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SOURCES OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION. IRRATIONALITY OF RATIONALITY AS A SUBSTRATE

ABSTRACT

This work attempts to reconstruct the culture that contributed to the philosophical way of thinking. My goal is to extract two important factors: religion carrying individual experience and the importance of certain ideas which are present in that culture. Sources of philosophical thinking can be found in the structure of *polis*. Only on its basis could the idea of the wise man and citizen as well as religion-oriented individual experience be raised. Greek polis paves the way for a new style of thinking by creating the conditions for its citizens to follow the ideal, regardless of the position they occupy in society. Sustainability, which should be a feature of a good citizen, is also the essence of society. Highly positioned wisdom as moral reflection tinged with religiosity allows thinking according to the laws of logos. Finally, the experience offered by the mystery cults leads to the transformation of their own existence and the emergence of a way of recognition of reality different than before. Undeniably, all the elements related to structure policies with its ideals contribute to the emergence of a new way of thinking in the form of philosophy. One could say that the philosophical objectivity is preceded by the subjectivity and rationality of its roots dating back to irrationality.

Keywords: irrationalism, divinity, structure *polis*, philosophy, religious experience.

The emergence of philosophy in Ancient Greece is the phenomenon which goes down in history with “golden letters.” Nowadays, there is no doubt that philosophy is a great benefit both as a mode of thinking and as a scientific basis. What becomes problematic when we try to search for the sources of philosophical thinking is the choice of one significant determinant from a number of factors shaping this form of thinking. In my reflections, I refer to the literary output of the acknowledged researchers of the ancient religion and philosophy, such as Károly Kerényi, Werner Jaeger, Walter Burkert, Jean P. Vernant, Eduard Zeller, Martin P. Nilsson, Walter Otto, John Burnet. According to them, it is religion and social transformation which play an important role in the formation of the mentality of the

ancient Greeks. In his monumental work, *Early Greek Philosophy*, John Burnet refers to religion as to the phenomenon which influences the creation of a new style of thinking and which, as speculative thinking, is opposite to mythical thinking. At its very beginning, philosophy means the rejection of religion; in its mythical aspect. The divine epithets which create speculative thought, such as “ageless” and “deathless,” are borrowed from religion. Burnet says: “In its religious sense the word ‘god’ always means first and foremost an object of worship, but already in Homer that has ceased to be its only signification.”¹ Not only does philosophy reject mythical thinking but also the practical use of mathematics, adopted from Egyptians. The intellectual effort of the early Greek philosophers results in the formulation of the theory which, with time, becomes a certain style of life. The views of Zeller and Vernant on the emergence of philosophy seem to be similar. Both the researchers point out that social transformation creates the possibility for speculative thought to emerge. Vernant presents the sources of philosophy in the socio-political context and he thinks that the emergence of *polis* is a decisive factor behind the emergence of philosophy and various forms of religiosity. For Zeller, the religious element is important for the formulation of the theory about the beginning of philosophy. Both the belief in the Olympian gods as well as the cult of Dionysus, which comes from Thrace and becomes very popular in Hellas, is a strong impulse towards thinking according to the laws of *logos*.² Homer’s mythical stories in which too-human gods, as the product of the artistic imagination, must listen to Moira (immutable fate), bring about the conclusions related to the natural law.³ Zeller thinks that Hesiod manages to convince the ancient Greeks that god’s blessing depends on their diligence and mind. In his works, he presents himself as a person who wants to tell people the truth and improve them morally. He stands at the border between two epochs as a forerunner of speculative thought.⁴ The second wing, which enables human thought to soar in order to create philosophical theories, is the cult of the god of life and death, Dionysus. Both his Spirit as well as practice, which are completely new in the Homeric world, meet with a strong opposition but, with time, win for themselves a place among the native gods. The clash between two religious options creates a certain intellectual ferment which develops a new impulse towards thinking.⁵ When reconstructing the fragment of reality, i.e., philosophical thinking at its beginning, we cannot forget about the complex and ambiguous socio-cultural background. My goal is to draw two important factors from this background: religion carrying individual experience and

¹ J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, London 1920, p. 11.

² E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, L. R. Palmer (trans.), New York 1955, pp. 15–23.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 18–21.

the importance of certain ideas present in that culture. The concepts, which are important constituents of philosophical thought, can be formulated on the basis of empiricism. Although the social world *polis* creates the conditions for the formulation of such concepts as immortality, infinity, immutability, eternity, non-complexity etc., it does not generate them by itself. That is why the thesis that philosophical thought is the result of laicization must be false. To approach religion, including the Greek religion, I use the concept of Rudolf Otto. In the centre of every religion there is *numinosum* which cannot be compared to anything known in the existing world. According to Otto, *sacrum* manifests itself in the reality which has a totally different order than the natural reality. Our language can only express things which respond to our sensory experience. Therefore, only through analogy we can express what is beyond that experience, what is outside of it. Religious reality is given to a man in an *a priori* way and, therefore, it can be justified by means of neither the reason nor logical thinking. Therefore, religious irrationality is not an opposite of rationality. It points to sources of its origin different than rational. Only in religious experience the element of irrationality is present, and it leads to the experience of the extraordinary.⁶ The rational elements make this experience absolutely perfect, in accordance with the moral rules. Philosophy as rational thinking is a completely new quality in the culture of the ancient Greeks. It emerges in the BC 7th as an entirely new way of thinking about the world, gods and a man, and it is created thanks to the intellectual atmosphere of *polis*.

THE STRUCTURE OF GREEK *POLIS* AND THE BEGINNING OF MORAL REFLECTION

We agree with Vernant's opinion that the fall of Mycenaean Greece and various types of crises lead to social transformation which, in return, influences the changes in the way of thinking of Hellenes.⁷ When reconstructing the history of Hellenes as well as the archaic and classic epochs, we encounter various phenomena which are an important factor for the emergence of a certain way of thinking about the world and a man. Regal authority gives way to the aristocratic state, which means that the king, the ruler, not only changes the name but also the nature.⁸ Therefore, in view of its functions, power becomes dispersed, which results in various forces existing in the

⁶ Cf. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: an Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* 1923, see: <https://archive.org/details/theideaoftheholyoottouoft>.

⁷ Cf. J. P. Vernant, *The Origin of Greek Thought*, 1984 (1962), Cornell University Press. Hereafter I refer to this work in its 1969 Polish edition; the book has been translated by Jerzy Szacki, pp. 26–52.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

society clashing with one another. The concepts characterising the social order of the 7th century BC are proportion and sustainability. Although the number of aristocrats as well as impoverished people is still considerable, the middle class plays a “moderate” role, introducing balance between two opposites.⁹ Solon, a lawmaker, is a man of “the centre” who turns *polis* into harmonious *cosmos*. In Ancient Greece we deal with a casual chain; factors influence one another, causing reactions and the emergence of new phenomena. Politics undergoes desacralization but, in return, it becomes permeated with moral reflection. *Dike* and *Sophrosyne* come down from Heaven to Earth and choose agora as their seat. They are relevant factors determining the picture of the society. What characterises the middle class (*hoi mesoi*), which counterbalances the forces existing within the society, is the fact that it represents a certain civil ideal. It embodies new values—moderation and sustainability in the society. Although *nomos* includes an element of religion, it is applied to all social strata in order to introduce and regulate the social order. It is the testimony of a certain political “rationality.” Social transformation brings about one more important phenomenon—the attitude towards speech and writing. The structure of *polis*, established between the 8th and 7th century, mainly assumes the dominance of speech over other tools of power. Greeks turn it into the goddess—*Peitho*. It personifies the power of persuasion and the efficiency of words.¹⁰ The language of Greeks conveys more than just information. In his comprehensive work on the concept of *logos*, Krzysztof Narecki points to its rational and declarative value. Before it makes its way to philosophy, in the works of many poets, it means “value, recognition” (Tyrtaeus), “arguments” (Stesichorus and Theognis), “relation, proportion” and “the ability of reasoning and thinking (Theognis) as well as “figure, essence, justification” (Pindar).¹¹ As illustrated with an example of the poets, language, in a sense of *logos*, is rational and, that is why, it can provide right governance. Every rational utterance can be justified, the right arguments can be given. Although it includes an expressive element, it can become admonishment, lesson and even the establishment of guilt, i.e., the sentence. Therefore, it is not surprising that such understanding of speech (*logos*) justifies its didactic character in poetry, whereas in the case of a dispute, it enables to deliver the right judgment. All important issues, which are defined by the ruler, undergo the oratorical process and must be solved through discussion. Therefore, they require the provision of proofs and arguments. “There was thus a close connection, a reciprocal tie, between politics and *logos*. The art of politics became essentially the management of language; and *logos* from the beginning took on an

⁹ Ibidem, p. 70.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 39.

¹¹ K. Narecki, *Logos we wczesnej myśli greckiej* [Logos in the Early Greek Thought], Lublin 1999, p. 50ff.

awareness of itself, of its rules and its effectiveness, through its political function.”¹² A spoken word becomes a political tool and the centre of culture which generates and carries the ideas which promote certain attitudes. In *polis*, a written word fulfils the unveiling function in the same way as the spoken language. It allows truth, which is important to Hellenes, to last. Similar to law, *logos* is regarded as a common good of the society of *polis*. In this intellectual atmosphere, wisdom can take on the objective character addressed to all. Word does not have an objective or common dimension in all spheres. *Logos* of wise men, politicians, poets, playwrights becomes a common legacy of Hellenes, whereas *logos* evinced in mysteries is directed to an individual. In both cases, *logos* has a divine dimension. By spreading divine knowledge, a wise man is a mediator between gods and people. In times of danger, *polis* turns to a wise man perceived as an extraordinary and unique person who has the remedy. The paradox of this phenomenon is expressed by the opposition of elitism and egalitarianism. Knowledge forwarded by a wise man has a common character but, at the same time, it is understandable and directed to only a few. This is a point of contact with the truth revealed in mysteries. Elitism results from the cost that needs to be born for wisdom. Mystery revelation must be hidden from the eyes of many and it can only be revealed to those who spare no effort and participate in rituals. It can be put into words but they will not be understood by everyone. Common *logos*, which reaches the public space, not only requires the transformation of the community members but also discussion. Raised to agora, it becomes an important element which develops the culture of Hellenes. From this point, the rivalry for a victory wreath takes place using the criteria of wisdom. I mean different aspects of wisdom. Not only will it become truth — *theoria* but also truth according to which people should nurture themselves — *praxis*. What elevates a man over others is no longer kingship (as it is the case in the Mycenaean epoch) but wisdom. The economic and socio-political crises contribute to the rise in the importance of wisdom understood as an art of living. The existing order of the world, based on beliefs and certain ideas, comes under criticism. In the situation of chaos and disintegration, the organization of the society needs to be thought over, it needs a new order. The concept of *habrosyne* (excellence), characteristic of wealthy aristocracy, mainly portrays the eastern world. Also, Greek aristocracy of the 7th century shows off their wealth by upholding its supremacy. This, obviously, causes feud, jealousy and, consequently, divisions. Aristocracy becomes rich on land as well as on trade. Therefore, the opposition emerges and it consists of the city and country dwellers. This phenomenon occurs in the Mediterranean countries, in the Phoenician cities, as early as in the 9th century. However, the reaction against the social injustice, result-

¹² J. P. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, op. cit., p. 40.

ing in the change of thinking about growing rich, can only be observed in Greece. It creates a new ideal of citizen who “gains advantages” from moderation. Aristocracy, which upholds its supremacy through self-will and injustice, meets with opposition. The new concept results from the reaction against the excess and the brutality of the rich and it is also promoted by religious groups.

“That way, sects must have contributed to the formation of the new concept of *arete*. The aristocratic virtue was an innate quality, related to the excellence of birth, which revealed itself through the military value and the grandness of lifestyle. In religious groups, not only does *arete* lose its military aspect, but it stands as the opposition to everything that represents the concept of *habrosyne* in its behaviour and sensitivity: a virtue is the result of long and hard asceticism, iron and strict discipline (*mele*); it establishes (*epimeleia*) effective control over itself, ongoing vigil in order to resist the temptation of the ecstasy (*hedone*), the lure of effeminacy and sensuality (*malachia*) and (*tryfe*), in order to make life devoted to effort (*ponos*) a priority.”¹³

The attitude which generates the opposition in the society, as it disturbs the social equilibrium, is eliminated. Wealth poses the risk of lawlessness. Contrary to other goods, it develops the awareness of unlimited power because it never achieves the momentum of its full potential. The essence of wealth is the strive towards accumulating it. As Greeks say it is one of the reasons of misfortune, i.e., *hybris*. Greeks identify it with unlimited desire, a lack of moderation, blindness, insanity. This insanity pushes a man to commit crimes and to uncontrolled aggression which ends up with a catastrophe explained as the gods’ punishment. Greeks believe that *hybris* may have its source in the lack of piety. Such belief is popularized by Aeschylus and Sophocles in the 5th century. In times of crisis, the voice of Wise Men, i.e., poets, playwrights, philosophers and even politicians, counterbalances the ideal of wealthy aristocracy. Writers give inspiration for the formation of the attitudes in *polis*. Solon disapproves of wealth and perceives it as the threat to the morality of citizens. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that borders are a blessing and resisting the desire allows one to avoid the trap of *hybris*. It is clear that such maxims, which are very popular in the society, herald the beginning of the theory which connects the right attitude with cognition. *Hybris*, understood as insanity or even blindness, is the biggest misery. Therefore, we can conclude that only those who can see clear can act in a right way. A man overpowered with *hybris* becomes a doer of despicable and wrongful acts. If what creates a man is money and power, people, together with the society, face the threat of degradation. At this point Theog-

¹³ Ibidem, p. 69.

nis, the poet, is worth quoting: “Those who are the richest, desire twice as much. Wealth, *chremata*, becomes man’s madness, *aphrosyne*.”¹⁴ *Sophrosyne* is the opposite of *aphrosyne*, or *hybris*. Although, in the social life, there are tendencies towards making all citizens equal and all social groups harmonious (as the elements of a whole, i.e., *polis*), in the religious life, regardless the official cult, there is a tendency towards the hierarchization of the members of religious groups. The society of *polis* is divided according to birth, wealth and function. On one hand, we observe the tendency towards eliminating the differences in birth (class), on the other hand, towards reaching a good position in the society which, again, means the emergence of a certain hierarchy according to specific characteristics. Hesiod says that the battle (strife) is good because it brings benefits to mortals. Only people who are equal to one another can compete: Neighbour with a neighbour, carpenter with a carpenter, bagger with a bagger, song writer with a song writer. Rivalry can only happen between people who are equal to one another.¹⁵ The concept of *isonomia* reflects the condition of the society of *polis* where various elements clash and counterbalance one another. *Isonomia* is the expression of the reforms of Cleisthenes.¹⁶ Law is the reason behind the equilibrium of *polis*. All citizens are equal before the law. The society of *polis* is characterized by certain dynamism. Only the best may take up prominent positions. Philosophy, as speculative thought, has its source in Ionia where the belief in the Olympian gods does not have a strong position. Therefore, it would be wrong to look for the beginning of the Ionian teaching in the Homer’s mythology. In Burnet’s opinion, this phenomenon explains the secular character of the earliest natural philosophy. However, he also adds that the Ionian thinkers use divine epithets to define “the fundamental substance” of the world.¹⁷ The fact that the first philosophers do not resort to the religious tradition of Homer does not mean that they fully reject all forms of religiosity. However, we agree with Burnet who thinks that, in the case of the Ionian philosophers, it is curiosity that creates an impulse towards the formulation of various concepts of cosmos, which makes them different from other philosophers who are characterized by a practical aspect; a certain model of life.

In the 6th century BC, secret societies are commonly set up. Desacralization of political life directs the activities of religious groups (the believers of Orphism) towards the extraterrestrial world. A pious man wants to participate in the divine sphere. Orphism is a branch of the Dionysian religion which comes from Thrace. In the Dionysian religion, religious convictions are based on the phenomenon of *ecstasy* taking place “outside the body”

¹⁴ Theognis, in: J. P. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days*, M. L. West (trans.), Oxford, New York 1988, pp. 23–26.

¹⁶ G. Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, Princeton, New Jersey 1996, p. 94ff.

¹⁷ J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 11.

where the soul reveals its true nature. Although it does not result from dual personality, in this religious experience a man must perceive themselves as god who can return home through the system of purification rituals and sacraments.¹⁸ Therefore, the tendency, which is also present in the public space, is revealed—a new hierarchization according to lifestyle or the degree of initiation. According to Adam Krokiewicz, the ritual Orphism comes into existence as early as in the 7th century BC¹⁹ and, from that moment, it inspires literature and philosophy and becomes enriched. Orphics felt longing for super humanity and the reward in heaven. One could achieve those by participating in rituals and by following certain rules. Orphics demonstrate knowledge which is broadened by Pythagoreans who show the connection between unity and greatness.

That way, in philosophical thought, religious *logos* (understood as the content of faith), changes to common and objective *logos*—something that can be discussed. The Orphic theogony coincides with cosmogony unveiling the truth about the relation between unity and greatness.²⁰ In the Orphic mythology, Zeus is the symbol of unity but, right next to him, there is another important god Zagreus—Dionysus who also seems to be the symbol of the relation between unity and greatness. Dismembered by the titans, Zagreus exists as two entities: in the figure of the reborn Dionysus and in the greatness of human souls. Unity is associated with the good and greatness with the bad. On that basis, we can assume an abstract relation between unity, understood as harmony and love, and greatness, understood as rape and disharmony. Good behaviour is influenced by the reward after death as well as by the fear of punishment. Krokiewicz thinks that these fundamental truths have their origin in the Minoan culture.²¹ The mysteries organized in the BC 6th, which offer the purification of souls, have three levels of initiation. Initially, Orphism develops on the periphery of *polis*, which would mean that it is a popular religion among those who struggle with everyday life. Aristocracy absorbs and develops the ideals present in the Homer's poetry. After the fall of the Mycenaean civilization, we can observe the ongoing clash between various social strata; the pursuit of stabilization based on equilibrium and, on the other hand, the dominance of one group over the other. Therefore, the ideals present in one cultural circle, may percolate other circles. That way they become more common; this fact creates the possibility of their transformation and development. A good example of that is the common practice of symposium (characteristic of aristocracy—from the 8th to 6th century BC) which actively influences the collective representa-

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 66.

¹⁹ A. Krokiewicz, *Studia orfickie. Moralność Homera i etyka Hezjoda* [The Orphic Studies. Morality of Homer and the Ethics of Hesiod], vol. II, Warszawa 2000, p. 17.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 418.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 48.

tions.²² Orphic as well as Eleusinian mysteries have a common stem, i.e., the spirit of Dionysus. Inspired by the beliefs of Orphics, philosophers such as Pythagoreans, Eleatics, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras and Plato formulate theories slightly different from the Orphic teaching. Even if the goal is some kind of salvation (as it is in the case of Pythagoreans), its concept is rational. The Orphic dogma is not reflected in the thought of the philosophers. As an example I will use the concept of Parmenides who, on one hand, resorts to the allegory practiced by the believers and, on the other hand, disproves the existence of multiplicity. Pythagoreans adopt and broaden the knowledge of the relation between multiplicity and unity, but what they value the most is getting to know reality. Mathematical studies are incorporated in the teaching on the journey of souls and in the need to live pure on Earth. In the rivalry with the teaching of the philosophers, the Orphic teaching loses its original importance and strength. So popular in the ancient world of *polis*, mystery cults offer a certain type of salvation. They do not offer power or any political function and they do not have any political consequences. Instead, they offer a spiritual transformation thanks to which a man becomes similar to gods. The fate of a participant is unique. They win the blessing in life after death. When the cult is separated from the function it serves in the society, it is easier to notice the spiritual aspect of life. The initiation, *epoptes*, leads to deep internal experience thanks to which a man is convinced that they participate in the life of gods; that they touch the sphere of sacrum. That way, their perspective changes. Initiated, they get rid of the ballast, i.e., life on Earth, because they belong to another world. Mystery cults lead to the transformation of consciousness. Regardless of birth or a position, a man achieves sheer happiness and the promise of immortality; something which, in the past, was only a royal privilege. This means that egalitarianism, with the simultaneous pursuit of elitism, is present in the public as well as religious space. The truth, revealed by a man during mysteries, is not suitable for public display.

“Unlike the transparency of the official cult, the mystery takes on a special religious meaning; it is the religion of a personal salvation which aims at the transformation of an individual (regardless the social order) and at making their rebirth real, which will free them from the ordinary position and let them start entirely different life.”²³

Therefore, we can equate the didactic and wisdom literature with the mystery revelations, as the aim of both is internal transformation. Myths highlight the distance between deity and a man and the dependence of a man on

²² M. Wecowski, *Symposium, czyli wino jako źródło kultury* [Symposium, i.e. Wine as the Origin of Culture], in: Włodzimierz Lengauer, Paweł Majewski, Lech Trzcinkowski, (eds.). *Antropologia antyku greckiego. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów* (The Anthropology of the Greek Antiquity. Inquiries and a Selection of Texts), Warszawa 2011, pp. 399–408.

²³ J. P. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, op. cit., p. 47.

god. The aim of mysteries is to reduce that distance by giving a man a sense of “owning” god or touching the divine sphere. In the area of religion we can observe the tension between monotheism and polytheism. There are many gods, but one of them is superior; often presented as the king of all gods who is the most powerful. Religion is characterized by the coherent anthropomorphism, built on the foundation of the Greek rationalism. The Olympian gods constitute the anthropomorphic congregation of the highest class which resembles aristocracy. Being granted power over a certain area by Zeus, each of them carries out its own project.²⁴ Zeus is very powerful and his strength wins him victory and reign. However, such power over everything seems to go beyond the personal deity. Therefore, there is no coherence and clarity about the way this highest power is called. Together with other gods, Zeus must listen to the orders of Moira, he must “take into account” the Necessity (*Ananke*), which seems to rule the world, and sometimes he should give in to the power of Dike which maintains the order. The anthropomorphism of the Olympian gods leads to the criticism of religion, which gives way to speculative thought.²⁵ Immortality, attributed to gods, does not deplete in its ongoing continuation. Divinity is something more than immortality and the reign over the world. By making reference to the mystical traditions of the East, we can say that divinity is above god, free from all manners, all “how” and all activity.²⁶ Therefore, it cannot be identified with god. Mythical stories, incorporated into the cult, reveal unlimited greatness and the distinctness of deity. Thanks to that, they allow to participate in the initiation which is beyond mortals.

IRRATIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE MYSTERY CULTS

According to Mircea Eliade, Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries as well as Orphism are infinitely complex phenomena. They are of great importance in the religious and cultural history of Greece.²⁷ We cannot marginalize the significance of rites and rituals because, as Otto points out, the most important aspect of the religion of Hellenes are, in fact, various forms of cult.²⁸ Therefore, we cannot separate the myth from the cult because they both reflect the power of god, his nature.²⁹ The arrival of deity, often understood as “breaking normality,” is significant for the rites, as religious experience leads to the transformation of consciousness which often initiates internal

²⁴ M. P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, F. J. Fielden (trans.), Oxford 1949, p. 143.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 169ff.

²⁶ R. Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, Tomasz Dulinski (trans.), Warszawa 2000, p. 24.

²⁷ M. Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes*, K. Kocjan (trans.), Kraków 1997, p. 160.

²⁸ W. F. Otto, *Dionysus. Myth and Cult*, London 1965, pp. 24–25.

²⁹ Ibidem, pp. 71–75.

transformation. Mysteries give a sense of belonging to a certain group of the initiated but, above all, to a different world. In the cult of Dionysus, the transformation of consciousness occurs, as putting oneself into a trance allows one to enter a different state of consciousness. This can strengthen the conviction about the permanence of *psyche*. In his introduction to Eliade's work, Marcin Czerwinski characterizes the phenomenon of ecstasy as follows: "Ecstasy unveils this aspect of sacrum which needs to be called *communio*, the unity with being."³⁰

The history of the Dionysian cult is presented by Karoly Kerényi in his *Dionysus. Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*. The cult of Dionysus comes from Thrace. The reason for Dionysus to enter the congregation of the Greek gods is the crisis in the faith in the Olympian gods. According to Zeller, old popular cults do not meet the current expectations, i.e. the need to experience strong emotions and the necessity to have a personal relation with deity. The social changes bring greater awareness of the transience of all earthy things, which provokes a man to look for supernatural support which ensures safety and consistency among inconsistent things.³¹ Moreover, as Nilsson points out, Dionysus, as an alien god whose cult is in conflict with the national tradition, enriches the religion of Apollo. This is the most convincing proof that the foreign Dionysian religion is very powerful.³² The cult of the god of vegetation is very old and Homer calls Dionysus "the mad god" (*mainomenos*), which refers to the state of his worshipers. During the cult, participants are overwhelmed by madness, also called insanity. It is believed that madness, also called *thyia*, is sent by god. Kerényi thinks that this word can be understood as erotic ecstasy.³³ In the celebration of Dionysus, life and death overlap each other and god, who reveals himself through them, is present not only in the procession or the rituals, but also in his worshipers. "God revealed himself, he was present. Regardless of the form of this presence, it was the parousia of *zoé*."³⁴ The visionary talents of Bacchantes, who present themselves in their bodily shape at the head of the group of worshipers, are very well-known. The maenad excitation is characteristic not only of women, although it is mainly women who put themselves into this particular state. Dionysus, as the god of vegetation and death, is the foundation of the cult of Demeter. The spirit of Dionysus comes from "the immeasurable depth" where life and death are entwined with each other like god himself who brings those two phenomena together.³⁵ There is no life

³⁰ M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia* [Sacrum, Myth, History], A. Tatarkiewicz (trans.), Warszawa 1993, p. 11.

³¹ E. Zeller, *Outlines of the history Greek Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 18.

³² M. P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, p. 194.

³³ K. Kerényi, *Dionysus. Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, I. Kania (trans.), Kraków 1997, p. 158.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 173.

³⁵ W. F. Otto, *Dionysus. Myth and Cult*, op. cit., pp. 177–182.

(*bios*) without death. W. F. Otto sees death as an important factor behind the origin of Dionysus and his presence in this world. This god of contrast, god of life and death, sets an example for his believers.³⁶ It is easy to notice that, through his nature, he connects with Persephone as well as Orphics. The role of the symbols present in this cult is to bring closer the nature of deity, not to explain it. This points to a certain dimension of reality (but is not reality), as the mystery must be experienced, not solved.

Eleusinian mysteries, organized in honour of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone, make participants “see” (*epoptei*) and they also become the residents of “heaven.” Their “dominance” over the rest (non-initiated) lies in “the knowledge.” Those who participate in the cult see reality, which is inaccessible to mortals, with their “internal eye.” Unfortunately, we do not know much about how the mysteries are held, what their course is and, most importantly, what knowledge *epoptei* has. The secret of Eleusinian mysteries is carefully guarded. We do, however, know that during the mysteries the fundamental transformation of consciousness and a certain kind of enlightenment take place. We can only imagine that the essence of the mysteries is to uncover the secret of life and death. Those who participate in sacred rituals can die hoping for better life after death. People become equal to gods and they can say that they belong to the sphere of immortals. Not through the admonishment but through the certainty coming from the inside, acquired during the mysteries. The initiated use the password which is forwarded by Clement of Alexandria: “I have fasted, I have drunk the *kykeon*, I have taken from the *kiste* (‘box’) and after working it have put it back in the *kalathos* (‘open basket’).”³⁷ At this point, it needs to be pointed out that they relate to the Lesser Mysteries (held in spring) which are a necessary condition to allow *misty* to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries (held in autumn). The aim of the rituals is purification and the mysteries begin with the sacrifice of a piglet.³⁸ Only those who are freed from iniquity may experience the blessed vision at the end of the mysteries. The allegorization of nature is also very important. Everything must bring to mind the relation between life and death. The sacrifice of a piglet may symbolize the death of a girl (piglet is an offensive name for vulva).³⁹ On the second day of the Greater Mysteries, a sow is sacrificed as the symbol of Demeter, the goddess of fertility. During the Lesser Mysteries, fasting lasts ten days. It ends on the tenth day with the ritual of drinking *kykeon*, i.e. the mixture of barley, water and mild mint, which is supposed to strengthen

³⁶ Ibidem, pp. 124–132.

³⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* II 1212.

³⁸ K. Kerényi, *Eleusis. Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, Ireneusz Kania (trans.), Kraków 2014, p. 89.

³⁹ L. Kolankiewicz, *Eleusis: oczy szeroko zamknięte* [Eleusis: Eyes Wide Shut], in: *Między teatrem a literaturą* [Between Theatre and Literature], A. Juzwienko, J. Miodek, L. Kolankiewicz (eds.), Wrocław 2004, p. 7.

participants.⁴⁰ One of the rituals is mixing all the objects associated with the genitals of a man and a woman. Those objects, placed in the basket, undergo various rituals and have to be associated with life; its origin. The basket is entwined with a snake, which forms an association with Dionysian mysteries. *Mista* believes that, by manipulating the objects, it can unite with deity. We also know that the experience of great anxiety, accompanied by darkness, is the phase associated with destruction and death. Therefore, sitting on the stool with one's head covered or fasting for a few days serves the purpose of creating the conditions for a man to experience the state of terror and fright. That way a man can experience the state of bliss. In Eleusis, the hierophant shouts at night: "The mistress has given birth to a sacred boy. Brimo has given birth to Brimos! That is, the Strong one to the Strong one."⁴¹ This means that with life there also comes death and danger. Brimo is a dreadful deity, an infernal being similar to Erinyes or the head of Gordon. The world includes an element of evil: chaos and destruction. A single life (*bios*) is endangered by the forces of darkness and destruction. However, life that lasts (*zoé*) manifests itself through death and rebirth. Therefore, the hierophant can prove that death is not evil; it is something good. The rituals lead to the emergence of certain contradictory states. The state of true happiness has to be preceded by fear and uncertainty. The mental state is the dissimulation of death. According to Eliade, initiatory death is the beginning of spiritual life; that way a higher way of being is born.⁴² Going through this phase evokes a contradictory state. Participants believe that it is accompanied by the revelation of the divine secrets. The climax is to see a newly-mown ear of grain, to start a bonfire and to present the lit statue of the goddess.⁴³ What strengthen the experience ("the internal vision") are not the images but certain associations. *Epoptei* should see the goddess in its inside. Fire is associated with the unsuccessful attempt of adopting a man by deity and making them immortal. Only the experience of death may give a man immortality. This is where we encounter the mythical and ritualistic complex and the parallel with the Egyptian rituals. Through their practice, shamans control fire. In order to participate in the spiritual condition, they go beyond the human condition. Mystery participants are also insensitive to external objects and phenomena which might threaten them, as they are filled with "the mythical warmth." The initiation, which they go through, is capable of transforming a man into god. All activities, including passing down some of the mythical stories, serve the purpose of exiting this world towards the extraordinary experience. Duality, and sometimes identity, of mythical figures leads to the transcendental

⁴⁰ K. Kerényi, *Eleusis. Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, p. 225.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

⁴² M. Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴³ K. Kerényi, op. cit., p. 132ff.

sphere.⁴⁴ Therefore, imitating the despair of Demeter in order to become her daughter, strengthens the experience of a different, sometimes ghostlike but surely transcendental, sphere. Divinity may refer to what is unknown in this world: what petrifies and attracts⁴⁵. We can only imagine that the conviction of the initiated that they have the divine origin and a place in the world after death refers to “the understanding” of immortality, eternity and a totally “different” reality given to them through this experience. This allows them to experience the eternal life—*zoé*. Abducted to get married, Persephone, who is associated with death, gives birth to a sacred son. He is the bright star of the mysteries and his birth means coming out of darkness—sudden enlightenment. A newly-mown ear of grain embodies the miracle of existence which always comes out from non-existence. Eleusinian mysteries develop a certain understanding of the nature of reality of the ongoing cycle of birth and death. Only by entering an absolutely different, “divine,” sphere can we see life in its original dimension. Experienced in one flash, a sacred vision has the power to change the entire existence.⁴⁶ The conversion, which becomes a natural consequence of the active participation in mysteries, influences the mentality of Greeks. Burkert excerpts a testimony of one of the participants: “Several dozen years later, the mother of Aeschylus participated with her son in the initiatory rituals of the Dionysus Sabazios, which has been mischievously described by Demosthenes. The initiated finally screamed out: I avoided the evil, I found the better!”⁴⁷ Although the content of the revelations remains a secret, those who “participate in the divine life” can influence the development of philosophical reflection. In philosophy as well as in the mystery cults we witness an attempt to exit the sphere of what is mortal and finite. Myths treat about the events which gods participate in. The stories cannot go beyond a certain time and space. Gods are super humans and their stories (in their form) are not different from the stories of mortals. Everything that exists is finite and everything has the beginning. The religious experience, however, offers different kind of knowledge. The state of “different” consciousness, achieved in rituals, may lead to amenability to a different form of the description of reality. What characterizes the initiated is the certainty of the existence of a different sphere which has been unknown so far. Transition from the darkness into the light seems to be symptomatic. Knowledge is a religious experience and it aims at a certain type of salvation, i.e. blessing in life after death.⁴⁸ Strong emotional experience, which leads to a blissful vision, makes the initiated capable of contemplation.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 193.

⁴⁵ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: an Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, pp. 40–44; 59–67.

⁴⁶ L. Kolankiewicz, *Eleusis: oczy szeroko zamknięte* (Eleusis: eyes wide shut), op. cit., p. 51.

⁴⁷ W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, translated by Krzysztof Bielowski, Kraków 2007, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 68.

IRRATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF RATIONALITY

Only irrationality, understood as something that can be indicated but not explained, may lead to the development of the idea of divinity. Otto rightly points out that the way to gods never begins with theology.⁴⁹ Deity is mainly present in the cult and it is recognized as the sphere totally different from the sphere experienced through our senses. Jaeger proves that the word “*theion*” is present in the philosophical language of the pre-Socratic thinkers. Critias thinks that those who invented religion introduced the idea of deity, literally “introduced deity,” and gave it the features of immortal life and the ability to see and hear with its own mind. This entity has a divine nature, or it rather carries it. A man, who is an inventor of religion, also passes wisdom as they have the knowledge of what is divine. The confirmation of that can be found in the words of Democritus about wise men who, in the past, regarded Zeus as a powerful and omniscient ruler.⁵⁰

Therefore, it is easy to prove that the religious convictions of Hellenes, although unclear and incoherent, are the foundation for philosophical thought. Zeller notices that the religion of Homer and Dionysus as well as individualism (with a moral element of wisdom) offer an explanation for the emergence of Greek philosophy. It is a gift from the Greek nation where understanding and imagination, the rational element and the instinctual force are unambiguous in such a way that they can result in a peculiar phenomenon, i.e., all speculative thinking.⁵¹

It is worth noticing that the religion of the ancient Greeks is not a tool of any doctrine. That is why, the religious revival can inspire philosophy but it cannot engraft any doctrines in it.⁵² Therefore, what becomes the mainstay of the rational structure, i.e., philosophy, is not dogmas but the irrational convictions acquired through the religious experience. As speculative thought, it rejects what is concrete and accidental in favour of what is general and necessary. That is why divinity, as an important element of the world manifesting itself as an absolute “distinctness” through the religious experience, becomes separated from what is individual. If we perceive Zeus or Dionysus as an indefinite and divine power, which is the source of everything that exists, we will be able to describe this divine reality with the objectified language which uses universal concepts. The attempt to present Zeus as an indefinite but the highest god can be found in the utterance of Aeschylus “Ζεὺς, ὅστις ποτ’ ἔστιν (Zeus, whoever he is).”⁵³ Martin P. Nilsson assumes that the anthropomorphism presented by Homer leads to

⁴⁹ W. F. Otto, *Dionysus. Myth and Cult*, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵⁰ W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Jerzy Wocial (trans.), Kraków 2007, p. 69.

⁵¹ E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 22ff.

⁵² J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 67.

⁵³ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, Cambridge 1900, op. cit., p. 161.

a certain criticism of religion and, therefore, to the development of Greek thought. Gods described by Homer only reflect the aristocratic strata. That is why the attempt to establish the ethical border ends with the criticism of anthropological gods.⁵⁴ Myth and ritual, which overlap each other, elbow the way for the third dimension, i.e., philosophical reflection. Because myth is not a way of thinking according to the rules of *logos* and mystery rituals offer a peculiar type of experience, they can be both used to establish the foundation of original and rational thinking. Knowledge acquired through the revelation is neither the result of deduction nor the consequence of the observation of the world. Promotion to the other world, won during the mysteries, offers the possibility to think over the present life. Objects, living beings and various rituals are the expression of divinity in the reality of mortals. However, only through the rituals can mortals change their status, taking their share in divinity. Although inspired by the religious, i.e., mysterious revelations, philosophy does not provide an easy translation of the experience of the initiated. If we cover the religious layer with a cultural and social layer (which is more extensive), we will understand the common drive to internal transformation. The agonistic spirit, which becomes engrafted thanks to the clash between the forces existing in the society and which is also envenomed by the poets, is also expressed on the spiritual level. Therefore, apart from the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries, Orphism becomes a good foundation for spreading the idea of the adequate attitude and taking care of the quality of life. Not only does the Dionysian cult offer the religious experience (mystery cults) but also certain knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the atmosphere of the emergence of the highest ideas an attempt to go beyond the mortal condition (in order to verify present ideas and models) is made. The inclination to parallel with gods and to achieve divinity becomes the subject of reflection which is expressed in literature and philosophy. Taking into consideration the perspective of eternal happiness, it is easy to justify the necessity of reaching for higher values.

Divinity, as an axis of the existing philosophical concepts, is totally different from the things we know from experience. For some, it is unreachable but encompassing everything, for others, it is limited, harmonious and perfect. Religion and philosophy extend the meaning of divinity. Philosophy is not based on experience through the cult but through the intellect and its divine element is mind. However, it is external experience that drives a man to look for the connection with the higher—extrasensory—divine world. The theory of the divine character of the soul and the theory of the (divine) cosmos is a turning point in history. Jaeger presents it in the following way:

⁵⁴ M. P. Nilsson, *A history of Greek religion*, op. cit., pp. 143–170.

“Since Plato and Aristotle, philosophical theology has always complemented its rational proof that God exists by pointing to the reality of the internal experience of deity by the soul; however, the development of this idea is already present in the doctrines and mystery rituals. It is a well-known fact that the Orphic doctrine of the journey of souls is also mentioned by Pythagoras who, in an interesting way, connects it with his mathematical studies. The Pythagorean rule of life reminds us about βίος of the Orphic community. Yet, it is not similar to it in every detail, as Pythagoreans have a lot of individual features. Parmenides, Heraclitus and Empedocles seem to be well-acquainted with the Orphic theory of souls.”⁵⁵

We need to realize that the concept of god is slightly different from the one known in the Homer’s epoch. What characterises divinity is not only the reign over the world (or its parts) but also the ability to encompass everything, life and consciousness. It is an absolute distinctness which has such qualities as unlimitedness and infinity or the eternal undividable existence in its borders. It is enough to mention the concept of Anaximenes in which the air equals divinity. It encompasses everything and it is the source of everything. This is where the things come from and where they come back to. The divine attitude of the world incorporates life and consciousness.⁵⁶ It is possible to notice here the influence of Orphism, as death is nothing else but the comeback to the divine source in order to take a new form. Of course, it does not mean that philosophy is only a tool used to uncover the divine presence in the world. Philosophical reflection is a new theology, totally different from the one present in mythical stories. On the way to find the essence of reality we cannot forget about the genius of an individual which carries a new intuition, *physis*. Gods, or rather divinity, can be understood intuitively because they are the property of that reality. Therefore, philosophers study the structure of the world, trying to find its hidden form by asking questions about its present form. Most importantly, they see the world as a whole. Thanks to this, dark forces, which scare a man, flee under the influence on an intellect. The holistic presentation of the world is a sign of the triumph of the intellect over the world of wild and shapeless forces. This is a totally new perspective of the perception and description of reality. Both in myths and mysteries, the shapeless sphere of “non-existence” (the force of destruction) is present. Even if the philosophers attribute the forces of destruction and destabilization to reality, they will do so to highlight their necessary presence in the creation of this particular type of the nature of the world. This perception of reality takes us in the direction of a deep religious experience coupled with rationality, not in the direction of a myth. The apparition of dark forces disappears thanks to an internal “vision” during the

⁵⁵ W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, op. cit., p. 150.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

mysteries. In philosophy, the secret of divinity and reality is uncovered thanks to an intellect. Looking for a purely logical foundation makes it possible to differentiate, separate and reject wrong theses. On the purely logical basis, Anaximander rejects the assumption of Tales that water can establish the existence of anything that allows things of different shapes, like fire or soil, to exist. Therefore, the beginning must be absolutely different from the things that come out of it. Thanks to the ability to differentiate, we can see the transition from a mythical to a rational way of thinking. What characterizes Anaximander is the distinctness from what there is. Therefore, the beginning of the world must be absolutely different from the present reality. That is why it is referred to as *apeiron*. Aristotle thinks that *apeiron*, i.e., infinity, is divine because it is immortal and indestructible.⁵⁷ The world owes its existence to the rule which can be named and conceptualized, but it doesn't mean that its divinity (distinctiveness) can be taken away from it. Although Burnet thinks that the Ionian philosophy has a secular character. He admits that the fundamental substance of Anaximander, as the beginning and the end of all things, is different because it is infinite. The philosopher creates a certain image of the infinite mass, different from things, which encompasses all cardinal directions without any limits.⁵⁸ Therefore, it seems that this theology, with its rational foundations, is subject to ongoing studies and changes. The introduction of the term "infinity" is very important for the development of philosophical reflection related to cosmos. Not only is *apeiron* its beginning (*arche*) but also its end (*teleute*). A similar thought is expressed in the following Orphic passage: "Zeus is the beginning, the middle and the end." Although religion and philosophy enrich each other, they run on two separate tracks. At this point we need to mention Parmenides. The real wisdom "does not come from this world," the philosopher says, but it is given from the goddess. It is a mysterious vision in the kingdom of light and it is an authentic experience similar to the experience through the mysteries.

"It is a certain experience for which there is no space in the religion of official cults. Its archetype must be looked for in mystery prayers and in initiatory rituals and, because they developed dynamically in the southern Italy in the era of Parmenides, it is possible that it is where the philosopher first encounters them."⁵⁹

Parmenides adopts certain forms from religion and introduces them into philosophy. His existence is absolutely different from any reality known to a man. But it is not a certain kind of ritual that underlies the revealed Truth.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Physics* III, 4, 203b6, in: *Protrepticus. Physics*, Kazimierz Lesniak (trans.), Warszawa 2010.

⁵⁸ J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁹ W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, p. 157.

The reason requires a certain logical coherence which leads to the criticism of human knowledge—merging existence with non-existence. Parmenides does not know that formal logic can be used as a tool of rational thinking. However, the logical necessity leads to the understanding of existence. The philosopher “becomes aware of” things that exist, i.e., “Being.” On the strength of this realization, he places within brackets the universe of human experience. Similarly to Hesiod, he announces this extraordinary “revelation.” “Being” cannot be the same as we see it with our senses—it must be totally different. He does not equal “Being” with God. He only uncovers the secret of the existence which is totally different from what our senses perceive. Therefore, a religious element refers to the way the Truth is revealed—by having your eyes closed to the external world and not by categorizing the problem as divine. What creates the connection between the Greek mind and divinity is the fact that Being which, through its characteristics (eternally permanent One, a limited ball similar to light), is perfect.⁶⁰

SUMMARY

It is not possible to discuss all ancient philosophical concepts, even if we only select the thoughts of the Pre-Socratics. On the example of Parmenides and Anaximander, I only presented a new way of thinking about reality with similarities, or rather elements which are also present in religion. Because philosophical reflection is fairly well-known, I would like to draw up a scheme which presents the way reality is perceived. The answer to the question about the origin of philosophical thinking will not be complete if we only make reference to the political and social sphere of those times or to the ideas present in myths and moral reflection. The irrational elements, which establish the foundation for a new, rational thought, also result from the participation in mysteries. The religious elements may create a certain impulse to describe the essence of *physis*. Thinking according to *logos* becomes both the tool and the essence of revealing things that go beyond the senses. To sum up, the following needs to be assumed: mystery cults are an important source of philosophical thinking. We need to remember, however, that only in the womb of *polis* can the idea of a wise man and a citizen as well as the religion-oriented individual experience be born. Greek *polis* paves the way for a new style of thinking by creating the right conditions for its citizens to follow the ideal, regardless the position they occupy in the society. Sustainability, which should characterize a good citizen, is also the essence of the society. Highly valued wisdom, as moral reflection tinged with religiosity, allows to popularize speculative thinking. Finally, the experience

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 171.

offered by the mystery cults leads to the transformation of the existence and the emergence of a different perception of reality. Undeniably, all presented elements related to the structure of *polis* (together with its ideals) create a new style of thinking in the form of philosophy. The relation between a social factor and a cosmological factor is mutual. Philosophy makes use of the social factor which presents itself as the cosmic order. Therefore, we can assume that the philosophical objectivity is preceded by subjectivity and that rationality has its roots in irrationality.

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**ZRÓDŁA FILOZOFICZNEJ REFLEKSJI.
IRRACJONALNOŚĆ RACJONALNOŚCI JAKO PODŁOŻE**

STRESZCZENIE

Praca ta bierze sobie za cel rekonstrukcję kultury, która przyczyniła się do powstania filozoficznego namysłu. Moim celem jest podkreślenie dwóch ważnych czynników: religii, przenoszącej doświadczenia osobiste oraz wagę pewnych idei zawartych w tej kulturze. Źródła myślenia filozoficznego można dopatrywać się w strukturze *polis*. Jedyne na jej podstawie mogły powstać idee mądrego człowieka i obywatela jak i religijnie zorientowanej jednostki ludzkiej. Greckie polis przeciera szlak nowego stylu w myśleniu poprzez tworzenie dla obywateli warunków do podążania za ideałem niezależnie od zajmowanej w społeczeństwie pozycji. Wysoka pozycja wiedzy jako moralnej refleksji zespolonej z religijnością pozwala na myślenie według praw logosu. W końcu, doświadczenie oferowane przez kultury misteryjne prowadzi do transformacji własnej egzystencji i powstania innego niż wcześniej sposobu rozpoznawania rzeczywistości. Bez wątpienia, wszystkie elementy powiązane ze strukturą polis wraz z ich wartościami prowadzą do powstania nowego sposobu refleksji w formie filozofii. Można powiedzieć, że filozoficzna obiektywność jest poprzedzona subiektywnością, a korzenie racjonalności sięgają irracjonalności.

Słowa kluczowe: irracjonalność, bóstwo, struktura *polis*, filozofia, doświadczenie religijne.

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