

# Philosophy Department Newsletter

**Fall, 2014**

**Spring, 2014 Graduation!**



Pictured above at UVM's College of Arts and Sciences 2014 graduation ceremony, from left to right: Cara Corcoran, Connor Burns, Daniel Davis, Benjamin Beaudoin, Dana Kamencik, Ian Martel, Lindsay Whittaker, Nicolas Kauffman, Amanda McNamara, Maxwell Olarsch, and David Travis. Also graduating but not pictured are Gina Blacutt, Elisha Gale, Jordan Jensen, Vladimir Lermant, Jonathan Massaro, Natasha Sprengers-Levine, Ian Straus, and Finn Westbrook. Congratulations to all!

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## **The UVM Philosophy Newsletter Returns!**

We're excited to be back with our second departmental newsletter! We're gradually creating a UVM philosophy 'community' that spans the globe, but we'd also like to keep building the community. So if you have something interesting to share, please send it to us. Or possibly you have suggestions for future newsletter pieces. Or maybe you'd like to share your own philosophical arguments.

Besides our newsletter, we now have a UVM Philosophy Department Facebook page, so come follow us on Facebook! You'll hear the latest news and see many more photos. To find our page, log on to Facebook and search for 'UVM Philosophy Department'. All suggestions, criticisms, and other comments or contributions can be sent to: [Mark.Moyer@uvm.edu](mailto:Mark.Moyer@uvm.edu)

## Awards and Honors



Philosophy major **Samantha Berthelette** was awarded \$5,000 as a Brennan Scholar to perform research under the mentorship of Professor Louis deRosset. Her research focuses on the potential legal implications of neuroscientific advances that could affect agency and responsibility. As part of her award, she travelled to the University of San Francisco to meet with Professor Manuel Vargas in August. She plans to develop this research into her honors thesis.



Philosophy major **Ian Martel** was awarded the Philosophy Department John Dewey Prize with an award of \$900.00. Each year the Dewey Prize is awarded to the top philosophy student.

We're quite excited to hear that **Peter Zipparo**, who won the John Dewey Prize in 2011, and **Paul Gross**, who won the John Dewey Prize in 2012, have been accepted to Harvard Law School. They will be starting law school this fall.



Professor **Terence Cuneo** was appointed the Marsh Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy, a position previously held by Professor William Mann but vacant since his retirement in 2010.

Professor **Terence Cuneo** was promoted to full professor in 2012 and therefore gave a Full Professor Lecture in spring. His talk was titled, "Non-causal Normative Explanations".

Professor **Terence Cuneo**, together with Russ Shaffer-Landau (University of Wisconsin—Madison), received a \$48k grant from the Science Beyond Scientism project, sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation.

Graduating philosophy majors **Ian Martel**, **Lindsay Whittaker**, and **David Travis** were elected to the national honor society Phi Beta Kappa.

Two graduating seniors successfully defended their honors theses. **Ian Strauss's** thesis title is "Incongruity Theory and the Explanatory Limits of Reason", and **Connor Burns' thesis** title is "Intuition Reliability".



Professor **Tyler Doggett** and Amy Trubek (Nutrition and Food Science department), won a grant from the College of Arts and Sciences to develop an upper level interdisciplinary course studying the ethics of food worker treatment, the ethics of organic farming, and the ethics of various hunger relief programs.

This year the John Dewey Memorial Lecture was delivered by **Dr. John Perry**, the Henry Waldgrave Stuart Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus at Stanford University and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of California-Riverside. His talk was titled "On Being Me". **Debra Satz**, the Marta Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society, the senior associate dean for the humanities and arts at Stanford University, and the director of the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society, delivered the D.R. Brown Memorial Lecture (co-sponsored with the Department of Political Science). The title of her talk was "Markets and Corruption".

## Our Two New Professors!

This year we are thrilled to have Kate Nolfi joining us as a new faculty member. She recently completed her Ph.D. at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,



writing her dissertation on the nature of epistemic norms (rules specifying which beliefs are rational to have, given your evidence). Kate explored why some evidence makes certain things rational, or more rational, to believe and not others. The usual line is that what makes it rational to

believe some things rather than others, in some circumstance, is that belief aims at truth, and thus it is because the former beliefs are more probably true, given the evidence, that they are rational to believe. Kate, however, argues that this leaves unexplained *why* we should aim at truth; she argues that we can

therefore explain the normativity of belief only if we incorporate the action-guiding nature of beliefs. In addition to her dissertation, Kate already has three articles published.

Kate has moved up to Burlington with her partner, Eugene, and her horse, Emily Bug. Eugene works at the intersection of design and education and will also be starting a position at UVM this fall. They're both excited to be returning to the northeast, where they spent their college years, and to be moving into an apartment where they can (finally!) adopt a dog. Kate has been horseback riding competitively since she was a child - as an equitation rider and then as a show jumper. In the last year or so, she has started eventing. She says it's been much fun to learn all about another corner of the world of equestrian sports and she's looking forward to continuing her eventing career once she and Emily Bug are both settled in Vermont. Welcome, Kate, Eugene, and Emily Bug!

The philosophy department is also excited to have Mark Budolfson joining the department. Mark received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 2012, was a doc-



toral fellow at the Center for the Philosophy of Freedom at University of Arizona 2011-2012, was a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Ethics in Society at Stanford University 2012-2014, and is now starting a position as a postdoctoral research associate at the Center for Human Values at

Princeton University. Because of the Princeton position, Mark will join us at UVM in 2015 or possibly

2016. However, he will be visiting UVM over the coming year occasionally to become better acquainted with Vermont and UVM.

Mark works on interdisciplinary issues at the interface of ethics and public policy, especially in connection with collective action problems such as climate change and other dilemmas that arise in connection with common resources and public goods. Other current research areas include epistemology, the nature of normativity, the legitimacy of international institutions, food ethics and politics, and environmental philosophy. He has already amassed an impressive list of publications, as well as winning an award for excellence in teaching while teaching at Arizona State University. His hire was a cooperative effort by the UVM Food Systems Initiative and the philosophy department.



## A Visit With Two Alumni



Eric Lipton, Class of '87

Eric Lipton majored in philosophy at UVM and graduated in 1987. While working as a reporter in Connecticut for the Hartford Courant, he investigated and co-wrote a series of articles about what had gone awry in the manufacture of the Hubble Telescope, which earned him the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Journalism in 1992. Since 1999 Eric has been with the New York Times—first based in New York covering the last years of the Giuliani administration and the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and now in Washington, D.C. where he has recently been investigating issues arising in connection with lobbying and corruption.

He is the co-author of *City in the Sky: The Rise and Fall of the World Trade Center*.

Arthur Kuflik: Hi Eric— It's been many years since you were here at UVM majoring in philosophy. As you can imagine—philosophy professors sometimes like to say something like this—'The study of philosophy helps people to think more carefully and to communicate more clearly.' As you see it now, is there any truth in this?"

Eric Lipton: In my case, there is a very good and simple answer. I can say that I would not be able to do the work I have been doing, if I hadn't been a philosophy major. My ability to start with a document, or with someone's spoken statement—engage with it, question it, clarify it, critique it—was developed and strengthened by the way I was taught philosophy.

A.K.: How so?

Eric Lipton: By the way our philosophy teachers at UVM would get us to keep digging more deeply—to grapple with an issue and to work through the related texts with especially close and critical attention. And the same is true with respect to the investigative reporting and analysis that I do in my profession. I engage with the materials as thoroughly and critically as I can, until, in a manner of speaking, I can feel that I have come to "own" what's at issue—to appropriate it as my area of expertise.

A.K.: So your study of philosophy back then has had a lot to do with the habits and skills that have made you an effective and respected investigative reporter for a first-rate newspaper?

Eric Lipton: It has had an enormous influence on me and helps me every day in what I do.

A.K.: As the years go by, it seems that even people who majored in philosophy and did very well at it, might have difficulty recalling in detail all they had read and discussed. What do you make of that?

Eric Lipton: To whatever extent that might be true, it is also true that the serious study of philosophy has equipped me, and I believe others as well, with analytical and critical skills needed to work through complex issues of any sort, whether they be philosophical in nature or not.

A.K.: As I recall, you also have a keen interest in fine art. Leaving all those political controversies aside, Washington does have some great art museums. Do you ever get the time to go to them?

Eric Lipton: Yes. Washington does have some great museums. But my wife and I have two young children. Not much time left to stroll around the art galleries nowadays.



Tara Wood, Class of '97

Tara Wood double-majored—in Philosophy and in Art. She received her B.A. from UVM in 1997. After completing graduate studies in Architecture at the University of South Florida, Tara settled in the St. Petersburg-Tampa Bay area where she currently serves as Designer and Project Manager for the firm of Wannemacher Jensen Architects. Included among her design and planning projects are--- the Largo Community Center (certified by the U.S. Green Building Council for Leadership in Energy and Environment, the Ford Amphitheater Soundwall, several sustainable-

energy-plant projects, and, currently, two shelters for women and children in need. In addition, Tara co-owns, with her husband, the Cycle Brewery in St. Petersburg, Florida-- whose structure Tara also designed.

Arthur Kuflik: Hi, Tara. I know you enjoyed your philosophical studies back in the mid-1990's. You are now a practicing architect. What perspective on philosophy can you offer today's students here at UVM?

Tara Wood: Actually, my having majored in philosophy – and my continuing interest in philosophical thought — has been incredibly helpful to me both in my architectural studies and in the professional work I have done since then.

A.K.: That's truly great to hear, but how so?

Tara Wood: When I got to architecture school, I found that most of my colleagues had majored in engineering or in (undergraduate level)

architecture. Of course, they had worked hard to absorb the technical materials that were taught to them. But they had little or no experience thinking in broader conceptual terms and they weren't very accustomed to analytical or critical thought.

A.K.: How does that sort of thinking play a role in architectural design?

Tara Wood: As an architect, you need to analyze what needs or purposes the project is intended to serve, and conceptualize various ways of prioritizing and meeting those needs. At the same time, what is built must also be in compliance with various codes — not only having to do with construction but also, for example, with environmental protection and with zoning. Such codes are not always written very clearly or accessibly. My ability to read and to decipher them, to raise appropriate questions about what they mean, has a lot to do with the work I did in philosophy — reading and interpreting still more difficult and demanding philosophical texts, whether Kant or Heidegger, Nagel or Chalmers. And the same could be said about what it takes to write up a project proposal or to provide a progress report. The skills we honed as students of philosophy have a lot to do with being able to do the kind of work I do now in the way I believe it needs to be done.

A.K.: On a lighter note, I also understand that you co-own, with your husband, a brewery you designed.

Tara Wood: Yes, the Cycle Brewery in St. Petersburg, Florida. I designed it and he manages it.

A.K.: Well, OK then— one last question — Is there a brewery in Vermont you especially like?

Tara Wood: Yes, the Hill Farmstead Brewery in Greensboro, Vermont!

# FOOD & PHILOSOPHY

You might remember your philosophy professors encouraging you not to start papers by saying “For thousands of years, philosophers have wondered...” But it really is true that for thousands of years, philosophers have wondered whether it is morally permissible to kill animals for food, whether it is permissible to even raise them for food, and whether it is permissible to eat them. Starting in the early 1970s with work by philosopher Peter Singer, interest in these questions intensified. But still more recently philosophers have become interested in other questions relating food and ethics, questions about the ethics of consumer behavior, about complicity, about organic agriculture, the treatment of farm workers, and local food, just to name a few. Together, such issues have become a new hot topic in philosophy. The philosophy department at UVM is one of the leading departments in the world in this area both in expertise and extent of involvement. What follows are some of the many activities going on in the department relating food and philosophy.

## Books

**Tyler Doggett**, together with Andy Egan (Rutgers) and Anne Barnhill (Penn), is editing an anthology on food ethics. The anthology will be published by Oxford University Press as one of their Oxford Handbooks. These collections offer authoritative and up-to-date surveys of original research in a particular subject area. Essays are specially commissioned from leading figures in the discipline to give critical examinations of the progress and direction of debates, as well as a foundation for future research.

**Tyler**, again with Andy and Anne, are also publishing a textbook with Oxford University Press. The book anthologizes popular and more academic work on food ethics and will have chapter overviews provided by Tyler, Andy, and Anne.

**Terence Cuneo**, together with Andrew Chignell (Cornell) and Matthew Halteman (Calvin College), is editing a collection of new essays on the ethics of eating. The new book, to be published by Routledge, is titled *Philosophers Come to Dinner*. Its essays treat a variety of issues that matter to a lot of people, including the ethical permissibility of eating meat, the environmental impact of following a vegan diet, and the ethical dimensions of eating locally raised food. Three UVM philosophers — **Mark Budolfson**, **Terence Cuneo**, and **Tyler Doggett** — contribute essays.

## Conferences

In both 2013 and 2014 **Tyler Doggett** has organized food ethics conferences at UVM gathering scholars from schools such as Cornell, Penn, Princeton, McGill, and Dartmouth. Attending the conference were not only philosophy faculty, but also philosophy undergraduates and graduate students and other faculty working on food systems. Tyler hopes to continue the conference annually.

**Terence Cuneo** participated in the summer, 2009 faculty seminar sponsored by the Honors College titled “Food Systems.” The seminar considered a systems approach to understanding all aspects of food, from its production and transportation to what we think makes a healthy meal. The seminar also examined the structure of the contemporary food system with a focus on Vermont.

## Classes

**Kate Nolfi**, **Terence Cuneo**, and **Tyler Doggett** include issues relating food and ethics in their introductory philosophy courses. For several years Tyler has taught an introductory philosophy course titled “The Ethics of Eating,” which tries to give a careful examination of arguments for and against going vegetarian, eating local, going organic, etc. Tyler has also co-taught an upper level course with Anne Barnhill, examining the ethics of food worker treatment, the ethics of organic farming, and the ethics of various hunger relief programs.



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals

The course readings were integrated with field trips relating to those readings.

## University Involvement

The interest in food ethics is part of a broader, university-wide involvement in food systems. In 2009, the University of Vermont embarked upon an unprecedented University-wide conversation — the Transdisciplinary Research Initiative, or TRI — to strategically advance our national role as a premier small research university. Three Initiatives were identified in 2010: Complex Systems, Food Systems, and Neuroscience, Behavior and Health. UVM's Food Systems Initiative is a cross-campus, transdisciplinary effort to promote research, teaching, and outreach on the most pressing agricultural and food issues of today. Some of the conferences mentioned, as well as the hiring of Mark Budolfson, are partially funded by this university-wide initiative.

# What's Wrong With Common Sense?

by Mark Moyer

Within contemporary metaphysics, those who study the existence and nature of material objects generally fall into one of three broad camps. There is the permissive camp that holds the implausible sounding view that besides tables and chairs, plants and people, electrons and galaxies, and other such familiar objects, there are a plenitude of objects we never talk about, most with strange boundaries in space and time. Your nose and the Eiffel Tower together form one such object, they claim. As an even stranger example, they say there are incars, objects that exist whenever a car is inside a garage. When a car is fully inside a garage, an incar also exists occupying the exact same space as the car. When a car is partially inside a garage, however, the incar occupies the exact same space as that portion of the car that is inside the garage. So when a car enters a garage, an incar comes into existence and grows in size until it's the size of the car, and when a car leaves a garage, the incar shrinks in size correspondingly.

At the opposite extreme is the eliminativist camp, which holds an equally surprising view. Eliminativists hold that such strange things do not exist, but, they maintain, neither do tables, planets, people, and all the other familiar objects. One common version of eliminativism says that all that exists are the smallest constituents of matter, perhaps quarks, and nothing larger is composed of these.

And, finally, the common sense camp holds that tables, people, and the other objects we commonly talk about do exist, but not the exotic objects of the permissivist camp. What is surprising is that among metaphysicians the common sense camp is the least popular of the three views canvassed. Why? Because various arguments convince them that the common sense view is unprincipled or, worse, simply inconsistent.

## *An Argument Against Common Sense*

One main strand underlying these debates concerns the spatial and temporal extent of objects. Many holding the common sense view, for example, insist that for two things to compose a larger thing, they must be connected: an object must be composed of a single contiguous quantity of matter. That is one reason why, insists common sense, your nose and a tower don't together make up a larger object. Or consider how an object's spatial extent changes across time. Incars don't exist, they insist, because such things would change shape and size even though none of their constituent matter has changed at all. Nothing about the car itself changes as it enters the garage, so how can part of it constitute an object at one time and a larger part compose that same object at a later time?

The problem with such common sense responses, however, is that ordinary objects have spatial and temporal extensions that are every bit as odd and unprincipled as those the permissivist camp countenances. Chess sets, constellations, and art collections consist of pieces of matter quite separated in space. And islands change size simply by the relative location of the surrounding water. As the seas rise, the island shrinks, and if it rises far enough, the island ceases to exist. So there does not seem to be any principled account of when matter composes an object that will include the objects of common sense and yet exclude

the exotic objects of the permissive view. That is why so many philosophers have rejected the common sense view in favor of permissivism or eliminativism.

## *Defending Common Sense?*

E.J. Lowe and Dan Korman, however, argue that this criticism of the common sense view is off the mark. They hold that objects cannot have the strange identity conditions of incars. Nothing can grow or shrink in virtue of the change in location of what surrounds the object. But what, then, of islands? As they see it, our talk of an 'island' should be seen as referring to the mountain, something that protrudes from the sea floor but doesn't change size with water level or cease to exist when submerged. While the word 'island' refers to the mountain, this is so only during a phase of the mountain's career, much as 'girl' is a term we use to refer to a person, but only during childhood. A girl does not cease to exist when she grows up; rather, she — the person — merely ceases to be a girl. Similarly, runs the line of thought, an island doesn't cease to exist when permanently submerged, but it — the mountain — simply ceases to be an island. If this account works, perhaps it is safe, once again, to endorse a common sense ontology.

Unfortunately, the line of reasoning fails. To begin, 'island' simply can't refer to the mountain. It is a commonplace that islands shrink and grow as the water level changes and that they cease to exist when permanently submerged. Lowe and Korman's hypothesis conflicts with the common sense it's designed to save. Moreover, talk of 'an island' can't be talk of a mountain since a mountain often constitutes many islands and flatter islands aren't constituted by mountains or even hills.

Why think 'island' refers to a mountain? Lowe and Korman note that some things we say about islands can only make sense if in fact we're referring to the mountain and not to something that shrinks as the seas rise or that exists only when protruding above the water level. For example, we might say that an island that a millennium ago towered high above the seas now lies far beneath the surface and that its shape has altered very little in that time. We wouldn't say that it now lies anywhere or has any shape if we thought it ceased to exist when it sank below the water. However, this point shows little since we say comparable things of other ordinary objects that Lowe and Korman do accept. People say such things as that their gold ring was once an amorphous nugget lying on the bottom of the river or that they themselves will some day lie in a grave being eaten by worms. We usually think the ring was crafted, and came into existence, when it was given the ring shape. And we usually think a person 'is no more', that they cease to exist, once they die. But we do occasionally talk as if the ring existed before it was formed and as if a person exists after they die. So even the common sense camp must agree that we sometimes use sort-specifying terms as if to talk about objects of different sorts. It seems, then, that the word 'ring' can, given the right context, be used to talk about the piece of gold constituting the ring, and the word 'I' can be used to talk about one's body. With this sort of explanation we can explain both a)

continued on page 7 . . .



## The Department Chair — A Thankless Task

Being the chair of the department requires a lot of work and typically earns you little thanks but much criticism. As is common in other departments, professors in the philosophy department would prefer that someone else take over the administrative burdens of being chair.



Professor Don Loeb

In 2010, the chair, William Mann, retired. The preceding years had seen the departure of Derk Pereboom (to Cornell), David Christensen (to Brown) and, earlier, Hilary Kornblith (to University of Massachusetts, Amherst). Their departure left the department with no full professors, which is usually what is wanted to be chair. Because somebody needed to do the job, Don Loeb stepped forward to serve as chair.

Chairs do a variety of things that go unnoticed. They attend various college meetings representing the department, manage the department budget, handle cases in which any unusual academic problems arise, fill out a pile of paperwork, schedule classes, and so forth for *many* other tasks.

Some tasks arise in addressing new problems. In the past, introductory philosophy courses caused confusion because there were different courses, with different numbers, that *we* treated as if they are the same course: a student cannot receive credit for more than one such course. As chair, Don helped bring some clarity to the course list by overseeing the process that changed all these courses over to having the same course number, even if their titles vary. It was also under Don's tenure that the requirements for being a philosophy major and minor were modified and, more significantly, that the college math requirement (every student in the College

of Arts & Sciences must demonstrate a certain level of mathematical ability, typically by taking a math or statistics course) was changed so that our logic course would also satisfy that requirement. As a final example of the chair's work, the paperwork involved in faculty re-appointment and tenure cases is quite onerous,

both on the faculty member and on the chair. The rules for such cases are confusing and located in various documents. Don was meticulous in handling these cases, going to great lengths to ensure that each faculty member was fairly represented.

In 2013, Louis deRosset began his stint as chair. One problem the department has been facing (Don was one voicing concerns) is a gender imbalance in upper level philosophy courses. The ratio



Professor Louis deRosset

of males to females in introductory philosophy courses is roughly 1 to 1, but in mid-level courses, and more so in upper level courses, there are significantly fewer females. This is a problem facing many philosophy departments, and yet nobody seems to have a clear understanding of what's causing the imbalance or how we can remedy it. Louis charged a committee to investigate the problem. The committee has reported back with initial suggestions, and as a result professors have now altered their courses as well as their teaching styles. The committee will continue to investigate the problem and monitor the department's progress.

This is a sample of only some of the chair's work, most of which those outside the department and even those inside seldom appreciate. So perhaps this is a good opportunity to say "Thank you, Don and Louis!"

*"Common Sense" . . . continued from page 6*

why we sometimes talk of islands as if they continue to exist when permanently submerged and they maintain their size and shape despite changes in water level — we're referring to the mountain — and b) why we usually talk of islands as if they do cease to exist when permanently submerged and as if they do change size with changes in water level — we're referring to something that isn't the mountain and yet is constituted by it. Lowe and Korman can explain the former, but it seems they can't explain the latter.

Islands are used to illustrate how everyday objects often have strange persistence conditions, for example growing and shrinking with the changing relative location of something else. Lowe and Korman are trying to deny that there are things with such strange persistence conditions. But there are other things we commonly talk about with equally strange persistence conditions, and it seems that the considerations Lowe and Korman raise don't carry over so well to these other things. Caves, e.g., change their size based upon the surrounding matter; if the dirt or rock at the entrance erodes, the cave shrinks correspondingly. If the word 'island' actually refers to the underlying mountain, what would the word 'cave' refer to? Driveways lengthen when we reduce the street's width on the side of the driveway everywhere except where contiguous with the driveway. Driveways

shorten when we add to the width of the street. What would 'driveway' refer to on their account? As Peter van Inwagen impressed upon philosophers with *Material Beings* in 1990, prospects look dim indeed for finding a principle of composition that includes ordinary objects yet excludes all else.

Stepping back, notice how a debate about the world, in this case about what exists, has become more and more a debate about how our words refer, what makes a claim true, and other such linguistic facts. This 'linguistic turn' has transformed much of philosophy, but especially metaphysics where it has motivated a deflationary view of metaphysics. Simply in virtue of what our words mean, say some, we can see that if there is some clay that has been formed into a cup-like shape and fired in a kiln and used for drinking, then a cup has come into existence. And simply in virtue of what it is to be an 'incar' we can see that if there is a car partially inside a garage, then an incar must exist. So, they say, once we've established the facts about the underlying constituent matter, additional issues about which composite objects exist are trivial, shallow matters. You can, as it were, infer metaphysical conclusions from linguistic premises. While abstract questions about what exists are thus in many ways like what one finds since the time of Aristotle, the even greater focus on the role our language has brought a new twist to perennial debates about whether such questions are substantial.



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Your donation to the department is invaluable and deeply appreciated. We gratefully accept donations in any amount, including matched gifts, deferred gifts, and other gift-planning vehicles, which can often make more substantial gifts possible. Contributions can be made online at <https://alumni.uvm.edu/giving/> Scroll down, choose “Other”, and type in “Department of Philosophy”. For more information, please contact the philosophy department at (802) 656-4042.

### **Don't Miss Our Newsletters!**

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