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The Specificity of the First Cognitive Acts in Realist Metaphysics as interpreted by Mieczysław A. Krapiec and Stanisław Kamiński

The philosophical explanation of reality in the classical perspective concentrates on understanding being and the ways of making it explicit. However, diverse and not always compatible interpretations of being as the object of philosophy are the cause of divergent conceptions of philosophizing. In this context, the fundamental problem is the manner of cognition and the reflective formulation of basic theses that adequately correspond to real states of affairs. Frequently in the history of philosophy, formulated assertions did not fully align with reality, and as a consequence, *a priori* systems and even ideologies were created. This is aptly expressed by Aristotle’s maxim from the treatise *De Caelo*: “A small error at the beginning becomes great at the end.” Therefore, the analysis of the first cognitive acts constitutes, in philosophical research, a fundamental and key issue for explaining reality.

The concept of the initial stages of philosophizing presented in the article was developed on the foundation of realist metaphysics, which

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originated within the Lublin Philosophical School.¹ Philosophy within this tradition focuses on the rational elucidation of the existence of things and on resolving the cognitive problems that accompany this elucidation. This mode of philosophizing was initiated by Aristotle, who proposed at the outset an aporetic approach to discovering within reality that which underlies its existence. The Peripatetic solutions, involving the posing of the question about the reason for reality and formulating answers consistent with that reality, were particularly continued by Thomas Aquinas. In the 20th century, thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson philosophized within this tradition. Their research initiated a renewal of the Peripatetic tradition and its intensive development on Polish soil. The presented proposal refers to research in the field of the theory of being by Mieczysław A. Krapiec and Stanisław Kamiński, who offered an ontologically-justified and methodologically-developed proposal of the initial stages of the philosophical explanation of reality.² They conducted a methodological elaboration of the issues of primordial metaphysical experience, especially judicative cognition in the context of logical-methodological conditions.³ On this basis, they presented an original system of realist

¹ See Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik and Paweł Gondek, eds., *The Lublin Philosophical School: History—Conceptions—Disputes* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2020; e-book).

² See Stanisław Kamiński and Mieczysław A. Krapiec, *Z teorii i metodologii metafizyki* [From the theory and methodology of metaphysics] (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1962); Mieczysław A. Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of History of Being*, trans. Theresa Sandok (Peter Lang Publishing, 1991); Stanisław Kamiński, *On the Methodology of Metaphysics*, trans. Maciej B. Stępień (Lublin-Roma: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu – Società Internazionale Tommaso d’Aquino, 2018); Stanisław Kamiński, *On the Metaphysical Cognition*, trans. Maciej B. Stępień (Lublin-Roma: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu – Società Internazionale Tommaso d’Aquino, 2020).

³ See Andrzej Bronk and Stanisław Majdański, “The Epistemological and Methodological Inspirations and Aspirations of the Lublin School of Classical

metaphysics, within which they identified the object of philosophical inquiry and the method of metaphysical cognition conditioned by that object. By attempting to reconstruct the first cognitive processes, we aim to answer the question of what significance the acts initiating metaphysical cognition have and what epistemological procedures accompany these processes.

The Characterization of the First Cognitive Acts in Realist Metaphysics

The foundation for formulating philosophical theses in realist metaphysics practiced at the Lublin School of Philosophy is cognitive contact with reality. Philosophy in this approach is the rational explanation of reality in the aspect of its existence. Accordingly, reality, as the fundamental point of reference for metaphysical inquiry, determines all research procedures. On the one hand, reality is the field for the cognizing subject to perceive problems and pose questions; on the other hand, it serves as the fundamental point of reference for seeking answers to these questions—that is, for solving problems. This is accomplished by formulating rational justifications guided by the real state of affairs. Within these real, knowledge-generating references, it is indicated that the primordial apprehension of the fundamental modes of existence of reality occurs in pre-reflective cognition, in which the cognizing subject attains only common knowledge but

Philosophy,” in *Lublin School of Philosophy. A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Jacek Wojtysiak, Zbigniew Wróblewski, Przemysław Gut, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2020; e-book), 11-42; Paweł Gondek, “Sapientis Est Ordinare: On the Metaphysical and Methodological Phenomenon of the Lublin Philosophical School,” in *The Lublin Philosophical School: History—Conceptions—Disputes*, 73–99.

remains cognitively neutral.⁴ Consequently, all cognitive activities are conditioned by the object of cognition, and the subject at the starting point remains neutral—that is, does not introduce any form of prejudiced approach to the cognitive process.

The specificity of pre-reflective cognition is the spontaneous experience of reality, in which the subject remains cognitively unengaged from an intellectual standpoint. The object of cognition constitutes the reason for the occurrence of the cognitive relation, which at this level has an experiential character, and is simultaneously directed and received by the intellect. The cognizing subject absorbs all the data that imposes itself in this type of cognitive process. The initially unengaged stance of the subject is the reason for its openness to everything that appears in the cognitive field. The potential methodological value of this act is the absence of a directed cognitive attitude in the cognizing subject, meaning that it is an unintended and consequently unprofiled contact with the reality being cognized. As a result of such an act, we can only assert that “something is.”⁵ Interpreting the content of “what is” would require cognitive orientation toward a specific aspect—that is, the engagement of reflective activities. It is worth adding here that pre-reflective cognition does not constitute merely a sum of sensory impressions but pertains to intellectual apprehensions. It is through the intellect that the cognitive state becomes conscious, whose primary result is the assertion that “something is...”. Realist metaphysics points at this moment to the act of the primordial assertion of the existence of something, which is termed the existential judgment.

⁴ Stanisław Kamiński, “Methodological Peculiarity of Theory of Being,” in *On the Methodology of Metaphysics*, 223–228.

⁵ Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, “Experience and Metaphysics,” in: *The Polish Christian Philosophy in 20th Century. Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec*, ed. Marek Czachorowski, Tomasz Mamełka, Paweł Mazanka, Zbigniew Pańpuch, (Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2020), 149–150.

The existential judgment is understood here in epistemological terms; that is, it constitutes a cognitive reaction to the experiencing of “that which is.” This moment of experiencing is an experience whose immediate consequence is the affirmation of the existence of something. Gilson, analyzing this moment, points to the fact of the pre-reflective cognition of being, which constitutes a direct experience based on sensory self-evidence.⁶ Krapiec classifies this experience as the reason for the emergence of the primordial existential judgment, in which the affirmation of the existence of “that which is” occurs.⁷ Affirmation serves as the factor asserting the existence of something concrete, which is grasped in a judgment directed solely at the cognition of the existence of a particular thing. The cognition of existence occurs without symbolic mediation; therefore, we cannot form a concept of existence. The expression of the judgment in verbal form and the analysis of the structure of the uttered judgment is already a systematizing operation. Nor can we, as the cognizing subject, assign any preliminary cognitive conditions to the cognitive acts. This makes the value of the existential judgment as a cognitive act fundamental for a neutrally grounded philosophical explanation of reality. The participation of content-related cognitive data in such judgments is minimal, usually limited to the assertion that “something is.” A deeper analysis of the content requires a reflective ordering of data, which occurs only at the stage of making being explicit.

The existential judgment in realist metaphysics constitutes the fundamental cognitive operation that provides the subject with a direct and assumption-free reference to reality in the aspect of existence. No cognitive content, from either a quantitative or qualitative standpoint,

⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, trans. Philip Trower (Christendom Press, 1990), 120–122.

⁷ Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 86–87.

determines this type of cognition. Simultaneously, from the perspective of cognitive value, such a judgment is not subject to qualification as true or false, because either something exists and that is affirmed, or it does not. There may be errors in apprehending the content of the thing being known; however, in the very affirmation of the existence of the thing, such errors do not occur. Krąpiec describes this nature of metaphysical cognition as *surveridical* (*surintelligible*) cognition.⁸ The primordial metaphysical experience, arising from pre-reflective cognition, primarily leads to the moment of affirmation of the fact of the existence of something and accepting it as it is. *Surveridical* cognition occurs, according to Krąpiec, in two cognitive operations: in the primordial and direct existential judgments affirming the existence of something, and in the affirmation of the existence of one's own "I" as the subject of cognitive acts.⁹ It is worth emphasizing that this second operation also has significant epistemological importance in the transition from spontaneous to conscious cognition of reality.

A rational verification of assertions made on the basis of spontaneous cognition reveals numerous difficulties in directly incorporating them into philosophical considerations. Spontaneously received data about the world and overly hasty generalizations can lead to the formulation of erroneous assertions, or even the adoption of some form of naive realism. However, this does not imply the necessity of imposing meta-objective conditions on the first cognitive acts. The postulate of methodologically subjecting cognitive acts to criticism before undertaking any cognitive activities always bears pre-philosophical characteristics.¹⁰ It excludes the possibility of employing any cognition other than rational, methodical, and systematic cognition, subjected to the

⁸ Krąpiec, "Experience and Metaphysics," 150–152.

⁹ Krąpiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 89–90.

¹⁰ Stanisław Kamiński, "Method in Classical Philosophy," in Stanisław Kamiński, *On the Methods in Contemporary Metaphysics*, trans. Maciej B. Stępień (Lublin-Roma:

intersubjective verification of theses. Meanwhile, in realist metaphysics, the aim is not the direct incorporation of pre-scientific spontaneous cognition into the methods of philosophical explanation of reality, but revealing the genesis of the cognitive apprehension of the world. Therefore, the analysis of the starting point primarily indicates the value of spontaneous cognition directed at really existing things. It is conditioned by concrete existence, which is not subject to modifications resulting from the cognitive attitude of the cognizing subject.

Anchoring the metaphysical explanation of reality in pre-scientific modes of cognition—which are not directly classified within philosophical theories of knowledge—should not be considered a methodological error. For it is not the primary task of philosophy to qualify cognitive tools conditioned by logical rules of correctness. Metaphysical cognition, if it is to be true knowledge about the world, must correspond above all to real states of affairs. The lack of cognitive contact with reality can lead to introducing into philosophy an object that is an intellectual construct, built upon the properties of things that are possible to grasp in conceptual cognition. Meanwhile, the object of metaphysics must correspond to that which exists independently of our cognitive acts. Therefore, we seek such modes of cognition through which it is possible to apprehend reality adequately and neutrally. In spontaneous, pre-scientific cognition, reality becomes the cause of cognitive acts occurring, and such acts guarantee a direct and autonomous reference to that which is. Spontaneous pre-scientific cognition neutralizes the possibility of the subject's interference in the cognitive process. This cognition gains ontic justification in the sense that individual spontaneous cognitive acts correspond to some real state of affairs, which is apprehended by the subject due to the fact of its existence.

In the context of spontaneous pre-scientific cognition, the problem of an irrational attitude arises in philosophy, which manifests itself in the emergence of superstitions or assumptions that distort objective knowledge. Unreflected human cognition is not free from non-rational data, which can appear in the form of naive generalizations, generating a subjective disposition toward the world. However, within this scope, it is necessary to distinguish spontaneous commonsense cognition from naively formulated colloquial knowledge, which may be the result of such cognition. The threat to the rational order of acquiring knowledge occurs at the moment of unreflective acceptance of the content that appears in the initial apprehension of the object of cognition. Therefore, spontaneous common-sense cognition cannot constitute a naive generalization of the content derived from the reality being cognized. The contents thus apprehended are selective, individual, non-necessary, and conditioned by non-rational factors as cognitive results. Therefore, they require systematization in the form of methodically organized knowledge and specialization—that is, specifying the aspect of cognition.¹¹ However, for philosophy, the primary moment remains—the unconditioned subjective affirmation of the existence of things. All subsequent cognitive stages possess a reflective and systematized form shaped by that primary act.

Epistemological Procedures in Forming the Object of Philosophy

In the realm of philosophical cognition, the problems of knowing existence reflect the epistemic mismatch between the subject and the nature

¹¹ Stanisław Kamiński, “On the Nature of Philosophy,” in *On the Metaphysical Cognition*, 186–190.

of reality. Therefore, the process of transitioning from primordial cognitive apprehensions to systematized philosophical assertions requires operations that verify their value. In this respect, realist metaphysics extensively references the Peripatetic tradition. The method of diaporetic cognition proposed by Aristotle—following the scheme: aporia (difficulty) – diaporesis (investigation) – euporia (solution)—which leads to the resolution of a problem, is carried out in the context of data obtained from real states of affairs.¹² Among the characteristic elements of the diaporetic method of philosophizing, we find the following structure of philosophical deliberations: formulating the problem based on questions, comprehensive confirmatory-refutational discussion of the problem, and then demonstrating justified conclusions. Diverse argumentation guides us toward solving the problem but does not provide a definitive resolution. Dialectical argumentative techniques constitute a preliminary ordering of the investigated issues. This is accomplished through a contradiction-eliminating determination of the research field, in which all unjustified procedures and conclusions related to the object investigated are excluded. The dialectical process also involves an analytical review of historical positions concerning the given problem. Such a context accompanies the epistemic determination of the proper object of philosophy.¹³ In this way, one moves from the direct assertion of real states of affairs to what is called being in metaphysics.

The objective character of the theses of realist metaphysics requires appropriate methodological preparation, in which the explanatory procedure must, at every stage of research, maintain conformity with the mode of existence of real states of affairs. In this context, reality is not

¹² The diaporetic method is used by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* I–III. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. William D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹³ Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 41–46; Stanisław Kamiński and Mieczysław A. Krapiec, “The Specificity of Metaphysical Cognition,” in *On the Metaphysical Cognition*, 55–67.

only a factor stimulating the posing of questions but also, thanks to it, we find substantive answers. Questions arise when the cognizing subject is intellectually astonished by the mode of existence of reality, that is, perceives the problem of adequately interpreting the content of that which is. The questions posed are justified mainly due to the structure of reality itself, and their number and modes of formulation reveal the multifacetedness of cognitive approaches to reality.¹⁴ The questions arising in this context aim toward the discovery of the nature of things. Among them, the chief philosophical question is “why?” It expresses the way of revealing the causal conditioning of “that which is” and constitutes the basis for all other questions formulated in philosophy. The very act of posing the question “why?” unveils the pluralistic and relational character of the reality being cognized.¹⁵ Questions constitute the foundation for aporias, which are then subjected to the dialectical method of arriving at their solutions.

Dialectic constitutes a critical examination of probable judgments, arising from contentious issues highlighted in the aporetic procedure. It involves an argumentative resolution of the reasons for and against, resulting from proposed solutions to a given problem. This process aims to argumentatively refine the answers provided to the questions forming the problem under investigation and to eliminate possible errors in this reasoning. The goal of dialectic is to lead to the resolution of the problem and to justify probable assertions. For Aristotle, dialectic did not hold the same value as analytical explanation but served as important preparation for it.¹⁶ The propaedeutic character of

¹⁴ Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, “What is Classical Philosophy?” in *The Lublin Philosophical School. History—Conceptions—Disputes*, 292–294.

¹⁵ Paweł Gondek, “The Question ‘Why?’ as the Foundation for Knowledge of Causes in Aristotle,” *Studia Gilsoniana* no 2 2013: 92–98.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1004 b 25. Aristotle presents dialectical procedures in detail in *Topics* and *On Sophistical Refutations*. On this topic, see Enrico Berti, “Ancient

the dialectical method allowed for a justified transition from the results arising from pre-scientific cognitive operations to assertions proper to systematic philosophical deliberations. In this way, dialectic fulfills functions appropriate to the method of discovering and critically examining the fundamental theses of philosophy.

The first cognitive stage within realist metaphysics is the pre-scientific reference to real states of affairs, verified through elements of the dialectical method. The primordial justification of theses in metaphysics thus involves utilizing the dialectical rules of indirect proof and elenctic refutation, in relation to the real states of affairs affirmed in existential judgments.¹⁷ On this basis begins the proper procedure for arriving at philosophical theses, which relies on intuitive-reductive reasoning. The specificity of such a method lies primarily in intellectual intuition, constituting a non-discursive and direct cognitive act of “that which is.” In this type of cognition, we focus primarily on the existential aspect of fundamental ontic relations present in the cognized states of affairs. Reduction, in turn, pertains to causal relations that constitute the sole and specific ontic reasons for existing states of affairs.¹⁸ In this case, the method of reductive explanation is based solely on indicating their real and ultimate causes.

Such procedures may raise logical doubts because reduction is a type of plausible reasoning that does not lead to infallible conclusions. However, the cause indicated in metaphysical explanation does not constitute a possible factor, but an ontic reason without which a given effect could not occur. Therefore, the manner of applying this reason-

Greek Dialectic as Expression of Freedom of Thought and Speech,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no 3 1978: 363–369.

¹⁷ Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 42–45.

¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion on the status of the intuitive-reductive method, see Stanisław Kamiński, “Explanation in Metaphysics,” in *On the Methodology of Metaphysics*, 190–201.

ing transcends formal relations and pertains to the real states of affairs grasped in direct cognition. In the context of realist metaphysics, the intuitive-reductive method can be employed on the condition that, for a specified resultant state, one identifies the sole and ultimate ontic cause.¹⁹ Otherwise, it loses its necessary ontic grounding. Limiting cognition to a single cause is possible only within the context of cognitive reference to existential states of being, based on necessary ontic relations. In this way, reductive explanation gains reliability due to the necessary character of intra-being relations and the high degree of analyticity of the language in which metaphysical theses are to be expressed.²⁰ In realist metaphysics, such a type of explanation is regarded as reliable reasoning, because it is based on ontic states of affairs that, in the existential aspect, possess the status of necessary states. The procedure of explaining metaphysical theses, carried out on the basis of intuitive-reductive cognition, is realized at each of the main stages of forming the system of realist metaphysics. It plays a role in the process of determining the formal object of metaphysics and in the stages of explicating being.²¹

In the context of the above considerations, we can reconstruct the process of forming philosophical theses based on primordial cognitive acts. The naturalness of the initial act of knowing the existence of things results from spontaneous contact with reality, grounded in commonsense data. However, in the process of dialectical cognition and philosophical understanding of reality, a distinction is made between spontaneous and reflective cognitive acts. Therefore, the proper delimitation of the object of metaphysics occurs in two orders: natural con-

¹⁹ Kamiński, "Explanation in Metaphysics," 195–201.

²⁰ Stanisław Kamiński "On the Language of the Theory of Being," in *On the Methodology of Metaphysics*, 99–134.

²¹ Kamiński, "Methodological Peculiarity of Theory of Being," 241–246.

struction and artificial construction. Within natural construction, we deal with the pre-scientific cognition of things, whose specificity at the initial stage is the passivity of the cognizing subject. The subject of cognition unreflectively receives all data that imposes itself in the cognitive relation to reality. The potential methodological value of this act is the absence of a directed cognitive attitude in the cognizing subject. This means that it is an unintended and assumption-free act, in which we primarily assert that “something is.” However, the information about the content data known in this situation is minimal, because it still requires reflective ordering. At this stage, the crucial factor is the assumption-free cognitive contact with the thing, which only then allows for proper reflection on this cognition. Through this, the cognitive orientation towards the object naturally actualizes.

Only on the basis of natural construction can the artificial construction of the object of cognition, which has a subjective dimension, occur. The result of the natural cognition of “that which is” allows for the extraction of the cognitive aspect of the apprehended thing. This emerges in the form of reflective and preliminarily organized cognition, aiming to select the appropriate aspect of investigation. This does not occur spontaneously but requires intellectual reflection on the manner of apprehending spontaneously known reality.²² In this way, spontaneous knowledge about the world becomes particularized and organized, and as methodically detailed knowledge, it can serve as the basis for distinguishing individual sciences. However, in the cognitive order, it is only the specification of content—mainly in quantitative and qualitative aspects—that becomes the cause of the detailed differentiation of the sciences. The emerging philosophical knowledge about the world pertains primarily to the reflection upon the primordial cognitive act in which the spontaneous apprehension of the existence of

²² Kamiński and Krapiec, “The Specificity of Metaphysical Cognition,” 26–35.

things occurred. Therefore, philosophy, based at the starting point on such a defined object, can be understood as cognition that is both direct and realist.²³ In this objective aspect of inquiry lies the fundamental reflection on reality and the search for the reason for its existence. And this is the primordial plane for the philosophical cognition of reality.

Conclusions

The issue of the first cognitive acts constitutes a fundamental problem for philosophy. The resolutions reached at this stage determine the ways of explaining reality and shape the profile of the philosophical system being developed. The interpretative difficulties arising in this area largely result from the need to engage pre-scientific sources of cognition at the starting point. The utilization proposed by Krapiec and Kamiński of spontaneous commonsense cognition in the existential aspect stands in opposition to many contemporary philosophical positions. However, from the perspective of understanding philosophy as the rational explanation of reality, the experience of what really exists is a necessary condition for practicing it. Therefore, the proposal to refer to cognition, which is most often considered subjective and inaccurate, results from a direct and assumption-free reference to things. At the same time, the value of this cognition is emphasized mainly in the aspect of the object's influence on the cognizing subject, which allows for the affirmation of the existence of something beyond the subject. Consequently, the first cognitive act becomes the existential judgment, whose verbalized form constitutes a preconception of the proper object of philosophy. In the context of realist metaphysics, the existential judgment is not only the basic cognitive contact with reality, but also

²³ Kamiński, "Methodological Peculiarity of Theory of Being," 223–225.

the starting point for formulating a rational and systematic philosophical theory.

Spontaneous pre-scientific cognition and existential judgments are not accepted in the system of realist metaphysics without appropriate refinement. The epistemological procedures employed by Krapiec and Kamiński aim to extract from cognitive data those elements that possess philosophical value. All these operations are carried out in accordance with the specificity of the fundamental point of reference, which is the really existing reality. In the aporetic approach and the dialectical method developed on its basis, these are questions that arise in reaction to the modes of existence of the known things. On the basis of these questions, a critical examination of theses is conducted, allowing for a justified transition from pre-scientific cognitive results to preliminary philosophical assertions about reality. Within the proposed concept of realist metaphysics, at this stage, the intuitive-reductive method is also engaged, for which the context of states of affairs constitutes a necessary condition for accepting assertions. All these operations are accompanied by meta-objective reflection, which, however, plays only an improving and verifying role concerning the way of philosophical cognition of reality. In this way, in realist metaphysics, one moves from the first cognitive acts to the formulation of systematic theses. Such a procedure has a unique character within philosophy. The applied proto-cognitive epistemological procedures guarantee that systematic theses maintain strict contact and adequacy with the reality being known.



The Specificity of the First Cognitive Acts
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SUMMARY

The issue of the first cognitive acts is a decisive factor in the adopted methods of philosophical explanation of reality. The concept of the first cognitive acts presented in this article was developed by M. A. Krąpiec and S. Kamiński within the framework of realist metaphysics. They methodologically elaborated the problem of the primordial metaphysical experience, which constitutes a direct and assumption-free reference to existing things. The interpretative difficulties that arise in this area result from the need to engage pre-scientific sources of cognition at the starting point. Simultaneously, the value of this cognition is emphasized in the aspect of affirming the existence of something beyond the subject, which is expressed through the existential judgment and constitutes a preconception of the proper object of philosophy. In this conception, the first cognitive acts are accepted with appropriate refinement. This includes the dialectical method, which allows for a justified transition from pre-scientific cognitive results to preliminary philosophical assertions about reality. Subsequently, the intuitive-reductive method is introduced, in which, for a specified effectual state, we indicate the sole and ultimate ontic cause. In this method, the context of states of affairs constitutes a necessary condition for accepting theses. On such foundations, in realist metaphysics, one moves from the first cognitive acts to the formulation of systematic theses.

Keywords: cognitive acts, reality, existential judgment, dialectic, realist metaphysics

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