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### **A study of the influence of custom on the moral judgment**

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Chapter VI - The eudaemonistic standard

## CHAPTER VI

## THE EUDAEMONISTIC STANDARD

Our results thus far have been essentially negative: the foreign pressure theory neither describes nor explains correctly the facts of the every day moral consciousness. But our investigation enables us to make some positive statements with regard to the eudaemonistic point of view. These may properly find a place in our study, although the detailed description of the eudaemonistic judgment formed no part of our program.

We may begin with a certain statement about the mode of passing moral judgment in general, for which the preceding examination supplies, indeed, no absolutely new evidence but which, when accepted on other grounds, it tends decidedly to confirm. I shall not attempt to argue for the view about to be set forth. It is here given a place solely in order to show that the denial of immediacy does not necessarily thrust us into the arms of another alternative which, to many, would seem no better than that which has been rejected. This removal of a possible misunderstanding may serve, I hope, to make the acceptance of the conclusions of the preceding chapters less difficult for some readers.

The moral judgment is often described as the comparison of conduct with a standard. This view, if stated as a universal proposition, seems to me erroneous. It supposes the presence in the mind of some general rule as a major premise, of a formula for the present situation as a minor premise and the consciousness of the relation of the major and minor terms to the middle term as the basis of the conclusion. This process may of course take place at times. It certainly does so not infrequently in the so-called prudential judgment and I see no reason why it should not equally in the moral. Thus a man adopts the maxim: Letters are not to be written when in anger. On being tempted

to write a letter under such conditions he may think of his resolution and refrain. Usually, however, what happens is this. An angry man feels tempted to write a letter highly charged with electricity; then, without any general principle in mind at all, fears he may say something he will afterwards regret and lays aside his pen. It is the same, I believe, with the moral judgment. Ordinarily, as I have asserted on page 17 above, no process of reasoning seems to take place. We condemn an action usually because there is something about it that arouses dislike directly. There is to be sure one difference between the prudential and the moral judgment. Moral condemnation means that we disapprove of the act not because of any relationship in which it may chance to stand to our own welfare (as the industry of a business competitor which may lose us many customers) but because we wish no one whatever to do it, under the given conditions. But the universal involved in the "no one" is a universal that applies as such only to this particular kind of conduct as practiced in this particular situation. So that the act before the mind may be a single act in its concrete individuality.

The denial of immediacy, therefore, does not mean that in the eudaemonistic judgment the person compares the action with the principle of "the greatest good of the greatest number," or some similar formula. In fact he often prefers the less good as is shown by many of the answers to VIII and IX of Series I. And such answers are not to be explained by assuming that the person supposed, either explicitly or implicitly, that these modes of conduct were in the long run most conducive to the general welfare. Any such statement, however guarded, may be unequivocally denied if put forward as one of universal validity.

But whether he chooses in favor of what *de facto* will tend to bring about the greatest good or not, he seems usually to have in mind not the whole world of sentient life but merely the actors in the drama before him. "Taking the bread will save these lives:—good." or, "it will save these lives without doing any appreciable harm to the baker:—good!" such are some of the points of view from which the latitudinarian answers to I are formed. In the rigoristic answers the *dramatis personae* may be more numerous, including oftentimes the community in

which the chief actors live, or occasionally their country or even (still more rarely) the whole of the human race. But even in this there may be and often is no reference to a general rule in the meaning of the definition we are criticizing.

Sometimes, indeed, the reference to a rule takes place and that without any clear awareness of the eudaemonistic factors in the situation. But such a judgment, as I have tried to show,<sup>1</sup> if not itself entitled to the name of eudaemonistic, is the direct product of the eudaemonistic point of view, since it is but an echo of past eudaemonistic judgment. As it has already been discussed at length it need not detain us now.

After this introductory explanation we turn to a brief examination of the content of the eudaemonistic judgment where that content is explicitly before the mind. There is here much room for diversity. One aspect of a situation may attract the attention of one man, another aspect, the attention of a second man. Thus a great variety of attitudes is possible on the part of those who are using fundamentally the same criterion. The latitudinarian answers to the five questions we have been studying turn, in general, upon the approval of the intended good. In I, II, and IV there is usually—but not always—a recognition of the fact that some harm at least is a necessary accompaniment of the good. In such instances the principle often employed and sometimes expressed is that duty is determined rigorously by the balance of gain over loss; as in answers Ib, IIb, IVa, and also IIIb (page 24); again in I, page 81; II 5, page 76; IV, page 78 (in effect), page 83. More frequently, however, the limits of service are either not placed so high, or are at all events less clearly formulated and presumably less clearly recognized. This is especially true of the Agricultural students, though it holds also for the members of the College of Letters and Science. For examples from the former see above pages 76, 84 under I; from the latter IVb, page 25. In view of these results we must deny the statement of Professor Ladd,<sup>2</sup> "It would be contrary to fact to affirm that [in passing moral judgments] men at all frequently deliberate whether this or that way of behavior will produce the maximum

<sup>1</sup> See above, page 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Philosophy of Conduct*, 514.

of human happiness." Or at all events we are bound to assert that men very frequently deliberate whether a given mode of behavior will produce the greatest attainable happiness for those whom they think of as affected by it.

The rigoristic answers exhibit a much greater diversity in the point of view. The following are the chief varieties represented in our papers and interviews: (1) By all odds the most important class of causes for rigoristic answers to our questions is that group of considerations brought together in the Appendix under the heading: The eudaemonistic reasons for the observance of general rules. (2) The second class of causes consists of certain fallacies, the two most important of which, though already described, may be mentioned here for the sake of completeness. (a) The first I have been calling the pseudo-eudaemonistic judgment as such, although (b) is equally entitled to the name. In this we see the eudaemonistic reason for the rule but fail to observe that it does not hold in this particular case. The resultant judgment was illustrated above, Chapter II, page 35 and following. (b) The person judging regards it as impossible to maintain a rule if you permit a single exception. This point of view is not identical with reason 2 or 6 for the observance of general rules, just referred to; for the latter depends upon a recognition of the fact that there are all sorts of imperceptible gradations in conduct, and asserts (in effect) that were it not for this, exceptions to the rules would be permissible. But here this difficulty is not in mind, and the answer would presumably hold even if there were not a series of puzzling grays lying between the black and the white. Neither is it only a form of (a) above. For in (a) the person may be willing in principle to permit exceptions but fails to see that this is the place for one. Here, on the other hand, every possibility of flexibility is cut off by some such consideration as this: "If it was not wrong for him to steal, then it would not be wrong for anybody, and in this way would all go stealing when in need" [No. 233]. As will be remembered other representatives of this point of view were studied at some length in Chapter IV above, page 92 ff. (3) Trust in the leadings of God who does all things well. This appears most frequently, of course, in the answers to V. Sometimes, however, we find it in I also, as in 201, page 73

above. (4) The interests of the party that has less at stake catch and hold the attention and make the person judging their partisans. This may be due to several different causes: (a) The interests of the other party fail to obtain any consideration whatever, they are ignored. This seems to be the case in the following rigoristic answers to IV: "I think every one ought to stick to an agreement; I should want any one to do it to me." "He was hurting them folks' feelings just the same, whether they was rich or poor." In the following there is a formal recognition of the interests of both parties, but the imagination is so completely occupied by the smaller evil that the greater is for it practically non-existent. The answer is in reply to question IV of Series II, and reads: "No. No act or deed even though it is an act of kindness to one person is justified if it thereby causes injury to another." (b) The judges place themselves at the point of view of the person who will be injured by the proposed action and feel that the sacrifice involved is greater than he is bound to make. An unequivocal example is to be found, page 76, supplementary questions under I; another, page 43. There is no place where it appears as beyond controversy a determining factor in the answer to a basal question, but IVd, page 26, may perhaps belong here, and I have ventured to explain hypothetically I and IV of 129 (page 45) by this same principle. In practice it will often be difficult to distinguish between cases of (a) and (b), but as points of view they are of course quite different. (c) In promises, contracts, and matters of veracity the principle is tacitly adopted *volenti non fit injuria*. Examples are IV 1a and b in 8 (page 43), and in 205 (page 78). The number of such answers in III 1a and b and IV 1a and b among the Agricultural students is considerable. One student applies it in III. (d) Sensitiveness to the claims of family loyalty. An example is IIId, page 25. There are a number of similar answers among the Agricultural students. (e) For some reason other than (b) and (d) above enumerated sympathy goes out to one party as it does not to the other. Thus 201 changed his answer to II when I told him how good the father had been to the son. (See page 74.) Other examples are those of pages 75 and 77, where the answer turns on the fact that the father is dead. (d) and (e) ordinarily represent only one of the factors con-

tributing to the result. Usually (not always), for example, the son is not supposed to be bound to sacrifice his life to his father's wishes unless he has promised to do so. The second factor will be one or more of those enumerated under (1) or it may sometimes be (2) (a). On the other hand, as appears from our example, the latter alone is not able to determine the decision for the promise is not considered binding except as (d) or (e) is operative.

The comparative frequency of these different points of view is of considerable interest for a number of reasons. I have accordingly prepared two tables that may serve to throw a little light on this subject. They are preceded by a table that will enable us to compare the relative amount of rigorism among the "Hill" and the Agricultural students.

TABLE I.—LATITUDINARIAN AND RIGORISTIC ANSWERS AMONG "HILL" AND AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS.

Figures Represent Percentages.

		L. and S. Men.	L. and S. Women.	L. and S. Average.	Agric.
I.....	L.....	90	82.3	86.1	65
	R.....	10	13.7	11.9	33
	D.....	0	4	2	2
II.....	L.....	79.6	76	77.8	26
	R.....	14.3	16	15.1	70
	D.....	6.1	8	7	4
III.....	L.....	82.3	73.1	77.7	42
	R.....	17.6	17.3	17.5	54
	D.....	0	9.6	4.8	4
IV.....	L.....	54	54	54	35.5
	R.....	44	40	42	64.5
	D.....	2	6	4	0
V.....	L.....	64	57	60.6	56
	R.....	32	41	36.4	44
	D.....	4	2	3	0

Superficial observation would lead one to explain the remarkable difference in the amount of rigorism between the Agricultural and the "Hill" students by the influence of custom or the authority of the Bible. Our investigation has shown, however, the inadequacy of this assumption. The explanation must therefore be sought in other quarters. It is to be found partly in the difference in education and average culture in the two classes, partly in the particular circumstances of their lives. The de-

tails can be discussed to better advantage after an examination of the following tables.

These tables exhibit the reasons assigned for rigoristic answers to the "basal" questions, and, in questions the students were unable to decide, the reasons which made the rigoristic point of view appeal to them. Hypothetical reasons which I myself have assigned in the attempt to explain a position, such as those of pages 37 to 46, and 94, 95, do not appear.

TABLE II.—REASONS FOR RIGORISTIC ANSWERS,  
College of Letters and Science.

	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
1. Influence of example.....			4			4
2. Danger of creating a habit.....					1	1
3. Loss of confidence in the agent.....			8	1		9
4. Loss of confidence in man.....				1		1
5. Effects if everyone so acted.....				1		1
6. Difficulty of drawing the line.....	6	4	5	3	2	20
7. Social anarchy.....	2			1	5	8
8. Loss of respect for agent.....						
9. Pseudo-eudaemonistic judgment (a).....					1	1
10. " (b).....	3	2	1	1		8
11. Trust in leadings of God.....					19	19

TABLE III.—REASONS FOR RIGORISTIC ANSWERS,  
Students in Agriculture.

	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
1 Influence of example.....	1	2	10	2	1	16
2 Danger of creating a habit.....	3	4	5	5	2	19
3 Loss of confidence in the agent.....	2	5	8	7	1	23
4 Loss of confidence in man.....	2	2	3	2	1	10
5 Effects if everyone so acted.....		1	1	1		3
6 Difficulty of drawing the line.....	3	1	2	2	1	9
7 Social anarchy.....	1	1		1		3
8 Loss of respect for agent.....		1	3	1		5
9 Pseudo-eudaemonistic judgment (a).....						
10 " (b).....	4	3	2	3	3	15
11 Trust in leadings of God.....	4	1		1	12	18

The various entries are in the main self-explanatory. Numbers 1-6 are the "eudaemonistic reasons for the observance of general rules," of page 70. "Social anarchy" includes such answers as IV c of page 26: "The bottom would drop out of everything, if you commenced to permit any contracts to be



broken;" furthermore, considerations of the danger of abuse in V, and others of a similar nature. "Loss of respect for agent" refers to the fact that the intentions of the agent, while good in themselves, may be misunderstood by others and thus he will lose their respect. Where respect clearly means "confidence," the answer is of course classified under 3. The two references to the commands of the Bible on the part of 215 (page 99) find here no place for reasons which will have appeared from the discussion of this case.

The tables contain only reasons that belong under (1) (2) or (3) above, page 124. The others appear only in single questions. They are as follows. In II: The promise is judged binding because of sympathy for the dead, L. and S., 2 answers; Agr., 5 answers. The promise is binding because made to his *father*, L. and S., 2; Agr., 5. The promise is binding because to break it when the father is dead seems "sneaky," Agr., 1. III: Telling children about Santa Claus does not really give them more pleasure than pain (or, any pleasure at all because of the fear it arouses), L. and S., 3; Agr., 3. It turns the child's thoughts away from the significance of the day, Agr., 3 (in two cases the idea came from a Norwegian religious paper). IV: "I should not want it done to me" (see above, (4) (a) page 125); Agr., 2. The obligation to remain with the widow is asserted on the basis of a balance of gain in her favor, and then it is asserted that the loss to the landlord is just as great when he is well-to-do as when poor; this may be another case falling under (4) (a); Agr., 1. The landlord is not bound to give up the advantage secured to him by the promise, therefore the promiser has no right to wrest it from him, (see (4) (b) above) L. and S., 1 (?) V: "Something might happen which would have made the patient glad to have lived," L. and S., 3. The suffering is punishment inflicted by God for past sins and therefore must not be interfered with, L. and S., 3; Agr., 2.

These tables will prove helpful, I believe, if they are not approached with the assumption that they are meant to show more than was ever intended. In the first place, I recognize that the number of students represented is too small to permit the results to be anything more than suggestive. In the second place, such reports as these present at best what the students

had in mind at the time they framed their answers. Had the problems been given out the day before, the reason that occurred to the mind at any given point might have been somewhat different from that which appeared on the paper or in the interview at that point. Whether, however, the complexion of the whole would have been greatly changed thereby is another matter. It is always possible also that additional reasons may be operative besides those which receive mention. Apart from these two imperfections inseparable from any work of this kind, certain others may be present which were avoidable *per se* and are due to the fact that this investigation was not carried out with a view to collecting materials for such tables as these. The most serious is this. Four of the Agricultural students declared, in response to my inquiry, that they recognized and used two, three, or four of reasons 1-6 in answering the basal questions and I made no attempt to discover specifically which of them determined the decision in each instance. All appear therefore in the table under all of the answers to which they may possibly apply, whereby, no doubt, a certain amount of error is introduced into the returns. This, however, is not true of the "Hill" students. The reasons with which they are credited are always the grounds for some one answer except in three or four cases, like 43 (page 31), where it seems indubitable that a single consideration supplied the ground for several answers.

With these explanations in mind we may now take up the question why the Agricultural students are more rigoristic in their attitude towards general rules than are the "Hill" students. One reason is presumably the possession on the part of the latter of higher powers of imagination with which to picture the sacrifices involved in keeping the rule. We have come across a number of examples of this effect of the imagination upon the moral judgment. It will be sufficient to refer to 19 in V, page 52. The conditions in which the Agricultural students have always lived operate, no doubt, in the same direction. Accustomed to a life of hard work, and in many instances to exposure and privations, the stern call "*Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren*" does not send a chill to the heart as it does for their more delicately nurtured brothers.

So much is *a priori* probable. Other factors reveal themselves

in the written and oral returns. First there is the fact that among the "Hill" students the habit is far more highly developed of looking at both sides of a situation, instead of merely at one side, and of balancing the evil against the good. Then the pseudo-eudaemonistic judgment of type (b) appears throughout in six per cent. of the agriculturalists, whereas the percentage among the members of the College of Letters and Science is but one and a half. Curiously enough, however, type (a) occurs with about the same frequency in both, as determined from a study of VII of Series I (see above, page 36). The actual figures are: L. and S., eighteen per cent.; Agriculture, twenty-one per cent. Trust in the guiding hand of God is another important source of difference between the two groups. In the second, it is found not only in V, but also in I, and sporadically even elsewhere.

Special conditions affect the result in particular cases. In I among the agriculturists we may discover the peculiar horror which the farmer is said to have of theft, a horror due largely to the difficulty of effectually guarding his barns and their contents against it. In II the influence of sympathy for the dead, and filial affection and loyalty play a rôle apparently much larger than among the "Hill" students. In II, I must add, however, the disparity between the returns from the two groups is not quite so great as it appears from the table. In the questions of 1905 the promise is represented as having been exacted on a death-bed. The circumstances under which such a promise would be given exonerate the son completely when he later breaks it, in the eyes of a considerable number. Just exactly what effect this has upon the final outcome is not easy to determine. It is almost certain, however, that at the outside the elimination of this factor, making the question read as it does for the "Short Course" men would not raise the proportion of rigorous answers to anything higher than thirty per cent.

The unexplained remainder is attributable mainly to the greater timidity of the Agricultural students in the matter of example and of the confidence of others. This shows itself clearly in III and—for the second consideration—equally so in II and IV. One is tempted to find the source of the strength of the latter in the circumstances of country life, where everyone knows

everyone else. But it must not be forgotten that a considerable proportion of the "Hill" students come from farms or small towns. The most important reasons are doubtless those which were enumerated at the beginning of this discussion. At all events the latitudinarianism among the "Hill" students is not due to ignorance. At least one and usually more than one of the eudaemonistic reasons for the observance of general rules appears in over half the returns from either the first or the second series. These young men and women are thus aware of the reasons for rigorism but are not so apt to let them decide matters as are the other students. But the members of the Agricultural College are not mere slaves to these considerations. III of Series II was given to both sets of students. Of the members of the College of Letters and Science, seventy-eight per cent. declared the soldiers might leave their post, of the Agricultural students, eighty-one per cent.

Certain applications of the results presented in this study to the work of moral education must have forced themselves upon the attention of the reader from time to time. It seems advisable, however, to bring them together in one place for convenience of reference if for no other reason. What is called moral education consists of two things which in the abstract are quite distinct, *viz.*, moral instruction and the training of the will. As a matter of fact, however, the two can not be kept apart. Every moral ideal serves at once as a standard for approbation and disapprobation and a motive for conduct. The clarifying and harmonizing of standards thus render motives more completely conscious of their goal, more coherent, broader in their outlook, and more strong to resist at least certain dangers, such as moral skepticism. On the other hand the strengthening of the motives to do right will steady and broaden and, in the long run render more consistent the moral judgments themselves. Selfishness and cowardice dim the moral vision more effectively than ignorance and short-sightedness. And while it is undoubtedly true that a larger number of wrong actions are performed with a good conscience than is commonly believed, nevertheless dullness of conscience is more apt to be a matter of bad will than of defective or sluggish intelligence. With this

explicit recognition of the intimate relation between the two I shall not be misunderstood when I say that the few remarks that follow with regard to the bearing of the preceding investigation upon practice will deal primarily with the subject of moral instruction.

According to the foreign pressure theory, the mind of the young is mere putty in our hands, which we can squeeze into any form we may happen to desire. Education is thus practically omnipotent. Accordingly if all the authorities will but unite—parents, teachers, the church, society at large—they can make their pupil believe that anything is right, without any limitation whatever. The system of moral instruction, and of moral training also, that results is too obvious to need a moment's elaboration. Those who have accepted the conclusions reached in this investigation, on the other hand, must recognize that each child has an individuality of his own in matters moral, as almost everybody now recognizes he has in matters that concern his physique, his intelligence, his temperament, and his tastes. This individuality we must, as far as possible, discover and use as our starting-point in the work of moral education; precisely as in education in the ordinary sense we must start with the existing store of knowledge and the inborn aptitudes of the pupil. The moral ideals of the young can indeed be modified up to a certain point as was pointed out in Chapter III. Just how far this can be done in any particular case we shall probably never be able to determine, but that there are real limits always present seems undeniable in the light of our study of authority. If then we would broaden or deepen our pupil's ideals, we must do it either by showing him that the new duty is logically involved in that which he already recognizes as right, or by awakening aptitudes and latent powers that have hitherto slumbered, or by developing such as have already given evidence of existence.

It seems beyond question that common sense, in passing moral judgments, makes use not of a single standard but of a number of standards. It is, however, with the education of only one of these, which I have been calling the eudaemonistic, that I have to do in this place. An examination of the defects of the judgments that we have been studying will show, I believe, that the

first aim of moral instruction, in the case of the youth of high school or college age (and I am unable to consider any others here), should be the establishment of the habit of looking at the situation under consideration as a whole. Only when so viewed can a judgment upon it be valid—except by accident. Carelessness, or prejudice, or partiality, all too easily blind us to one side, and that often the most important one.<sup>4</sup> We must train our pupils, accordingly, to trace with impartial eyes the effects of an action, or a failure to act when action is called for, upon the agent himself and upon the other parties affected, the effects both in the way of happiness and of character and indeed of every other element of personality. This means, among other things, that they must be brought to recognize that there are no limits to the influence of any of our acts; that Mill's distinction between conduct which concerns only the agent himself, and that which concerns others is a purely artificial one; that in the last analysis every portion of human society is affected, for better or worse, by every significant act we perform. On the whole the students examined lack a sense for these things. They realize the difficulty of drawing the line when you once begin to break a general rule; they have some conception of the danger of forming the habit of skating on thin ice; they know very well that if you lie or break your promise you will become an object of distrust. But with few exceptions they fail to recognize that every lie, every breach of contract, every theft tends to undermine the confidence of man in man. They are aware of the influence of example, but in the few cases in which I looked for it I was unable to find any recognition whatever of the important consideration urged by Paulsen, the fact, namely, that our good and bad actions respectively awaken in the recipient a sort of impersonal gratitude or resentment which moves him to pay third parties in the same coin that has been dealt out to him.

He who has learned to look at conduct from these points of view will be more cautious about permitting the infraction of general rules than were a large number of our students from the College of Letters and Science. And this, it seems to me, is a desideratum. The extent of the laxity of standards of cer-

<sup>4</sup> See above, page 125.

tain of these young people does not perhaps appear from the answers to the questions which we have been studying at length. For in some or even most of them there is much to be urged in favor of breaking the rule. But the answers to IV of Series II show a very unsatisfactory attitude towards actions whose ultimate outcome can only be anarchy. Out of the seventy-six answers of this question, thirty-seven justified the theft. The following is a typical answer: "I believe I would say it was right since the merchant was rich and no other means existed to get leather. He was doing much good and perhaps not *really* hurting the rich man to an appreciable extent." Judgments of this sort are bound sooner or later to influence practice, either that of the man himself or of those within the sphere of his influence. Such shortsightedness on the part of well-intentioned people is a positive menace to society. Another need is to make the young recognize the necessity of keeping faith with those who no longer live or who for one reason or another will never know whether you are doing so or not. Some of the answers to II from both classes of students exhibit an inability to see beyond the immediate situation which, again, may have serious consequences.

A comparison of the answers of the agricultural students with those that came from the College of Letters and Science will show that the rigoristic attitude tends to disappear in certain cases as a result of the very intellectual progress which from the moral point of view itself we must desire to become general. Family ties seems to count less with the latter than the former (see pages 128 and 130); the imagination, which we must develop if we are to train the young to put themselves in the place of others, may awaken too much sympathy for the individual sufferer and lead to the ignoring or disregarding of the interests of a larger whole; trust in the guiding hand of God, however inconsistently applied—for no one today would hesitate to protect his house against lightning or to take an anaesthetic for fear of interfering with the designs of Providence—nevertheless is a powerful support to rigorism. The losses in these directions which the advance of education will bring must be counterbalanced by gains in other directions if we are not to be the losers in the end. On the other hand the disappearance of the

pseudo-eudaemonistic judgments (also, in their way, a stronghold of rigorism) will be little or no loss to practice if I was correct in my impression that these products of mere logic, and of bad logic at that, had little emotional warmth behind them. And the position of an Agricultural student: "It is always wrong to steal, but I would rather steal than starve," is more dangerous to morals than a frank admission that there are exceptions to the Eighth Commandment. I do not present this picture of the tendencies making for laxity because I have a remedy for them in my pocket, but simply in order to contribute my mite to that understanding of the actual situation which the moral education of the future must possess if it is to build upon a foundation of rock.