unique, to whose peculiar mode of working on other minds I scarcely know a parallel in history. He was the generator, indirectly and through others, of a new and abundant crop of compositions—the “Socratic dialogues:” composed by many different authors, among whom Plato stands out as unquestionable coryphæus, yet amidst other names well deserving respectful mention as seconds, companions, or opponents.

It is these Socratic dialogues, and the various companions of

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Sokrates from whom they proceeded, that the present work is intended to exhibit. They form the dramatic manifestation of Hellenic philosophy—as contrasted with the formal and systematising, afterwards prominent in Aristotle.

But the dialogue is a process containing commonly a large intermixture, often a preponderance, of the negative vein: which was more abundant and powerful in Sokrates than in any one. In discussing the Platonic dialogues, I have brought this negative vein into the foreground. It reposes upon a view of the function and value of philosophy which is less dwelt upon than it ought to be, and for which I here briefly prepare the reader.

Philosophy is, or aims at becoming, reasoned truth: an aggregate of matters believed or disbelieved after conscious process of examination gone through by the mind, and capable of being explained to others: the beliefs being either primary, knowingly assumed as self-evident—or conclusions resting upon them, after comparison of all relevant reasons favourable and unfavourable. “Philosophia” (in the words of Cicero), “ex rationum collatione consistit.” This is not the form in which beliefs or disbeliefs exist with ordinary minds: there has been no conscious examination—there is no capacity of explaining to others—there is no distinct setting out of primary truths assumed—nor have any pains been taken to look out for the relevant reasons on both sides, and weigh them impartially. Yet the beliefs nevertheless exist as established facts, generated by traditional or other authority. They are sincere and often earnest, governing men’s declarations and conduct. They represent a cause in which sentence has been pronounced, or a rule made absolute, without having previously heard the pleadings.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Napoléon, qui de temps en temps, au milieu de sa fortune et de sa puissance, songeait à Robespierre et à sa triste fin—interrogeait un jour son archi-chancelier Cambacérés sur le neuf Thermidor. “*C’est un procès jugé et non plaidé,*” répondait Cambacérés, avec la finesse d’un jurisconsulte courtisan.—(Hippolyte Carnot—Notice sur Barère, p. 109; Paris, 1842.)



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Now it is the purpose of the philosopher, first to bring this omission of the pleadings into conscious notice—next to discover, evolve, and bring under hearing the matters omitted, as far as they suggest themselves to his individual reason. He claims for himself, and he ought to claim for all others alike, the right of calling for proof where others believe without proof—of rejecting the received doctrines, if upon examination the proof given appears to his mind unsound or insufficient—and of enforcing instead of them any others which impress themselves upon his mind as true. But the truth which he tenders for acceptance must of necessity be *reasoned truth*: supported by proofs, defended by adequate replies against preconsidered objections from others. Only hereby does it properly belong to the history of philosophy: hardly even hereby has any such novelty a chance of being fairly weighed and appreciated.

When we thus advert to the vocation of philosophy, we see that (to use the phrase of an acute modern author<sup>b</sup>)

<sup>b</sup> Professor Ferrier, in his instructive volume, 'The Institutes of Metaphysic,' has some valuable remarks on the scope and purpose of Philosophy. I transcribe some of them, in abridgment.

(Sections 1-8.—"A system of philosophy is bound by two main requisitions: it ought to be true—and it ought to be reasoned. Philosophy, in its ideal perfection, is a body of reasoned truth. Of these obligations, the latter is the more stringent. It is more proper that philosophy should be reasoned, than that it should be true: because, while truth may perhaps be unattainable by man, to reason is certainly his province and within his power. . . . A system is of the highest value only when it embraces both these requisitions—that is, when it is both true, and reasoned. But a system which is reasoned without being true, is always of higher value than a system which is true without being reasoned. The latter kind of system is of no value: because

philosophy is the attainment of truth *by the way of reason*. That is its definition. A system therefore which reaches the truth but not by the way of reason, is not philosophy at all, and has therefore no scientific worth. Again, an unreasoned philosophy, even though true, carries no guarantee of its truth. It may be true, but it cannot be certain. On the other hand, a system, which is reasoned without being true, has always some value. It creates reason by exercising it. It is employing the proper means to reach truth, though it may fail to reach it." (Sections 38-41)—"The student will find that the system here submitted to his attention is of a very polemical character. Why? Because philosophy exists only to correct the inadvertencies of man's ordinary thinking. She has no other mission to fulfil. If man naturally thinks aright, he need not be taught to think aright. If he is already in possession of the truth, he does not require to be put in possession of it. The occupation of

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it is by necessity polemical: the assertion of independent reason by individual reasoners, who dissent from the unreasoning belief which reigns authoritative in the social atmosphere around them, and who recognise no correction or refutation except from the counter-reason of others. We see besides, that these dissenters from the public will also be, probably, more or less dissenters from each other. The process of philosophy may be differently performed by two enquirers equally free and sincere, even of the same age and country: and it is sure to be differently performed, if they belong to ages and countries widely apart. It is essentially relative to the individual reasoning mind, and to the medium by which the reasoner is surrounded. Philosophy herself has every thing to gain by such dissent; for it is only thereby that the weak and defective points of each point of view are likely to be exposed. If unanimity is not attained, at least each of the dissentients will better understand what he rejects as well as what he adopts.

The number of individual intellects, independent, inquisitive, and acute, is always rare everywhere; but was comparatively less rare in these ages of Greece. The first topic, on which such intellects broke loose from the common consciousness of the world around them, and struck out new points of view for themselves, was in reference to the Kosmos or

philosophy is gone: her office is superfluous. Therefore philosophy assumes and must assume that man does not naturally think aright, but must be taught to do so: that truth does not come to him spontaneously, but must be brought to him by his own exertions. If man does not naturally think aright, he must think, we shall not say wrongly (for that implies malice prepense) but inadvertently: the native occupant of his mind must be, we shall not say falsehood (for that too implies malice prepense) but error. The original dowry then of universal man is inadvertency and error. This assumption is the ground and only

justification of the existence of philosophy. The circumstance that philosophy exists only to put right the oversights of common thinking—renders her polemical not by choice, but by necessity. She is controversial as the very tenure and condition of her existence: for how can she correct the slips of common opinion, the oversights of natural thinking, except by controverting them?"

Professor Ferrier deserves high commendation for the care taken in this volume to set out clearly Proposition and Counter-Proposition: the thesis which he impugns, as well as that which he sustains.

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the Universe. The received belief, of a multitude of unseen divine persons bringing about by volitions all the different phenomena of nature, became unsatisfactory to men like Thales, Anaximander, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras. Each of these volunteers, following his own independent inspirations, struck out a new hypothesis, and endeavoured to commend it to others with more or less of sustaining reason. There appears to have been little of negation or refutation in their procedure. None of them tried to disprove the received point of view, or to throw its supporters upon their defence. Each of them unfolded his own hypothesis, or his own version of affirmative reasoned truth, for the adoption of those with whom it might find favour.

The dialectic age had not yet arrived. When it did arrive, with Sokrates as its principal champion, the topics of philosophy were altered, and its process revolutionised. We have often heard repeated the Ciceronian dictum—that Sokrates brought philosophy down from the heavens to the earth: from the distant, abstruse, and complicated phenomena of the Kosmos—in respect to which he adhered to the vulgar point of view, and even disapproved any enquiries tending to rationalise it—to the familiar business of man, and the common generalities of ethics and politics. But what has been less observed about Sokrates, though not less true, is, that along with this change of topics he introduced a complete revolution in method. He placed the negative in the front of his procedure; giving to it a point, an emphasis, a substantive value, which no one had done before. His peculiar gift was that of cross-examination, or the application of his Elenchus to discriminate pretended from real knowledge. He found men full of confident beliefs on these ethical and political topics—affirming with words which they had never troubled themselves to define—and persuaded that they required no farther teaching: yet at the same time

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unable to give clear or consistent answers to his questions, and shown by this convincing test to be destitute of real knowledge. Declaring this false persuasion of knowledge, or confident unreasoned belief, to be universal, he undertook as the mission of his life to expose it: and he proclaimed that until the mind was disabused thereof and made painfully conscious of ignorance, no affirmative reasoned truth could be presented with any chance of success.

Such are the peculiar features of the Sokratic dialogue, exemplified in the compositions here reviewed. I do not mean that Sokrates always talked so; but that such was the marked peculiarity which distinguished his talking from that of others. It is philosophy, or reasoned truth, approached in the most polemical manner; operative at first only to discredit the natural, unreasoned intellectual growths of the ordinary mind, and to generate a painful consciousness of ignorance. I say this here, and I shall often say it again throughout these volumes. It is absolutely indispensable to the understanding of the Platonic dialogues; one half of which must appear unmeaning, unless construed with reference to this separate function and value of negative dialectic. Whether readers may themselves agree in such estimation of negative dialectic, is another question: but they must keep it in mind as the governing sentiment of Plato during much of his life, and of Sokrates throughout the whole of life: as being moreover one main cause of that antipathy which Sokrates inspired to many respectable orthodox contemporaries. I have thought it right to take constant account of this orthodox sentiment among the ordinary public, as the perpetual drag-chain, even when its force is not absolutely repressive, upon free speculation.

Proceeding upon this general view, I have interpreted the numerous negative dialogues in Plato as being really negative and nothing beyond. I have not presumed, still less

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tried to divine, an ulterior affirmative beyond what the text reveals—neither *arcana caelestia*, like Proklus and Ficinus,<sup>c</sup> nor any other *arcantum* of terrestrial character. While giving such an analysis of each dialogue as my space permitted and as will enable the reader to comprehend its general scope and peculiarities—I have studied each as it stands written, and have rarely ascribed to Plato any purpose exceeding what he himself intimates. Where I find difficulties forcibly dwelt upon without any solution, I imagine, not that he had a good solution kept back in his closet, but that he had failed in finding one: that he thought it useful, as a portion of the total process necessary for finding and authenticating reasoned truth, both to work out these unsolved difficulties for himself, and to force them impressively upon the attention of others.<sup>d</sup>

Moreover, I deal with each dialogue as a separate composition. Each represents the intellectual scope and impulse of a peculiar moment, which may or may not be in harmony with the rest. Plato would have protested not less earnestly

<sup>c</sup> F. A. Wolf, Vorrede, Plato, Sympos. p. vi.

<sup>d</sup> Ficinus suchte, wie er sich in der Zueignungsschrift seiner Version ausdrückt, im Platon allenthalben *arcana caelestia*: und da er sie in seinem Kopfe mitbrachte, so konnte es ihm nicht sauer werden, etwas zu finden, was freilich jedem andern verborgen bleiben muss."

<sup>d</sup> A striking passage from Bentham illustrates very well both the Sokratic and the Platonic point of view. (Principles of Morals and Legislation, vol. ii. ch. xvi. p. 57, ed. 1823.)

"Gross ignorance desecrates no difficulties. Imperfect knowledge finds them out and struggles with them. It must be perfect knowledge that overcomes them."

Of the three different mental conditions here described, the first is that against which Sokrates made war, *i. e.* real ignorance, and false persuasion of knowledge, which therefore desecrates

no difficulties.

The second, or imperfect knowledge struggling with difficulties, is represented by the Platonic negative dialogues.

The third—or perfect knowledge victorious over difficulties—will be found in the following pages marked by the character τὸ δύνασθαι λόγον διδόναι καὶ δέχεσθαι. You do not possess "perfect knowledge," until you are able to answer, with unflinching promptitude and consistency, all the questions of a Sokratic cross-examiner—and to administer effectively the like cross-examination yourself, for the purpose of testing others. Ὅλως δὲ σημείων τοῦ εἰδότες τὸ δύνασθαι διδάσκειν ἔστιν. (Aristotel. Metaphys. A. 981, b. 8.)

Perfect knowledge, corresponding to this definition, will not be found manifested in Plato. Instead of it, we note in his latter years the lawgiver's assumed infallibility.

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than Cicero,\* against those who sought to foreclose debate, in the grave and arduous struggles for searching out reasoned truth—and to bind down the free inspirations of his intellect in one dialogue, by appealing to sentence already pronounced in another preceding. Of two inconsistent trains of reasoning, both cannot indeed be true—but both are often useful to be known and studied: and the philosopher, who professes to master the theory of his subject, ought not to be a stranger to either. All minds athirst for reasoned truth will be greatly aided in forming their opinions by the number of points which Plato suggests, though they find little which he himself settles for them finally.

There have been various critics, who, on perceiving inconsistencies in Plato, either force them into harmony by a subtle exegêsis, or discard one of them as spurious. I have not followed either course. I recognise such inconsistencies, when found, as facts—and even as very interesting facts—in his philosophical character. To the marked contradiction in the spirit of the *Leges*, as compared with the earlier Platonic compositions, I have called special attention. Plato has been called by Plutarch a mixture of Sokrates with Lykurgus. The two elements are in reality opposite, predominant at different times: Plato begins his career with the confessed ignorance and philosophical negative of Sokrates: he closes it with the peremptory, dictatorial, affirmative of Lykurgus.

To Xenophon, who belongs only in part to my present work, and whose character presents an interesting contrast with Plato, I have devoted a separate chapter. To the other less celebrated Sokratic Companions also, I have

\* Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* v. 11, 33.

The collocutor remarks, that what Cicero says is inconsistent with what he (Cicero) had written in the fourth book *De Finibus*. To which Cicero replies:—

“Tu quidem tabellis obsignatis agis

mecum, et testificaris, quid dixerim aliquando aut scripserim. Cum aliis isto modo, qui legibus impositis disputant. Nos in diem vivimus: quodcumque nostros animos probabilitate percussit, id dicimus: itaque soli sumus liberi.”

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endeavoured to do justice, as far as the scanty means of knowledge permit: to them, especially, because they have generally been misconceived and unduly depreciated.

The present volumes, however, contain only one half of the speculative activity of Hellas during the fourth century B.C. The second half, in which Aristotle is the hero, remains still wanting. If my health and energies continue, I hope one day to be able to supply this want: and thus to complete from my own point of view, the history, speculative as well as active, of the Hellenic race, down to the date which I prescribed to myself in the Preface of my History near twenty years ago.

The philosophy of the fourth century B.C. is peculiarly valuable and interesting, not merely from its intrinsic speculative worth—from the originality and grandeur of its two principal heroes—from its coincidence with the full display of dramatic, rhetorical, artistic genius—but also from a fourth reason not unimportant—because it is purely Hellenic; preceding the development of Alexandria, and the amalgamation of Oriental veins of thought with the inspirations of the Academy or the Lyceum. The Orontes<sup>f</sup> and the Jordan had not yet begun to flow westward, and to impart their own colour to the waters of Attica and Latium. Not merely the real world, but also the ideal world, present to the minds of Plato and Aristotle, were purely Hellenic. Even during the century immediately following, this had ceased to be fully true in respect to the philosophers of Athens: and it became less and less true with each succeeding century. New foreign centres of rhetoric and literature—Asiatic and Alexandrian Hellenism—were fostered into importance by regal encouragement. Plato and Aristotle are thus the special representatives of genuine Hellenic philosophy. The remarkable intellectual ascendancy acquired by them in their

<sup>f</sup> Juvenal iii. 62:—

“Jampridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes,” &c.

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own day, and maintained over succeeding centuries, was one main reason why the Hellenic vein was enabled so long to maintain itself, though in impoverished condition, against adverse influences from the East, ever increasing in force. Plato and Aristotle outlasted all their Pagan successors—successors at once less purely Hellenic and less highly gifted. And when Saint Jerome, near 750 years after the decease of Plato, commemorated with triumph the victory of unlettered Christians over the accomplishments and genius of Paganism—he illustrated the magnitude of the victory, by singling out Plato and Aristotle as the representatives of vanquished philosophy.<sup>§</sup>

§ The passage is a remarkable one, as marking both the effect produced on a Latin scholar by Hebrew studies, and the neglect into which even the greatest writers of classical antiquity had then fallen (about 400 A. D.).

Hieronymus — Comment. in Epist. ad Galatas, iii. 5, p. 486-487, ed. Venet. 1769 :—

“Sed omnem sermonis elegantiam, et Latini sermonis venustatem, stridor lectionis Hebraicæ sordidavit. Nostis enim et ipsæ” (i. e. Paula and Eustochium, to whom his letter is addressed) “quod plus quam quindecim anni sunt, ex quo in manus meas nunquam Tullius, nunquam Maro, nunquam Gentilium literarum quilibet Auctor ascendit: et si quid forte inde,

dum loquimur, obrepit, quasi antiqui per nebulam somnii recordamur. Quod autem profecerim ex linguæ illius infatigabili studio, aliorum iudicio derelinquo: *ego quid in meâ amiserim, scio. . . .* Si quis eloquentiam quærit vel declamationibus delectatur, habet in utrâque linguâ Demosthenem et Tullium, Polemonem et Quintilianum. Ecclesia Christi non de Academiâ et Lyceo, sed de vili plebeculâ congregata est. . . . Quotusquisque nunc Aristotelem legit? Quanti Platonis vel libros novère vel nomen? Vix in angulis otiosi eos senes recolunt. Rusticanos vero et piscatores nostros totus orbis loquitur, universus mundus sonat.”

## ERRATUM.

In Vol. i. Ch. vii. p. 283, note <sup>d</sup>, the following sentence appears:—

“It is not impossible that there may have been two distinct forms of indictment (against Sokrates), since there were three different accusers—Melêtus, Anytus, and Lykon.”

This sentence ought to be omitted. The conjecture (I find) has no foundation: for the citation immediately preceding out of the Platonic Apology, though it is cast into the form of an indictment, is not a real indictment tendered at the archontic office as foundation for criminal procedure, but a summary extracted by Sokrates himself from the words of unofficial writers and speakers who had censured him. He chooses to put the summary into the phraseology common in the administration of criminal justice at Athens.



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Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00962-1 - Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates, Volume 1

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