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Aristotelian '*Phronesis*' and the dilemma of its translation

La *Prónesis* aristotélica y el dilema de su traducción

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Abstract: *The Greek Phronesis* is among the key concepts in Aristotle's ethics and politics. It appears especially in the Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The translators of Aristotle's work could only render those aspects of its meaning that they were able to comprehend. The present study examines how *phronesis* is transmitted into Arabic in the revised version of the first known translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain (9th century) where he renders it to *ta'āqqul*, *'aql* or *fahm*, and the translation made by 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī (20th century), who translates it as *fiṭna*. The findings are occasionally compared with the English and German translations of the same text by two significant commentators of Aristotle. The paper concludes that while Ibn Ḥunain's renderings are historically justified, all in all, Badawī has translated the Greek terms with relative faithfulness, although he occasionally fails to establish a correlation between the concepts.

Keywords: *Phronesis*, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī

Resumen: *Phrónesis* es uno de los conceptos clave en la ética y la política de Aristóteles. Aparece especialmente en el Libro VI de su *Ética Nicomáquea*. Los traductores de la obra de Aristóteles solo pudieron traducir aquellos aspectos de su significado que pudieron comprender. El presente estudio examina las formas en que la *phrónesis* se transmite al árabe en la versión revisada de la primera traducción conocida del NE por Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain (siglos III / IX) donde lo traduce a *ta'āqqul*, *'aql* o *fahm*, y la traducción realizada por 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī (siglos XV / XX), que lo traduce como *fiṭna*. Los hallazgos se comparan ocasionalmente con las

traducciones al inglés y al alemán del mismo texto. El artículo concluye que, si bien las representaciones de Ibn Ḥunain están históricamente justificadas, en general Badawī ha traducido los términos griegos con relativa fidelidad, aunque ocasionalmente no logra establecer una correlación entre los conceptos.

Palabras clave: *Phrónesis*, Aristóteles, *Ética Nicomáquea*, Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī

INTRODUCTION

Phronesis (φρόνησις) is among the key concepts in Aristotle's ethics and politics, commonly referred to as «practical wisdom» or «practical reason» or «moral knowledge». It originated in the Greek language, long before Aristotle, as a by-product of classical intellectual culture. It was, however, Aristotle's attention and interpretation, especially his detailed discussion on *phronesis* in the Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*), that endowed the concept with broad semantic latitude. Throughout the ages, the translators of Aristotle's work who have rendered the term *phronesis* into different languages, in their laborious efforts in transmitting the concept, could only render those aspects of its meaning that they were able to comprehend according to, and within the limits of, their own cultural training.

The Book VI of *NE* makes it quite clear that finding a single term in other languages to convey the full meaning of *phronesis* is extremely difficult if not impossible. The complexity and multifaceted nature of this concept have led Aristotle to approach it from different angles to refine its connection with the adjacent concepts as well as its usage in the common language. Thus he creates a complex network of correlated concepts to explain *phronesis*. The reader/translator in his/her turn is required to form a proper understanding of this network and clarify its semantic field. In other words, one must carefully examine the neighbouring concepts as well as their interrelations in the source language, and try to translate that network of concepts into the target language. Then and only then it will be possible to produce a translation of *phronesis* consistent with its original meaning.

The present study takes the observation raised above as its hypothesis and critically examines how the term *phronesis* is transmitted into Arabic in the revised version of the first known translation of the *NE*, limiting the scope of the investigation to the text of Book VI only. Based on this, the article aims to analyse how far the interconnected network of the different interpreted concepts related to the Greek *phronesis* renders the different meanings as was intended by Aristotle. In this regard, the Arabic text will

also be occasionally compared with the English (Aristotle, 2019) and the German (Aristoteles, 1998) translations of the same text, in the hope that the comparative reading would demonstrate how Aristotle defines *phronesis*. Both English and German texts were directly translated from Greek by two significant commentators on Aristotle.

The first Arabic translation of the *NE* was made during the Abbasid translation movement by Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain (circa 9th century)¹. According to Ibn Nadīm in *Al-Fihrist*, there existed a complete Arabic translation of *NE* by Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain in the 4th/10th century (Ibn Nadīm, 1871, Vol. I pp. 248-252). As M. A. Molavī has aptly pointed out, scholars regard Ishāq's Arabic translation as clearer and more reliable compared to the Latin translations from Greek, so it has been consulted for a better understanding of Aristotle's texts (Molavī, 1998, p. 233). Scholars have reasons to believe that Ishāq's translation received attention, particularly from Muslim philosophers who developed an interest in Aristotle and his philosophy of politics and ethics. In the Arabic sources, the *NE* was generally referred to as *Kitāb al-aḥlāq* (The Book of Ethics) (Dunlop, 1962, p. 21).

Until the second half of the 20th century, almost the entire text of Ibn Ḥunain Arabic translation of *NE*, now kept at a library in Rabat, Morocco,² was in effect unaccounted for. The second half of it (Books VII-X) was discovered by the British orientalist A. J. Arberry in 1951 in the Qarawīyīn library in Fez, Morocco. Arberry introduced it in an article he published in 1955. A few years later, D. M. Dunlop, another British orientalist, continuing Arberry's research, found the first part of the *NE* (Books I-V and the last few lines of Book VI) in the same library in Fez, and published his findings in 1962. Dunlop dedicated the rest of his life working on the Arabic manuscript of *NE* and translated it into English but did not get a chance to publish it before his death in 1989. Anna Akasoy and Alexandra Fidora edited Dunlop's work and published it in 2005. In this edition, they remain loyal to the manuscript of Arabic translation; hence, the missing Book VI, except for the last few lines, is absent in Dunlop's revised version of the Arabic *NE* and its English translation.

In addition to Arberry and Dunlop, the renowned contemporary Egyptian philosopher, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī too developed an interest in the Arabic translation of *NE*. He compared Ishāq's translation with the original Greek as well as several other European translations of the *NE*, translated the missing sections of the manuscript, including the Book VI,

¹ Recently, it has been raised an alternative opinion about the arabic translation by Manfred Ullmann. It will be mentioned later.

² dated H 619/AD 1222.

from Greek into Arabic and eventually published his book in 1979 with a comprehensive introduction.

Recently, Manfred Ullmann has offered a new description of the mentioned manuscript, in a two-volume edition. He also raised an alternative opinion about the presence of two different translators. According to Manfred Ullmann's recent study (2011), Frederique Woerther has pointed out:

...Whereas modern critics, following the testimony of Ibn an-Nadim's notice, tend to attribute the whole of the Arabic translation to Ishāq b. Ḥunain.³ In fact only Books 1-4 are in reality the work of Ishāq b. Ḥunain, while Books 5-10 were translated into Arabic by Eustathius, probably at the request of al-Kindī (Woerther, 2019, p. 38).

Ullmann's approach may need to be critically analysed. However, in the present study, we will mainly examine Badawī's translation of Book VI in comparison with Ibn Ḥunain's translation of other sections of the *NE*.⁴ It should be noted that the terms used in Book VI do also appear in other sections of the *NE*. Therefore, one can understand Ibn Ḥunain's interpretation of Arabic terms and concepts only by following them within the context of the whole manuscript. This will simultaneously allow us to determine the appropriacy of Badawī's translation of Book VI.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's German translation and interpretation of the *NE* is a unique event in itself because translation itself plays a major role in his philosophy. Moreover, as Robert J. Dostal observes, «one of the most important features of Gadamer's work, in general, is his attempt to recover Aristotelian *phronesis*, practical wisdom.» (Dostal, 1997, p. 297) To be sure, Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* presents it as the pivotal concept of Aristotelian ethics and politics. In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer refers to the *NE* frequently, especially where he discusses «the recovery of the fundamental hermeneutic problem» and the reinterpreting of *phronesis* becomes one of his main subjects (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 312-20). Gadamer's German translation of the *NE* will occasionally be consulted in this study to inquire about his unique understanding of certain terms or concepts.

Sir W. D. Ross, a prominent twentieth-century British philosopher and a leading authority on Aristotle, has left us with his monumental multi-volume English translation of Aristotle's complete writing. No scholarly research on

³ 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī attributes the whole of Arabic translation to Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain (Badawī, «Introduction» in *Aristūṭālis*, 1979, p. 45.)

⁴ In the present study we have focused on 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī's interpretation and translation of the ancient text, so we assume his fundamental premise about attribution the whole arabic translation to Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain.

Aristotle and his thinking, including this study, can dispense with his work, because, as J. J. Mulhern writes:

... he was, like Aristotle, a person of wide experience ... Ross's version continues to aid interpretation because of his experience and because of his broad grip on Aristotle's ways of thinking across the corpus. (Mulhern, 2010.11.44)

So in the present study, Ross's English Translation of the *NE* (hereafter *NE.eng*) will be the main reference to translate Greek terms or concepts of the *NE*.

Ever since its translation, the Arabic translation of *NE* has been a source of considerable influence on the Islamic philosophical scholarship, as it is reflected in the frequent references to it by the Muslim thinkers of the classical era. Dunlop aptly raised the issue in his introductory remarks, followed by Anna Akasoy in her article «The Arabic and Islamic Reception of *Nicomachean Ethics*» (2013) and Josh Hayes in his essay, «The Arabic Reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics*» (2015). For whatever reason, neither of these recent studies, however, has examined the concept of *phronesis*.

1. THE GREEK 'PHRONESIS (φρόνησις)' AND ITS TRANSLATIONS

The term '*phronesis*', Jana Noel writes, «has been translated and interpreted with several different English phrases in the attempt to capture the full meaning of the term. Translations have included, among others, practical reasoning, practical wisdom, moral discernment, moral insight, and prudence» (Noel, 1999, p. 273). This all too apparent diversity in translation is seemingly caused by the complexity of the conception of *phronesis* itself, which even forced Aristotle to describe a network of related concepts to elucidate the meaning of *phronesis*. Thus, interpreting it as «practical wisdom» in effect emphasizes the relation between practice and *phronesis*, immediately considering *phronesis* as a type of wisdom. As for «prudence» (Aristotle, 1934, p. 333) and «practical knowledge», two other translations, «prudence»⁵ emerges as a foresight which underlines a special virtue and notable feature in some persons, while «practical knowledge» inherently reflects a type of wisdom that can generally exist in humans.

In the German translation, the situation is almost similar. *Klugheit* emphasizes a certain form of genuine giftedness like «prudence.» But *Vernünftigkeit* is more about rationality; and *das praktische Wissen* is more about «practical wisdom.» Gadamer's reading of *phronesis* highlights not only the complexity of the term but its resistance to translation:

5 «The Latin translation of *phronesis* as *prudentia* abetted the failure to see the real state of affairs, a failure which still haunts contemporary «deontic logic.» (Gadamer, 2004, p. 378.)

... It shows how difficult it is to translate the term and the broad extent of its semantic field. As it is not only a matter of individual rationality, but it also takes on a sense of political and social responsibility (*eine Art politischer und sozialer Verantwortlichkeit*), discussing at once the issue of conscientiousness. For this reason, I have chosen two words for the translation of *phronesis*: *Vernünftigkeit* (rationality), or *Gewissenhaftigkeit* (conscientiousness). In Greek, both of these meanings are in one word: «*Phronesis*.» (Gadamer, 1998, p. 14)

In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer directs our attention to the fact that Aristotle considers *phronesis* an intellectual virtue; but it is at once a special kind of knowledge (moral Knowledge) (Gadamer, 2004, p. 312) and an intellectual virtue.

Practical knowledge, *phronesis*, is another kind of knowledge. Primarily, this means that it is directed towards the concrete situation. Thus it must grasp the «circumstances» in its infinite variety. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 19)

Gadamer highlights the multifaceted nature of *phronesis*:

He [Aristotle] sees it [*phronesis*] not only as a capacity (*dunamis*), but as a determination of moral being [*hexis*] which cannot exist without the totality of the «ethical virtues,» which in turn cannot exist without it. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 20)

In his Arabic translation of the Book VI, Badawī interpreted *phronesis* as *فطنة* *fiṭna* throughout the text. *fiṭna* at once means «discretion» and engages with a mental, internal faculty such as «acumen», and additionally provokes a kind of intellect. It seems that the multifaceted nature of *phronesis* has led Badawī to select this Arabic term; however, *fiṭna* does not correspond with Ishāq's translation perhaps because of Badawī's reading of the word. In addition to Book VI, *phronesis* appears multiple times in the Books I, VII and X. Depending on the context of its appearance, Ishāq Ibn Hunain translated it as *التعقل* *at-ta'aqqul* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, pp. 83, 236, 352)⁶, *العقل* *al-'aql* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 259)⁷ or *فهم* *fahm* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 70). *ta'aqqul*, from the root 'aql, means «contemplation and deep thinking»; this, in turn, means «to become gradually rational.» It appears that *ta'aqqul*, semantically relatively close to «practical wisdom» in English, sounded rather appropriate to Ibn Hunain as the translation of *phronesis*.

Much to the multifaceted and ambiguous nature of *phronesis*, Aristotle tried a different way to shed light on this concept by describing and

⁶ In this context, he translated *phronimos* as *al-muta'aqqil* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, pp. 235, 236, 352).

⁷ Elsewhere, he translated *phronimos* as *al-'āqil* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, pp. 60, 96, 259, 262).

explicating *phronimos* (φρόνιμος). *Phronimos* means one who embodies *phronesis*, that is, one who is practically wise. Badawī translated *phronimos* as *faṭīn*, which means one who embodies *fiṭna*. Again, his translation varies from Ibn Ḥunain's, who, in agreement with his translation of *phronesis*, rendered it as *al-muta'aqqil* and *al-āqil*, as they come from the same root.

To sum up, the Arabic translators offered three different terms for *phronesis*. An examination of these translations shows that each term highlights only one aspect of *phronesis*. As it can be shown, a term like *fiṭna* does not necessarily relate to «practice»; hence, by only considering these equivalents the relevance and application of *phronesis* in ethics will not be clear. Moreover, «Acumen» appears to be more of an individual virtue; but such a narrow reading of the term will readily distance its application from the social and political context. But if we consider all these individual virtues as prerequisites to proper participation in the political and social context, then *phronesis* can have a full presence and participation in the social and political activities. This is the reason why Aristotle combines *phronesis* with a certain level of social consciousness and commitment (Gadamer, 1998, p. 14). Thus, as it was mentioned above, a network of related concepts must be considered in the process of translation so that the reader may have a clearer and more relevant perception of the term.

2. PHRONESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOOK VI

NE is Aristotle's main book on ethics. According to him, the aim of this book is not the mere reading of the essence of ethical virtues; rather, it is to present the question of how to be virtuous. Therefore, he focuses his inquiry on «*praxis*» (πρᾶξις), that is, how we should act (Aristotle, 2009, II.2, 1103 b 33). In the first five chapters of the book, Aristotle advances on issues regarding happiness and the good, moral virtues; and after a compelling argument over moral virtue, he comes to the important conclusion that moral act «determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being following correct reason [orthos logos/ὀρθὸς λόγος]» (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 1138 b 24-5). Then he adds that although this is true, it is by no means clear. Thus, finding a standard or criteria in a situation where everything is in a state of change and variation is the main objective of this inquiry. In other words, the task is to determine the intermediate in the moral act.

Aristotle sets out to answer two important questions: First, what is *orthos logos* (correct reason)? And second, what is the standard that fixes it? (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 1138 b 35; Brown, 2009, p. 236) Interestingly, Badawī translated this key phrase to قاعدة مستقيمة *qā'idah mustaqimah* (correct/straight rule), unlike Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain who interpreted it as التميز الصواب *at-tamyīz aṣ-*

ṣawab (right discernment) (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 88), the utter untranslatability of the Greek expression in a context like the following notwithstanding:

Now, that we must act in accordance with correct reason (*orthos logos*) is a common principle and must be assumed ... it will be discussed later, i.e. both what correct reason [*orthos logos*] is, and how it is related to the other virtues. (Aristotle, 2009, II.2, 1103 b 32-4)

After a short introduction on the soul at the beginning of Book VI, Aristotle continues on moral action and its relevance to proper choice (*προαίρεσις*) (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 1139 a 23). Action is related to a good life (*eupraxia*). The origin of action –its efficient, not its final cause– is choice (*proairesis* /*προαίρεσις*). According to Aristotle, a 'proper choice' is grounded on two things: a right desire, and reasoning that is aimed at the good life. Thus, the choice is the consequence of the interaction between desire and reasoning, in other words, the outcome of deliberated desire.⁸ In a proper and contemplated choice, what is necessary for reason is to agree with the right desire: «The origin of action — its efficient, not its final cause — is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end» (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 1139 a 30-35). Therefore, it is possible to say that to act morally is to act in accordance with reason. Here lies one of Aristotle's most important accomplishments in the Book VI of his *NE*: determining the activity of intellect in the state of making the proper choice and taking the appropriate action, that is, *phronesis*. As for the choices of its Arabic translation, it seems that its ninth-century translation as *ta'aqqul* properly reflects the interrelation of phronesis with wisdom and intellect, unlike the term *fiṭna* which describes rather an acumen.

3. LOGISTIKON (λογιστικόν): PHRONESIS IN RELATION TO PRACTICAL REASON

Relying on his attempt to clarify the relationship between reason and its parts to the elements in the soul; In Book VI, Aristotle begins with the analysis of the element which has reason (*logon*); and based on the division of things into variable and invariable, he considers *logon* as consisting of two parts: *logistikon* (*λογιστικόν*) and *epistemonikon* (*ἐπιστημονικόν*) which mostly are translated as «scientific» and «calculative» (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1139 a 10-5).

Accordingly, the realm of *epistemonikon* consists of things being and becoming of which is necessary and we can only «know» them. In this invariable realm, man cannot make any change. Metaphysics, mathematics and natural sciences fall under this rubric, yet, *logistikon* is a kind of

⁸ προαίρεσις ὄρεξις βουλευτική

contemplation directed towards whatever is variable (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1139 a 10-5), like making decisions or practising or creating things. In other words, the subject of this latter category emerges as the affairs that are calculated, deliberated and determined by man.

For each of these two parts, Aristotle assigns two virtues: *sophia* to the scientific part (*epistemonikon*) and *phronesis* to the calculative part (*logistikon*) (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1143 b 14-6). As it is noted, *logistikon* is interpreted as «calculative» (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1139 a 13-5); nevertheless, this interpretation misleads our understanding of the term by focusing on accounting and quantity while such semantic aspect is not dominant in this Greek word. Conversely, it is related to logic and *logos* (*logistikon*). Sure enough, *logistikos* (the man who have *logistikon*) in its different uses in the ancient Greek texts is expressed as following: *Skilled or practiced in calculating (Plato), endowed with reason, rational (Aristotle), using one's reason, reasonable.*⁹ But, one should keep in mind that here Aristotle is opting for an understanding of *orthos logos* which is semantically connected to *logistikon*. By focusing on its translation as «calculative,» eventually one loses this connection.

Gadamer translates *epistemonikon* as *auf Wissen beruhend* (knowledge-based) and *logistikon* as *auf Überlegung beruhend* (thought-based) (Aristoteles, 1998, p. 27) by way of which he emphasizes on its deliberating aspect, without a reference to calculation. Thus, we may have a better understanding of *logistikon*: when the soul is thinking about a variable affair. In fact, the deliberative part of reason is contemplating, evaluating and calculating in order to consider a suitable action.

In the Arabic translation, *Badawī* renders *logistikon* to *التقديرى at-taqdīrī* and proposes *الجزء العلمى al-ǧuz al-ilmī* versus *الجزء التقديرى al-ǧuz at-taqdīrī* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 209). The term *at-taqdīrī* has multiple meanings like evaluative and discretional. It stems from the root *قدر qadr* meaning 'measure'; so *تقدير taqdīr* also means «calculating» and «determining.» The root *qadr* does not only mean «quantity», but also «position and status,» and «the place and portion that God has defined for everything.» (Quran 65, p. 3) In the light of *Badawī's* translation, the latter meaning may be reformulated as: this contemplation is in fact for finding out the portion that deserves the matter in question.

It is also worth mentioning that the term *taqdīr*, like *logos*, has two meanings: it refers to humans as well as God, just as *logos* refers to the human mind as well as to the divine word. Therefore, it is possible to say

⁹ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/λογιστικός> (accessed December 19, 2019).

that *taqdīrī* is a more suitable choice than «calculative» as the equivalent for *logistikon*, while one must keep in mind that translation of *logistikon* to *taqdīrī* and *logos* to *qā'idah* loses the all-important correlation between *logos* and *logistikon* for the simple reason that the two Arabic terms do not share the same origin.

4. KALOS BOULEOSTAI (καλῶς βουλευσασθαι): PHRONESIS AS WELL DELIBERATION

After alluding to the difference between *technē*, *epistēmē*, *Phronesis*, *Sophia* and *nous* (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1139 b 17-8.), which are all related to *logos*, Aristotle distinguishes *Phronesis* as a reasoned and true state of capacity to act and the virtue of soul's rational part in *praxis* (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1140 b 20-1).¹⁰ He begins the main discussion on *Phronesis* by considering who the persons are credited with it, and with the examination of the traits of *phronimos*:

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom [*phronimos/φρονίμους*] to be able to deliberate well¹¹ [*kalos bouleostai/καλῶς βουλευσασθαι*] about what is good¹² [*agatha/ἀγαθὰ*] and expedient¹³ [*sympheroneta/συμφέροντα*] for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life¹⁴ in general. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1140 a 25-7)

To effectuate the discussion, he concentrates on explaining its key concepts which are «deliberating» (*Bouleostai/βουλευσασθαι*) and «good» (*Agatha/ἀγαθὰ*). A quick inspection of the translations reveals that the translators' understanding of *Phronesis* depended critically on grasping the meaning of these key concepts.

Bouleostai (*βουλευσασθαι*), often translated as deliberating, is a kind of wisdom different from other types of thinking (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1142 a 1) and specific to calculating part of soul. Earlier in the Book VI, Aristotle mentions *Bouleostai* in order to explain soul's calculating state (*logistai/λογίζεσθαι*):

¹⁰ «Practical wisdom, then, must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods.»

¹¹ ar-rawīya-t-uṣṣahīḥah (trans. by Badawi)

¹² ḥayr (trans. by Badawi)

¹³ nāfi' (trans. by Badawi)

¹⁴ al-ḥayāt as-sa'idah (trans. by Badawi)

To deliberate (*βουλευσασθαι*) and to calculate (*λογίζεσθαι*) are the same thing. But no one deliberates about the invariable. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.2, 1139 a 14-15)

Regarding the calculating part of the soul, *Bouleostai* focuses on decision and action during which a human «searches» for something (Aristotle, 2009, VI.9, 1142 b 2, 16); but it is not just seeking because he also sifts¹⁵ and calculates (Aristūṭālis, 2009, p. 223). He searches for the best possible action in a particular condition. In fact, he deliberates about possible actions in relation to desires and objectives as well as conditions and situations. *Bouleostai* could be a self-consultation that flourishes in the domain of things that lead to *Agatha* and *eupraxia*:¹⁶ «About things which have an end which is a good that can be brought about by action (*πρακτὸν ἀγαθόν*).» (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1141 b 12-3)

Bouleostai stems from the Greek word *βουλά*, which means «course of action or a plan», and in its plural form is defined as «counsels, deliberations, designs;» it also means determination and will, especially when it is used to refer to gods.¹⁷ From this root, the word *bouleosis* has been coined in *NE* (Aristotle, 2009, III.2, 1111 b 26-7) which means «wish» and engages with rational desire. In its Greek context, the verb *bouleostai* /*βουλευσασθαι* has been used in various ancient texts, meaning «take counsel, deliberate, determine or resolve after deliberation (in past tenses), take counsel with oneself.»¹⁸ In *bouleostai*, the emphasis is on choices and decisions. It is only about possible things, and does not apply to necessities as these are not calculated and cannot be «decided.»

Libra is considered as the root of the verb «to deliberate,» meaning «scale.» hence, in English, the verb connotes an «evaluative contemplation.» Gadamer translated *bouleostai* as *Sich beraten* (consulting with oneself) (Aristoteles, 1998, p. 27) and *Überlegen* (contemplation) (Aristoteles, 1998, p. 34). It appears that these two definitions are the same for Aristotle, while *Beraten* in German means «consulting», and *Sich-beraten* means «consulting with oneself.» In fact, *Überlegen* (contemplation) is nothing but a self-referential form of counseling.

In the Arabic translation of Book III of *NE*, Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain translated *bouleostai*/βουλευσασθαι in its infinitive form as *ar-rawīyyah* and *تروي tarawwī* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 114). These two terms both stem from a common root. Badawī too in his translation of Book VI used the same terms.

¹⁵ «wa man yurawwī ... yabḥaṭu wa yaḥsabū.» (Aristūṭālis, 2009, p. 223.)

¹⁶ This will be discussed shortly in the following pages.

¹⁷ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/βουλευύω> (accessed December 19, 2019)

¹⁸ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/βουλευύω> (accessed December 19, 2019)

Rawīyyah in Arabic means «contemplation, careful consideration of actions», and it appears that it is the proper rendering of *bouleostai*. The root word of *ar-rawīyyah* means «to be saturated» or «to strengthen (like in joints and muscles),»¹⁹ or «to tighten up (a knot).»²⁰ The semantic element of «being saturated» precisely highlights the relation between *tarawwī* (*Bouleostai*) and «desire.» However, the verb *tarawwī* does not in itself embody any part of the meaning «determining and deciding»; rather, the emphasis is on the activity of reason when the mind is contemplating and is gradually coming to maintain strength and consistency; the process continues until the stream of thought begins to be formed and saturated with regard to a particular issue, and eventually determines the form of an action. As it can be seen, this image is slightly different from the image of evaluation or calculation in «deliberation.» In the Arabic translation, the word does not mean «consultation and counselling,» while in the Greek and German terms «consultation» is semantically emphasized.

5. AGATHA (ἀγαθὰ): PHRONESIS AS GOODNESS

Bouleostai is oriented «toward» something. That is, when one deliberates, his deliberation is «for» something. The question is, «toward» what this deliberation is inclined, and «for» what it has been formed? It is possible that, for instance, someone has been contemplating and evaluating conditions so that he could become rich in a short time. This is not a proper example of good *bouleostai*. Aristotle calls these individuals «clever» or smart (Aristotle, 2009, VI.13, 1144 a 12-3) rather than *phronimos*. Hence, we learn that the duty of *phronimos* lies in «*eu-bouleostai*», namely, one should deliberate «well», and his deliberation should be directed towards «good/*agatha*»; it is attainable for man, that is, good in its practical sense. To this end, Aristotle notes:

The man who is without qualification good at deliberating (*εὐβουλος*) is the man who is capable of aiming in accordance with calculation²¹ (*λογισμὸν*) at the best for man of things attainable by action. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1141 b 13-5)

¹⁹ <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/الرويية/> (accessed December 19, 2019).

²⁰ Muntaha-'l-arab fī luġāt al-'Arab <https://archive.org/details/MuntahalArabRubEDuvumFarsi/page/n219> (accessed December 19, 2019).

²¹ In Ross's text it is translated as «calculation». Yet, as mentioned, the word «calculation» is not a proper translation for Logismon. In this case, the Arabic translator has made a mistake and translated logismon into burhan (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p.218).

He cautions that there could be much evil²² if *logistikon* and calculation weren't set to good /*Agatha* (Aristotle, 2009, VI.9, 1142 b 20).

Man deliberates to practice in a particular moment and situation; hence, deliberation becomes a matter of good and appropriate choice. According to Aristotle, the meaning of '*agatha*' in relation to *Phronesis* is not only good in its general sense but also in its practical and concrete sense; a form of good that is related to the realm of possibility and can be realized in a concrete situation. This good involves a particular condition, and, at the same time, it points to human happiness or good life (*eupraxia*). In this respect, *phronimos* must be able to recognize the practical form of *agatha*, and this is why Aristotle regards *phronesis* as a special kind of knowledge which can understand practical and particular good/*agatha* among a plethora of possibilities in a situation. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1142 a 1-3)

Phronesis is not a knowledge that can be achieved through intuition or education; rather it can be achieved by life experience. This is why a young person can never be a *phronimos*, as he lacks this experience (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1142 a 15-6). *Phronimos* has repeatedly been in the position of making decisions and practising, and each time has faced different situations and tried to make the best decision and act accordingly. In this way, a kind of *hexis* is achieved, so that he can handle new situations. This knowledge highly depends on individuals, but it is not purely a personal good /*agatha*. *Phronimos* can see what is good for men in general too (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1140 b 8-10); and who can do that «is good in managing households or states.» (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1141 b 9-10)

Good/*agatha* is the *skopos* of moral practice, namely, what we look at. And it shows us the way to find the intermediate. Yet, at the same time, recognition of this goal is not possible for all; Aristotle insists that «good» does not come to light except in the eyes of a good man, because the evil infects the soul and he cannot recognize the *skopos* and is not able to practice well (Aristotle, 2009, VI.13, 1144 a 34-5). In other words, a man can't be *phronimos* without being good (Aristotle, 2009, VI.13, 1144 a 35-7). In fact, although «*phronesis*, though it is an intellectual virtue, cannot develop independently of the moral virtues.» (Brown, 2009, p. XVI.) Thus, once we understand the importance of good/*agatha* in *phronesis*, it becomes even clearer that translating *phronesis* as «acumen», «subtlety» or *fiṭna* (in Arabic) is not very appropriate, for it leaves out an important aspect of the concept. Subtlety, sharpness, or intelligence are features in men that refer to a faculty that can be applied in the direction of good or evil, while the

²² Like a thief who has calculated all conditions so that he could have a proper chance to steal.

concept of *phronesis* (in Greek) includes good, and in Aristotle's perception, an acuteness that doesn't lead to good can't accompany *phronesis*.

Agatha, which is usually translated as «good» in English, and as «gut und gerecht» in German, is translated as خير *ḥayr* in Arabic. The Arabic *ḥayr*, at the same time, means 'good', 'better' and 'the best' depending on the context. Its root meaning is 'what is chosen and selected'. The word اختيار *iḥtiyār*, which means choice and in the present text is used as the equivalent of *proairesis*, is a derivative of the root.

6. SYMPHERONTA (συμφέροντα): THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE PROPER

In phrasing the definition of *phronimos*, Aristotle uses the word *sympheronta/συμφέροντα* to describe «well deliberation,» which semantically implies that here good is not considered in its pure sense; rather, it depends on a particular situation. A correct perception of *sympheronta* is therefore necessary for our understanding of *phronesis*. The definition of this Greek term is «to bring together» and «to gather, collect, contribute,» as well as «to be in harmony with, adapt oneself to, agree with, agree together.»²³ Accordingly, «appropriate» and «expedient» appear to be the proper equivalents for «*sympheroneta*». In English translations, the term has appeared as «beneficial» or «advantageous,» while in Arabic it is rendered as نافع *nāfi'* (profitable) (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 213). Gadamer has translated the term to gut und nützlich (good and expedient) (Aristoteles, 1998, p. 33). In each case of these renderings, an important aspect is missing. In other words, they have altered the meaning of *phronesis* so much so that what actually means «the ability to understand the proper»²⁴ has been translated as «beneficial choice.» In our contemporary understanding of the respective languages, the words «expedient», nützlich or 'nāfi' convey a sense of practice or use, while *sympheroneta* in the classical Greek had a wider definition. *Phronimos* is someone who can understand the relation between matters, such as the relation between *praxis* in each particular situation with *agatha* in general.

7. PHRONETIC KNOWLEDGE: UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICULAR

Aristotle insists that *praxis* is concerned with particulars (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1141 b 17) and concrete situations: «doing is always doing some

²³ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/συμφέρω> (accessed December 19, 2019)

confer a benefit, be useful or profitable, it is of use, expedient

literally: to be carried along with,

Gramm: to be constructed with, agree in form with.

²⁴ The distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between the proper and the improper. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 20.)

particular action. Reasoning which remains at the level of universals cannot result in action» (Brown. 2009, p. 239). According to him, the main problem in the realm of human actions is that here we are not dealing with the realm of necessity and there is no regular natural rule that exactly specifies how human beings must act. One can't always act well only by his general knowledge. To act, it is important and necessary to recognize what works in this particular situation. Choosing the right action depends always on the acting person.

...Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only. it must also recognize the particulars; for it is practical, and practice (*πρᾶξις*) is concerned with particulars. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.5, 1141 b 15-17)

In this respect, *phronesis* at once is both universal and particular knowledge; although the particular one has the higher priority (Aristotle, 2009, VI.8, 1141 b 22-4). *Phronimos* is the intermediary between the universal and the particular. In deliberation, in fact, he is oscillating between the universal and the particular. Meanwhile, this oscillation determines the domain of particular and extends the meaning of the universal. This is what Gadamer intends to describe as «application» (Gadamer, 2004, p. 313) by considering the universal rule, the agent understands the particular situation and reflects on the action in this situation, then takes the appropriate action. Recognition of the occasion (*sympheronta*) of the situation with the universal and «good» is what the soul demonstrates during good deliberation.

8. ORTHODES (ὀρθότης): PHRONESIS AND THE CONSISTENCY OF DELIBERATION

Aristotle uses *orthos* as a special trait to elucidate the meaning of «good deliberation» (*eubolia*). He accurately shows that goodness in «*euboulestai*» actually means the existence of *orthodes*²⁵(ὀρθότης) (Aristotle, 2009, VI.9, 1142 b 16-7), namely, a kind of consistency and stability in deliberation. Hence, in addition to seeing and attaining the good, the goodness of deliberation²⁶ is also the discovery of a practice that is appropriate to that *skopos* (good life in general).

There is more than one meaning for *orthodes* (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 223), so Aristotle defines its proper meaning for good deliberation

²⁵ «correctness» (English translation by Ross): Aristotle, 2009, p. 111.

«aṣ-ṣawāb» (Arabic translation by Badawī) : Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 223.

²⁶ Aristotle mentions several traits for deliberation, all of which describe a «good» state for this type of thought. One of them is *kalos bouleostai*/καλῶς βουλευσασθαι. In the ancient Arabic translation, the translator translated it into «ar-rawīyya-t-uṣṣahīḥah», and εὖ βουλευσασθαι to «ḥsun ar-rawīyah». In another place, it has been translated as «rawīyat ḡayyidah.»

(*euboulestai*):²⁷ «rightness (*orthodes*) in respect both of the end, the manner, and the time.» (Aristotles, 2009, VI.9, 1142 b 18-28)

If, then, it is characteristic of men of practical wisdom (*φρονίμων*) to have deliberated well, excellence in deliberation (*εὐβουλία*) will be correctness (*orthodes/ὀρθότης*) with regard to what conduces (*sympheron/συμφέρον*)²⁸ to the end (*τέλος*) which practical wisdom apprehends truly. (Aristotles, 2009, VI.9, 1142 b 33-5)

At the beginning of Book VI, *orthos* as a trait was used for *logos*, and the main purpose of the book was to clarify the meaning of *orthos logos*. In his reading of *logistikon* and *bouleostai*, Aristotle explains a specific kind of *logos* which relates to «practice.» *bouleostai* is the specific kind of reasoning which could be described by *orthodes*. therefore, it is necessary to explain what the term *orthodes* is.

Orthodes/ὀρθότης in Greek means «erectness, upright posture, straightness and fixity,²⁹ and as its secondary definition it means «correctness and rightness». *Orthos* is also an adjective meaning «upright and standing.» It can also mean «straight» if it discusses the features of a line, namely, a line without digression or distortion, and in geometry, it means vertical or right angle;³⁰ however, it also means an object that stands upright and straightforward.³¹ Although the term has secondary been used to refer to features such as correct, true and right. It seems that when this feature is used to describe a state of the soul, it may be interpreted as «being consistent.» This image is present in the Greek sense of the word, but if it is translated as truly and correctly, the specific meaning of *orthos*, which is specific to the deliberation (*bouleostai*), would be lost. Gadamer translates it into *Richtigkeit* that means «correctness and rightness.» (Aristoteles, 1998, p. 47).

Ibn Ḥunain translates *orthos/ὀρθός* in all cases to صواب *ṣawāb* (accurate) and صحيح *ṣaḥīḥ* (correct); and *orthos logos* as التميز الصواب *at-tamyīz aṣ-ṣawāb* (Aristotle, II.2, 1103 b 33; Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 88), التميز الصحيح *at-tamyīz aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (Aristotle, 2009, III.12, 1119 a 20; Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 138), القول الصحيح *al-qawl aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (Aristotle, 2009, VI.3, 1147 b 1; Aristūṭālis, 1979, pp. 241-2) and القياس الصحيح *al-qīyas aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (Aristotle, 2009, VII.9, 1151 a 21-2; Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 256). This variation in

²⁷ «rawīyyah ḡayyidah» Arabic trans by Badawī. (Aristūṭālis, 1979, p. 223.)

²⁸ Bringing together what is appropriate and expedient for attaining the end (what is good).

²⁹ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ὀρθότης> (accessed December 19, 2019)

³⁰ <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ὀρθός> (accessed December 19, 2019)

³¹ like when a horse stops on two legs, and turns its body upright.

<http://logeion.uchicago.edu/ὀρθός> (accessed December 19, 2019)

translation indicates that Ibn Ḥunain duly understood the multi-faceted meaning of *logos*. *aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (correct) means *السلیم as-salīm* (healthy) which stems from *صحة ṣiḥhat* (health). In the Persian translations, the term *orthos logos* is mostly rendered as *aql-e salīm* (correct reason-common sense) (Araštāālis, 2002, p. 9). Both of these attributes, that is, *salīm* and *ṣaḥīḥ*, refer primarily to an image of the state of health and illness, and in the secondary meaning to the state of correctness and falsehood.

Badawī translated *orthos* in its adjective form as *مستقيمة mustaqīmah* (straight). Yet, he took *orthodes* as *صواب 'ṣawāb'*. The fact is, because of the root difference in these two words, the link between *orthodes* and *orthos*, which is notable in Greek, has been ignored. The Arabic *ṣawāb* in its noun form means «right,» the antonym for «wrong.» It comes from the root *ṣawb* which means «to ascend» and «the falling rain.»³² It also means 'to descend from a height'. The semantic connection between *ṣawāb* and the root *ṣawb* is provided by the straightness and smoothness of raindrops when they fall to the ground. Basically, the image of 'right' is different in the two words *mustaqīmah* (straight) and *'ṣawāb* (right).

On the other hand, the conceptual metaphor of the word *ṣawāb* is completely the opposite of the word *orthodes*. *ṣawāb* is rightness and correctness in something that falls straight from the top, but *orthodes* means «correctness and straightness» in the sense that something becomes firm and stands firmly and becomes consistent. This difference in conceptual metaphor has also consequences and in turn, makes a difference in understanding. Consistency as a semantic component in *orthodes* comes from *phronimos*; however, in the case of *ṣawāb*, its rightness and correctness stem from conforming with a right thing coming from the outside.

9. PHRONESIS IS ORTHOS LOGOS

Aristotle sets out to answer two important questions: first, what is *orthos logos*? And second, what is the standard that fixes it? (Aristotle, 2009, VI, 1138 b 30; Brown, 2009, p. 236) Following a detailed discussion on *phronesis*, he refers to *orthos logos* at the end of Book VI. He implicitly says that in matters such as practice, *phronesis* is actually *orthos logos*:

... now correct reason (*orthos logos*) is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom (*phronesis*). All men, then, seem somehow to divine that this kind of state is virtue, namely, that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. But we must go a little further.

³² Muntaha-'l-arab fi luḡāt al-'Arab

<https://archive.org/details/MuntahalArabRubEDuvumFarsi/page/n585>, (accessed December 19, 2019).

For it is not merely the state in accordance with correct reason, but the state that implies the *presence* of correct reason, that is, virtue; and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is correct reason (*orthos logos*) about such matters. (Aristotle, 2009, VI.13, 1144 a 20-25)

Aristotle saw *orthodes* or consistency in deliberation. Hence, *orthos logos* is a consistent intellect that evaluates well and deliberates regarding the good. *orthos logos* does not mean the universal rule or principle outside *phronimos*. Rather, it is his conscientious, consistent intellect, which guides to the good. Aristotle corrects this famous statement that «virtue must be in accordance with *orthos logos* by relying on the fact that a virtuous person must himself possess *orthos logos*, that is to say, be a *phronimos* (Brown, 2009, 243), rather than conforming with something outside of himself. Therefore, its Arabic translation as *qā'idah mustaqīmah* is far from its original meaning, and perhaps rendering it to *'aql-e salīm* (correct reason) (Arasṭātālis, 2002, p. 9) or *at-tamyīz as-ṣaḥīḥ* (correct distinction) is more appropriated. Choosing *'at-tamyīz* (distinction) for *logos* in the term *orthos logos*, reveals that Ibn Ḥunain considered the meaning of the words in their combinations as well. Although *logos* per se usually does not translate to *at-tamyīz* (distinction); but its description with *orthos*, and its relationship with *phronesis* in this context lead Ibn Ḥunain to choose this appropriate equivalent. *at-tamyīz* also renders an active meaning for *logos* that are close to the meaning of deliberation and *at-ta'aqqul*, unlike the passive concept of *qā'idah*.

We noted that Badawī translated *logos* as *qā'idah* (rule) and *orthos* as 'mustaqīmah' (straight). The term *qā'idah*, from the root *qu'ūd* (sitting down), has also been used in the sense of «principle» and «the law,» as well as «to be set and put in place» like the base and foundation of a building. *mustaqīmah*, on the other hand, is from the root *qāma* (standing) and a cognate of *qawām* (to be firm). *Mustaqīm* is also occasionally used to convey the meaning of «true and correct.»

Apart from being the translation of *orthos logos*, the term *qā'idah mustaqīmah* seems to warrant a different kind of attention as a compound word, which offers a somewhat static and passive dimension of the concept. Here, the strength and straightness come from the base or rule (namely *qā'idah*) like the foundation of the building. While the combination of the attribute *orthos* with the noun *logos* shows that *logos* receives its consistency and strength not from somewhere outside itself, but from its inner uprightness and standing, its inner consistency and its tendency to approach *skopos* or the «good.» In fact, *logos* gradually rises and stands while reasoning by way of deliberation (*tarawwī*). It seems that in the discussion of *orthos logos* regarding practice, the translation of *logos* into the

term *qā'idah* is not quite adequate, for there is a kind of uncertainty in this kind of reasoning that gradually acquires consistency and strength during *bouleostai* or deliberation. The art of medicine or navigation³³ as examples that Aristotle uses in the Book II (Aristotle, 2009, II. 3, 1104 a 9) shows that this kind of reasoning does not necessarily depend on the resources on which it stands, but it relies on a kind of tactfulness, an ability of distinction and decision-making.

The relative inadequacy of rendering *orthos logos* to *qā'idah mustaqimah* seems to have a matter in itself. It takes us back to the point raised at the beginning of our discussion that one must carefully examine the neighbouring concepts as well as their interrelations in the source language, and try to translate that network of concepts into the target language. Failure to do so is in fact due to the lack of attention to the network and the interconnectivity between all the linguistic devices in the text that makes the emergence of original meaning possible. The impression one gains from the concept of *orthos logos* in the source language is completely different from the impression out of *qā'idah mustaqimah* in the target language. The understanding that emerges from the Greek network of concepts is that, in order to have moral life, one has to be trained and strengthen his practical reason. However, the meaning transmitted in Arabic is that the moral act derives its strength from compliance with the rules and laws; therefore, in this kind of ethics, the primary effort is to extract or to establish general rules.

CONCLUSION

The present study was intended to critically examine how the term *phronesis* is transmitted into Arabic in the revised version of the first known translation of the *NE*, relying on the interpretation of English and German commentators of Aristotle. Due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of this concept, it is more than difficult to find a single term in other languages to convey the full meaning. Aristotle creates a complex network of correlated concepts to explain *phronesis*. The reader/translator in his/her turn is required to form a proper understanding of this network and clarify its semantic field. One must carefully examine the neighbouring concepts as well as their interrelations in the source language, and try to translate that network of concepts into the target language.

Based on these considerations the results of this study may be summed up as follows: First, a comparative review of the Arabic translation

³³ «two branches of skill or expertise that offer a neat parallel for moral virtue, since each is an expertise, not a matter of chance, but to be an expert does not consist in knowing and being able to apply a set of rules.» (Brown, 2009, p. 212)

of Book VI with the rest of the ancient translated text reveals that in his translation of the terms, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī does not adhere to the framework of interpretation applied by Ishāq Ibn Ḥunain. Therefore, it cannot be said that his translation properly aligns with Ibn Ḥunain's, forming an integrated, harmonious text. One reason for this lack of conformation may be the historical difference brought about by the change and modification in the meaning of some of the terms. One of the most pivotal examples of this difference lies in the interpretation of *phronesis*. It seems that in the classical Arabic language *ta'aqqul* was semantically very close, if not exact, a term for *phronesis*; however, it has, over time, undergone so many conceptual changes that *Badawī* seems to be uneasy in selecting 'aql and *ta'aqqul* as a proper rendering for *phronesis*, so he consequently translates it to *fiṭna*.

In some cases, the contextual importance of the etymological connection between Greek words is somehow overlooked. For example, the close semantic proximity of *logistikon* and *logos* is completely lost in their translation into *taqdirī* and *qā'idah* respectively. One of the most practical ways to overcome this hurdle may be that in translating certain key terms one would also cite the original word or phrase next to its rendering so that the reader does not lose sight of the conceptual coherence of the text and would be able to retrieve what is lost in the translation by way of noticing the etymological connection of the terms.

A comparative reading of the translation of Book VI of *NE* along with the original Greek text shows that *Badawī* translates the Greek terms with relative faithfulness, although he occasionally fails to establish a correlation between the concepts. This serves as a good example to confirm the hypothesis that it is not enough to translate the meaning of the words and independent terms correctly. Rather, one should also consider the relationship between the terms, the network of concepts, the metaphor and the impressions through which these terms become meaningful.

ABBREVIATIONS

- (*NE*): *The Nicomachean Ethics*
- (*NE*. Eng): Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Transl. by David Ross. Revised with an introduction and notes by Lesley Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

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