AUGUSTINE relates in *Confessions* 3.4.7 that around the age of eighteen he was permanently converted to a passionate and lifelong love of Wisdom by reading Cicero’s dialogue, the *Hortensius*. In this dialogue, modeled after Aristotle’s work, *Protrepticus*, Cicero applies all his eloquence and rhetorical skills to exhort his fellow Romans to the study of Greek philosophy. Unfortunately the *Hortensius* is also a lost work, but we have approximately 103 fragments. These were collected by H. Mueller, and
have been translated into Italian, French and German. As far as I know, no similar translation in English exists. However many of the fragments are found in well known works by Cicero, St. Augustine and Lactantius that are available in English. These are supplied below.

Following these a list of additional passages from Cicero’s works that have related content (and, at least hypothetically, could have been included in his  *Hortensius*) are shown.

As Cicero evidently consulted (among other sources) Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*, anything in the latter could potentially have appeared in the *Hortensius* and caught Augustine’s notice. Readers are in any case encouraged to consult Ross (see Bibliography) for a collection of existing *Protrepticus* fragments.

**Hortensius Fragments**

**Mueller 1. Cicero. *De divinitione* 2 1.1**

AFTER serious and long continued reflection as to how I might do good to as many people as possible and thereby prevent any interruption of my service to the State, no better plan occurred to me than to conduct my fellow-citizens in the ways of the noblest learning — and this, I believe, I have already accomplished through my numerous books. For example, in my work entitled *Hortensius*, I appealed as earnestly as I could for the study of philosophy. And in my *Academics*, in four volumes, I set forth the philosophic system which I thought least arrogant, and at the same time most consistent and refined. (Falconer, p. 371)

**Mueller 2. Cicero, *De finibus* 1.1.2**

To all of these objections I suppose I ought to make some brief reply. The indiscriminate censure of philosophy has indeed been sufficiently answered already in the book which I wrote in praise of that study, in order to defend it against a bitter attack that had been made upon it by Hortensius. The favorable reception which that volume appeared to obtain from yourself and from others whom I considered competent to sit in judgment encouraged me to embark upon further undertakings; for I did not wish to be thought incapable of sustaining the interest that I had aroused. (Rackham, p. 3)

**Mueller 3. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2 2.4**

But I have answered the detractors of philosophy in general, in my *Hortensius*. (Yonge, p. 339)

**Mueller 4. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.3.6**

Philosophy is certainly the medicine of the soul, whose assistance we do not seek from abroad, as in bodily disorders, but we ourselves are bound to exert our utmost energy and power in order to effect our cure. But as to philosophy in general, I have, I think, in my *Hortensius*, sufficiently spoken of the credit and attention which it deserves, (Yonge, p. 365)

**Mueller 5. Cicero, *De officiis* 2 2.6**
Now, when I am advocating the study of philosophy, I usually discuss this subject at greater length, as I have done in another of my books. For the present I meant only to explain why, deprived of the tasks of public service, I have devoted myself to this particular pursuit. (Miller, p. 173)

Mueller 6. Cicero, Academica 2.2.6

In fact, if there is truth in the praise of philosophy that occupies a certain volume of mine, it is obvious that its pursuit is supremely worthy of all persons of the highest character and eminence, and the only precaution that need be observed by us whom the Roman nation has placed in this rank is to prevent our private studies from encroaching at all upon our public interest. (Rackham, p. 471f)

Mueller 9. Augustine, De beata vita 4

From the age of nineteen, having read in the school of rhetoric that book of Cicero’s called Hortensius, I was inflamed by such a great love of philosophy that I considered devoting myself to it at once. (Schopp, p. 46)

Mueller 10. Augustine, Confessions 3.4.7f

In the ordinary course of study, I lighted upon a certain book of Cicero, whose language, though not his heart, almost all admire. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called Hortensius. This book, in truth, changed my affections, and turned my prayers to Yourself, O Lord, and made me have other hopes and desires. Worthless suddenly became every vain hope to me; and, with an incredible warmth of heart, I yearned for an immortality of wisdom, and began now to arise (Luke 15:18) that I might return to You. Not, then, to improve my language — which I appeared to be purchasing with my mother’s means, in that my nineteenth year, my father having died two years before — not to improve my language did I have recourse to that book; nor did it persuade me by its style, but its matter.

[8] How ardent was I then, my God, how ardent to fly from earthly things to You! Nor did I know how You would deal with me. For with You is wisdom. In Greek the love of wisdom is called philosophy, with which that book inflamed me. There be some who seduce through philosophy, under a great, and alluring, and honourable name coloring and adorning their own errors. And almost all who in that and former times were such, are in that book censured and pointed out. There is also disclosed that most salutary admonition of Your Spirit, by Your good and pious servant: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Colossians 2:8-9 And since at that time (as Thou, O Light of my heart, know) the words of the apostle were unknown to me, I was delighted with that exhortation, in so far only as I was thereby stimulated, and enkindled, and inflamed to love, seek, obtain, hold, and embrace, not this or that sect, but wisdom itself, whatever it were; and this alone checked me thus ardent, that the name of Christ was not in it. (Pilkington)

Mueller 12. Lactantius, Divine Institutes 3.16.9

Hortensius in Cicero, contending against philosophy, is pressed by a clever argument; inasmuch as, when he said that men ought not to philosophize, he seemed nevertheless to philosophize, since it is the part of the philosophers to discuss what ought and what ought not to be done in life. (Fletcher)

Mueller 14. Lactantius, Divine Institutes, 6.2.15
In Cicero, Catulus in the *Hortensius*, while he prefers philosophy to all things, says that he would rather have one short treatise respecting duty, than a long speech in behalf of a seditious man Cornelius. And this is plainly to be regarded not as the opinion of Catulus, who perhaps did not utter this saying, but as that of Cicero, who wrote it. I believe that he wrote it for the purpose of recommending these books which he was about to write on *Offices*, in which very books he testifies that nothing in the whole range of philosophy is better and more profitable than to give precepts for living. (Fletcher)

*Muller 32. Lactantius, Divine Institutes 3.16.12*

Moreover, the argument which the same Hortensius employed has great weight also against philosophy — namely, that it may be understood from this, that philosophy is not wisdom, since its beginning and origin are apparent. When, he says, did philosophers begin to exist? Thales, as I imagine, was the first, and his age was recent. Where, then, among the more ancient men did that love of investigating the truth lie hidden? (Fletcher)

*Muller 36. Augustine, De Trinitate 13.4.7*

Shall we, then, hold that to be false of which the Academic Cicero himself did not doubt (although Academics doubt every thing), who, when he wanted in the dialogue *Hortensius* to find some certain thing, of which no one doubted, from which to start his argument, says, We certainly all will to be blessed? (Haddan)


*Muller 39. Augustine, De beata vita 2.10*

I smiled at her and said cheerfully: ‘Mother, you have really gained the mastery of the very stronghold of philosophy. For, undoubtedly you were wanting the words to express yourself like Tullius, who also has dealt with this matter. In his *Hortensius*, a book written in the praise and defense of philosophy, he said: “Behold, not the philosophers, but only people who like to argue, state that all are happy who live according to their own will. This, of course, is not true, for, to wish what is not fitting is the worst of wretchedness. But it is not so deplorable to fail of attaining what we desire as it is to wish to attain what is not proper. For, greater evil is brought about through one’s wicked will than happiness through fortune.”’ (Schopp, p. 56)

Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13.5.8

*Muller 40. Lactantius, Divine Institutes 1.7.4*

But perchance some one may ask of us the same question which Hortensius asks in Cicero: If God is one only, what solitude can be happy? As though we, in asserting that He is one, say that He is desolate and solitary. Undoubtedly He has ministers, whom we call messengers. And that is true, which I have before related, that Seneca said in his *Exhortations* that God produced ministers of His kingdom. (Fletcher)

*Muller 42. Lactantius, Divine Institutes 3.16.5*

It is not therefore utility, but enjoyment, which they seek from philosophy. And this Cicero indeed testified. Truly, he says, all their disputation, although it contains most abundant fountains of virtue and knowledge, yet, when compared with their actions and accomplishments, I fear lest it should seem not to have brought so much advantage to the business of men as enjoyment to their times of relaxation. (Fletcher)

*Muller 50. Augustine, De Trinitate 14.9.12*
Yet Tullius, the great author of eloquence, when arguing in the dialogue Hortensius, says of all four: If we were allowed, when we migrated from this life, to live forever in the islands of the blessed, as fables tell, what need were there of eloquence when there would be no trials, or what need, indeed, of the very virtues themselves? For we should not need fortitude when nothing of either toil or danger was proposed to us; nor justice, when there was nothing of anybody else’s to be coveted; nor temperance, to govern last that would not exist; nor, indeed, should we need prudence, when there was no choice offered between good and evil. We should be blessed, therefore, solely by learning and knowing nature, by which alone also the life of the gods is praiseworthy. And hence we may perceive that everything else is a matter of necessity, but this is one of free choice. This great orator, then, when proclaiming the excellence of philosophy, going over again all that he had learned from philosophers, and excellently and pleasantly explaining it, has affirmed all four virtues to be necessary. (Haddan)

Mueller 54. Augustine, City of God 3.15

In the dialogue Hortensius, too, while speaking of the regular eclipses of the sun, he says that they produce the same darkness as covered the death of Romulus, which happened during an eclipse of the sun. Here you see he does not at all shrink from speaking of his death, for Cicero was more of a reasoner than an eulogist. (Dods)

Mueller 76. Augustine, De beata vita 26

But, let us think of such a man as resembles Tullius’ description of Orata. Who could affirm offhand that Orata had been afflicted with want, since he was a man of great riches, luxuries, and delights, not lacking anything in regard to pleasure, influence, dignity, and having a healthy constitution? Immensely rich in estates, and exceptionally blessed with most charming friends, he had in abundance whatever his heart desired, and all these goods in the interest of his physical wellbeing. In a word, all his undertakings and his every wish were crowned with success. (Kavanagh, p. 74)

Note. Nonius has a longer version in Latin (see Mueller).

Mueller 81. Augustine, Against Julian 4.14.72

Consider Tully’s words in the dialogue Hortensius, which should delight you more than those of Balbus, who takes the part of the Stoics. What he says is true, but it concerns the inferior part of man, that is, his body, and it could not help you. See what he says about the quality of the mind over against the pleasure of the body. He says: ‘Should one seek the pleasures of the body, which, as Plato said truly and earnestly, are the enticements and baits of evil? What injury to health, what deformity of character and body, what wretched loss, what dishonor is not evoked and elicited by pleasure? Where its action is the most intense, it is the most inimical to philosophy. The pleasure of the body is not in accord with great thought. Who can pay attention or follow a reasoning or think anything at all when under the influence of intense pleasure? The whirlpool of this pleasure is so great that it strives day and night, without the slightest intermission, so to arouse our senses that they be drawn into the depths. What fine mind would not prefer that nature had given us no pleasures at all?’ (Schumacher, p. 229)

Cf. Ibid., 5.8.33. But if you would yield to true judgments, found in at least some of the philosophers’ writings, you would not fail to hear them say pleasures are the enticements and baits of evils, and that lust is a faulty part of the soul.

Cf. Ibid., 5.10.42. What can one think about when the very mind with which he thinks is so absorbed in this carnal pleasure? He whose words I quoted in the foregoing book spoke well when he said: ‘When its activity is most intense, it is most hostile to philosophy. Intense pleasure of the body is incompatible with great thought. What man, under the power of this the most intense of pleasures, can use his mind or carry on a process of reasoning, or think about anything at all?’
Mueller 82. Augustine, Against Julian 5.7.29

Let us enjoy present pleasures to the full, let us amuse ourselves in their absence with thoughts of them, as Epicurus advocated, and we shall be without sin and not deprive ourselves of any good. Let us not resist natural movements because of any doctrinal opinion, but, as Hortensius says: ‘Man would be obedient to nature, sensing without a teacher whatever nature desires.’ A nature which is good cannot desire what is evil, or we must deny good to the good; therefore, let whatever this good lust desires be done, lest he who resists the good himself be evil. (Schumacher, p. 274f)

Mueller 89. Augustine, De beata vita 14

To this remark he smilingly replied: ‘Such things will really cure me. For this dish you have placed before us, prickly somehow and elaborate, is sharp in its sweetness—as that well-known writer says of Hymettic honey—and does not bloat my stomach. Therefore, after a taste of it, I gladly swallow it all. For I see no way in which this conclusion can be refuted.’ (Kavanagh, p. 61f)

Note: Nonius has a longer version in Latin (see Mueller).

Mueller 95. Augustine, Against Julian 4.15.78

How much better than you and nearer the truth in their opinions about the generation of man are those whom Cicero names in the last part of his dialogue Hortensius, who seemed to be drawn and compelled by the very evidence of things. After he had mentioned the many things we see and grieve over in human vanity and unhappiness, he said: ‘From those errors and hardships of human life it happened that at times there was vision by the ancients, whether they were seers or interpreters of the divine mind, as found in sacred things and origins; who said we are born to atone by punishment for crimes committed in a higher life. We find in Aristotle a statement to the effect that we have been afflicted by punishment similar to one once given a group of men who, fallen into the hands of Etruscan pirates, were slaughtered with deliberate cruelty, and their bodies, part corresponding to part, were very neatly piled up, the living with the dead; thus it seems our souls are united with our bodies as the living were joined with the dead.’ (tr. Schumacher, p. 234f)


This contemplative wisdom, which I believe is properly called wisdom as distinct from knowledge in the sacred writings; but wisdom only of man, which yet man has not except from Him, by partaking of whom a rational and intellectual mind can be made truly wise — this contemplative wisdom, I say, it is that Cicero commends, in the end of the dialogue Hortensius, when he says: While, then, we consider these things night and day, and sharpen our understanding, which is the eye of the mind, taking care that it be not ever dulled, that is, while we live in philosophy; we, I say, in so doing, have great hope that, if, on the one hand, this sentiment and wisdom of ours is mortal and perishable, we shall still, when we have discharged our human offices, have a pleasant seeing, and a not painful extinction, and as it were a rest from life: or if, on the other, as ancient philosophers thought — and those, too, the greatest and far the most celebrated — we have souls eternal and divine, then must we needs think, that the more these shall have always kept in their own proper course, i.e. in reason and in the desire of inquiry, and the less they shall have mixed and entangled themselves in the vices and errors of men, the more easy ascent and return they will have to heaven. And then he says, adding this short sentence, and finishing his discourse by repeating it: Wherefore, to end my discourse at last, if we wish either for a tranquil extinction, after living in the pursuit of these subjects, or if to migrate without delay from this present home to another in no little measure better, we must bestow all our labor and care upon these pursuits. And here I marvel, that a man of such great ability should promise to men living in
philosophy, which makes man blessed by contemplation of truth, a pleasant setting after the discharge of human offices, if this our sentiment and wisdom is mortal and perishable; as if that which we did not love, or rather which we fiercely hated, were then to die and come to nothing, so that its setting would be pleasant to us! But indeed he had not learned this from the philosophers, whom he extols with great praise; but this sentiment is redolent of that New Academy, wherein it pleased him to doubt of even the plainest things. But from the philosophers that were greatest and far most celebrated, as he himself confesses, he had learned that souls are eternal. (Haddan)


Thus, it is most correctly said by the dialecticians that any word is ambiguous. Do not let it dissuade that Hortensius sneers at them in Cicero: “They say that they dare explain the ambiguous clearly. They also say that any word is ambiguous. Then how were ambiguous things explained by ambiguous things? That is like bringing an unlit torch into the darkness.” (Marchand)

Mueller 100. Augustine, *Contra academicos 3.14.31*

(to be added)

Mueller 101. Augustine, *Contra academicos 1.3.7*

‘Do you not think that Carneades was a wise man?’ asked Licentius.
‘I am not a Greek,’ replied Trygetius. ‘I do not know who that Carneades was.’
‘Well, what about our own Cicero?’ asked Licentius. ‘At any rate, what do you think of him?’
After a long pause, Trygetius said: ‘He was a wise man.’
‘Therefore,’ said Licentius, ‘his opinion on this matter has some weight with you?’
‘It has,’ replied Trygetius.
‘Then hear what it is, for I think it has escaped you. Our Cicero was of the opinion that a man who is searching for the truth, even though he be unable to attain to its discovery, is nevertheless happy.’
‘Where has Cicero said that?’ Trygetius asked.
Licentius rejoined: ‘Who does not know that he has forcefully asserted that nothing can be understood by man, that nothing remains for a wise man but a diligent search for the truth, and that, if he should give assent to doubtful things — and in a wise man this fault is the greatest of all—he could not be free from error, even if those things should happen to be true? Wherefore, if we must believe that a wise man is necessarily happy, and, if a mere search for the truth is the whole function of wisdom, why should we hesitate to believe that a happy life can be attained by the mere search for the truth? ’ (Kavanagh, p. 113)

Mueller 102. Augustine, *Against Julian 4.15.76*

You feared lest you be thwarted in our discussion about pleasure by those more sound philosophers whom Cicero called a kind of consular philosophers because of their soundness, as well as by the Stoics themselves, most inimical to pleasure, whose testimony you thought should be quoted from Cicero’s book, in the person of Balbus, but which was in no way helpful to you. (Schumacher, p. 233)

Fragments of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* in Cicero’s Works
Cicero, Tusculan Disp. 3.28.69 (= Aristotle, Protrepticus, Ross fr. 8; p. 37)

Therefore Aristotle, criticizing the old philosophers who had thought philosophy completed by their intellectual labours, says they were either very stupid or very conceited, but that he sees that, since great progress has been made in a few years, philosophy will in a short time be brought to completion. (Ross)


Cicero, Tusculan Disp. 1.39.94 (= Aristotle, Protrepticus, Ross fr. 10a p. 40)

But what age can truly be called old? What possession of man is lasting? . . . Because we have nothing more, we call this lasting; all these things are called long or short according to the proportion of each that is given to each of us. By the river Hypanis, which flows into the Pontus from the direction of Europe, Aristotle says there are born little creatures which live for but one day. One of these that has died at the eighth hour has died at an advanced age; one that has died at sunset is decrepit, especially if it is on a midsummer day. Compare our longest life with eternity; we shall be found as short-lived as these little creatures. (Ross)

cf. Iamblichus Protrepticus 8 (47.5-21 Pistelli), Boethius Consolation 3.8, Seneca Brev. Vit. 1.2.


I shall hold that we must first exclude the opinions of Aristippus and the whole Cyrenaic school, who were not afraid to place the supreme good in the pleasure which moves our senses most delightfully, and spurned the freedom from pain of which you speak. They did not see that as the horse is born to run, the ox to plough, the dog to follow a scent, so man (as Aristotle says) is born as a sort of mortal god to do two things — for understanding and for action. (Ross)


Cicero, Tusculan Disp. 5.35.101 (= Aristotle, Protrepticus, Ross fr. 16 p. 53)

How then can a life be pleasant from which prudence and moderation are absent? We see from this the error of Sardanapallus, the wealthy king of Syria, who ordered these words to be engraved on his tomb: ‘What I ate and what sated lust drained to the dregs, that I have; many a famous deed lies left behind.’ ‘What else’, Aristotle says, ‘would you have inscribed on the grave, not of a king but of an ox? He says he had in death the things which even in life he had no longer than for the moment of enjoyment.’ (Ross)

Cf. Strabo 14.5.9, p. C 672; Cicero, De finibus 2.32.106.

Cicero, Tusculan Disp. 5.30.85–31.87 (= Aristotle, Protrepticus, Ross fr. 18 p. 54f.)

The case of the Peripatetics has been unfolded — apart from the views of Theophrastus and those who, following him, show a weak dread of and shrinking from pain; the rest may do what they in fact practically do, to exaggerate the importance and dignity of virtue. When they have extolled it to the skies, which these eloquent men are wont to do at length ... 31.87 according to the reasoning of these men the happy life will follow virtue even if it leads to torture, and will descend with it into the tyrant’s bull,[1] with Aristotle, Xenocrates, Speusippus, and Polemon, to encourage it; it will never, seduced by threats or blandishments, desert virtue. (Ross)


Ibid. 5.10.30.
I do not, therefore, readily allow my friend Brutus, or our common masters, or the ancients, Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Polemon, when they count as evils the things I have enumerated above, at the same time to say that the ‘wise man’ is always happy. If this noble and beautiful title, most worthy of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, delights them, let them bring themselves to despise the things by whose splendour they are attracted—strength, health, beauty, riches, honours, power—and to count their opposites as nothing; then they will be able with a voice of crystal clearness to profess that they are terrified neither by the onslaught of fortune, by the opinion of the multitude, by pain, nor by poverty, that everything lies in themselves, that there is nothing outside their power which they should reckon as a good. (Ross)

Ibid. 5.13.39.

Cicero, De finibus 5.5.12-14

But since the happy life is sought for, and the one thing that philosophy ought to consider and pursue is the question whether happiness is entirely in the power of the wise man, or whether it can be weakened or snatched from him by adversity, on this point there seems to be sometimes variation and doubt among philosophers. This impression is produced most strongly by Theophrastus’ book on the happy life, in which a great deal is ascribed to fortune. If this were true, wisdom could not guarantee a happy life. This seems to me, so to speak, a softer and more timid line of thought than that demanded by the force and dignity of virtue. Let us, therefore, cling to Aristotle and his son Nicomachus . . . but let us follow Theophrastus in most things, only allowing virtue more firmness and strength than he did…. [14] Our own Antiochus seems to me to follow most faithfully the opinion of the ancients, which was (he maintains) common to Aristotle and to Polemon. (Ross)

Cicero De natura deorum 2.20.51-52 (= Aristotle, Protrepticus, Ross fr. 19 p. 55)

Most admirable are the motions of the five stars which we wrongly call wandering stars…. It is on the basis of their diverse motions that mathematicians have given the name of ‘great year’ to that which is completed when the sun, the moon, and the five ‘wandering’ stars, the course of all of them completed, have returned to the same relative positions. How long this period is, is a great question, but it must be certain and definite. (Ross)

Cf. Cicero, Hortensius, fr. 35 Mueller; Tacitus Dialogus 16.7; Censor, c.18.11.

Other Related Passages in Cicero

Throughout his philosophical works Cicero’s has magnificent passages concerning the greatness and immortality of the human soul, divine Reason, and the ascent of the mind by contemplation of the order, beauty and goodness of the natural world.

Cicero, De natura deorum 2.37.95-96 (= Aristotle, On Philosophy, Ross fr. 13; p. 85ff)
Great was the saying of Aristotle: ‘Suppose there were men who had lived always underground, in good and well-lighted dwellings, adorned with statues and pictures, and furnished with everything in which those who are thought happy abound. Suppose, however, that they had never gone above ground, but had learned by report and hearsay that there is a divine authority and power. Suppose that then, at some time, the jaws of the earth opened, and they were able to escape and make their way from those hidden dwellings into these regions which we inhabit. When they suddenly saw earth and seas and sky, when they learned the grandeur of clouds and the power of winds, when they saw the sun and learned his grandeur and beauty and the power shown in his filling the sky with light and making day; when, again, night darkened the lands and they saw the whole sky picked out and adorned with stars, and the varying lights of the moon as it waxes and wanes, and the risings and settings of all these bodies, and their courses settled and immutable to all eternity; when they saw those things, most certainly they would have judged both that there are gods and that these great works are the works of gods.’ Thus far Aristotle. (Ross)

Cf. Philo, Allegorical Interpretation 3.32.97–99; On Rewards and Punishments 7.40–46; Special Laws 1.35.185–1.36.194; Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta 2. 1009–1020; Xenophon, Memorabilia 1.4.

Cicero, De divinatione 1.30.63f (= Aristotle, On Philosophy, Ross fr. 12a; p. 84f)
Cf. Sextus Empiricus, Phys. 1.20–23; Cicero, Tusculan Disp. 1.68ff.

Cicero, De natura deorum 1.13.33 (= Aristotle On Philosophy, Ross fr. 26; p. 97)

Cicero, De natura deorum 2.6.16–17

Cicero, De natura deorum 2.15.40 (= Aristotle On Philosophy, Ross fr. 21; p. 93f.)

Cicero, De natura deorum 2.16.42–17.47

Cicero, De natura deorum 2.61.153

Cicero, De natura deorum 3.10.26

Cicero, Pro Milone 83–84

Cicero, Academica 2.38.119 (= Aristotle On Philosophy, Ross fr. 20; p. 92f)

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