

Dedicated to the living memory of Gilles Deleuze, a non-revengeful philosopher

Jalal Toufic  
**If You Prick Us,  
Do We Not  
Bleed? No**

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Have we *not* eyes? No: “He [a Japanese man]: ‘You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.’ She [a French woman visiting the city]: ‘I saw *everything*. *Everything*.... The hospital, for instance, I saw it. I’m sure I did....’ ‘You did not see the hospital in Hiroshima. You saw nothing in Hiroshima.’ ... ‘Four times at the museum in Hiroshima.... I ... looked thoughtfully at the iron ... made vulnerable as flesh ... [at] anonymous heads of hair that the women of Hiroshima, when they awoke in the morning, discovered had fallen out....’ ‘You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.’”<sup>1</sup> (Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*) (Ludwig Wittgenstein: “If a blind man were to ask me ‘Have you got two hands?’ I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don’t know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn’t I test my eyes by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? What is to be tested by what? [Who decides what stands fast?])”<sup>2</sup> Have we *not* hands[?] No – the man without hands in Patrick Bokanowski’s *L’Ange. Organs*[?] No – Daniel Paul Schreber: “I existed frequently without a stomach; I expressly told the attendant M., as he may remember, that I could not eat because I had no stomach. Sometimes immediately before meals a stomach was so to speak produced *ad hoc* by miracles. This was done particularly by von W.’s soul, which in at least some of its forms sometimes showed a friendly spirit towards me. Naturally this never lasted long; the stomach which had been produced by miracles, in any case only an inferior stomach, was usually removed again miraculously by v. W.’s soul during the meal ‘because of a change of mind’; great changeability is a marked feature of the soul-character, absolutely divine rays perhaps excluded. Food and drink taken simply poured into the abdominal cavity and into the thighs, a process which, however unbelievable it may sound, was beyond all doubt for me as I distinctly remember the sensation. In the case of any other human being this would have resulted in natural pus formation with an inevitably fatal outcome; but the food pulp could not damage my body because all impure matter in it was soaked up again by the rays. Later, I therefore repeatedly went ahead with eating unperturbed, without having a stomach ... Of other internal organs I will only mention the *gullet* and the *intestines*, which were torn or vanished repeatedly, further the *pharynx*, which I partly ate up several times.”<sup>3</sup> *Dimensions*[?] Not if one is subject to “the Alice in Wonderland syndrome, [which is] named for Lewis Carroll’s titular character, [and which] is a

disorder characterized by transient episodes of visual hallucinations and perceptual distortions, during which objects or body parts are perceived as altered in various ways (metamorphopsia), including enlargement (macropsia) or reduction (micropsia) in the perceived size of a form. Such episodes are of short duration (generally less than an hour), variable frequency (up to several times per day), and unpredictable onset.”<sup>4</sup> *Senses[?]* Not if one is a yogi who has achieved *pratyahara* (Sanskrit: “withdrawal of the senses”), “in the Yoga system of Indian philosophy, fifth of the eight stages intended to lead the aspirant to *samadhi*, the state of perfect concentration. The goal of *pratyahara* is to arrest the reaction of the senses to external objects, thus helping to isolate and free the mind from the involuntary intrusions caused by sensory activity. The mind does not cease to experience external phenomena but merely experiences them directly through its own intensified powers of concentration instead of through the mediation of the senses.”<sup>5</sup> *Affections[?]* No – the Septimus of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* “had gone through the whole show ... European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him – that he could not feel. For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel.”<sup>6</sup> *Passions[?]* Not if we have achieved Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge: “This kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things. So ... we readily conceive how effective against the emotions is clear and distinct knowledge, and especially the third kind of knowledge whose basis is the knowledge of God. Insofar as they are passive emotions, if it does not completely destroy them, at least it brings it about that they constitute the least part of the mind” (*Ethics*, Part II, Scholium 2, and Part V, Proposition 20, Scholium).<sup>7</sup> *Fed with the same food[?]* No: “All painted buddhas are actual buddhas.... Because the entire world and all phenomena are a painting, human existence appears from a painting, and buddha ancestors are actualized from a painting. Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice-cake” (Zen Master Dōgen, “Painting of a Rice-cake”).<sup>8</sup> *Hurt with the same weapons,*

*subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means[?]* No, Daniel Paul Schreber was hurt by the voices (“To be torn from the cell in the middle of the night in order to be drowned was another terrifying possibility which occupied my imagination, indeed was forced on to me by what was said by the voices”<sup>9</sup>; “there had been times when I could not help myself but speak aloud or make some noise, in order to drown the senseless and shameless twaddle of the voices, and so procure temporary rest for my nerves”<sup>10</sup> ...), and asserted in his memoirs, “Even now I am convinced that I am immune to all natural disease influences; disease germs only arise in me through rays and are removed again in the same way by rays,”<sup>11</sup> and, “One distinguished ‘searing’ and ‘blessing’ rays; the former were laden with the poison of corpses or some other putrid matter, and therefore carried some germ of disease into the body or brought about some other destructive effect in it. The blessing (pure) rays in turn healed this damage.”<sup>12</sup> *Warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?* No: “Junkies always beef about *The Cold* as they call it, turning up their black coat collars and clutching their withered necks ... pure junk con. A junky does not want to be warm, he wants to be Cool-Cooler-COLD. But he wants The Cold like he wants His Junk – NOT OUTSIDE where it does him no good but INSIDE so he can sit around with a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack ... his metabolism approaching Absolute ZERO”<sup>13</sup> (William S. Burroughs). *If you prick us, do we not bleed?* No, or at least not necessarily because of the prick. Was my video ‘*Āshūrā: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, 1996, with its documentation of ritualistic bloodletting, a demonstration that Shi’ites too can bleed? If indeed a demonstration, it would be one only for the benefit of the Israelis, so that they would be able to ascertain that Shi’ites too bleed without having to bombard us in south Lebanon. With my affinity to Shi’ism, I certainly do not need such a demonstration since, irrespective of any wounds suffered in my life (whether as a result of bombardments or otherwise), I already feel even the blood in my veins to be spilled blood, that is, that I am bleeding in my veins. But ‘*Āshūrā: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* is not really a demonstration that if pricked, Shi’ites bleed: I am not a revengeful person. A disturbance is introduced in the ostensibly rhetorical question, “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” by those who, although they bleed, do so without being pricked or wounded: the stigmata of some saints and of some hysterics of the psychosomatic type; the blood spilled *in my veins*, someone affined to Shi’ism. In Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, the lawyer informs the Jew Shylock, a revengeful person (Salarino: “Why, I am sure, if

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he forfeit, thou wilt not take / his flesh: what's that good for?" "... If it will feed nothing else, / it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and / hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, / mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my / bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine / enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew" [Act 3, Scene 1]), that he is indeed permitted by the contract signed by his debtor Antonio to cut one pound of flesh from the latter's body, but that he has to do so without spilling one jot of blood, otherwise he would be persecuted for the attempted murder of a Christian. Did I need to reach the latter part of the discourse of Portia-as-lawyer when she lists all the punishments that Shylock is to suffer to know that she is a revengeful person? Was it not enough her implying to Shylock during her defense of Antonio: "If you prick us [Christians], do we not bleed?"? Shylock's desistance from making an incision in Antonio's flesh to take one pound of it – for fear of spilling blood and of possibly causing the death of a Christian – is still a revengeful gesture. Could not only revenge but also revengefulness have been stopped? Had Shakespeare's play proceeded not with the lawyer's refusal of Shylock's belated proposal to settle for money, and the subsequent revengeful long list of punishments, ranging from religious – conversion – to financial, imposed on him by the lawyer; but, to everyone's surprise, including still untouched Antonio, with the latter's sudden bleeding – whether in a saintly manner (along roughly the same area that was pierced by a lance in crucified Jesus' body) or hysterically – at the precise contours of the area specified in the contract, revengefulness on both sides could possibly have been stopped. Untouched Antonio's bleeding at the precise contours of the specified area for the incision would have provided Shylock with the opportunity to take revenge, since he could then have cut the pound of flesh and nothing would have incontestably proven that the spilled blood is from the wounds inflicted by him (in this play where a woman and her maid assume the role of a male lawyer and his subordinate, where Shylock's daughter disguises herself as a man, etc., the blood from an externally inflicted wound in Antonio's side would have been indiscernible from blood seeping psychosomatically or in a saintly manner [from the same area that was pierced by a lance in crucified Jesus' body]). Untouched Antonio's bleeding at the precise contours of the specified area for the incision would have made apparent to all those present, including Shylock and the lawyer, that when pricked Antonio does not bleed *as a result of that*. Such bleeding would have provided Shylock with the opportunity to take revenge while taking away from him the

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revengeful logic of similarity. Would psychosomatic bleeding have stopped the Christian Phalangists, and their accomplice, the Israeli army, from massacring the Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps? *If you tickle us, do we not laugh?* I, for one, don't, and not because I am depressed, but because I find this historical period largely so laughable that were I to start laughing I am afraid I would not be able to stop. I remember how when high on marijuana my ex-girlfriend would giggle virtually at everything on and on. I never had this kind of extended laughter on the few instances I smoked pot. Yet I am sure that were I to start laughing in my normal state of consciousness, my laughter would certainly surpass hers. As for her, there was no danger of her starting laughing and not managing to stop, dying of it: she did not find present-day societies that laughable. All I ask of this world to which I have already given several books is that it become less laughable, so that I would be able to laugh again without dying of it – and that it does this soon, before my somberness becomes second nature. This era has made me somber not only through all the barbarisms and genocides it has perpetuated, but also through being so laughable. Even in this period of the utmost sadness for an Arab in general, and an Iraqi in specific, I fear dying of laughter more than of melancholic suicide, and thus I am more prone to let down my guard when it comes to being sad than to laughing at laughable phenomena. The humorous thinker Nietzsche must have been living in a less laughable age than this one for him to still afford the sublimity of: "To see tragic natures sink and *to be able to laugh at them*, despite the profound understanding, the emotion and the sympathy which one feels – that is divine." In a laughable epoch, even the divinities are not immune to this death from laughter: "With the old gods, they have long since met their end – and truly, they had a fine, merry, divine ending! They did not 'fade away in twilight' – that is a lie! On the contrary: they once – laughed themselves to death! That happened when the most godless saying proceeded from a god himself, the saying: 'There is one God! You shall have no other gods before me!'" (Nietzsche, "Of the Apostates," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).<sup>14</sup> At this point in history, can one still laugh on reading Nietzsche, Beckett, Thomas Bernhard? Has this age not deprived us of a major facet of these works: their humor? Can present-day humorous people still find Richard Foreman's work, or for that matter my early work humorous – without dying of that? All funny people in laughable periods are not humorous enough; to find the most humorous people in such a period one has to look among the serious, who *need* this seriousness not to

expire in laughter. In this respect, I reached a critical point on June 20, 1996. I was standing in a fairly long line at a checkout counter at the Ralphs supermarket on Wilshire and Bundy, Los Angeles. Amidst the many magazines on the adjoining rack, I saw the current issue of *Time*. Its cover story was: "America's 25 Most Influential People." Flipping through the pages to get to the section in question, I was suddenly seized by an apprehension verging on anxiety: that starting to laugh on reading some of the listed names I would not be able to stop, even my aroused seriousness proving this time inadequate to do the job as a defense mechanism. Four months later, I still do not know whether the intense apprehension I felt then was warranted. But from that day on an even more heightened vigilance against starting to laugh has become one of the salient features of my life.<sup>15</sup> *If you poison us, do we not die?* No, we cannot die absolutely from poisoning, whether because we have unfinished business (in a restrained perspective: treacherously murdered King Hamlet; or an extended one: the death and rebirth cycles of Hinayana Buddhism); or because we have become fundamentally liberated from any unfinished business, and now when in life are fully in life, when in death are fully in death, life not leading to death, death not leading to life (Zen Master Dōgen: "It is a mistake to suppose that birth turns into death. Birth is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future ... Death is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future. ... In birth there is nothing but birth and in death there is nothing but death" ["Birth and Death" (*Shōji*)]). Were we only the living, who at some future date simply biologically die and are no more, there would be only the revengeful morality of identification (don't we too cry, laugh, biologically die, etc.?) to prevent us from murdering others and to prevent others from murdering us. What should persuade us against murder is rather that we are mortals, hence already undead even as we live, and that as undead we undergo *every name in history is I*. The question that directly follows the preceding ones from *The Merchant of Venice* is: *and if you wrong us shall we not revenge?* How insightful of Shakespeare to have detected and intimated that such a manner of thinking that dwells on similarity is a revengeful one. It is revengeful neither simply because one can take revenge only on what has senses, affections, etc., i.e., on one who can be affected by the revenge; nor just because revenge is one more similarity (*if we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that* [Act III, scene I]); but as such. Yes, ultimately, every discourse that invokes a fundamental similarity is a revengeful one, is a discourse of

revenge. Nietzsche wrote: "A little revenge is more human than no revenge at all"<sup>16</sup> ("Of the Adder's Bite," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). Wouldn't that be also because humanism (don't we too reason,<sup>17</sup> weep<sup>18</sup> ... ?) is revengeful, regardless of any wrong suffered, and even or especially when it invokes a tolerant coexistence based on a fundamental similarity? And aren't many of the aforementioned manners of saying No to such revengeful questions experiments in evading or undoing the generalized revengefulness around<sup>19</sup> – unfortunately, in some instances failing and resulting in yet other, novel kinds of revenge.<sup>20</sup>

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Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He was born in 1962 in Beirut or Baghdad and died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois. Many of his books, most of which were published by Forthcoming Books, are available for download as PDF files on his website. He was most recently a participant in the Sharjah Biennial 11, the 9th Shanghai Biennale, Documenta 13, *Art in the Auditorium III* (Whitechapel Gallery ...) and *Six Lines of Flight* (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). In 2011, he was a guest of the Artists-in-Berlin Program of the DAAD.

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1  
*Hiroshima Mon Amour*, text by Marguerite Duras for the film by Alain Resnais, translated by Richard Seaver; picture editor: Robert Hughes (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 15–18.

2  
 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright; trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), #125.

3  
 Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, introduction by Rosemary Dinnage; translated and edited by Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), 144–145. From the quote, it looks like Schreber, who, according to Dr. Guido Weber's report of 1899, "thought he was dead" (*ibid.*, 328) and believed that "he is called to redeem the world" (*ibid.*, 333), intuitively attempted to actualize what Antonin Artaud would demand years later: placing man "again, for the last time, on the autopsy table to remake his anatomy.... / Man is sick because he is badly constructed.... / there is nothing more useless than an organ. / When you will have made him a body without organs, / then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions ...." ("To Have Done with the Judgment of God," in Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, edited, and with an introduction, by Susan Sontag; translated from the French by Helen Weaver; notes by Susan Sontag and Don Eric Levine [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 570–571).

4  
 Kathleen Brumm, Matthew Walenski, Frank Haist, Shira L. Robbins, David B. Granet, and Tracy Love, "Functional MRI of a Child with Alice in Wonderland Syndrome During an Episode of Micropsia," *Journal of AAPOS* 14, no. 4 (August 2010): 317–322, see <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2928409/>.

5  
 "Pratyahara," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, see <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/474079/pratyahara>

6  
 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, foreword by Maureen Howard (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 86–87.

7  
 Spinoza, *Complete Works*, translations by Samuel Shirley; edited, with introduction and notes, by Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 267 and 373.

8  
*Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, ed. Kazuaki

Tanahashi; trans. Robert Aitken [et al.] (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 136 and 138.

9  
 Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, 99.

10  
*Ibid.*, 128. While through its incorporation of noise, chance procedures, and screaming, fine experimental music often liberates inhuman forces and sides of the human listener, it is still addressed to a human audience. Orpheus' music was not merely human not only because it liberated inhuman forces and sides of the human listener but also and mainly because it was addressed not only to human ears (in whom it produced a hushing of the interior monologue), but also to animal ears ("and it so came to pass that not from fear / or craftiness were they [animals] so quite then / but to be listening" [Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*]), and even to objects ("Another [of the female Bacchanals], for a weapon, hurls a stone, / Which, by the sound subdu'd as soon as thrown, / Falls at his feet ..." [Ovid's *Metamorphoses*] – "to be listening"). Even more impressive than the hushed silence of the objects was that of *the voices*, which proved sensitive to Orpheus' music. While Orpheus played his music in the underworld, the undead were relieved of the voices that tormented them.

11  
*Ibid.*, 145.

12  
*Ibid.*, 95.

13  
 William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*, ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 208.

14  
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, translated with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1961), 201.

15  
 It is still unclear to me why it was that this apprehension of dying of laughter was triggered in this case and not, say, in response to the news that following the massacre on February 25, 1994, by Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish extremist, of tens of praying Palestinians in the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron (aka, al-Khalil) in the West Bank, a curfew was imposed on the city's Palestinian population of 130,000 rather than on the 450 Israeli Jewish settlers in their midst (arguably to guard against potential reprisals by the Palestinians); or on coming across an article in the *Baltimore Sun* of September 3, 1996, titled, "Saddam Hussein Again Iraq's machinations:

Invasion of Kurdish Zone Must Be Met with U.S. Response,” and a September 28, 1996, article in *Slate* magazine, “The Kurds,” that starts with: “Early this month, the United States bombed Iraq in retaliation for Saddam Hussein’s invasion of the Kurdish city Irbil” (see [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/the\\_gist/1996/09/the\\_kurds.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_gist/1996/09/the_kurds.html)) – as far as I know Erbil was then and still is one of the cities of Iraq.

16  
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, 94.

17  
See Aristotle’s influential definition of man as a rational animal.

18  
“For others too can see, or sleep, / But only human eyes can weep” (Andrew Marvell, “Eyes and Tears”).

19  
Here’s a dialogue from *Sylvie and Bruno*, a book written by an author who could have answered the seemingly rhetorical question, “Have we not dimensions?” with a No, at least during one of his migraine episodes (“Migraine is a well-known cause of visual hallucinations.... Patients who have migraines may experience every variety of hallucinatory image from simple unformed lines and spots to highly complex, formed scenes. Visual distortions, including macropsia and micropsia, may also occur. Such sensory distortions have been called the ‘Alice-in-Wonderland’ syndrome, after the tale by Lewis Carroll who called on his own migraine experiences to describe Alice’s dramatic changes in size” [Jeffrey L. Cummings and Bruce L. Miller, “Visual Hallucinations: Clinical Occurrence and Use in Differential Diagnosis,” *Western Journal of Medicine* 146, no. 1 (January 1987): 47–48, see <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1307180/>): “‘What are you doing there, Bruno?’ I said. ‘Spoiling Sylvie’s garden ... The nasty cross thing – wouldn’t let me go and play this morning – said I must finish my lessons first ... I’ll vex her finely, though!’ ‘Oh, Bruno, you shouldn’t do that!’ I cried. ‘Don’t you know that’s revenge? And revenge is a wicked, cruel, dangerous thing!’ ‘River-edge?’ said Bruno.... ‘No, not river-edge,’ I explained: ‘revenge ... Come! Try to pronounce it, Bruno!’ ... But Bruno ... said he couldn’t; that his mouth wasn’t the right shape for words of that kind.... ‘Well, never mind, my little man! ... I’ll teach you quite a splendid kind of revenge! ... First, we’ll get up all the weeds in her garden. See, there are a good many at this end – quite hiding the flowers.’ ‘But that won’t vex her!’ said Bruno. ‘After that,’ I said, without noticing the

remark, ‘we’ll water this highest bed – up here. You see it’s getting quite dry and dusty.... Then after that ... the walks want sweeping a bit; and I think you might cut down that tall nettle – it’s so close to the garden that it’s quite in the way – ’ ‘What is oo talking about? ... All that won’t vex her a bit!’ ‘Won’t it?’ I said, innocently. ‘Then, after that, suppose we put in some of those coloured pebbles – just to mark the divisions between the different kinds of flowers, you know. That’ll have a very pretty effect.’ Bruno turned round and had another good stare at me. At last there came an odd little twinkle into his eyes, and he said, with quite a new meaning in his voice, ‘That’ll do nicely....’ ‘... and then – what kind of flowers does Sylvie like best?’ ... ‘Violets’ ... ‘There’s a beautiful bed of violets down by the brook – ’ ‘Oh, let’s fetch ’em!’ ...” *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*, with an introduction by Alexander Woollcott; illustrations by John Tenniel et al. (Ware, Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, 2008), 352–353.

20  
Heeding the chapter’s title, “Bruno’s Revenge,” and the symptomatic “At last there came an odd little twinkle into his eyes, and he said, with quite a new meaning in his voice, ‘That’ll do nicely....’” in response to his interlocutor’s “my little man! ... I’ll teach you quite a splendid kind of revenge! ... First, we’ll get up all the weeds in her garden ...” should the quote from *Sylvie and Bruno* be placed here, as an example of a subtler kind of revenge, rather than in the previous footnote as an example of evading or undoing the generalized revengefulness around (the latter interpretation is supported by: “‘Revenge ... Come! Try to pronounce it, Bruno!’ ... But Bruno ... said he couldn’t; that his mouth wasn’t the right shape for words of that kind....”)?

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