

Being-in-Nature and the Question of Love

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Love makes us human, and it makes us natural. Its humanness arises among the poets who speak of salvific love, for instance, across cultures and without tiring of the topic.¹ Poets speak of love in language, divide it into different kinds, and describe its agentive impact on people's lives. In Christianity and Judaism, it has been spoken of as the proper bond between human beings and God, and even the very nature of the God in whose image we were made.² Love's naturalness arises in its participation in processes deemed natural because they are common to animals: reproduction, child-rearing, and group-building. Even while the poets sing about love, it quietly ensures that these jobs are done. It crosses what divides we erect between nature and ourselves; love leads us to act naturally, but there is hardly an experience that appears more particularly human than love.

In order to explore the place of love in a human/nature divide I turn to its appearance in the work of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, and in particular, to their readings of divine and human love in Augustine that have been at the center of this seminar. These sources are linked by a certain love of their own; during the affair

¹ "But the poets fool us," writes Hannah Arendt, for "they are the only ones to whom [romantic] love is not only crucial, but indispensable, which entitles them to mistake it for a universal" (HC 242n.81).

List of abbreviations. PRL: Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. C: Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961) (book and chapter numbers given). BT: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) (page numbers given for German text). HC: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). LSA: Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, edited by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

² Deuteronomy 6:5; 1 John 4:8.

between Heidegger and Arendt in the 1920s, he would quote to her from Augustine,³ whose ideas had been formative to his own phenomenology. She then went on to write her dissertation on Augustine's idea of love under Karl Jaspers, after the affair with Heidegger had ended. Each, in their thinking through Augustine, adopts an anthropology that distinguishes between nature and the quintessentially human. This divide then comes to play a critical role where love might have entered into both of their systems: authentic being with others and the generativity of human politics. Neither, however, goes on to deal with love directly in their own frameworks, despite Augustine's Christian fascination with it.

The impact of these two thinkers on modern social theory and philosophy has been tremendous. Their exclusion of love, and with it nature, from phenomenology and politics has become standard outside of theology. On the one hand, their thinking leaves us with a critique of certain biological approaches to human life, suspicious of efforts to naturalize the human.⁴ On the other, the most important postwar theorists after them, including Derrida, Foucault, and Bourdieu, treat love as a thing to be explained rather than one that explains. But for those of us interested in returning to the subject of love in conversation with Heidegger and Arendt, what might we mean by the loving

³ In a love letter, Heidegger wrote to Arendt, for instance, "Augustine once said: I love you—I want you to be what you are." See Carol Brightman, "The Metaphysical Couple," review of *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger*, by Elzbieta Ettinger, *The Nation*, May 20, 2004. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040607/brightman>

⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001 [1966]); Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (eds.), *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Jean-Luc Marion, "Mihi magna quaestio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing," *The Journal of Religion* 85 (2005): 1-24.

subject? Can we speak about love without speaking of its naturalness, its biology? And further, might love play a role in unifying a divided human condition?

Defining what we mean by “nature” is unlikely to be straightforward, especially when dealing with several different authors. Its meaning arises discursively, in usage. We can start, though, with a usefully contradictory definition: *nature is the world apart from relations among “fellow man,” while also being, in part or in whole, constitutive of human beings.*

“Love,” in turn, will insist on its own necessary ambiguity. Augustine tries to speak of love directly, but Arendt’s dissertation reveals what contradictions arise in his doing so. When she speaks of love in *The Human Condition*, she does it rhapsodically but briefly, and only to exclude it from the public life. Love, as anti-political, is not to be theorized. Heidegger reads Augustine’s love as well, but makes little of love per se in his own system (*Being and Time* mentions love in only a footnote). Bringing love to light in this context requires from us a certain faith of our own in its phenomenal, political, or theological reality. As far as this conversation goes, love has yet to be begun to be defined.

Following chronology, I will begin with an account of this divided condition of love in Heidegger on Augustine, then in Arendt on Augustine (and Heidegger also, implicitly), followed by concluding remarks of my own. There, I suggest that this division may not be what it appears.

• Heidegger on Augustine

· α Animals

“What do I love when I love You?” asks Augustine, with Heidegger reading closely alongside (PRL 141). The *beata vita*, the happy life, is his answer. And where is that to be found? In memory, since our universal striving for it “would not be possible if that for which we strive were not in the *memoria* in some way” (143). Looking for the beautiful life, then, begins not beyond us but within our created selves, our natures. The search cannot, however, end there. Augustine knows this because of animals: “For beasts and birds also have memory: otherwise they could never find their lairs or nests,” he writes (C X.17). And further, returning to the first question:

What, then, do I love when I love God? Who is this Being who is so far above my soul? If I am to reach him, it must be through my soul. But I must go beyond the power by which I am joined to my body and by which I fill its frame with life. This is not the power by which I can find my God, for if it were, *the horse and the mule, senseless creatures* [Rom. 1:20], could find him too, because they also have this same power which gives life to their bodies. But there is another faculty in me besides this. (X.7)

For Augustine in these passages, animals play a decisive role in his attempt to answer the question of loving God. They serve as dead ends, marking the limits of memory and limits of bodies. Why? By divine ordination. “Where you not my Creator,” he prays, “and was it not you who made me different from the beasts that walk on the earth and wiser than the birds that fly in the air?” (VI.1) Augustine then uses his knowledge of animal behavior to mark the boundary that human must cross.

In his subsequent work, Heidegger mirrors the move that Augustine makes here. Famously (for us) in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, a set of lectures replete with zoology, he declares animals to be “poor in world,” where “poverty implies less as

opposed to more.”⁵ The more, of course, is the world that constitutes Dasein, the worldhood relevant to the human. Because of this difference, animals do not live or die as Dasein does. Indeed, Stuart Elden suggests, “In Heidegger the human only seems recognizable if it is described in relation to an animal that it is not.”⁶

As we see in Augustine’s account of memory, the dividing line between human and animal implies a dividing line through the human as well, between what is shared with animals and the remainder. The remainder turns out to be decisive; it becomes all that really matters about humans. For Augustine it consists in the *imago Dei*, and with it the capacity to sin or be redeemed in the eyes of God. For Heidegger, it is the parallel problem and possibility of authenticity. Because of what separates humans from animals, Heidegger will insist, the human “can never be nature, but always is either *over* the animal, or, precisely as human, *under* it, which is when we say they have been an ‘animal.’”⁷ Humans could not be nature even if they chose it, for to choose nature makes one less than human. The possibilities of Dasein’s life are therefore determined not *in* nature but *in reference to it*.

Heidegger follows Augustine through chapter X of *Confessions* into the exploration of temptation, which reveals the human at war with itself. Natural desire, “scattered among the many” of nature, must be “brought into the One” (PRL 151-2). This “One” stands first for God⁸ and by extension it posits a human soul who must

⁵ My discussion of Heidegger on animals depends on Stuart Elden’s “Heidegger’s Animals,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006): 273-291. Here, p. 275.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Heidegger seems ambivalent. “The necessary One—God?” he writes parenthetically (PRL 152).

shepherd its fallen nature toward God. The desire of the flesh, of the eye, and of worldly ambition, all guided by the natural (and fallen) logic of vanity, consist in the trouble [*molestia*] of living. Here, “in temptation appears what kind of human being one is” (181), precisely by experiencing through one’s own nature what true humanness is not.

For Augustine, nature itself is not fallen, for natural animals do not experience sin; but sin is natural for people, and rescue requires the ascent to God. Where the animals go we cannot follow, and vis versa.

· β The Question

In the conclusion of the Augustine lectures, it is clear how much Heidegger’s own dialectic of authenticity, his *falling*, owes to this account of *fallenness*. Here he speaks of Augustine’s *molestia* in such terms as might easily appear in *Being and Time*.

In the concrete and genuine enactment of experience, it [having-of-onself] gives itself the possibility of falling, but in its ownmost radical self-concern, it gives itself at the same time the full, concrete, factual “opportunity” to arrive at the *being* of its ownmost life. (PRL 183)

As creatures able to raise the question of Being, which is the critical characteristic of Dasein in *Being and Time*, we step outside of nature while existing in reference to it. This question is an “opportunity,” because authenticity (or being saved) can only be spoken of when one grasps, in the act of asking, the real possibility of inauthenticity (or hellfire). For this reason Heidegger’s Augustine knows his true self through the very temptation and fear that makes him a question to himself. The question also corresponds to the difference between human and nature in Augustine, for whom nature does not speak to animals because “animals cannot question it” (131).

But Heidegger's Dasein introduces an ambiguity in its divided condition. Giorgio Agamben perceptively writes that for Heidegger, "man is not a duality of spirit and body, nature and politics, life and *logos*, but is instead resolutely situated at the point of their indistinction."⁹ Because the opposition between Dasein and nature is ontological rather than ontic —that is, determined a question about the meaning of Being rather than a description of beings—the dividing line is far from final. It is an orientation made for asking a particular kind of question. The indistinction that Agamben points to arises because Dasein is "there" in "being" by virtue of the question it asks, rather than calling a particular being human or nature.

The asker's question maintains its priority in Dasein's encounter with other Dasein. Such encounters are, "after all, oriented to one's *own* [Dasein]" (BT 118). Being with others authentically requires insisting on returning to the question of one's ownmost rather than falling among the they, among beings. While Dasein is constituted among others and amidst a world, authenticity depends on maintaining truly Augustinian distinctions between the asking Dasein, Being, and beings (i.e. Augustine's soul, God, and world). Heidegger thus predicates the condition of possibility for love—being with others—on distinguishing the questioning self from the very nature that constitutes it. A Heideggerian ontology of love could not begin to speak of the body, for instance, without beginning at the question.

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 153.

: Arendt on Augustine

It can be no accident that Arendt chose Augustine as the subject of her dissertation, who had been so central to the development of her mentor Heidegger's thinking. While his lectures follow Augustine's reasoning with eager enthusiasm, she sees contradictions. These, however, do not prevent her from drawing from Augustine much as Heidegger had—translating his theology into a worldly phenomenology. In her analysis, much as she would later write of Heidegger's early seminars, "a single dialogue was pursued and subjected to question step by step, until the time-honored doctrine had disappeared to make room for a set of problems of immediate and urgent relevance."¹⁰ Arendt's new "set of problems" were aimed squarely at Heidegger's Dasein and the deterministic loss of the new that she saw arising from it. In Augustine, she finds not being toward death but natality—being from birth (LSA 173-4, 184). At the same time, though, what she sees in Augustine's concept of love becomes exactly the way out of love for the later Arendt, toward the friendship and *amor mundi* that she would turn to in *The Human Condition*, a politics to which love is opposed. It thereby should not be surprising that she began revising the dissertation in the late fifties, around the same time that *The Human Condition* was completed (183).

: a Divided Desire

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," *The New York Review of Books*, October 21, 1971, quoted in Walter Biemel, *Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study*, translated by J. L. Mehta (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 5.

For Arendt's Augustine, the nature of love is not only knowable but known: "To love is indeed nothing else than to crave something for its own sake," he posits, and "love is a kind of craving" (9). As craving, the love comes naturally to human nature. It expresses itself as the movement all beings make toward what they perceive as good. After making love so ordinary, Arendt's Augustine focuses his attention not on the nature of love but always on its object. For him, the soul cannot choose whether or not to love but only what to love. Consequently, the fundamental distinction in Augustine's idea of love that Arendt points to is between *cupiditas*, desire that seeks enjoyment of things in the world, and *caritas*, desire that seeks to use things in the world toward the enjoyment of God (18).¹¹ Love itself comes naturally to us and is universal; what distinguishes humans from each other, and therefore what matters to Augustine, is where they choose to place it.

Of the two loves, *cupiditas* is both the most natural and the choice to be avoided. *Cupiditas* is being "a denizen of this world," and its logic has immediate appeal: "Would it not then be better to love the world in *cupiditas* and be at home? Why should we make a desert out of this world?" (19) We are led to the things that surround us, since imitating "belongs first among the basic structures that rule human conduct" (54). But both Christian faith and (primarily) Greek reason, in ways that don't always cohere according to Arendt, tell Augustine otherwise. The love of temporal things, *cupiditas*, will always be plagued by the fear of their loss, bringing the threat of the future ever into the present. This is because happiness, he insists, depends on "having and holding" what one loves and "even more in being sure of not losing it" (10).

¹¹ Less central, but also relevant, is the distinction in Augustine's vocabulary within *caritas* between general *amor*, *dilectio* of self and neighbor, and the love of God in *caritas* (LSA 39).

Attaining it means realizing one's "second nature" (82), which overcomes and supplants what originally comes naturally to the fallen person. Resting in God, only *caritas* offers this promise, and securing it rescues the soul from the sequence of passing presents that the natural world endures in exchange for a present without future, a life eternal (13). Beholding the choice between *caritas* and *cupiditas*, Augustine warns, "Love, be careful what you love" (17). The object of its love determines the soul's eternal status.

The enjoyment of God in *caritas*, however, does not utterly abandon the world but preserves it for a love of use. Arendt is particularly concerned with Augustine's view of the neighbor, the love of whom is commanded by Jesus alongside love of God. "Love of neighbor is man's attitude toward his neighbor," she explains, "which springs from *caritas*" (93). This sequence, from love of God to the love of things, is the "order of love" inscribed in *caritas*. By it, we find that love of the world and others is not damning in itself, only insofar as God is not loved above all. Then, "everyone is loved as much as he ought to be," as Arendt puts it, "no more and no less" (38). This proper hierarchy of love, predictably, begins with the divinity above us, then comes to ourselves and others beside us, and finally to our natural bodies below (39). Coming to bodies by this route eliminates the possibility of idolatrous carnality (94). From start to finish, bodies sit on the sidelines. Though its origin is natural, and presumably bodily, Arendt describes the central challenge as the soul's *mental* shepherding of its love toward the proper object.

To Arendt, this account of love represents a contradiction for Augustine. The "indifference" to the neighbor and the isolation of the soul that *caritas* requires does not meet the this-worldly demands of Pauline Christian love (43). However, this very indirectness, this distance, and this aloofness above nature becomes central to the

political community she would later imagine, anchored on a timeless *amor mundi* apart from the love of particular things and people.¹² What might have been a truer, Pauline, Christian love for Augustine is exactly the “unworldly,” “antipolitical” kind that her politics would abandon.

: β Divided Community

Part III of *Love and Saint Augustine* turns to “Social Life,” which Arendt takes as a distinct approach to “the relevance of the neighbor” in Augustine's thought. Here she encounters his concept of love not in the interiority of the person but in the context of community and the command to “love one another.” This social world springs from a “twofold source”: creation (by God) and generation (from the natural, lineage of Adam that passes on original sin).

First of all, people enjoy equality in their common creation by God. This fact, however, loses its meaning in the fall of Adam, and by the subsequent generations. “In the society founded on Adam man has made himself independent of the Creator. He depends on other persons and not on God” (LSA 103). Here, life occurs in a natural cycle of birth and death. The man-made world is the extent of things, and people operate by negotiations of interdependence, each depending on finite others and loving only by *cupiditas* (101).

The decisive moment in this account of social life is the entrance of common faith. This faith, given “relevance” by the historical coming of Christ and his defeat of

¹² Shin Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship,” *The Review of Politics* 57, no. 3 (Summer, 1995): 505-535, 506.

finite death, binds the community not by reference to the past but to hope in the eternal future (98). In a state of total commitment, each person becomes the property of the community and “is completely forgotten” in his individuality (109). The former boundaries of life, natural birth and death, become relevant only insofar as they merely signify the possibilities of eternal life and eternal death. Other people, once dependence on them has been replaced by dependence on God, become also fundamentally signifiers—their multitude is a constant reminder of original sin and a warning against pride (105). Loving them is merely an occasion to love God, in whom all enjoyment rests. All the while the transmission of this new life, this faith, occurs not through the natural generation that perpetuates natural life, but through the life of the *civitas Dei*.

Again, Arendt points out an apparent contradiction in the indirectness of Augustine's *caritas*, which seems to leave the individuals isolated in the gaze of God. How can social life be explained? She explains that because the community depends on shared sin and bodily death first in order to bring to light the common origin of all in God, the interdependence of the first relation conjoins with the indirectness of the second (112). Together they reveal the relevance of the common Creation by creating a new community, remembering the “natality” expressed in Genesis. Seemingly, as the making of nature is reenacted, the new community might re-conceive itself as nature all over again, undivided, as before the Fall.

: y Divided Condition

Arendt does not appear welcome any such apotheosis of nature. Her *Human Condition* proposes its own divided account of human nature. As in Augustine, the real life of

“man” and the “man-made world” matters only in so far as it can be made distinct from the natural. “Natality” is at its most meaningful for Arendt not when generating literal life but when employed in a metaphor of language and action, just as her Augustine takes the true meaning of the body's death to be a metaphorical one. It represents the birth of “something new,” which “cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before” (HC 178). To ensure human openness to natality, she insists on distinguishing labor from work and action and on creating of the distinction a hierarchy resembling that of Augustine’s *caritas* (see note ¹¹ above). Natality is a disembodied metaphor built on a disembodied reading of Augustine’s love.

She takes *caritas* still further in her later work. The distance its indirectness makes between individuals, which she claims is contradictory in the Christian context, becomes the form of a new public bond. The very distance she sees in Augustine that makes the world “a desert to the lover” becomes for her the singularity that makes political freedom possible: “without intimacy and without closeness” (243). A refugee from Germany by fact of her Jewishness, Arendt insists that this freedom must also be grounded in something other than natural origin. As Shin Chiba writes,

A new public *vinculum* [bond] should bring people into a common mode of living without any recourse to more-or-less *naturalistic* bonds such as family, ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion, or a shared origin of humanity. For Arendt political life does not belong to the *naturalistic*, but to the *artificial* dimension of life.¹³

The political represents Arendt’s striving for a community driven toward metaphorical natality and what it can make of itself over and against nature. “Love” rather, in most of

¹³ Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” 508-509. According to Chiba, Arendt changes her regard for the bond of common origin, which appears optimistic in *Love and Saint Augustine*, to utter pessimism after the experience of Nazism.

its forms, “is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere” (243). While founding a model for this community in Augustine’s *caritas*, she drops from it any pretension to being love.

Finally, Arendt’s openness to the new stands opposed to Heidegger’s attempt to unify human experience around being toward death. This, by Arendt’s account, ends in “nullity,” a view of life as nothingness (LSA 75). In Augustine’s account of memory she finds an alternative. There “it is memory and not expectation,” she writes, explicitly against Heidegger’s view of death, “that gives unity and wholeness to human existence” (56). Thus she is able to re-read death through natality—“Death becomes the beginning of eternity in which life is embedded” (75-6). In reaction to him, she reframes the question of Being from death into birth, and from it, in her philosophical imagination, sketches a community directed toward a natality inspired by (but separate from) natural human birth.

.. Love in Question

For both Heidegger and Arendt, Augustine’s famous *quaestio* is of special significance: “I have become a question to myself” (C X.33). It comes at the beginning and the end of Heidegger’s lectures on Augustine as the unifying question, suggesting that from it Heidegger learned to ask about the meaning of Being in the first place (PRL 130, 184). A related formulation, “I have become a land of trouble to myself” (C X.16) appears in *Being and Time* among the first formulations of Dasein (BT 43-4). Arendt draws attention to the *quaestio* a number of times in her dissertation—with it, “man initiates the quest for his own being” (LSA 57). Meanwhile, “in his quest for ‘true being,’” she

explains, “man has begun to ask himself out of the world,” which is to say, out of nature (58). Decades later, by the time of *The Human Condition*, the *questio* is synonymous for her with “the problem of human nature” (HC 10).¹⁴ Or rather, the problem of the human standing in distinction from nature by asking about the nature of himself.

“What Augustine expects of God is an answer to the question ‘Who am I?’” writes the young Arendt in reference to the *quaestio*, “the certainty of which all previous philosophy had taken for granted” (LSA 25). This passage bears an echo of Heidegger, who thought of the significance of Dasein’s question in similar terms. Yet Heidegger and Arendt, perhaps because they speak of no God to do the answering,¹⁵ do not expect their question to be resolved. Indeed, the *quaestio*

seems unanswerable in both its individual psychological sense and its general philosophical sense. It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves—this would be like jumping over our own shadows. (HC 10)

A recent lecture by Jean-Luc Marion recalls the *quaestio* to speak of human nature and draws just this sense from it. For Marion the question is one to be inhabited “without a response” in a “privilege of positive self-unknowing,” for any answer given to it constrains possibilities—including the possibility of love: “I can only love him who remains for me without definition, and only as long as he thus remains, which is to say as long as I will not have finished with him.”¹⁶ Together with Heidegger and Arendt, Marion joins in phrasing authentic life in the terms Augustine used to describe his

¹⁴ Scott and Stark also note that Arendt returns to the *questio* near the end of her life in the 1973 Gifford Lectures, published as *The Life of the Mind* (LSA 192).

¹⁵ Both studies of Augustine specifically detach themselves from “dogmatic content,” with consequences that deserve a separate discussion (PRL 47; LSA 4).

¹⁶ Marion, “*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*,” 14.

forgetfulness and finitude before God, the ground of his Being; in effect, as a question. Because the loved one remains unknown, the Levinasian other, loving too is a kind of asking, just as Augustine asks God, “What do I love when I love You?”

It is possible to read each of these authors as making firm and final oppositions between human and nature, as I have almost done—the “poor” animals of Augustine and Heidegger, or Arendt’s subjugation of biological “labor” to the *vita activa*.¹⁷ They then would join along with those who count human beings as superior to nature—to non-human beings like animals, plants, dirt, and outer space—and thereby feel obligated to master it. But this, actually, is only an appearance; for all three thinkers, the focus is on the question. The “human” opposed to nature is not a being, as in an onto-theology that might imagine nature’s subjugation, but a question, a dilemma, an *aporia*. *The human, in asking, is not first a being but a question.*

When this human is no longer begins as being, a particular *Homo sapiens* for example, the meaning of nature transforms as well. It is no longer “everything else.” Nor is it, properly, the biological or otherwise “reality” that the question depends on. Rather, nature is a discovery that emerges with the question, providing the terms in which the question is asked. Heidegger’s menagerie of animals, for instance, are inquired, and inquired about. The early chapters of *Being and Time* make clear that Dasein is what it asks, and it can ask only with what appears to it, with phenomena. Therefore the distinguishing between human and nature, along with man and animal, labor and action, and the rest, are a kind of chimera, a temporary (as fundamentally temporal) opposition that a particular question-asking happens to frame.

¹⁷ To this could be added Marion’s rejection of a naturalistic anthropology in *Ibid*.

Within this dynamic anthropology, and along the lines Marion points to, love may be spoken of as asking. Like Augustine's craving it has little specific importance in itself but just happens and happens and happens naturally. If this is the case there is little to gain by making love into an analytic category or assigning it properties. Rather, what matters about love is the phrasing it makes of other things, that is, the concretes with which it *participates* in nature while never ceasing to be the question: built in every important way out of the particular gifts we offer, the commitments we make and keep, the "natural" processes our bodies enact with one another.